The Underdogs Strike Back:
Usage of social media platforms by female body activists
to resist stigmatization

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Abstract

This study explores what female body activists aim to achieve by initiating and carrying out their movements on social media platforms. It also explores how female body activists make use of social media in their favor to challenge normative ideals of femininity and resist stigmatization of female body fat and hair.

The exploration of the issues of stigmatization of female body fat and hair in this study relies on Michel Foucault’s theory on disciplinary power and disciplinary practices as well as Erving Goffman’s theory on stigmatization. This study claims that stigmatization can be considered as a disciplinary practice to control and regulate female bodies. Through construction of gender norms of femininity and norms of acceptable bodies in the society, body hair and fat on female bodies are stigmatized when they are visible attributes. This stigmatization acts as a control mechanism of bodies and forces bodies to comply with the norms.

In this study, related to the idea of disciplined and stigmatized female bodies, female body activists are investigated in the context of deviant and rebellious bodies which aim to challenge norms of femininity and resist stigmatization by posting their selfies on social media platforms, to expose real life depictions of different types of female bodies, to create body positivity and acceptance.

Keywords: body activism, social media, disciplinary practices, stigma, online movements, resistance, body hair, body fat, female body activists, exposure
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Table of Contents

1. Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 5

1.1. What is Going On Out in the World? ......................................................................................... 5

1.2. Why Study This Subject and What Does It Contribute to the Field? ..................................... 7

1.3. Research Questions ..................................................................................................................... 8

1.4 Chubby Bunnies and Body Hair Love Affair as Social Movements ........................................... 9

1.5. Body Activism in a Nutshell and Participants as Activists ....................................................... 10

1.6. Disposition .................................................................................................................................. 12

2. Literature Review .......................................................................................................................... 13

2.1. ICTs and Social Movements ........................................................................................................ 13

2.2. Online Activism .......................................................................................................................... 16

2.3. Feminism and Its Waves .............................................................................................................. 20

2.4. Feminist Activism and Digital Media ......................................................................................... 21

3. Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................................. 28

3.1. Making Sense of Foucault and Power ....................................................................................... 29

3.2. Disciplining of Female Body ....................................................................................................... 32

3.3. What is Stigma? ......................................................................................................................... 36

3.4. Stigmatization of Female Body Hair and Fat ............................................................................. 40

3.5. Resisting and Challenging Norms and Stigmas ....................................................................... 42

3.6. Leveraging Technological Affordances .................................................................................... 44

3.7. Digital Storytelling ..................................................................................................................... 46

3.8. Selfies for Exposure and Resistance ......................................................................................... 48

3.9. Hashtags and Reblogs: Get Connected, Raise Your Voice, Be Exposed ............................... 51

4. Methodology ................................................................................................................................ 54

4.1. Qualitative Research, Online Communities and Case Studies ............................................. 54

4.2. Netnography .............................................................................................................................. 56

4.3. Ethical Issues and Limitations of the Study ............................................................................. 59

4.4. Making Use of Interviews ......................................................................................................... 60

4.5. Notes on Research Design and Standpoint as a Researcher .................................................. 62

4.6. Data ............................................................................................................................................. 63

5. Analysis ....................................................................................................................................... 67

5.1. Defining Body Activism ............................................................................................................. 67
5.2. Everyday Experiences of Stigmatization ................................................................. 73
5.3. Digital Storytelling, Safe Spaces and Community Feeling .................................. 78
5.4. Selfies: Flaunt and Expose .................................................................................. 82
5.5. Hashtagging and Reblogging ............................................................................. 90
6. Discussion and Further Research ....................................................................... 96
7. References ............................................................................................................ 101
APPENDIX I ............................................................................................................ 110
APPENDIX II .......................................................................................................... 111
APPENDIX III .......................................................................................................... 113
APPENDIX IV .......................................................................................................... 115
1. Introduction

Like most girls are “supposed to”, I liked the color pink and Barbie dolls when I was a little girl. I was supposed to comb my hair, wear decent and clean clothes and when I was wearing a skirt, I had to close my legs shut, at all times. I have never liked the role of the little girl which was given to me by not my biology but my culture. Yes, I did like Barbie dolls but I also liked Action Man figures and running around with a ball. One of my favourite past time hobbies was to pretend that I am a badass warrior, Xena was my idol. In addition to being a female, I was fat. Being already doubly marginalized as a fat little girl in society, I was hairy in an “abnormal” way as medical science would put it, making me a triply marginalized, confused little girl who did not understand why she was seen as “the freak” she is. I never knew the reason why I was “different” until I was diagnosed with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome when I was 14 years old. Struggling with this disease meant that my body as a woman did not function “normally”. My illness caused irregular menstrual cycles, excessive weight gain, as well as excessive body hair accompanied by bad skin. In all aspects, my body was “othered” by societal norms due to its nature, which resulted in more bullying, mental health problems and struggles in self-confidence. I was the total opposite of what society deemed beautiful or womanly, so I began to question who decided what was beautiful or acceptable. It was after years and years of reading and research about this particular subject of cultural norms and femininity that I have come across with female body activists online who challenged all the norms of beauty and resisted stigmatization of how they look, hand in hand. Therefore, I must admit that I was driven to study female body activists in online spheres for personal reasons but I was also driven to conduct my research on this specific subject because I knew they were so many of them out there who were overseen by the academicians and scholarly research.

1.1. What is Going on Out in the World?

Chernin (1981), who coined the phrase ‘tyranny of slenderness’ underlines the obsession of contemporary culture with female slenderness and emphasizes that this obsession drives women to shape their bodies according to beauty ideals which are deemed acceptable in society (cited in Richardson 2010, p.76). According to Suzie Orbach (1979), women being fat is a challenge against feminine ideals and this creates “a crack in the popular culture’s ability to make us mere products” (qtd in Richardson 2010, p. 76). Similarly, Richardson (2010), emphasizes that, “we live in an era which is obsessed with the body. Contemporary culture
feeds individuals with beauty ideals and how to fit into these norms on a daily basis through traditional and digital media “which instruct us about how the body should” look (p. 1).

According to Donaghue & Clemitshaw (2012), although there are discussions on how media’s effect on body dissatisfaction and eating disorders through exposing ‘unobtainable beauty standards’ are exaggerated, it has been proven that media images indeed have “profound social, as well as psychological, effects” (p. 416). According to Melissa A. Fabello who holds a master’s degree in Human Sexuality and works as the editor of the social media platform Everyday Feminism, “over 50% of girls” carry out self-destructive methods “like starving, purging, excessive exercise, and laxative abuse” to control their weight according to beauty standards represented by popular media and social conduct. She also emphasizes that “there was a 470% increase in pro-eating disorder websites between 2006 and 2007”, encouraging women to adopt unhealthy lifestyles with the help of digital media. Furthermore, the statistics show that “3 out of 4 girls feel guilty, shameful, or depressed after” spending just “three minutes” reading a fashion magazine” (Allison Epstein, www.adiosbarbie.com). Another point which should be addressed in line with body dissatisfaction created through media, is the new trends of thinspiration and fitspiration we can observe on different social platforms such as Instagram, Tumblr and Facebook. These accounts promote self-disciplining by extreme workouts, anorexia and other eating disorders to create an online culture of slenderness.

Imagine a world in which teenagers fight for real images of women in media because they are sick of being fed excessively photoshopped, idealized and enhanced body images. Imagine them creating online petitions to get magazines to feature “real-life” representations of female bodies. In 2012, 14-year-old Julia Bluhm started a campaign on change.org three years ago, asking Seventeen Magazine “to commit to printing one unaltered--real--photo spread per month” demanding to see real-life women who look like her rather than touched up models of normative beauty standards of the modern era and succeeded in her campaign (www.change.org). Another pair, Carina Cruz and Emma Stydahar, encouraged by the success of Bluhm’s campaign, decided to start a campaign against Teen Vogue to “stop altering natural bodies and faces so the real girls can be the new standard of beauty” (www.change.org). Unfortunately, Cruz and Stydahar could not accomplish what Bluhm did and the campaign was stopped.
1.2. Why Study This Subject and What Does It Contribute to the Field?

The struggle of power between patriarchal systems and women seeking their voices still goes on, not only for Western teenagers but also for women all around the world. Still, many women are not represented on media platforms enough or at all, although they are a part of the world we are living in. However, Kyrölä (2014) directs attention to the contemporary and “strong current...in media” which encourages “ordinary or real” women to “empower themselves” by exposing their bodies to be admired. She emphasizes that the position of visibility which women with ideal beauty has been occupying, is now available for other women thanks to social media (p.158). With the tools provided by social media today, body activists began using social media platforms in their favor to gain more attention to ‘renegotiate’ the beauty ideals which are existent in societies in by emphasizing diversity in body image, beauty as well as health standards (Afful & Ricciardelli 2015, p. 454). Therefore, women who have been under-represented by media have begun to gain visibility with the help of social media, to spread a message of diversity and acceptance. In this aspect, we see body activists on social media platforms more and more every day to promote body acceptance. They are on Facebook, on Tumblr, on Instagram and on Twitter. They have been accelerating in number and establishing more and more online social movements. I believe this is an important subject to investigate due to female body activists’ newly found visibility, the impact they create on societies, the important issues of body dissatisfaction, control of female bodies as well as stigmatization of certain attributes they refer to in online spheres. Even though there are many studies on body image and its relation to popular media, body dissatisfaction and how it is caused by popular media as well as social structures, there are not many studies carried out particularly on body activism (Sastre 2014, p. 932), and its relationship with social media. The studies which were carried out about body acceptance or positivity as activism by far, are only concerned with fat acceptance movements and how they are initiated in online spheres or how fat activists make use of the Web to discuss issues of fatness. For this reason, I believe my choice of study is an important subject to be addressed, for it can contribute to the little and limited research which exists today and hopefully might act as a fundamental research for other researchers who aim to understand what online body activism is and conduct further research on body acceptance movements aided by social media platforms.
1.3. Research Questions

As the research subject of my thesis, I intend to investigate how female body activists use social media platforms—particularly Tumblr and Instagram in this study—to challenge societal norms of femininity and stigmatization of female body fat and hair. Although people of all genders are affected by the existent societal norms of ideal beauty, this study is narrowed down to only females. Additionally, in this study, challenging societal norms as well as resisting the stigmatization of female bodies are investigated through only two aspects of stigmatized physical attributes which are in this case body fat and hair. In relation to this, my research questions are as following:

**RQ1**: What are the goals of female body activists in using social media for body activism causes?

**RQ2**: How do female body activists make use of social media to resist stigmatization and to challenge socially constructed norms of femininity as well as beauty ideals?

The aim of the study related to **RQ1**, is to investigate what body activism is in the framework of my thesis. Additionally, linked to **RQ1**, this research aims to find out what goals female body activists have by making use of social media platforms Tumblr and Instagram. This research question is studied mainly through the conducted interviews. Furthermore, in relation to **RQ2**, the study aims to investigate how female body activists make use of social media platforms and online movements to achieve their desired goals. Thus, I aim to find out if female body activists have any tactics they use online, how they make use of posting their selfies on social media platforms and how they make use of technological possibilities brought by the internet to resist stigmatization of female body fat and hair. For this purpose, I have chosen two accounts which are **Chubby Bunnies** on the blogging platform **Tumblr** and **Body Hair Love Affair** on **Instagram** to carry out my investigation on female body activists and their social media platform usage. I claim that **Chubby Bunnies** and **Body Hair Love Affair** carry out online social movements to achieve their activists’ goals of resistance and challenging. On **Chubby Bunnies**, women submit selfies of themselves to the blog showing their body fat and on **Body Hair Love Affair** women submit selfies of themselves to the blog showing their body hair. Both of these online platforms function as spaces for women to...
challenge and resist societal norms. How they achieve this is further discussed in the analysis part and the cases are presented in more detail in the methodology section.

1.4. **Chubby Bunnies and Body Hair Love Affair as Social Movements**

According to Buechler (1995), since 1960s there have been visible changes in how social movements are carried out as well as what they are concerned with. These changes have been reflected onto academia itself and social movement theories. There emerged a group of theoreticians, one of them being Alberto Melucci who underlined the changing nature of social movements and the emerging theories of new social movements (p.442). Buechler (1995) points out that “the term ‘new social movements’...refers to a diverse array of collective actions that have presumably displaced the old social movement of proletarian revolution associated with classical Marxism”. This displacement was brought about by the greater emphasis on different aspects of collective identity in relation to “autonomy”, “self-determination” and individuality. Unlike the former and traditional nature of social movements, the new social movements focused on different “sources of identity in such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality as the definers of collective identity”. Additionally, the new social movements “signified a divergence” from the traditional understanding of social movements for it did not assume “that centralized organizational forms are prerequisites for successful mobilization” (p. 442).

According to Alberto Melucci (1980), the new social movements are concerned with and aim to respond to “the new forms of social control” and “conformity pressures” which are brought by the “(post)modern world”. Furthermore he emphasizes that new social movements were “triggered by new sites of conflict that are interwoven with everyday life” and social interactions (cited in Buechler 1995, p. 447). Unlike the traditional Marxist social movements, new social movements “are not oriented toward the conquest of political power or of the state apparatus”. Instead they are directed against the social powers which control human “autonomy and “individuality” or in other words the modern system itself through the disciplinary as well as punishing mechanisms of social regulation and control (Melucci 1980, p.219). Additionally, Melucci (1980) underlines that blurring of the public and private spaces resulted in “sexuality and the body” becoming public “areas of collective resistance” and gave ‘human body’ “centrality” in contemporary movements -especially in “women’s, youth and homosexual movements”- by uncovering the issue of bodies as spaces upon which
“integrative and manipulative efforts” are exercised to for a “system of domination” to be established (p.119-221).

In line with this, it is possible to say that **Chubby Bunnies** and **Body Hair Love Affair** are social movements carried out in online sphere. The participants of the movement aim to resist stigmatization of female body fat and hair as well as to challenge socially constructed norms of femininity by re-shaping the discourses around what female bodies should act and look like. Additionally, the participants also engage in power struggle with the oppressive regime of disciplinary practices by turning their once docile bodies which were regulated and controlled into rebellious bodies which advocate freedom of choice and emphasize individual differences.

### 1.5. Body Activism in a Nutshell and Participants as Activists

According to Harlow (2011), activism can be broadly defined as “the actions of a group of like-minded individuals coming together to change the status quo, advocating for a cause, whether local or global, and whether progressive or not”. Furthermore, activist action can circumscribe “social movements and moments of collective action” (p. 228). According to Martin (2007), activism includes a variety of actions from “door-to-door canvassing, alternative radio, public meetings, rallies” to “fasting”. It also varies in its causes which can for example be “women's rights, opposition to a factory, or world peace”. The most important quality an activist possesses is that she is a “challengers to policies and practices” to achieve social change or a specific “social goal”, “not to obtain power themselves” but for to empower individuals in general (p. 20-21). Martin (2007) emphasizes that activism also varies in itself which can demonstrate “face-to-face conversations...massive protests,...principled behavior,...peaceful protests” as well as “violent attacks” (p.20-21). Another point Martin (2007) emphasizes that activism is not a “well defined” concept, therefore “people often have somewhat different ideas of what constitutes activism” (p.21). Martin (2007) points out that, what can be considered as activism “depends on what is conventional” in a society:

[i]n societies in which free speech is respected and protected, making a posting on an e-mail list complaining about the government is a routine occurrence. But in a dictatorship, such a posting might be seen as subversive, and both the sender and the list manager
might be punished. Similarly, when strikes are banned, going on strike is a more daring form of activism than when they are legal and routine (p.21).

Martin (2007) also emphasizes, as non-violent actions of ‘noncooperation’, “such as religious excommunication, disobeying social customs, protest emigration, rent strike, producers’ boycott, withdrawal of bank deposits, international trade embargo, and a wide variety of strikes” can easily be identified as activism (Martin 2007, p.21).

Keeping Martin’s (2007) claims in mind and moving on to body activism, it is important to underline that in academia, various body acceptance and positivity movements are not gathered under the umbrella term “body activism” which was chosen in this study to refer to all kinds of body acceptance movements and is further discussed in the analysis section. Body activism aims to challenge normative societal assumptions of body image and encourages people to engage in debates about popular visual representations of people which are constructed by societal and cultural norms as a way of policing as well as disciplining human bodies. One of the most known aims of body activism is to celebrate and give visibility to “real life” representations of people which were not digitally altered to empower people through the idea of body positivity and acceptance (Afful & Ricciardelli 2015, p. 454). In recent years, as the popularization of online social movements have increased, there emerged a number of websites which were dedicated to body activism- which are called body positive websites-, as strongholds of body acceptance and resistance against unrealistic representations we come across in traditional and digital media every day. These websites, in general, operate as “a safe space for people to share stories, and more importantly images of their bodies”. The launch of body positive websites emphasized “a broader need for alternative body images” and gained popularity through its aim of creating equality among all body shapes, colors and types (Sastre 2014, p. 929-930).

In the case of Chubby Bunnies and Body Hair Love Affair, it is possible to say that the participants of submitting selfies to flaunt and expose stigmatized physical attributes of female bodies as fat and hair can be considered as activists and body activists in specific when the causes they support are considered. First of all, in relation to what Martin (2007) proposes, these women submit such selfies as a way of ‘noncooperation’ by not conforming to socially constructed feminine norms and beauty ideals. Secondly, their engagement in posting selfies is directly related to resisting the stigmatization of female body fat and hair which is a disciplinary and regulatory practice of exercising power in social interactions among
individuals. Lastly, the participants of these online social movements advocate body positivity and acceptance by engaging in public discussions and trying to educate other individuals on the issues of stigmatization. In this light, what female body activists aim to achieve by making use of social media platforms and how they use these online spaces to achieve their goals are further presented in the analysis.

1.6. Disposition

To investigate RQ1 and RQ2, first a literary background on ICT usage in social movements, online activism and a feminist perspective on social movements must be drawn to pave the way for further understanding of the study. Therefore, Chapter II, underlines these issues and gives a brief overview of them. Chapter III, includes the description and elaboration of the relevant theories that I have made use of in my analysis, to be able to answer my research questions thoroughly. This chapter aims to create a connection between all the theories presented to be operationalized in the analysis with the collected empirical data. Therefore, theoretical concepts of disciplinary practices, disciplining of female bodies, stigmatization, resistance and other related concepts are discussed here. Chapter IV presents the methodology of the study. It gives an outline of how different methods are brought together to create a suitable research design to explore answers for the research questions. Moreover, the two cases Chubby Bunnies and Body Hair Love Affair which are selected to be investigated in relation to RQ1 and RQ2, are presented. In Chapter V, I present the analysis of the empirical data in relation to the theoretical framework. First, I create a brief description of body activism based on the limited but relevant existent studies and the testimonies of the female body activists I have reached out to. Second, I describe the everyday experiences of these female body activists to present what they are actually aiming to challenge and resist by using social media. Moreover, I present the ways they use social media to achieve their goals. Lastly, in Chapter VI, I conclude my study by giving a brief theoretical summary, present my results and their relation to the research questions clearly, point out limitations of the research, discuss broader relevance of the studied subject to the society and propose further research based on the issues I have observed during my study.
2. Literature Review

In the following part of my thesis, I would like to briefly talk about adoption of ICTs in social movements, online activism and how women's movements and protests- which are referred as feminist activism as an umbrella term- have been affected by digital media usage in 21st century. I would like to underline that it is not my aim to investigate what activism is or activist types as a general phenomenon. It is also important to remind that my thesis is only focused on the particular issue of how female body activists make use of social media. Therefore, in the last section of the literature review, I briefly outline ICT usage in contemporary social movements from a feminist perspective as my specific focus. The reason why I have chosen to apply a feminist perspective is that even though not all women’s movements are called feminist movements, the issues they emphasize and advocate are in line with feminist waves and they can easily be categorized as feminist movements. Additionally, although not all women’s movements are particularly in the context of Western feminism in contemporary era, since my investigation of female body activists is limited to Western scope, the literature review covers the Western literature on feminism and women’s movements. Another reason behind the application of such perspective is that based on the testimonies of the female body activists- 10 out of 12- I have interviewed as a part of my study, the online movements in which they are participating, are strictly related to feminism and feminist issues. Although feminist studies on women’s movements are extensive and have been progressing rapidly throughout years, the literary focus here, only covers the theoretically relevant part of feminist activism and examples for my thesis.

2.1. ICTs and Social Movements

The rise of ICT usage and accelerated technological innovations, have begun to affect all aspects of our everyday lives, including how activists organize, mobilize and carry out protests (Garrett 2006, p. 202). Since “mid 1980s” scholars from a variety of disciplines-“sociology, political science and communication”- have been conducting studies to create an understanding of how the emerging ICTs transform our lives. Therefore, it is possible to say that there are many different perspectives that have been presented on ICTs and how they affect human lives. Even though, the diversity and the complexity which are created by
the multitude of perspectives are “enriching” academic literature on ICTs, it also presents a
hindrance for researchers to create a meaningful overview (Garrett 2006, p. 203).

In their work, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996), propose “a framework” designed to define “social movements’ emergence, development and outcomes” through “addressing three...factors” which are interconnected: “mobilizing structures, opportunity structures and framing processes”. In this context, ‘mobilizing structures’ concern the methods which allows “individuals to organize and engage in collective action”, involving ‘social structures’ as well as ‘tactical repertoires’. ‘Opportunity structures’ concern the circumstances present in the setting which aids the acts of social movement. It also involves “factors such as the relative accessibility of the political system...and the state’s capacity and propensity for repression”. ‘Framing processes’ include crucial efforts to “craft, disseminate and contest the language and narratives used to describe a movement”. The aim of such efforts is to legitimize the motivations and claims behind activists’ actions “using culturally shared beliefs and understandings” (cited in Garrett 2006, p. 203-204).

I believe, on Garrett’s part, reviewing all three components of ICT usage and social movements, was an intelligent choice to bring previously conducted studies together and emphasize “connections between scholars and research agendas that might otherwise be difficult to discern” (Garrett 2006, p. 203). Therefore, I intend to make use of R.Kelly Garrett’s extensive and well written review on ICTs and social movements. However, my main focus here will be on mobilizing structures since it is the main, theoretically relevant part for my study.

There have been many debates on ICTs and their impact on social movements in terms of participation. Garrett (2006) emphasizes that these debates are mainly based on ‘mechanisms of participation’, in relation to “reduction of costs, promotion of collective identity and creation of community” by making use of ICTs (p. 204-205). According to Leizerov (2000), through diminishing ‘costs’ of participation “associated with publishing and accessing movement information”, ICTs are likely to enhance social movements by generating “new low-cost forms of participation” which eventually results in participation influx (cited in Garrett 2006, p. 205). Bonchek (1995, 1997) claims that through decreasing “communication
and coordination costs”, ICTs expedite establishment of groups, “recruitment and retention” at the same time enhancing group effectiveness (cited in Garrett 2006, p. 205). Similarly, in their theory 2.0 approach, Earl and Kimport (2011) emphasize that ICT usage can alter the fundamental methods of activism. By making use of ICT ‘affordances’, “organization and participation” are made “less expensive, quicker, and more convenient”. Therefore, they argue that ICTs are likely to change how social movements “take place” (p. 29). On the other hand, Bimber (2001), who conducted research on ‘political psychology’ argue that “human beings have a limited capacity to absorb information systematically”, therefore, he believes having easier and faster access to information has no compelling impact on enhanced participation (cited in Garrett 2006, p. 205). Furthermore, ICT usage in social movements develop ‘collective identity’ and create a feeling of belonging to a “larger community by virtue of the grievances they share”. Thus, ICTs can aid creation of ‘collective identity’, “across a dispersed population” that results in mobilization of individuals to “support collective action” (Garrett 2006, p. 205). According to Norris (2004), ICTs assist formation of communities. Based on various researches, members of online communities “report that their experiences with these groups significantly reinforce existing social networks” and online communities also allow them to reach out and communicate with others who are from different beliefs, views and backgrounds (cited in Garrett 2003, p. 206). Thus, individuals are enabled to come together online and support a community or a cause of their choice.

The ability of ICTs to expedite and diffuse information related to ‘social movements’ and ‘protests’ are often mentioned by scholars. Myers (1994, 2000) states that the features of “internet-mediated communication” push mobilization and reaction into a “more rapid” state and enable diffusion to be also faster (cited in Garrett 2006, p. 207). Therefore, with the adoption of ICTs, it is possible to see social movements spreading to different cities and even countries. One of the examples of this kind of diffusion is the SlutWalk protest by women all around the world which I will briefly talk about in an upcoming section of this chapter. Another example is the Gezi Park Protests which started in Taksim Square in İstanbul and spread around the whole country through information disseminated through platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr.

Another change brought about with ICT usage in social movements is the possible replacement of “traditional social movement organizations”. According to Arquilla and Ronfeldt (2001), ICTs establish appropriation of “decentralized, non-hierarchical
organizational forms” of social movements and deem new modes of activism “more feasible”. Thus, various scholars argue that there might be a decline in the essentiality of “hierarchical organization(s) and established institutions” when it comes to initiating and carrying out social movements. They furthermore underline that these organizations will be eclipsed by networked organizational forms” which are more fluid, resilient and powerful in making maneuvers when faced with a conflict (cited in Garrett 2006, p. 210-211).

Here, as a concluding remark, it is important to point out that it is not technologies which achieve such “social or political change”. They do not “change societies or social processes through their mere existence”. Instead, it is how people make use of ICTs that bring social change (Earl & Kimport 2011, p.14; 32).

### 2.2. Online Activism

Unlike the previous section which underlines the connection between social movements and how they are aided by the implementation of ICTs, this part aims to focus on online activist movements specifically. Technology has always been a useful tool for activists to achieve their goals. Throughout history, activists adopted “new technologies” such as newspaper, radio, television or film to enhance their social, cultural and political “struggles” by disseminating information, ‘making statement(s)’, creating understanding and “consciousness” as well as organizing events. Until the adoption of digital media and internet to protest, activists had to depend on “in-the-flesh meetings to form a collective identity”, to mobilize and inspire other members of the society and to perform resistance. Since internet is instantaneous, “interactive” and “transspatial”, it enables us to communicate with others without revealing our “voices, faces and bodies” and new modes of resistance and activism are made possible online. (McCaughey & Ayers 2003, p.14-16).

“Defining online activism” is challenging since defining what activism is has also been challenging to define before the adoption of internet. There are many different views on what can be and cannot be considered as activist action. Activism includes different modes that vary from “direct action, protests, efforts to change laws, self-help groups, educational groups, cultural groups, activist newspapers and political bookstores” (McCaughey & Ayers 2003, p.27). However, this thesis does not aim to define what activism is in its nature and
what kind of activities or performances are ‘influential enough’ to be considered as activism. On the contrary, I intend to investigate how female body activists make use of social media platforms and the possibilities brought by ICTs specifically, to engage in online activism. Thus, this part of the thesis will cover only related literary background.

The expanded adoption and usage of “digital technologies” in “social and political” causes, campaigns and activist movements have begun to get more and more attention from people all around the world “over the past few years” (Joyce 2010, vii). With the attention directed towards digital tools and protests, activists have taken a further interest in coming up with tactics that would enable them to transcend the limitations of time and space through digital media (Scholz 2010, p. 30). By “facilitating rapid and cheap communication across geographical boundaries”, the Web proved itself to be a useful tool for organizing collective action and resistance “quickly and efficiently” (Kavada 2010, p. 101).

Sandor Vegh (2003) defines online activism “as a politically motivated movement relying on the Internet” and furthermore argues that activists have begun to make use of the internet and its “technologies” as well as “techniques” to accomplish social change (p. 105). Vegh (2003) states that activists use strategies which are “either Internet-enhanced or Internet-based”. He points out that in Internet-enhanced strategies, activists use the internet “to enhance” the traditional offline activist movement “by raising awareness beyond the scope possible” or coordinate “action” more effectively, prior to the internet. On the other hand, activists make use of Internet-based strategies when the intended “activities are only possible online”, the examples of which are new modes of actions such as “virtual sit-in or hacking into target websites” (p. 106).

According to Vegh (2003), there are three types of online activism which fall into “general areas” of a) “awareness/ advocacy”, b) “organization/ mobilization” and c) “action/ reaction”. This typology of online activism “emphasizes direction of initiative” if one “sends out information or receives it”, “calls for action or is called upon”, “initiates an action or reacts to one”. What he tries to explain here is that these three types of online activism are “progressive steps” which possess more initiative as it moves from “basic information seeking” as an action of awareness/advocacy to “hacktivism” as an action of action/reaction (p. 106).
Vegh (2003) argues that for decades, “public awareness” was attained by “accessing information” which is related to any “cause” or movement. Masses were generally informed through traditional media outlets such as television or newspapers, about such uprisings. However, it is important to remember that traditional media outlets can be under the control of “those whose interests are counter” to the people who wish to engage in a particular cause. Therefore, alternative modes of communication and dissemination might be needed in times of such conflicts. Since media outlets can withhold certain information or truth from masses, the internet can act as an “alternative news and information source”. Through the internet, news and information about activist causes can be disseminated and made visible “by individuals and independent organizations” who wish to provide people with “events and issues” which are not covered by “mainstream mass media” (p. 106-107).

The fundamental usage of internet and online tools for advocacy “revolve around organizing” movement and execute actions as well as initiating them. Online tools enable “activist groups and individual protesters” concerned with a cause to create “a time and cost efficient” medium for communication. Since the internet facilitates dissemination of messages among “thousands of people all over the world” in virtual boundaries which do not require co-presence or costly techniques of protest, participation of individuals on activist causes are made faster, cheaper, and more efficient (Vegh 2003, p. 108-109).

If we move on to the theme of “organization/mobilization” in Vegh’s (2003) typology of online activism, we come across three ways of using online tools for mobilization First, individuals can be mobilized to offline action through “a distributed e-mail list” or posts made on social media platforms. The second way to mobilize individuals is to directly carry an offline action to online sphere for efficiency purposes. A basic example of this is making use of petition sites to collect signatures for a cause rather than trying to contact the persons of interest offline. The last type of action to mobilize individuals is calling people to participate in an action that can “only...be carried online”. Efforts of “massive spamming campaign(s), or ping-storm attack(s)” can be shown as examples of such action (p. 110).

Vegh (2003) points out, the category of “action/reaction” as online activism which can be considered as “proactive and aggressive”, is usually carried out by hacktivists to accomplish political and economic motivations. As an example, cyberattacks can be organized by hacker groups or individuals to criticize “state-led political agenda or military engagement” as a
“civil” reaction or they can be motivated to go against “capitalist imperialism” and target multi-million companies. Some tactics used by hackers is to leak important confidential documents, carry out DoS attacks, “deface websites or disrupt servers” and hackers who are “politically” motivated for social change, aim to make “use of technology to advance human rights” by using digital and online tools (p. 113-114).

Another recent typology of online activist movements has been created by Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport (2011). They came up with three different categories which are: e-mobilizations, e-movements and e-tactics. ‘E-mobilizations’ are characterized by its usage of online tools to aid dissemination of information to ‘mobilize’ people who are online to offline ‘face-to-face’ protest spaces. E-mobilizations illustrate “low leveraging of the affordances of the Web” since they only use the internet for sharing information about movements and to attract individuals online (Earl & Kimport 2011, p.5; p. 12). E-movements are online activism forms that are initiated and carried out only in online spaces without any performance of offline movements. They illustrate “high leveraging of the affordances of the Web” since all merits of online communication and organization are used to establish a fully online movement. Strategic voting movements can be shown as an example of e-movements (Earl & Kimport 2011, p.8; p. 12). ‘E-tactics’ are situated between “two poles” of e-mobilizations and e-movements. They are characterized as cases of ‘collective action’ which demonstrate “varying degrees of offline and online components” and also different levels of engagement with “social movements and SMOs”. Online petitions which are “low cost and do not rely on copresence” of individuals are examples of e-tactics (Earl & Kimport 2011, p.9; p. 12).

As a conclusion, I would like to mention an important point that Earl and Kimport (2011) emphasized in their book *Digitally Enabled Social Change*. First of all, technological affordances of “reduced costs for participation, reduced costs organizing, reduced need for physical togetherness in order to participate in collective action and reduced need for both collectivity and physical togetherness in organizing” are significant leverages of digital media that essentially alter how individuals initiate and carry out movements as well as mobilize others and participate in their own selected causes by either augmenting online and offline performances or establishing purely online social, political or cultural movements ( p. 177).
2.3. Feminism and its Waves

Based on the context of my study, I believe it is important to talk briefly about the history of feminist waves and what kind of issues and movements they were concerned with. Feminism, as a ‘critical term’ is socially, culturally and politically charged and has always been controversial by its nature and definition. It has been signifying different meanings throughout history since its emergence, based on the perspectives of the people who use it (Easton 2012, p.99). However, according to Easton (2012), how Oxford English Dictionary defines feminism is “quite straightforward” (p.99). The dictionary tells us that feminism is ‘advocacy of the rights of women based on the theory of equality of the sexes’ (qtd in Easton 2012, p.99), which I also use as the main definition throughout my thesis. In line with this, I take feminist movements in general as socio-political movements based on the equality of genders and tackling inequalities created by socially constructed discourses.

The history of feminism and its movements are defined by different ‘waves’. The first wave of feminism which accelerated in 1920s was the suffrage movement that aimed to give women the right to vote and enable them have voice in political matters. The second wave of feminism came about in 1960s and lasted through 1970s which had a main goal of giving women “equality in education, the workplace, and the home” (Easton 2012, p. 99). But the second wave of feminism was criticized by many women since it only focused on ‘the white female’ leaving out issues and oppression of women of color and other classes (Enszer 2007, p. 20). The upcoming third wave of the movement was concerned with ‘identity politics’ and took previous criticisms about gender, race and class seriously and included these issues in feminist debates and protests. The third wave movement also included issues of ‘patriarchy’ and ‘misogyny’ in their agenda to advocate for greater social change concerning the different aspects of equality among women as well as men who belong to different classes, genders, races and cultures (Easton 2012, p.100). However, there have been debates about contemporary feminism and its movements. Some scholars and activists argue that we are still witnessing the third wave of feminism and some others state that with the technological innovations and adaptation of ICTs in feminist movements, feminism started its fourth wave. Up until now, there have not been any agreements on the discussion. According to Phillips and Cree (2014), the fourth wave of feminism characterized by its extensive dependency on social media. With the help of social media, “significant spaces for the rebirth of feminist debates and resistance” has been created and these spaces also gave birth to fourth wave
feminism (p.938). The beginning of the fourth wave of feminism was located as 2008 by Baumgardner (2011) who claims that “the fourth wave evolved to take forward the agenda of third wave feminists” and decided to make use of their ‘experiences’ of the contemporary “online universe” which is now “just a part of” everyday life (cited in Phillips and Cree 2014, p.938). Baumgardner further emphasizes that, additional to the “zines and songs” created by the third wave feminists as tools of protest, the fourth wave feminists “introduced the use of blogs, Twitter campaigns and online media with names like Racialiscious and Feministing” (cited in Phillips and Cree 2014, p.938).

2.4. Feminist Activism and Digital Media

For the previous six decades, there have been many studies conducted on “meaning and functions of social protest, change and movements”. The main conclusion was that social protests and movements operated in a discourse of change for the better and mostly public offline protests were investigated (Sowards & Renegar 2006, p. 57). As important examples of feminist activism, the Suffrage Movement, “the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, environmental movements in the 1970s and 1980s” and similar social movements demonstrate how organization of individuals took place and how movements are initiated to combat social ills” however, activism in the 21st century has been reformed with digital tools. Therefore, new kinds of feminist activism and social change must be investigated and included in academic studies. Although new studies have been “reconceptualizing the nature of social movements”, new literature “on the notion of activism” should be discussed out of the traditional perception of activism as “organized collective action and social protest” (Sowards & Renegar 2006, p. 57-58).

DiCenzo, Delap & Ryan (2011) argue that social movements and adoption of alternative media in relation to “mass and electronic forms of media” have been central to contemporary media research due to their “significant impact on the levels of participation” (p.54). However, apart from social movements and their coverage on mass media outlets, compelling amount of media have been also created by activists themselves throughout history: “newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and other print media” were published to disseminate information about movements and campaigns. These publications were used to “announce forthcoming movement events, evaluated those activities and provided news reports on their successes or failures” (Tilly qtd in DiCenzo et.al. 2011, p.54-55). Similarly, feminist activists
also made use of such publications to make claims, gain visibility and through alternative media they created such as feminist periodicals and newspapers. These publications were “inspirational, informative and integrating” (Harrison qtd in DiCenzo et.al. 2011, p.55). They aimed to recruit new members to the social movements, bolster and inspire existing members and educate the members of the society as well as individuals who are already engaged in specific causes. The print media used by feminist activists also functioned as a space for discussion and “a forum for participation” for individuals who were connected beyond “geographic and even social lines” (DiCenzo et.al. 2011, p.55-56). As Atton (2002) and Downing (2001) characterized, feminist activist “periodicals and reviews functioned the same with “media of social movements now” (cited in DiCenzo et.al. 2011, p.67). They “were a part of conscious campaign of counter-information” which aimed to impact the opinion of the public. Since alternative media allows individuals to supply and disseminate “information and interpretations” which are not covered by mass media for their deviant nature, by making use of it feminist activists could “construct (their) own news, based on alternative values and frameworks” (Atton qtd in DiCenzo et.al. 2011, p.67).

According to Sowards and Renegar (2006), contemporary female activists have been adopting new modes of resistance through online platforms in the 21st century rather than making use of conventional modes of “social activism”. Although they label themselves as activists, they are deemed as “inadequate and ineffective by their predecessors” for relying heavily on online spaces for protest and social change (p. 58). Sowards and Renegar (2006), furthermore claim that new forms of feminist activism “consists of traditional...understanding of activism and social movements”, yet they also “move beyond” conventional modes of protest and movement. It is important for us to acknowledge that activism as a concept, which has been “traditionally” characterized as “public protest and confrontation”, very well includes efforts in creating “grassroot models of leadership, using strategic humor, building feminist identity, sharing stories, and resisting stereotypes and labels” (p. 58).

Contemporary Feminist Movements

According to Baer (2015), one of the most important differences observed between contemporary feminist activism and traditional modes is the accelerated use of digital media- specifically social media platforms- as a new way of challenging, resistance and protest. Contemporary feminist movements, make use of the digital world to grab attention to gender
oppression and go beyond “national borders” to create global movements (p. 2). Usage of digital platforms facilitate novel types of “intersectional conversations” between females by uniting people from all kinds of different backgrounds to address a variety of issues (Baer 2015, p. 2). Baer (2015) emphasizes that through digital platforms, dissemination of “feminist ideas and shaping new modes of discourse about gender and sexism” is potentially made easier. Additionally, new modes of resistance and protest can be adapted by females to stimulate or enhance their movements. With the adoption of digital media, contemporary feminist activism has been “altered, influenced and re-shaped in the 21st century” by enabling access to various “modes of communication” in the online and offline world (p. 2). Therefore, “feminist politics” of the 21st century shies away from traditional paths of participation and adopts “digital feminist activism” as a fresh movement and critical juncture (Baer 2015, p. 2).

It is important to point out here that contemporary feminist activism emphasizes that we engage in acts of resistance in our everyday lives more than we think. According to Weitz (2001), we encounter explicit “political resistance” more often than “informal”, disorganized and implicit modes of resistance performed in our everyday lives such as “pilfering from factories, enjoying jokes that ridicule those in power, or performing gender in subtly subversive ways”. Therefore, such subversive and subtle modes of resistance might go undetected although they are essential performances of activism. She furthermore emphasizes that according to “postmodernists” like Judith Butler, everyday modes of resistance are more essential and effective in creating “social change” than explicit “political resistance” (p. 688). Stompler and Padavic (1997) points out that “even small acts with no obvious effects on the broader system may affect individuals and pave the way for later social change” (cited in Weitz 2001, p.669). Additionally, Sowards & Renegar (2006) point out that feminist activism can also be performed in “private settings” in our everyday lives “through daily conversation or the internet”. The important point is that even though these modes of feminist activism might be overlooked and “unnoticed” they still function and aim for social change (p. 61).

Baer (2015) states that the female body and its issues of “sexual violence, reproductive justice, sex work, sex trafficking, genital cutting, cosmetic surgery, disability, and disordered eating” have been fundamental for feminist activism. However, with the advancement of digital media usage, the body has further become an influential and important “site of self-representation and surveillance” linked to “gender norms and identities” to be debated online by a wider scope of female attention (p. 3). She points out that the mutual interaction of
“digital feminist activism” and “female bodies” lays an aggravating and speculative ground for newly emerging feminist politics of digital era. Thus, the shift of feminist politics’ attention from the “emphasis of equality and rights” to challenging societal norms and perception of womanhood is visible and it is possible to say that digital feminist activism establishes “a paradigm shift within feminist protest culture” (Baer 2015, p. 2). Baer (2015) also underlines that we witness “redoing” of feminist activism by the “interplay between digital platforms and local protests” which call for attention on women’s bodies as a medium of argument linked to gender politics, culture and sexuality (p. 3).

Another change which came into play with the rise of digital media usage related to feminist activism is the “communicative turn” in how movements are carried out to progress further and mobilize. Instead of using offline, mass protests and grassroots movements, women began to work with online platforms to make use of “targeted fundraising and campaign activity”. Therefore, digital media adaptation for feminist politics allows amplification of women’s voice further (Knappe 2014, p. 362). Knappe (2014), points out that even though feminist scholars have argued that females are “under-represented in mainstream public discourse”, women have managed to establish “alternative” spaces to debate and discuss women’s issues as well as politicize and enrich feminist activism (p. 362). Contemporary digital media research underlines evidence of the ability of internet usage to broaden a “movement’s capacity for outreach and mobilisation” (Knappe 2014, p. 364). Additionally, Knappe (2014) argues that online commitment to activism can create a “spillover” effect for offline movements. Therefore, there is a potential for “online and offline engagement” to merge into particular and new “modes of participation” (p. 364).

Feminist activism can be seen in various different forms. Nowadays, internet acts as a significant medium for activism. According to recent studies, majority of feminist activists state that digital media has been influential in contemporary feminist politics and activism (Redfern & Aune 2013, p. 15). An important point to be acknowledged is that although usage of digital feminist activism has been increasing, we cannot say it is taking over the whole feminist activism agenda. We must remember that the traditional “street-based” offline action is a part of digital activism’s progress because it is the collaboration of online and offline modes of protests that make each one more effective and influential (Baer 2015, p. 6).
Female Bodies

According to Judith Butler, “it is through the body that gender and sexuality become exposed to others, implicated in social processes, inscribed by cultural norms, and apprehended in their social meanings” (Butler 2004, p. 20). She furthermore emphasizes that “for politics to take place, the body must appear” (Butler 2011, http://www.eipcp.net), because the body “possesses mortality, vulnerability, agency” since it is “exposed” to the “gaze” of other individuals, physical contact and assault through “skin and flesh”. Therefore, the body is not only private but a “public dimension” which is constructed by social power (Butler 2004, 21). Thus Butler (2004) underlines “my body is and is not mine” (p. 21). Butler (2004) emphasizes that “gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized”. This ‘deconstruction’ and ‘denaturalization’ can be achieved by re-shaping the “restricting discourses” around gender as a norm which with its normative nature, is perceived by individuals as the “binary” relation of “man and woman” (p. 42-43). According to Butler (2004), “as a form of social power”, norms can only “persist as a norm to the extent that it is acted out in social practice and re-idealized and re-instituted in and through the daily social rituals of bodily life”. Without their performance by individuals within social relations, norms of “gender binary” cannot survive in the specific cultural and social context in which they belong to (p. 48). In line with what Butler (2004) argues, the main aim of body activism is to make use of the female body in various ways to point out “gender norms” are constructed, more flexible than they seem and can be transformed. This transformation is carried out by body activists by engaging in non-normative performance of their culturally and socially assigned genders. Thus, body activist movements’ goal is to re-construct and re-signify gender norms by distorting them (Baer 2015, p. 7). Baer (2015) argues that body activism engage in action symbolically to “expose the precarity of the female body” as a medium which possesses an “insecure status” within dominant patriarchy but also as a medium which is “ambivalent” and has a “potential” of “resistance” (p. 7).

One of the most known examples of contemporary feminist activism related to the issues of women’s bodies was The Slut Walk movement in Canada which took place in 2011 and then spread to “at least seventy-five cities across the globe”. Slut Walk advocated “a critical gaze at the issue of” women wearing all kinds of clothes without being “slut-shamed”. The participants of the movement were encouraged to dress themselves in whatever they are comfortable with, from “modest dress(es)” to revealing pieces of clothing. Another influential
movement has been established by a Ukraine-based group FEMEN which performed their “first topless protest in Kiev” in 2008. The “trademark” of FEMEN has been “sextremism” which is characterized “by the bare breast as a symbol of defiance”. Another significant movement which took place was Pussy Riot by a “Russian art collective” founded in 2011. The resistance of Pussy Riot was signified by “DIY-balaclava” as a symbol of “contemporary feminism” which draws attention “to the female body through masking and covering”. All of these examples successfully made use of online affordances to enhance and accelerate their offline actions by increasing the number of participation for their causes and by disseminating their messages also on online platforms besides the streets. Therefore, with the help of online tools, feminist activism in the 21st century has begun to transform itself to an augmentation of online and offline to bring about success (Baer 2015, p. 25-28).

With the impact created on discussions of female bodies and their regulation by these offline movements, online support and new online movements came into being which fully took place on social media platforms (Baer 2015, p. 7). Some examples of these online movements are #AufSchrei and #YesAllWomen on Twitter. “The #Aufschrei campaign first emerged in January 2013, when German women began broadcasting personal stories of everyday sexism over Twitter”. The online movement was created by “a group of feminist activists” which ended up with generating “more than fifty-seven thousand” tweets with the hashtag in a few days, after its initiation. The impact created on individuals through the everyday experiences and hardships of being a female in patriarchal societies by #Aufschrei was so significant that it was rewarded with “a major media award, the Grimme Prize” in June 2013, for enabling a great amount of people to engage in discussions of misogyny and sexism in Germany. The other online movement which emerged on Twitter to create drastic influence was #YesAllWomen. The movement was established after the dreadful killing of “six undergraduate students near the University of California–Santa Barbara campus”. Elliot Rodger who was responsible for the mass murder and was twenty-two years old at the time, published a video on YouTube with “misogynistic” messages including a message from him about his objective “to punish women for refusing to have sex with him”. After the video went viral, “more than a million” tweets were posted with the hashtag “YesAllWomen” to create attention around “individual traumas caused by sexual harassment and rape culture” as well as female bodies being perceived as objects for men who have the ultimate “right” to possess them whenever they want (Baer 2015, p. 12). Looking back on these movements of women’s “outcry” online with remarkable attention directed to them all over the world, it is
possible to observe how feminist movements have been transformed by adoption of digital media usage for reaching bigger audiences and increased participation of women in such movements through social media platforms to be heard (Baer 2015, p. 13).
3. Theoretical Framework

In this section of my thesis I will be elaborating on the theoretical concepts that I make use of in analyzing my empirical data further in the thesis. I must underline that my theoretical framework consists of multi-disciplinary theories from different disciplines of digital media, gender studies, sociology and social movement studies. **For this reason, it is challenging for me to position myself only in one field. Therefore, I would like to position myself in the intersection of digital media studies as a part of social sciences which are concerned with social movements, gender and social media usage.** As I have mentioned earlier, there have been no studies conducted on online body activism in general or how female body activists make use of social media to challenge norms and resist stigmatization of certain physical attributes.

I have selected theories from different disciplines and created a web of theoretical framework to address different dimensions of my research questions. The first concept presented here is the notion of power, as discussed by Michel Foucault. I have decided to investigate power and disciplinary practices to control human bodies from his perspective since unlike the traditional Marxist perspective, he sees power as a circulating force in social relations which can be challenged or resisted and can shift between different groups of people when the conditions are right. The next concept I present is stigmatization and I have chosen Erving Goffman as the ‘father of stigmatization theory’. Moreover, I have created a suitable overview of the concept of stigmatization to be used further in my analysis, based on the works of Bruce Link & Jo Phelan (2001, 2013, 2014) along with Goffman himself and other scholars. Furthermore, building on the connection I make between Foucault and Goffman claiming that stigmatization is a kind of disciplinary practice, I have made use of Sandra Lee Bartky and Judith Butler as pioneers of studies on modernity and gender norms, to talk more about the concept of disciplinary practices and how female bodies are regulated and policed. Moreover, my theoretical framework consists of theories on how female body fat and hair are stigmatized and perceived in social relationships through a collection of theories from different scholars. I have made use of Peggy A. Thoits to talk about challenging and resisting stigmatization since her study proved to be the most suitable and reasonable for my own research in relation to Goffman’s theory of stigmatization. Moving on to the social movement aspect of the research, I made use of Manuel Castells, who supported my research on social
media usage for resistance and social movements very well, to analyze the issues of power
given to people through social networks for resistance and emotions as the driving force of
social movements. Furthermore, I made use of Earl & Kimport along with danah boyd as two
different perspectives on the concept of technological affordances of the Web, to create a
more adaptable framework for my own data. Another point I would like to underline is, the
concepts of digital storytelling, selfies, hashtagging and reblogging were important concepts
for me to address in relation to my results, based on the netnographic data collection and
analysis. However, these concepts, as presented by me and only in the context of my study,
were created through works of different scholars since there were not many direct and in-
depth studies concerning how they were used by activists.

3.1. Making Sense of Foucault and Power

In one of his interviews, Foucault (1980), described power simply as "relations" which are
"more or less organised...co-ordinated cluster of relations" (p. 198). He was mainly concerned
with how power operated in societies rather than its “essence” (Driver 1998, p. 117). Hardy
(2015) underlines that Foucault aimed to investigate “existing forms of power” rather than
studying power as an “abstract” concept (p. 426). The aim of Foucault’s study on power was
not to investigate “sovereign power”, instead his analysis was interested in the power
relations:

[b]etween every point of a social body, between a man and a woman, between the
members of a family, between a master and his pupil, between everyone who knows
and everyone who does not, there exist relations of power which are not purely and
simply a projection of the sovereign's great power over the individual; they are rather
the concrete, changing soil in which the sovereign's power is grounded, the conditions
which make it possible for it to function (Foucault 1980, p. 187).

In its nature, “Foucault’s concept of power is relational”. For him, power is “multiplicity of
force relations”. This force does not necessarily need to be “physical” and it takes place
“between two or more individuals” in their social settings. This means that members of the
society possess the ability “to exert actions on one another” in various ways (Dore 2010, p.
739). Foucault himself states that “by power” he does not mean “power as a group of
institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of citizens or a given state” (qtd in
Dore 2010, p. 739).
Unlike the “liberal-Marxist notion of sovereign power” as something that only oppresses, limits and completely dominate individuals, Foucault put forward the idea of “disciplinary power”. In the Marxist notion, individuals could accomplish total “liberation” from the evils of the power by “entirely removing” it. On the contrary, Foucault expressed that it is the existent power which “constitutes” individuals and constructs them in all aspects anyways. Therefore, abolishing power mechanisms completely would not be possible as long as societies existed (Armstrong 1998, p. 23). According to Foucault, “power is the capacity to act on others”. But it is not exercised “violently” or “explicitly” on individuals (Dore 2010, p. 739). Furthermore, he states that “power is omnipresent” and penetrates all aspects of “social life”. Thus, it is possible to say that “power is everywhere”, created between all individuals as social tensions. With its ever-changing nature it is not centralized and enforced only from top-to-bottom, on the contrary, power circulates among all members of society and it is “multi-directional” and it can be “projected” from bottom-up. Therefore, power might also generate resistance “from below” against any kind of domination in all aspects of social life. In this aspect, Foucault emphasizes that power is not symmetrical and “sovereign” unlike Marx stated (Dore 2010, p. 741).

Based on his evidence of historical research of societies, Foucault (1995) emphasizes that “in every society” the body has been “in the grip of very strict powers” that forced “constraints, prohibitions or obligations” on it to achieve domination over the members of the society to keep them inside social norms (p.136). Through the 17th and 18th centuries, rather than exerting explicit forces of power-such as slavery-, new methods have been adapted to ensure “domination” which were called ‘disciplines’. Aggravated disciplines have been exercised “which assured the constant subjection” and “docility” of human bodies. Although these disciplines were corrective mechanisms and mastery of bodies, they operated inconspicuously since they were not overtly violent and visible (Foucault 1995, p.136-137). With the adaptation of “disciplines”, forces of the body were diminished “in terms of political obedience” (Foucault 1995, p.138).

According to Foucault, societies need disciplined “docile” bodies “to carry out the tasks of modern economic and social life”. For disciplines to be successful in shaping individuals in favor of the system, they need to be ‘internalized’ and ideologies of ‘subordination’ should be “acted upon” by the members of the society. Foucault (1995), further states that control of bodies have been “an effort” to exercise ‘mechanisms of power’ on the “everyday lives” of
individuals”, aiming to shape their “identities, activities and behaviours” through surveillance (p. 77). According to him, in “the classical age” bodies became “as object(s) and target(s) of power”. Therefore, they have been “manipulated, shaped, trained” in ways to “obey” and “respond” (Foucault 1995 p. 135). For Foucault (1995), bodies are made “docile” so that they can be “subjected, used, transformed and improved” to act as “political puppets” and “small-scale models of power” (p.136). With disciplinary practices, “manipulation of” the body’s “elements, its gestures” and “its behaviour” is made possible. Through the “mechanics of power” bodies were surveyed, dissected and reconstructed (Bartky 1997, p.94).

According to Ells (2003), Foucault’s study reveals that power relations affect bodies of individuals instantaneously, assign its attributes different meanings and regulate “its behaviour” (p. 218). Furthermore, Ells (2003) emphasizes that we are not only disciplined and controlled by “abused power in our social institutions, but all power disciplines us” (p. 218). We are usually not aware of the power relations that we are entangled in and do not acknowledge their operation and control on ourselves. Since “power is capillary”, diffusing itself into every aspect of our everyday lives, it takes a hold of “our bodies and souls as well as our social relationships”. Substantially, individuals are disciplined through institutions of the state and social life since they are born, “societal demands” and “norms” become internalized and “pervasive” (Ells 2003, p. 218).

Foucault emphasizes, the political power which states exercise through surveillance and disciplinary practices on individuals can be “totalizing” since it makes use of “disciplines” to examine all aspects of individuals’ lives to be able to keep them in line with constructed norms. When an individual fails to act according to the norms, she is faced with “social pressures” from others -for example stigmatization- to “conform” and adapt herself to social expectations (Dore 2010, p.743). In this aspect, “normalization” as Dore (2010) suggests, is a ‘disciplinary power’ forced upon individuals through cultural and societal rules to be in control of individuals’ bodies (p. 743). Another point expressed by Foucault is that even though ‘disciplinary power’ exerted by the states can be totalitarian, it is also individualizing. When people who do not or cannot “conform” the norms, they end up being “individualized” in their own terms and are excluded since they are seen as “a problem for society” (Dore 2010, p.743).

Foucault argues that in all societies, there are multiplicities of power that infiltrate, define and form “the social body” (Dore 2010, p.746). Although Foucault concludes in his study that power is everywhere and it infiltrates all social relations, he does not suggest that there is no
way to challenge or resist it. On the contrary, Foucault (1978) believes that "where there is power, there is always resistance" to it (p.95). As mentioned previously, people are both subjects and are subjected to power. Therefore, they are not completely or infinitely “enslaved by power relations”. In fact, it is possible for different individuals to claim power in power relations when the right conditions are created (Ells 2003, p.215). Since the power which is exercised on another acts as a “normative” force of “influence”, the oppressed party would eventually challenge the force pushed upon herself. Thus, a shift of power from the oppressor to the oppressed would be made possible (Dore 2010, p. 741). Therefore, with these disciplines of the modern world, bodies also become “a site for power struggles and, potentially, for resistance” (Weitz 2001, p. 668).

Resistance to dominating and normalizing power can be presented in different ways. As an example, Foucault states that “resistance can take the form of speech that undermines power” or it can be displayed through “silence” (cited in Ells 2003, p. 216). With the inversion of disciplinary tools that construct individuals, the very same disciplinary tool can be used against power itself. Foucault (1980) points out the fact that after binding “itself on the body”, power is subjected to reprisal “in that same body”. Thus, the conditions which “made power strong” is made weak and attacked by the same thing (p. 56). The main idea here, is that there is always a possibility to break free from the norms (Ells 2003, p. 216). As Foucault puts it, we can achieve to “refuse what we are” and what we have been made into as subjects (cited in Ells 2003, p. 216; Simons 1995, p. 1-2).

### 3.2. Disciplining of Female Body

Pro’Sobopha (2005) underlines that “the body” is an abundant and appealing “object of social use and political theory upon individual, ethnic and societal values” are attributed to embellish ideological obligations. Thus, the body is a place of dispute where conflicting and opposing “discourses converge”. Therefore, “politics of representation of female body” has been debated and investigated for “over the past 40 years” (p.118). Throughout the history, subordination of women has been carried out “by an ideology” which marked “their bodies and brains as inferior” through the construction of gender norms. This resulted in a constant power struggle between men and women, and definition of the female body as “submissive” by patriarchal systems (Weitz 2001, p. 668).
Foucault (1980) states that “for the state to function” as it does, there “must be” certain “relations of power” as well as “domination” among members of society such as “female and male” or “adult and child” so that all social relations are regulated and kept under control (p. 188). In these specific “relations of domination”, different sides are expected to behave in certain societal norms so that domination can be assured to keep the constructed social order in its place. From a feminist perspective, Foucault’s theorization of power enables us to make sense of “the very existence of gender dichotomy”. Since the relationship between man and woman is constructed in “networks of power” and is infiltrated by power which “is everywhere” in the society, there is a constant power struggle between two sides. Amigot & Pujal (2009) underline that this specific context of struggle of man and woman, has been in favor of “subordinating” women historically (647). Furthermore, they emphasize that “the female body appears” as a crucial site, which lacks power and is a “subject to a process of progressive objectification and control” (Amigot & Pujal 648-649).

Furthermore, Foucault emphasizes, once considered non-political, relationship “between men and women are also political” since they are charged with power relations and are directly related to construction of gender norms, femininity and masculinity in the society (Amigot & Pujal 2009,649). The interest of feminist research to adapt Foucault’s study of power to talk about female domination and objectification was because Foucault emphasized that “the personal is political”, since individuals are also regulated through power relations in the society. Therefore, “everyday struggles” of women on how to act, look and present themselves” are “explicitly political” (Amigot & Pujal 2009, 650). From Foucault’s perspective, with disciplinary and “normalizing” practices, feminine subjects are constructed and are expected to perform their sexuality in a certain socially constructed discourse of femininity which produces “proper feminine bodies” and “naturalizes” myths about female sex (Amigot & Pujal 2009, 649-651).

Foucault underlines that since the 18th century to this day, it is the social norms that acted as the most important tool of power, instead of “the law”. In this sense, females have been forced to comply with norms and are constructed normatively for over two centuries. “Formation of” female subject throughout history, has been achieved through the arbitrary “medical, psychiatric, and educational discourses” and adaptation of these discourses “in their relevant institutional practices” (Amigot & Pujal 2009, p. 653).

According to Butler (2009), gender norms are related to aspects of our everyday lives more than we actually realize. They are related to “how and in what way we can appear in public
space”. The determination of who will be subjected to domination, objectification or stigmatization is highly connected to one’s performance of sexuality in line with gender norms and standards (p. ii). Therefore, gender norms are “instances of power” which aim to regulate individuals based on their biologically given sex and gender discourses of masculinity and femininity (Butler 2009, p. ii-iii). However, Butler (2007), emphasizes that while sex is seen as natural and biological inheritance- which she opposes by saying that both gender and sex are socially constructed in her own studies-, gender “is culturally constructed”. Thus, we should not perceive gender as “fixed as sex” (p. 8). Furthermore, Butler (2007), states that the formulation of “biology-as-destiny” in reality is “culture-as-destiny” (p.11). Meaning that it is the cultural norms and rules which determine how a female or a male should ‘perform’ their sexualities and their sex in line with the constructed gender norms. Therefore, treating gender and its norms inside “the biology-is-destiny formulation” is the wrong way to perceive gender (Butler 2007, p.8). Butler (2007) emphasizes that “for Foucault the body is not sexed...prior to its determination within a discourse”. When the body enters a certain discourse, it is assigned meaning “in the context of power relations” (p. 124-125). Our sexes are recognized as natural, they act as “a politically neutral ground on which culture acts” in line with the discourses surrounding sexuality and gender in that specific culture (Butler 2007, p.10). What Butler (2007) is trying to tell us by this is that, our biological sexes are used to construct gender norms as feminine and masculine as a way of disciplining our bodies through normative ideals of sexuality. Additionally, Butler (2007) points out Foucault’s emphasis on “sexuality” being “always situated within matrices of power” and being constantly re-produced or re-constructed “within specific historical practices” carried out by discursively and institutionally (p. 131-132). Therefore, she underlines that it is possible for individuals to re-construct gender norms in different ways and deny feminine or masculine ideals as a part of their bodies (Butler 2007, p. 10-11).

**The Female Body as a Disciplinary Project**

Similarly, Bartky (1997) points out that biologically, we are either born “male” or “female”, however, gender norms such as “femininity” and “masculinity” are just social constructions, they are “artifices” and learned rather than congenital characteristics of human beings. Furthermore, she emphasizes that female bodies are controlled through “three categories of disciplinary practices”. The first one is aimed to generate bodies “of a certain size”, the second one aims to discipline the female body’s “gestures, postures and movements” to be
considered “feminine” and the last category’s objective is to regulate the female body’s display “as an ornamented surface” (p. 95).

According to Bartky (1997), in contemporary society, bigger body mass, “power or abundance” a female figure possesses, is approached with aversion. What is deemed acceptable for a female is to have “small-breasts”, “narrow-hips” and a slim figure paired with “emaciation”. Bartky states that this “silhouette” of the “ideal” woman “seems more appropriate to an adolescent boy or newly pubescent girl than to an adult woman” (p. 95).

Furthermore, she draws attention to the contemporary “tyranny of slenderness” which forbids women to “become” bigger because the normative rules of society foresee a female body to “take up as little space as possible”. With severe disciplinary practices forced upon female bodies, such as dieting, women are expected to abandon their mature bodies with “fuller breasts and rounded hips” which have become to be perceived as “distasteful” and re-shape their figures to have a “body of early adolescence” that is significantly small and amorphous “lacking flesh or substance”. This contemporary ideal female figure outlines “immaturity” that has been carved on it (Bartky 1997, p. 102). As a consequence of this ‘tyranny’, “dieting” to control the female body fat becomes a “disciplinary project”. Similar to body mass, when it comes to regulation of women’s skin there are also certain norms that they are expected to fit in. “A woman's skin must be soft, supple, hairless, and smooth” and she should not only dispose of her facial hair but also the hair “from large surfaces of the body” such as her legs, thighs and arms (Bartky 1997, p. 96-97). Bartky (1997) also underlines that “women’s preoccupation with youth and beauty” is nothing recent, throughout history, women have been focusing on how they are physically perceived. In contrast, what is new is the increasing influence and “power of the image in a society” which is familiarized with and adjusted to “visual media”. In this sense, visual media are used as a way to exercise disciplinary power on women by conveying “images of normative femininity” as beauty standards (p. 107).

Moreover, Bartky (1997) emphasizes that the existent disciplinary power in the society which aims to “inscribe femininity” and feminine ideals in “female body is everywhere and it is nowhere”. Thus, she argues that the “disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular”. This resonates with what Foucault puts forward about disciplinary practices, it is anonymous and it is in every aspect of social relations in our everyday lives (p. 103). In this sense the fact that disciplinary power operates anonymously, is critical for us to understand how women are subordinated. Bartky (1997) underlines that since there is no formal “institutional structure” or “authority” to exercise disciplinary power upon women to regulate and control female
bodies, “the impression that” construction of “femininity is either entirely voluntary or natural” (p. 103). On the contrary, female bodies are disciplined in societies through the ‘patriarchal gaze’, self-surveillance and the norms created around the performance of femininity.

According to Bartky (1997), norms and “standards” of femininity and ideal female body which are “acceptable” in the society “are impossible to” keep up with and they require “a virtual transcendence of” natural state of female bodies. Therefore, it is possible for a woman to live her life with a pervasive feeling of bodily deficiency” and spend even more effort to fit in norms. Thus, further and “tighter control of the body” is achieved and disciplinary power not only takes a hold of the female body but also the female mind since she constantly contemplates her deficiencies and ways to redeem them (p. 107-108). When a woman cannot or simply is not willing to comply with feminine norms and “body discipline” principles, she is exposed to “sanctions”. Bartky (1997) states that she will “face a very severe sanction...in a world dominated by” patriarchy (p. 104) which leads to stigmatization as a way of punishing this specific female body.

### 3.3. What Is Stigma?

In *A Dictionary of Psychology*, Andrew Colman describes stigma as fundamentally “a mark of disgrace” that is in association with “a person, a personal quality or a personal circumstance” (2016). In academic literature, stigma as term has been used to specify “the mark or label that is used as a social designation” which is connected to “negative stereotypes” or discrimination and exclusion of the stigma bearer (Link & Phelan 2013, p. 529). A broader description was also put forward by Chrisler (2011) who stated that “any substance or condition” that arouses a sense of “disgust or avoidance” can be specified “as stigmatized” (p. 206). Historically, the term stigma is derived from the Greek culture in which stigma refers to “bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier”. These signs were carved into people’s bodies to signify that “the bearer was a slave, a criminal or a traitor” which sent a message to others in society “to avoid” these stigmatized persons. According to Erving Goffman (1968) as the pioneer of stigmatization theory who “introduced the term stigma to social sciences” (Colman 2016), there are certain categories which are established in which members of the society fall into. These categories are a part of one’s “social identity” and it is the first appearances of people
which allow us to determine in which category they belong to (Goffman 1968, p.13). When a person unknown to us possesses “attributes that makes him different from others” and which are not in line with normative expectations of the society, we tend to “discredit” and “taint” this person and place him in a stigmatized category (Goffman 1968, p.14). This “attribute” which functions as the “stigma”/ “the sign” mentioned in a historical context previously, is seen by the society as a “a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap” and becomes an inseparable part of one’s social identity which in reality, is only a fragment of her actual identity (Goffman 1968, p.12). Therefore, stigma as a term serves to specify “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (Goffman 1968, p.13).

In this context, it is important to mention that there are different types of stigmas that we come across in our everyday lives. According to Goffman (1968) the first category of stigmas is directly linked to physical appearance. The stigmatized attributes in this category are considered to be “abominations of the body” and “physical deformities” (p.16). Another type of stigma is referred as “blemishes of individual character” which are seen as “unnatural”. Goffman (1968) states that “dishonesty”, “rigid beliefs”, “mental disorder”, “addiction” and “homosexuality” are examples of this type of stigma (p.14). The last type mentioned by Goffman (1968) are “the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion” which are passed on through ancestry “and equally contaminate all members of a family” (p.14).

According to Goffman (1968), society exercises different kinds of “discrimination” - sometimes unintentionally- which results in the decline of the stigmatized person’s “life chances” for he is seen as “inferior” than the other members of the society (p.15). However, people we put in a stigmatized category have the same normative perception on “identity” as rest of the society. Therefore, s/he longs to be accepted as “a normal person, a human being like anyone else”. With her denial of social acceptance by others, the stigmatized person eventually believes that she “indeed falls short of what (s)he really ought to be” (Goffman 1968, p.17; p.19-20). Therefore, she might “attempt to correct” her stigmatized attributes-if possible- to escape from the “self-isolation” brought by the discrimination she faces in her everyday social interactions (Goffman 1968, p.24).

A more recent study derived from Goffman’s stigmatization theory, conducted by Link and Phelan (2013), states that stigma is linked to “labeling, stereotyping, status loss, and discrimination”. According to their conceptualization stigma occurs when certain “interrelated components” coincide (p.529). The components are described by Link and Phelan (2013) as follows;
In the first component, people distinguish and label human differences. In the second, dominant cultural beliefs link labeled persons to undesirable characteristics – to negative stereotypes. In the third, labeled persons are placed in distinct categories so as to accomplish some degree of separation of “us” from “them.” In the fourth, labeled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes.

Additionally, Hinshaw et.al (2007) underlines that “there is an insidious and global quality to stigmatization” because when one is stigmatized, her risk of being “discriminated against” and expelled from other circles of social life and interactions increases (p.25). According to Hinshaw et.al. (2007), by the nature of its definition, stigma “connotes an internal mark of deep degradation” to the stigma bearer and licenses the other members of the society who lack this certain stigma “to perpetuate and escalate their judgemental attitudes and responses” (p.24). Thus, it is possible to say, stigmatization circumscribes one’s “interpersonal” interactions by which “other members of society” happen to depreciate certain attributes of the stigma bearer and “begin to interpret” her “characteristics in terms of” a “flawed identity” and this results in “lowered acceptance” in society (Hinshaw et.al. 2007, p.26; p.31).

Although stigma is fundamentally a “social psychological” issue which is established “in the individual psyche”, it is continually arbitrated by “material, political, institutional and symbolic contexts” that exist in the society (Campbell & Deacon 2006, p.416). According to Link and Phelan (2013), for stigmatization to be successful, there is a requirement for “the stigmatizer” to possess power (p.533). They emphasize that there are many distinctions between members of the society but only some of these differences are stigmatized. The reason behind this is the “stigma power” which allows members of the society who are “in a position of social power” to stigmatize others (Hinshaw et.al. p.25). Chrisler (2011) similarly expresses that it is the members of the society who are considered “powerful” who decide on “which marks or identities are stigmatized” and it is their perspective - which eventually becomes the perspective of the majority- that forms the stereotypical representations of the stigma bearers (p. 209). Stigmatization itself as a phenomenon, is linked to power struggles because it is related to “social, economic, and political power” which enables us to detect “differentness” of others, construct “stereotypes”, separate people into “distinct categories” as well as giving us the possibility to perform “rejection, exclusion, and discrimination” (Link & Phelan 2013 p. 529). When seen this way, in its core, “stigma is a source of power” which
allows “the stigmatizer” to dominate over as well as control the stigma bearer (Link & Phelan 2013 p.534). Therefore, “it takes power to stigmatize” (Link and Phelan 2013, p.533).

**Dominant Groups and Stigmatization as Disciplinary Practice**

Stigmatization can be seen as an incorporation of “the social and institutional structures and policies”-social norms- which highlight and affirm the perspective as well as beliefs of the “majority” (Hinshaw et. al. 2007, p. 26). Generally, social norms are imposed on us through “written and unwritten rules” in our society that govern every aspect of our lives from social interactions to “how people should form a line at a bus stop”. Since these norms or rules are a part of our everyday lives invisibly, members of the society begin to “depend on” and internalize them. Therefore, when they are “violated” in any sense, people immediately react to it by punishing the violator by stigmatizing, discriminating and/or excluding her from social circles, as a corrective mechanism of society (Link & Phelan p. 533). Furthermore, stigmatization mechanisms also act as a regulator in societies to “keep people in” normative and discursive boundaries besides punishing the “violator” of the norms to make an example of them “as a reminder to others that they should” also “remain in” these boundaries (Link & Phelan p. 24-25). The violators of social norms are then, forced to “alter” their behaviours or “adapt a more normative standard” to be included in the society again (Link & Phelan p. 532). In this sense, combined with Foucault’s perspective, stigmatization of individuals acts as a disciplinary practice exercised by people who possess disciplinary power and power of stigmatization on the powerless groups.

Another important feature of stigma is that it is “both universal and specific to individual cultures”. There are stigmatized and outcast groups in all societies but the attributes or “deviances” they possess based on which they are degraded as a part of social stigmatization mechanism are different from culture to culture and time to time (Hinshaw et.al. 2007, 26). Regarding “aesthetics”, there have been many research conducted on “humans’ tastes and preferences in terms of appearance and attractiveness” which uncovered robust “tendencies” to deny the ones who are not able to keep up with normative beauty standards (Hinshaw et.al. 2007, 32). As an example, it would be relevant for our case to briefly mention stigmatization of body sizes. Hinshaw et. al. (2007) point out the change in perception of female body sizes throughout history, differing based on cultures (26). Then admired heavier bodies, representing fertility and abundance in Renaissance, are now stigmatized and condemned by contemporary Western cultures. In this light, it is possible to say that when the cultural and
social contexts in which stigmas are embedded alter, what is considered as stigma and who are stigmatized can also change.

The attributes which have been stigmatized in a certain “society or culture”, ends up generating “strong consensus” concerning “their devalued status”. Thus, as certain attributes are stigmatized, stigmatization of them becomes “pervasive” making devaluation and exclusion inescapable, especially with the “huge impact of print and visual media in modern societies” (Hinshaw et.al. 2007, p. 33). Just like gender roles, “societal views” on stigmatized attributes are seen “as factual rather than mythical or stereotypic”. What is considered out of boundaries of societal norms and unacceptable, is conveyed beginning from “as early as the preschool years”. Therefore, members of the society are conditioned to see certain attributes as inferior and stigmatization comes along with this subordination (Hinshaw et.al. 2007, p. 34).

### 3.4. Stigmatization of Female Body Fat and Hair

With my previous analysis of Foucault's conception of disciplinary practices and Bartky’s analysis of modernity and the female body, it is possible to say that stigmatization of certain attributes on female bodies such as body fat and hair, is a covert controlling mechanism of women. It is important for us to understand how women are stigmatized when they possess “body fat and hair”, so that we can understand their efforts of online body activism. Therefore, in this section, I would like to briefly talk about what kind of meanings are assigned to female body fat and hair through stigmatization.

Fahs (2011) underlines that women tend to “internalize” how their bodies should look in line with societal norms of feminine ideals and end up being distressed how the male gaze perceives them. To comply with feminine norms, “women disguise and conceal their natural bodies” and adopt a variety of practices such as adjusting their bodies, medical procedures and develop “grooming habits” as well as regular “maintenance behaviours” (p. 452). One of these practices is constant riddance of female body hair. This “practice” usually possess “sexist and heterosexist ideologies” as a “culturally charged way of discipline” (Fahs 2011, p. 453).

As Kyrölä (2014) points out, “bodies are related to, valued, judged, desired, accepted, rejected, and imagined fundamentally in terms of their weight, size, and shape”. When compared to other “categorizations” which are seen as entrenched “in the body” such as
“gender, skin color, or disability”, “body size and weight” are considered as “changeable” and a personal responsibility with the possibility of alteration unlike previously mentioned categories. Thus, stigmatization of body fat and existence of “size hierarchies” are deemed as “justified”, if not, they are not seen as “problematic” as “gendered, sexual or ethnic” inequalities, even though, “these axes of difference” are extremely entangled (p. 2).

In contemporary culture, “body fat” is deemed “ugly and stigmatizing” (Chrisler 2011, p. 205). As well as body fat, female body hair is stigmatized similarly. In 2010, actress and singer Mo’Nique was harshly judged because of showing her hairy legs at the Golden Globes while walking the red carpet. The public commented on the issue saying that she was “disgusting” (Chrisler 2011, p. 206).

In “popular culture and psychology” studies there is sufficient “evidence of stigma” linked to females and their bodies (p. 206). Chrisler (2011) emphasized that an evidence for this stigmatization is the “absence of older”, “fat” and "hairy" women from popular media outlets suggesting “that viewers...do not want to see them” although they make up a substantial part of the society (p. 207). The fat female body is “deviant” and does not fit into social norms or feminine standards (Murray 2005, p.155). Therefore, it must be stigmatized to be controlled and transformed into what society and especially patriarchy deems as “acceptable”. Fat women are stigmatized as “lazy, not willing to commit to change or to the dictates of healthy living”. They are usually perceived as compulsive eaters” and “hyper-emotional” signifying fat female bodies are “discursively constructed” as a failed body project. Furthermore, females with ‘excessive’ body fat are expected to desire being “thin” and “sexual” and are further stigmatized when they represent a self-loving and accepting outlook (Murray 2005, p. 155).

Concerning female body hair, McDonald (2006) emphasizes that the “cultural norm” of hairlessness of female body has “three functions” to perform. First of all; it aggravates the distinction “between women and men”. Secondly, it associates “female attractiveness with youth”. Lastly, it implies “the to-be-looked-at-ness” of the female body (p. 68). Fahs (2011) argues that sometimes women take “body hair removal” for granted as they perform it “unconsciously” and do not recognize its normative and disciplinary nature. (p. 454). He furthermore, underlines that the “practice of women’s hair removal” signifies an essential aspect of “gendered social control” (Fahs 2011, p. 454). An important point Lesnik-Oberstein (2006) argues is that even though fat women are just as stigmatized as hairy women, and are represented as “undesirable or unattractive”, they are still considered “female”. On the
contrary, “hairy” women are perceived as “monstrous in being like men, or masculine” (p. 3). Therefore, women who prefer staying in their natural state of hair are harshly stigmatized and are seen as "dirty, gross" or “unfeminine, mad” (Fahs 2011, p. 454; Lesnik-Oberstein 2006, p. 1-7). With stigmatization of female body hair, in society:

[h]airy women are rated as less sexually attractive, intelligent, sociable, happy, and positive compared to hairless women, less friendly, moral, and relaxed, and more aggressive, unsociable, and dominant compared to women who remove their body hair...Hairiness connotes masculine qualities, while hairlessness connotes feminine qualities. Hair has historically (at least in some contexts) represented power, so women's routine hair removal symbolizes their lack of power (Fahs 2011, p. 454).

### 3.5. Resisting and Challenging Norms and Stigmas

According to Scott (1990) resistance can be simply defined as “actions that reject subordination”. Subordination here signifies any kind of “idea, practice or system” which depreciate a particular “social group” compared to another social group and positions the former under the “domination” of the latter (cited in Weitz 670). Additionally, as stated by Thoits (2011), resistance can also be seen as an act of defiance against “a harmful force or influence”. The important point about resistance is that even when it does not yield the intended results or change, confronting stigmatization can add on to “an individual's sense of personal control or empowerment”. Therefore, resistance might increase “self-esteem” and “protect the self against devaluation” (Thoits 2011, p. 11).

According to Thoits (2011), even though a lot of theorists argued that stigmatization leads “inevitably” to “self-devaluation or low self-esteem”, the evidence presented in this case is not conclusive. Thus, she underlines evidence of noticeable percentage of stigma bearers display “resistance” against stigma “rather than accept or adapt to it” fully (p. 6). Agreeing with Thoits, Campbell and Deacon (2006) stress that “stigmatizing representations are not always internalised” and there is the possibility of “negative representations” resulting in “resistance” and “renegotiation” of the meanings conveyed by stigmas. Emphasizing that stigma not having to be a “disadvantage all the time”, according to Campbell and Deacon (2006), stigmatization “might even” fuel “group mobilization” as a “resistance” (p. 415).

Hinshaw et.al. (2007), states that “the hopeful sign” is that specific attributes that are stigmatized can be “valued” in different cultures as well as in different eras (p. 26). Therefore,
stigmas should not be seen as “fixed” and “permanent” since they are socially constructed (Chrisler 2011, p. 206; Hinshaw et al. 2007, p.26). Specific “mechanisms” can be adapted by the members of the society to “preserve self-esteem” and banish exclusion of stigma bearers. One of these mechanisms is challenging societal norms and views on stigmatized attributes and alter them, by the stigma bearers or people who decide to advocate against the discrimination of stigma bearer. The “challenging” as a “direct and active confrontation”, can be done by calling attention to stigmatizers and their behavior against stigma bearers and declare disagreement on such stigmatizations to create a consciousness around how stigma bearers are mistreated and marginalized in the society (Hinshaw et al. 2007, p. 36; Link & Phelan 2013, p. 537).

Thoits (2011) states that the act of resistance involves either “challenging, confronting, fighting a harmful force/influence, or “deflecting, impeding, refusing to yield to the penetration of a harmful force or influence” (p. 11). As an act of resistance, Thoits (2011) argues that, “challenging” aims to change others’ “beliefs or behaviors” on a certain matter (p. 14). Instead of only deflecting or trying to avoid certain stereotypes linked to stigmatized attributes as a resistance mechanism, challengers “engage with the biased attitudes and actions of others rather than dismiss them” by confronting stigmatization and “engaging with the biased attitudes” towards stigma bearers. An individual who challenges stigmas argue that stereotypical representations of stigma bearers which reduce stigma bearers into one simple category by generalization, are simply “wrong” (Thoits 2011, p. 12; p. 14).

Thoits (2011) mentions three ways of making use of social action to challenge stigmatization. First strategy that can be adapted is to create contact “through personal stories of struggle” and express how stigmatization damages the stigma bearers. The other strategy is to educate members of the society through “media campaigns, newsletters and advertisements” to create an understanding to abolish “myths” about a certain stigmatized attribute. The last strategy she emphasizes is “group protest” which precisely aims to go against “public statements made by opinion leaders, representations in the media, or social or industry policies that are prejudicial in content or discriminatory in practice” (p. 15). Therefore, it is possible for the stigmatized individuals to bring in their perspectives as an oppositional force against the perspective of the majority (Chrisler p. 209-210). In our case, an example would be women challenging and ‘rejecting’ norms and beauty standards. Chrisler (2011) points out that for this purpose, women have been using “satire, media literacy workshops, zines, blogs, and
other activist techniques” to reduce and ideally abolish stigmatization of specific female attributes (209-210).

However, it is essential to underline that “challenging” also comes with its risks of backlash because when one decides to openly resist stigmatization then she is “outed” to the world. The idea behind the act of “challenging” is changing “the norms and social policies” that ensure stigmatization and “sustain group distinctions”. In this sense, ‘status quo’ is rejected by the individuals resisting stigmatization and instead collective resistance takes over. Therefore, the challenger faces “interpersonal costs” as she is now more exposed to direct discrimination and exclusion on the path of defending herself and/or others (Thoits 2011, p. 21-22).

3.6. Leveraging Technological Affordances

As discussed above by Foucault, Goffman and other scholars, resistance to societal norms and socially constructed stigmas are possible. One powerful tool activists are making use of in contemporary culture, to rebel and to achieve social, political and cultural change is the internet which supplies individuals with networks of power as media scholar Manuel Castells (2012) puts it. Although disciplinary practices are carried out and sometimes violent measures are taken, what determines “the fate of institutions, norms and values on which societies are organized” are dependent on how individuals think. Meaning, if the masses begin to think “in ways that are contradictory to the values and norms institutionalized”, the societal system would be forced to change. Therefore, any tool that enables members of the society to alter social norms, can be used as political opposition against the state or the power-holding groups. In line with this, by changing “the messages and frames created, formatted and diffused in multimedia communication networks” which are in constant metamorphosis and diffuse into “all domains of social life”, social change can be achieved (Castells 2012, p.6).

Castells argues that the way ‘networks of power’ exercise their control and domination is disseminated “through multimedia networks of mass communication” mainly by affecting minds of individuals. Therefore, it is possible to argue that “communication networks are decisive sources of power -making” (Castells 2012, p.7). I agree with Castells on the matter that digital media channels can be called networks of mass communication in the 21st century for they can spread out messages and information to all networked individuals. Therefore, I believe digital media channels are one of the “new sources of power-making”, challenging power and counter-power.
Similarly, danah boyd (2011) argues that “networked technologies introduce new affordances for amplifying, recording, and spreading information and social acts”. These technological affordances, affect the shaping of networked publics and how individuals engage in them (p. 45-46). According to boyd (2011), ‘networked publics’ are “publics that are restructured by networked technologies”. Meaning that they are spaces formed by ‘networked technologies’ and imagined communities which “emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice” at the same time. ‘Networked publics’ function as traditional publics which allow individuals to come together “social, cultural, and civic purposes, and they help people connect with a world beyond their close friends and family”. However, the difference of ‘networked publics’ with other kinds is the technological affordances presented by ‘technology structures’ that alter how people engage in public environments (p. 39). A point that should be underlined is that there are many different perspectives to understand what a ‘public’ is in various scholarly disciplines and traditions. Here, I use the terminology ‘publics’ as “imagined communities” of individuals coming together who hold “a common understanding of the world (or) a shared identity” (Anderson 2006; Livingstone 2005 qtd in boyd 2011, p. 40). Shortly, as defined by danah boyd (2011), I take networked publics as “publics that are restructured by network technologies” which are “simultaneously a space and a collection of people” (p. 41).

As a general and brief description, ‘technological affordances’ are “special technological capacities of Internet-enabled technologies” (Earl & Kimport 2011, p. 32). Earl & Kimport (2011) define ‘technological affordances’ as “the actions and uses that a technology makes qualitatively easier or possible when compared to prior like technologies”. They argue that “harnessing or leveraging” affordances such as faster dissemination of information through the Web compared to traditional ways of communication, can alter social processes. However, they also emphasize that is not the existence of new technological capacities to enhance social processes or movements but how individuals make use of them to leverage these affordances (p. 33). These technological affordances enable groups or individuals to “achieve visibility” online. Even though “only a small fraction receives mass attention”, the majority of users “receive very small, localized attention” which in some cases can also be significant. Therefore, we must underline that technological affordances in ‘networked publics’ do not guarantee “tremendous visibility” but present “the possibility” of it (boyd 2011, p. 48).
3.7. Digital Storytelling

Lambert (2013) emphasizes that more and more people began to “wake up to the power of their own voice” and seek out new ways to articulate themselves through digital media platforms (p.4). With the power blogs, micro-blogs and many other platforms established on the internet, people now have the chance to talk about their own experiences and be heard more likely than traditional media outlets. Similarly, activists online and offline have begun to adopt digital storytelling to make claims about their causes as well as accelerate their movements and mobilize individuals.

Our focus here is specifically personal stories written by activists, therefore, I will describe storytelling on an individual level rather than collective stories. Davis (2002) argues that “at the personal level”, individuals tell stories about their own experience. These stories can be called ‘self-narratives’ which vary in their context. ‘Self-narratives’ can be about a person’s whole life or “stories of significant life passages, existential moments, and traumatic events”. There are also “participant narratives” of personal stories written by individuals talking about their own experiences of the movement that they are a part of (p.22). According to Chung (2007):

> through stories we explain, interpret, and assess situations, experiences, and ideologies, leading in turn to the creation of new meanings. As an intrinsic form of human communication, storytelling is prevalent in all aspects of human interaction. It connects generations of the past with the present and future to form, pass on, or reformulate wisdom, values, and beliefs (p.17).

Storytelling functions as a catalyst for understanding others and seeing through their eyes as well as self-awareness. By making use of personal stories of individuals, existing and prospective participants of a movement are enabled to “identify and empathize with real protagonists, to be repelled by antagonists, to enter into and feel morally involved in configurations of events that specify injustice and prefigure change”. Therefore, stories provoke robust “emotional” reaction which can be “sympathy”, “anger”, hope for change or solidarity and escalate the desire to fight for social “change”. Castells (2012) argues that “at the individual level, social movements are emotional movements”. Uprisings are not initiated “with a program or political strategy”. He states that these might occur on later stages of a movement “as leadership emerges”. “The big bang of a social movement” begins when ‘emotion(s)’ are converted into ‘action’ (p.13). Thus, with the creation of ideas from personal
experiences of ‘the participants’, a movement is expected to be “more representative, enthusiastic and hopeful” (Castells 2012, p.15-16). Through storytelling, ‘participants’ are encouraged to “take an evaluative stance toward unjust social conditions” and stand up for the integrity “of the oppressed” through involvement in social movements as well as “imagine...an alternative social order” all together (Davis 2002, p.25). Moreover, storytelling just as social movements, trigger ‘creative participation’ through construction of real-life experiences as self-narratives (Davis 2002, p.27). Kavanagh (2010) points out that storytelling in movements aids the shift of priority of “objectivity and materialism” to a general perspective which values “feelings, connections, and communities”. Therefore, self-narratives can support “connection, recognition, and communion” among individuals (p. 91-92).

Using storytelling to create social change is not a new trend adopted by activists. Women’s movements, with their encouraging nature to talk about personal as political, enabled individuals to talk about experiences and stories of rape and abuse. Similarly, LGBT movements encouraged the ‘queer community’ to tell stories of coming-out and transition. With the vocalization of personal stories, these social movements were empowered. An important example of power of storytelling from the history is the “anti-rape and child protection movements” which took place in 1970s. By declaration of stories of rape and abuse experienced by children, the “widespread” but “unrecognized” abuse was exposed to the public, resulting in an ‘anti-rape’ movement (Polletta 2006, p.18).

Moving on to digital storytelling as an adaptation of traditional storytelling to online space, Vivienne and Burgess (2013) describe digital stories as “short autobiographical multimedia narratives in video form, combining personal photographs and/or artworks, narration voiced by participants themselves, and sometimes music” (p.283). However, I do not agree with such a traditional and narrow description of it. In my opinion, rather than making videos, combining different digital media tools can also be considered as digital storytelling. For this reason, here I would like to refer to Nick Couldry’s concept of digital storytelling. Couldry (2008) presents a broader description of digital storytelling as; “telling personal stories” with the help of digital tools, “storing and exchanging those stories” digital platforms and ‘networks’ which owe their existence to the ‘world wide web’ (p. 374). From this perspective, the female body activists who post their selfies with enclosed personal experience and stories, are in fact, digital storytellers.
But why is digital storytelling an important tool for online activists? First of all, digital storytelling challenges traditional mass media representations and constructs through its possibility to engage in “democratization” by pointing out societal inequalities and “reshaping of hierarchies of voice” by making ‘ordinary’ heard and seen (Couldry 2008, p.383-384). Therefore, it gives marginalized groups—which also include stigmatized individuals- and activists a chance to challenge societal norms. Digital storytelling also influences “an important dimension of social power” which is the “inequality” and absence of ‘social recognition’ created by ‘hidden injuries of media power’, meaning the absence of certain individuals from the mass media and public sphere. In its nature, digital storytelling aims to “correct” such inequalities because it gives individuals space to “represent oneself as a social and therefore potentially political agent”. Thus, “in a way” marginalized individuals are made a part of the “public domain” by its usage (Couldry 2008, p.386). Secondly, as Lambert (2006) argues, digital storytelling presents a significant capability to listen to personal stories of others and create ‘conversational media’ which aims to establish communication and conversation between individuals through sharing life experiences as well as building an understanding of a collective cause. Thus, digital storytelling flourishes “understanding” of people across various cultures, classes and “generations”. Additionally, it can be used in organizing movements and mobilization of individuals (cited in Couldry 2008, p. 387). In the analysis part of the thesis, I will further talk about how female body activists make use of storytelling as a part of their movement against stigmatization of female body fat and hair.’

### 3.8. Selfies for Exposure and Resistance

Social media platforms and applications that are “image-centered”, for instance “Instagram, tumblr, Snapchat and WhatsApp”, are advancing in user numbers and significance. Therefore, usage of these online platforms and selfies published on them are gaining more and more attention in academia. The word ‘selfie’ which means “a self-portrait made in a reflective object or from arm’s length” was officially included “the Oxford Dictionary in 2013” as a word we use in our everyday lives (Tiidenberg & Cruz 2015, p.77-78). Senft & Baym (2015) describe selfie as a ‘practice’ or a ‘gesture’ which has the capability to convey “different messages to different individuals, communities and audiences”. As a ‘gesture’ selfies can be:

- [d]ampened, amplified, or modified by social media censorship, social censure, misreading of the sender’s original intent, or adding additional gestures to the mix, such as likes, comments, and remixes (p. 1589).
In this context, selfies, as a culturally complex and newly emerging phenomena, are observed to be bound to societal norms, ideals and expectations. Therefore, the debates of the motivations and messages behind selfies have been presented from various perspectives. Although taking and posting selfies are deemed by the majority as narcissistic, trivial and ‘self-absorbed’, in reality, the relationship between the subject, “the practice and social use” of selfies are more complicated than it seems (Tiidenberg & Cruz 2015, p.77-78). In contrast to some scholars (Hjorth, 2006; Lasén and Gomez-Cruz,2009; Van House et al., 2005; Waskul and Martin, 2010) arguing that selfies are obscure in power, repressive consolidation of “consumerist, heteronormative and body-normative discourses” which turn individuals to commodities, gendered subjects or ‘docile bodies’, selfies can possess a potential of ‘empowerment too’. In this context, what is meant by empowerment here is a “personal sense of power and control” which holds a promise of social influence on “existing discourses” and perspectives (Tiidenberg & Cruz 2015, p.78-79).

When we take selfies, we do not only use technological filters but also cultural ones. Cultural filters are “norms, expectations, normative discursive strategies” which “teach us” to act in societal gender norms when we are even taking selfies, meaning that they drive us “to mimic photo models in fashion magazines or Instagram selfie stars when we photograph ourselves” (Rettberg 2014, p.22). In this context, cultural filters are significant due to its “rules and conventions” of normativity that lead us to discipline ourselves without being aware of it (Rettberg 2014, p.24). We mainly “represent our lives or our bodies” with these ‘cultural filters’ we use in our selfies, which are just as societal norms and ideals, “embedded in our culture”. Similar to socially constructed norms, cultural filters are not fixed, on the contrary, they vary and alter over time. Therefore, in line with Foucault’s conception of power, disciplining of bodies and resistance, cultural filters not only regulate individual’s way of taking selfies when they are complied with and re-inforce the normative ideals of how a woman should look or represent herself, but also gives individuals the power to resist and challenge them by not complying with the rules and expectations brought by these cultural filters and by making use of selfies in non-normative ways (Rettberg 2014, p. 24-25). As Susan Sontag (1973) emphasized, ‘photography is power’, power of an individual to represent herself in any way she wants and a way to “take back the power” which has been stripped from her by cultural filters and appropriations (qtd Rettberg 2014, p. 88). Thus, online selfies hold a ‘visual power’ which is intended to oppose and resist ‘devaluing and misrepresentation’ of women in relation to social norms (Murray 2015, p. 512).
Murray (2015) emphasizes that ‘young women’ have begun to define and perceive the action of taking and sharing selfies on social media platforms “as a radical act of political empowerment” due to its nature to resist patriarchy and “media culture’s obsession” to monitor and discipline female bodies (p. 490). Contemporary social media is full of ‘blogs’ and ‘accounts’ opened up by young women who post selfies “in various states of dress or undress – or at times completely nude”. Since women are “constantly bombarded with unattainable” beauty ideals in contemporary media, they make use of these social media platforms to “construct image(s) of themselves” in ways they want to be represented rather than how societal norms want to see them as women. On these social media platforms such as Tumblr and Instagram, some female users disseminate their selfies to accomplish “recognition”, to be represented and “to make themselves present in the world” of popular media which chooses to stigmatize them and render certain types of attributes of female bodies invisible on media (Murray 2015, p. 496).

Lasen and Gomez-Cruz (2009) argue that through self-portraits “shaping and knowing of the self” is achieved (qtd in Tiidenberg 2014). Additionally, engaging in ‘storytelling’ of bodies and body related issues through selfies and texts, can function as ‘empowering’ exposure which enables individuals to restore self-esteem, to claim back their rights to their own bodies and to resist disciplinary practices of social norms (Tiidenberg 2014). Furthermore, portraying of ‘self-narratives’ through selfies can be considered “self-storying as activism” (Crawley & Broad, 2004 qtd in Tiidenberg 2014). Sharing selfies on social media platforms which foster different communities of women as well as “commenting, reblogging and actively participating” in these communities emphasizes novel and ‘body-positive’ perspectives of seeing, “looking and experiencing” bodies. Therefore, the ‘self-shooter’ not only transforms how she sees herself but also gains new perspectives of looking at other ‘selfie-shooters’ that she sees online (Tiidenberg and Cruz 2015, p.83-84). The ‘body-positive’ attitude within these communities are flourished by “sharing and learning new ways of looking”. Thus, individuals are encouraged by this atmosphere and attitude to participate in posting their own selfies more and more. This process is vital for empowering women who participate in posting selfies in online communities to challenge societal norms, because the more selfies are posted by different participants, the more other individuals become willing to share their own (Tiidenberg and Cruz 2015, p.86).
3.9. Hashtags and Reblogs: Get Connected, Raise Your Voice, Be Exposed

Hashtags have been studied by scholars in the context of politics and discourse. Most of these scholarly studies have focused on Twitter and how hashtags function “during major political events” on this social media platform. The most famous example of how hashtags were used by protesters was Arab Uprisings (Rambukkana 2015, p.31). After Twitter, in December of 2010, Instagram launched a new feature which allowed its users to add “searchable hashtags to photos” and the possibility to organize and mobilize individuals came into being. Following Twitter and Instagram, social media platforms such as Tumblr and Facebook also adapted the usage of hashtags in posts (Olszanokwski 2015, p.229).

Hashtag usage is “currently...a common phenomenon” and hashtags can be used for different reasons. According to Zappavigna (2012), hashtag usage is an “emergent” practice which aims to label themes or “topic(s) of a micropost and a form of metadata incorporated into posts”. (cited in van den Berg 2014, p. 3). Popularity and demand of hashtags depend on their “functional usage” which is “the common practice of sorting and selecting thematically related information from a torrent of messages within the context of social media platforms” (van den Berg 2014, p. 3). Zappavigna (2012) emphasizes that hashtags can be considered as a mode of “conversational tagging” which brings different individuals together to discuss specific issues of their choice and it creates and online conversation between them (qtd in van den Berg 2014, p. 4). In this perspective, hashtags contribute to supplying and shaping “process of thought” (van den Berg 2014, p. 4).

Creation of Communities with Hashtags

According to Olszanokwski (2015), there are four categories to make use of certain hashtags. First of all, through searching and using specific hashtags, individuals are enabled to “find like-minded people” on social media platforms. Therefore, individuals can be part of communities of their choice by following hashtags. Second, hashtags can function as a tool of ‘inspiration’. Through searching posts “tagged with a chosen hashtag”, individuals can “consider their own practice and look for specific aesthetic arrangements” meaning that they can follow and “create aesthetic trends” on social media. Furthermore, hashtags open a possibility for users to engage in “hashtag-based challenges, contests and/or communities”. Hashtag-based challenges and contests are generally created by organizations, companies or the social media platforms themselves. Last but not the least, hashtags are useful tools acting
as themes, for archiving texts, videos or photographs that can be found on multimedia social platforms -especially on micro-blogging platforms such as Tumblr- (p.235).

Daer, Hoffman and Goodman (2014) argue that based on their analysis of hashtags and what purposes they are used for, five categories of hashtags usage surfaces. First of all, hashtags can be used for the purpose of ‘emphasizing’. They create “emphasis or call attention to something in the post or something the post describes or refers to; usually expressed without judgment as a comment or reflection”. Examples of such hashtags are “#evidenceofspring; #lateafternoon; #goodtoknow”. The second usage of hashtags are ‘critiquing’. The critiquing hashtags are used by individuals “when the purpose of the post is express judgment or verdict regarding the object of discussion”. These hashtags can be exemplified as follows: “#skinnyjeansfail; #couldbeworse; #whyarewefacebookfriends”. Furthermore, hashtags can also be used for the purposes of ‘identifying’ which functions to refer to the author of the post, to express some identifying characteristic, mood, or reflective descriptor”. The examples of identifying hashtags are: “#ihatemyself; #needtofindmyhappyplace; #geeiamsubtle”. ‘Iterating’ as a function of hashtags are “used to express humor by referring to a well-known internet meme or cultural event. Could be considered an ‘inside joke’ or take the form of parody”. The examples of these hashtags are: “#hashtag; #toooldforhashtags; #instacat”. The last but not the least is ‘rallying’ that has the objective of creating “awareness or support to a cause or campaign”. Rallying hashtags are exemplified by: “#pitbullisnotacrime; #liftyourvoice; #YesAllWomen; #prayforboston” (p. 13-14).

Hashtagging a post boosts its “exposure” but it also plays a role in an account/blog or a post getting ‘flagged’/reported. Furthermore, by searching hashtags, some individuals might write undesirable or bullying comments on certain posts. Additionally, some users who participate in posting selfies on specific online communities can be disturbed and even harassed by these individuals. Therefore, even though hashtags make posts, communities and users visible it also makes them objects of “surveillance” by others (Olszanokwski 2015, p. 236). This issue will be further addressed in discussion.

Besides hashtagging used both on Instagram and Tumblr, it is also important to mention reblog function- which only Tumblr possesses- as a way of leveraging technological affordances to disseminate posts further and to more people. When a user on Tumblr decides to reblog another user’s post, the reblogged post becomes visible on the blog of the reblogger which means that followers of the person who reblog the post can begin to see this specific
post. This function “enables information to be propagated through the network” (Chang et al 2014, p.26-27). Since a specific post can be reblogged by many other users at the same time, the dissemination of the information is advanced and the further exposure of the post is made possible. Similar to hashtagging, reblogging also functions as a way to connect with other users. Reblogging “enable like-minded folks to find each other and form communities: intellectual, sexual, political, and otherwise” (Murray 2015, p. 497). According to Murray (2015), blogging has turned into “an extremely powerful force that has created complex social networks and affiliations” between users who live geographically far away from each other and different time zones. Furthermore, he argues that with its technological potential, “one of the most remarkable features of blogging culture is the way that” it brings “complete strangers” together and creates “lasting bonds that inspire creative collaboration” (p.504).

In sum, Foucault’s concept of power and disciplinary practices is combined with Goffman’s concept of stigmatization to be used in the analysis to create an understanding around the everyday experiences of stigmatization of females with body fat and hair. Foucault’s concept of disciplinary practice along with Bartk and Butler’s theorization of disciplining of female bodies are used in the analysis to investigate how female bodies are policed and regulated. With the help of these theories, what the female body activists are challenging and resisting are made evident for further investigation of how they make use of social media for their benefit. Thoits’ concept of challenging and resisting stigmatization is used in the analysis to investigate how female body activists challenge feminine norms and resist stigmatization. To understand how the action of challenging and resisting takes place in online communities, concepts of technological affordances, digital storytelling, selfies, hashtags and reblogs are used in the analysis.
4. Methodology

In this chapter, I will be talking about the methodological approaches that I have made use of in my study. As the first step, I discuss why adopting a qualitative approach is suitable for my research, how I have chosen my cases and why conducting a case study is preferred by me. Next, I briefly describe what netnography is and describe how I have conducted it in my own research. Moreover, I talk about how I made use of interviews and how I selected my interviewees. Another part I refer in this chapter is the ethical issues and the limitations of the study. Finally, I present the cases and the selected interviewees of the study as the sources of my empirical data.

4.1. Qualitative Research, Online Communities and Case Studies

My research design is heavily dependent on qualitative methods, for I have made use of semi-structured and in-depth interviews, case study research as well as netnography. This approach of mixing different methods can also be referred as “the notion of convergence” which brings together “different kinds of evidence, gathered in different ways” to lean on one research problem (Gillham 2000, p. 49). “Qualitative methods are essentially descriptive and inferential in character” and they “primarily” focus on the kind of evidence that will enable you to understand the meaning of what is going on”. Since “their strength is that” they shed light on issues and are illuminators of explanations, qualitative methods enable researchers “To investigate situations where little is known about what is there or what is going on” (Gillham 2000, p. 10-11). In this sense, qualitative methods prove themselves to be the best fit for my research due to lack of any serious and in-depth study about how female body activists use social media in digital media literature. Additionally, qualitative methods also enable researchers to “get under the skin of a group or organization to find out what really happens” and “to view the case from the inside out: to see it from the perspective of those involved” (Gillham 2000, p. 11). In this aspect, using qualitative methods in my research resonates with my aim to give female body activists who use social media in their favor, the possibility to talk about their everyday life experiences.
An important point of my research was to find accounts and blogs on social media platforms as cases to carry out my study on online body activism. According to Kozinets (2010), a researcher who plans to study online communities should look communities which are; (1) “relevant” to her “research focus and question(s)” ; (2) “active”, meaning they have “recent and regular communications”; (3) “interactive” and “have a flow of communications between participants”; (4) “substantial” and “have a critical mass of communicators”; (5) “heterogeneous” with various “number of different participants”; (6) “data-rich” which offers “more detailed or descriptively rich data” (p. 89). However, as Kozinets underlines, it is not necessary for an online community to have all the features mentioned as long as the data they provide is useful for the researcher and her study. Therefore, while I was choosing my cases, I searched for accounts/blogs which were relevant to my case, data-rich, heterogeneous and interactive and ended up investigating Chubby Bunnies on Tumblr and Body Hair Love Affair on Instagram particularly.

Case Study as a Methodological Approach

A case study is a research which has its “object of research limited in time and space” and enables the researcher to say “something meaningful beyond the case in question”. Therefore, as a methodology, cases are bound to space and time as well as the theories drawn around them by the researcher (Hancké 2009, p.62). The universe in which the researcher takes as her case “needs to be defined so that it has a logical ending” which means the researcher who chooses to conduct a case study must think about the issues in a specific time scope and space (Hancké 2009, p. 47). Unfortunately, as Flyvbjerg (2006) emphasizes case studies are still “oversimplified as to be grossly misleading” since they are seen as trivial studies which “cannot provide reliable information about the broader class” and “according to the conventional view, a case and a case study cannot be of value in and of themselves” (p. 220).

According to Flyvbjerg (2006), case studies do not demonstrate drawbacks in entering “the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or society” unlike the general judgement in social scientific circle against it as a methodology which is deemed to be shallow and too narrow-minded (p. 227). Similarly, Harland (2014) emphasizes that even though it might seem “unusual for the outcome of a case study to generalize in the same way that natural science data can”, this does not mean that it cannot be achieved (p. 1116). Since I agree with Flyvbjerg (2006) who argues that social sciences must be phronetic and problem-driven rather than methodology-driven and too concentrated on generalization as well as
universality, I find case studies as a useful methodology for my research (p. 40). My aim is not to investigate a universal phenomenon which proves itself to be true in a generalized sense everywhere and anytime, what I aim for is to carry out an in-depth study about how female body activists make use of social media in the specific communities I have chosen.

4.2. Netnography

As the main methodological approach to conduct my research I have chosen to carry out netnography. The term “netnography” derives from “internet” and “ethnography” which is “an approach to analyze online communities systematically” (Belz & Baumbach 2010, p.304). Just like ethnography, netnography adapts “research techniques such as observation to study cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communication” (Belz & Baumbach 2010, p. 305) and it can be defined as “participant- observational research based in online fieldwork” (Kozinets 2010, p. 58). The main aim of netnography is to achieve “ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon” which can be investigated through the online communities (Kozinets 2010, p. 58). I have chosen to make use of netnography in my research since it enables researchers to make their own observations from a distance which reflects the reality of the natural and free-flowing medium as online communities operate. I believe conducting netnography helped me to do an in-depth analysis of the conditions in which online content of body activism is constructed and gave me insights concerning the usage of the online spaces at hand. However, Kozinets (2010) underlines that netnography can only be conducted meaningfully in online communities. Therefore, even though it is not my aim to investigate if the accounts I have chosen are online communities, it is important to mention why they can be considered as online communities in line with the description of Rheingold. Rheingold (1993), developed the terminology ‘virtual community’ to define online communities in which individuals hold “public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace”. He furthermore argues that individuals who participate in online communities “exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support” (Rheingold qtd in Kozinets 2010, p. 8). In this aspect, with their personal and supportive natures, Chubby Bunnies and Body Hair Love Affair can be considered as online communities in which the participants discuss societal issues, share their feelings and engaging exchanging as well as creating knowledge
through posts. Therefore, conducting netnography in such online spaces was the best choice to go deeper in my study.

According to Kozinets (2010) there are six steps to conduct netnography properly; (1) “research planning”; (2) “entrée”; (3) “data collection”; (4) “interpretation”; (5) “ensuring ethical standards” and (6) “research representation”. The first step is “research planning” which includes deciding on the subject and the research questions of the study and investigating the online communities to find the best fitting one for the study at hand. The second step is called “entrée” which aims the researcher to be introduced in the community (p. 61). In my own study, as the first part of my ‘entrée’, I have reached out to the owners— with the messaging interface on Instagram and Tumblr— of the Chubby Bunnies blog and Body Hair Love Affair account by telling them that I am a researcher who is interested in studying their online communities and asked them for their permission to carry out my investigation which was very welcomed by the owners themselves. As a side note, I was hoping to investigate another Instagram account on body hair additionally but reaching out as a researcher to introduce myself and to get a permission to investigate the account ended up in getting reported and blocked from the community for me. As the second part, I have reached out to the participants I have selected - the selection process will be addressed further in this section- to let them know about my presence in these online communities as a researcher to be able to have interviews with them in a conversational tone. In general, the reactions I have gotten were very supportive but there were also participants who could not determine if I was really there for research purposes or if I was ‘joking’—as they have expressed— with them. When they realized that I was indeed a researcher, they were really eager to talk about body activism, issues of body acceptance and stigmatization of female bodies. The next two steps of netnography are “data collection” and “interpretation”. Kozinets (2010) argues that data collection in netnography “means communicating with members of a culture or community” and this specific communication can be established with various forms. But the main idea behind it is to achieve “relevant involvement, engagement, contact, interaction, communion, relation, collaboration and connection” with the participants who are sometimes geographically distant and live in different time zones. Furthermore, the data collection in netnography “does not happen in isolation from data analysis”. As the researcher collects her data, she “struggles” to decode the meanings behind the actions and the communications carried out by the community members “within the online communal and cultural context in which they are embedded” instead of collecting data in an isolated and “unspecified” manner.
According to Kozinets (2010), unlike the content analyst, the netnographer aims to read the data she collects “deeply for their cultural information, pondering them and seeking to learn from them” to make sense of how a certain community operates and how the members participate online (p. 95-96). In this context, this was one of the main reasons why I have chosen to conduct netnography rather than a basic content analysis, to not to miss out on the cultural nuances and personal ties which the female body activists demonstrate.

The first part of my data collection and analysis was spending some amount of time on the Chubby Bunnies blog on Tumblr and Body Hair Love Affair account on Instagram, aiming to grasp how people communicate with each other and how they participate in posting selfies. The selfies posted by the participants are the main content for my data analysis to see how these women make use of them to resist stigmatization and challenge feminine norms. The data derived from Body Hair Love Affair on Instagram, is 172 submitted selfies in total. However, the total number of posts- approximately 88,000- in the Chubby Bunnies blog is fairly greater than the Instagram account. It is also important to underline at this point that not all the posts in Chubby Bunnies are selfies of followers, they also include posts challenging racism, sexism and homophobia as well as advocating for feminism, gay rights and body activism in specific. Therefore, the total amount of the selfies posted on Chubby Bunnies was not possible to calculate. For this reason, my data collection on this blog is limited to approximately last 2 months; from around 20.02.2016 to 20.04.2016. Although the number of posts concerned with issues of gender, race, feminism and body activism in general are less on Body Hair Love Affair, it is possible to observe the Instagram account referring to these issues similar to Chubby Bunnies. Here, I would like to underline that I have only investigated the selfies posted by the participants in this time scope and did not go deeper into the general posts regarding broader issues as I have mentioned previously, featured by Chubby Bunnies or Body Hair Love Affair. The second part of the data collection and analysis will be addressed in the next section in relation to making use of interviews. The data analysis was mainly looking at every selfie posted on these online communities from different perspectives and storing them with screenshot. Furthermore, the data analysis included investigation of the selfies as images and the texts posted alongside the selfies of the participants. Both the images and the texts were analyzed in relation to the discourses of body image, acceptance, positivity as well as challenging and resistance, which were created around them by the participants themselves. Therefore, I have investigated how they made use of their selfies, which aspects of their bodies they have put an emphasis on and how they
engaged in taking selfies to deconstruct such discourse. Additionally, all the hashtags posted with the selfies have been read and were categorized according to their context which will be presented further in the analysis. Another part of the data analysis was reading personal stories of the participants under the selfies they have posted. The important aspect of this part of the analysis to understand how female body activists framed their stories and for what purpose they used main narratives which were observable frequently. For a better presentation of these narratives, I have detected the themes and issues that are being addressed in these digital stories. Similarly, they will be presented in the analysis.

4.3. Ethical Issues and Limitations of the Study

Moving on to the step which is called “ensuring ethical standards” by Kozinets (2010), I have made sure to explain what I am doing in these online communities as transparent as possible. Although it was impossible to notify everyone in these online communities of my presence, I believe I was sensitive in not crossing personal and private boundaries when I was making use of the participants’ selfies when conducting my analysis. The selfies presented in the analysis section belong to the participants who granted me permission to make use of them in this study. The interviewees were not forced to talk about any details they did not feel comfortable in sharing and they were ensured anonymity if they wished to not to use their real names. For this purpose, some of them wanted use their online account names or nicknames they use in their real lives. Another issue I would like to address here is the limitation of the study I have conducted. First of all, I have conducted a case study which is intended to be limited in a time scope and certain communities. Similarly, due to the short nature of the master thesis, I have narrowed down the scope of my study to female body activists and stigmatization of female body fat and body hair. Unfortunately, other genders and stigmatized physical attributes are left out on purpose. Therefore, the online communities I have chosen to investigate mainly demonstrate female participation in posting selfies, even though they welcome people of all genders. Another limitation was the issues of visibility of ‘black women’ specifically addressed by the followers on the Instagram account Body Hair Love Affair. The owner clarified the situation by explaining that the submissions are made voluntarily and she expressed that she also hoped for more racial and cultural diversity on the account. While I was investigating the possible causes behind black women not submitting such selfies on this particular account, I observed that they usually preferred to stay in the communities on social media platforms which were entirely dedicated to black women. The
last point of limitation I would like to address is the cultural diversity, even though both Body
Hair Love Affair and Chubby Bunnies had participants from very different backgrounds, they
were mainly settled in the Western sphere which resulted in making it impossible for me to
find online body activists in these communities who are from the continent of Asia.

4.4. Making Use of Interviews

As mentioned previously, there are no in-depth studies carried out or new theories created
around body activism and social media usage. Therefore, I believe, studying this subject from
the scratch calls me to engage in conversation with real life body activists, to understand their
experience, their ways of using social media platforms and how useful they find it for
themselves and for others for the purpose of resisting stigmatization and challenging existing
norms of femininity. For this purpose, I carried out semi-structured, in-depth interviews
because conducting interviews is “a common method used to elicit qualitative data and
provide insight into people’s behavior and the meaning they ascribe to that behavior”
(Bolderston 2012, p. 67).

According to Kozinets (2010), “depth interviews allow researchers to broaden their
understanding of what they observe online”. For example, through conducting online in-depth
interviews, a researcher can make meaning of how the “social situation of the culture
member” such as “their age, gender, nationality, ethnic orientation, sexual orientation, and so
on” and how this social positioning “influences their online community participation” (p. 47).
Furthermore, he points out that in-depth interviews enable a researcher to:

1. “bring in a detailed subjective understanding of the lived experience of online
community participants.”
2. “deepen the understanding of the relationship between a person’s own unique
socio—cultural situation and their online culture or community activities or
behaviours.”
3. “gain a detailed, grounded, subjective sense of an online community member’s
perspective and sense of meaning.” (Kozinets 2010, p.47).

Therefore, making use of in-depth interviews, enabled me to engage in conversation with real
life body activists and to understand their experience better and deeper, from their standpoints
and perspectives as stigmatised individuals and challengers.

According to Hancké (2009), another important part of intelligent research design is that a
researcher should make sure she is not relying on only one kind of data (p. 104). Additionally,
he emphasizes that it is essential for a researcher to “triangulate the insights” she obtained “during the interview with material that supports” these insights (Hancké 2009, p.104). This is an important point in this study for it covers a relatively new and unexplored field. Similarly, Kozinets (2010) emphasizes that if netnography is ‘employed’ in an accurate manner, the researcher might be provided “with a window into naturally occurring behaviours, such as communal discussions” which enable her to enhance such data collected from netnography “with more intrusive options such as communal participation and member interviews” (p. 56).

Since the main aim of interviewing is “to collect insights and pieces of information” that a researcher can make use of to “match to other pieces of information”, it is important to support the data collected from interviews with other sets of data accumulated through different methodologies to “make up a convincing story” (Hancké 2009, p.104), as I have done with the data I have collected from netnography and the interviews.

The second and maybe the most important part of my data collection to understand how female body activists make use of social media to challenge norms and resist stigmatization, was the semi-structured and in-depth synchronous online interviews I have conducted with 12 participants which also included the owners of the Chubby Bunnies and Body Hair Love Affair. The interviews I have conducted were synchronous, meaning they took place “in real time using online venues such as video-conferencing or IM” and with one interviewee at a time. The reasoning behind this interview method is because synchronous interviewing “closely resembles a traditional research interview” with only difference being it taking place online (Bolderston 2012, p.73). I believe with the anonymity that I could adapt to the online interviews made the interviewees more comfortable to talk about sensitive issues such as the driving forces, such as everyday experiences of discrimination or bullying, behind why they have decided to become body activists. Furthermore, when necessary, new interview questions have been constructed simultaneously when the online interviews were being conducted to be able to discuss important issues which were not included in the original set of questions but were expressed by the interviewees. The selection of the interviewees was done manually and based on their cultural backgrounds. I aimed to find participants from different countries and from different ages to have a broader outlook on how they use social media, what they aim to achieve and detect the differences and similarities of their experiences. With different backgrounds, I wanted to have a collection of interview data which is more generalizable and rich. After the collection, all of the interview data has been coded according to themes and used to create a conversational way of presenting the analysis. The analysis is
heavily influenced by the testimonies of the interviewees since it was important for me to convey the female body activists’ own voice and experiences. The following table presents the information about the participants which they willingly agreed to be enclosed in this thesis.

4.5. Notes on Research Design and Standpoint as a Researcher

As mentioned previously, my study is profoundly dependent on qualitative methods. As a part of my qualitative design, I have conducted netnography to gain an in-depth understanding of the online communities at hand. Although netnography is a good way to carry out this task, it also involves its risks. First of all, the interpretation of the content posted and the communicative texts such as comments and discussion points between members of such communities require time to get familiar with the communicative processes. To be able to fully understand how people interact with each other and with other outside these communities, the researcher must spend great deal of time by carrying out netnographical observation. For my study, the observation period was roughly 4 months and was only focused on understanding certain aspects of the community in relation to body activism. Therefore, the netnography I have conducted ended up being fairly limited to the context of answering my research questions feasibly, although netnography aims a broader and longer in-depth investigation of communities.

Another point I would like to address here is the choice of interviews to understand RQ1 and RQ2. I have chosen to conduct interviews to be able to understand the female body activists from their own perspective. Although my netnographical analysis include interpretation of online data based on observations -from outside- , a greater deal of information on how female body activists make use of social media has been obtained from the interviews themselves. The risky point here comes with the reliability of interview data. First of all, when it comes to conducting interviews, there is always a challenge of detecting truth. Unfortunately, not all interview data might not be 100% reliable just because the interviewee claims so. The problematic nature of what people claim to do online or offline and what they actually do in their real lives under the gaze of a researcher is a common risk in studies similar to mine. There might be unfortunately exaggeration in claims or hiding a part of what truth is. It might also be harder for the researcher to see the cues if the interviewee is painting the truth rather than presenting it as it is especially in online text-based interviews since there
is no real face-to-face contact. Being aware of such risks, as I have mentioned earlier, by bringing them together, I have both implemented my own observations and perspectives from different interviewees all around the world to answer my research questions in the most possible un-biased way.

As I have mentioned previously in my introduction, I was inspired to conduct such a study based on my real life experiences of stigmatization. Therefore, the issues of emotional involvement and personal interest were the challenges I had to face when doing my study. Most of the stories which were told by them had familiar struggles and feelings embedded in them with my own story as a marginalized woman. At this point, it was really easy for me, as a researcher, to identify with these female body activists. However, I was aware of the risks of being emotionally involved in the stories of my interviewees even before I have started to carry out my study and conduct my interviews. Therefore, I have done my best to create interview questions that would somehow enable me to avoid severe identification with them. For this reason, the only personal question I have directed towards them was about their everyday life experiences of stigmatization linked to their body hair or fat, not because I was disinterested in hearing more details but I had to ensure a level of objectivity from my standpoint. Similarly, when I was conducting my interviews, I was aware of the fact that I was talking to women who I could create strong bonds with if I were not there to talk to them in the role of a researcher. Some of my interviewees had say very interesting and even at times intimate or sad things to say related to the experiences of their bodies in their homes, in school, their work places and even on the streets. To not get carried away by such emotionally familiar information, I have strictly kept the interviews in line with my interview guide and asked them additional questions only related to my study and not my personal interests. Needless to say, despite every measurement I have taken before and during conducting my study, there was a certain level of emotional involvement present in the process. Even so, I believe I could keep my levels of involvement at the lowest by keeping in mind that my objective as a researcher is to be neutral.

4.6. Data

The empirical data which is used to investigate RQ1 & RQ2 were collected from the blog Chubby Bunnies on Tumblr and Body Hair Love Affair on Instagram. Moreover, the 12 interviews I have conducted with the female body activists from these online communities
provided me with further qualitative data to be combined with the netnographic data collection to be used in the analysis.

**Chubby Bunnies and Body Hair Love Affair as Online Social Movement Communities**

According to Lian and Grue (2016), an online social movement community is:

[a] sustained network of individuals who work to maintain an overlapping set of goals and identities tied to a social movement linked through online discussions. These communities are constituted, expressed and mediated via a chain of textual and visual utterances from individual participants, posted on the internet (p.3).

In light with what Lian and Grue (2016) claim, **Body Hair Love Affair** and **Chubby Bunnies** can be considered as online social movement communities. Established by Bec Mae Scully for personal inspiration of body positivity and acceptance at first, **Chubby Bunnies** has been up and running for almost 6 years. Although the initiation of the blog was for personal reasons, the account started to get submissions from the followers who wanted to participate in posting their selfies and tell their stories related to female body fat a while after the blog accelerated in popularity. From then on, as Bec expressed, the blog turned into a community of ‘bunnies’ who continued to participate in posting selfies for further exposure of female body fat to create positivity and acceptance as a follower started social movement. The blog currently has approximately 160,000 followers, 88,000 posts and it gets news submissions from people approximately 50-200 times a day.

![Figure 1: The opening text written by Bec to underline the rules of the online community Chubby Bunnies and what issues it aims to bring a discussion about](image)
The account Body Hair Love Affair was created in 2013 by Shannon Darby after she became invested in issues of female body hair and its stigmatization. Her interest peaked after a personal experience of stigmatization by others when she decided to grow out her armpit hair and when she detected the negative attention directed towards Miley Cyrus on media for growing out her armpit hair and dying them, just like her. The blog has been running for 2 years with 2,239 followers and 194 posts in total.

Figure 2: The welcome post made by Shannon the owner of the account, underlining the issues Body Hair Love Affair discusses and how to participate in submitting selfies.

Both of the communities express their interest in engage in discussions around public debates. This interest is one of the most important features of both communities since they strive for changing mind-sets of individuals and educating not only them but also other participants as a part of body activist action. In the description of the community Chubby Bunnies, it is underlined that the blog is a space for discussing “body positivity, bullying, feminism and social/political issues” as well as submitting selfies as ‘visial utterances’ of individuals who participate in the community. Similarly, as well as engaging in body activism to discuss stigmatization of female body hair through posting selfies, Body Hair Love Affair engages in discussion of body acceptance and positivity in all its dimensions especially with zines as a visual tools of resistance.
The communities have their own set of followers some of who participate in posting selfies and others who prefer only following posts or engage in the discussions in these communities. Both accounts are public spaces and they can be found as well as seen everyone online which gives individuals the possibility to lurk without following them. Similarly, individuals who are both followers and lurkers are allowed to engage in discussions by commenting on the posts -in **Body Hair Love Affair** on Instagram- or by reblogging the content with their own comments to be visible in their personal blogs -in **Chubby Bunnies** on Tumblr-

**Table 1: General Information about the Interviewees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Online community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexis Fowler</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Transportation Coordinator</td>
<td>Body Hair Love Affair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arantxa Von Appen</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Fashion Design Student and Plus Size Model</td>
<td>Chubby Bunnies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bec Mae Scully</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Full time mum and housewife.</td>
<td>Chubby Bunnies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Body Hair Love Affair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storm</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Life Coach</td>
<td>Chubby Bunnies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exposureacceptance</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Student, Brewery server</td>
<td>Body Hair Love Affair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Claffin</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Healthcare worker</td>
<td>Body Hair Love Affair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mawi Mawsters</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Chubby Bunnies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon Darby</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>On a break and study to focus on health and travel</td>
<td>Body Hair Love Affair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rautanainen</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Preparing to get into Arts Academy</td>
<td>Chubby Bunnies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thehairylife22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Body Hair Love Affair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valeshushka</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Chubby Bunnies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Analysis

The analysis presented here is built upon the intersection of the concepts in the theoretical framework I have created previously and the empirical data collected from the cases and the interviews conducted. I would like to underline that some of concepts of disciplinary practices, stigmatization and challenging/resistance have been used to understand and interpret the data at hand and guide and support the analysis. On the other hand, concepts of hashtagging, reblogging, selfies, technological affordances and digital storytelling have been derived from the data as the theories which are grounded in empirical data specifically.

5.1. Defining Body Activism

As a terminology, body activism emerges in online spaces and offline discussions, specifically used by activists themselves. However, the term has not yet been adopted by academia itself. Therefore, as I have mentioned earlier, there are no direct scholarly studies which define what body activism is. For this reason, I would like to describe what it is, in my own terms and within the context of my thesis and with the help of previous studies which are useful for me to create my definition. I also decided to make use of the testimonies from my own interviewees –10 out of 12- who considered themselves as body activists, to have different perspectives that can be included in the formation of the definition. Another point I should underline is that I only aim to define body activism briefly in relation to what it aims to achieve and what issues it discusses.

It is important to understand how bodies are associated with ‘social action’ when trying to understand what body activism is. Klawiter (1999) underlines that human bodies are “site of cultural contest, a flexible signifier of identities and meanings, and an anchor of political knowledge and action” (cited in Sasson-Levy & Rapoport 2003, p.381). In line with this, it is possible for us to say that ‘body practices’ are intertwined with “the basic values and themes of the society” in a certain cultural context. Additionally, and as mentioned previously, “discourse and social institutions are produced and reproduced only through bodies” and their discipline. However, it is substantial to see bodies not only as controlled and regulated objects but also as sites which have the potential for “subversiveness and self-empowerment” by challenging and resisting disciplinary practices. Thus, bodies can be “instrumental in carrying” a certain movement’s political message”. In this sense, significance of bodies and their power in social movements should be emphasized as “agent(s) of social change”.

67
(Sasson-Levy & Rapoport 2003, p. 381; 398-400). Therefore, we should keep in mind that, essentially, it is this exact potential that paves the way to social action of bodies and body activism.

According to Sasson-Levy & Rapoport (2003), there are “two different meanings of the body in social movements”. The first one is the body as “the major subject matter of the protest”. In this case any social movement regarding bodily rights - “abortion”, “rape” “violence”- and discrimination of certain bodies based on their features- color, disability, fat, hair- are included in this first category. The second category of bodies’ relation to social movement is their potential to “be used as the carrier for social and political protest”. In this case, bodies can be used as “medium” of protest when the social movements are related to bodily issues mentioned in the first category (Sasson-Levy & Rapoport 2010, p.398). Examples of these social movements can be Femen protests and SlutWalk movement as I have described earlier in the thesis. However, bodies can also be used for social protest which are concerned with other issues. An example for such movement can be Greenpeace activists chaining themselves in social protests (Sasson-Levy & Rapoport 2010, p.398).

In line with what Sasson-Levy & Rapoport (2010) argue about bodies’ involvement in social movements, the female body activists who contribute to Chubby Bunnies and Body Hair Love Affair make use of their bodies in both ways. They aim to project attention to issues of female bodies with fat or hair and they also make use of their own bodies in these online movements to achieve challenging of norms and resistance to stigmatization, by posting their selfies online. Therefore, with the ways that female body activists use them for activist causes, female bodies are turned into sites that socially constructed feminine norms and beauty ideals are re-negotiated.

According to the female body activists I have interviewed, body activism is mainly about challenging societal assumptions of what is considered as an acceptable body.

*Storm:* ...there is so much stigma and misunderstanding out there, really easy example is that those of a larger size are often viewed as lazy or as if they eat too much, don't look after themselves etc, and no one knows how they actually became that way, it could just be that they are happier that way and that is how they want to be, or it could be health or any number of reasons, likewise the same goes for people of a smaller size, sometimes someone very skinny is called anorexic and told they don't eat when they may just have a high metabolism. People of all shapes and sizes are valid...and I will always do all within my way to remind others of that.
Additionally, they believe that body activism is about the power to choose what to do with one’s own body and support others in their choices of bodily practices without having to obey societal norms or ideals.

*Alexis:* I personally just feel liberated not removing the hair. It’s like saying FU to advertisements and assholes for trying to make me feel I need to change in order to be acceptable...I have the same right as any person to make the decision to remove my body hair when and how and if I choose.

*Shannon:* ...The power is in choice and supporting each other in their choices.

*TGL22:* ...We live in a world where we have to pay so much more money out of our pocket to even be considered a respectable woman. Young women need to help others to accept them in all forms we come in - whether we shave or not, whether we put makeup on or not, and whether we work or not. Whatever we choose to do we should not be disqualified from being a woman...

The main idea behind body activism, according to these female body activists, is to change other individuals’ mind-sets which drive them to control their own bodies as well as being forced to comply with disciplinary practices.

*Marie:* ...I think it is revolutionary for a woman to be publicly proud and accepting of her body. Posting body positive pictures allows me to do that work.

*TH22:* ...Even if things are legal, social mindset controls behaviour which is really what I want to help liberate...I want my daughter to go to school and feel that she deserves to be a healthy weight, with a body unshaven if she so desires, work or stay home if she desires when she gets that old, and do whatever she dreams of without being inhibited by a society with limited beliefs telling her she can't do one or all of those things because it will make her less of a woman...I consider myself a body activist because I'm done starving myself and ripping the hair out of my most sensitive areas for the sake of being considered a woman...I am working to liberate women from having to starve themselves and go through endless body mutilation/ change to be told they have successfully become something that they already were to begin with. Our bodies are naturally perfect. We do not need to change one thing about ourselves.

An important part of body activism is that it welcomes individuals from all body types, all gender preferences and all races as well as classes. In this sense, it is usually mentioned and related with feminist movements which desire equality for all.

*Bec:* The issues I focus on have really evolved over time to be honest. At first it was purely just seeing more fat bodies being represented. But then because most of the following I have is from O.S. (overseas), I really started feeling more connected to my beautiful followers and becoming more invested in their stories and lives. Learning more about racism and colourism, and classism, and sexism, it's all entwined with feminism and body positivity. You can't really call yourself body positive if you're not willing to accept all people regardless of what their bodies look like.
**Rautanainen:** I think posting to the website shows that this affects more than one person, and showing yourself in this manner strengthens the idea that we're all in this together...I can say that most important in the feminist message that chubby-bunnies gives is that we are all included. Trans, big or small, black or white, everyone is accepted, and that we will live on...we will stand strong and prevail.

As Bec summarizes the main idea behind engaging in body activism on social media platforms is to achieve “representation” of females who are stigmatized because of their certain physical attributes such as body fat and hair. Additionally, “education” as well as raising “awareness and understanding” are also expressed by Bec among the goals of carrying out body activism.

Some of the female body activists I have interviewed not only engage in online activism but also offline action in their everyday life setting for their causes. For example, Marie points out that she considers “being comfortable in her unshaven skin”. Other body activists agree upon that answering questions about their body fat and hair and trying to educate them in the underlying reasons of why some physical attributes are stigmatized and deemed “unacceptable” and how feminine norms are actually socially constructed and normative. Similarly, they also expressed that they do not shy away from engaging in a discussion of females’ choice of liberating themselves from these norms as disciplinary practices which marginalizes them as “deviant bodies”. They also engage in educating children, such as Bec educating her son about personal choice and Rautanainen educating her sister about acceptance of different body sizes. Some activists like Arantxa believe that limiting other individuals’ power on her body is the offline action she carries out in her everyday life. She expresses that she simply does not “accept third-party opinions on my body”, therefore, she does not let others discipline, regulate or police her body by wearing the “the pieces of clothes” she “want” and manifesting that no one is “entitled to have an opinion about” her “body”. Additionally, some other activists like Storm “work with others in peer support groups for mental health” to emphasize the importance of body acceptance and positivity and discuss issues of self, body image and mental health with other individuals as well as her close environment including her friends.

First of all, even though I only investigate female body activists and their activities on social media platforms, I must underline that I make use of body activism as a terminology which involves all kinds of body acceptance and positivity movements of all ages, genders, races and classes. These movements include fat activism, body hair activism, menstrual activism as examples.
Based on my research, here, I would like to define the goals of body activists from a broader perspective;

1. Body activists aim to represent individuals with bodies which are and have been misrepresented and/or under-represented.
2. Body activists aim to educate the public on bodies and social control to create body acceptance towards stigmatized bodies.
3. Body activists aim to resist stigmatization of bodies by exposing underlying workings of social interactions which result in disciplining, regulating and policing of all bodies.
4. Body activists aim to expose bodies which are stigmatized to make them more visible to the public and promote diversity and heterogeneity in societies.
5. Body activists aim to challenge socially constructed norms of bodies related to gender and beauty ideals by transgressing these norms and engaging these actions overtly—such as by flaunting—and not only in social movement communities but also in their everyday lives.
6. Body activists aim to liberate human bodies from docility by promoting freedom of choice and rebelling against social norms.

These aims which body activists hold are closely related to body politics. Chandler and Munday state in *A Dictionary of Media and Communication* that there are certain definitions for what body politics is. First, it can be identified as “an ideological struggle between individuals, groups, and social institutions over control of the human body”. Second, it specifically can be about “institutionalized social practices and policies through which the human body is regulated”. Third, “the active struggle of socially disadvantaged groups against the social forces regulating the use and representation of their bodies, originally associated… with feminism—notably in association with rape, sexual abuse, violence, and abortion—” (2016). In line with the definitions provided, the struggles of body activists which are related to control and discipline of bodies as well as advocating bodily issues to create body positivity and acceptance are direct links of body activism to body politics. Additionally, as Richardson (2010) argues, transgressive bodies— which are identified as bodies that transgress societal norms—are “rebellious bodies” which acknowledge societal norms and standards but choose to resist or challenge them (p. 15). In this sense, I would like to refer to body activism as the *activism of ‘rebellious bodies’* that is concerned with struggles of body politics.
5.2. Everyday Experiences of Stigmatization

Since my thesis deals with female body activists using social media platforms to challenge societal norms and resist stigmatization, it was important for me to investigate how they were stigmatized in their everyday lives because of their body fat or hair. Thoits (2011) states that, what drives some individuals- the stigma bearer herself or someone outside the stigmatized group- to engage in resistance is “the encounter” of “series of events” which acts as a moment of epiphany. The recognition of drastic “impacts of stereotypes, social rejection” and inequity of “differential treatment” leads the individual to “commit” to challenge representations of stigma bearers and to better their conditions in the society (21). In line with what Thoits (2011) argues, this part of my analysis aims to create an understanding of what these female body activists face, to make sense of what they are challenging and resisting from their own experiences and stories.

One of the questions directed to the interviewees for this purpose was:

“Can you briefly talk about any experiences related to your body fat/hair in your everyday life?”

Almost all of the interviewees were quite open about their everyday experiences of stigmatization concerning how people react to them. The stigmatization in their social interactions were created not only by the strangers outside of their social circle but also by their family members, colleagues, classmates or partners:

**Alexis:** ... if people see my excess body hair does it become kind of an issue. People are uncomfortable seeing a woman with armpit hair or leg hair...I always want to remind people that if they stopped shaving (waxing, etc) that they would look like this too...I shared it (a selfie of herself showing body hair) with my coworkers. They were grossed out by it.

**Bec:** I come from a family of thin/tall people... So growing up was quite hard for me in my household. I actually used to do modelling when I was a child: McDonalds commercial, cheesecake shop, Telstra phone company, Vogue magazine! But then around 12-ish I started getting pudgy and filling out...Then I got a belly and my thighs touched and I got a little double chin...Just like many of my followers and submitters I got bullied at home, school and then work about my weight. I'm always "the fat friend...."

**Rautanainen:** Well, first of all is my immediate family, which has not been very supportive or understanding. I have heard comments like "You would look better skinnier" from my grandmother and been told that I am "too feminine" by my father.
Here Rautanainen’s father stigmatizes her by saying she is ‘too feminine’. In my opinion there is a double-entendre concerning this claim. When I asked Rautanainen who is 19 years old and lives in Finland, what her father possibly means by ‘too feminine’, she told me that she probably had “too much breast and bottom”. In this aspect, her figure does not fit the slender body type which signifies youth as expressed by Bartky, therefore, she is stigmatized by her naturally ‘feminine’ features and her being ‘too feminine’ represents unattractiveness in her father’s eyes.

In their testimonies, Alexis, Bec, Shannon and Marie talk about how they were mainly stigmatized by their mothers when it comes to their body hair or fat.

Shannon: My mother HATES it! She’s always hassling me to shave them. In fact, she’s getting married at the end of the year and told me I couldn’t be a bridesmaid if I didn’t shave them. My partner is not a fan of hairy legs, so I still shave them, which definitely annoys me.

Marie: The first time I stopped shaving I was in high school. I was going to a formal dance and my mother was very upset that I hadn’t shaved. She complained and shamed me until I shaved my armpits.

Alexis: ...my mom insists that I’m hairier than my brother (we are equally as hairy but heaven forbid a woman be just as hairy as a man!).

Stigmatization of body hair and fat does not stop within social interactions between family members. Members of the society are raised in certain discourses of stigmatization and the disciplinary practices begin in earlier stages of life as Foucault mentions. In this aspect, not only adults stigmatize certain bodily attitudes but also children, who learn what or who to stigmatize from social interactions embedded in bodily discourse of femininity or masculinity.

Marie: When I was 20, I worked in a summer camp with 6 year olds. When one of the children saw me in a bathing suit with hairy armpits, she said ‘No one will ever love you’.

As mentioned previously, fat or hairy female bodies are seen as “deviant” and society sees these bodies as objects that should be monitored and controlled (see 3.4) The interviewees underlined the strong connection between their stigmatization as a being result of not complying with societal norms of femininity or beauty ideals embedded in societies. In this sense, the stigmatization of the bodies of these female body activities by their family members, partners or friends, act as an ‘unrecognized’ disciplinary practice to fit them into “molds”. I refer to the exercise of such stigmatization as ‘unrecognized’ disciplinary practice because they are embedded in social interactions of everyday life and are mainly used by individuals without them knowing for what purpose it serves in reality.
Most of the interviewees expressed that they were somehow discriminated in their social settings by rude comments, disapproving looks or direct engagement in bullying. They were also aware of the societal gender norms and beauty ideals forced upon them. Another point to be addressed is that women who possess stigmatized attributes are excluded in their social interactions and sometimes denied from interacting with certain individuals as Valeshushka pointed out in her interview: “Besides being cubby, I'm also pretty tall in my country, and this has made people around me don't usually approach. So I have just a few friends who accept me the way I am”.

Similarly, Bec expresses that her appearance is not in conformity with societal norms neither as a woman or a mother and she expresses getting used to everyday judgements thrown her way: “And now being a young mother myself, plus being heavily tattooed, fat and bright pink hair I don't really blend into society… I see a lot of people during the day and I've gotten used to people staring at me”.

However, instead of choosing social exclusion or alienating herself as a way to cope with stigmatization (see 3.3), Bec tells us that she prefers to empower other women who she sees on the streets and are ‘chubby’ just like her. She identifies this as an offline action for the cause beside her online actions for the cause of body positivity, challenging norms and resisting stigmatization. She also aims to raise and educate her son in such a manner and hopes that his attitude creates an impact on the children around him in school:

Bec: ...I try and be body posi around my son which then in theory, rubs off on the little people (other students) around him...

Another interviewee, Alexis points out that women with stigmatized attributes are not fitting the ‘certain mold’ of worthiness in society. Therefore, their exclusion and discrimination do not only affect their social relationships with family members, friends or partners but they might also be deprived of ‘success or security’ in their everyday lives.

Alexis: ... Society makes you feel like you have to fit a certain mold to be worthy (of love, success, pleasure, security, etc). And I never felt like I fit that mold. I am fat. I have dark course body hair... I have such pale skin that you can see my blue and purple veins... It is like there are some many things about me that I would have to go through so much personal maintenance to change, in order to fit that mold. And really, it's all a fallacy.

The issue of ‘personal maintenance’ is also discussed by Bartky who tells us that natural states of female bodies are not accepted when they do not fit into feminine norms. Thus, they are expected to undergo series of personal maintenance such as waxing body hair, dieting and
exercising to become or stay thin as well as applying makeup to hide blemishes or any visible proof of aging (see 3.2).

As Goffman mentions, people who are put into the category of the stigmatized and discriminated tend to have normative perception of identities which are in line with what other members of the society think. Therefore, the stigma bearer wants to be seen as a normal person who is indeed no different than other individuals apart from possessing a culturally constructed stigma (see 3.3):

*Arantxa*: I grew up with a fat body and always saw myself as a normal person, without distinction of others, but in the early teenage years, I began to see that society had a different view from mine... So I began to ask myself the reason for this distinction and want to break this pattern, showing that I am a normal person with potential in life as all the people around me.

However, instead of feeling herself falling short due to her body fat, as a plus size model, *Arantxa* engages in online body activism with her selfies, to show people of all sizes, including herself, are beautiful and worthy. Therefore, she advocates for body acceptance and ‘true beauty’ rather than trying to alter her appearance to fit in beauty standards. She also aims to inspire and empower other women.

Foucault mentions that all discourses are created by power relations and powerful groups have the upper hand to create knowledge. He argues that with scientific innovations of the modern era, scientific discourses have also been used for disciplinary purposes. In line with Foucault’s outlook, as mentioned previously, discourses around bodies are also a product of power relations and certain individuals can be stigmatized such as insane, criminal or else to be controlled by states or other individuals of the society. Similarly, discourse of obesity falls into this category of discipline. We live in a century an obese person is always branded as unhealthy without any real proof.

*Rautanainen*: My mother keeps fussing about my health, suggesting every now and then that most my health issues are related to overweight... Fussing over my eating led to me starting binge-eating for comfort, and I would stuff anything into my while my family was not home...

*Storm*: ...I’ve had weight issues most of my life due to medical conditions that cause weight gain, and difficulty losing weight. I went through a lot of bullying in school due to my image, amongst other things... I have struggled with body dysmorphia and eating disorder issues alongside other mental health issues that have all tied into my mental health in some way or another, alongside other aspects of course.
What individuals overlook is that stigmatization might be more harmful than obesity itself. As Storm and Rautanainen expresses, they have been struggling with eating disorders and mental issues because of their exclusion and discrimination. Thus, as a disciplinary practice, stigmatization of body fat might not help stigma bearers to become more “healthy” but result in poorer physical and mental health related to experiences of bullying.

Another important point here is the stigmatization of female body hair and fat specifically by males. Previously, in my theoretical framework, I have mentioned that women with body hair are not seen as feminine since hair is seen as a masculine attribute.

**THL22:** My boyfriend, who will stand up for me in public, is not in love with my stance on body hair. Honestly he has called me a “beast” in a joking manner. He has also said that my leg hair reminds him of a "male hockey player"... He has also mentioned to me that he would rather me be unhealthy than to have body hair.

In line with what thehairylife22 expressed, it is possible for us to see the power struggle between she and her partner. What her partner uses as words of stigma are directly related to masculinity. A male hockey player or a beast is a direct representation of attributes of ‘manliness’ and places thehairylife22 directly out of norms of femininity. Therefore, the male part of the relationship engages in exercising his masculine power to discipline the female body by stigmatizing it.

Furthermore, thehairylife22 states that her partner who is unhappy with her choice to go all natural, makes use of the discourse of body hair being unhygenic. The essential point here is, as thehairylife22 tells us, is the discrimination exercised by her partner. Although he is a male who “grows hair literally everywhere and... goes uncut”, it is only unhygenic for his female partner to have body hair but not himself. This here, is another way of disciplining female bodies.

In line with my discussion of body hair signifying masculinity above and also in my theoretical framework, exposureacceptance underlines the misconception about women and body hair: “Many people don’t consider the idea that when females mature into adults, they grow hair under their arms and on their legs just as men do. It is a feminine attribute as well as a masculine one”. For people like exposureacceptance who work to demolish stigmatization of females and their body hair, it is important to point out that certain discourses deeming female body hair as unhygenic or unnatural do not have to be inherently the truth.
An important point I would like to mention before I conclude this section about females and stigmatization of their bodies, is the fact that certain attributes which are constantly stigmatized in a certain “society or culture”, ends up generating “strong consensus” concerning “their devalued status”. Thus, as certain attributes are stigmatized, stigmatization of them becomes “pervasive” making devaluation and exclusion inescapable, especially with the “huge impact of print and visual media in modern societies” (Hinshaw et al. 2007, p. 33). In “popular culture and psychology” studies there is sufficient “evidence of stigma” linked to females and their bodies (p. 206). Chrisler (2011) emphasizes that an evidence for this stigmatization is the “absence of older”, “fat” and "hairy" women from popular media outlets suggesting “that viewers...do not want to see them” although they make up a substantial part of the society (p. 207). Keeping this aspect in mind, my analysis will mention how female body activists make use of social media for visibility which they are not allowed on mass media.

5.3. Digital Storytelling, Safe Spaces and Community Feeling

As mentioned previously, the biggest strength of storytelling in social movements is learning the personal stories of activists which drove them to participate in such movements. While I was conducting my netnographic analysis, I came across many posts on Body Hair Love Affair and Chubby Bunnies, using digital storytelling. The participants made use of texts about their experiences by putting them under the selfies they are posting on these platforms, as a way to express their emotions and struggles of stigmatization of their body hair or fat. These digital storytelling texts have many variations and different perspectives from different individuals but a common denominator was to spread body positivity and acceptance. Additionally, there were certain themes, sayings or keywords which were used in many of these storytelling texts which I have put into the following table based on my observations to create an understanding of the content of these stories. However, the texts included in the table are not directly original for ethical purposes so that it cannot be traced back to the users who have posted them by online search. Therefore, I have changed certain words or how sentences were constructed to respect personal boundaries of the participants on these accounts.

While I was conducting my netnographic analysis on storytelling texts, repetition of certain themes or words have led me to create four different categorizations which are; ‘Words of Support’; Words of Gratitude; Words of Personal Struggle and Words of Personal
**Motivation.** In this categorization, *Words of Support* include texts which aim to emotionally support other participants or individuals who follow these accounts. *Words of Gratitude* signify the participant’s appreciation of other participants who inspired or helped her through their own selfies and personal stories. The category of *Words of Personal Struggle* includes parts of storytelling texts in which participants mainly talk about their struggles of body acceptance and self-confidence, stigmatization, bullying, physical and/or mental health problems. The last category which is *Words of Personal Motivation* in general contains sayings that are directed by the participant to herself, as self-motivation or as sayings directed to individuals who stigmatize certain female attributes A table concerning these dominant narratives observed in the online communities are presented below.

Table 2: Classification of Dominant Storytelling Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words of Support</th>
<th>Words of Gratitude</th>
<th>Words of Personal Struggle</th>
<th>Words of Personal Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stand tall, stay strong</td>
<td>Thank you for...such an empowering blog</td>
<td>Learning to love my body</td>
<td>Proud of who I am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep spreading positivity</td>
<td>I am so thankful for this space</td>
<td>It is a struggle but...</td>
<td>Look at DAT belly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to try going all natural? Don’t be scared!</td>
<td>I want to thank you all for the courage</td>
<td>I have always been insecure</td>
<td>I am ready to accept myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not forget how beautiful you are</td>
<td>Thank you all for helping me gather the courage to post here</td>
<td>It has taken me a long time to be confident and feel sexy</td>
<td>Fuck your beauty standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is your choice to shave/wax or not!</td>
<td>Thanks to all the lovelies on this blog, you made my journey easier</td>
<td>I still haven’t accepted my body, still struggling</td>
<td>I just gotta...stay positive and strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You deserve love</td>
<td>I do not think I can put into words how much this safe haven means to me</td>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>Proud of my size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You do not need anyone to tell your worth</td>
<td>Thank you for being so inspiring.</td>
<td>Eating Disorders</td>
<td>If you don’t accept me for who I am, darling I do not give a damn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never give up on loving yourself</td>
<td>Strong and beautiful ladies</td>
<td>Mental Health Problems</td>
<td>Girls can have body hair, get over it- it's not a big deal!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When analyzed further, digital storytelling is used by female body activists as a way of expressing themselves; their emotions, their weaknesses and strength as well as creating a collective around a mutual goal or a cause. Being emotionally charged with sayings of support, love, hope and sometimes sadness or anger, digital stories become important tools for these women. Furthermore, female body activists do not engage in digital storytelling just for expressing themselves but also inspire and support other participants and/or prospective participants of the online movement.

_Mawi Mawsters:_ I like to write so If I do post a selfie I write a long paragraph...To tell these women that they are beautiful just the way they are and they do not need to change themselves to be accepted in today’s society.

As Castells (2012) argues, in their origins social movements are driven by emotions such as empathy and they turn into action by those emotions. Then, action can be transformed into “deliberation” (p.15-16). Since storytelling and self-narratives ‘provoke emotional reaction, as mentioned above (3.8.), we can say that, in our case of female body activists making use of digital storytelling, action and participation of others in posting selfies on these platforms are provoked by it.

_Mawi Mawsters:_ I wanted to feel confident just like the other girls...Everyone is all shapes and sizes and I felt comfortable there.

Here, I would like to underline that Mawi found the _Chubby Bunnies_ blog through the recommendations on Tumblr and when she saw the posts, she thought it was brilliant. Seeing other participants’ selfies and reading their stories, she was inspired by the confidence of these women and decided to post a selfie on a social media platform where she felt comfortable even though she expressed that she is a shy person. Therefore, by making use of digital stories, female body activist not only get to express themselves but also encourage other people in participating in their social movements.

Through making use of storytelling in activism, emotions are highlighted, and stories of self-help form interpersonal connections and communities (see 3.8). Therefore, by reading and sharing journeys of body positivity as well as challenging norms frequently on social media blogs/accounts like _Chubby Bunnies_ and _Body Hair Love Affair_, a strong community feeling
is created. Additionally, the participants have begun to see these platforms as their safe spaces.

**Bec:** ...They found it a "safe space" for them to express themselves, and I was so honoured (still am!)...

Furthermore, the interviewees underlined that through feeling like belonging to an ‘accepting community’, they felt less lonely and social media was the main reason they could find their safe spaces in the first place.

**Alexis:** It's nice knowing I'm not alone. Because if I didn't have social media, I would be convinced that I was the only one...Being different can be lonely if you haven't found 'your people'...Social media opens up a way to find that community.

**Bec,** the owner of the blog Chubby Bunnies tell us that she had some of her followers since the initiation of the blog. Other followers have also been a part of the ‘Chubby Bunnies’ community for a few years. The followers of the blog who participate in posting selfies do not only use digital storytelling for support or motivation for body activism causes but also make use of it as a way to talk about their everyday lives. Some of the participants who became a part of the online movement Chubby Bunnies carries out when they were teenagers and now they share stories and photos of themselves graduating, getting married, their ‘fat pregnancies’ and baby photos after they give birth. This, as Bec tells us, strengthens the feeling of a safe space and communion.

**Bec:** It really feels like a safe communal space. Everyone is a "bunny" and people write it saying hi to all the ‘other bunnies’...

Although my analysis or the thesis in general is not concerned with collective action/identity or online communities specifically, based on the testimonies of the interviewees and my netnographic analysis, I could observe that the comfort created by the ambiance of a safe place and an ‘accepting community’, encouraged followers to participate. While conducting my analysis, I came across many participants writing “Thanks for encouraging/inspiring me to post here!” under their selfies. As mentioned above by Thoits (2011), when resistance is carried out by a group of stigmatized people who come together for the same cause, ‘understanding’, ‘in-group support’ and ‘shared socio-political goals are created among the stigma bearers which results in their empowerment (p. 15-16). Therefore, it is possible for me to say, with the personal atmosphere created by digital storytelling on these platforms, participants are driven to participate more and are empowered at the same time.
Another observation based on my netnographic analysis was the direct messages of resistance, challenging and taking action which were given in the texts and selfies through digital storytelling. Here I would like to refer to Thoits, who argues that there are different ways to challenge norms and resist stigmatization. One way to do this, is trying to educate other individuals on issues of stigmatization and its discourses. For example, Shannon, who is the owner of the account of Body Hair Love Affair on Instagram, engages in educating participants and other followers in her personal stories as well as in the comment section. Under one of her selfies, she talks about her struggle with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome which causes excess body hair. Because of her disease, she says that she needs to pluck her facial hair all the time. Whenever she does not pluck them, she is stigmatized by other people around which results in her feeling insecure. However, she uses her disadvantage to educate others through digital storytelling:

Figure 3: Shannon showing her facial hair on Instagram account Body Hair Love Affair

“... I can't help my chemical makeup. And I want to share with you all to say the same. We may remove certain hair because we don’t feel confident showing it off, and that's ok! We are human. And no one should ever judge you for being your natural self.”
Thoits argues that another way to resist stigmatization is to directly confront the stigmatizer (see 3.5). Some of the female body activists on these online spheres make use of digital storytelling to confront and oppose individuals openly and directly who discriminate them. They challenge the stigmatizer with the texts they post with their selfies;

   A1: ...it's MY body. Girls can have body hair, get over it- it's not a big deal!
   A2: It's all natural so get over it already!

Additionally, some of these women made use of digital storytelling for rallying purposes. They were using slogans such as “choose to shave, choose to grow it out!” as if they were activists engaging in offline action and calling out to people on the streets. This was an interesting aspect to observe, because even though the movements at hand took place in social media platforms, some ways the body activists used digital storytelling were similar to traditional offline movements as I have described above.

5.4. Selfies: Flaunt and Expose

According to Kyrölä (2014), “media images” have the power to exclude bodies which are seen in everyday of our lives but not on mainstream media and “shape our evaluations of what kind of bodies are significant, valued or devalued enough to become stuff of images”. However, the power of media images can similarly work in favor of those bodies and make them visible (p. 1). Therefore, female body activists aim to leverage the technological affordances of the Web and post selfies to make ‘real’ women seen by a broader audience with the impact of the online ‘media images’ can create. As Arantxa tells us, this is all part of empowering women who are stigmatized in their real lives and are left out in their social interactions. She says that participating in posting her selfies online aims;

   Arantxa: To show my real beauty without standards or image manipulation...I believe that posting pictures of my body to other women see is a way to also empower them. I grew up without a lot of references of body fat and... true beauty...I believe that posting my photos...can help girls who are growing up with their fat bodies to see that are also beautiful and can love their bodies.

Similarly, Bec talks about the power of social media which can create references of variety of bodies for other women. She emphasizes the essentiality of such references for the cause of body activism and the possible result in more body acceptance and challenging of feminine norms in the society.
Bec: ...dang, I needed this shit when i was growing up! So if I can spare just ONE person from feeling like they're going through it alone, then that's what life is about right?... just the support of knowing that you can be exactly your true self and you won’t be judged at all, I think it’s a powerful thing in today’s society.

Both Bec and Shannon as the owners of Chubby Bunnies and Body Hair Love Affair respectively, believe in the power of support through giving a message of unity through online communities. When I asked Shannon why she started such an account Instagram, she told me that one of the aims was to show that “women who choose to keep/grow their body hair that they aren't alone”.

According to these female body activists, unlike the mainstream media which constantly excludes female bodies in accordance with feminine beauty ideals, social media can be a powerful tool to include women of all shapes, colors and sizes to be represented. Alexis tells us that social media not only enables all kinds of individuals to gain visibility but also helps them to represent themselves as they are in their everyday lives and also as they want to.

Alexis: The great thing about social media is that it is real people showing the world how they want to be seen. And a lot of people want to be seen as something unique that breaks the mold...So the point is, it's making reality more accessible.

In the case of representation and visibility of stigmatized attributes of female bodies, not only individuals who follow these online communities are empowered but also the participants who decided to challenge feminine norms. An anonymous interviewee expressed how she was affected herself by posting a selfie of her body hair. She furthermore expressed that she gained confidence in her choice of not shaving her body hair, due to being exposed to other hairy females on these online platforms.

Anonymous: My personal benefit was to see that there are more people out there, who overcome the oppression of having to be beautiful in the way society promotes it and it made me feel more secure with my own decision...I believe that accounts like this can make a change. Because it made a change for me and it encouraged me in not shaving. I think this is the same for many other people who might first feel insecure with their body hair until they see that there are more people not shaving.

Similarly, Marie expressed her boost of confidence through being exposed to women who decided to challenge feminine norms just like her.

Marie: Seeing woman with hairy armpits and legs on Instagram has made me feel a lot more confident about doing it myself.
Bec also expresses that being exposed to such representations of female bodies which are excluded by mainstream media, creates a message of solidarity and unity among women who are in many ways different but “real life women” wishing to be seen and see others like themselves.

Bec: If you don’t see other people out there that look like you, then of course you’re going to feel alone... It’s important to feel a connection with others and I like to think CBs (Chubby Bunnies) is a little corner of the internet where it’s achieved. Solidarity and unity. United with our differences...a place where you might see a picture of someone with the same shaped butt as you, or with breasts/ nipples that look like yours, or someone with backfat, someone with stretch marks and scars.

In line with this, exposure to selfies which are sometimes nude, semi-nude or clothed, posted on these social media platforms by female body activists, brings about a sense of confidence to the female body activists themselves and acceptance for other individuals who get used to the idea of women having body hair or fat is nothing but natural. According to exposureacceptance, as her account name also suggests, acceptance of stigmatized attributes can be created by exposure “to what exists outside of an individual’s reality”.

exposureacceptance: ...I believe that exposing people to something allows them to become accustomed to it and allows them to be more accepting of it in the future.

Just like most of the interviewees, Shannon also believes that making “it more common to see hairy everyday women” and taking exposure as an action to resist stigmatization, would make stigmatized female attributes “less shocking and more confronting”. She also argued that adapting social media for this cause enabled her to reach much more people than she “could ever achieve by physical audience”.

Shannon: Social media is used so often by people now that is available on mobile phones, tablets, computers etc. People are accessing it all over the world all the time. Just one viral post can reach millions of people. And if that post is one that challenges the status quo than that's awesome!

thehairylife22 agrees with exposureacceptance and expresses that “exposure is everything when it comes to desensitizing people to a particular idea” and social media plays a big role in these body activist movements to create acceptance and positivity by exposing individuals “to a lot more people than we would normally be exposed to in daily life”. Furthermore, she underlines that it is the technological possibilities brought about by social media that female body activists’ selfies reach many individuals “who may one day begin to stop caring when they see women with body hair because they see it enough online” and change individuals’
minds by reaching more and more people day by day and ‘plant seeds’ of acceptance. She says that the seeds “will grow...one day. If not now, then in our children later in life” and create change in future societies.

The main idea of all types of resistance against stigmatization is to re-produce and re-shape the meanings attached to stigmatized attributes. According to Link & Phelan (2013) for stigma resistance to be “successful”, it needs to include altering of the discourses created by the stigmatizer. Therefore, with resistance, “cultural conceptions” of stigmatized attributes can be changed and balance of power between the stigmatizer and the stigmatized can be restored (p. 538). As mentioned previously, photography enables individuals to present themselves as they wish and by making use of the power of photography female body activists engage in challenging feminine norms and resist stigmatization to restore the power balance. In this context, posting selfies of female bodies online is a powerful tool to change discourses around stigmatized features and re-shape the meanings conveyed by them. In this context, thehairylife22 expresses that if individuals make use of social media to challenge arbitrary gender norms, beauty ideals and resist stigmatization of female bodies in their natural forms a different reality can be created. Rautanainen also agrees that being exposed to different body types and features online can change how people perceive bodies in general:

  thehairylife22: We have been brainwashed like monkeys to be who we are today, so if we can start exposing a different message we can create a different reality.

  Rautanainen: Sharing one's opinions, seeing things you were not aware of, can really change your perspective on the world around you and see things differently

There are certain ways these female body activists make use of social media to deconstruct and reconstruct the discourses around feminine norms and stigmatization to create this ‘different reality’. First of all, they identify posting selfies of their body hair and fat online as a “rebellion”;

  Bec: ...Selfies in general, let alone a fat woman’s selfie is a modern day act of rebellion...Internet activism. Forcing my fat body to be seen, to be heard. To show I'm right there with you all!

As mentioned above by Rettberg (2014), when we take selfies, we make use of cultural filters as well as technological ones. These cultural filters act as an undetectable disciplinary practice to control female bodies by expecting women to take their selfies in line with societal norms and feminine ideals (see 3.9). But since self-photography allows individuals to take the power
they are stripped from, female body activists do not comply with these cultural filters to resist stigmatization and challenge norms. In this perspective, as Bec expressed, posting of selfies with visible stigmatized attributes, can indeed be seen as rebellious acts.

As a disciplinary practice, if women possess body hair or fat they are expected to cover it to remain in societal norms. For example, a hairy woman is stigmatized if she ends up going to the beach with body hair and similarly, a fat woman is stigmatized when she wears a “hot-pink bikini” instead of hiding herself in bathing suits (Saguy & Ward 2011, p. 58) One of the tactics the female body activists use for resistance is the “refusal to cover” their stigmatized attributes. According to Yoshino (2006) “this refusal to cover” is “flaunting” which aims to accentuate stigmas (cited in Saguy & Ward 2011, p. 58), rather than feeling inferior because of possessing such a stigma and trying to compensate this “short-coming” as Goffman (1968) argues. Westhaver (2006) argues that “to flaunt the body is to exhibit it ostentatiously” and “can be read as a kind of resistance” against societal norms of how bodies should look (p.630).

*Alexis*: I love seeing women, who don’t fit that perfection mold, representing themselves as the sexy thriving gals they are! Also, men are starting to feel the effects of advertised perfection and I love seeing the chubby hairy men out there strutting their stuff too!

*Alexis* expresses that she, also changed her ways of taking a selfie compared to the way she used to:

*Alexis*: All my pictures had to hide my double chin and acne and if they didn’t then I’d feel horrible that people are seeing me like that. But now, I don’t hide that stuff. I’m still not 100% confident in my body.

Instead of hiding her stigmatized features such as her body hair, fat and acne, she decided to flaunt her beauty in the selfies she posts online as a way to challenge beauty ideals and a proof of her self-confidence and self-love. Just like Alexis, Arantxa believes that showing certain stigmatized attitudes are both empowering for the person who participates in flaunting online and also the people who are exposed to such selfies:

*Arantxa*: I think showing body parts with characteristics like striae, cellulite, flab, is a way to show that this is a real body and several people have the same (so called) "defects".

Similarly, Marie believes that flaunting is an important part of body activism and a significant action to resist stigmatization when it comes to female body hair:

*Marie*: I was feeling really good about my body hair. I find it attractive. I wanted to show other people that female body hair is not something that needs to be hidden or shaved off.
Another importance of flaunting as resistance is that it enables these women to expose other individuals to their realities rather than the “controlled and disciplined” representations of slender and hairless female bodies in contemporary media.

**THL22:** ...By posting a photo I can help to put imagery in the world that tells a different story than what magazines, porn, ads, and society are showing us. There needs to be more people out there saying it IS okay for women to be natural too.

**Bec** tells us that similar to **Marie, Alexis** and **Arantxa**, she does not comply with beauty standards and cultural filters when she is taking her selfies. As a body activist, she aims to promote body acceptance, positivity and solidarity. For this purpose, she flaunts her stigmatized attributes when she posts her selfies on the **Chubby Bunnies** blog and her person social media accounts in which she is also very vocal about body activism, feminism and discrimination.

**Bec:** I try and make my body look... real? Like, in my last one for example (which is illustrated below). You can clearly see my pinky purple stretch marks on my belly. It’s real and true for me. So that’s what I show!

![Figure 4: Bec asking for selfie submissions with her own “natural” selfie](image)
As mentioned above, the discourses of stigmatization deem hairy women as “monstrous” or “masculine” as well as fat women as “lazy, “hyper-emotional” and “compulsive eaters” (see 3.4). Along with the disciplinary discourses of stigmatization to control female bodies, both women with body hair and fat are seen as unattractive. Since selfies have the power to influence “existing discourses”, female body activists make use of their own selfies to deconstruct such discourses and reconstruct them.

Marie: ...I am working towards undermining entrenched ideas about female beauty and the ways we are told to conform to that beauty standard. Many men and women think that female body hair is disgusting.

According to Thoits, challenging such discourses of stigma can be done by acting “in ways which disprove stereotypical representations of stigma bearers” (cited in Link & Phelan 2013, p. 537). For this purpose, the participants take their selfies in certain ways to give messages about themselves being as normal, youthful and attractive as everyone else.

THL22: I try to make my photos look like I’m just another average 22-year-old woman living a fun and wonderful life. I go for young, sexy, and innocent in my pictures to help convey a strong message that what I am doing isn’t wrong and that hairy women can still be sexy.

One of the interviewees, thehairylife22 tells us that it is an important part of body activism to share selfies of natural bodies of females so that the feminine norms and beauty ideals which are embedded in cultures and societies can be reshaped and the stigmatized features such as female body fat and hair are not “devalued” and perceived as repulsive anymore.

By sharing my photo with other people, I am helping to support a culture that accepts women for being women. Currently, should a woman be who naturally she is, in my society (Canadian culture) it is considered masculine. It is oppressive. I post photos to liberate women.

Figure 5: thehairylife22 flaunts her armpit hair on her own Instagram account of body activism
In this context, using selfies as resistance is an empowering tool for body activists to present themselves as they want and challenge the stigmatized stereotypes around them.

Shannon: ...hair is clean and natural. And whether a woman removes it or keeps it is completely up to her. It's no more or less feminine or feminist either way...Women who grow their body hair aren't just 'dykes' or stereotypically manly feminist types.

I have previously mentioned, fat female bodies are directly stigmatized as unhealthy and lazy. Female body activists also make use of their own selfies to deconstruct these discourses around female bodies.

![Figure 6: Chubby Bunnies participant doing aerial yoga](image)

![Figure 7: Chubby Bunnies participant doing pole dancing](image)

Illustrated above, the two participants on the blog Chubby Bunnies, present themselves as women who are fat but healthy and sexy. In the first figure, the participant talks about how people suggest her to work out, which is, from Foucault and Bartky’s perspectives, a disciplinary action. As a resistance of the stigmatization of her body fat, she tells that she shows these people of her photo when doing aerial yoga which requires great amount of stamina and flexibility. In the second figure, the participant is seen pole dancing. As she
writes under her selfie, by posting it online, she aims to challenge the ideas about fat women not being able to pull of pole dancing which similar to aerial yoga, requires great muscle strength. Additionally, both participants argue that women should not let “societal norms” and stigmatization to get in the way of performing their passions.

In sum, using selfies as a resistance reshapes the discourses around hairy and fat women and show others that unlike the stereotypical and stigmatized depictions of them, they are happy, sexy, active, loved and much more than their stigmatized attributes. By challenging cultural filters and resisting to act in line with feminine norms in their selfies, bodies of these female body activists are not ‘docile’ or ‘regulated’ anymore. On the contrary, they take control of their own bodies and claim their positions of power in societies. Also by exposing their stigmatized attributes and accepting them as natural and beautiful, the power which stigmatizes them cannot function as it used to anymore since the discourses created around stigmatization are deconstructed and then re-constructed in a positive way by how these women present themselves by posting their selfies online.

5.5. Hashtagging and Reblogging

Based on the typology of hashtags created by Daer et al. (2014) which was presented earlier in the section 3.10-, I have stated that there are different contexts in which hashtags are used. By relying on this typology, I have analyzed the hashtags that are constantly used in Chubby Bunnies and Body Hair Love Affair which were 30 and 33 of them in number respectively. In this analysis, I have observed that from Daer et.al. (2014)’s typology, there were three categories of hashtags which were created and used in these accounts. These categories were, hashtags for ‘emphasizing’, ‘identifying’ and ‘rallying’. To be able to exemplify what kind of hashtags were used by Chubby Bunnies and Body Hair Love Affair according to the categories they belong to, I present a table below:
Table 3: Categories of Hashtags Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hashtags for <strong>Emphasizing</strong></th>
<th>Hashtags for <strong>Identifying</strong></th>
<th>Hashtags for <strong>Rallying</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#fatacceptance</td>
<td>#happy</td>
<td>#loveyourhair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#bodypositive</td>
<td>#confident</td>
<td>#loveyourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#feminist</td>
<td># proud</td>
<td>#bodyhairdontcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#fatbabe</td>
<td># cute</td>
<td>#allbodiesarebeautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#chubbybunny</td>
<td># beautiful</td>
<td>#beyou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># LGBTQA+</td>
<td># person of color</td>
<td>#effyourbeautystandards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#bodyconfidence</td>
<td>#woman of color</td>
<td>#noshavenoshame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#empowerment</td>
<td># trans</td>
<td>#lovetheskinyouarein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#selflove</td>
<td>#girlswithhair</td>
<td>#freeyourpits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As mentioned previously, hashtags can be used for ‘emphasizing’ and in the case of female body activists, these hashtags were used to emphasize the bodily features of the participants (#fatbabe; #chubbybunny,) or to emphasize the issues discussed related to the cause of body activism in general (#bodypositive; #fatacceptance; #empowerment; # LGBTQA+). The second category of hashtags for ‘identifying’ was used to identify characteristic features of the participants which were related to their race, gender or just who they are in general (#woman of color; #girlswithhair; # trans; # proud). The last category I have observed through my data analysis was the hashtags of ‘rallying’. The main idea of rallying hashtags is to direct attention to causes and social movements. Similarly, on *Chubby Bunnies* and *Body Hair Love Affair*, many of the hashtags were used for this purpose. As I have pointed out in the section about digital storytelling and the sayings these body activists used in their digital stories (3.8.), the feeling of an offline movement and people protesting on the streets are also created by these rallying hashtags. The narratives of these hashtags are similar to slogans since they are directed against a group of individuals, as a resistance, who wish to contain fat and hairy female bodies in a docile state by stigmatizing them. By making use of the hashtags, the female body activists not only leverage technological affordances, create a possibility of
higher exposure and attention or a rapid spread of their ideas as well as easier connection with other community members with similar causes, but they also call other members of the public to discuss issues of bodies being regulated, disciplined, policed and stigmatized. For this purpose, rallying hashtags—such as #effyourbeautystandards; #bodyhairdontcare; #noshavenoshame—are not only generated to intensify collective action and community feeling but also provoking others who disagree by telling them their beauty standards are not valide and acceptable for all women. However, not all the hashtags which are directed to other individuals strive for provocation. Some of them were directed to individuals who are or might be more sympathetic for these activist causes and can be a prospective supporter to motivate their participation. Therefore, by using empowering messages and encouraging people by emphasizing freedom of choice, body positivity and acceptance, female body activists lure other individuals to participate in their social movements (#lovetheskinyouarein; #loveyourself; #beyou; #freeyourpits).

For female body activists in online communities as *Chubby Bunnies* and *Body Hair Love Affair* to find each other, technological possibilities brought by social media hold a significant role. For selfies of female body activists to make impact, exposure to many people on social media is essential so that stigmatization of female body fat and hair can be challenged and resisted overtly. This visibility and exposure that female body activists desire can be achieved by hashtags and reblogs. According to Shannon, it is important to make use of hashtags to create attention around body hair acceptance and also body activism in general. Therefore, she expresses that the hashtags she uses are not only related to female body hair but body acceptance and challenging beauty ideals in general.

*Shannon:* I think it's the hashtags that generates the most interest...The hashtags certainly help, and I try to incorporate ones that relate to both body hair, body image and beauty standards. I used some that already existed. Then made variations of some and just created my own.

Debies-Carl (2015) argue that the internet “empowers resistance in terms of its reach and dispersion” and enables individuals to disseminate their messages by making them “more accessible” (p. 702-703). In this context, hashtags and reblogging functions are technological affordances which helps female body activists to carry out resistance. First of all, some of the
interviewees expressed that they were found by Shannon on Instagram from the hashtags they used Shannon aimed to have more submissions on Body Hair Love Affair to have greater exposure by recruiting more participants for the cause and was following the hashtags related to female body hair and body image acceptance.

![Marie’s selfie](image)

**Figure 8: Marie’s selfie which she submitted to Body Hair Love Affair**

![Alexis’ selfie](image)

**Figure 9: Alexis’ selfie which she submitted to Body Hair Love Affair**

Just like Alexis and Marie, exposureacceptance and thehairylife22 -who both have their personal accounts on body hair positivity and acceptance- were also found by Shannon by the hashtags they used when they posted their selfies.

I found it (the account) after posting a photo of me licking my hairy armpit. I used several hashtags including #armpithair and #hairygirl (when she posted the selfie in her own Instagram account). **Body Hair Love Affair** liked the photo and asked to repost it.

I posted a picture of my armpit hair on Instagram and they found it through (I think #pithairdontcare but not positive). They contacted me asking permission to share it.

I posted a picture of my armpit hair on Instagram and they found it through (I think #pithairdontcare but not positive). They contacted me asking permission to share it.
Similarly, some of the interviewees found *Chubby Bunnies* on Tumblr by its reblog function which functions to disseminate posts to a bigger audience by being re-posted by different users and causing a chain reaction of visibility.

*Valeshushka*: I've always looked for blogs about chubby people, mostly guys, and in one of the blogs I found, this tumblr user reblogged some pictures from *Chubby Bunnies* I was fascinated by the pictures and followed them.

*Rautanainen*: I think it was through a mutual blog, but I can't remember which one. I saw they had reblogged a story someone had submitted, and it peaked my interest. I scrolled through the blog, and I started following.

For *Shannon*, making use of hashtags to recruit participants was definitely a tactic for her body activist cause. When I asked Bec if she had any tactics she used with her hashtags, she expressed that she was using existing hashtags related to her cause and with time the participants -which she calls the submitters- asked for more hashtags to address the diversity in the *Chubby Bunnies* community based on race and gender.

*Bec*: Over time more (hashtags) have been added at the request of the submitters. So all the tag options are there when someone submits and they choose the ones that go on their photos.

When I asked *Bec* for more tactics she used, if she had any, she pointed out that the popularity of the blog- which has almost 160.000 followers now- was mainly because of reblogging.

*Bec*: I guess the only thing I did was reblog popular posts of mine or CBs? But that's about it. The rest was word of mouth I guess? And people just finding it themselves!

Additionally, she expresses that as a tactic, she keeps in mind that many of the followers of *Chubby Bunnies* are from different places so she chooses the best time- based on when people from different countries are awake- to post the submitted selfies or reblog so they can have more exposure online.

*Bec*: It's usually about the time of day I post. Because I live in Australia, the timing is different to most of my followers. So if I have something I want to post that I want a particular large number of people to see, I post it or reblog it in the times I know more people will be on. Like usually during the day here, it's night overseas. So it just worked out that the time when I was most active was when it was night time or a time when more people were on.

I have pointed out earlier that both hashtagging and reblogging functions as a way of bringing ‘like-minded people’ together online and enables them to form communities (see 3.10). In our
case of female body activists using hashtags and reblogs, it enabled them to find each other and participate in body activist movements. Some of them were already carrying out their own resistance on Instagram and Tumblr through their personal accounts, but by discovering or being discovered online, they could become a part of a bigger movement which took place in an online community of people who are there for the same political, social and cultural reasons. Marie expressed that she made use of hashtags on purpose so that other users with the same mind-set can find her and this could benefit body activism because of the potential of having greater numbers of participants for such causes of body acceptance.

Marie: I use hashtags so that other people can see my pictures and so that I can find other people that feel the same. It allows me to have a worldwide community of body positive friends, instead of a handful at home. There is strength in numbers!
6. Discussion and Further Research

In my thesis I aimed to investigate how female body activists make use of social media to challenge societal norms of femininity and resist stigmatization of body hair and fat through the online communities called *Chubby Bunnies* and *Body Hair Love Affair* as my cases. To understand how cultural norms are created I have used Foucault and his concept of disciplinary practices to elaborate on how female bodies are disciplined through these norms. In line with Foucault, I have mainly used Butler and Bartky to create a deeper understanding of which disciplinary practices are used to discipline female bodies in contemporary modern societies. Furthermore, to explain how certain attributes -female body fat and hair in particular- are stigmatized, I have made use of Goffman’s theory of stigmatization and Link and Phelan’s theoretical built on it as a newer study (see 3.3). Finally, I have made use of Thoits, to demonstrate how stigmatization can be challenged. Additionally, I have briefly explained theories on networks of power, technological affordances, hashtagging and reblogging, selfies for resistance and digital storytelling as different concepts which are detected throughout the data analysis and used in presentation of my results.

My research enabled me to obtain results related to (RQ1) what female body activists aim to achieve on social media platforms and (RQ2) how they make use of social media platforms to challenge societal/cultural norms of femininity and stigmatization body fat and hair.

The data analysis I have conducted to answer RQ1, gave the following set of results:

The female body activists who engage in posting their selfies as a way of carrying out body politics on *Chubby Bunnies* and *Body Hair Love Affair* aim to challenge societal/cultural norms created by the power relations in the society which decided what is an “acceptable” and “normal” female body figure. Second, they aim to promote the “freedom of choice” for women to choose to do or do not do whatever they desire with their bodies without complying with societal/cultural norms. Third, these female body activists aim to change other individuals’ mind-sets about stigmatized attributes- body fat and hair this case- and create an acceptance of these attributes. Fourth, they aim to include all genders, races, classes and
individuals from different backgrounds, in their efforts to create body acceptance and positivity as well as representation of bodies which are stigmatized.

The analysis I have conducted to answer RQ2, gave the following set of results:

Female body activists as participants of Chubby Bunnies and Body Hair Love Affair make use of digital storytelling by combining text and photography to make their stories heard online. They furthermore, engage in creating a safe space and a community feeling among themselves by enclosing personal everyday life experiences through digital storytelling. Additionally, they create their digital stories in certain themes of body acceptance and struggle to motivate others to participate in this online movement of body activism and also to motivate the existent participants themselves. The digital stories are also used to express gratitude by the participants or as a way of self-expression to describe the struggles they have been going through or as a way to educate other individuals on stigmatization of female body hair and fat. Overall, all these usages of digital storytelling enables female body activists to turn emotions into activist action.

Another part of results concerning the RQ2 showed us that female body activists make use of selfies as a way to engage in rebellion. This rebellion is directed against societal/cultural norms of femininity and stigmatization of body hair and fat. By not complying with the cultural filters, exposing and exposing stigmatized attributes, female body activists shift the power of their own bodies to themselves and transform their docile bodies into rebellious ones. This rebellion of bodies aims to empower women and reconstruct the discourses around the stigmatized attributes of female bodies. The selfies of rebellion are also used by body activists to represent such bodies which are under-represented or entirely absent in popular media to create ‘acceptance through exposure’ as an action of politics of bodies. Additionally, these female body activists made use of technological possibilities brought by the internet. As a tactic, hashtagging and reblogging act as technological affordances which female body activists leverage to reach bigger audiences in a faster way and expose their selfies and stories easier. These affordances also allow them to find like-minded people and bond with them online. Additionally, female body activists sometimes use hashtagging and reblogging functions to find participants to the movements they have created online. The kas but not the least, hashtagging function allows female body activists to emphasize certain issues, identify themselves and rally the social movements they are a part of, in online spheres.
Limitations

I believe, I have reached the goals of my study. I aimed to understand what female body activists desired to achieve by using social media for their causes and how they make use of social media for their benefit, from an insider’s perspective. Therefore, both my netnographic analysis and interviews enabled me to see how female body activists carry out their online movements and how they interact with each other for their cause. However, it is also important to understand the limitations of my research. First of all, as mentioned earlier (see 4.3), the study is only based on two cases and only on female body activists. Even though I have created a narrow and brief description of body activism, due to the short nature of thesis as I have mentioned earlier, I have not identified the phenomena in a more extensive manner by relating it to the typologies of online activism to generate an applicable concept for future studies. For these reasons, this research does not give me the possibility to relate my results to the phenomena of body activism as a sub-category of online activism, in a broader sense. Additionally, since I have only investigated two social media platforms, Instagram and Tumblr, in relation to my cases, the female body activist behaviours on different social media platforms might differ. Another point I would like to emphasize is the post-structuralist and feminist perspectives adopted in my theoretical framework. In line with these perspectives, certain dimensions of online body activism might have been left out. The last point of limitation would be the investigation of online communities in relation to body activist communities online. Even though I have conducted netnography within the two selected online communities as my cases, I am aware of that there are more dimensions to be studied in relation to the interaction between body activists as participants and followers as outsiders of the online movements, in a broader and more extensive manner.

Unintended Consequences

Although female body activists make use of social media in their favour to create social change, this does not mean there aren’t any risks or complications involved. One of the biggest problems expressed by them was the “fetishization” of their activist work. Female body activists make use of selfies of their bodies not as a way of exhibitionism for sexual attention but as a way to expose other people to issues of body activism and to change the discourse around stigmatized attributes of female bodies. However, both on Chubby Bunnies
and *Body Hair Love Affair*, there has been detected a male presence trying to undermine the activist action of these women by asking them to see nudes or by harassing them constantly for Skype sessions. This is an important point to discuss since it harms female body activists’ actions by putting them right under the sexualizing male gaze. In most cases, these kind of audience are blocked from the online communities of body activism but it is not a permanent solution for female body activists avoiding harassment. Another risk I have observed and would like to underline is the further stigmatization these female body activists by other individuals. Although the whole aim of these women to reconstruct the ideas around body fat and hair, their exposure to big audiences online also makes them more accessible, therefore more vulnerable for further bullying and stigmatization. Both in *Chubby Bunnies* and *Body Hair Love Affair*, I have observed such stigmatization taking place by individuals who made use of normative discourses these female body activists are challenging, which deem body hair as “unhygienic” and “body fat” as unhealthy. Most of the participants saw this as an opportunity to educate others and some were psychologically affected by the attitude of such “hatred” which resulted in declined participation of posting selfies. In this aspect, I present such risks as prospective further research on online body activism and how these activists are both empowered and undermined by social media usage and exposure.

However, against all the odds, female body activists believe that social change is achieved through their online movements. They believe through social media platforms, people’s mindsets are already beginning to change when it comes to different bodies and stigmatized attributes of female bodies. They express that although the impact might seem small at the moment, online movements carried out by female body activists is a step towards bigger impact on the society and social change. Female body activists express that the biggest social change achieved by the adoption of social media platforms for the advocacy of body acceptance and positivity, is felt by the participants of the online movements in the first place. Through coming together on these social media platforms they do not only aim to affect other but also each other. This interaction between the body activists results in solidarity, community feeling and support. In line with the small scale social changes that female body activists achieve- as they express-, I believe a bigger scale of change is possible through social media platforms and initiation of online body activist movements. The effects female body activists create are still visible but not yet a drastic transformative force upon societies. However, with more investigation, dedication and enhanced tactics to represent variety of bodies and expose “real life” women, in the long run, we might be able to observe bigger
impacts and changes that female body activists can accomplish through social media platforms.

I believe, with this small case study I have conducted and with the brief description of body activism I have created, further research on body activism can be supported. The first step could be the expansion of the definition of what body activism is, specifically online. A typology of online activism can be created and can be evolved into a concrete concept. Also a grounded theory of body activism can be generated through investigating more cases to explore the area of online body activism broader which has been neglected by other scholars. Another point for further research can be the involvement of popular media in body activism. Most of the female body activists I have interviewed agreed on the fact that they would like to see traditional media and especially commercial media to join them in their efforts to challenge societal norms of femininity and resistance of stigmatization. Therefore, commercial media’s possible contribution to the causes of body activism can be investigated in the future. Once again, since my thesis limited to only two stigmatized attributes of female bodies which are fat and hair, other important attributes which are also stigmatized are left out. For this purpose, people who live with disabilities and engage in body activism can be investigated as well as women who engage in menstrual activism or activist movements against body mutilation or modifications forced upon women by certain cultures or traditions. An additional point on further research would be the involvement of all genders to the study of online body activism and social media platform usage. Since my thesis is limited to only female body activists and only two distinct cases of it on social media platforms, an extended version of this study can be possibly carried out in the future including male and LGBTQIA+ body activists and their resistance. With this expansion, more social media platforms would also be possible to investigate. The last suggestion I would like to make for further research is to investigate different modes of body activism.
7. References:


APPENDIX I

In this appendix, the text I have made use of to contact prospective interviewees is presented.

Hey there!!! My name is Cansu Elmadağlı and I am currently doing my masters study in Digital Media and Society at Uppsala University. I am writing about body activism and women using social media for resistance. Therefore, I am interested in studying the Tumblr account Chubby Bunnies/ Instagram account Body Hair Love Affair. I have seen that you are also a supporter of this body acceptance cause and submitted a selfie of yours to the blog/account. For this reason, I would like to conduct an interview with you for my study. This is a very important part of my thesis and I would like to get a positive or a negative answer from you (so that I can explore other options). I believe what you are doing here is an important issue to be encouraged and discussed in academia. If you agree, the interview will be online and through instant messaging and if you want you can remain anonymous throughout the whole study. Thanks for your answer in advance!
APPENDIX II

In this appendix the interview guide used to conduct in-depth and semi-structured interview with the account owner of Body Hair Love Affair on Instagram.

Q1: a) What was your main idea behind opening up such an account as Body Hair Love Affair
    b) Is there anything specific that drove you to this?

Q2: What kind of issues do you want to draw attention to through your Instagram account Body Hair Love Affair?

Q3: What do you aim to achieve by using social media to discuss these issues?

Q4: How do you choose the hashtags you use for the submissions?

Q5: a) You also have other accounts and blogs on different social media platforms such as Facebook and Wordpress besides Instagram, which one of these gets more attention?
   b) In your opinion, what is the reason behind this?

Q6: Can you talk about any everyday life experience related to your body hair?

Q7: Do you carry out any offline action for this cause?

Q8: You also submit your own selfies on the Instagram account Body Hair Love Affair. Do you think your participation in posting a selfie to the account is directly or indirectly related to feminist issues /actions?

Q9: Are there any special ways you take your photos, or any tactics you use to reach more people in making use of social media for body image acceptance?

Q10: Are there any other tactics you use when managing your Instagram account Body Hair Love Affair for the same purpose?
Q11: Can you briefly talk about how people react to the posts on the account?

Q12: Please reflect on the proposition that if you consider yourself an (body) activist?

*Q13: Please reflect on the proposition that if you consider yourself a feminist?
This question was omitted during the interview because she previously expressed that she is a feminist.

Q14: Do you believe any social change/impacts is/are achieved through these social media accounts?

Q15: In your opinion, what role can social media play to achieve such social change?

Q16: What else can be done to resist stigmatization of certain female attributes, challenge contemporary beauty standards/norms/ideals or promote body image positivity/acceptance?

Q17: Is there anything you would specifically like to comment on/mention? Please feel free to discuss it here.

Please state:
i) Your location (country and / or city):

ii) Your age:

iii) Occupation (optional):

iv) Would you like to remain anonymous?

v) If yes, is there any other name you want to be referred as (please state the name)?
**APPENDIX III**

In this appendix the interview guide used to conduct in-depth and semi-structured interview with the account owner of *Chubby Bunnies* on Tumblr.

**Q1:** How long have you had the blog *Chubby Bunnies* on Tumblr?

**Q2:** What was your main idea behind opening up such a blog?

**Q3:** What kind of issues do you want to draw attention to through your blog?

**Q4:** What do you aim to achieve by using social media to discuss these issues?

**Q5:** How do you choose the hashtags you use for the submissions?

**Q6:** Approximately how many submissions do you get a day?

**Q7:** How many followers and posts do you currently have?

**Q8:** Did you promote your blog in any way to attract more followers? Or did you do anything else special to increase the visibility or the success of the blog?

**Q9:** Can you talk about any everyday life experience related to your body fat?

**Q10:** You also post your own selfies on Chubby Bunnies. Do you think your participation in posting a selfie to the account is directly (or indirectly) related to feminist issues/actions?

**Q11:** Are there any special ways you take your photos, or any tactics you use to reach more people in making use of social media for body image acceptance?

**Q12:** Do you carry out any offline action for this cause?

**Q13:** Please reflect on the proposition that if you consider yourself as a feminist?
Q14: Please reflect on the proposition that if you consider yourself as an (body) activist?

Q15: Do you believe any social change/impacts is/are achieved through social media accounts like yours?

Q16: In your opinion, what role can social media play to achieve such social change?

Q17: What else can be done to resist stigmatization of certain female attributes, challenge contemporary beauty standards/norms/ideals or promote body image positivity/acceptance?

Q18: Is there anything you would specifically like to comment on/mention? Please feel free to discuss it here.

Please state:
  i) Your location (country and/or city):
  ii) Your age:
  iii) Occupation (optional):
  iv) Would you like to remain anonymous?
  v) If yes, is there any other name you want to be referred as (please state the name)?
APPENDIX IV

In this appendix, the interview guide which is used to conduct interviews with the participants of Body Hair Love Affair on Instagram and Chubby Bunnies on Tumblr, is presented.

Q1: How did you discover the account Body Hair Love Affair on Instagram/ the blog Chubby Bunnies on Tumblr?

Q2: What drove you to participate in posting a selfie there?

Q3. Do you post selfies of yourself on Body Hair Love Affair account / Chubby Bunnies blog regularly?

Q4: Do you post similar selfies on different accounts or different social media platforms?
   a) If yes, can you state which accounts or platforms?
   b) If no, is there any reason behind it?

Q5: Can you briefly talk about any experiences related to your body hair/fat in everyday life?

Q6: Do you carry out any offline action for this cause?
   a) If yes, can you please describe those actions?
   b) If no, would you be willing to engage in offline action for this cause after using the Instagram account Body Hair Love Affair/ Tumblr blog Chubby Bunnies?

Q7: Do you think your participation in posting a selfie to this account/blog is directly (or indirectly) related to feminist issues/ actions?
   a) If yes, can you describe in what way?
   b) If no, why do you think so?

Q8: Are there any special ways you take your photos, or any tactics you use to reach more people in making use of social media for body image acceptance?

Q9: Have you had any benefits from participating in this movement on Instagram/ on Tumblr?
a) If yes, in what sense?
b) If no, please tell if there are other motives in participations?

Q10: Please reflect on the proposition that you consider yourself as a feminist?

Q11: Please reflect on the proposition that you consider yourself as an (body) activist?

Q12: Do you believe any social change/impacts is/are achieved through these social media accounts?
a) If yes, can you describe them?
b) If no, can you tell us why don’t you believe so?

Q13: What role can social media play to achieve such social change?

Q14: What else can be done to resist stigmatization of certain female attributes, challenge contemporary beauty standards/norms/ideals or promote body image positivity/acceptance?

Q15: Is there anything you would specifically like to comment on/mention? Please feel free to discuss it here.

Please state:
i) Your location (country and/or city):
ii) Your age:
iii) Occupation (optional):
iv) Would you like to remain anonymous?
v) If yes, is there any other name you want to be referred as (please state the name)?

[the transcription of the interviews were too extensive to be enclosed in the appendices, therefore they will be sent to the opposition and the examiner through e-mail as supplementary documents]