

False Consciousness In Body Positivity Campaigns In Women's Lifestyle Media

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Submission: 27 October 2023; Revised: 14 December 2023; Received: 26 December 2023

Abstract-- This article aims to discover how women's lifestyle media constructs a false awareness about women's bodies through body positivity discourse. Using media and gender perspectives, false consciousness, body positivity, and Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, this research finds that the media produces body positivity discourse as a narrative that 'all bodies are beautiful, whatever their shape.' Body positivity discourse refers to fat bodies as 'normality' to fight the stigma that fat bodies are not beautiful and are a problem for women. Body positivity evolved from the fat acceptance movement. This body positivity discourse is built on the construct that women must accept their body shape to live happily. The media produces the message through photos and texts that fat bodies are delicate as long as they are healthy. It ignores that medical obesity carries serious health consequences for many women. Thus, this research shows that instead of building women's positive acceptance of their body shape, the media creates a misguided consciousness of fat bodies from a medical perspective.

Keywords: *Semiotics, Lifestyle Journalism, Cosmopolitan, Body Positivity, False Consciousness.*

Abstrak--- Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menemukan bagaimana media gaya hidup perempuan mengonstruksi kesadaran palsu tentang tubuh perempuan melalui wacana *body positivity*. Dengan menggunakan perspektif media dan gender, konsep kesadaran palsu dan *body positivity*, serta analisis semiotika Roland Barthes, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa media memproduksi wacana *body positivity* sebagai sebuah narasi bahwa 'semua tubuh itu indah, apapun bentuknya'. Wacana *body positivity* merujuk pada tubuh gemuk sebagai 'kenormalan' untuk melawan stigma tubuh gemuk adalah tidak cantik dan masalah bagi perempuan. *Body positivity* ini berevolusi dari gerakan *fat acceptance*. Wacana *body positivity* ini dibangun dengan konstruksi perempuan perlu menerima bentuk tubuhnya untuk hidup bahagia. Media memproduksi makna melalui foto dan teks bahwa tubuh gemuk tidak masalah asalkan sehat, dan mengabaikan bahwa kegemukan secara medis membawa konsekuensi kesehatan serius pada banyak perempuan. Dengan demikian, riset ini menunjukkan bahwa alih-alih membangun penerimaan perempuan atas bentuk tubuhnya secara positif, media justru membangun kesadaran yang sesat atas wacana tubuh gemuk secara medis.

Keywords: *Semiotik, Jurnalisme Gaya Hidup, Cosmopolitan, Body Positivity, Kesadaran Palsu.*

Permalink/DOI: <http://doi.org/10.15408/jsj.v5i2.35384>

Citation: Fadhil, A.R., et al., (2023), *False Consciousness In Body Positivity Campaigns In Women's Lifestyle Media*, *Jurnal Studi Journalistik* (5), 2, 68-82, doi: [10.15408/jsj.v5i2.35384](https://doi.org/10.15408/jsj.v5i2.35384)

A. INTRODUCTION

When someone reads information from the media regarding the health and lifestyle categories, the illustration shown is a man or woman with an ideal body. The idea often appears as a woman with a slim body and a man with an athletic body. In Indonesia, mainstream media generally uses these illustrations in their news. This news shapes public opinion and becomes a picture of the ideal body that lives in society. There is an idea that the image of the perfect body, as depicted by the media, will make people more aware of their daily nutritional needs.

However, on the other hand, this image becomes a standard for social acceptance of other people's bodies. As a result, dieting becomes a necessity. Even though this diet process is quite complex and not everyone is suitable for the same diet pattern. As a result, some women and men fail and experience complications. This solid urge for diet occurs because the media often continuously campaigns for an ideal body image. Visuals such as videos or photos have a more substantial impact in influencing a person's thoughts about themselves or others. Consequently, most people begin to feel burdened by social standards about the ideal body, which in some situations leads to health problems such as eating disorders, bulimia, anorexia, and others.

The diet itself is more prevalent among women and has become a lifestyle. Diet messages are usually spread not only through the media but also widely on social media. They create social pressure on women about what their ideal body should look like. The media usually conveyed the diet messages with emotional narratives, such as the experiences of people who have successfully dieted.

Therefore, in the West, the body positivity movement has emerged, a movement that aims to change the ideal body image in a society that has been formed for a long time. (Shen et al., 2015)

Body positivity aims to erase the ideal female body image that exists in society because of the media. This movement is popular among women because social pressure on women's body shape is heavier than men's. For a long time, women have been 'objects' in advertising and entertainment. Representation of women in the media has often been exploitative for years. Therefore, women compare themselves with existing standards, and these standards will later become an object of satisfaction for men.¹

However, this movement has weaknesses. The weakness is related to its aim to erase the ideal body image created by the media and society. As a consequence, all body types are glorified, including obese and overweight bodies. In the end, body positivity is not a movement to free women from the ideal body shape created by the media and society but adds new pressure.

What is interesting about this movement is the criticism from The Sydney Morning Herald in the article 'Body positivity is a laudable campaign, but it does not aim to liberate women.' USA Today, with the article 'Body positivity is everywhere, but is it for everyone?'. Body positivity is a movement that focuses on acceptance of the body's appearance. If your body is like that, then accept it; love it as it is; there is no need to change it. It is the body positivity movement that society understands today.²

If someone wants to change, they face pressure and hostility, even if the change is for health reasons. The impression of transforming

¹ S. N. Berberick, "The Objectification of Women in Mass Media: Female Self-Image in Misogynist Culture", *The New York Sociologist*, (Vol. 5, No. 2, 2010).

² N. Reilly, (2017, March 19). *The body positive movement is admirable, but it isn't liberating women*. Sydney Morning Herald. Retrieved May 11, 2023, from <https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/i-dont-like-how-i-look-and-im-ok-with-that-20170319-gv1jnt.html>

your body according to your wishes has become taboo in the body positivity movement. Instead of being liberating, this movement pressures women to change their body shape. Therefore, in Western society, there is currently concern about increasing obesity rates due to the glorification of bad habits and the normalization of large bodies.³

This research aims to analyze the content of the women's lifestyle magazine *Cosmopolitan*, which is pro-body positivity. From the cover and text in the magazine, fat bodies are promoted visually and in text as a 'healthy' body shape. *Cosmopolitan* is a large media with branches in various countries and a broad reach. In several editions, *Cosmopolitan* wraps the body positivity movement with a health theme alongside visualizations of fat women who claim to be 'healthy.'

The media considers women only as subjects used in advertising. In advertisements, women are usually not depicted in their entirety, only the shape of the woman's body is depicted. Buttocks, chest, thighs, legs, skin texture, armpits, and various parts of the female body that can be a fetish. Maybe by making ads like that, ad engagement from men will increase because their focus will be shifted to the shape of the woman's body, while the women themselves will wonder whether their bodies could be like that.⁴

Body Positivity

The Body Positivity movement has emerged as a response to societal norms and standards related to beauty and appearance. It seeks to foster acceptance and appreciation of all body types and sizes, reframing the narrative around physical beauty. This movement underscores the

importance of individuality and self-worth, urging people to celebrate their unique attributes and not to equate their value with their physical appearance. It is particularly prevalent among women due to societal pressures regarding ideal female beauty which typically includes a slim and sexy body at an ideal weight.⁵

The origins of this movement can be traced back to public stigmatisation towards individuals with larger bodies or abnormal weight. This societal pressure often leads such individuals, especially women, to undertake rigorous diet and exercise regimes. However, the long-term nature of weight loss and the requirement for consistency often leads to these individuals discontinuing their efforts. Moreover, the psychological stress experienced due to societal stigmatisation serves as another contributing factor to the rise of the Body Positivity movement.⁶

Lifestyle Media and False Awareness Practices

The Lifestyle category in media reporting itself was initially introduced in United States daily news in the 1970s, which was actually a development of news about women. Maybe we can assume what news content is in the lifestyle section when we hear it, until now there is no definite classification in this lifestyle section because its reach is too broad. News about travel can come in, about fashion too, about celebrity life too. This makes the media a bit confused about differentiating between the lifestyle section and the entertainment section in their news portals.⁷

For that reason, the content or articles written are often critical. Although in other journalism categories there is also criticism,

psychometric evaluation", *Body Image*, (Vol. 12, 2015).

⁶ C. Leboeuf, "What Is Body Positivity? The Path from Shame to Pride", *Philosophical Topics*, (Vol. 47, No. 2, 2019).

⁷ C. H. Sterling (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Journalism*, (SAGE, 2009).

³ R. Cohen, T. Newton-John, & A. Slater, "The case for body positivity on social media: Perspectives on current advances and future directions", *Journal of Health Psychology*, (Vol. 26, No. 13, 2021).

⁴ C. M. Byerly, & K. Ross, *Women and media: a critical introduction*, (Wiley, 2006).

⁵ T. L. Tylka, & N. L. Wood-Barcalow, "The Body Appreciation Scale-2: Item refinement and

such as in the hard news category which criticises a government's policies (either subtly or openly). However, in the lifestyle category, criticism of a product is not completely objective because there is a subjective assessment from the author.⁸

Because the public can only demand entertainment news, it is the media itself who determines what advertising products and articles will be presented to the public which means the media has the power to influence trends and the habits of its consumers. That way, the media can build awareness in society according to its wishes, including false awareness that revolves around certain trends and types of products.

False consciousness itself is a phenomenon in which there is a distorted or erroneous understanding of a person's social and economic interests in a society. This phenomenon is a manipulative practice carried out by certain groups through the media or other means of publication to perpetuate the interests of their group.⁹

For example, in the context of this research. The media is trying to change the view of the ideal female body in society from being thin and slender to normalising all female body shapes. This does sound like a good thing, but from a health perspective, body shape can tell a woman's health condition. Women who are too thin are susceptible to disease due to a low immune system, while women who are too fat are also susceptible to cardiovascular disease due to obesity. A false awareness is created where when standards are changed other problems occur.

Roland Barthes' Semiotics Model

Before starting to analyse the Cosmopolitan magazine content, understanding the semiotics

method used is crucial. Roland Barthes' semiotics analytic method itself consists of three steps which are denotative, connotative, and myth. This could be seen in a table below:

Table 1

Roland Barthes' Semiotics Model

Signifier (Penanda)	Signified (petanda)	Tingkat Pertama (Bahasa)
Denotative sign (Tanda Denotatif)		
Connotative Signifier (Penanda Konotatif)	Connotative Signified (Petanda Konotatif)	Tingkat Kedua (Mitos)
Connotative Sign (Tanda Konotatif)		

From the Barthes map above, it can be seen that the denotational sign (3) consists of a signifier (1) and a signified (2). But at the same time, denotative signs also become connotative markers (4). For example, the sign "rat" in the denotative meaning is an animal, while in the connotative meaning rats are associated with being cunning, dirty and greedy.

From the explanation above we can understand that denotative is a meaning that is conveyed directly and clearly, you could say the most external meaning of a sign. Meanwhile, connotative is a second meaning or implied meaning that does not immediately pop into our heads without understanding it more deeply, and this is usually subjective. In other words, denotation is a description of the signs of an object, while connotation is how to draw it.¹⁰

Then there are myths which function as information from symbols or signs related to a

⁸ E. Fürsich, "Lifestyle Journalism As Popular Journalism", *Journalism Practice*, (Vol. 6, No. 1, 2012).

⁹ S. W. Littlejohn, *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory* (K. A. Foss & S. W. Littlejohn, Eds.), (SAGE, 2009).

¹⁰ I. Wibowo, *Semiotika Komunikasi Edisi II (2013): Aplikasi Praktis Untuk Penelitian Dan Skripsi Komunikasi*, (Rumah Pintar Komunikasi, 2013).

particular culture. For example, the swastika symbol, denotatively we see it as a swastika symbol, then connotatively we see it as the holiest symbol in Hinduism, but mythically the majority of people in the world see it as a Nazi symbol which is associated with German cruelty and fascism.¹¹

B. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a constructivist paradigm with a qualitative case study method. According to Gertz (1998), the qualitative case method is a method that describes a problem in three steps. The initial stage involves gathering unprocessed information about individuals, institutions, programs, or event locations, forming a case study research basis. The next stage is to compile the cases that have been collected, condense and summarize the remaining data as raw information, categorize and revise them, and combine them into one file. The final phase involves the researcher creating a final narrative report about the case study, which should be easy to understand.¹²

This research used this method to examine the campaign about body positivity in Cosmopolitan content. Therefore, this research uses semiotics to find the meaning behind visual and textual signs in news content.

C. FINDING AND RESULTS

Three Cover Analytics

To find out the meanings of these three Cosmopolitan UK magazine covers, each of them will be elaborated separately and analysed with Roland Barthes' Semiotics Model.

Picture 1. Callie Thorpe Ver.



Denotative: Photo of a fat woman wearing sportswear smiling happily.

Connotative: Photos of fat women who look like they are obese with the slogan “This is healthy”, covers like this send a message to society that women with fat bodies like them are medically healthy people. Even though we ourselves know that medically a fat body is not healthy because it can be. The cover model is also seen smiling broadly, showing that she is still happy even though she is large and feels ostracised in society

Myth: From the many icons mentioned above, we can conclude that Cosmopolitan United Kingdom in its 2021 edition is trying to convey the message that fat women are healthy. Healthy what is meant here may be physically healthy, see the slogan “This is healthy” then there is a headline article entitled “11 Women on Why Wellness Doesn’t Have to Be One-Size-Fits-All” or if translated it means “11 Women Why Health Shouldn’t Be One Size Fits All.”

“One Size Fits All” referred to here is for body shape. So a woman’s health does not have to be based on one body shape, namely a slim or slender body. This argument is strengthened by the sportswear worn by the model in the photo, showing that the theme in this photo is physical health. Callie is a London travel, food and lifestyle influencer. She is also a plus size model or a plus size model. Callie herself has appeared in Teen Vogue, Ele, Cosmopolitan, People Style

¹¹ P. Wibisono, & Y. Sari, “Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes Dalam Film Bintang Ketjil Karya Wim Umboh Dan Misbach Yusa Bira”. *Jurnal Dinamika Ilmu Komunikasi*, (Vol. 1, No. 1, 2021).

¹² Y. Yusanto, “Ragam Pendekatan Penelitian Kualitatif. *Journal of Scientific Communication*, (Vol. 1, No. 1, 2019).

Watch, BuzzFeed, and various other major media. Callie can be said to be one of the biggest body positivity activists, even becoming a model. From the past, a model was only focused on the criteria of height, an attractive face with a dominant impression, and a sexy body. However, Callie succeeded in becoming the model she is now, a plus size model who defies the fashion world in general.

Picture 2. Jessamyn Stanley Ver.



Denotative: Photo of a fat woman doing yoga, and she looks good at the movement.

Connotative: Photo of a fat woman who looks flexible and can do *yoga* movements that require balance and flexibility. Gives the impression “a fat person who looks heavy and has difficulty keeping his balance can actually be this skilled”. In the eyes of some people this may seem normal because many people can do it, but in the eyes of others they see this as something extraordinary. With such a large body, he can make flexible movements.

MythThis cover is more or less the same as Callie Thorpe’s digital magazine cover myth, namely giving the message that fat women are healthy. Almost all of the icons in the digital magazine are the same as Callie Thorpe’s version, the only difference is the model. However, Jessamyn Stanley’s cover version shows that fat women can be flexible.

If we look at the Proairetic Code from this cover, we can see that the model is doing yoga movements which seem to require balance and flexibility when doing it. In yoga itself, the

movement performed by the model in the photo is Natarajasana (Dancer), and this movement requires good balance and flexibility. And what the model on this cover does is a perfect movement from Natarajasana. This cover was highlighted in a digital magazine feature article with the aim of countering the narrative ‘fat bodies are not flexible’.

Historically, fat bodies have been seen as bodies that are not ideal for sports and have often been underestimated, especially for women because they do not conform to feminine values. In the media itself, few fat people appear, unless they have certain abilities that are attractive to the public.

For example, Melissa McCarthy, who is a talented actress, with her fat body, can get a suitable role in a film because of her acting skills and the suitability of her physical form for the role she plays. What is interesting about Jessamyn Stanley herself is her flexibility. With a fat and big body, he can do difficult yoga movements that not everyone with a thin body can do. She was able to do it with consistency and this became her attraction so she was able to appear in a Cosmopolitan feature article to promote the body positivity movement.

Picture 3. Main Ver.



Denotative: The magazine cover normally features six headlines with three female models, indicating that this edition focuses on sports.

Connotative: This digital magazine cover features three female models with different body shapes but all wearing sportswear which shows that they are all healthy and active in sports. This

cover also gives the impression that physical health is not limited to one body shape, which has sparked controversy because obese bodies are not medically healthy.

Myth: In this main cover, *Cosmopolitan* shows that healthy women are not only women with slim and thin bodies, but those with large bodies are also healthy. However, in society's view, medically and culturally, someone with an excessively fat body is unhealthy. Then *Cosmopolitan* wrapped it with a sports theme to show that these three women with different body shapes are women who are active in sports and physically healthy. But on the other hand, exercise alone is not enough to say that a person is healthy, because it is useless if what goes into the body is much greater than what goes out. So what *Cosmopolitan* wants to convey through this cover is in vain, maintaining a diet is important, paying attention to the nutrition we consume every day is important.

Text Analysis of the Article Titled “Don’t go on a diet this January” on Page. 6 *Cosmopolitan* UK digital magazine February 2021 Edition

Title

“Don’t go on a diet this January.”

From the title, we can already clearly understand that this article persuades people to stop dieting in January. Even though this digital magazine is the February 2021 edition, it was released on December 31 2020. Then in the content the justification for this title is explained. This title itself was created because in January, the first month of the year, many people, especially women, start the year with new resolutions. “New Year, New Me,” is a slogan that perhaps some of us often hear. At the beginning of the year, many people want to achieve things they achieved in the previous year, new goals they want to do in this new year. Dieting often occurs in January because there is motivation from the slogan “New Year, New Me.”

Paragraph 1

“This is an open letter to anyone planning to start the new year with a diet – and dreading it.”

After the title, there is an invitation sentence targeted at people who want to diet this January. Apart from people who want to plan to start their diet, this is also an invitation to people who want to start their diet but are afraid they won't be able to do it. Then there is an emphasis on the word “new year” because, as explained by the researcher above, in the new year many people start new things, including starting a diet. After that there is also the saying “afraid of it” which may indicate that previously many people did it at the start of the new year but were unable to carry it out. Then these people who can't afford it want to start their new year with a new diet.

Paragraph 2

“Millions of people start them. The majority stop by January 12th. Not because people are flawed, but because dieting is. Most diets are impossible to stick to. So they don't work. If they did, you wouldn't have to keep trying new ones. (Did you know the average person tries 55 fad diets in their lifetime? That's a lot of cabbage soup!)”

Overall, this paragraph uses signs and symbols to convey a critical perspective on dieting and weight loss.

Denotative: The denotative meaning of these signs is in the form of numerical information or data relating to the percentage of people on a diet.

Connotative: The connotative meaning shows that diets are generally flawed and ineffective as a solution which is confirmed through numerical data even though it is unsourced and is the author's opinion.

Myth: Another myth is the idea that failure in dieting is caused by an individual's lack of will or ability to follow diet rules. The text states that the above ideas are actually wrong, and states that diets that focus on restrictions and prohibitions are likely to fail in the long run. In

fact, dieting is not instant and must be consistent, it must be done in the long term if you want to lose weight to your ideal weight. However, this article aims to make readers feel that this is normal and to blame the diet that is wrong, not the consistency of the readers. It sounds a bit childish if you think about it, rather than accepting the fact that the person is not able to do it, they instead blame it on the diet which is not easy.

Paragraph 3

“Most diets are built on fads, not facts. They promise fast results and focus on restriction, limiting what, how, or when you eat. They might work as a quick fix, but let you down long-term. No one can survive on juice alone and, let’s face it, there are only so many times you can ‘eat’ shakes for lunch before you have to scream into your pillow. So the diets don’t last, and 83% of dieters gain back more weight than they lose.”

Overall, this paragraph uses signs and symbols to convey a critical perspective on popular diets and emphasises the importance of research and facts in choosing the right type of diet.

Denotative: The denotative meaning of the signs is often related to the description of the diets.

Connotative: The connotative meaning indicates that these diets are not effective in the long term and can affect quality of life.

Myth: The myth in this second text states that January is the time when people start their diet, considering that in the first month of the year many people are motivated by the slogan “New Year, New Me”. However, this motivation does not last long because it is defeated by the person’s abilities or their motivation is not strong enough. This slogan has always existed from year to year, and is indeed maintained in society. Then the text also states the consequences of fad diets which only apply in the short term not the long term, then states that 83% of them returned to their normal weight. This statement is not completely wrong,

because fad diets are diets that are widely spread on the internet, not everyone is suitable for these diets so some are successful, some are not.

Paragraph 4

“And then there’s January. It’s cold, dark and miserable, yet still, every year, so many of us choose this particular month to resist and restrict, ‘cleanse’ and count calories. (How does every woman know how many calories are in a banana?) You tell yourself that wine is naughty, bread is evil, and chocolate is a sin. You say ‘I can’t’, ‘I shouldn’t’, ‘I’m being good’. Then you feel like you’ve failed when the diet doesn’t stick. Well, we’re here to say you haven’t failed - you’ve been failed, by false promises, fad diets and bad advice.”

Overall, this paragraph uses phrases and sentences to convey a critical perspective on the behaviour of people who diet in January and the effects of their behaviour.

Denotative: The denotative meaning of these signs is always related to the behaviour and views of people who diet. The denotative meaning of these signs is always related to the behaviour and views of people who diet.

Connotative: The connotative meaning shows that the behaviour and views of people who diet will have a bad impact in the future and cause eating disorders.

Myth: The myth in this paragraph is that January in the UK is usually winter time, and it is associated with the words cold, dark and miserable. In this paragraph the author tries to influence the minds of his readers by saying that when we fail to diet then the person who needs to be blamed is the diet, not the reader. Although in reality, when someone fails on a diet, it is not only because they chose the wrong type of diet, but because the person failed to understand the diet more deeply and understand their own body better. Each person has their own proportions in their body such as their bone weight, muscle mass, and amount of fat. That’s why when dieting you can’t be careless and follow any diet that is spread on the internet.

Paragraph 5

“So, what if you did things differently this time? This January, we’re taking a stand against fad diets, and we want you to join us. Don’t waste your energy feeling guilty. Don’t torture yourself with celery. Don’t start a diet that won’t stick. Make a commitment that will: ‘I will start cooking more,’ ‘I will start planning my meals,’ ‘I will start every day with a walk.’ Because there are plenty of healthy, sustainable, enjoyable ways to lose weight — fad diets just aren’t one of them.”

This text invites readers to avoid fad diets that are unsustainable and self-torturing. The text suggests making a realistic commitment such as starting to cook again, planning meals, or walking every day. Readers are reminded that there are many healthy and enjoyable ways to lose weight. The text also condemns fad diets and bad advice that deceive readers with false promises and only make readers feel like failures. Readers are reminded that diet failures are not caused by themselves, but by useless fad diets.

Text Analysis of the Article “Callie: Our bodies don’t fit the narrative” on Page. 61 Cosmopolitan UK Digital Magazine February 2021 Edition

Paragraph 1

“I thought if I made myself accountable to strangers, I’d [lose weight]. It made me feel worse than ever.” She adds, ‘I had a really terrible relationship with my body growing up. I always struggled with the fact that it was different to my friends’. I tried every single diet.”

Denotative: This sentence is a description of Callie’s efforts to lose weight by getting herself motivated by strangers, and the negative impact this has on Callie’s relationship with her body.

Connotative: This line implies that Callie’s struggle with her body image may be influenced by social expectations and standards regarding

weight and appearance. Mythically, weight loss and adherence to certain beauty standards are necessary for happiness and acceptance.

Myth: These myths are maintained through various means, including advertising, media representations, and social norms. It makes Callie feel pressured by the standard ideals that exist in society. Plus, the differences with his friends made him feel isolated.

Paragraph 2

“Callie, 31, has suffered from disordered eating throughout her life but found comfort in the blog too. ‘I was welcomed into a community where I was able to meet other plus-size women going through the same thing. I realised the importance of focusing on my mental health and addressing issues with my anxiety, and finding ways to take care of myself.’”

Denotative: Callie, a 31 year old woman, has suffered from an eating disorder most of her life. However, she found solace through blogging, where she was welcomed by a community of other plus-sized women who were going through the same thing. Callie realised the importance of focusing on her mental health and managing her anxiety, as well as finding ways to take care of herself.

Connotative: Blogging has helped Callie feel accepted and supported by a community of people who understand what she is going through. This text shows that this community gave him a sense of belonging that has helped him overcome his eating disorder and anxiety. Mythically speaking, blogging can bring someone together with a community that “suits” him, a group that makes him feel that he is part of that group. This text implies that blogging has helped Callie overcome her anxiety and find ways to take care of herself, and that these experiences are shared by others in the same community.

Myth: This myth reinforces the idea that social media and online communities can be a positive force for mental health, providing a sense of belonging and support that can help individuals overcome difficult issues.

Paragraph 3

“These days, Callie adheres to the body neutrality movement, which focuses on what your body can do rather than how it looks.”

Denotative: Callie currently adheres to the body neutrality movement, which focuses on what a person’s body can do rather than how it looks.

Connotative: The body neutrality movement is a more positive approach to body image. In today’s society, we often get caught up in paying attention to our physical appearance and become obsessed with an “ideal” body image. The body neutrality movement, however, emphasises the importance of focusing attention on one’s physical health and mental well-being, rather than pursuing an idealised body image.

Myth: Body neutrality is a new movement. Body neutrality has actually been around for some time and is part of the larger body positivity movement. However, this text shows that the body neutrality movement is gaining increasing attention, perhaps because more people are becoming aware of the dangers of unrealistic body perceptions. But on the other hand, the body neutrality movement also ignores whether our bodies have indications of being overweight or obese because they focus on what our bodies can do now.

Paragraph 4

“It was an awful time. Now I’m able to handle that kind of abuse because ‘fat’ isn’t a harmful word to me any more. I want other women to feel comfortable to move their bodies, whatever their size.”

Denotative: Callie is comfortable with the word ‘fat’ and no longer feels it is something negative or embarrassing. Callie wants to

¹³ R. M. Sarroca, *Plus-Size Female Bodies on the Small Screen: A Perpetuation of Stigmas or a Step Forward Towards Inclusivity?* (Universitas Lleida, 2022). Retrieved from <https://>

support other women in feeling comfortable with their body size, without having to feel embarrassed or burdened by confusing beauty or social standards.

Connotative: The word ‘fat’ in society is often considered a derogatory or embarrassing word, especially for women. Therefore, this article shows that the author has taken a positive attitude towards the word, and emphasises the importance of embracing diverse body shapes and not feeling burdened by beauty standards that are often unrealistic and confusing.

Myth: Women must pursue an ideal body image, or that being overweight is something undesirable. This article challenges this myth and shows that every woman has the right to feel comfortable in her own body, without having to feel burdened by unrealistic social standards. But at the same time, Callie herself is an abnormally fat woman, her fat is not normal if you look at her body appearance. When Callie with an appearance like that says that, this is quite problematic because being comfortable with a body condition that indicates obesity is not something that should be normalised. This will only be resolved in the short term because by feeling comfortable, the mind will feel unburdened, but in the long term if no action is taken to change the body weight, then there will be health complications which will later challenge the person’s comfort.

Discussion

Beauty standards always change over time. We can see this from the changes in works of art from century to century. In the past, fat women were the subjects of works of art, but several centuries later thin women became the subjects.¹³ This encourages women who do not meet the beauty standards presented by the media to try hard to achieve these standards. Such as exercising, strict diets, buying beauty

products, and attending various beauty workshops.¹⁴

Body weight is one of the benchmarks in determining whether a woman can be said to be beautiful or not.¹⁵ As a result, many women who diet not only for reasons of maintaining health, but because of trends in their environment, also feel watched by the people around them. This phenomenon can be related to the Panopticon theory developed by Jeremy Bentham.¹⁶ In the context of women's diet, they are like prisoners in that cell. And the tower of light represents the people around it, both from the real world and the virtual world. These women feel watched and judged by the people around them, even though they themselves don't know whether the people around them are paying attention to them or not. Therefore, they go on diet and exercise to lose weight. They also often upload it on social media to show off their diet developments in the hope that the public will accept it.¹⁷

As a result of the stigmatization of fat women, the body positivity movement emerged which pushed the narrative that all body shapes are beautiful and not limited to certain body shapes.¹⁸ This movement accepts all body types without exception. Fat, thin, barely fit, even people with disabilities. Since there are no such restrictions, body shapes with health-threatening conditions are supported. Fat bodies with indications of obesity are also included in this movement.¹⁹

One well-known multinational women's media, Cosmopolitan, is campaigning for this movement. It caused controversy because, as a media with a massive audience, it was campaigning for a movement that was considered to cause debate.

If we look at Cosmopolitan UK's market exposure, they have a total audience of almost 20 million across multiple platforms: print, digital, and social media. For print media alone, they have a total readership of 623,000. Meanwhile, they have a total global readership of 13.2 million for digital. For social media, they have a total of 5.6 million followers, consisting of Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest. For online media, they have a website called [Cosmopolitan.com/uk](https://www.cosmopolitan.com/uk).²⁰ It is just the number of readers in England. The magazine's distribution is global, so the audience is massive.

With such a large audience, instead of following journalism ethics that convey the truth and educate the public, they are trapped in supporting things that are considered more enjoyable and appropriate for them.²¹ By doing this, they violate ethics and endanger society by not providing a good education.²² Instead of telling the truth, they choose to bias one group in order to please them.

This phenomenon can be called Confirmation Bias, the attitude of people who tend to seek and accept information that supports their beliefs and ignore information that

¹⁴ A. Goldman, & D. Waymer, (2014). Identifying Ugliness, Defining Beauty: A Focus Group Analysis of and Reaction to Ugly Betty. *The Qualitative Report*, (Vol. 19, No. 10, 2014).

¹⁵ R. M. Sarroca, (2022), p.

¹⁶ M. Galič, T. Timan, & B.-J. Koops, "Bentham, Deleuze and Beyond: An Overview of Surveillance Theories from the Panopticon to Participation", *Philosophy & Technology*, (Vol. 30, 2017).

¹⁷ B. Humeira, & A. Ramadhan, (2022). "The Uses of Social Media in Journalism Practices: The Reversed-Agenda Setting on Television News Production", *Jurnal Studi Jurnalistik*, (Vol. 4, No. 2, 2022).

¹⁸ C. Leboeuf, (2019).

¹⁹ T. Mandel, *The Line Between Body Positivity and Glorifying Obesity – An Ecological Approach to Obesity and Eating Disorders*. (Pressbooks.pub, 2017). Retrieved August 8, 2023, from <https://pressbooks.pub/btugman/chapter/the-line-between-body-positivity-and-glorifying-obesity/>

²⁰ Hearst UK, *Cosmopolitan UK Media Kit 2023*, (Hearst, 2023).

²¹ K. Wahl-Jorgensen, & T. Hanitzsch, (Eds.), (2019). *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, (Taylor & Francis Group, 2019).

²² S. J. A. Ward, *Global Journalism Ethics*, (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

contradicts them²³ It is what Cosmopolitan UK did. They deliver what fat women want, different from what they need to hear.

What Cosmopolitan is doing aligns with Karl Marx's concept of false consciousness. The false consciousness constructed by the media is assumed to change the status quo regarding women's beauty standards, which the media and society have perpetuated with specific sizes such as slim, tall, skinny, and white.²⁴

The media builds the narrative: "You do not need to worry about what your body looks like; focus on what your body can do. We are all different, and differences are typical. This statement is like a false narrative built so that women can be happy, free from pressure, to look beautiful and slim. However, this thinking encourages women not to pay attention to what they eat until other problems arise, namely more severe symptoms of obesity and the risk of cardiovascular disease, which can cause death."²⁵

In England, the percentage ratio of men and women who are obese is 26% and 25%.²⁶ Compared with the global percentage, the UK ranks tenth, while the United States is ranked first. It proves that instead of contributing to reducing obesity rates in the UK, Cosmopolitan UK is choosing to support obesity.

Cosmopolitan chose to build a narrative through their feature article, which rejected the diet movement with the claim that all diets are futile. The word 'diet' has a negative connotation in this digital magazine because it is

always associated with eating disorders. It can impact society, especially readers.²⁷ In reality, diets only work if we stick to them.²⁸

One form of false consciousness construction is to choose Callie Thorpe and Jessamyn Stanley as their main models. They are both fat but can live happily and confidently and show off their fat bodies on social media. In reality, not every fat person can be Callie and Jessamyn. They are successful influencers who have used their body shape as an asset. Of course, they do not see any urgency in losing weight because why lose assets that provide income for their lives? Of the many fat women that exist, only a few can live a successful life, and that is because they have something to show for it, not just their fat bodies. However, the media narrative places a fat body as happiness instead of focusing on body acceptance to stay healthy rather than caring about media standards of beauty.

At the same time, apart from wanting to make fat women more confident, Cosmopolitan UK also wants to change society's view of fat women so that they do not experience discrimination and can be accepted not because of their body shape. Discrimination against obese people (men and women) impacts everyday life, such as in the workplace, health facilities, educational institutions, and many other places.²⁹

However, this research shows that Cosmopolitan UK forgot the most important

²³ U. Peters, "What Is the Function of Confirmation Bias?" *Erkenntnis*, (Vol. 87, No. 3, 2022).

²⁴ S. W. Littlejohn, (2009).

²⁵ Center for Disease Control and Prevention, (2022, September 24), *Health Effects of Overweight and Obesity | Healthy Weight, Nutrition, and Physical Activity*, (CDC, 2022). Retrieved March 29, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/effects/index.html>

²⁶ C. Baker, (2023, January 12), *Obesity statistics*. (House of Commons Library, 2023). Retrieved from <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn03336>

²⁷ F. Shen, V. C. Sheer, & R. Li, "Impact of Narratives on Persuasion in Health Communication: A Meta-Analysis", *Journal of Advertising*, (Vol. 44, No. 1, 2015).

²⁸ S. L. Thomas, J. Hyde, A. Karunaratne, R. Kausman, & P. A. Komesaroff, "“They all work...when you stick to them”: A qualitative investigation of dieting, weight loss, and physical exercise, in obese individuals", *Nutrition Journal*, (Vol. 7, 2008).

²⁹ R. M. Puhl, & C. A. Heuer, "The Stigma of Obesity: A Review and Update", *Obesity*, (Vol. 17, No. 5, 2009).

part, namely, providing awareness of the importance of taking care of the body to avoid obesity. Instead of fixing the problem's root, they try to change reality by creating false consciousness.

Many of the issues raised by *Cosmopolitan UK* are all interconnected. Many women go on diets to meet existing beauty standards and be considered beautiful with a slim body shape. As a result, problems with eating disorders arise due to dietary trends circulating on the internet. Also, many women are stressed due to the difficulty of losing weight to appear slim. Then *Cosmopolitan* assured that their mental health is essential and provided a narrative built on the foundation of the body positivity movement.

Cosmopolitan UK builds this narrative through visuals that support obesity among women. As a result, this touches on a health problem that has existed for years, namely obesity. Many people have lost their lives due to this disease. In this way, *Cosmopolitan* creates a false awareness about accepting women's body shapes by labelling a healthy body as more important than a slim body. However, it provides a 'celebration' of obesity with the narrative that 'it is important to be healthy to be fat.'

D. CONCLUSION

This research shows how the media builds false consciousness through discourse on women's bodies, leading to the acceptance of fat bodies as healthy. The media produces body positivity discourse to encourage its readers, most women, to be more confident and love their bodies more as they are.

However, *Cosmopolitan UK* ignores the importance of health elements in our lives. Apart from that, this media targets women who are overweight or obese. *Cosmopolitan UK* dismisses the importance of maintaining weight to avoid both problems by saying that life can be happy if we do what we can with our bodies now.

Thus, this research shows how the media promotes obesity under the pretext of body positivity. In fact, by definition, body positivity

is a movement to accept the body as it is, whatever its shape, color, or condition. In reality, body positivity is closely related to people with large bodies because this movement is an evolution of the obesity acceptance movement, so it is natural that the issue closely related to this movement is the issue of fat bodies.

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