

Overcoming the Odds: Disability Studies, Fat Studies, and Rhetorics of Bodily Control

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As the field of disability studies expands, a question that is cropping up in theoretical discussions more and more often is whether or not Fatness falls into the category of disability. Theorist April Herndon gives a compelling argument for the inclusion of Fat within disability studies, making an especially interesting connection between the idea of “elective disability” in the Deaf community (associated with a refusal to undergo procedures for cochlear implants or similar surgeries) and the idea that Fat people actively “choose” to be Fat by foregoing medical treatment. Herndon states, “[B]oth Fat and Deaf people are often considered morally blameworthy when they choose not to adopt recommended treatment. Similarly, both fatness and deafness are routinely recognized as medical conditions but seldom as the counter-hegemonic identities of Fat and Deaf, especially within the contexts of law and medicine” (128). The connection Herndon is making is that, rather than recognizing Fat and Deaf as identities that

many people embrace, both are seen as defects that could and should be fixed. Thus, Herndon is making a clear connection between Fat studies and disability studies—that of medicalization, perceived choice, and normalization.

Feminist theory also actively discusses issues of normalizing bodies. While many theorists make the connection between feminism and disability studies, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson was one of the first to do so in her article “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory.” However, although Garland-Thomson makes a very clear argument for how feminist theory can help transform the ways we look at embodiments of disability, she never explicitly mentions how considering Fat embodiments might add to this discussion. “Together, the gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and ability systems exert tremendous social pressures to shape, regulate, and normalize subjugated bodies,” she states. “Such disciplining is enacted primarily through the two interrelated cultural discourses of medicine and appearance” (10). Medicine and appearance, along with law, are the main normalizing factors that Herndon and other rhetoricians who discuss Fatness point to as well, but Garland-Thomson never explicitly includes a discussion of Fatness in her theory, leaving a large gap.

As a Fat, disabled woman, I was at first bewildered by the idea that two of my main physical identifiers were so intimately connected, but the more I considered Herndon’s argument and Garland-Thomson’s connection between feminist theory and disability studies, the more it became clear where these connections lie. Expanding upon some of Herndon’s ideas, I would like to argue that the rhetorics of bodily control surrounding both Fatness and disability, connect these categories in a meaningful way. While I will expand on what I mean by “rhetorics of bodily control” throughout this paper, what I mean, in short, is the way that we use public rhetoric to suggest that the only disabled or Fat bodies worth discussing in a positive manner are those that have somehow become “in control” in some way, from learning to run after an amputation to before and after diet pictures. Other bodies, I suggest, are either invisible, ridiculed, or seen as tragic. This connection creates a space wherein both groups could benefit from including and actively engaging with the

other, especially because these are two identity categories that often overlap. In addition to Herndon's connection, both Fat people and disabled individuals are often viewed as in a situation where they are out of control of their bodies, either by choice, or by fate. Similarly, when these individuals are able to become what is commonly thought of as in control of their bodies, they are praised and lauded as "success stories" for others to emulate, such as in weight-loss testimonials and human interest stories about disabled people "overcoming the odds."

To exhibit this connection between Fatness and disability, I will first share my own story concerning the realization of the connection between control, Fatness, and disability, then turn to some rhetorical readings of weight loss success stories and disability "overcoming the odds" human interest stories. While medical discourse is an obvious link between Fatness and disability, my focus is instead on how mainstream and popular discourse uses rhetorics of controlling one's body when discussing both categories. Finally, I consider how both disability and Fat counternarratives are working to break down the expectations that popular rhetoric places around these identity groups, each modeling for the other group different strategies that can be utilized to change how we talk about Fatness and disability. My hope is that I will show how the rhetorical moves used to talk about and break out of these totalizing narratives for both Fat and disabled bodies are similar, and that the way that people experience the material world (and the way that the material world is shaped) is linked to public rhetoric surrounding disabled and fat people. In addition, many of us, including myself, who fall into both categories could benefit from an acknowledgement of the connections between these two identity categories.

I. STRENGTH THROUGH NARRATIVE

To talk about oneself in an academic paper seems self-serving, but many disability studies scholars insist that narrative is a path with which to achieve liberation. Theorist Tobin Siebers claims that narrative satisfies the "theoretical, practical, and political requirements," that disability studies, and, I would argue, Fat studies, needs (8). As Siebers states:

Narratives about disability identity are theoretical because they posit a different experience that clashes with how social existence is usually constructed and recorded. They are practical because they often contain solutions to problems experienced by disabled and nondisabled people alike. They are political because they offer a basis for identity politics, allowing people with different disabilities to tell a story about their common cause. (8)

Thus, I will share this story to give myself a voice, both as a disabled person and, simultaneously, as a Fat person that is acknowledging Fat as a positive identity, rather than a negative designation placed upon me.

I was first considered “disabled” after a car accident that left me with a limp, chronic pain, and a leg that requires the use of a brace if I’m going to walk any substantial distance. Like many disabled people, this category was first placed on me by the controlling narratives of the structures that both Garland-Thomson and Herndon discuss—medicine and perceived appearance, as well as law (I was designated disabled enough to have a “permanent” placard and even an identification card). In addition, the identifier “Fat” was placed on me by similar structures—as a child, I was teased incessantly and put through multiple medical tests to explain my “obesity,” despite the fact that I was “healthy” by every other medical indication. As Herndon points out, “it seems that many medical practitioners feel quite comfortable telling patients that regardless of any other aspect of their lifestyle or health, they are ill,” and this was my experience exactly (126). By the age of 19, when I was in a car accident, I had been actively “trying to lose weight” for almost a decade, going through several weight fluctuations and weight loss systems. As Kim Q. Hall points out, diet and exercise regimes, especially, I might add, those actively pushed by medical professionals, “seek to transform deviant bodies, bodies that threaten to blur and, thus, undermine organizing binaries of social life ... into docile bodies that reinforce dominant cultural norms of gendered, raced, and classed bodily function and appearance” (vii). In other words, these regimes are directly linked to the idea of the “normal” body. After my accident, strangely enough, I felt a weight (figuratively, of course) lifted off of my shoulders, because I had an excuse to be fat—by viewing my disabled body as something

out of my control, I was able to relinquish constant control of my fat body. Soon, though, I was hard at work trying to control my disabled body—going back to work before I was supposed to and engaging in activities that were harming rather than helping my leg. I imagined that I was brave and that I would “beat” the disability that I had been saddled with. When I was trying to lose weight, I was working toward the ideal or “normal” body or at least a body that was able to do the things that a “normal” body could do. I felt a constant need to control my body in a way that would render it a socially acceptable body or would at least render me, as a person, socially acceptable as I had at least attempted to control my deviant body. While the expectations of bodily control surrounding Fatness and disability are not exactly the same, they are interrelated in a very real way, especially for those of us who fall into both categories.

As Herndon notes, “Discussions of weight and disability seem perpetually freighted with issues of choice and frivolity,” and this directly applies to my situation; I viewed my weight as connected to a choice, but that choice was to relinquish control of my body to food and lack of exercise, which basically means I was “choosing” to be out of control (124). This connects to common mainstream rhetorics of Fatness. Once I was disabled, though, I viewed myself as having no control over my weight, and thus absolved myself of these worries about control. Soon, though, I found myself attempting to control my disabled body in whatever way possible. This brings up the question: How do mainstream rhetorics of Fatness relate to mainstream discourse about disability that suggests, albeit implicitly, that you should constantly try to control your disability?

Like Fatness, common views of disability paint the disabled body as something out of an individual’s control but still something that an individual should at least attempt to control, whether through surgery, drugs, and constricting braces that allow individuals to move “normally” or through any other controlling devices. If an individual is especially exceptional at obtaining control of their disabled body, they are often featured in what those in the field call “super-crip” human interest stories, stories that engage with people that, “despite the odds,” achieved something great (or great “for a cripple”). Or, as Garland-Thomson describes this category in the article “Feminist

Disability Studies, “the disabled figure that assures, soothes, and inspires the nondisabled” (1571). Disabled individuals who do not fit into this category are objects of pity, rather than inspiration, if they are seen at all. As Siebers points out in a discussion of human interest stories about disability, “in each case, ability trumps disability, creating a morality tale about one person’s journey from disease to cure, from inhumanity to humanity,” and I would add to that from lack of control to control (16).

Similarly, in mainstream discourse, Fat people are portrayed as either out of control or as former Fat people who have become in control. As Elena Levy-Navarro notes, “In the confession that is the center of diet discourse, the newly thin person announces that she has found the ‘new me.’ Crystallized in the ‘before’ and ‘after’ photograph that accompanies such confessions, the fat person . . . is imagined to be all that we do not want to be: lazy, gluttonous, unsexy, and unhappy” (340). In other words, it could be argued that the “before” Fat person is there to “assure, soothe, and inspire” those who are not Fat, do not want to be Fat, and see Fatness as a transgression as it further utilizes the popular notion that the Fat body is a bad body that should be eliminated. It implies that Fat bodies are in fact deviant and that the owners of these bodies are happier, more successful people when they have these bodies in control. In order to further this point, I will examine two weight loss stories next to two “super-crip” stories to show the similarities in the public rhetoric surrounding these groups.

II. THE NEW ME, DESPITE THE ODDS

While they may seem unconnected, super-crip stories and weight loss testimonials in many ways work toward the same end: to tell stories of abnormal or deviant bodies that were brought under control in some manner. As such, bodies that are not brought under control in this manner, such as the body of someone who stays Fat or the disabled person that does not achieve an incredible feat, are often rendered unimportant or invisible. In “Disability and Representation,” Garland-Thomson notes, “The way we imagine disability through images and narratives determines the shape of the material world, the distribution of resources, our relationships with one another, and our sense of ourselves” (523). This phenomenon applies to Fatness as well—images and narratives of Fatness directly affect not only

how Fat people see themselves but how thin people see themselves in relationship to the unwanted category of Fatness. Considering mainstream disability narratives of overcoming next to weight loss stories reveals the similarities in how changing or controlling one's body is seen as something to be rewarded and respected, whereas those who do not fall into the categories deemed appropriate for these narratives (e.g., those who are fat or who struggle with disability) are silenced and/or ignored.

Even within disability human interest articles, the subjects themselves will often use rhetorics of bodily control, even if they do not realize they are doing so. An article on *Bleacher Report* from October 10, 2013, tells the story of Patience Beard, “a Division I cheerleader on scholarship who uses a zebra-print prosthetic while cheerleading at Arkansas football games” (Zaldivar). The article focuses on Beard’s “initial struggles and ultimate triumph,” and Beard claims that she doesn’t even notice her disability. In the companion video titled “Amputee Cheerleader Takes Self-Acceptance to New Heights,” Beard tells her story, stating, “If you just sit back and say, ‘I can’t do that,’ then, you can’t do it. Whether it’s waking up in the morning to go to class or walking. Like, you know, it’s all mental” (1:36-146). Beard, here, is being placed in the super-crip role, and, while she says she hopes to inspire people, her rhetoric still suggests that those who are not able to do what she does or something comparable or are uninterested in doing such things, are lacking in control over their bodies. The author suggests that “At the heart of [Beard’s story] lies the fantastic question: What is normal?” (Zaldivar). The answer seems to be that normal is using your deviant body in a socially acceptable way. As the article states, “The sophomore has a zebra leg just like we all have physical features or personal characteristics that distinguish us. Beard isn’t about to dwell on what she is lacking, though, maneuvering life’s road with the ease of someone with two legs,” again, defining normalcy as someone that is able to do things in the same manner as those with normalized bodies (Zaldivar). In addition, this statement suggests that others whose stories are not being told *are* dwelling on what they are lacking, rather than working to control their bodies. The “if you try hard enough, you can do anything” attitude permeates both the article and video, marginalizing those who may be disabled but will never, no matter what, be able to walk. While I do not aim to critique Beard, I would

like to point out that she has fallen into the trap of treating disability as something an individual should control in some way and uses the polarizing rhetoric of control versus lack of control when telling her own story.

This sentiment of bodily control is similarly, and perhaps more explicitly, seen in weight loss testimonials. As Le'a Kent points out about the popular "before-and-after sequences," "[T]he fat person, usually a fat woman, is represented not as a person, but as something encasing a person, something from which a person must escape, something that a person must cast off" (134). Like disabled individuals, Fat people are seen as a group that should strive to gain control over their bodies, rather than embodying these identity categories. It should be noted, though, that I am not equating being Fat with having a severe physical disability, but that my point is that the rhetorics surrounding the control of both Fat and disabled bodies are extremely similar. Levy-Navarro argues that "in making the fat person into the 'before' that must be rejected for the 'after,' that we only imperfectly become, such discourse would render life uninhabitable for fat people" (340). One could argue that Beard's story suggests that if she had not overcome her disability her life would be, if not uninhabitable, unimportant.

Just as popular as disability human interest stories are weight loss stories meant to inspire. A November 14, 2013 *Huffington Post* article details one of these all-too-familiar weight loss testimonials. However, this story is told in a way that suggests that even those who tell you to lose weight or to control your body are only doing so because of love, not because deviant bodies, especially deviant women's bodies, are alarming to most people. In other words, this testimonial is not only working to normalize bodies, but to normalize the ways that we tell others that they should control those bodies. The author, Akela Stanfield, describes herself as a life-long weight watcher, suggesting that, for a fat person, vigilance over one's unruly body is a life-long chore. The article, titled "When the Man You Love Asks You to Lose Weight," begins as Stanfield describes when she asked her best friend, who she had been in relationship limbo with for years, what he would do if she lost weight. His answer? "I would ask you to marry me." Stanfield, rather than seeing this as problematic, seems relieved that he

had finally said it, even though she was “wrist deep in a Doritos bag.” She makes excuses for his choice to not want to marry her while she was big: “I didn’t come off as someone capable of giving or receiving a lifetime of love and care. I didn’t even care about myself.” Although she describes traveling the world and dating men who accepted her size, all things that might point to a motivated person who enjoys life, she claims she did not care about herself. And what was the proof that she did not care? She was fat. She describes becoming fat over time: “I changed from a confident and curvy girl with lots of energy to an anxious and obese woman that spent her evenings on the couch... He waited patiently for glimpse of the self-assured girl he used to know. I presented an uncontrolled woman with no plan.” While she was able to travel the world and date men who did not reject her for her size, she still sees herself as out of control—doing things with her body but not the right things. Similarly, Beard’s story suggests that those who “say, ‘I can’t do that,’” or even “I don’t want to do that,” whether in connection to walking or weight loss, are out of control.

As the Beard story suggests, an important aspect of these rhetorics of bodily control within disability overcoming stories, is the suggestion that those who cannot do the things that the subject of the story can, have not tried hard enough or are not determined, persistent, or strong. I would like to again point out that giving disabled individuals the chance to tell their stories is important, but when only those who are considered extraordinary are given voice, it suggests that others are not important or worth hearing. The story of Jessica Cox is an excellent example of this. According to her website, rightfooted.com, Jessica was born without arms but “now flies airplanes, drives cars and otherwise lives a normal life using her feet as others use their hands.” In the YouTube video “The Sole to Persevere,” Cox discusses her life over footage of her eating, driving, brushing her hair, and putting on makeup all with her feet. She states, “Whenever I’m confronted with an obstacle in life, I’m pretty determined about overcoming it, and it starts out with, well, what is this obstacle in front of myself? I figure out how I need to accomplish it and I’m persistent. So it starts with acceptance, you move forward, and you use whatever challenge or hardship it is as an opportunity” (:30–:52). The suggestion here, then, is that those who do not accomplish the things that she has—she is the first armless person to earn a pilot’s certificate, for example—are not persistent, they do not see hardships as opportunities, and they

do not take on these hardships. Cox has gotten her deviant body in control, and thus her story is told. Though there are countless others who live successful lives without arms, their stories are not told, as they have not learned to control their bodies in a way that is seen as significant or noteworthy. As Eli Clare notes, stories such as Cox's suggest that "disability and achievement contradict each other and that any disabled person who overcomes this contradiction is heroic" (qtd. in Ware 144). Thus, Cox's job as a motivational speaker should not come as a surprise—she is painted as a hero, and the collateral damage of this heroic framing of Cox's body is that other disabled individuals who may not be controlling their bodies in the way that she is are rendered invisible.

In the same way that super-crip stories often effectively silence stories of disability outside of this paradigm, weight loss stories effectively silence self-love among Fat people, as they suggest over and over that the "before" Fat body was the miserable home of the "real," thin, happy person inside. A February 28, 2013 *Huffington Post* article highlights the story of Tracy Plumb, a woman who lost 150 pounds. The story begins: "'The bigger you are, the more invisible you are.' That's how Tracy Plumb, of Madeira, Ohio, felt as she edged closer to 300 pounds." The subsequent article does not suggest anything problematic with this reality but instead tells the story of Plumb's weight loss, suggesting that this invisibility was due to her own actions, and it was thus her job to become visible once again. According to the article, Plumb "remembers crying in front of her closet, trying to find something to wear that could disguise her appearance," but, after receiving an invitation to her 10-year high school reunion, she became motivated to lose 150 pounds, which she did in 11 months through simply eating better and exercising. The article fails to go into any detail and suggests that this weight loss was a simple fix to the annoying problem of invisibility and unhappiness. In addition, it suggests that it was Plumb's job to fix the feeling of invisibility. The story ends: "Weight loss is about learning to love yourself, she says, and she's better equipped to help others reach their goals because she intimately knows the journey they're on." Rather than discussing the way that Fat individuals are rendered silent and invisible, Plumb's story suggests that the only way to be heard is to become in control of your body so that others will hear you. Just as super-crip stories silence disabled individuals who are not climbing

Mount Everest or learning to drive with their feet, diet “before and after” stories leave no space for conversations that acknowledge Fat bodies as legitimate bodies.

If you do a quick internet search of “diet success stories,” you get article after article of individuals, usually women, who tell the same story—they were fat and miserable, couldn’t stand their bodies or their lives, and then finally stopped being lazy, lost weight, and everything changed for the better. This begs the question: What other possible reason could there be for so many people to say that being Fat made them intrinsically unhappy, unless Fatness always leads to a miserable, out of control existence? The answer can be found when considering the discourse surrounding Fat bodies. Levy-Navarro suggests that the “before and after” diet stories and photos are compelled by a cultural understanding of which bodies are good and right.

Levy-Navarro claims:

In confessing, the individual sees herself to be speaking a truth that she sees as liberatory, even as this truth is a cultural one that is conventional and confining. To highlight this last aspect, Foucault describes the confession as a ‘ritual of discourse.’ As Foucault writes, ‘a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation’ (342).

Stories like Stanfield’s and Plumb’s tell a story of being miserable because that is the story they are expected to tell. What would people think if you were to say that you were fat and happy? In most people’s minds, that’s the equivalent of saying that you are happy being a lazy slob with no self control. Levy-Navarro goes on to say that diet confessions, “have the effect of compelling us to acknowledge their truth. That is, each time a person confesses that she has found a new me that is younger, more energetic, and healthier than her former fat self, and every time we applaud her transformation, we are with

her implicitly making the fat self all that we must hate, avoid, and finally control” (349-350). While we aren’t applauding an explicit transformation in the story of Cox or Beard, we are still applauding them for transforming from the “normal” disabled person who does not achieve to the “super” in control disabled person who achieves something outside of what we consider ordinary for anyone with a body outside of the “norm.” Just as confessions of weight loss paint those who have or will not lose weight as deviant and out of control, stories such as those by Cox and Beard paint those who have not done something extraordinary with a disability as out of control by choice, because they lack determination, because they are lazy, or because they are too downtrodden to do what others have done. Thus, I would suggest that these stories of overcoming are often turned into compelled confessions in and of themselves, further cementing this relationship between rhetorics of bodily control in relation to disability and in Fatness.

Returning to Herndon’s discussion of “elective” disability and weight loss, we can further see how these stories of overcoming are often compulsory in nature as well. As mentioned, Herndon points out when both Fat and Deaf people choose not to undergo “treatment” such as weight loss programs or cochlear implants, people treat them as morally at fault for some transgression, either to themselves or to society. Levy-Navarro suggests that, “We can see the compulsory nature of the reaction if we imagine in contrast an interlocuter questioning whether such a change needed to be made or expressing dismay at the transformation. Such a person would be considered ‘rude,’ ‘mean,’ or perhaps even crazy” (353). Similarly, when people voice the belief that disabilities such as autism or Deafness don’t need to be cured, many people react in a similar way. For example, Margaret Price discusses the organization Fighting Autism’s “autism clock” which recorded the incidence of autism and its economic cost, using the medical discourse and the rhetoric of autism as a disease to be cured. In response, the group Aspies For Freedom, which is working to create a counternarrative about autism, created a parody clock. As Price notes, “While Fighting Autism viewed autism as a disease that must be battled and cured, Aspies For Freedom takes the stance that autism is a form of neurodiversity, that is, of difference, not something that should be eradicated” (17). To the people of Fighting Autism, the idea that autism should be embraced is just as “crazy” as

the idea that Fatness should be embraced to those who take part in diet confessions. Both disability rhetorics and Fat rhetorics work to push against the normalizing discourse of bodies under control. By highlighting the similarities between disability and Fat rhetorics, we can imagine a space where both groups can work together to push against these discourses of control.

III. COUNTERNARRATIVES AS A SOURCE OF SOLIDARITY

The similarities between discussions of disability and discussions of Fatness in mainstream discourse are evident when you suggest bodily control as the defining factor, but where does that leave us? Disability studies theorists have pointed to embracing theories that do not necessarily include disability in order to further the field. For example, Ellen Samuels engages with the ways that applying Butler's famous theories of embodiment to disability theory will both expand and introduce complications to disability studies. Nevertheless, she states that:

[U]ltimately the groundbreaking nature of Butler's work means that it represents the first steps of a new body of thought that will necessarily become more nuanced, comprehensive, and accountable as it grows with time, and I believe that disability studies must and should be an active participant in that growth—not only to enhance our own work, but to provide the necessary apparatus to evolve those theories beyond their original limitations (73).

Similarly, disability studies could and should embrace Fat studies (and vice versa) in that same manner to continue to be “an active participant” in the shaping of a more nuanced understanding of the connections between different embodiments. The connections between rhetorics of bodily control within both mainstream disability and Fat rhetorics can help to shape this growth and can further explore the realities of those of us that embody both of these categories. Exploring the rhetorics of already existing counternarratives of disability and Fatness further shows how these two identity categories are linked and shows ways in which each can learn from the other.

Both disability and Fat counternarratives highlight ways of existing within the world that push against the normalizing discourse we've seen in both weight loss testimonials and disability stories of overcoming. Nomy Lamm's 1995 manifesto "It's a Big Fat Revolution" is an excellent example of pushing against this normalizing discourse concerning Fatness (and traditional academic rhetoric). As Lamm states, "This is my life, and my words are the most effective tool I have for challenging White-boyworld (that's my punk-rock cutesy but oh-so-revolutionary way of saying 'patriarchy'). If there's one thing that feminism has taught me, it's that the revolution is gonna be on my terms" (85). Much like the group Aspies for Freedom mentioned above, Lamm is insistent on self-identification and description, refusing to allow normalizing discourse to paint her body as deviant or wrong.

Those, like Lamm, who view Fatness as a political issue to rally around seem to be largely in the minority, making it hard to write against these rhetorics of bodily control. In the chapter "Are We Ready to Throw Our Weight Around?" from *The Fat Studies Reader*, the editors ask why Fat people have not organized in the way that other oppressed groups have. They relate:

When we asked our friends and colleagues their opinions on why fat people have not organized, the majority stated that it is because fat people could lose weight if they wanted ... Maddox, Back, and Liederman (1968) asked people to indicate the degree to which different groups were responsible for their condition. Whereas only 2% of subjects felt that a blind person was responsible for his or her lack of sight, 76% felt that a 'man with a flabby body' and 84% felt that 'a woman needing a girdle' were responsible for their condition. (337)

Yet, as we've seen, rhetoric of control surrounding disabled people and fat people is not as disparate as this study might suggest. They go on to say that, "Goffman has pointed out that the worst consequence of stigmatizing attitudes is that the stigmatized group comes to believe and accept the negative evaluations. Thus, fat people are not only stigmatized by Western society, but also come to believe that we are responsible for this oppression" (337). My own story, though,

would suggest that it is not only fat people that feel responsible for their own oppression, but that mainstream rhetorics can lead disabled individuals to, at times, feel responsible as well. I found myself feeling like my inability to do anything extraordinary—my inability to run after I was told I would never run again, to gain some new skill I didn't have before my accident or even to start some kind of motivational or non-profit group to inspire others with disabilities, made me feel that I was a failure as a disabled person. Just as staying Fat felt like I was doing size wrong, existing in the world with a disability without an inspirational story felt like I was doing disability wrong.

In addition to acknowledging that, despite what many might think, the rhetorics of bodily control surrounding disability do make some feel responsible for their own oppression, I would like to consider how both disabled and Fat are meaningful identity categories that many do not see as such. What I mean here is that, even for some who fit into these categories, it is not clear how being either Fat or disabled could constitute a political identity. Or, if it is acknowledged as an identity, it is an identity seen as taken on only when someone is giving up on control. For example, in her story, Stanfield says that “Most men I dated believed my weight was a part of me because that was the narrative I sold them. I would say with pride, ‘I’m a big girl.’ However, I could not fool a man that has loved me for more than half of my life.” Stanfield did not view accepting Fatness as an identity category as a source of liberation but as a lie she told herself and others around her. Similarly, it wasn't until I began to read about disability studies that I realized that disability was an identity category that could be political in nature, rather than a label to deny and to fight against. The idea that disability is not a loss but is instead an integral part to how I experience the world is something that I and many others struggle with every day, especially because mainstream rhetoric continually suggests that to be disabled is a negative thing. Beard, for example, insists throughout her story that she does not even notice that she's disabled until somebody brings it up, in many ways denying disability as an identity category. Fatness as an identity category and Fat people's lives in general are often rendered invisible as well, even by movements seen as liberatory. For example, Lamm notes that:

My thin friends are constantly being validated by mainstream feminism, while I am ignored. The most widespread mentality regarding body image at this point is something along these lines: Women look in the mirror and think, 'I'm fat,' but really they're not. Really they're thin. Really they're thin. But really I'm fat. According to mainstream feminism theory, I don't even exist (91).

The continual insistence that women are in fact not fat suggests that those that are, either don't exist, as Lamm suggests or that their struggle is deserved. Similarly, those with severe disabilities do not have the space to discuss the struggles and realities of their disabilities without the expectation of a triumphant overcoming narrative. While a disabled person's struggles are not seen as deserved in the same way that as a Fat person's struggles are, the very fact that their stories are not told if they are not inspirational suggests that, unless you are inspiring in some way, you don't deserve to be heard. In some ways, by only telling tales of overcoming, mainstream disability rhetoric is suggesting that those who do not overcome don't exist—or at least that their existence is not important enough to discuss.

But just like Lamm is talking back to mainstream feminist and diet discourse, so are disabled individuals talking back. For example, the organization that Price discussed, Aspies for Freedom, was integral in getting the "autism clock" taken down in July 2010, and others in the autistic community are insisting upon telling their stories, even when they are not pretty and "controlled." James C. Wilson, disability scholar and journalist, published the book *Weather Reports on the Autism Front: A Father's Memoir of His Autistic Son* in 2008. In the preface he states:

So let this be a warning to the reader. If you're looking for sentimentality, or if you want a heart-warming story about a cute, cuddly autistic child, you won't find it here. Instead, I offer a realistic account of life with an autistic adult. Likewise, if you want a narrative of overcoming, you best look elsewhere. There are no heroes here, no supercrip savant overcoming all odds to solve the latest mystery in numbers theory, and certainly no superdad, long-suffering and self-sacrificing (2-3).

Wilson takes expectations concerning what a book about fathering an autistic child should be about and turns it on its head, inviting a discourse of disability that highlights real, lived experience—even lived experience that does not leave able-bodied readers feeling soothed and validated.

IV. CONCLUSION

As we can see from these readings, the rhetorics of bodily control within both mainstream Fat discourse and disability discourse clearly shape how we view those that fit into these categories, as well as how they we view ourselves. Both super-crip overcoming the odds stories and weight loss testimonials rely on specific ideas of controlling one's body and denying membership in an identity category that render those who do fit into these categories largely invisible. As such, Fat studies and disability studies are presented with a connection that, were it to be further explored, could create a space for counter-hegemonic work that would allow for the narratives of those not included in overcoming stories and weight loss testimonials to be heard, especially because there are many individuals who are both Fat, disabled, and rendered silent and invisible. Work like this is already happening in each field, as evidenced in groups like *Aspies for Freedom*, which rejects normalizing rhetoric concerning autism, and in activists like Nomy Lamm, who insist on speaking out and being heard regarding her body and Fat liberation. Still, a recognition of the connection between the ways that rhetorics of bodily control work to silence members of each group could help to further create a space for the invisible to be made visible and the silent to be heard.

Furthermore, we must consider how the stories that are part of public consciousness about Fat and disabled people might affect aspects of life even as large as public policy and the shaping of the material world. Robert Aspen describes public policy as “a mediation of rhetorical and material forces. In terms of materiality, public policies provide money, goods, and services to target populations to achieve particular outcomes, such as offering retirement incomes and disability benefits to millions of American workers and their families” (126). With this in mind, then, we have to consider how the rhetoric of bodily control affects public policy about both disabled and Fat individuals and even how decisions about public spaces might

be shaped by the popular rhetoric that suggests that both Fat and disabled folks should become “in control.” If the only stories about disabled folks are those of supposed triumph over unruly bodies, why should accommodations for disabled people be a concern? If popular rhetoric suggests that Fat people only become happy and fulfilled when they lose weight and become in control of their bodies, why should we make public spaces comfortable for Fat individuals? How does the elision of stories about disabled and fat people who have not necessarily “overcome” their “limitations” affect the ways in which policies might be enacted to protect both Fat and disabled folks (and those who fall into both identity categories) from discrimination? How does this elision impact how city planners, architects, and manufacturers make decisions that influence how we experience the material world in our everyday lives, such as the implementation of curb cuts, ramps, the size of bathroom stalls, placement of elevators, height of sinks, availability of public transportation, and even the size of desks in college classrooms? The way that stories of Fat and disabled folks are presented to the general public directly influence the material world, which suggests the extreme importance for other stories and perspectives to be shared in public arenas.

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