“Let’s talk about my weight…”

Negotiating Body Positivity with YouTube Fans and Anti-fans as a Plus-Sized Beauty Vlogger

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to investigate how plus-size YouTube vloggers interested in beauty products and practices represent themselves, in relation also with issues of body shaming and body positivity, and how they negotiate their representations with their audiences. This thesis will also show the viewers’ side, thus to give a wider picture on the underlying talk of the plus-size body.

*Keywords*: body positivity, vlogger, YouTube, plus-size, fans, social media.
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CHAPTER 1

“WHY SHOULDN’T I WEAR IT?”

I remember the first time I saw a video from LoeyLane. I was in Taipei, finishing my studies in Chinese and ready to enroll in a master course. It was a late afternoon and I was sitting in my room. I don't remember how I got to it, but the video immediately enthralled me. It was different, unique and it sparked my interest. LoeyLane, as a professed body positivity advocate and YouTube vlogger, was showing her new collection of bikini with long and close shootings focusing on her body. What is new to that, you might ask? There are probably hundreds of thousands of similar videos all over the internet. Well, LoeyLane is a plus-sized woman; a curvy, beautiful blond from the US who was not afraid of showing herself. What captured me was not only that willingness, that courage of displaying a body out of canonic beauty standards. I was surprised by the approach she was using to launch her message. With a deeply ironic, funny atmosphere, she proceeded to dismantle every comment and every negative opinion that suggested a bikini is not for a “fat” person. On the contrary, she argued, it's the perfect choice if I feel beautiful in it. In the same way, shorts are perfect for a hot summer, why should I suffer in long jeans? A crop top suits me so well and I'm wonderful in it, why shouldn't I wear it? To my amazement, the message she wanted to get across was that a body could be beautiful and stylish no matter what. Start loving your body for what it is, appreciate what it can do for you, embrace that are so many diverse kinds of representations and you are one of them. The video blown me away, it opened my eyes. From it to LoeyLane's entire playlist on YouTube it was a short step and even a shorter one to what Loey called Body Positivity Movement.

Body Positivity Movement is a social campaign influenced by the Fat Acceptance Movement of the 1960s second-wave feminism. Created by two young women in 1996, Connie Sobczak and Elizabeth Scott, it encourages a different perspective and approach to the body. Through acceptance and the consequent improvement of one's self-image, body positivity increases self-esteem with the final resolution of also improving health and general well-being.
In other words, by first appreciating and finding worth in the body, and by nurturing a positive attitude towards it and gaining self-confidence, a person can modify, improve or maintain their behavior to get a good and healthy lifestyle. Since the advent of social media, and in particular with Instagram in 2012, Body Positivity Movement had reached a great popularity in western media. In fact, it was easy for new and old activists alike to reach a greater public to spread their message. The acceptance of the Body Positivity Movement was evident to the mainstream public when, in 2016, the magazine *Sports Illustrated* published on its cover a plus-sized model called Ashley Graham. The editors explained this inclusion by asserting that bodies have different forms, sizes, and beauties. Diversities needed to take place in a sports magazine too. Since then, other brands like Dove, H&M, and Barbie have drawn the same conclusion and used body positivity as both a marketing strategy and a sign of their social standing.

Not only LoeyLane but also many other vloggers, like Learningtobefearless's Alex and Sarah Rae Vargas, profess to be huge promoters and believers of the Body Positivity Movement. This small but meaningful community can be identified with the term of "plus-size beauty vloggers". As the name in itself explains, those women have the common feature of being curvy and of being interested in fashion and style. Their principal form of expression is the “vlog”. As the word itself might suggest, a vlog is a blog in video format that aims at the registration of one’s personal life. The vlog can take many shapes, but principally it documents thoughts, opinions, and common daily life experiences in an entertaining and natural formula. The short video is more often published on YouTube, but can also be found on other platforms like Video and TubeMogui. Its main point is to communicate on a personal level with fans and to treat and dialogue with them as they were present at that moment, and as they were friends.

Vlogging is a part of a post-television phenomenon that obeys a hierarchy of viral popularity. It’s a creative commercialized practice, ambivalent and contradictory, and still susceptible to media power (Tolson, 2010). Vloggers not only choose to express themselves and their passions but engage in activities of “self-branding” and “viral marketing”. They are figures of recognition within their own subcultures, they have their own niche and thus have to create content of interest and market it for their specific community (Warmbrodt, 2007). Advertisers target famous vloggers to have an increased audience and to promote their products. Businesses place a new emphasis on people. They put vloggers at the very heart of their advertisement
strategy in a new model of capitalism called “capitalism with a human face” (Warmbrodt, 2007). They use vloggers’ personalities but also their message and their relationship with the audience to sell products and new lifestyles (Warmbrodt, 2007). Since these vloggers are recognized and valued in their subculture and they have their own niche, this business model relies on the creation of a close community. Even a marginal vlogger like a plus size one can gather viewers for sponsorships and money. All it’s necessary is a product that might attract their niche audience (Warmbrodt, 2007).

In our changed economy everyone can become a successful entrepreneur, and at the same time find a way to express themselves and be recognized in new social platforms. However, young women found themselves in part-time, unstable and unprotected labor (Zheng, 2016). They thus turn to other kinds of aspirational occupations, like vlogging. (Bevan, 2017). However, their labor is still unrecognized and under-compensated and actually reproduces old social hierarchies. In fact, female vloggers usually suggest a progressive message like the focus on individualism, sympathy, and transparency for the representation of the self (Bevan, 2017). They display themselves and their feelings, appearing authentic as it’s necessary for their post-feminist identity and branding (Bevan, 2017). They re-imagine femininity and show how it’s difficult to achieve society beauty standards. Nonetheless, their vlogs are accompanied by branding and product-placement, and class and race exclusivity. They present discourses of consumption and actively participate in the beauty industry (Bevan, 2017). Subsequently, notwithstanding their progressive message, they still participate and reiterate old oppressive systems.

As someone who knows nothing of make-up and clothes, I used to look up to these beauty vloggers but most importantly, I liked listening and participating in their life. I was a huge fan, even if it was just for few months. Then I got busier, I didn't have enough time to spend watching videos and only glimpsed at their uploads from time to time. I still appreciated them, I just couldn't afford much time on YouTube anymore. Then, months passed and I was on winter vacation, at home in Italy. With suddenly nothing much to do, I went back to watching LoeyLane and few others' videos. However, this time I had a new critical insight into the content in front of me.

It was by watching, forgetting for some weeks and then coming back to them again that I started seeing patterns in LoeyLane, Alex and Sarah’s videos. I have always been intrigued by
comments in every social media. I like to read a post and then continue with its comments. Not only the comment section often gives its own fair amount of entertainment, but it also provides information about the audience, about its general opinion, its background, and characteristics. I read comments on Facebook, Instagram, Reddit and YouTube like it's my job and so it was not a surprise that sometimes even more than the video itself, my attention was often drawn to the comments in LoeyLane, LearningToBeFearless, and Sarah Rae Vargas' accounts. There, not only I started to notice how the comments would react to a particular content and the relationship between vlogger and her viewers but also, and even more interesting, how the audience response would shape and modify future videos. The power of the audience was astounding and made me wonder. How could Loey, Alex or Sarah negotiate their own belief in body positivity, their own view, perception and representation of their bodies with the response of their audience? Did they have to hide, hinder and obscure some part of themselves to maintain and have a more successful career? Did the omnipresent and both critical and supportive audience made them change? Were there limits to how much power the vloggers were willing to give in? How did the Body Positivity Movement come out from all this production? Was it splattered, broken, stronger or unchanged?

As to give me a clue, one day I read a comment and my curiosity, already sparked, increased. The comment accused LoeyLane of not only hiding her true weight but also lying upfront about it. That kind of behavior, the commenter continued, was uncalled for. It was going against body positivity, which preached about how a body is not just a number on the scale. Furthermore, it was hurting people in the audience. According to this viewer and those agreeing with her, the inauthenticity displayed by Loey was hurtful to her image, to the audience and even to the Body Positivity Movement. Hiding characteristics of her body rendered her incoherent and fake. As another sign of how YouTube, vloggers, and audiences work, the comment was deleted in less than a couple of hours. While it's impossible to know if it was the commenter or the vlogger herself, still the small conflict had raised my researcher interest. I wanted to analyze this conflictual and negotiated relationship between a female YouTube vlogger, her plus-sized body, the belief and preaching about Body Positivity together with the amplified social media space, and her very active audience.
As a young woman who made of her body and of Body Positivity Movement the launching site for her career, how does LoeyLane approach the audience? What are the features in her body, in the representation of it, in the content she shares and in her relationship with her fans and anti-fans that influence her likeability? What is the role of the audience in shaping her video content, her representation and relation with her body? How does she negotiate with the audience? How much can she keep of her original goal of being a successful YouTuber?

The Vlogger

Digital Economy, Celebrity Culture, and Self-Branding

Before explaining why I believe this research is valuable, I would like to describe in short what the main characteristics of vloggers and their audiences are.

The internet might seem like a confusing and erratic place, but it does show rules that are updated and maintained by a specific community (Rotman & Preece, 2010). YouTube is one of those. Not just a platform, it’s a community where online users interact, share interests and create creative content. It has a unique culture in terms of both language and gestures. The common knowledge and customs provide a unique framework for understanding, interacting and communicating, while the sense of companionship is maintained by shared interests and purposes (Rotman & Preece, 2010). YouTube vloggers also obey unwritten and communitarian rules (Christian, 2009). Vlogs have to be sincere and concerned with self-expression. Authenticity and reality are keywords since vlogs imply an intimate activity. The concern about fakeness, which includes the presence of characters, narrative, and editing, is a concern about sponsored videos. As they might be closer to television and cinema, and thus with a hidden agenda, sponsored videos tend to the opposite of what a vlog should be, therefore the natural and carefree expression of the self (Christian, 2009). This conflict between fakeness and authenticity reveals a clash between commercial channels sponsored by media corporations and channels supported by their own efforts (Rotman & Preece, 2010). The abundance of commercial and
sponsored YouTube channels is due to new factors like the digital economy, celebrity culture, and self-branding.

The creative self-enterprise is, in fact, one of the outcomes of the post-Fordist era, where employment is destabilized and the logics of flexible specialization and contract-based work prevail (Duffy & Hund, 2015). In the digital economy, an individual has all the pressure and responsibilities that companies had to face in the past. He or she is encouraged to invest time, energies and resources in this self-investment. Many of those individuals who choose to publish creative content on YouTube become a vlogger and find sponsors as a way of financial surviving.

As for celebrity culture, social networks like Instagram, Twitter and YouTube have created a platform where normal individuals become famous (Gamson, 2011). Well-known only to a niche or a subculture, micro-celebrities apply a behavior, presenting themselves as stars through a set of practices and a way of thinking about the self (Marwick, 2015). The shift in celebrity culture derives from the change from mass and broadcast media to a more diversified media landscape where culture has become participatory, and the audience had moved from just consumption to participation and creation (Littler, 2004). Furthermore, everyone is ready to be a star in a world where we are growing accustomed to always being watched, even if the price involves practices of individual subjectification and self-presentation.

In fact, individuals need to present themselves as a personal brand to fit into pre-existing media tropes. Through branding, the item displays a quality or an idea that simplifies the decision-making of the consumer. It is also a promise of consistency, which encourages multiple purchases and brand loyalty (Khamis et al., 2016). Branding the self is the testament to unstable and uncertain labor markets where we need to be adaptive and categorized as products: “the more the laissez-faire the economy, the more creativity and agility we need to survive” (Khamis et al. 2016, 8).

Vlogs and their Audience

In most vlogs, narratives are articulated around two motifs: passionate work and glam life. Passion is not just a driver; it’s a way to rationalize success and to romanticize the hard work, the self-management and the always-on persona (Duffy & Hund, 2015). The glam is displayed
strategically on social media, by being relatable and aspirational at the same time. By providing a representation of life that would not appear in glamour magazines, vloggers appear as more authentic and relatable. Furthermore, to best curate their content, vloggers use a specific strategy to share their posts. By choosing a particular channel or social media, they seek to fulfill a specific need. When they prefer to publish a video on the second channel instead of the primary one, for example, they might want to differentiate their content, their creative expression or to reach a more ample audience. Therefore, Twitter is used for information, status seeking and socializing, as it is less intimate and immediate (Pittman & Reich, 2016). Snapchat is geared toward developing and maintaining relationships. Its immediacy and image content mimics real-life interaction and it ensures a good, stable relationship with fans. (Pittman & Reich, 2016).

Thanks to the "context collapse" of social media, therefore when viewers from different backgrounds are united as a singular group of message recipients, if vloggers have a compelling narrative they can attract spectators for a multitude of reasons and from multiple environments (Khamis et al., 2016). However, they need first to understand who their fans and anti-fans might be and thus prepare an adequate content. This invisible spectatorship is called imagined audience and, as many social networks users, vloggers spend a lot of attention and energies to figure out who the viewers might be. They depend on their imagined audience. An incorrect understanding of it might create wrong impressions and judgment within the real people watching, whose reaction could influence the channel (Litt and Hargittai, 2016). The role of fans and anti-fans has in fact been elevated. Now powerful and hyperaware of their star-making capacity, they can just as easily render a video viral, completely ignore it, support or crash it (Gamson, 2011). They are resistant to dominant culture, norms, and ideals. They express a more democratic range of ideas and opinions that are not usually allowed inside the culture industry mode of production (Keltie, 2017). This is the reason why, more often than not, comments on social media bear a great influence on businesses and companies. By subscribing their own meanings to the content they are watching, fans and anti-fans can show their agreement and appreciation or they can disagree and refuse it, thus influencing industries' production.

There are different aspects of the relationship between YouTubers and their subscribers. First, vloggers benefit from the PSI (Para-social interaction), an "illusory experience" where the fans and anti-fans engage with the persona as it was a reciprocal relationship. Developed like a
normal relationship, therefore with the tendency to form a bond with those who have some similar aspects, the relationship can increase brand loyalty, the willingness to share important information with the brand and to purchase their products (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Secondly, YouTubers are subjected to a strong pressure of scrutiny in private life (Marwick, 2013). Their micro-celebrity interactions with their audiences often reveal intimate details of thoughts, dreams, food consumption, and sex lives that are all subjected to examination (Vaterlaus et al., 2016). This kind of controlling force often leads to criticism and, in its extreme form, even to shaming practices where the content and the creator of the video are again inscribed in acknowledged and standard frameworks.

The Conflicted Path

While previous feminist research deeply analyzed social media, bloggers, and Body Positivity, I found little if not mostly inexistent material on vlogging or plus-sized representation in blogs and social networks. When talking about blogging, previous literature stated that because of a non-growing and unstable creative economy, more and more people look for other solutions in social media. It's an independent work-force, whose creations often get re-used by mainstream sources. It's also an unequal platform, not only because female users are often commodified, but also because of discourses of authenticity connected with "post-feminist self-brand" issues. Furthermore, within those who managed to have a wealthy blogger career, most are privileged, educate, thin and beautiful white women (Brooke, 2015). In fact, digital and social media reproduce; they don't stop or create from anew. They don't challenge problems and issues related to genders, like patriarchy and heteronormativity. By reproducing the same gendered discourses, women are limited in autonomy and self-expression. Social media's focus on self-representation force women in practices of scrutiny, where only those who are aesthetically appealing to the male eye can participate and be publicly recognized (Nurka, 2014). Female YouTubers are also less in numbers and receive more sexist and negative comments than their male counterpart, suggesting that the auto-defined liberal platform might actually prefer some representations over others (Wotanis & MacMillan, 2014).

For what concerns Body Positivity online, previous research argues the necessity of unique and different expressions. While many websites propose the same kind of images,
methods, and representation of a positive attitude towards the body, there are actually more ways to obtain a confident relationship with it. More than a prescribed modus operandi, body positivity should be a "diligent engagement with the ways we are expected to understand, perform, and be our bodies" (Sastre 2014, 13). It should be a stimulation to refute old and ordered notions and, on the other hand, a challenge to envision the infinite complexities of our experiences (Sastre, 2014).

Previous research offered interesting points of view and concepts on social media, blogging and body positivity, but there is still a void to fill when talking about the new phenomenon of vlogging. Furthermore, plus-sized YouTubers and their careers have never been the focus of a previous study. With this thesis, I offer a new analysis from a different perspective. I want to find out how YouTube audience plays in relation to female plus-sized beauty vlogger and with her body, knowing that she is a body positivity supporter. Ask teenagers. I bet some of them would like to be a YouTuber, some of them tried, some thought of it at least once. YouTube is an interesting and stimulating platform that inspires the creation of content and different representations. However, how does the audience control and shape the content created? How does it understand when it talks about new images of the body, but also a new representation of femininity? With this study, I believe we could obtain a valuable point of view on how the body is negotiated on a public social platform like YouTube, on how women are trying to look for new spaces of expression, dialogue, personal and financial growth. This research seeks to investigate the way female YouTubers, and more specifically plus-sized vloggers, negotiate in the face of multiple conflicts with the audience, with their beliefs and their career, to gain a better social, economic status and a sense of enrichment.

I believe this study to be valuable to both communication and feminist research. Even if the world of plus-sized beauty vloggers is small and of niche, and at the same time not many people had had access to it, still I argue that it can offer a worthwhile point of view on some aspects of nowadays social media-driven society. The plus-sized beauty vlogger is a woman, a body positivist supporter, an entrepreneur, a creative content creator who has constantly to negotiate the representation, the meaning and the value of her changeable body with her audience. Through positive and negative comments, the videos themselves might change, shape, being negotiated in their content, as to follow both vlogger's will and audience response. In this changeable platform, how is the body represented? How does the vlogger negotiate her meaning
with the audience, trying at the same time to get an economical income, stay faithful to her audience and her beliefs? It's through these questions that issues, characteristics and unsolved problems might surface. These issues are not only belonging to vloggers and to their niche, but also to a bigger territory: the social network in relation with the matter of the female body.

No background in social media or communication is needed for those who would just like to have a better understanding of how young lives shape themselves online, through videos and other's representations. For other researchers and professionals, I would like to provide a different point of view on a feminist matter that involves the representation of the body, the mystifying world of vlogging and the difficult and sometimes hideous reality of comments and opinion sharing.

**Research Questions**

The relationship between vloggers, body positivity and fans/anti-fans could reveal much not only about the world of female presence on social media, but also about how their bodies are perceived and how the audience’s perception and the response to it can shape its manifestation.

Considering the three main characters of this study, I first wonder about the vlogger. How does she represent her body, taking into consideration her belief in Body Positivity? Does she negotiate in her representations, and if yes why, how and with who? Is this negotiation at a high cost?

My second question would be about the audience. How do fans and anti-fans react to the videos, to the representations and the discourses around them? What do they react against? What do they appreciate or hate? And why?

Lastly, I will put together the two precedent inquiries to find a unifying answer. What kind of talk, common themes, orientation and responses about the plus-sized, public bodies are generated? How do they interact? What kind of body talk emerges?
In this literature review, I will investigate social media and audiences, the body in its historical and social meanings, and its new development in Body Positivity. I will explore how the power system interested in dividing, categorizing and discriminating uses the signifiers inscribed in our physical forms to keep maintain its control on our society. Through media, these influencing discourses are brought to our doorsteps and modify our relationships with image and self-image.

Social Media, Audiences and YouTube

Young people recognize themselves and others, share knowledge and create bonds through social networks. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, among many others, are not just a popular hobby but platforms for any kind of fast and worldwide communications, news and issues. Through social media, users can create new relationships faster, can share experiences and personal lives, can access to information and resources. Still, social networking does have also negative aspects, like loss of concentration, focus on the users, and the possibility to reach too much information and entertainment at every time and without shelter. (Sinha et Al., 2016) Furthermore, it is necessary to note that all the information in social media is stored in a central repository in a centralized structure. Under this paradigm, people create their own personal social profile and upload data every day, often without being aware of how it is stored for marketing and business interests. While it does connect millions of people instantaneously, social media can’t be considered as owned by its people or even constructed with the purpose of fairly aiding users.
Because of the vast difference of social media today, we can access to different, interactive features with just one tap on the phone screen. This status is called “technological convergence”, and it describes the possibility of accessing multiple social media at the same time. (Vaterlaus et Al. 2016, 1) By creating specific technologic options, social networks compete to gratify particular desires. Different characteristics are developed to fulfill a specific need and thus permitting users to choose Facebook over Twitter (Pittman & Reich, 2016). In fact, previous research explains that through Facebook users can achieve a better social capital, therefore the possibility of better connections and better resources (Lambert, 2015). Psychological traits and dispositions may vary also the quantity of social capital. Intimacy, or what can be called “bonding social capital”, the possibility of exchanging resources with strong ties, is also a feature to consider when talking about social media like Facebook. Because of the creation of new communities online, the increasing of intimacy capital in those communities is more and more important. Still, Facebook is a fast system to keep up with and its influence on its users could be not just psychological, but also sociological (Lambert 2015, 2).

Other image-based social media like Snapchat are also found to be useful in decrementing loneliness (Pittman & Reich, 2016). They help in maintaining relationships through distance and time, they encourage self-affirmation and feelings of belonging through the sharing of pictures, which immediately relies on the information wanted. Likewise, it was reported that the more Twitter users “twits”, the bigger the socially related gratifications. Connecting is heartwarming, no matter if it’s for information seeking, for socializing and sharing (Pittman & Reich, 2016). It increases perceived social support and self-esteem while decreasing loneliness and depression, even if there are some studies that also affirm in the long run it might create a further gap between individuals and decrease social security (Pittman & Reich, 2016).

**Audiences, Fans and Anti-Fans**

Traditionally, the audience was understood as an invisible and passive force behind the screen. Media enterprises have always concentrated their efforts in understanding who might be the eyes on the other side. Many surveys have been done since the advent of cinema and television to comprehend how to direct, create and change movies, series and television shows. Based on who the audience is, representations and interactions vary (Litt, 2012).
The concept of imagined audience is still applicable nowadays. A picture shared on Instagram does not reach just the little circle of friends and family, but goes on and it spreads across unknown viewers. The Instagram user can get a small indication of the audience by the likes and comments received, but it is only a glimpse. Many might look and not answers, even between those who share a more intimate relationship. Furthermore, less the viewers are known, more the imagination of the user at work. He or she will depend on their own intuition in shaping their content and behavior, thus showing that the imagined audience has equal influence and power as the actual one. Interestingly enough, this behavior is also recognized in offline communication as we also tend to produce social interaction in our own imagination (Litt, 2012).

However, something has changed with the coming of social networks. The popularity of social media has given the opportunity for users to reach a diversified, large public (Litt, 2011). Users still need to rely on the imagined audience, because they have to navigate through “context collapse”, where people with different background and interests meet thanks to the use of the same social network (Litt 2011, 332). At this point, not only is difficult to pinpoint the right, real audience, thus probably creating misunderstanding and inaccuracies, but it’s also mostly impossible to keep satisfied the infinite stream of people reached by the shared content. As argued before, real viewers might be different from the one imagined by the individual. Social media users generally cope with this dilemma by approaching two different strategies: they think about a general, abstract audience or they picture a more targeted one made of homogenous groups of people (Litt, 2011).

Furthermore, the term audience in itself has become obsolete, failing to describe the reality of the media environment. The possibility of sharing, shaping, modifying and creating content through social media had generated a different kind of audience, one that influences markets and companies’ sales. It is a new different communicated world, where everyone is both consumer and creator. The growth of the audience skills in developing content also enhanced “the ways in which audiences ‘work’ within the functioning of media markets” (Napoli 2008, 35). This new labor and its results are not just something to put alongside traditional media institutions, but they are a source of data that can develop audience understandings and can also be treated as a “complementary currencies in the audience marketplace” (Napoli, 2008). Power has thus been distributed between organizations, communities and individuals. Marketing and
businesses do not longer deal with costumers who only listens, but also contribute, engage and answer back (Kietzmann et Al., 2011).

It is necessary, then, to engage with the community of social media. People are looking for a sense of connectedness and belonging, for entertainment, and for a sense of control. Through interaction and the forming of a relationship, an individual can foster a close bond with the viewers, giving them a community to belong to, entertainment etcetera. The audience is then regarded as a mix of fans and friends (Baym, 2012). A way to define the fans is by comparing them to the general audience. General viewers don’t comment, they don’t answer, share and they never or rarely engage actively on the content. They are more passive (Dredge, 2014). On the other side, the fans choose to comment, subscribe and follow the channel they like. They are vocal, they enter competitions, they respond to calls to action. They take note of what happens to the vlogger, they feel intimately close to them. They are active, they seek a personal relationship with the vlogger (Dredge, 2014). YouTube is for them a routine, like commenting a friend’s post on Facebook, or sharing a picture on Instagram and twitting about their day. Being present on YouTube is another part of their social life.

Another difference between fans and audience is that while the viewers change video, page or channel when the show is over, the fans don’t stop there. They liberally choose when and how to approach the content and repurpose it (García-Rapp & Roca-Cuberes, 2017). The content creators benefit incredibly from this passion. In fact, the more fans they have, the more important they are. Success is then the continued attention of loyal followers who engage, create and grow. It’s thanks to those views brought by fans and thanks to their engagement with the source, that the vlogger gains social and economic value. By taking care of the relationship with the audience, the vlogger also ensures that the channel grows and prospers (García-Rapp & Roca-Cuberes, 2017). This relationship has para-social qualities, it’s voluntary, equal and includes support, companionship and true daily online interaction that aims to fulfill a personal lack of autonomy, community, identity, power and recognition.

Intimacy is something expected and felt not only from the point of view of the fans, but it’s also part of the individual disclosure, as he or she shares something personal and receives responses and even criticisms to it. In fact, as they do search for control even in media, fans might and will dislike if they do not agree with the content. People would use the dislike button
on Facebook and are not afraid of down-voting a video on YouTube. While social media do usually pay more attention to positive affirmation, negative comments, trolling, flaming etcetera are difficult to avoid in platforms where everyone can communicate at every time. Anti-fandom, though, can still be considered a productive activity. Anti-fans or the so-called haters publish work, comment and have interactions. As Springer (2013, 58) in “Beyond the H8ter: Theorizing the Anti-Fan” explains, “how people situate themselves in relationship to texts tells us a great deal about meaning-making through texts and, as such, anti-fandom offers much unexplored terrain”. In fact, it’s implied that anti-fans do hold a great knowledge about the matter at hand. They had followed or still follow a specific YouTuber, for example, and don’t lose a chance to criticize. Furthermore, anti-fans use cultural and moral meanings to oppose the text and generally refer to para-textual sources to justify their position. As the fans assume their identity in reshaping, remixing forms of love for their idols, in the same way anti-fans establish their identities in their actions as anti-fans. They have agency, they express creativity and look critically at cultural phenomena. As such, they have motivations as strong as fans’ to express their own negative opinions with social media’s and other users’ every feature. This is one reason why, deleting a comment, controlling likes and dislikes can be effective until a certain point. In fact, if the hater is stopped on one front, he or she will surely find another path. More efficient would be to create dialogue, as much as possible, with the anti-fandom and understand the motives behind their actions, as they might possibly be as useful to give an insight on audience and popular culture (Springer, 2013).

**YouTube**

YouTube was originally created in 2005 to help sharing well-known news and information. Since then it has grown constantly to be a huge cultural and social phenomenon. YouTube is the largest video content sharing platform online. Its major success comes from the interest of the active users in creating their own videos and uploading them, sometime reshaping already existing material, sometimes producing from their own innovative mind. YouTube’s interactive features make it easy for everyone to upload content. With a camera or a phone, a simple editing program and internet connection, the audience shifts and becomes an active producer. (Thelwall & Sud, 2011) According to previous research, more than 60 hours of video
are uploaded every minute and there are more than 8 billion views in total every single day. No wonder, then, that YouTube has come to define how a video should be: short, mostly humorous and easy accessible (Sato, 2012). It also connects with other popular social media, like Facebook or Twitter, so permitting instantaneous sharing for multiple audiences. Furthermore, YouTube is also its own social network. By connecting subscribers, by permitting comments, messages, up-votes and likes, YouTube is a giant source of social communication.

Contrary to popular belief, Burgless and Green (2009) found out that most of the popular content present on YouTube comes from traditional media (42%) and are mainly uploaded so that a larger public can view it free. Traditional media companies and television networks represent only a very small fraction of the uploaders, thus suggesting that it’s the normal users who search for the specific content and then share for others to see. While there is more original content on YouTube and more normal users who contribute to the platform, still its popularity often doesn’t reach traditional media and television networks’. So there is a gap between professional and amateur participants, no matter the actual knowledge and techniques of both (Burgess & Green, 2009). Furthermore, the creation of creative content usually does not give compensation if not the attention and recognition of other users. However, in 2006 Google decided to monetarize YouTube by adding ads and using AdSense system to allow popular channels to receive recompense off the ads and the viewers clicking on them. This is how many YouTubers get compensation out of their careers (Sato, 2012), firstly by promoting themselves with marketing strategies, reaching and adequate number of subscribers and then using advertisement for their own benefit. The more the audience, the better the ads and the monetary gain.

The users can interact with YouTube videos in many ways. They can view, they can like or dislike it, they can respond with a video of their own, and they can share and discuss it in the comment section. All these actions presuppose that the viewer also has access to a personal account and thus a certain level of engagement. (Burgess & Green, 2009). While the general popularity can be seen from the total number of views, it’s actually through the rating system of likes and dislikes that it is possible to understand how viral the video really is. In fact, it is only a small percentage of viewers who step up to comment and rate. It’s by analyzing these features that we can really get an insight on the reception of the video. Additionally, it’s also important to
note that every commenter can volunteer personal information in their account, so actually opening up the road to age, gender and location statistics.

Online communication differs greatly from the face-to-face one. By being anonymous, without known background, public and asynchronous, they offer a new, hidden world to social media studies. YouTube users can choose to use a pseudonym and be anonymous. They are free to participate and they network mostly through comments and likes/dislikes. According to Shultes et Al. (2012), there is a rather negative view on YouTube comments. Users read the first two or three comments and believe informative, context-sensitive and interactive lead to a higher level of entertainment and pleasure, while negative and troll comments are considered inferior and are mainly responsible for the negative image, even if fewer in numbers. In fact, typical comments mostly have a positive response and the more popular and viral a video is, the more it will attract negative feedbacks. In general, the amount of discussion present in many videos suggest that YouTube might be a good platform for good and honest discussion between users and even if less than 0.5% of the viewers leaves a comment, still the threads are considered to be socially relevant (Thelwall & Sud, 2011). Additionally, since popular videos have thousands of comments that gradually leave the place to newer ones, it’s interesting to note that the discussions are actually multiple in numbers and engage different audiences in different times and locations.

The Fat, Primitive Body

The second concept I wish to analyze is the body connected to the social connotations inscribed into it. The gendered relationship with food and health issues is supposed to reveal much about one as an individual (Murray, 2008). As everyone but especially artists, performers and all the professionals who make a career out of their physical persona are aware of, the body is a signifier for feelings, qualities, and affections. The fatness or the skinniness of one's body carries a multitude of social meanings that influence culture, religion, politics and even scientific and evolutionist thought. Thus, throughout history and civilizations, the beautiful, rich body was
lean, overweight, morbidly obese, white or tanned according to that particular society's values and characteristics.

It was at the beginning of the XX century that the first connection between civilization and the body matter was drawn. In that period, non-white people were beginning to populate North America and Europe. White, acculturated men took to themselves the role to research and categorize the physical features considered savage, non-cultured and primitive. A racial policy took place in questionable research, books, and articles, accompanied by an accurate and strict selection of what consisted to be the superior body, which indeed was the white, male one. The whiteness superiority was born at that time, resulting from the XIX century democratic revolutions that fought and destroyed monarchies and nobilities. After this period of commotion, it was necessary to create new systems and new hierarchical arrangements, through which a selected minority of individuals could rule, live on and oppress the majority. New classes were formed. The civilized white man looked at corporeal clues to determine the status of a body, and consequently chose the fate of an entire category of individuals. One of the most instantaneous and easy features identified with inferiority was fatness. People below the evolutionary scale, Native Americans, African people etc. were fat and so considered savage. If it's for natural reasons that a physique is fat, then the body itself is inferior and unrestrained. If it was not because of health and food habits, the culture and the body were considered unworthy and unimportant (Farrell, 2011).

We usually think that the negative connotations of fatness derive from health reasons, but health factors came after and were intertwined with moral meanings (Farrell, 2011). The fat body was a space of laziness, deviance, and overconsumption, used to identify bodies of color, immigrants and working-class people, fat generates a new form of restraint to extend a racial and colonial system of control. The fat body was a challenge to social order (Gullage, 2014). In fact, in the beginning of the "fat problem", the concern about fatness showed up only in publications aimed at a white middle-class. It was when food was mass-produced and fatness was not the elite class prerogative that it started to be a cultural problem. It was not anymore a signifier of a higher status (Farrell, 2011).

Of course, the concern about the fat body was in the largest part a concern for the female fat body. In constructing new categories, the woman of any color was not exempt from a harsh
judgment. While the male was a synonym of rationality, the female was connected with irrationality. She had to maintain civilization through strict control in behavior, clothes and her manners. While sexually active men were considered healthy, women were expected to show no evidence of sexual desire (Farrell, 2011). Always a step behind because of her uncontrollable, impulsive nature, the woman was considered to be intrinsically inferior to her male counterpart because always at risk of a fat body. For this reason, fat itself became to be connoted with the female (Farrell, 2011). By being thin and not attached to earthly desires, a woman could transcend not only the desire of the flesh but also the laboring, economic body. The thin woman was aristocratically cool and unconcerned with material survival. That is the reason why she had to resist fat and her impulsive nature. Likewise, while "savage" males were attracted to plump, morbid women because of ancestral memories of wars and famine, bourgeois gentlemen preferred those who were able to fight and control their nature. Only those worthy and closer to God could stay thin and fit (Farrell, 2011). Consequently, hatred for fat was generated as an impulse to control society through bodies and sex. As Eva was the sinner because she did not regulate her desires, the same faults are inscribed in women who came to be the scapegoat for cultural shame on appetites and inability to control them. The beauty ideal, which was impossible to achieve, gave the society the perfect opportunity to hate, police bodies, hence making women the perpetual sinners (Sheinin, 1997).

Woman's "primitive" and sexual nature inspired contradiction in a dangerous mix of attraction and repulsion (a contradiction that survived centuries), making the XX century women walk on a thin, strict line. They could not refuse their sexuality by becoming too thin and so without sexy curves, but at the same time, they were not allowed to give in their desires by being overweight. The right curves in the right place were essential to be considered a true woman because they would attract men and were a symbol of fertility.

In the beginning of the XX century, the image of the beautiful, white and refined woman was used by both the suffragettes and their opponents to symbolize the educated heterosexual attractive model. On the other side, the plump lady was the unrestrained, uneducated, out of control equivalent; not ready to be a full citizen or, paradoxically, not fit to be like a man, and thus to have his same privileges (Farrell, 2011). After the right to vote was obtained, the most popular female body type was the thin but feminine one. Women had to fight to keep the
political, cultural and social rights they had struggled for. This means that they had to exercise a ferocious control over themselves. The lean but full physique became to be the ideal, civilized heterosexual alluring body, even for the feminists of that period, because of its independence, well-being, strength and white connotation.

What About Now?
Throughout history, the huge utilization of images in mass media and the most recent development of the diet industry created a situation where we are afraid, worried or anxious because we are aware, unconsciously or not, that behind our corporeal side are hidden social and cultural meanings of which we have no kind of control. Different factors might influence the individual in taking more food than what they would need. In the western world, the increase of production and supply, the constant use of sophisticated promotion and persuasion have made food accessible and easily available. On the other hand, people are prone to have more sedentary jobs, more stress, and job insecurity. With discourses of an obesity epidemic, the thin privilege has become more linked with class and gender categories, while the fat body is opposite of the “normalized” middle-class body and its values (Fahs, 2015).

In her book Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body (Bordo, 2004), Susan Bordo says that the body and a woman’s own relationship with it reflects the ways in which culture has shaped it. More specifically, how she dresses as well as the way she feels about her body size and shape is reflective of her cultural and historical context. In fact, culture changes the way we perceive our bodies and how we inscribe ideas and connotations in them. For example, in those communities where food is not abundant, people are considered crazy and problematic if they abstain from it. In western cultures where food is easily accessible, monitoring the intake of food means control and willpower, and lasting success. Extreme conditions like anorexia are then seen by Bordo as a way to control, discipline, and mortify the body in a society where women are marginal and powerless (Bordo, 2004).

Consequently, it’s impossible to separate the personal from the political. The female body then becomes a text in itself, where social rules are visible for everyone to see. The stress on makeup, on flattering clothes, diets and the hate on fat are just a few common examples of how
the body is constantly normalized in everyday cultural discourses, and of how women are relegated in the same submissive position by them (Bordo, 2004).

Fat people, and especially women, are believed to be lazy, without will-power and out of control. Fat is intertwined with discourses of self-responsibility and linked with medical issues. Because these discourses are perpetrated by scientists, anti-fat propaganda seems to be reliable, transparent and objective. Fat bodies, even according to these medical views, are connoted with moral discourses, they serve as confessors. This power dynamic pathologizes fat bodies and makes the individual responsible for his or her situation and at the same time a moral failure (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015). Like any other addiction, obesity functions as a diagnostic and normalizing tool that attempts to institute conceptual borders in our tacit, unfixed knowledge of deviant bodies, to name it pathology and thus arrest its development. The notion of healthy, natural eating is constructed and culturally encoded, through the historical and cultural meanings infixed in foods and in the rituals surrounding them (Fathi, 2011).

In the critical analysis of the best-seller “Skinny Bitch”, written by former modeling agent Rory Freedman and former model Kim Barnouin and marketed as a diet book, Winch (2011) points out how, according to the two female authors, skinniness is considered to be health, energy, success and happiness, and fatness humiliation, co-dependency, gluttony and laziness (Winch, 2011). There is no in-between. We reason with a binary code that excludes other possibilities, just because our thinking range is not used to space out of the box. So if thin is good, fat is bad. Diversity is normal but not culturally valued because we are used to black and whites (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015).

The body defines the person and his or her moral worth. Because health is understood socially and not medically and because it is everyone's responsibility, failing to be skinny is like failing to be normal (Winch, 2011). Being fat is a moral choice, that is why there's no empathy for fat people but anger and dislike (Fathi, 2011). It is a lifestyle choice and if someone doesn't adhere and follow the right path they might as well be punished with discourses of shaming and social avoidance. In “Skinny Bitch” we see how much being skinny is desirable in our modern society and how much, even if there is a critique towards the social pressure which makes women eat bad, dress bad and feel worthless, we still have the tendency to rejoin the status quo and don't promote any social change (Winch, 2011). However, there is a contradiction. On one
side, the misconception that the human mind can control every aspect of our body and that through rationality there can be behavioral changes. People are being held responsible for their fatness. It is because of fat people's weaknesses, their refusal to conform to body codes and to not accept responsibility that they're not changing. On the other side, obesity is an illness to cure. Even if many researchers suggest that so much alarmism is unwarranted, fatness is still treated like a plague to cure with healthy food and exercise (Fathi, 2011).

Another point to develop is how fatness is gendered. As also stated before, obese bodies become more offensive when they are female. They are a source of suffering not only to themselves but also to others, because fat is a moral and aesthetic threat. In the last century, there are new examples of how western medicine and science sustain the panic over fatness. Obesity intertwined with morals, and the preservation of fixed gender identities and normative female sexuality and embodiment. Women are the product of their own failure of will; they are to blame for their own deviance. These ideas are still here today if we watch television, commercials or articles on dieting. The main target is always the woman who lost and forgot herself, maybe because she is busy, overstressed or overworked, and the offered resolution is a stricter control on her body. They are required to regulate and restrain themselves, their intake of food and any other desire. If she allows her desires to run free, she will then evoke feelings of fear, of addiction, of failure of will and bodily ethics. When uncontrolled, she eats other people's disgust at her body, she eats her shame because she is living in an improper body (Fathi, 2011).

**Shame on You**

Fat Amy is one of the characters of “Pitch Perfect 1” and “Pitch Perfect 2”. Not afraid of being classified as obese, she chooses her own nickname. She is the classic comic relief. With gags that rely on her deviant body, it is her fat and uncontrollable nature that makes the audience laugh with rarely a hint of guilt. In fact, she chooses to joke and play at the expenses of her body. Why shouldn’t we? However, because they are self-directed or expressed by intimate people, these feelings of shame and humiliation are easily forgiven and forgotten.
Fat Amy is only one of many examples in recent comedies where fat brings a loss of respect and dignity to the overweight character. Media are full of this kind of humiliation rituals. Take a look at the entire human race in “Wall-e” or at Britney Spears in all tabloids dated 2000. Fat people, or people who are not idealistically thin, are still identified as savage and out of control, and of course oversexualized when women. Excess, desires, loss of control are all issues deeply connected with being overweight (Farrell, 2011).

The fat body does not fit into the normal-sized world. They are not accommodated in the culture, even if they are a good percentage of the population. To be lean and fit is to have power and demonstrate it (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015). Shame and humiliation are a part of the same normative discourse but they are qualitatively different because the first looks at oneself, the second is produced by others. Humiliation and shame, as fat denigration, are to convince women to adopt more forms of feminine beauty and thus are part of a coercive method used by hierarchies to reinforce power discourse concerning racism, sexism, and homophobia (Frith et al., 2014). Ridicule and shaming both targets the dignity. While shaming is solemn and can elicit sympathy, ridicule has irony and generates laughter. Both reaffirm social solidarity in front of a deviance, even if ridicule wants to solicit constituencies which otherwise would remain disengaged. They are the reaffirmation of power and authority through social control, and in western societies they are instruments of domination and superiority, a way to distance yourself against and reaffirm "the other" inferior state of being. Shaming and ridicule regulate and criticize life and cultural practices that are considered inappropriate. Ridicule builds an imagined community and energizes others who embrace the values represented by its message (Frith et al., 2014).

In this new media world, the role of ridicule in policy discourse seems destined to become even more important. As young people “begin to look elsewhere for both their information and their entertainment, and as governmental and corporate actors generate tightly scripted and anodyne messages, one may expect to see more attempts at humorous humiliation from the roots” (Grabosky 2016, 23).
Note on Skinny Shaming

I would like to spend few words to explain how shaming, ridiculing and social avoidance do not only address overweight people. On social media websites, it is not uncommon to find sentences like "bones are for dogs; meat is for men," "real women have curves," or many other forms of the same message. It is possible and often argued that fat people lash out at thin ones in order to feel better about themselves. After having examined in modern society the binary of fat equals bad, thin equals good, there is nothing to be surprised about that turning the cards over would help fat people feel better. However, I argue that the same logic that criticizes and tries to push in one framework the overweight body is also the one going against the thin, non-curvy one. Both of them are following the heterosexual normative standard of beauty, where a female body should be attractive to the male gaze and therefore should have the right curves in the right place (Winch, 2011).

A thin person can have body image struggles and can be judged equally as unhealthy, out-of-control as the heavier one. However, the difference between these negative feelings is that the fat person in very circumstances will be morally judged. Those who are thin are more likely to be considered lucky, even if they might be suffering from an eating disorder. Because they would not experience the intense conflict between appetite and desire to lose weight, which characterizes the overweight overeater, they escape the judgment of being out of control that defines compulsion (Murray, 2008). On the other hand, overweight or obese people are persistently reminded of their size with a subtle form of discrimination or open harassment that thin people rarely have to confront. The connection between health and morality, body and morality define fatness as a bodily deviance while using a disease metaphor to diagnose their body deviancy. This concept is particularly troublesome because it has been found out that weight-based discrimination is linked to other forms of oppression exercised on marginalized minorities. The same controlling power discourses are being used on all disregarded minorities, whose people are thus believed to be lazy, poor and without willpower. As stated before, within these groups the anti-fat sentiment is also linked to negative feelings towards women. Those are the reasons why I chose to dedicate this thesis on body shaming in general and fat shaming in particular (Fathi, 2011).
Having said so, I would like to add that something that I learned from researching into body positivity is that no one is 100% happy with their bodies. Any kind of oppressing discourse that utilizes the body to control the people is to be eradicated. In its every aspect, shaming is hostile, mean and makes the other person feel extremely uncomfortable in his or her own skin (Winch, 2011). Both skinny and fat shaming is harmful to the psyche, the confidence and the well-being of all the people involved. Both skinny and fat shaming should be eliminated, even though distinctly different, because based on the concept of the body as a set of several different parts, as the foundation of one person, descriptive of their soul, their moral and social values. Though focused on fat shaming and on plus size vloggers, this research opposes and rejects all types of shaming and advocates for a society where a person's worth is given by his or her inner qualities.

The Power of the Gaze

Body normalizing and body shaming have a specialized channel in media. The cis-gendered body, therefore the one that conforms to gender expression and assignment, is reaffirmed in the same media-generated stereotyped heteronormative feminine attributes (Guillard, 2015). Normalization is imposed through homogeneity and the necessity of being part of a group, and to not conform leads to a road of discrimination, social rejection, and ridicule. Establishing normative gender attributes make women a subject to a scrutiny exercised by family, schoolmates, coworkers or friends who thus both control and surveil our own bodies. This framework is then copied and applied in new media. For example, with the weakening of traditional and family relationships, the young girl looks at her classmates and friends to get a model and identify herself. Then, many commercials addressed to young girls figure older, pretty and cool example of female friends. Sisterhood becomes both a commodity to be consumed and a new market space, a concept with plays along with the patriarchal system because of its normative choices, policing and surveillance. In this example, the body is rewritten through a policy of guilt, punishment, and humiliation, where the role of female friendship is of
surveillance and public shaming and broadcasted through television, the internet and social media (Winch, 2011).

The Panopticon is a good metaphor to understand how media regulates our vision of the world and the relationship with our daily life. The Panopticon is an ideal prison where a tower surveils the prisoners, but cannot be seen in turn by them. The result is that the convicts know they are being observed, they cannot look back at their viewers and fight them; thus, they have no choice but to regulate their acts. In the same way, video and digital surveillance techniques monitor society through a gaze without eyes. As happens in new media like Instagram, YouTube etc., people subject themselves to the gaze, they are aware they are being observed but have no influence and power on how the reporting goes. The gaze is both the consequence and central function of surveillance, where the power acts and controls language, body and social order (Godoy-PRESSLAND, 2016). Through media, television, and internet we are exposed to beliefs, attitudes, and ideals about the real world that match the depicted world and, even if originally with divergent ideas, we tend to come to the same solutions after exposure (HARRISON, 2003).

One of the most important characteristics of the surveillance understood as gaze, it is that it's specifically the male to female gaze (Godoy-PRESSLAND, 2016). In other words, the active controller of the look is male. According to Mulvey and her studies in psychoanalysis (1975), the presence of phallocentrism depends on the castration of the woman. A woman can only exist as a symbol of castration. In the patriarchal society, she symbolizes the male "other", a symbolic presence that man can use to fulfill his obsession "through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning" (Mulvey 1975, 1). This is the reason why so many signifiers and connotations have been given to the female body; it's a blank space colored by sexual obsession. YouTube and other internet media can go against the dominant ideological concepts presented in cinema, by being an alternative place where other forms and concept of body, femininity, and woman can take place and the audience becomes a creator of content.

Still, I argue that for vloggers, Instagrammers and so on it is difficult to escape the controlling and voyeuristic gaze of the audience. The controlling and curious eyes of the viewers can at the same time make the atypical body glamorous, attractive and acceptable but also inscribe it in new domesticated frameworks of "to be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 1975, 4). Gaze as
a control medium ensures that the female body, rendered an object, follows particular rules of heterosexual attraction. It is the perfect body proposed to the male gaze that becomes the example women has to adhere to. The surveillance techniques established in media put the body in four different frames: trivialized, when focusing on irrelevant reporting on sexuality, clothes, and activities, relationship and personality instead of the achievements. It is secondary when the body as an entity comes after its weight and the anxiety of keeping up with the surveillance exercised by both media and peers. The female body representation is commercial when women are not seen as sexual being or persons anymore; they are seen as body parts with no worth. Lastly, it's feminine, when in an auto-surveillance situation, the woman represents the normative heterosexual femininity.

The determining male gaze imposes its desires onto the female body that is styled accordingly and thus, worrying about how people see her, the woman molds and decorates herself (Godoy-Pressland, 2016). Though, because of social surveillance putting every body in one frame, there's no discrimination between different religions, practices and cultures, only the propagation of a constructed idea of beauty and identity (Gallagher&Pecot-Hébert, 2007). The threat of being seen by the male gaze used to strengthen up and reinforce techniques of control objectifies women and coerces them in behaving and managing their body in the same way (Morrison, 2007). There is a contradiction, then, also suggested by the growing popularity of DIY programs, blogs, and channels. On one side, contemporary selfhood is central to social transformation, and the individualization process that focused on the "choice" as an increasingly central factor for people's life, since their identities are formed through lifestyle-oriented decision-making rather than social collectives (Martin & Lewis, 2012). Therefore, women are willing to spend time and resources in being guided in food, style and life choices. On the other side, the idea of reflexive, choice-based life is merely a utopia, a fake creation inside structural constraints.

Lastly, according to a recent study, ideal proportions for modern, beautiful women are believed to be 36-24-36. With bigger breasts, a smaller waist and larger hips, the perfect body is not just thin, but also imbalanced, making the ideal even more so impossible to reach. Thin, but only if curvaceously. Everyone, even balanced fit women are found to be insufficient. Consequently, idealization of thinness stops at the waist and its size, pushing body shaming to
not look anyone in the eyes. It is for everyone. Those women who desire an ideal body cannot do it without going through surgical operations, strict dieting or disordered eating (Harrison, 2003). Fat can thus be inscribed in heteronormative beauty standards, can be accepted, courted and domesticated when pleasurable to the man-gaze. Only parts of a body are acceptable, and only because they follow a hyper-sexualization standard of the woman. The woman then becomes merely an object of pleasure and desire (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015).

Gender and Heterosexual Normativity

Gender is considered to be a product of discourses, a set of repeated acts, whose performativity shows its factitiousness (therefore that is a construct) rather than its facticity (the body exists). Even if gender is a series of performances, that does not mean that the subject is free to decide the gender they prefer, because it's always going to be limited by a script and by a regulatory frame which has a limited set of possibilities. There is no "being", but only doing. The performance that is gender constitutes the identity; gender is an act that brings to life what it names. All genders become thus a form of satire, where some acts are more parodic in revealing the true performative nature of gender and the relation between sex and gender (Salih, 2002). By "doing gender", therefore by complying with a set of processes that are presumed to derive directly and naturally from the biological sex, we are permitted survival in this society as we reinforce gender inequality, as both man and woman are called to fit in the dominant framework.

The binary system that produces the relationship between male and female produces an even stronger hierarchical structure where rules of femininity and masculinity define what is appropriate or what is not (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Masculine is powerful, active and persistent, feminine is passive but at the same time always sympathetic to male sexuality. It is a set of oppositional relations that encourage and support men's greater power and status. Mistakenly associated with gender, masculine means to be heterosexual active while femininity means to be sexually attractive to men and gatekeepers in the sexual relationship. In a framework where male and female drives, needs and roles are said to complementary, heteronormativity,
therefore putting hetero desire before and above every other range of human desire, becomes a weapon of control (Eaton & Matamala, 2014).

While it is now recognized that sex is biological and gender is a sociocultural construct, separating sex from gender reinforces the binary nature/culture and does not consider how much biology is so close to culture. Sex, as a biological category, is not considered a construct or an achieved status, even if it is defined or constructed. In fact, the biological sex divides humanity into two categories, man, and woman (Ingraham, 1994). The idea of "oppositeness" indicates that heterosexual interaction involves opposing genitals and therefore behaviors, and that social and cultural roles must be opposed. Genitals are the central part of social interaction and are the basis for deciding about the gender of belonging and the person's sexual orientation (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009).

Eaton & Matamala argue that “heteronormative beliefs should be understood and represented as an underlying concept that motivates most, if not all, measures of heterosexual sexuality and gender relations” (2014, 3). It's the sum of legal, cultural, and institutional practices that maintain normative assumptions that there are only two genders, that gender and biological sex are reflected into each other and that only sexual attraction between two different genders is natural and acceptable (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Woman and man are different but complementary, eliminating all possible differences (Eaton & Matamala, 2014). Heteronormativity is an unrecognized, ignored structure that, however, organizes the lives of men and women by subverting them to an unequal division of labor, while patriarchy is a historical variable that reproduces the hierarchy of heteronormative divisions that privileges men and uses women. Heteronormativity organizes social structures and practices that are defined as natural when instead they are reinforced by organizational and ritual institutions such as marriage. We should think about how our sex and gender assumptions organize, differentiate, regulate and preserve relationships of power, especially related on to the establishment of heterosexuality. By faithfully believing in the naturalness of some social arrangements, we keep invisible interests that organize ideas for their own well-being. While concentrating on gender, which is a symptom, we leave on a side the primary root of exploitation and oppression (Ingraham, 1994).
Institutionalized heterosexuality divides people by class, power, and privileges. Because of this, women, the diverse, the "savage" are framed in fixed aesthetics; the body is weighted and judged, discarded and refused when found unworthy (Ingraham, 1994). Heterosexuality, femininity, and virility are taken for granted and are taken as naturally derived from biological sex. In this system that privileges heterosexuality and manhood at the expense of woman and homosexuality (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009), it is necessary to change the focus from gender to heteronormativity. This way we would understand that heterosexuality is at the center of social organization and work, which removes and rejects the odd or strange (i.e. all those queer practices that do not serve hetero-normative reproduction and are therefore considered immoral or not normal). Heteronormativity's role in building normativity gender and in closing (or forbidding) the critical discussion that sees heterosexuality as an organizational institution is the next barrier to be faced by the feminist sociological study (Ingraham, 1994).

The Role of Femininity

The necessity of being feminine, groomed and heterosexually attractive is one of the main requisites of heteronormative discourses (Winch, 2011). Women enhance their femininity by adorning it, shaping it and maintaining it according to social norms and expectation of both male and female gaze. Women should self-surveillance and practice normativity. When practicing more masculine activities, they should engage even more often in femininity practices to balance the equation. Their body otherwise would be considered dangerous, out of bounds. These normative and woman-based discourses carry the recognized gender type and offer a way of socially understanding the roles of gender and a way of interpreting the female body (Godoy-Pressland, 2016). Transforming themselves to achieve a new social status and a change of life through the acquisition of forms of cultural and social capital, women participate in this rhetoric where femininity is at the same time a commodity and necessity to achieve authenticity and the revelation of the self. She has to keep up to date with the trends and pay for new products to maintain her power and recognition,
By practicing self-surveillance, the woman appears as an agent of power and control, but actually has no authority over the patriarchal system (Winch, 2011). Femininity is not a choice but a forcible citation of a norm. Commercials want us to believe they are enhancing our bodies, but at the same time, there is the inherent concept that we are naturally imperfect, flawed and that only using products we can be considered beautiful. The body is a commodity in the traditional and hegemonic discourse of beauty where makeup change can at the same time improve our look, and generate self-esteem. According to how much one participates in consumption practices, a woman's identity is formed; the ideal state can be achieved if « xx » product is bought. Makeup, clothing and even plastic surgery are practices meant to create identities and associated with performing gender. Consequently, a woman's identity is not stable, because it is based on a performance that can be reworked, improved and altered at any time. Femininity itself is a set of alliances and identifications that requires constant work, self-surveillance, and self-realization. As also stated before, the female body has been divided into different fragments that in their totality are more important and real than her "self ». Beauty has become a commodity that can be bought to avoid feeling like the "other" but that can also help women to have some sort of social status (Gallagher&Pecot-Hébert, 2007). Social life is structured according to the distribution of various forms of capital. The body can also contain its form of capital (bodily or physical), which brings to the distinction of value through corporeal evaluations. Femininity can be considered a social capital, in the exchange economy, or scopic economy, which is the positioning in a scale in social life. We can move, access and engage in the scopic economy if we have enough forms of capital. This is a discourse of recognition and misrecognition. A good appearance is both an achievement and a resource, because who can't have it is seen as an illegitimate, marginalized subject. However, since the claim is only recognized by “the other”, who may have a different system of interpretation and meaning, the stake is still unstable. In a society where it is through the body that we encounter discourses of recognition, visibility, humiliation and shame, scorn and empathy, the process of disciplining of the self produces docile, self-surveilling subjects (Frith et al., 2014). Furthermore, by creating malleable individualized feminine identities, we are always constrained by the same conventional, fashionable femininity. Freedom is only the freedom to fit in the same framework (Martin & Lewis, 2012).
Positivity in the Body

The emergence and democratization of new technologies have placed great pressure on conventional news media, at least in western democracies. Their competition for market share has seen increasing emphasis on entertainment at the expense of young people, who are influenced by the idea of beauty, successful and cool created (Grabosky, 2016). Exposure to a thin ideal body in media is linked with the drive of thinness in women and the preference for a thin body in men (Harrison, 2003). Media portrayals of thin women lead women to believe they should adhere to this ideal, because not only is the norm but also a connotation for success, virtue, and attractiveness. Health is defined by current beauty standard and the exposure to idealized images produces a contrast effect that works against the average woman. There is a little space where women can negotiate and navigate with their bodies.

The exposure in social media to other kinds of bodies (beautiful, valued, considered worthy) can change the status quo (Harrison, 2003). We need to challenge the discourses about bodies. Through the critic of normative beauty standards, we thus create a debate on the dominant understanding of gender visualization and representation, to show the power relations that regulate women's lives, self-images, and media representation. By changing the cultural negative connotation given to the "diverse", body positivity seeks to normalize and bring to people's attention different and new kinds of bodies (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015). Body positivity does not just appreciate the physique, but also what it represents, what it does. It advocates for body acceptance and love, even when there might be imperfect parts. Body positivity stimulates adaptive appearance investment. Those with positive body image are invested in their appearance, in their representation of the world, because it translates as kindness to themselves.

Body image is not a one-dimensional aspect of a person. It can be increased, maintained and changed. Body positivity is protective: it protects physical health and psychological well-being. It is not linked with unhealthy eating and loss of self-care but with intuitive eating. Consequently, encouraging acceptance and other positive aspects of body image not necessarily will influence weight gain or eliminate the desire of achieving a healthy lifestyle. On the contrary, it increases engagement in health-related behaviors (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).
To form another way to understand the body, it is also necessary to investigate and concentrate deeper on the relationship between body and image, subject and object. It should be understood that the body and its images are not two separate things but have a relationship that is constructed slowly through their relationality. The subject is defined by the difference with the object. The subject is self-conscious, unique, has a body. In “The Becoming of Bodies”, Coleman (2008, 167) says that the dichotomy between "looking" and "object looked" falls when viewed from the woman's point of view. Women are constituted as objects and can be both object and subject at the same time. The space and temporal gap between subject and object, image and object do not exist for women. For female subjects there is no gap, she is subjected to an over-presence of images and at the same time, she is the image. The bodies are normalized through the over-presence of images and their invasive and fast circulation. Given this great circulation, the actual body must be and it is expected to be "filtered, smoothed, polished, softened, re-arranged". However, the body is a thing in becoming. The body "becomes" thanks to the contact with multiple and different objects, never separated from other relationships with the world (Coleman 2008, 167).

That is the reason why the role of the media is nowadays more and more important. The relation with the body comes from common behaviors and messages, comments or criticisms received not only in childhood at home or school but especially from the media we can access every day. While it is necessary to become a critical viewer of social and media messages, there are also some other personal and internal steps we can make while thinking about body image. In our mind, we are used to think of ourselves as not a whole person, but a divided identity. Our body is not perfect, therefore it is terrible. We construct a mental filter where we pick out a single negative detail ("I hate running. I will never get in shape. My stomach is big so I am fat"), disqualifying all the positive we have. To have a more constructive outlook on our bodies not only we need to cultivate a healthy relationship with the images we are submerged with, but we also need to promote a deeper awareness of what is bad for us and make the following decision to distance ourselves from it. We need more acceptance of what we are as a whole, not as bad legs or a fat stomach. Lastly, we need to cultivate an appreciation of what our body can do for us, thus nurturing a positive outlook and acknowledge that positive body image is a distinct construct from negative body image (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Feminist Standpoint

This research is built on feminist epistemology, so I will spend some words to delineate what I mean by it. Feminist epistemology looks for recognized knowledge and for an account of who is seeing what out of the mainstream focus. We come to experience the world in different ways because we have different lenses and positions. This situatedness influences knowledge, the authority of the claim, and its importance.

The body is an essential part of the feminist research and of communication studies critique. In fact, subjectivity is created through embodiment, through narratives applied to an always-changing subject. The physical parts of the self are modified and influenced by power discourses. The experiences or the situatedness of the body determine the self, who in turn assumes class, race and gender. Therefore, by thinking of the body behind the screen, we can see economic and social powers, agency and opportunities.

Consequently, researching media should be a political project. Not only media tells us about life just as much as it influences it, in media there are also all different kinds of existing powers and social hierarchies that we can recognize in our everyday experiences. Feminist media studies seek the cultural analysis of a phenomenon, to reveal the political side of it, and to demonstrate its impact on minorities and oppressed groups (Press, 2011).

Here then lies the difference between feminism and post-feminist sensibility. In the new post-feminism, there is an emphasis on individualism, personal choices and agency in comparison with the past conversation about “wider structural influences in gender inequality” (Pruchniewska 2017, 3). This is especially true in mediated spaces of cultural expressions. Nowadays we have the notion that “they” already fought and won all the battles, so feminism is
no longer necessary. Popular culture and media have participated for a long time in taking down feminism by promoting individual choice and success, while politics have become something obsolete. However, the individual choice cannot escape standard frameworks and impositions. These power discourses cannot be concealed if we only focus on our own individual success and choices (Maharajh, 2014). Because of the main belief that equality has been normalized and that feminism is unnecessary, there is also less sympathy (if nothing at all) for adult women in media. They can make their own intelligent decisions, so it seems logical that they must have taken part in objectification and subordination. Their behavior is not thought as due to a process they cannot change, a process that first needs to be revealed and then overcome.

While it can be considered a break from second-wave feminism, less white and more representative of other minorities, post-feminism can only be described as a sensibility. Through this sensibility, we approach concepts like femininity as a bodily property, the importance of self-surveillance and discipline, individualism, choice and empowerment etcetera (Maharajh, 2014). Therefore, if in the past it was political empowerment, now it is economical, it’s recognition through acts of consumption and a normalized feminine subjectivity.

**Body Positivity and Feminism**

Second Wave feminism saw the body as a site for personal discovery and rebellion. By looking at its corporeality, it was possible to understand political meanings around it (Fahs, 2015), that inspired motifs of sameness, equality, universal action, sisterhood and scientific research (Adriaens & Van Bauwel UGent, 2014). However, with the growth of an academic wing of feminism, the priorities inside the movement shifted. The body transitioned from being showed and strategically used to fight back, to being studied in the classroom. Many interests fell out of focus. The female body was seen more from an abstract and theoretical viewpoint (Fahs, 2015).
Body Positivity was largely influenced by Second Wave feminism, and equally as political in the beginning. Important influences on its message were the Fat Acceptance and Health at Every Size movements. Both movements aim for equal rights, representation and fair treatment (Prins, 2017). The term “body positivity” was actually born to help patients with anorexia nervosa and was immediately the center of many lectures, workshops, and exercises. Its first step was to learn how to

uncover the messages that have influenced your relationships with your body, food, and exercise [and d]evelop a weight-neutral, health-centered approach to self-care [to b]ecome the authority of your own body by sorting out facts from distorted societal myths about health, weight, and identity (Prins, 2017).

Though, its message got diluted as it reached more public. As “body positivity” got popular in social media, it got mixed with other meanings and especially with motifs belonging to post-feminism. Eventually, Body Positivity became to mean that all kinds of bodies are beautiful and was also used as a way to sell products to a niche market (Prins, 2017).

**Postmodern Feminism**

I’m looking at a movement created thanks to Second Wave feminism, deeply influenced by post-feminist discourses and I’m going to research it through a post-modern feminist perspective. It’s apparent that it’s impossible to have Body Positivity without feminism, and it’s also difficult to ignore the mainstream post-feminist message spread with it today. This is the reason why I provided a description for both. However, I need to have a postmodern feminist outlook not only because is more diverse and including, but also because it gives me instruments and the right lens to look at the postmodern content of Body Positivity in YouTube vloggers.

In fact, Postmodern Feminism accepts multiple truths, multiple roles and multiple realities as its focus. As there are different truths, there is also no one essential nature of women or one-way to be a woman. Following Postmodernism, Postmodern Feminism argues that human experience is located "inescapably within language". In fact, Not only the comments but also the vloggers’ videos can be seen as text. The audience discusses the meaning and the truth of the words. The same words spoken by the vloggers become a site of conflict, but also a place where a better understanding and new meanings can be created. In those words, experiences are shared

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and created. While the body is materiality, in the video and its comments it becomes text. It is commented, described, accepted and negated in words. The language used by both vloggers and audience shifts the perspective on the body, it molds it and changes it. Therefore, power can be seen not only in straight compulsion but also in all the ways language molds and modifies reality and the world. For this reason, this research is strictly looking at the text to understand discourses and power structures, because language can always offer different interpretation and thus can be altered and reshaped, as a “potentially fruitful site of political struggle” (Pruchniewska, 2017).

Because there is no truth out there but a multitude of different stories and points of view, the only solution would be to narrate and to focus on the thin line “between text and reality” (Pruchniewska, 2017). The emphasis is on textuality, which sometimes can obscure real life problems. Therefore, what we need is a critical analysis, so to not give up the status quo but to stir the waters up again. By looking at videos, productions and texts in general, to analyze their meanings and the practices that surround them and discourses, by studying lives that are shaped by the cultural meanings of these texts, we can reveal culture as a mix of practices and discourses that control women and minorities. However, does the focus on text obscure other kinds of power and institutions? Is there no action to take after? Are there only texts to analyze? These are other questions we need to ask. By offering new ways of looking at content and new perspectives on what interests us, this analysis can turn into something practical, modifying our approaches on social networks and their inhabitants.

These are many concerns I have to face as a feminist researcher, primarily to examine myself in relation with the text. By being reflexive and self-conscious, I want to give an honest account of myself as a feminist scholar. The one following are some of the inquiries I went through while writing this thesis.

**My Position**

I do not want to approach this research as a distanced third party with analytic and critique control. I wish to be more open, more conscious, less judging and more compassionate and understanding. Before I began the analysis of the data, I thus believed it was important to recognize all the preconceptions that have crossed my mind during the preparation of this thesis. From a bystander point of view, it is not difficult to harbor more than one bias towards the
subject of the research. The more I found about them, the more I had to think. Furthermore, as I said before I was a fan of these three vloggers. I liked them and I still enjoy watching them from time to time. While now I might be more critical of the content they upload, I still agree with many of their views and opinions. However, I did and still have mixed feelings about them that come from presumptions about class, culture, femininity and feminine practices. And, of course, about the body itself.

The first bias that I have is of course that I am myself not a thin person, so any offense and critique made to them is made to me. On the other side, I admit I have difficulties in going through my own deeply concealed fat-phobia. While I started watching these videos to get more self-confidence about myself, I cannot help but fall into old patterns of female heterosexual competition, where the thinner one is also the more acknowledged. Even if in a beautiful and well-cared body, I still perceive fat as a loss. I win, as I am thinner, in this game of heterosexual attractiveness.

Another point to deepen is that femininity in my mind equals to weakness and softness. I found myself slightly disliking the display of blatant and researched femininity of the vloggers. I know that all these concerns and stereotypes are created by constant messages streamed in media. Some of them are deeply hidden in every one of us, like fat equals to unhealthy and thin to healthy. I recognize and refuse the impulse to see myself as the better one, so reiterating the same discourse that sees the bigger or simply different body as unworthy, unable, and unrecognized. As a feminist researcher, I strive to create new mental approaches that respect, value and are aware of every kind of body. By putting all my stereotypes on words, by showing my weaknesses and defects, I adopt a reflexive inner look to uncover what can be deep-seated and ignored to become a better and more open human being and thus a better researcher.

**Ethical Concern and Involvement**

Earlier feminists understood radio and television, the first few broadcasting systems studied, as to occur mainly in specifically gendered spaces. This assumption can now be questioned. In a post-audience age, there is no difference between public and private sphere, because we live inside media (Gill, 2007). It is now portable, interactive, everywhere and taken for granted. Even if the consumption is still gendered, there is no more public/private distinction
and it’s not easy to understand the male/female division like in previous studies. Our lives are becoming media, we are all “audiencing” and participating in the creation of new content (Gill, 2007).

While gender remains relevant and important in media audience research, the new environment demands the review of the methods used. The most important questions for feminist audience researchers are about new media’s ubiquity and its multi-sitedness. New media is also spread globally, it has a new more interactive and reflexive audience. It has new questions of privacy and consent. In the same way, it’s also important to review ethical questions (Gill, 2007).

I would then like to quote England when saying, "Treating people like objects – sex objects or research objects – is morally unjustifiable" (1994). When analyzing LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless and Sarah Rae Vargas the first thought that came to my mind is that, as both a fan and researcher, I needed to treat these people not as mere mines of information or as examples to prove my point. I want to consider the human beings I am studying as they were in front of me, as they are aware of this research and as they would, in the end, read and analyze it. I do not want them to be just used, scrutinized. While they are still the research focus, I do not want them to feel like I am coldly analyzing them. That is why I decided to disclose part of my experiences and my involvement, my fears, tropes and so on. By showing the researcher, by making myself vulnerable, I want to get on the same level, cut the distance, climb down from the position of researcher and reach the girls on the same ground where we could discover together features of the framework we are living in.

Useless to say, then, how involved I am in this research. As someone who's not thin herself, someone who has to struggle more with the judgment of people than with weight itself, I immediately grew attached to plus-size vloggers. From one side I saw someone I could relate to being a YouTuber, that is having a big and public platform. On the other side, I recognized how I could take them as an example of bravery, self-assurance, and even style. I am not sure I would have developed this research if I had not had the chance to travel outside Italy and personally know different kinds of bodies, representations and trends. Even if in Italy I was not fairing so poorly, it was because I had the chance to live abroad, which allows me to put a distance between myself and everything I had known. Studying in Taiwan gave me new perspectives not just to the east, but also to the world in general. Still, researching a setting, which is now
predominantly American, puts me in a transnational position of research. Why did I decide to concentrate on American vloggers? Why are they all white, young and pretty? The reason is easy. There is still no one in Italy who is both declaring herself as a body positivity activist and continuously publishing videos or content online on the matter. The only background that offered enough material was in the US and within white women. Even if there were some African American or Asian American YouTubers with videos on body positivity, still there were too new, too few or too random to offer a good ground of research.

My culture as a young Italian woman might be different quite a lot from that of an American woman. No doubt, we were offered different images, standards, and examples when we were kids and even now. For what concern Italy, women were always portrayed as thin but curvy, dark-skinned, elegant women with dark hair. Voluptuous and sexy were the keywords. If you were not a young, sexy girl then you were the sexless mother or bothersome wife. The images were not compatible. For American images in the ’90 when I was growing up, the offered representations were not that different from the Italian ones, usually only changing colors, with whiter skin, blue eyes, and blond hair. With this imprint in my mind, when I had the chance to follow, to listen to and to become a fan of someone I recognized close to me I did not wait one second, no matter their nationality. Thus, in short, I have a third point of view because while I am white, I am on the other side of the world. I do not have a direct access to the vlogger world as I am not a YouTuber and I have never been a blogger or even published creative content online. My only experience is in handling social networks and my own self-representation in them. The number of viewers is quite different, and even the content published. I do not have the same experience as the beauty YouTubers who pursue their careers in the social network sphere.

Lastly, I wish again to stress the fact that I am white and the women in this research are white too. It would need another study to understand what other minorities (might them be sexual, racial etcetera) can face while doing the same work as the plus-size vloggers I am analyzing. While I chose LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless and Sarah Rae Vargas because they had more content, I cannot stop but wondering if they have more audience and more content intrinsically because of being white, American, middle-class women.
About Who?

In this section, I would like to formally introduce the three vloggers I am going to analyze. Firstly, I will give some background information on their lives, channels and social media usages. Secondly, I will present the comparison of their three YouTube channels.

LoeyLane

"Can I just wear whatever I want?" No. No — why would you do that? Why would anyone wear what makes them feel confident and happy, and not think about how others feel about the garments that they’re putting on their own bodies?"

LoeyLane is a white, blond, 24-year-old woman from Georgia. Married with no kids, she shares her house with family and pets. She studied classical music and graduated from college as a nurse. Her main career revolves around YouTube, even if she has side businesses as a model, with a collection of clothes and a published horror fiction called Haunted Hollywood. She is also sponsored by many online clothing brands and makeup lines like Boohoo, Beauty Gurus Get, Urban Decay, etcetera.

LoeyLane started uploading videos in 2013 and now has 1.250.000 and more subscribers on her main channel. She publishes one video every other day and has 848 videos. Huffingtonpost, Cosmopolitan, Vanity Fair and many other online magazines have shared her story in the past, and there are translations in other languages too (Spanish, French and Italian). Loey has two channels: LoeyLane and LoeyBug. In the main channel, she talks about makeup tutorials, reviews, clothing, accessories, body positivity and lately about personal or fictional horror stories. Her second channel LoeyBug is also defined as her vlog channel. It has 120,000 subscribers and mainly talks about normal day-to-day events and experience. In this channel, she shows herself as her most natural self, without makeup and fancy clothes and often with the company of family and friends. For the sake of this research, I will concentrate on her main channel as she has more videos, views, comments and a larger variety of subjects.
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<td>Personal/Fictional Horror Stories</td>
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Source: LoeyLane Playlists at [https://www.youtube.com/user/LoeyLane/playlists](https://www.youtube.com/user/LoeyLane/playlists), Information Updated 20/11/2017
LoeyLane uses Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as supporting social media for her YouTube channels or also for personal expression. Facebook closely follows her YouTube account; aside from her channels videos there is no other content available. While on Facebook, there is not a huge interaction with the audience, on Instagram she posts both about her YouTube account and about more private personal info about family members, outfits, travels, pets and hobbies. Still, half of the pictures appear to be professionally done by another party. They are not selfies but pictures used to display a new makeup style or a new outfit. Twitter too seems to be more personal than Facebook. Loey communicates with short, random and sweet tweets. She likes, answers and reposts content from both her followers, her fans and from other users.

An interesting fact is that Loey personally knows Learningtobefearless’ Alex and Sarah Rae Vargas. She made many videos with Alex. They went on vacation and worked together in LA, London and other fashion and modeling shows and photo shootings. In 2016, they referred to each other as best friends. Sarah Rae Vargas has a couple of videos with LoeyLane too, but according to rumors, they do not really get along in real life. Still, it is meaningful that they do know each other and had worked together at the BeautyCon in LA. Other than the two vlogs shared by both Loey and Sarah, there is actually another source from a third YouTuber commenting on both of them together (LoeyLane VS Sarah Rae Vargas).

Learningtobefearless

"Do you think I’m completely unaware? Do you think it’s not something I think about and love myself regardless for?

I’m not just sitting on the couch every day and live a miserable life because I’m fat.”

Learningtobefearless, also known as Alexandra Thomas, is a blond and white 26 years old woman from Boston. Close to family, friends and her boyfriend, she has worked in the past for makeup brand Mac and decided not to attend college. Aside from her vlogging career, started in 2011, Alex is a model for online clothing shops and gets sponsorship from makeup, fashion and beauty products. With a recently published music album and a weekly podcast about her life, she is trying to grow her business in other platforms and paths. She has been featured by The Huffington Post and AndPop.
Alex has one YouTube channel, *Learningtobefearless*. She has more than 280,000 followers and had uploaded more than 1100 videos. She updates once every other day. While the other two vloggers have side-interests, she talks mainly about life-advice, life experiences, trips and glam life. Her videos revolve around vlogging, fashion, make-up, accessories and body positivity. In the series "Big sister", for example, she gives advice to the audience about body positivity.

Table 2. *Learningtobefearless’* playlists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Playlist</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>N. of Videos</th>
<th>Last Update</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liked Videos</td>
<td>Liked Videos from Other YouTubers</td>
<td>2062</td>
<td>25/11/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLOGS</td>
<td>Daily Life Vlogs, Life Updates, Make-up Tutorials and Target hauls</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22/05/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Positivity</td>
<td>Weight, Body, Self-confidence Issues, Personal Experiences and Advices</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>08/05/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makeup</td>
<td>Makeup &amp; Beauty Hauls, Reviews, Tutorials,</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>08/05/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plus Size Fashion</td>
<td>Clothing Try-On-Hauls, Look-books, Hauls, Outfits</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>08/05/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covers</td>
<td>Covers of Songs in Vlog Format</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>08/05/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Sister Advice</td>
<td>Advices on Teenage Years, Fat, Body &amp; Insecurities Issues</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29/04/2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Learningtobefearless Playlists* at [https://www.youtube.com/user/LearningToBeFearless/playlists](https://www.youtube.com/user/LearningToBeFearless/playlists), Information Updated 25/11/2017

Alex has one YouTube channel, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, a blog and a podcast website. As LoeyLane, she uses Facebook to promote the YouTube channel. There are few comments from fans and most of them are unanswered. In Twitter, she answers directly to her fandom, she talks about her upcoming events, about her YouTube channel and gives a little disclosure to her personal life. On Instagram she shares selfies, pictures and portrays of her work, clothes, and shots taken from the videos. She answers directly to her audience, she is funny and quirky in the description but not particularly into intimacy, which is left to her YouTube channel. Snapchat narrates her daily life while the blog only shows outfits and clothing ideas.
Sarah Rae Vargas

“I’m a personality”

Sarah Rae Vargas is a white, red-haired 29 years old woman from Chicago. She graduated with a bachelor degree in communication and she is unmarried with two kids. She started a blog in 2012 and then became a YouTuber in 2013. Her official channel counts 780,000 followers and has weekly two updates.

Table 3. Sarah Rae Vargas’ playlists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Playlist</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>N. of Videos</th>
<th>Last Update</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Let’s Talk About Sex</td>
<td>Advices, Personal Experiences, Q&amp;A, Hauls</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>17/11/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>OOTD, Outfit, Look-book, Hauls</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>14/11/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask Sarah Series</td>
<td>Personal Experiences, Story-times, Advices</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14/11/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked Videos</td>
<td>Liked Videos from Other YouTubers</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>14/11/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makeup Tutorials</td>
<td>Tutorials, Reviews</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13/11/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will It Fit?</td>
<td>Try-On-Hauls</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15/10/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Wellness</td>
<td>Beauty, Fitness Routines, Weight-loss</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>08/08/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Fat Girl…</td>
<td>Story-times, Personal Experiences, Advices on Fat, Body, Self-confidence Issues</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13/07/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlogs</td>
<td>Daily Life Vlogs</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24/06/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All About Me!</td>
<td>Personal Life, Q&amp;A</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24/03/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100 Haul Challenge</td>
<td>Clothing Hauls Challenge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>09/01/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 5</td>
<td>Top 5 Videos on Random Subjects</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16/12/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>Advices, Q&amp;A, Personal life</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19/10/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book-Club</td>
<td>Books Reviews</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18/07/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#ReadingWithRae</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netflix &amp; Chill</td>
<td>Watching TV Series</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11/07/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Confidence</td>
<td>Advices, Personal Experiences on Body Confidence &amp; Body Issues</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28/04/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#theSRVproject</td>
<td>Personal and Work Project</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14/02/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My First Time…</td>
<td>Story-time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26/10/2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products Reviews</td>
<td>Beauty, Makeup Reviews</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25/03/2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How To’s</td>
<td>Tutorials, How To</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13/01/2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Chats</td>
<td>Live Chats</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>05/01/2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sarah Rae Vargas Playlists at https://www.youtube.com/user/RavingsByRae/playlists, Information Updated 25/11/2017
Sarah talked frankly in one of her videos about how she is surviving life with a vlogger job. With only two videos per week, she gets both sponsors and buys products with her own money. In the meantime, she gets a steady income with Google access through YouTube, with her blog and by her offline occupations where she creates courses, teaches people and speaks in conferences.

Her YouTube videos are about fashion, body positivity and life experiences. Her most followed videos are about relationships, sex toys, and sex bits of advice. She has another channel called Sarah Rae Vlogas, with 105,000 and more subscribers and where she opens up about her kids, family, school and boyfriend. Sarah uses the most number of social media, counting also Tumblr and her personal blog. On Instagram, there are many pictures of her outfits, her kids and there are portrays and less selfies. On Twitter, she mostly promotes her YouTube channels, with few likes and shares of other people's content. She has many more comments and views on Facebook, suggesting a larger presence compared to the other two vloggers. Still, she does not post there often. Her blog is also about plus size fashion but she had not posted anything in months.

Comparison
LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless and Sarah Rae Vargas have a different approach to their channels, which can also be a result to different personalities, different goals, experiences and interests. Through the years, there have been many changes in how they decided to approach their YouTuber careers. By looking at the charts below, it is possible to see how themes and goals were modified along the road. These charts were created by searching through the vloggers’ uploaded video history. Every video was categorized according to similar keywords. For LoeyLane (first chart below) I grouped the video in 4 main category: Beauty, Body Positivity, Life, Paranormal. “Beauty” represents all the videos talking about fashion, clothing, makeup, modeling and accessories (Keywords: “tutorial, makeup, haul, fashion, plus size clothing, Try-On Haul, Months Favorites”, etcetera). “Body Positivity” collects all the video about body, fat, weight and confidence issues and advice (Keywords: “fat, weight, confidence, plus size, body, positive, positivity, arms, tummy”, etcetera). “Life” is about personal experiences, vlogs, daily life and story-times (Keywords: “routine, vlog, day, follow me, around”, etcetera). In
“Paranormal” I put together all videos about creepy, horror fictional and personal stories (Keywords: “creepy, horror, paranormal, ghosts, haunted, possession, conspiracy, theories” etcetera).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4. LoeyLane’s videos through the years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LoeyLane’s videos in [https://www.youtube.com/user/LoeyLane/videos](https://www.youtube.com/user/LoeyLane/videos). Data Updated 3/12/2017

As we can see in table 4, in LoeyLane vlogger history there was a huge decreasing in beauty vlogs, and in 2017 even in body positivity and life videos. Parallel to this decline, from 2016 to 2017 there was a huge increase in the production of paranormal themed stories.

In table 5, we can see Learningtobefearless’ videos. The definitions of “Beauty”, “Body Positivity” and “Life” coincide with LoeyLane’s chart. “Songs” describes videos where Alex sings covers of famous songs, alone or with a friend (Keywords: “song, cover, name of song”, etcetera).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5. Learningtobefearless’s videos through the year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Learningtobefearless’ videos in [https://www.youtube.com/user/LearningToBeFearless/videos](https://www.youtube.com/user/LearningToBeFearless/videos). Data Updated 3/12/2017

Quite differently from LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless shows minimal changes through year 2014-2015-2016-2017 for “Beauty” and “Songs”. The number of videos in “Life” and “Body Positivity” are reduced to an half in 2016 but for “Life” the amount is still quite large.
Table 6 shows Sarah Rae Vargas’ videos. Her definition of “Beauty” is quite similar to the two precedent vloggers, so including fashion, makeup, accessories and clothing tutorial, hauls and look-books. Similarly, “Body Positivity” also groups together videos on body confidence, issues and advices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beauty</th>
<th>Body Positivity</th>
<th>Life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sarah Rae Vargas in https://www.youtube.com/user/RavingsByRae/videos. Data Updated 3/12/2017

However, together with personal vlogs, story-times and experiences, I included in “Life” also advices Sarah gives about relationship, sex and intimate issues. In her chart we can see how there was also a drastic drop in “Beauty” and “Body Positivity” videos in 2016. While for beauty videos, the number got back up again in 2017, body positive videos did not see another growth. “Life” videos also were reduced in 2017, mirroring the trend in LoeyLane’s channel.

What we can see clearly in these charts is that Body Positive videos were more frequent in 2014/2015 (and in 2016 for LoeyLane) and had seen a huge decrease in the two most recent years. There was probably a shift in interest for the vloggers and possibly for the audience too. Another analysis would be necessary to understand how and why these changes happen to be. My hypothesis is that most of the modifications were due to fans and anti-fans. It is very common for vloggers to ask openly about what the audience would like to watch next or to express opinions about the current content. An example is LoeyLane’s recent interest in paranormal activities. As we can see in the chart, in the beginning Loey would only concentrate on fashion, beauty and body matters. Since she uploaded the first video on her personal “creepy adventures”, it had been an escalation on the subject, so much that even sponsored reviews are now the secondary priority.

As the audiences, the interests and the strategies differ, it is not a surprise to see that their careers as YouTubers also have different tendencies. For checking their trends, I used the website Social Blade. Social Blade is a YouTube certified webpage that offers statistics on
YouTube, Twitter and Instagram accounts. It shows information like yearly, monthly and daily views, comments, subscribers and earnings and it also provide an estimation of future data. Through this website is also possible to promote one’s social media account, to get partnered with a television broadcasting system and thus receive a monthly payment from them. One of the interesting part of Social Blade, and the one more pertaining to this study, is that statistics are easily accessible to the public, you just have to type the name of the channel. Furthermore, it is possible to compare more accounts together to see how they’re all fairing.

Table 7. Comparison for total views, followers, number of videos and channel type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Subscribed to YouTube</th>
<th>N. of Total Views</th>
<th>N. of Followers</th>
<th>N. of Videos</th>
<th>Channel Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LoeyLane</td>
<td>23/02/2013</td>
<td>1336066993</td>
<td>1.283.430</td>
<td>848</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Rae Vargas</td>
<td>13/03/2012</td>
<td>78.457.077</td>
<td>827.359</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>People</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [https://socialblade.com/](https://socialblade.com/). Information Updated 20/11/2017

Table 8. Comparison for views and subscribers in the last 30 days, estimated monthly and yearly earnings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>View for the last 30 days</th>
<th>Subscribers for the last 30 days</th>
<th>Estimated Monthly Earnings</th>
<th>Estimated Yearly Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LoeyLane</td>
<td>5.991.180 (+90,8%)</td>
<td>27.836 (+306,3%)</td>
<td>1.5K - 24K $</td>
<td>18K - 287.6K $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LearningToBeFearless</td>
<td>1.192.643 (+11.5%)</td>
<td>3.625 (- 18.4%)</td>
<td>298 - 4.8K $</td>
<td>3.6K - 57.2K $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Rae Vargas</td>
<td>2.790.312 (35.3%)</td>
<td>22.028 (-52.7%)</td>
<td>628 - 11.2K $</td>
<td>8.4K - 133.9K $</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [https://socialblade.com/](https://socialblade.com/). Information Updated 20/11/2017

As we can see, LoeyLane has more views, followers and estimated earnings. Sarah Rae Vargas comes second and Learningtobeafearless third, even if her number of videos greatly
exceed those from the other two vloggers. Furthermore, the number of subscribers is growing only for LoeyLane, while Alex and Sarah are on the negative side.

Below, more detailed charts on LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless and Sarah Rae Vargas’s channels. In figure 1, we can see how the subscribers are increasing since April 2016. There has been a steady growth, even if it is exponential for LoeyLane.

Figure 1. Total subscribers for LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless and Sarah Rae Vargas

![Total Subscribers for LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless & Sarah Rae Vargas](https://socialblade.com/youtube/compare/loeylane/learningtobefearless/sarah%20rae%20vargas)


Information Updated in 20/11/2017

In figure 2, we can look at the total number of views on the vloggers’ channels. Again, LoeyLane’s channel shows a huger increase in views compared to the other two.

Figure 2. Total video views for LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless and Sarah Rae Vargas

![Total Video Views for LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless & Sarah Rae Vargas](https://socialblade.com/youtube/compare/loeylane/learningtobefearless/sarah%20rae%20vargas)


Information Updated in 20/11/2017
In figure 3 and 4, we can observe the daily statistics in subscribers and views since April 2016. In Sarah and Loey’s channel, we can see a spiked increment of subscribers in April 2016, October 2016 and October 2017. For views, there was a strong decrease in January 2017. Learningtobefearless shows less dramatic changes, probably because of the limited audience.

Figure 3. Daily subscribers for LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless and Sarah Rae Vargas

![Daily subscribers graph](https://socialblade.com/youtube/compare/loeylane/learningtobefearless/sarah%20rae%20vargas). Information Updated in 20/11/2017

Figure 4. Daily video views for LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless and Sarah Rae Vargas

![Daily video views graph](https://socialblade.com/youtube/compare/loeylane/learningtobefearless/sarah%20rae%20vargas). Information Updated in 20/11/2017
Lastly, we can observe the data projection for future view and subscribers in figure 5 and 6. LoeyLane’s views and subscribers are predicted to steadily increase in the period of time considered, from January 2018 to July 2022. Sarah Rae Vargas shows an interesting estimation. While subscribers are bound to exceed 2,000,000 of people in a constant growth, views might not develop as fast and as hugely. It also appears as Learningtobefearless will experience an increase in both views and subscribers but her audience is estimated to be limited.

Figure 5. Future subscribers for LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless and Sarah Rae Vargas

![Future Subscribers for LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless & Sarah Rae Vargas](https://socialblade.com/youtube/compare/loeylane/learningtobefearless/sarah%20rae%20vargas). Information Updated in 20/11/2017

Figure 6. Future video views for LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless and Sarah Rae Vargas

![Future Video Views for LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless & Sarah Rae Vargas](https://socialblade.com/youtube/compare/loeylane/learningtobefearless/sarah%20rae%20vargas). Information Updated in 20/11/2017
Methods of Research

Choosing the Vloggers

Since I knew already the little community of plus-size beauty vloggers, it was not difficult to find many candidates for my research. I started looking out for possible channels in January 2017 and decided on my samples according to views, subscribers and numbers of video of that time. I selected the vloggers following simple guidelines: the YouTuber had to have at least 5 videos on body positivity, the YouTuber had to have at least 50,000 subscribers to ensure an adequate number of views and comments. Lastly, the YouTuber had to be plus-sized and had a particular focus on fashion and beauty. From the initial 10 vloggers I had to restrict the selection to permit a deeper analysis. New criteria that determined these exclusions were: being prolific, uploading every certain amount of time, being active in social media and with fans, devoting words and content on body positivity every once in a while. From 10 vloggers I managed to arrive at 3: LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless and Sarah Rae Vargas.

Choosing the Videos

Selecting videos proved to be a more difficult step. My initial intent was to choose videos concerned with body positivity by preferring those with more views and comments, but I wonder if this approach would point me to videos that reveal conflict over body positivity or other relationships between vloggers and fans/anti-fans. I thus decided to start by applying the purposive homogenous sampling method to seek videos with the same interest in body positivity. The homogenous sampling is a non-probability purposive method where the researcher focuses on a particular subgroup. In this subgroup, the sample members share similar or the exact same characteristics. Generally, a homogeneous sample is used when the research questions aim at a particular trait of one group of interest, so to examine it in detail. I used keywords like “fat, body, plus size, positivity, weight, health, looks, confidence, skinny, big, stomach” to select the videos. In some cases, like for Sarah Rae Vargas, the research was simplified by the existence of playlists with telling titles as “Body Confidence”. Other times I had to start from the beginning of the vlogger career to manually choose and select the video. In both cases, however, I decided
it was necessary to check all the videos by myself to be sure I was not missing any possible content.

My results are as follow. LoeyLane counts 46 videos from years 2014 to 2017 (See Appendix 1, “Selected Videos for Loeylane”). The most viewed videos is “Why Fat Girls Shouldn’t Wear Bikini”, with 13,442,003, 4983 comments and 128,451 likes. The last updated video was on date 30/10/2017.

Learningtobefearless’ account counts 45 videos from 2014 to 2017, the most recent one updated in date 3/11/2017 (See Appendix 2, “Selected Videos for Learningtobefearless”). The most viewed video is “My Laser Liposuction Experience | Before & After, Cost, Procedure” with 792,561 views, 875 comments and 6750 likes.

Sarah Rae Vargas has 39 videos, from 2013 to 2017, and the most viewed one as “What Men Love & Hate About Dating Fat Girls”, with 1,320,502 views, 8135 comments and 34,777 likes. She last uploaded a video on body matter in date 13/10/2017 (See Appendix 3, “Selected Videos for Sarah Rae Vargas”).

As it’s clearly visible from the number of videos, the amount of data is copious, extended in time and diversified in the number of views, comments, likes and dislikes. While the videos with most comments and likes were obviously going to give me more content to analyze in form of audience response, I was not sure it was what this study needed. I was not looking for a general viewpoint on audience presence in YouTube; I was looking for clues on how the vlogger negotiates her body and her belief in body positivity with fans and anti-fans. I did not believe those videos where I could potentially uncover these issues would necessarily be those with more views and comments. Therefore, I decided to depend on my personal judgment and choose the non-probability purposive extreme (or deviant) sampling method as my second method to select videos. The non-probability purposive extreme (or deviant) sampling method strongly relies on the judgment of the researcher to select the units. The deviant or extreme sampling method seeks to investigate events or items that are out of the norm. By investigating these deviant cases, the researcher wants to understand diverse, uncommon behavioral patterns. By personally watching every video and finding unusual, special situations in the interaction between YouTuber and fans I could gain a better and deeper insight into my research questions.
My final decision then is to select one video from the beginning of the vlogger career (2013/2014), one video from the most recent uploads (autumn 2017) and another significant example in between (2015/2016). With this strategy, I plan to not only describe the journey of both vlogger and fans/anti-fans during the years but also to pinpoint any noteworthy change, compromise and intervention occurred in body representation.

**Choosing the Comments**

While huge in quantity, YouTube comments did not give me an equal headache in deciding the right sampling method. There are few videos with more than a 1000 comments and not all comments have the same weight. When analyzing comments on YouTube I will choose a sample of 30 to 50 comments depending on numbers of likes, significance and answers to the comment itself. I will also notice which comments are liked, highlighted and replied to by the vlogger. To get a fuller picture of the opinions of anti-fans I will also utilize the forum GuruGossip, where anti-fans reunite to share negative comments that are often deleted or blacked in the YouTube channel.

Guru Gossip is a website full of drama and its history is by itself worthy of any soap-opera. Presumably dead founders, users trying to blackmail users, hacked accounts and emails are only a few of the many stories I had the chance to encounter while researching this website. What I found was still not clear, too. The website registration belongs to a private owner, even if in the formal documents the name Eco Projects Ltd (manufacturer of polyethylene pipes and others) appears. Even if its story seems shady as best, in this website fans and anti-fans alike reunite to talk about their “favorite” beauty YouTubers. Interesting how two of the most popular sections are "Rave about Guru" and "Trash about Guru". In these sections, I found large and frequented topics on LoeyLane and Learningtobefearless. There was less content on Sarah Rae Vargas.

One repeated narrative in GuruGossip remembers how in the beginning of vloggers’ careers the YouTubers were more real, more relatable and more authentic. The situation changed once they became more famous and once they were not "really down to earth" anymore. This discourse is also often accompanied by comments on how they were also thinner, how they are
all getting fatter now and how they must lie because they say they are vegetarian/vegan/dieting/working out etc. There are at least seven topics about LoeyLane and most of the videos are scrutinized for the finest details. In the conversation about Learningtobefearless, anti-fans comment on her double-chin operation. According to them, the idea of modifying one's body goes against the concept of body positivity and thus rendering Alex incoherent and fake, not just for the decision she made for her body but for her morals too. There are not as many "haters" concerned with Sarah Rae Vargas, as I found only a small topic with her name. Mostly, she appears to be defensive about her weight with an "I don't care, fuck you" attitude. It was considered refreshing and more real than what most of her colleagues show.

I believe GuruGossip will prove to be useful in reading the other side of the story, and while many of the comments are more purposefully hating than negative criticizing, I still argue that they can provide another insightful point of view.

**Analyzing Vloggers, Audiences and Comments**

I will use a qualitative textual analysis of LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless and Sarah Rae Vargas’s selected videos, to highlight common codes, terms, ideologies, and discourses that dominate the narrative of body positivity in the community of beauty plus sized YouTube vloggers. What can be said about the individual featured in the video? What can be said about her fans anti-fans? How are the text framed and presented and which words and sentences are used? Do they have a symbolic meaning?

I will then analyze the most salient comments with qualitative textual analysis. As the vlogger has the power to control and eliminate the comments on her video, I will then use Guru Gossip as a support platform, when it's possible, to better understand anti-fans' point of view.

What I am aiming to do is thus a crosscheck analysis between vlogger, fans, and anti-fans to investigate the representations, the negotiations and the kind of body talks present.
CHAPTER 4

THE STRATEGIES OF THE DISPLAYED BODY

LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless, and Sarah Rae Vargas are popular because they attract an audience that is not necessarily overweight but always concerned with issues of body acceptance and positivity. Some of the viewers might be attracted by the vloggers because they look at bigger bodies that are still beautiful and well-groomed and thus gain confidence, even if they are not necessarily overweight themselves. Others just set the vloggers as a good example of a plus-sized woman should be.

When she first appeared online, LoeyLane provided a new model of a plus-sized woman. She was a novelty. She was the first plus-sized YouTuber concerned in beauty matters, and she was also a professional model on the side. Learningtobefearless attracted the same kind of audience and was helped by her friendship and partnership with Loey. Sarah Rae Vargas got popular because of her many and different themed videos. Sex talks, "girls advice" vlogs together with Body Positivity brought an interested audience. While those topics might have been popular in other channels too, Sarah is plus-size and thus attracted a new, similar audience.

Loey, Alex and Sarah have similar opinions on society’s body standards, and yet they deal differently with them. Their strategies show three levels of self-awareness and scrutiny and are connected with issues of fat, health, recognition and false representations.

This chapter will describe how plus-size beauty vloggers handle their identities, their fat and their bodies in comparison with society’s canons of beauty. Beginning with Learningtobefearless, who shows a more personal and oblivious attitude, and concluding with Sarah Rae Vargas, this chapter will also show how being self-critical might help in creating an aspirational persona and in fostering the relationship with the audience.
Lastly, I will delineate the concept of Body Positivity common within LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless, and Sarah Rae Vargas. Then, I will disclose their different points of view on the matter.

**Hiding and Justifying**

In this first section, I will show how Learningtobefearless uses flattering clothes as a strategy to hide certain parts of her body. I will then explain how she employs health as a rhetoric to justify her fat. Both techniques reveal a high concentration on the self and a significant lack of self-scrutiny. Additionally, I will argue that by focusing on herself and because of obliviousness, Learningtobefearless weakens the mentor-mentee relationship with her audience.

**Flattering Standards**

Like her fellow beauty vloggers, Learningtobefearless focuses on society beauty standards and the need to fit into them. "Society really makes it seem like there's only one standard of beauty until you love yourself and find out it's so inaccurate", she explains in *I hate my fat, gross body* (Learningtobefearless, September 2014). Alex suggests that self-love and acceptance might create new spaces of self-creation, but fails to show so in her vlogs. In fact, in her third video *let's talk about my weight* (Learningtobefearless, September 2017), she confesses that she always wants to look wonderful and that she purposefully chooses clothes that flatter her and make her look thinner. "Maybe I'm gonna wear an outfit that makes me flattered", she says, "I wear clothes that look good on my body, I know what to (wear) essentially. I know what I want to be, that's my own opinion, that's my own choice" (Learningtobefearless, September 2017). The clothes, the angle and the video editing are manipulated so that the vlogger can look thinner and better. By hiding the parts she doesn’t like, Alex looks successful and confident.

I argue that by hiding the fat with flattering outfits and with the rearrangement of the image, she traps her body and her representation back in the standards of thin, beautiful and perfect. She reinforces the same codes she seeks to fight with Body Positivity. Furthermore, she
appears totally unaware of doing so, justifying her actions as her decision, as her own personal preference (Learningtobefearless, September 2017).

**Health**

According to Learningtobefearless, her body can’t be criticized because it is essentially healthy: "I just want to live a healthy lifestyle and that's what I've been doing and you know at the end of the day that's enough for me on this health journey" (Learningtobefearless, September 2017). "If I exercise and I eat healthily and have good cholesterol, good blood pressure, does that not make me a healthy human?", she also asks in *I hate my fat, gross body* (Learningtobefearless, September 2014); "I don't drink excessively, I don't smoke, I don't end up in MacDonald's drive-thru like most fat stereotypes would say to you". While her words could be an attempt at shaking off haters and unwanted observations on her body, it seems as she doesn't consider that she is offering an excuse for her fat to be justified and accepted. With these words, Alex is saying that she shouldn't receive negative comments because she is exhibiting proper, moral behaviors. She is worthy to be a part of society, to not be shamed in her own comments section. By excusing her body because healthy, and by making health a choice, she excludes and judges those overweight people who could not have the money, the skills or the resources to lead a healthy life.

I believe that Learningtobefearless has a self-centered, highly personalized strategy of dealing with the stress of beauty standards. While she is trying to counterattack society’s body norms, she actually ends up by reinforcing them. She displays the least amount of self-awareness and reflexivity by employing techniques of clothing and image manipulation and the rhetoric of a healthy body. She is seemingly oblivious to the repercussions of her choices. Furthermore, she rarely if ever addresses her audience. Her words are used as a defensive mechanism. She completely forgets the role she chose for herself as a bigger sister for her fans. While she says that plus-size people need to be more confident than others because they have to face fat-shaming and hate (Learningtobefearless, September 2014), nowhere she discusses a method that could help her followers in accepting and loving themselves. On the contrary, she reiterates how nice clothes and healthy habits make herself feel good and worthy. In other words, Learningtobefearless’ vlogging attitude doesn’t really permit a growing relationship with her audience, as everything she says is centered on her persona and not on the message or her fans.
Fitting In and Validating

In this section, I will talk about how Loey struggles to fit her body in a strictly regulated society. Loey thinks that not only social media help in spreading the perfect, thin body image, but that fat is accepted solely when attractive to the male gaze.

Furthermore, I will define LoeyLane’s strategy of validation and recognition. She realizes her approach might go against her Body Positivity message, demonstrating a level of awareness and self-reflection apparently absent in Learningtobefearless.

Fitting in Standards of Beauty

In many videos, LoeyLane explains what she thinks about society’s beauty standards, and about how those same canons influence plus-size women’s lives. It is hard for an overweight woman to come to terms with these criteria. After all, social media shows and reiterates a very difficult example to achieve: beautiful, flawlessly fit and curvalicious. Since there are only a few alternative representations, this is the kind of body she has to compete with.

Weight, fat, and curves are central issues in Loey’s vlogs. She talks about weight and sizes in "I hate fat people" (LoeyLane, September 2014), the first video I selected for this research. She explains that she has tried everything she could "but nothing has worked”. Then she realized she was trying to lose weight to please other people, and that she had impossible objectives. Influenced by images seen in social media, she sought to imitate unreal bodies, she wanted to please others to feel accepted (LoeyLane, September 2014).

Being thin and voluptuous it's the standard of beauty and attractiveness, so a plus-size woman can't be either (LoeyLane, September 2014). In a world where women must be beautiful and thin not just to avoid social shame and alienation, but also to be heterosexually desirable, LoeyLane gets often told to lose weight. Otherwise, she will never find a man. Then, "pleasing others" by being thin and attractive takes the meaning of pleasing the male gaze. By being heterosexually more attractive and more competent, Loey could become more valued and recognized in the sexual game. She could be more attractive if she was thin, or if her fat was only in the right places. In fact, curves are usually accepted when strategically placed in selected parts
of the female body. It's only in this circumstance of heterosexual attractiveness, LoeyLane concludes, that fat is somewhat acceptable (LoeyLane, September 2014).

**Recognizing and Validating Fat**

Loey acknowledges that she used two strategies against body standards. She utilized the words curvy and healthy in an attempt to accept and validate her fat body.

Everyone needs to be recognized in society, to be valued as worthy and part of a community (LoeyLane, September 2014). However, for overweight people, this recognition might be harder to receive. "I've been told before that I deserve to live in a hole until I lost weight because I am disgusting and I don't deserve to participate in society" LoeyLane explains in "I hate fat people" (LoeyLane, September 2014). Because of her excessive fat, she is perceived as abnormal. She is "something else", immoral and foreign, and thus unrecognized. Because she is not part of society, her needs and issues are ignored. She can’t suffer from other ailments that is not her overweight body, as LoeyLane says in "I hate fat people" (LoeyLane, September 2014): "When I have talked about my eating disorder in the past, again there's been a lot of people who say that because of my size, and because I was never underweight by medical standards that my eating disorder is invalid and therefore shouldn't be counted". In this extreme situation, Loey's eating disorder is not considered real because she is overweight. According to her, people understand fat as the only visible factor, thus as the only possible problem. Any other underlying matter is prevaricated (LoeyLane, September 2014). Not only she is not socially recognized and valued, but because of her overweight body, her medical and mental issues are ignored too.

To fight against this unrecognized space of existence, Loey used the words curvy and healthy to validate herself. In fact, fat sounds too harsh. It has too many bad connotations, while "curvy" suggests sexy and feminine. Loey preferred one term over the other, but she is now aware that her choice hides unsettling issues of hate, discrimination, and shame (LoeyLane, December 2015). She wanted to escape the negative meanings inscribed in her bigger physique. She shouldn’t feel the need to hide her body under nicer descriptions, there shouldn’t be anything wrong with the word fat. Nonetheless, LoeyLane validates herself and her peers "because we're
still not in a place where being fat and pretty or fat and attractive could be in the same sentence” (LoeyLane, December 2015).

Loey used the adjective healthy with the same approach. Just as fat is considered tolerable when sexy, the overweight body is acceptable when perceived as healthy. Then, it’s not immoral but contained and controlled by a rational mind. "I made a lot of excuses for my body", LoeyLane admits in the third video So I Gained Weight | The Truth About My Body Confidence (LoeyLane, September 2017). She explains how she was big but still worked-out two hours a day, controlling her diet and eating healthily. She acknowledges that she was making "excuses and when I say that, you know, I'm a big girl, I'm a thick girl, I'm fat and whatever you want to call me, but I'm not the wrong kind of fat. It sets the precedence that there is a wrong kind of plus-size and there is a wrong time to be body positive" (LoeyLane, September 2017). Contrary to Learningtobefearless with whom she shares the rhetoric of health, Loey recognizes that she validates herself by saying "it's ok to be fat if…” (LoeyLane, September 2017).

I argue that LoeyLane realizes that there shouldn’t be any circumstances where the body is not worth to be recognized. She understands Body Positivity doesn’t have any requirements or conditions for a body to be accepted and considered worthy of love and care.

It’s also interesting to point out that Loeylane's followers also call her curvy or healthy. They validate her, validating their overweight bodies in return. By doing so, plus-size people avoid shame and find a way to still be empowered and worthy in their own skins. Thus, the word curvy and the health discourse take a deeper meaning, as an instrument of liberation and as a protection system against body shaming and negativity.

The Critical Approach

In this section, I will describe how Sarah Rae Vargas uncovers the mechanism behind social networks’ imagination. By pointing out the falseness of social media, she also stresses the
importance of having a critical mind. In fact, an analytical perspective can help in dealing with fake, perfected images and creates a more compassionate, loving portrait of oneself.

Dealing with False Beauty Standards

Social media spread an infinite series of unrealistic images (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2016). Internet, Sarah says in the video *False realities* (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2016), is a sum of these creative ideas that are placed somewhere, whether it be on Twitter, on Facebook, whether it be a video or a blog post or a news story or whatever. People are just bringing together some stuff, some content and they're putting it out there for the world to see and when we see it we tend to just believe it.

This content has the same care and attention to details as traditional media’s texts, and they are just as much artificial. Still, it looks more believable because it has real people in them. "It has our friends", Sarah explains (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2016), "it has YouTubers, it has bloggers and has just regular old people that somehow just got a huge following, and now we're looking at what we think in our head are us, right? These are normal people, these are not movie stars". Social media share fake images centered around the same old beauty norms. However, because they are not about celebrities but about normal people, the deception is less obvious.

In the face of all this perfection, it’s impossible not to lose confidence. Natural flaws become all that matters. Bodies then are the ugly thighs, the chin or the tummy that are not toned. Sarah criticizes commenters because they define themselves with those flaws, with their weight or height. In the third video *I Hate My Body...|Dear Fat Girl|* (Sarah Rae Vargas, January 2017), she pointed out her audience would reveal their weight even before their own names. It is the first thing they want to tell her. They wait to be judged for their imperfections or, also, despite them. Their weight and bodily inadequacies define their identities.

Sarah, then, tries to change their minds. What would happen, she asks her audience directly, “if you were to wake up today and this was the first time you opened your eyes and you're 18 or 20 or 25 or 30 or 45" (Sarah Rae Vargas, January 2017)? Standing in front a mirror,
without knowing anything about society or without anyone explaining what to do or feel, would her followers still hate themselves? Without any preconceptions, would "the first thoughts in your brain be ‘wow I sure hate my dimply thighs' or ‘I hate the fold in my stomach' or ‘I hate my boobs that sag down'?” (Sarah Rae Vargas, January 2017). d? No, it's the answer to all these questions. Sarah is in fact quite certain that all the negative things they see in their bodies are the result of society’s influence (Sarah Rae Vargas, January 2017). The viewers would consider themselves to be perfect if they didn't have anything to compare themselves with and, she continues, if those models were not based on unrealities.

Sarah’s strategy is to have a critical perspective on social media’s images (Sarah Rae Vargas, January 2017). By being aware that most of what is visible online is actually fake, her followers should be able to create a different image of themselves. It’s thanks to this new perspective, that they can start being compassionate and accepting of their bodies.

Sarah addresses directly her audience and removes herself from the discourse, concentrating exclusively on her message. By doing so, I argue that Sarah shows a level of involvement with the audience unprecedented in Learningtobefearless and LoeyLane. Additionally, she explains and directs her followers into new approaches and knowledge. Even if she does gain sponsors and views, it appears as her vlogs are almost exclusively for the advantage of her audience. Within the three vloggers, I believe she is most certainly the only real role model.

**Body Positivity**

LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless, and Sarah Rae Vargas use Body Positivity as both a solution to beauty and body standards and as a branding strategy for their careers. While they share the main concept of Body Positivity, they sometimes focus on different but connected themes. I will then first give a general summary of their main view on Body Positivity, for then focusing on Learningtobefearless’ issue with cosmetic surgery, LoeyLane’s positive approach to one’s body image and Sarah Rae Vargas’ advertisement of mental health.
The vloggers talk about Body Positivity in two different ways. They create videos concerning directly themes of Body Positivity, for example explaining how to be more confident in one's own body, how to face unwanted criticism, or how to have a better mental attitude towards oneself. Otherwise, the three vloggers share personal experiences, strategies, short advice or simple comments in unrelated videos. For example, they might upload a video where they showed their new collection of clothes and at the same time share what they do to feel good about themselves when showing their tummies. Or also, they talk about their body shaming experiences when preparing themselves for a makeup-focused video.

Body Positivity is the answer and the counter-strategy to society beauty standards (Learningtobefearless, September 2014). It's the self-created oasis where everyone can start to love their own body, an alternative to a world of self-hate, shame, and punishment. Body Positivity involves everyone, no matter the size, the color and the gender. It creates feelings of nurture and acceptance and encourages healthy habits. It's a deeply personal path, one that requires time, self-reflection and self-education (Learningtobefearless, September 2014). Thanks to Body Positivity, people learn that they shouldn't feel embarrassed, apologetic or ashamed of their bodies. Fat, for example, doesn’t mean “lower class citizen” (LoeyLane, September 2014), and shouldn't be considered a flaw (Learningtobefearless, September 2014). In the same way, stretch marks or scars belong to everybody regardless of their weight. A person is more than their physical attributes (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2016), and everyone deserves to be happy regardless of their sizes and bodies (LoeyLane, September 2014).

**A Kind of Assisted Body Positivity**

Within the three vloggers, Learningtobefearless is much more incongruous. Her Body Positivity is characterized by the conflict between self-acceptance and the decision of employing cosmetic surgeries.

In her video *My secret...* (Learningtobefearless, April 2015), Alex suddenly reveals she is going to undertake a liposuction surgery on the chin. Her reason, she reveals in a moment of emotion, is that she can't accept herself without taking away that fat. After losing much weight
and altering her attitude towards herself, Alex finally "arrived at a better place mentally" and
decided to modify her face (Learningtobefearless, April 2015). "It's okay to want to change
yourself", she states (Learningtobefearless, April 2015), "but at the same time love yourself
before, love yourself during that process and love yourself after". Self-love is the motive of the
change, but also the fuel behind it.

Body Positivity shouldn't be a fixed concept or a static image (Learningtobefearless,
April 2015). As people evolve naturally over the years, nothing should stop a change if it pleases
the person and if it helps self-esteem (Learningtobefearless, April 2015). Still, a transformation
might imply there was a dissatisfaction in the first place, something that Alex’s audience also
believes. According to them, people are not allowed to change. It would mean that they don’t
really love themselves and, thus, that they are not real Body Positivity activists
(Learningtobefearless, April 2015).

I believe that the decision of undergoing an invasive surgery is highly controversial. Alex
says self-love is a long, on-going process. However, it’s still indispensable for her to resort to
extreme procedures. Learningtobefearless shows it’s impossible to completely love yourself
without stepping inside and lastly resorting to society’s standards of beauty. Even if she
proclaims she believes in Body Positivity.

Furthermore, the topic of transformation is not undertaken for the benefit of the audience.
Alex doesn’t talk about change because she answers the needs or requests of her fans. On the
contrary, she undertakes the issue in the attempt of justifying her own actions. As we already saw
with strategies used against beauty standard, Alex reveals again a highly personalized approach
that has nothing to do with vlogging or her followers. She addresses particular themes not as a
way to fulfill her aspiration as bigger sister and role model, or to talk about her message, but to
defend her own persona.

Strategies of Acceptance and Compassion

LoeyLane and Sarah Rae Vargas show a different level of self-reflexivity and
involvement. They go beyond the necessity of defending their own bodies and identity to the
public.
In "I hate fat people." LoeyLane offers a particular approach on how to start practicing Body Positivity (LoeyLane, September 2014). She suggests thinking to oneself as if addressing a friend. "Would you ever want your best friend to treat themselves the way that you're treating yourself?", she asks her followers (LoeyLane, September 2014), "and the words that you're saying in your head to yourself, would you ever want that for someone else? And I'm sure that 99.9% you'd say of course not, you are not worthless, you are so worthy of love and respect from others but mostly from you". Believing that people are meaner and more judgmental towards themselves than with others, Loey offers her fans a way to better their mental image and increase their confidence. She gives advice not because she needs to in order to defend her point, but out of any interests.

While Loey gives concrete guidance, Sarah Rae Vargas offers a new whole side of Body Positivity, one that could possibly change her viewers’ whole perspective. She points at mental health as the primal and more important source of body acceptance, happiness, and general well-being. Usually, fat is seen as the most important problem in overweight people, but the truth is that fat can be the consequence of other concerns. In fact, weight gain or loss can hide serious mental or social issues. Even if "it seems like everything else I do in my life does not matter because I'm fat, because I'm fat I'm not everything else. It's always about weight first, weight is much more important than anything else" (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2014), in reality, there are questions that should be addressed before worrying about someone's fat. Mental health should be the first concern. "I think that fat people really are very very unhealthy, you know?", Sarah says in Fat people are unhealthy (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2014), "Because if someone wakes up in the morning and their first thought is about how fucking fat and disgusting they are and how they are so worthless and not deserving of anything positive in their life, I mean that sounds pretty unhealthy to me". The shame and hate addressed to plus-size people, the feeling of being unworthy of others' attention, respect and love can have serious consequences in their lives.

In a more practical suggestion, Sarah also recommends changing the source of communication and knowledge. In fact, "if you change the things that you see, then you will change the things that you think. If you change the things that you hear, you will change the things that you say" (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2016). The only important thing is to focus on
one’s self because it’s the only constant in life. To focus on growing and becoming stronger to move past negativity, to show positivity and share it with others (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2016).
CHAPTER 5

CONFLICTS, NEGOTIATIONS, AND THE AUDIENCE

In this chapter, I’m going to present some of the most common topics found in LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless, and Sarah Rae Vargas’ comment sections. Through their analysis, I will demonstrate how anti-fans view micro-celebrities and how they prefer self-consciousness and awareness over other qualities. I will show how YouTube doesn’t offer a truly open space for communication, and how this absence influences conflicts and negotiations. I will also point to the issues LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless, and Sarah Rae Vargas have to face in balancing out their duties as vloggers, their relationship with their followers and their careers. Lastly, I will reveal how fat is still connected to issues of shame, morals, and health.

I would like to add that the majority of the viewers embrace Body Positivity. The fans purposefully look for a vlogger who might inspire them and resonates with them. As in any other social media, YouTube users search for something that might satisfy their needs. They look for someone similar to them, who has the same characteristics or shares the same hobbies and passions. By watching more and more of the same vloggers, the viewers grow interested in their lives as they were their real friends. Fans thus defend their vloggers, they want to create content, respond to and react to what the vloggers say in the video. They share personal stories and experiences, they discuss themes like body shaming and positivity, confidence and acceptance. They are critical to society beauty standards and offer great input on the matter.

It's also important to note that everyone, in the beginning, was a fan. Even the most hateful anti-fans were watching at the vlogger's channel because they were genuinely interested. Then something didn't meet their expectations, the vlogger betrayed their trust. They felt like they couldn't idolize her anymore. The vlogger showed inconsistency, most probably, or spread a message that the audience didn't share. So from the position of fans, those viewers became anti-fans. This passage, though, doesn't exclude that if the situation arises the anti-fans wouldn't go back to their original point of view of an admirer. If the vlogger repented and showed more
integrity, the anti-fans could become fans again. Those who really hate the YouTuber and would never go back are really a minority. The others would prefer for the vlogger to go back on the right path, for her message to be harmonious again. This is why the fans are also important, not only because they also offer a growing, interesting content but also because some of them hide in the anti-fans space, offering other perspectives and waiting for a change.

However, fans’ comments don’t offer the kind of content I’m looking for. Thus, I decided to focus on anti-fans. Anti-fans comment on all they can get their hands on. They analyze every picture, every word up to every sound the vlogger produces. While the fan shares a personal story, adds a comment and has a positive attitude, anti-fans don’t usually talk of private matters but focus on the vlogger. Their strategies are precise. They check between videos if the message is still coherent, and if not they point it out. They dig in old pictures and social media stories, to find what doesn’t match. They compare, research, investigate and critique. Thus, the most important difference between fans and anti-fans is that the anti-fans go behind and beyond the video, to look for something more. They reveal the hidden parts, they show the mechanism at work. So, they find out how much vloggers make a year, they discover what kind of sponsors reach out to them, they point out at the Photoshop used in Instagram pictures. In the same way, they notice the possible lies and they reveal them to the public. Not only they review the vlogger as she was a bad movie, but they argue that their mission serves the purpose of protecting younger, more innocent viewers who could believe in lies and be twisted by them. Anti-fans not only are critical to social media images and their protagonists, but they thus believe they are performing a social service to the advantage of everyone.

Refusing Lies, Accepting Fat

In this section, I will first give a brief description of LoeyLane’s particular audience. Then, I will show why and how anti-fans accuse her of lying, and why it’s a relevant problem in vlogging. Lastly, I will analyze the discussion about fat and curviness generated and brought on by viewers in the comment section. With these three separate steps, I seek to explore the
relationship between vlogger and viewers, the conflicts inherently perceived in the vlogger representation and the emerging body talk.

**Against Everything and Everyone**

There are three main characters sitting in the audience: the fan, the anti-fan, and the casual viewer. LoeyLane has the “LoveBugs”, her fans; the general audience, people who might come across her videos but are also not exceptionally interested or drawn to them. Lastly, she has ex-fans or anti-fans, who have been following Loey for many years but disappointed by her on the way: “I used to like Loey when I first started watching her but now she's just unbearable” (phpBB Group, August 2014).

Anti-fans believe to be better than the vlogger in many ways, and sometimes rightly: “The ladies on this thread are 10000 times more body positive than this fame whore” (phpBB Group, December 2015). They even believe fans got brainwashed by LoeyLane’s cute and nice persona, and feel superior to with them too. Because they have seen more and they are smarter than the normal commenters, they can see internal discrepancies in LoeyLane’s message and wonder how people still believe in what she says.

The perceived superiority, the antagonist position and their past as fans play an important role in how anti-fans perceive LoeyLane’s image and how they deal with them.

Image 1. GuruGossip comments on before/after picture
Unbearable Liar

LoeyLane’s anti-fans are savage and have constructed recurrent themes over the years, all based on meticulously searched proofs. The most popular motif that almost always comes back is that LoeyLane is a liar.

“I don’t believe for a second she is a 14, I would think 16-18” an anti-fan insists, going against what Loey herself said about her size (phpBB Group, August 2014). The sentence, a favorite within the GuruGossip community, is accompanied by a picture of LoeyLane in 2012, a time when she was a normal girl in college. “She would get so much praise if she could just be honest with her subscribers and with herself” is the statement that often follows (phpBB Group, September 2017). In fact, Loey created her internet persona on being a plus size woman believing in Body Positivity. It should be the main point of the channel. However, “the message she sends to viewers is unhealthy and a lie” a commenter protests (phpBB Group, August 2014). “There's nothing wrong with being plus-sized”, they insist; the problem “is that you make body
positivity your whole spiel even though you hate your own body and would wear ill-fitting clothes to make yourself feel better” (phpBB Group, December 2015). In fact, according to anti-fans, these perceived lies reveal that LoeyLane might not be as comfortable in her body as she affirms: “She's been avoiding the scale, so I can almost guarantee that she doesn't even know her true size!! She needs to wake up. She hates being fat. She wants to be straight sized... But until she can realize how rotund she is and accept it, she'll never be able to change” (phpBB Group, September 2017).

There seems to be a problem in her message. While she might really believe in Body Positivity, I argue that it could also be a way to gain popularity. However, it’s necessary to keep in mind that she gains money from her views and that she might have to change the subject of her videos to follow new trends. Furthermore, I believe it’s important to consider how difficult it is to truly accept oneself. LoeyLane has a conflicted, misunderstood body. Everyone wants her to be healthy but in reality, many people make fun of her when she shows herself. Her decision of lying, if she does lie, reveals insecurities and issues that are more than just a number. The size and the weight hide behind a mountain of meanings that Loey can’t control. In the same way, Body Positivity is not a linear concept. It’s a changing matter, it’s a step by step journey.

LoeyLane proposes her own way to solve the conflict with her audience about her Body Positivity message, by changing it and making it more personal. She doesn’t believe in the same version of it anymore, she explains in the video So I Gained Weight | The Truth About My Body Confidence: “Is that I don't necessarily believe in the same Body Positivity I did when I first started making these types of videos and I want to explain why for a long time” (LoeyLane, September 2017). LoeyLane at the same time rejects her old beliefs and creates a new standard of Body Positivity. By doing so, I think she seeks to change the message to include what is different in her too. On one side, she expands the limits of what, in her view, is considered to be body positive to defend herself against critiques. On the other side, by altering the message at the roots, and by being transparent to the audience about it, Loey accommodates a modified body and mind. It is a negotiation of sorts because Loey acknowledges both criticisms and personal change. She comes to terms with the audience, even if in a small step that might be immediately ignored by anti-fans, or even worse, seen as a simple cover-up for more lies.
Fat – Loey’s Inconsistencies

As I explained before, the audience likes to actively discuss. They often follow the video’s topic, but sometimes a conversation breaks in the comments section without the vlogger’s aid and with its own input. I decided to focus on these conversations because I found out that they reveal much about the viewers’ popular opinion on body matters. Thus, in this section, I will present how Loey’s followers discuss and argue about being plus-size. In particular, in the three videos I selected they linger on two topics: the word fat and the word curvy.

Is fat just an adjective like tall, blue or light? The audience can’t seem to reach a consensus. While on one hand they say fat is just a word, they still believe Loey should panic at her own weight: “Omg her new weight gain video. WTF? So the problem isn't that she's now morbidly obese, it's that she saw the number and her first instinct was to panic. YOU SHOULD BE PANICKING. THAT WAS THE CORRECT RESPONSE” (phpBB Group, September 2017). Loey has not accepted her obesity but if fat is just a word, is it really necessary to accept it? In this context, the word acceptance sort of implies the obligation of seeing and recognizing a bad thing. While the body needs to be recognized as it is, still I argue that acceptance in being fat here takes the meaning of “yes I accept, I take that I’m fat and I need to change to be better”. Fat can’t be just a word then, because its acceptance precludes the necessity of eliminating it.

Another point that proves that fat is not just a word is LoeyLane audience’s conflict about the word curvy. Which bodies are considered fat? Which curvy? What meanings hide between those two words? I already explained what curvy means for the plus-size community in the last chapter, but what do all viewers think? Again, they can’t reach a conclusion. On one side, we have those who believe overweight girls took the word curvy inappropriately: “Fat women will call themselves anything but Fat. It's "big girl", "voluptuous", "curvy", "juicy", "plus size", but never, ever, Fat” (LoeyLane, December 2015). Curvy is then seen as a way for overweight women to accept themselves without the necessity of change. On the other hand, it is a “nice, cute, empowering word for plus sized women” (LoeyLane, December 2015), a term that has now been turned into a debate. The plus-size community chose curvy for themselves to gain agency and power, but not everyone agrees with them. Not everyone would like for them to use it because it’s impossible to be fat and attractive at the same time:
MY issue is that some people are starting to say that it's inappropriate for plus size women to be called curvy, even though, let's face it, a lot of us ARE truly curvy. And, even worse, they profess this opinion in an almost insulting manner and turn it into something negative. So, I'm not trying to offend or exclude anyone […], I am just trying to say that I don't find it OK for some people to tell me and people like me what I can or can't call myself, because they somehow feel superior to me. That's it (LoeyLane, December 2015).

The terms curvy and fat become again a site of conflict, where the actual fight it’s between recognizing and not recognizing those who are different from normal standards.

Fake It Till You Make It

For Learningtobefearless section, I will first delineate the audience characteristics and talk about how some fans and anti-fans believe they have the power to say whatever they want. I will then address again the topic of being fake, this time interlinked with the problematic decision of undergoing a cosmetic surgery.

The Right and Power to Criticize

Checking what kind of audience populates a channel can give a quite good idea of the content, the vlogger and the matters that might appear. Exactly like LoeyLane, even Alex has a special name for her followers, the “Fearless Tribe.” This behavior suggests a micro-celebrity attitude towards the audience. Aside from the typical theme of inspirational content, fans assert they watch Alex “because of who she is - not because of her weight or because of her skin color or for any other reason that may come up and possibly be frowned upon” (Learningtobefearless, September 2017). Real followers see a gap between body and soul and defend her from other viewers. Their point is that there should be a difference between criticism and being mean, but most of the comments “indulge in the last socially acceptable form of bullying, and (take) out all the anger and frustration they have about their own lives and shortcomings”
(Learningtobefearless, September 2017). The Fearless Tribe understand that there are real people behind YouTube channels, people that can get hurt, while the general audience is not aware of it: "What's your problem! Honestly... Even if you don't think being plus size is healthy. Even if you don't think it's 'beautiful' doesn't mean she should hate her body. Nobody", a YouTube viewer scolds another one for suggesting Alex should hate herself for having gained weight (Learningtobefearless, September 2014).

The idea that the audience can and has a right to criticize comes from the belief that they are the primary monetary gain of the vlogger. In fact, negative comments pay as much as positive ones. “We are paying her bills and helping her career. We are her damn career” says a YouTube user on the video let's talk about my weight (Learningtobefearless, September 2017). They are backed up by peers: “I don't want to cause an argument but the viewers do pay the bills. Without viewers, there's no channel” (Learningtobefearless, September 2017). The vlogger has success because there are people who watch her. The viewers can say whatever they want because, essentially, they own the power.

The only thing Alex can do, in a way negotiating with her audience, is to focus on the positive comments, without looking at the negative ones, as she says in let's talk about my weight (Learningtobefearless, September 2017). There are ways to get some space from the audience and limit its power, like not completely involving them in her life, policing her channel and comment sections by disabling replies and blocking users.

**Being Fake and the Surgery**

What is the difference between being fake and being a liar? A lie can cover a truth, but it doesn’t mean all the discourse is a lie. Being fake, on the other hand, shields more. It means that everything is an invention and that the message in itself is a cover. The difference that also brought me in making two sub-chapters about similar topics of lies and fakeness is that LoeyLane might lie about her size and about her weight, but her message of Body Positivity is not used as a way to justify her intentions. Alex, on the other hand, used Body Positivity to hide herself and her insecurities, in the wake of her liposuction. As a GuruGossip user explains:
I like her personality, she seems funny and easy going. BUT lately she's been bothering me. Like the whole double chin liposuction thing? (who knew that was even a thing) The surgery itself and the fact that she's getting it doesn't bother me. What bothers me is that she keeps saying she's body positive, yet she's getting liposuction. Body positivity is about embracing yourself and loving yourself, flaws and all. NOT getting plastic surgery for a stupid little thing like a double chin (phpBB Group, January 2013).

Alex is not a bad person, but she shows some incoherent behavior that got the audience confused and conflicted. The problem is not even the operation, but that she keeps saying she is still body positive even after it. By getting the surgery, Alex loses credibility and her perceived honesty. She preaches about something but then goes against it to satisfy a personal wish (phpBB Group, January 2013). By doing so, she also sends the wrong message to her audience, as a comment in GuruGossip points out: “I'm really disappointed. I thought she was one of the more honest plus-sized beauty bloggers. She's sending a great message out to all the teens that watch her. -_-” (phpBB Group, January 2013). In the end, Alex loses in one shot both credibility, authenticity and the power of being inspirational.

Notwithstanding the emotional speech on the video, I argue that Alex is probably aware of the problem. She repeats multiple times that surgery won’t damage her Body Positivity because she feels comfortable in her skin and because it would happen only once (Learningtobefearless, April 2015). By saying that she would undertake a cosmetic surgery “only once”, she rather implies that she is aware her audience wouldn’t accept a second time. Alex thus negotiates the surgery by saying that it’s acceptable because she loves herself and because she would do it only once. She defends her actions to the audience, trying to find comfort and acceptance but also suggesting that she doesn’t believe in her words herself.
Inspiring Integrity

Similar to the two previous vloggers, I will start this section with a short analysis of Sarah Rae Vargas’ audience, then followed by a topic centered on the moral connotations of fat. The last part will show how Sarah is not afraid of pointing at the audience’s shortcomings. I will also explain how her frank attitude might be the real motor of her popularity.

Don’t Like, Don’t Watch

Sarah’s vlog persona is for sure biting but also the most straightforward within the three vloggers. Even when dealing with the audience, she is the most self-assured in deciding where to draw the line. In this section, I will explain how this feature of hers come to play and how viewers react.

Sarah’s YouTube channel is the house she invites people in; she has her own set of rules and people are free to leave and watch something else if they don’t like them: “you're not about to comment on my YouTube channel and my videos and tell me that I am a shitty person because fuck you I know that I'm not” (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2014). Her “If you don’t like don’t watch” attitude is recognized by her fans. They are aware she can control her career the way she wants and say what she wants; her channel, her choice. They understand, because they know she wants to create a positive space in her channel (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2014).

Still, exactly like Learningtobefearless’ audience, the viewers wonder how much of this power should be really permitted. In a free, social platform where should the line be drawn? People expressing their opinions are not always trolls, but vloggers like Sarah and Alex delete everything they don’t agree with and the viewers, especially the anti-fans, of course, are not happy with it:

Sure go ahead and delete every comment you don't like but you are playing the victim card when people are just stating their opinions (by all means delete that ones that are just flat out insulting, but otherwise no.) but you lose a lot of credibility by doing so and people will gradually respect you less (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2014).
While I believe that it’s their own right to control and deal with their channels as they prefer, I still wonder how much the vloggers permit, and how they distinguish real criticism from simple anger and meanness. One thing is for sure, Sarah is not afraid to deal with her audience and might be considered more genuine and transparent because of it. Sarah’s sharp interactions and unwillingness to receive random hate help her in creating a stable, fruitful relationship with her followers. She appears not only more congruous but also more sincere exactly because she shows her true reactions and feelings. Her readiness in attacking whoever criticizes plus-size people and in defending her followers is a motif of inspiration.

**Fat, Morality and Shame**

In this section, I will describe how hate and negativity hide in discourses of fat and health. These emotions address a part of the population considered inferior, problematic and unworthy.

Sarah often complains about how many viewers look at her and decide she is not healthy. She wonders what kind of effect these commenters seek to make: “do you think that’s gonna make me feel better about myself and it's gonna have a positive effect on me and I'm gonna go and take all of your very educated advice and go make a huge life change” (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2014)? The truth is that they don’t want her to feel better, they are just pushing their thoughts on her, tying her in a category by strategies of hate and shame. By repeating discourses of hate, they put her in an inferior position and they get stronger out of it.

One of the excuses these negatives comments use is that the vloggers are not healthy, and it’s obvious: “I hear what you're doing and trust me, we know that it's not healthy” (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2014). The health they are referring to is almost certainly the physical one because mental health or emotional health is not even taken into consideration. In this discourse where fat and health are correlated, people are overweight and unhealthy because they can’t work hard enough to better themselves.

In fact, aside from health reasons, negative comments focus on how being fat is a moral choice. Overweight people don’t accept themselves because they can’t admit it was the accumulation of their own mistakes that made them overweight: “Obesity isn’t a disease. It’s a result of decisions you made in your life. In your case, you made the wrong ones.” (Sarah Rae
Vargas, April 2014). They are considered a moral failure, their wrongdoings at the same time in plain light for everyone to see and a possible bad influence on others. “If people want to be obese fine but I still don't think we should all be dragged down with them” a viewer comments on YouTube (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2014). Like other kinds of addicts, fat people can’t control themselves. Because they lack willpower, they end up by eating more than they need, consuming more than they should. They exceed, like any other kind of addict would do: “This video is literally 10 minutes of an addict justifying their addiction and half the comments are supporting her. Is there any other substance abuse where that would happen?” (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2014).

If fat people make wrong decisions, if they are immoral, then they deserve to be treated with hate, to be shunned, ridiculed and disciplined. “You shame people so that they stop doing a bad thing” (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2014), a commenter on YouTube explains, pointing at shame as the only strategy that could save them. “Not to compare them morally but that's what our society does to racists. We shame them for being racist so they stop being racist. Being obese is bad, it's bad for the obese individual, it’s bad for their loved ones and its bad for society” (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2014). Overweight people are socially unacceptable thus need to be shamed. At one point, they are even compared to racists, harmful for their families and for society. Being obese is thus damaging for everyone and not just the single person. It’s a social problem.

“The Jealous Audience”

Sarah Rae Vargas offers another particular explanation about the negative comments she receives. Not only people are trying to police her body and habits. According to her, some viewers watch her because they are uncomfortable with her happiness and self-assurance: “I have that flaw and she has it too and I can see that she has it so why isn't she feeling the way that I feel? That's not fair”, she explains in False Realities (Sarah Rae Vargas, April 2016), taking the point of view of the hateful audience, “It's not fair that she gets to be happy with herself, it's not fair that she has a confidence to wear you know a swimsuit or a crop top or just be on camera”. This kind of audience is envious of her and let out their own frustrations through negative and hateful comments. Her opinion finds some evidence thanks to a comment I found in the I Hate
*My Body... |Dear Fat Girl|* video (Sarah Rae Vargas, January 2017). The viewer comment that it’s Sarah’s confidence with her overweight body, something that she can’t master, that instigated her negative comments:

I was fat too. I hated myself. In fact I still do. I tried to commit suicide 4 times and unfortunately I failed as you can see. So forgive me for not congratulating people on celebrating their obesity. It ruined my life and the lives of so many women. We always go on about saving women from abuse of men, but so many girls can be saved from self-abuse of obesity.

Obesity ruined her and many other people’s lives. So instead of taking Sarah as a good example of what she might achieve, the commenter takes her anger out on those people they are trying to celebrate a body she can’t accept (Sarah Rae Vargas, January 2017).

The fact that Sarah is not afraid of pointing out at the audience, of critiquing it too, demonstrates again how much she favors transparency. While I argue that Loey and Alex would have never criticized the audience in such a manner, and I’ve never seen them openly commenting on their fans’ shortcomings, Sarah again not only critiques but also show another layer of meaning in the hate she receives. She gives an explanation brought from years of observations. She then informs the audience of how jealousy could be a reason why people might leave hateful messages. As she has done when pointing out at the fakeness of social media’s images, here Sarah again educates her followers in understanding not only the mechanism of YouTube but also each other.

While LoeyLane and Learningtobefearless have inside conflicts discovered and discussed by the audience, Sarah is unsatisfied with some issues within the audience and she digs them out and discusses them in her videos for her followers' benefit.
Final remarks

For what concerns directly the audience, I think it’s important to stress how anti-fans play a role in understanding the internal dynamics of a vlogger discourse, message, and reception. As previous loving followers, anti-fans are careful in looking at the content, though fighting the dynamics of micro-celebrity: the looking up to an idol, the impossibility of criticizing, the far gap with the audience. Anti-fans refuse the labeled fandom because they prefer integrity and transparency to the aspirational motif. This could also explain why Sarah Rae Vargas have few entries in her GuruGossip topic, while Loey and Alex have thousands of them. Sarah displays more self-consciousness in her role and career of a vlogger. Sarah Rave Vargas doesn’t have a name for her followers. She explains the forces at work, she openly tells her size and weight. She is perceived as someone with her feet on the ground, even when or probably because she openly tells her audience about the fakeness and construction of YouTube and social media.

For the Body talk, we saw fat connected with many other discourses: health, morality, beauty. In the end, it all comes down to fat still being connoted with negative meanings that are thoroughly debated and argued over, redesigned and challenged. Together with discourses of hate, shame, and humiliation, there are a vast majority of people that recognize the importance of other factors like mental health, positivity, and confidence. The body, usually an item disconnected from the face, can become a temple of possible improvements and self-love. The word fat is thus discussed, stripped of its negative meaning and appropriated.

Terms and concepts are constantly, forcefully argue over not only in the video but also in the comments. However, the negotiations are far in between. The processes and acts of negotiation are more about what the vlogger decides to come to terms with than a real truce with the audience. Usually, those acts are not even openly declared. There are not a lot of negotiations in the first place, because there is no space to really converse, but also because it’s almost impossible to create a normal, peaceful dialogue in a platform like YouTube. The viewers who don’t agree not necessarily are bad people, not necessarily hate the vlogger but they have to adhere to the anti-fans community because there is no other space where to express their opinion. This lack of space, also perceived as lack of transparency and acceptance from the vlogger, increase the hate and other bad responses. And still, the vloggers can’t let their channels be
without applying filters. Not only because they need to have a certain amount of control on their jobs, but also because it doesn’t fit with their perceived role model aspirations.

Since there are not a lot of negotiations, but more fights between the vloggers and the viewers, I argue that only to a certain extent the content is changed to please the audience. The vloggers answer to the duty they perceive in their careers, and also to their monetary needs. If the response of the audience menaces one of those two factors, then yes, the vloggers might need and want to change what they upload on their personal channels. If, for example, they are accused of not being inspiring anymore, then they probably will try to dedicate more time and energies to their message duties as a bigger sister or a role model. They would also try to appear as less constructed and more genuine. However, if the issues are born because of other factors, I believe that seldom the three vloggers will come down to pacts with their audience. Also, they know who their fans are and for sure they will listen to them first, and negate or cancel everything else. While this approach might seem a bit strict or totalitarian, it’s doubtlessly difficult to find another method in social media.
CONCLUSION

The Authenticity of Conflicts, the Fakeness of Negotiations

Vlogging is a set of contradictory practices, even before taking into consideration how Body Positivity could emerge from such an environment. The relationship with the audience and the necessity of getting a monetary income get connected with bodily issues and with vlogging rules.

Within the three vloggers, Sarah Rae Vargas has the winning strategy. Her straightforward attitude and willingness to fight for what she believes render her more authentic, down to earth and inspirational to the eyes of her followers. I believe that Sarah understood that while the general audience might comment on the body, fans and anti-fans care more about what message comes across and how. LoeyLane and Learningtobefearless seemingly haven't learned the lesson. Hiding or lying about important information, they are accused of lacking transparency. The audience recognized the fakeness and the lies, and will never trust them again. Once they saw the message is corrupted, they have no more reason to consider the two vloggers as nothing more than frauds.

The tension in vlogging dynamics is bound to create conflicts. Negotiations, though, are harder to achieve. LoeyLane and Learningtobefearless have inconsistencies discovered and discussed by the audience. Those issues are never directly mentioned and taken care of. Alex and Loey prefer to protect themselves, ending up by losing focus on Body Positivity and their followers. Sarah Rae Vargas has the opposite approach. She sees issues in her viewers, she digs them out and discusses them for her followers' benefit. She concentrates on the audience but she is also rarely willing to compromise. Since Sarah doesn’t negotiate but attack and is still successful and without anti-fans, I argue that negotiations might not be necessary to solve conflicts. They are not essential to keep an audience. They might actually be more harmful because they seem like a condescending way to protect the persona, to shut up the audience. While with her integrity, Sarah doesn’t look for compromises.
Where is Your Credibility?

The point of social media is that it should be, if not just appear, more authentic than traditional media. Everyone is aware that in movies and TV shows, for example, there is a high degree of preparation and transformation. YouTube has become so popular because it is more direct and less artificial. Yet, those who make a career out of it repeat and copy the same techniques of big broadcasting systems. We saw how LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless and Sarah Rae Vargas have to always appear perfect. It’s demanded of them, it has become a requirement for social media personas. It is asked out of micro-celebrity. To bring back transparency vloggers can admit and open reveal the mechanism behind, the rules that they have to obey. In this way, they circumnavigate them, showing themselves on the same side of the audience, together with them in a counter-system opposite to traditional media. By doing so, they appear real and inspirational at the same time.

Vlogging is a blog in video format and thus should be more anchored to reality and life than any other media representation. Still, this research shows that is not entirely true. There is still a huge part of fabrication, of artificial that goes in successful vlogs. Is the artificial ruining the purpose of vlogging? Is it because it had become, like everything else, a source of income? Is it that the audience is too used to media’s standards and can’t accept anything else? I believe the answer lies in all three factors. Vlogging has become a possible career and as such there are even more rules to obey, necessities to follow. As it is now, it’s a very unstable, unsafe territory, a new insulated developing sector where more and more people try to gauge an audience while at the same time using views and sponsorships to survive. The precarious state of this job, by most considered a part-time, non-valuable occupation at best, doesn’t help vloggers. Understandably more interested in gaining a monetary outcome out of their otherwise unpaid labor, it’s no wonder they don’t consider qualities like authenticity and credibility as a top priority. They seek commercial partners even if they might not adhere to their online persona, they advertise for brands they wouldn't have chosen if they had a more stable income. Furthermore, the audience often forgets the lucrative nature of vlogs, or they don't understand the implications of it, thus creating a conflict when their expectations of a more interest-free content are not met. Additionally, social media reiterates traditional media’s necessity of perfection, of constantly
grooming, with the downside that the curated content often requires time and labor that are not compensated. But what is the point of vlogging if it’s not honest? As the vloggers showed, any social media’s image is incongruent and full of layers of meanings at best. As soon as the image or the message targets a bigger audience, it immediately loses part of its transparency. Yet, there are still other strategies that could come in to play to guarantee an adequate level of integrity, and to replenish the feeling of honesty.

The problem of credibility grows exponentially if the vlogger decided to follow a progressive, liberal message. Then, transparency and honesty are not a requirement, but a huge necessity. Integrity, transparency, style, Body Positivity belief, consistency, and aesthetics are all characteristics appreciated in LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless, and Sarah Rae Vargas vloggers. In this thesis, we saw how change can damage the perceived integrity. Like with LoeyLane, who gained weight, or with Learningtobefearless and her liposuction. While the latter is a very extreme example that mostly clashes with the audience because it doesn't fit with the idea of Body Positivity, I still believe that change can be accepted and embraced by even the stricter viewers. Vloggers might be criticized if their image doesn’t follow what previously stated, so I think the solution might be in a more open communication. If Loey had openly stated she had gained weight, if she hadn’t lied or hidden her size, but embraced the transformations in her body, most of the fans wouldn’t have shifted and become anti-fans. As anti-fans also explained, they wanted to follow and look at a plus size woman. Fat is not a problem, the lies are. Change is not automatically rejected, it's refused and criticized only when not followed by an honest conversation about it. And yet, only Sarah managed to maintain her integrity. Body Positivity is supposed to be liberating. Nonetheless, there are many inconsistencies in Loey and Alex’s message. The plastic surgery is really something that I struggle to understand and justify, not only because it goes against the core of what Learningtobefearless was saying till that moment. She was spreading the idea that body standards are there to be rejected, that everyone is worthy. Then, instead of taking her time and follow her own words she decided to have a liposuction. In the video where she broke the news to her audience, she used tears and pity talk to instigate compassion and understanding. It was always for her, for having people say “good” and pat her on her head. She changed the idea of Body Positivity, she discussed it not to inform the audience, not to be the big sister or role model as she wanted, but to justify herself. How can she still believe in Body Positivity, is the question that I asked, together with many in the audience. How
can this be a proper behavior for a public persona? How can she consider herself a role model, when all she does is just for herself?

**Note on Feminism**

The body of these vloggers is far away from the political and revolutionary body of the Second Wave Feminism. It's not a site of political rebellion and new knowledge. Even if it changes with clothes and make-up, it remains an abstract concept more than a physical presence. When it appears in its corporality, the body presented by the vloggers seeks and wants to be accepted despite its defects. It’s not through its understanding, but through the person’s mental acceptance of it that the body can lead to happiness and satisfaction. This journey is individual and intimate, and doesn't translate into political recognition. It’s a personal choice that brings to spiritual and emotional wellness and empowerment. This idea of the female body belongs more to the post-feminist discourse, subjugated by the dominant cultural standards of feminine beauty. LoeyLane, Learningtobefearless, and Sarah Rae Vargas constantly refresh themselves and recharge in acts of self-surveillance, where even leisure activities become a practice of self-regulated high-privileged femininity. They are not passive and voiceless. Yet, while they identify themselves as active, desiring sexual subjects, they still present themselves in a objectified manner because “it suits their liberated interests to do so” (Gill 2007, 35). There is no real personal choice, though, if the representations reproduce old structures of oppression. By adhering to an established model of femininity and beauty, the three vloggers end up by being locked in a patriarchal system where their girl power is used only to increase sales.

Furthermore, even if representatives of the plus-size minority, Loey, Alex and Sarah struggle to present different images of women and completely fail in even hinting to other sexualities, genders, races or even nationalities. Body Positivity and post-feminist discourses of individuality and empowerment are only referred to young plus-size white women like them. They never hint to other kind of bodies, the only exception the anorexic one, that might need more confidence. They never talk about how race, social class, education and so on might influence the mental attitude to one’s body. The only body they know is their own, and they fail to open up their limits. Even if they could ask their audience for different experiences, they
rarely do. It appears like they are and they see their viewers as a mass of white, middle class heterosexual American young women. They don’t try to gather to other kind of audiences, even if more diversity could provide a breath of fresh air into their videos. They fail to acknowledge their privileged position and thus deepen the gap between white, straight and educated rich people and other minorities.

**On Body Positivity Now**

Since I began this research there were many changes in the general representation and idea of Body Positivity on social media. While I was studying for this thesis, I found many other vloggers and influencers who were uploading and sharing content on Body Positivity. The novelty was in their diversity. While in the beginning Body Positivity was mainly producing content for the plus-size female community, now it embraces and creates texts not only for different races, different genders, sexual identities and bodies but also on other minorities like disabled people. This variety is more visible and widespread on Instagram than YouTube, suggesting maybe a preference in social media usage.

Another interesting development is the new focus on the male figure. Usually only seen as a female problem, body confidence and dysphoria have in fact not avoided men. Thus, thanks to new Instagrammers and influencers, Body Positivity now aims at actively including different representations of men aside from the idolized muscular, manly body. While these new images are still rare compared to the female equivalent, I still believe it’s an important step in broadening people’s horizon through social media.

**On Further Research**

A point I couldn’t analyze in my research but that I believe would reveal much about vlogging, is how the vloggers search and include the products they advertise. I think it would be an interesting idea to see how sponsors might change according to the video’s theme. Or, vice
versa, how the vlogger explores new topics to attract more sponsors. Also, are there specific products to be commercialized for a Body Positivity vlogger? Are there products that shouldn’t be advertised? What kind of items are welcomed by the audience, and what others are not? How are the sponsors and the branding involved? How much aware is the audience of this involvement? In other words, it would be thought-provoking to have a clearer image of how monetizing a vlog might change, influence and shape its underline message. It doesn’t necessarily have to be applied to Body Positivity vloggers too, since most if not all successful YouTubers are sponsored and brand themselves.

Another direction of research might be to see how different Body Positivity is shaped according to the different social media. In this thesis, I focused only on YouTube and GuruGossip, thus looking at video content and comments. However, how does a different social media present the concept of Body Positivity? How does the different platform influence the relationship between the Body Positivity activist and influencer with their audience? Is the message perceived more or less authentic, realistic, inspiring?

Lastly, the three vloggers I analyzed are white, middle-class, straight and cisgender American women. I would be interested to see how Body Positivity is conceptualized, shown and spread when the protagonists are of different countries, races, economical class, gender, and sex.
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### APPENDIX

#### Appendix 1. Selected Videos for Loeylane

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<td>Fat Shaming &amp; Skinny Shaming… and why it's stupid.</td>
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Source: [https://www.youtube.com/user/RavingsByRae/videos](https://www.youtube.com/user/RavingsByRae/videos), Data Updated 25/11/2017
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