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1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, “39% of adults aged 18 years and over were overweight in 2014, and 13% were obese”. Consequently “[w]orldwide obesity has more than doubled since 1980” (“Obesity and overweight”, *WHO*). We are confronted with the concept of fat nearly everyday. We are told it is ugly and should be avoided at all costs. Fatness is a liability. It is a “curse” for those who suffer from it. It is a stigma that has been left mostly untouched by the larger societal discourse. On the contrary, words warning us of an “obesity epidemic” and preparing us for the “war on obesity” seem to occupy the public rhetoric. A lot of money has been spent, by governments as well as individuals, on “obesity prevention”. A big industry catering to those in need of losing weight depends on this type of rhetoric and continues to flourish with the selling of various “helpful” items such as dieting pills, fitness programs or advice books. This economic dependency on society wanting to become and stay thin raises the question whether our war on fatness is justified and unbiased, as Marilyn Wann in her foreword to “The Fat Studies Reader” challenges that, “[w]hen members of a society have recourse to only one opinion on a basic human experience, that is precisely the discourse and the experience that should attract intellectual curiosity” (Wann x). An entire industry that depends on, supports and consolidates society’s obsession with thinness in the end creates an environment of constant scrutiny that is inescapable. Not seeing fat as something horrendous seems impossible. The hate of fat appears to be intrinsic. This unconscious, obedient adherence to society’s demands is the reason why it is necessary for academics to not only consider the reasons but also the outcomes of fat denigration.

Fat studies is a relatively new field in academia which intends to explore the roots and personal, social and societal implications of fat stigma. What has become clear in the years of fat studies and will become clear in the course of this paper is that society’s power relations are, amongst many other factors, also based on weight. Weight bias is an internalized power system that ensures the oppression of fat people. It is based solely on a descriptive human characteristic. Fat studies accepts that humans naturally differ in weight (just as they differ in height) and instead explores how and why weight has become a socially meaningful characteristic (Wann ix-xii).

One of the first issues tackled in the field of fat studies has been a confrontation with terminology. In the larger societal discourse, “overweight” and “obese” are considered politically correct while “fat” is considered derogatory. Fat studies argues that neither “overweight” nor “obese” are neutral terms, each coming with a social stigma and each discriminating against the labeled person. The same applies to euphemisms such as “heavy”, or “plump” as they “put a falsely positive spin on a negative view of fatness” (Wann xii) and are thus carrying a mocking undertone. They imply that the “overweight” is outside the “norm” and “abnormal”, when in reality judging a very personal characteristic by reference to an outside norm that could never describe the “normal” of that particular person is unjust and discriminatory. Thus fat activism and consequently the academic field of fat studies has decided to reappropriate the adjective “fat” as a neutral term. It is descriptive in the same way that “old” and “young” or “short” and “tall” are descriptive (Wann xii-xiii). This paper adopts this position and distances itself from all existing cultural connotations connected to the terms “fat” and “fatness”. The adjective “fat” and noun “fatness” in this paper are used as merely factual, neutral observations of body size. Neither are meant as degrading or insulting terms and thus do not in any way judge people’s appearance and/or character.

Although extensive research has already been conducted on how the media, and in particular advertising and TV, work to support the thin-ideal and denigrate fatness as undesirable and ugly, relatively little work has dealt with TV shows. Although there have been various studies analyzing the television landscape and its lack of representation of fat people, fewer research has been conducted in regard to analyzing TV shows that *do* include fat characters. Moreover, there are very few analyses of shows that claim to be body-positive and actively oppose the stereotypical and judgmental depiction of fat people. In my analysis my goal is to focus on two shows in particular - *Girls*, created by Lena Dunham, and *The Mindy Project* by Mindy Kaling. Both shows not only have bigger women as protagonists but both shows were created by exactly those two bigger women. Not only is the former revolutionary in the sense that fat protagonists are still a relative novelty, but even more so when taking into account the fact that both shows claim to be body positive and not actively aim to make fun of fatness as such. The latter, namely the fact that two bigger women created their own shows to star in, not only illustrates that the stigmatization of fatness is most deeply felt by those suffering from it, but also that there is in fact a market that regards reprieve from the constant onslaught

of body criticism, as can be deduced from the success of both shows, curiously and warily but mostly positively. Thus the paper is based on the hypothesis that as persons of size who have already come into contact with society's notion of their body not "fitting in", both women in the creation of their shows will have a critical look on fat bias. In the course of this paper I consequently intend to find out if, how and why *Girls* and *The Mindy Project* draw on fat stigmatization in their portrayal of Hannah Horvath and Mindy Lahiri as fat women.

2. Female Bodies

Mary Douglas constitutes two bodies for every person - a social and a physical one - with the former “constrain[ing]” the perception of the latter one and thus being “always modified by the social categories through which it is known”. In the process it becomes “a highly restricted medium of expression” (Douglas 69). Thus the human body is an important transmitter of culture. It is not only “a medium of culture” but also a “locus of social control” (Bordo 165), a site where control is exercised through the “docile” body (Foucault qtd. In Bordo 165). Thus there are a number of rules and regulations which control and constrain especially female bodies.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways of how culture differentiates between men and women. On the one hand, the differences can be seen as biological. This is commonly referred to as a person’s sex. The perceptions of beauty across the globe vary starkly as many human features and their perception within a society are culturally determined. Nevertheless, there is also a biological component in human’s perception of attractiveness. Regarding the aesthetics of the body the two major points of analysis are body size (underweight to overweight) and body shape (fat distribution). In order to find out whether certain cues for attractiveness were universal, Devendra Singh in a 1993 study explored how the body fat distribution and the waist-hip ratio, which reveals the distribution of fat between upper and lower body, influenced perceptions of attractiveness. The study is based on the assumption that some bodily features are considered universally attractive as they indicate a woman’s reproductive ability (Singh, *Body Shape*, 298-299). Women generally have a lower WHR than men due to their gynoid fat distribution (= gaining fat in the gluteofemoral region). Lower WHRs seem to be associated with higher reproductive ability (Kaye et al. 1990 In: Singh, *Body Shape*, 301), while a high WHR on the other hand is associated with a higher mortality risk regardless of body weight (Folsom et al. 1993 In: Singh, *Body Shape*, 302). Moderate obesity does not seem to affect the WHR (Singh, *Body Shape*, 299-301). In the study Singh used four figures (WHR 0.7-1.0) in three different body sizes (underweight, normal and overweight) as stimuli. Participants (white and hispanic men) were asked to rank the figures according to attractiveness, youthfulness, healthiness, sexiness and capability of and desire for reproduction (Singh, *Adaptive Significance*, 297). Results indicated that fatness and thinness are perceived as unattractive (the former more so than the latter). Nevertheless, also in both of those cases, the lower the WHR, the more

attractive the person was perceived as (Singh, *Adaptive Significance*, 301). Thus the study showed that “[t]o be attractive, women must have a low WHR and deviate little from normal weight” (Singh, *Body Shape*, 310-311).

On the other hand, there is gender. It is the social construction built around humans’ sex. In Western society there are many normativization processes related to the human body and the concept of gender. Gender is one way of constructing and organizing the world (McKinley 99). Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity postulates gender as not a biological constant but a culturally constructed way of performance (179-180). One is not born female but becomes female through performance. This performance naturally also plays out on the female body. Women are encouraged in their “pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity” (Bordo 166). The “docile body” is achieved through external as well as internal regulations of self-modification (e.g. disciplining females’ diet, makeup or clothing). This exercise of control over the female body leads to the chasing of an ideal that can never be reached and thus to the memorization of feelings “of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough” (Bordo 166). This raises the question of what ideal women are even chasing.

Culturally, there are many conflicting and contradictory definitions of the “ideal woman” (e.g. passive and active, mother and object of sexual desires), most of which also play out on the female body (McKinley 100). An important aspect of any discussion of gender is the question of femininity and masculinity. As already discussed, Butler defines it as a certain way of performance that defines women as feminine and men as masculine. McKinley (100) adds that, according to psychologists feminine and masculine is defined by “traits and behaviors [that] distinguish reliably between women and men“. These traits and behaviors become the norm. Regarding the female body, “ideal weight” then becomes “normal” weight. Women who fail to perform according to these traits and behaviors are defined as deviant as they refuse to adhere to set standards. Thus anyone straying from the “normal” weight also becomes deviant (Seid 1989 qtd. in: McKinley 100). Women are required to focus on themselves in order to adjust to dominant culture’s demands (McKinley 107), one of which is society’s expectation that women be attractive, and, more importantly, that they *want* to be attractive. They are required to care how they look to their (male) surroundings. Ideal weight constitutes an important aspect of adhering to society’s ideas of attractiveness. As in Western culture ideal weight is thinness (the cultural reasons for this will be

discussed in consequent chapters), it is only natural to assume that thinness *is* attractiveness. Thus not only are women who have the ideal weight perceived as more attractive but they are also perceived as being more concerned with their attractiveness and thus perceived as caring more about themselves and their appearance (McKinley 103). In the end a woman's aesthetics depend very much on whether she feels comfortable in adhering to society's norms and, consequently, in her gender role (Spitzack 1990 qtd. in: McKinley 103). Her aesthetics depend on her devotion to the feminine ideal and vice versa. This can be seen most prominently in the way feminists addressing gender roles were depicted as ugly (McKinley 103). Interestingly enough, this stands in direct contradiction to the role of the woman as nurturer and carer, as the ideal woman is also expected to only care for others and not herself. Any self-care in the form of nurturing or feeding, is considered "greedy and excessive" (Bordo 171). Fatness is thus also a sign of being too needy (Bordo 202). Women with ideal weight have their own needs under control. Looking back one can conclude that while the ideal woman should care about her own appearance, she should not care about herself in any way else but be fulfilled in her role as nurturer and put others' needs above her own (McKinley 104).

One particularly interesting thing in the concept of the ideal woman can be seen when looking at the contradictory directions the concept of female space has taken. Women have taken up increasingly more public space in the last two centuries, moving into a spheres previously occupied by men and claiming ownership. In this traditionally male space women are then expected to "embody the masculine language", namely "self-control, determination, cool, emotional discipline, mastery, and so on" (Bordo 171). At the same time the bodily space women ideally should take up has become smaller. Thus aesthetically the ideal body with its glorification of thinness correlates with the idea of women preferably taking up as little space as possible and having to control their hunger for any type of public space - bodily, politically, socially and sexually (Bordo 171). Thus the male ideals of control and determination are transformed onto the female body and lead to the physical discipline that most prominently peaks in anorexia.

"The ideal of slenderness, then, and the diet and exercise regimens that have become inseparable from it offer the illusion of meeting, through the body, the contradictory demands of the contemporary ideology of femininity" (Bordo 172).

3. Fat Stigmatization

The previous chapter illustrated that there is intense pressure for women to reach a certain ideal in society - socially, physically and mentally. Women's bodies are under constant scrutiny and there are high expectations to conform. Hence, straying from the norm is heavily frowned upon. In her book *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture* Amy Erdman Farrell illustrates not only the historical development of fat shame and its link to race, gender and civilization but analyzes the stigma connected to fatness and how it plays out in society.

The term and concept of stigma goes back to ancient Greece when people who were deemed morally questionably (such as criminals, slaves or traitors) were marked through branding or cutting (Goffman 9). Today the meaning has shifted from the physical to a more figurative branding in society. Nevertheless stigma refers to some property of a human that is not as anticipated - the stigmatized fails to meet the criteria we expect them to meet (Goffman 13). The person in the eyes of the stigmatizing turns from being whole to being tainted (Goffman 10-11). In this process of stigmatization, the stigmatized are attributed a range of insufficiencies based on the one prominent inadequacy (Goffman 14).

Why then is society's treatment of fat people considered a stigmatization? First of all, fatness in today's society can definitely be considered a "discrediting attribute" (Goffman 11) that a range of other insufficiencies are assigned to. Fat people are commonly perceived as being "lazy, gluttonous, greedy, immoral, uncontrolled, stupid, ugly and lacking in will power" (Farrell 4) . Moreover, many people believe fatness stems from psychological issues (Farrell 6). Therefore, it is not only a physical stigma, one that is clearly visible and cannot be hidden, but it is also a character stigma (Goffman 12-13). However, in order for stigmatization to take place, the stigmatized as well as the stigmatizing need to have a similar perception of their identity. Only then do the stigmatized themselves realize their own insufficiencies which lead to feelings of shame (Goffman 16). This is also the case for fat stigmatization as the repercussions of it are manifold. It not only leads to personal issues with self-esteem but even reduces people's life chances¹. Thus society's fear of fat can undoubtedly be regarded as a

¹ The effects of fat stigmatization will be discussed more closely in relation to fat shame, blame and body image in subsequent chapters.

stigma. Fat stigmatization not only denigrates the stigmatized but at the same time endorses the norm in society.

3.1. History of Fat Stigmatization

Generally speaking fat stigma has had a long history. The origins of culture's focus on women's size can be traced back to the 19th century when fears of industrialization and consumerism played out on the human body, especially the female one. While thickness showcased "bourgeois success" and very physically claimed social space, slenderness was a symbol of an aristocracy who had an established power and wealth which did not need to be flaunted. Over time the middle class adopted the aristocracy's behavior as their own ideal (Banner 232/53-55 qtd. In: Bordo 191-192). By the end of the 19th century, wealth was associated with control over one's resources, so fatness was seen as "reflecting moral or personal inadequacy, or lack of will" (Walden 334-335/353 qtd. In: Bordo 192).

Apart from marking class and wealth, fatness soon became a marker of civilization. Until the 19th century class, race and gender had been the main markers of discrimination between people. Now "[f]atness was a motif used to identify 'inferior bodies' - those of immigrants, former slaves, and women - and it became a telltale sign of a 'superior' person falling from grace." (Farrell 8). Starting in the 19th century with Dr. Watson Bradshaw, thinness became a characteristic of "advanced nations". Dr. Watson Bradshaw argued that only in uncivilized cultures fat was linked to a higher cultural status (Bradshaw 6 qtd. In: Farrell 59). The early 20th century saw another physician, namely Dr. Leonard Williams, stating that "the uneducated" and even "many of the educated" are of the conviction that the urge to eat as much as possible is natural, as it stems from "the most primitive days when food was scarce and its enjoyment intermittent" (Williams 4, qtd. In: Farrell 59). Thus "uneducated", lower-class people were prone to overeat because of their unconscious fear of famine. Moreover, he explained that men of "savage tribes" (Williams 77, qtd. In: Farrell 59) were attracted to fat women while England and the United States, as the civilized nations, understood that fatness was "repulsive" (Williams 67, qtd. In: Farrell 59). In his dieting book from 1923 Henry Finck described how Africans, Polynesians, the Turkish and the Aborigines of Australia actively sought fatness while the "modern British and American citizens" had a different understanding of beauty from that of the "Hottentots, Moors and Turks" (2-9,

qtd. In: Farrell 59). Thus the beginning disapproval of fatness and upholding of thinness as a beauty ideal was intricately linked to the “construction of whiteness”. In its very early stages fat was used as a dividing bodily characteristic the same way skin color was used. Its intricate link to ideas about race and an untouchable evolutionary hierarchy was used to contrast an “us” against a “them”. Naturally, the fact that fatness was seen as a characteristic of “uncivilized” bodies carried with it all the connotative meanings that were awarded to the “primitive” nations, starting from being uneducated and dumb to being farther from God (Farrell 60). The 19th century and Enlightenment also brought about a questioning of the existing political hierarchies and justifications for them. Thus medical and scientific “proof” was needed to justify societal oppression of specific groups such as women or the colonized (Schiebinger, qtd In: Farrell 61). Contemporary scientists attempted to classify peoples of the world according to their physical and cultural traits. This led to a heavy focus on the body and bodily traits being subscribed to specific peoples. Scientists attempted to find differences between the “civilized” and “uncivilized” classes. The emerging fields of anthropology and sociology and their close examination of peoples’ bodies and culture thus furthered the belief that the white male was at the top of the evolutionary hierarchy as the most perfected version of a human, with women and “uncivilized nations” beneath him and “less human” than he himself. (Farrell 61-62). Referencing back to Aristoteles “Great Chain of Being” scholars rated everything, from minerals to animals to humans, on a scale. The latter were the closest to God. During imperialism the same classification process was performed on the colonized nations, rating them as inferior to the white, Western Europeans. This then also served as justification for imperialism, slavery and other forms of discrimination (Farrell 60-61). This development also clearly illustrates that at its very roots, fat denigration was already associated with language with negative connotations by using words such as “savage”, “uneducated” and “primitive” in relation to fatness and contrasting it with “civilized” and “modern”. A fat body was a “deficient” body, the same way other races were “deficient” (Farrell 60). As Farrell puts it, “In other words, fat was not white” (60).

This way of thinking not only differentiated between “uncivilized” and “civilized” and all its bodily and cultural connotations reaching from skin color to cultural rituals, but it also differentiated between men and women. As Farrell notes, “(...) this differentiation between women and men was most pronounced the higher one rose on the ‘civilized

ranks,' and least pronounced among the more 'savage' people, whose size, clothing, and cultural roles appeared scandalously close (...)" (62-63). The lower the "race" was on the evolutionary hierarchy, the more women resembled men in their "strength, intelligence and sexual promiscuity" (Farrell 63). The conclusion scientists drew from this was that the less "feminine" the body of the partner a man chose was, the lower his class was perceived (Farrell 63). As women were generally considered to be more prone to fatness, it simultaneously strengthened the belief that they were below men on the evolutionary scale (Farrell 64).

This led to the advent of the advertising industry with magazines publishing dieting programs or tips and cartoons mocking fat people. This development and the cultural response to it illustrates the increasingly strong influence of consumer culture and the advertisement industry starting in the 1920s. With increasing intensity fatness was scandalized (Farrell 3-4). Capitalism and its paradox of on the one hand "cultivat[ing] the work ethic" and "repressing desires for immediate gratification", and on the other hand encouraging consumption and the consumers' yielding to the longing for immediate gratification increasingly plays out on the body. Not only does the body itself become a product of capitalism to be exploited, but the body becomes a symbol for "the work ethic in absolute control" in the form of anorexia, and "consumerism in control" in the form of obesity (Bordo 199-201). While society's attitude towards anorexia is ambivalent, obesity provokes sentiments of rage and disgust (Bordo 202). In a society whose love for consumerism increased, certain virtues needed to be upheld. As religion lost some of its power, "a new, compensatory need to maintain moral anxiety and the potential for virtue" emerged (Stearns 56) and thus "[f]at became a secular sin" (Stearns 64).

Especially the 1970s then saw bodily size becoming more of a personal issue, reflecting a person's emotional, moral and spiritual state as body size began to signify class mobility rather than class location. Fat had become to symbolize everything that objects upward mobility, such as "laziness, lack of discipline, unwillingness to conform, and absence of [...] 'managerial' abilities" (Bordo 193-195). The obese body itself thus seemingly expresses the person's attitude towards cultural norms and their "defiant rebellion" making itself the target of animosity (Bordo 203).

Moreover, the 20th century saw an increasing focus of fatness being connected to issues of health and, in the process, health being a justification for fat stigmatization. The definition of the “ideal weight” for women by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in 1943 was based on the weight of insurance holders who had lived the longest and were below the average American weight (Seid 1989 qtd. In: McKinley 98). This resulted in the general belief that thinness of any kind was preferable to and healthier than fatness. Thus thinness is culturally connected to health. The only way to become “thin” and therefore the only way to become “healthy” is to adopt a certain lifestyle that includes a low calorie diet and exercise. Thus thinness is automatically associated with leading the “correct” lifestyle and fatness with the incorrect one (McKinley 98-99). This furthermore led to the belief that stigmatizing fatness can be justified for health reasons. Society strongly believes that fat people are to blame for their fatness and communicates this message through a number of channels such as advertising (i.e. dieting products) or entertainment (i.e. dieting shows such as “The Biggest Loser”), all of which expose people’s “poor lifestyle choices”. There is a strong belief that both thinness and fatness are “choices” one can make. Fatness is “self-indulgence” (Hartley 66). “Choosing” to be fat thus means that one is too lazy to “choose” to be thin. Consequently, discrimination against fat people is hardly questioned as it is a question of character strength and morality (Bordo 192-195). The “battle against fat” has become part of society’s “ethical compass” as it is a divider between those who could “resist temptation” and those who could not (Stearns 126). Thus effectively what fat stigmatization and the idealization of thinness does is create a barrier between fat people and dominant culture and ensure that they blame themselves and admit to their own excessive behavior (McKinley 107). Anyone not participating in this self-blaming thus becomes a target themselves. So while there are fat people who refuse to be controlled in how they form their bodies and how they feel about their bodies, the circle still continues. “If the rest of us are struggling to be acceptable and ,normal‘, we cannot allow them to get away with it; they must be put in their place, be humiliated and defeated” (Bordo 203).

3.2. Fatness, Sexuality and Female Hunger

Female sexuality, hunger, desire, morality and ideas of primitiveness and race have for a long period of time been intricately linked in Western society leading to a demonization of the fat woman as unnatural, uncivilized and sexually deviant. The

beginnings of this development can be found in the 19th century, when, as previously mentioned, ideas of evolution and civilization began to be explored by scientists. In the 19th century scientists began to rank peoples and people on a scale of civilization and found fatness as one distinguishing factor between civilized and uncivilized peoples. One peoples studied closely were the “Hottentotts”, the Khoikhoi people of South Africa, as they were believed to be the “missing link” between apes and humans and thus lowest on the scale of civilization. Sara Baartman was a Khoikhoi woman who became known as “Venus Hottentott”. She was brought to Europe to be examined and exhibited to the public for her large bottom and breasts. Scientists at the time found her fat to be a “distinctive attribute of [her] sexual attributes” and found her fat distribution to be unnatural and sick (Farrell 64-66). Baartman thus already showcases the cultural connection between sexuality, civilization and fatness that was based on seemingly “scientific” discoveries.

This connection between morality, body type and sexuality was further explored in the following years. Cesare Lombroso, an Italian anthropologist of the late 19th century, attempted to identify the people “whose primitive nature dooms them to violate the laws of civilizations” i.e. people who were prone to criminal behavior, in his book *Criminal Woman*. He based his theory on his observations of their bodily traits and came to the conclusion that criminal women, namely prostitutes and murderers, weigh more than normal women. According to his research especially prostitutes “become positive monsters of fatty tissue” (Lombroso; Ferrero 122-123 qtd. In: Farrell 67). What this demonstrates is that soon enough close connection was created between female morality, sexuality and the female body.

This aided the development of a very strict ideal female body type in the early 20th century. Women were neither supposed to be too thin as “a certain plumpness” implying health and fertility was encouraged, nor too thick so as not to align oneself with the primitive peoples. Nevertheless the belief remained that women, in order to rise from the uncivilized, had to fight their natural inclination towards becoming fat. Cartoons and postcards were drawn to mock fat women, their bottoms often being the focus of attention thus reminding the viewers of the familiar images of Venus Hottentott and her unnatural sexuality. Most of the cartoons show fat women being the target of either

sexual desire (as they were believed to be overtly sexual beings) or disgust (Farrell 68-69).

At the same time, the 20th century also saw the first waves of feminism with female advocates demanding more rights for women. These women's rights advocates were heavily criticized by the general public. There were two ways early feminists were usually portrayed, either as (in caricatures usually thin) spinsters who could not find and take care of a husband, or as fat women who were unable to attract a husband. They were depicted as being masculine (with little to no "feminine" features) as they and their demands would in the end "unsex" women. Especially the fat motif perfectly matched the patriarchal agenda, as it was claimed that these women were literally "unfit" to enter the male sphere. They were portrayed as "large, strong women, out of control beasts who threatened to suffocate the men in their midst". In a multitude of cartoons they were depicted as being out of control in terms of their bodies as well as their desires (Farrell 86-89).

This stigmatization of fatness as primitive, amoral, out of control and overly sexual has led to an increasing eroticization of the thin, slender body. That fact that slenderness is a specifically female ideal can be traced back to Western culture's philosophical and religious heritage. The ability for self-management has been traditionally ascribed to men while the ability to contain and control the body has been ascribed to women, therefore making female desire "by their very nature excessive, irrational, threatening to erupt and challeng[ing to] the patriarchal order". This means that fatness represents not only an unfeminine, uncontrollable body but one that therefore is not erotic to the male and threatening to his own dominance and sexuality (Bordo 205-206). While women are expected to be sexual enough to appeal to men and passively encourage their action, they should not be too sexual so as not to threaten male virility. If a woman is overly "sexy" but remains unresponsive to a man's advances it "may be interpreted as teasing, taunting, mocking" the man's virility (Bordo 6-7). This leads back to another important aspect of sexuality: the Western construction of the male as active and the female as passive, an idea which is based on psychoanalytical and sociobiological theories. Freud understood women to be naturally passive in their sexuality as well as in general behavior due to them waiting to be impregnated (McKinley 101). Sociobiologists explained female passivity by referring to females' way of attracting male attention and

then choosing a partner, rather than actively pursuing one (McKinley 102). Sexuality is then “the gaze that constructs women as objects for male pleasure” (MacKinnon 53 qtd. In: McKinley 105).

Feminism rejected these notions of passivity and focused on ideas of personal freedom. Maternity and the maternal femininity with its focus on hips, waist, and breasts (i.e. hourglass shape) and its powerlessness was rejected. Postmodern society took the feminist ideas of free choice and control, and applied them to the female body. The control over one’s own life was equated with control over one’s own body. Women were encouraged to become active in the shaping of their body and consequently, the shaping of their own life (McKinley 102). Female bodies lost the maternal aspects, becoming boyish and entering the male sphere the same way women were entering the male professional arena (Bordo 207-208).

Moreover, closely related to the ideas of fatness representing uncontrolled desire and a lack of control is then the idea of the act of eating as a sexual act. Fatness is culturally linked to a lack of bodily control, visible in an abundance of food consumption or insatiable sexual desire. On TV this cultural appropriation plays out most clearly. Women are generally expected to be enjoying food “appropriate” for them and in acceptable quantities while never openly enjoying the consumption. If they do, it is nearly always a metaphor for sexual desire (Bordo 110). Susan Bordo analyzed TV advertisements for food and found that while for men appetite and hunger is encouraged (108) and food itself is portrayed as a sensual, erotic experience (Bordo 110-111), women are expected to eat sensually but small portions and low calorie meals. Any female violation of that rule is labeled as “cheating” (an interesting choice of vocabulary with a sexual connotation) (Bordo 112). The female sexual act itself is then equated with the act of eating, an act of “incorporation and destruction of the object of the desire” threatening to “deplete and consume the body and soul of the male”. This can most prominently be seen in the figure of the man-eater in popular culture (Bordo 117). Thus fatness is a sign of sexual deviancy of two types - enjoyment of the act (sex/eating) itself and too much appetite (McKinley 105).

This relationship with food also ties back to female morality, which originated in Victorian gender ideology, warning women against eating too much as it was

considered “vulgar” (Bordo 113). Stearns moreover claims that at the time, along with the beginning sexual interest came (female) guilt and thus a focus on controlling and restraining the body (62-63). Beginning in the 20th century, women were told that the “declining maternal functions did not leave [them] free for every form of indulgence” but that in order to delight in “shared sexuality” they should look slender. Thus constraining women’s bodies was a new way to discipline and moralize them (Stearns 86-87). Consequently, morality has for a long time been closely related to and dependent on the female body and female sexuality. Women’s goodness was and still is frequently judged not by her deeds in general but her sexual deeds as well as her body shape. Slut-shaming is still an effective and frequently employed way of insulting a woman with the ultimate goal of controlling women’s sexuality. This desire to control the female body has spread to women’s size and to their relationship with their own bodies, actions and food. Fatness is culturally accepted as being “bad”. It is a moral category, just like sexual issues are issues of morality in Western culture (Stearns 125-126). Consequently, women themselves are “bad” when they’ve eating too much or the “wrong” things, thus there’s been a shift in women themselves. They may no longer consider themselves being “bad” for being sexual, but they frequently label their eating habits (McKinley 106).

In addition to defining the type of food women are “supposed” to eat, the way women eat is very much subject to social restriction. As fatness is perceived as a sign of lack of control, fat women are not only believed to be eating large quantities of food - food which is considered unhealthy and aiding in their obesity - but are also the object of disgust. Disgust in general is a very strong emotion tied strongly to “the avoidance of some stimulus” and thus also to disordered eating behavior. Additionally, disgust has been known to be “one of the most powerful ways of transmitting cultural values” (Harvey et al. 214). A study conducted by Harvey et al. found that overweight body shapes and high-calorie foods more frequently evoked feelings of disgust and fear in people with eating concerns (217). Thus feelings of disgust are a very strong medium at work in the denigration of fatness.

4. Effects of Fat Stigmatization

The stigmatization of fatness naturally has a multitude of repercussions on the lives of those affected. The fact that fat people have been denigrated for centuries has not only effected people's personal relationship with their bodies and had detrimental effects on body image and mental health but has also caused some very real discrimination in other parts of their lives.

4.1. Fat Discrimination

Ever since the early days of fat stigmatization it has become an omnipresence in Western culture, most recently in the contemporary discussion of America's "obesity epidemic" (Farrell 6). Boero notes that between 1990 and 2001 the *New York Times* published 751 articles related to obesity, aiding the so called "culture of fear" by creating a sense of urgency and spreading panic (Boero 41). The terminology used in order to describe this increase in overweight and obesity has a big influence on the public's perception of fatness. Referring to it as an "epidemic" prompts connotations of disease (Farrell 177) and creates the feeling that obesity is "out of control" (Boero 43). It not only suggests that fatness is infectious but conveys a sense of danger and imminent threat (Farrell 9), invoking a "war on fat" and justifying discriminatory treatment of the "culprit" (Farrell 9-10). While obesity undoubtedly poses many health risks by causing a high risk for cardiovascular diseases and being marketed as the number one cause of death in the world (31% of all global deaths) ("Cardiovascular diseases", *WHO*), the seemingly natural link between body weight and health *could* be questioned but

"The limits on critical thought about obesity in the mainstream media are built on invisible but powerful scientific black boxes (Latour 1987). These black boxes encase issues that are considered to be accepted scientific wisdom and no longer open to debate. In the case of obesity, this includes knowledge of the general negative health consequences of overweight and obesity, the reliability of the body mass index (BMI) as a measure of health, and the general desirability of and positive health outcomes associated with weight loss" (Boero 42).

Thus, the "epidemic" is regarded as a fact and hardly ever questioned. More than that, a "cultural black box" exists (Boero 42), meaning that the public knowledge regarding the consequences of obesity are never questioned. The long history of fat discrimination along with the scientific justification make a differentiated public discussion of these health concerns next to impossible. This "cultural black box" ensures that certain beliefs about fat people remain unquestioned and consequently, the medical health aspect

becomes an excuse for discrimination against fat people (Farrell 11). By simply referring to the medical risks of obesity, a victim-blaming and shaming process is easily justified, as it is “in the best interest” of the person concerned. Although the reasons for overweight and obesity have been proven to be a mixture of genetical and environmental factors, many people still lay blame on fat people themselves. As a study quoted by the *New York Times* claims, Americans (3/4 of 1509 participants), despite evidence suggesting otherwise, still “blame obesity on willpower” (Kolata, “Americans Blame Obesity”, *NY Times*).

This behavior so common in Western society’s public discourse gives rise to the question why the public deems it acceptable to judge over a person’s body. Attribution theory explores the connection between causality, reaction and expectations of people being confronted with a social stigma. It claims that “the perceived cause of the stigma should (...) determine affective reactions toward the stigmatized person” (Weiner, Perry and Magnusson 738-739). In their study, Weiner, Perry and Magnusson found that obesity is generally perceived as a controllable stigma (as it is considered to be caused by excessive eating without exercise) and thus leads to more negative attitudes than when the causes are perceived to be uncontrollable (e.g. glandular dysfunction) (744-747). While fatness is a physical stigma, a stigma that is clearly visible and cannot be hidden, culture attributes many non-physical characteristics to fatness. There is a strong belief that a high body fat is related to gluttony, laziness (Himes and Thompson 712), greed, a lack of willpower, immorality, stupidity, (Farrell 4) and uncontrollable desire (McKinley 105). It has been found that although negative fat-bias is significantly lower among people with high BMIs, there is no positive fat-bias either, as

“[e]ven the most obese group of respondents in this study showed an implicit preference for thin people relative to fat people and implicit stereotyping of fat people as lazy compared with thin people” (Schwartz et al. 444).

The aforementioned assigning of blame and the consequences it brings have lead to a deep fear of fat and to a number of ways obesity is discussed in today’s society. First of all, in the process of warning against the loss of control and in the spread of fear, disordered behavior (obsessive planning of meals, counting calories, excessive exercise) is openly encouraged (Boero 46). A multitude of new products have entered the market, from weight-loss drugs to exercise machines, all with the aim of selling to the desperate. In cases where this type of control is not enough, the body being already too far gone, too “out of control”, bariatric surgeries, the removal of parts of the

stomach, have become a widespread and accepted part of the public conversation of obesity with only little mention of risks and costs, once again bringing with it the classification of obesity as a self-caused disease (Boero 46-47). The fact that people are willing to permanently alter an essential organ in order to shake the visible stigma of fatness is worrying. Nevertheless, “[t]his normalcy, or the ability to move through life without one’s weight being a defining feature, is the most often cited reason my interviewees gave for having weight-loss surgery (...)” (Boero 96).

People’s willingness and desperation to shake the fat stigma with any means necessary of course raises the question to what extent fatness even affects people’s lives. Fat stigma has both internal as well as external consequences for fat people. Besides having a disastrous effect on people’s own body image, self-understanding and self-esteem (which will be discussed more extensively in the following chapter), it also reduces people’s chances in elementary life situations. On the job market, overweight people are discriminated against in a number of ways. Quantitative meta-analyses of multiple studies show that the weight significantly influences workplace treatment in regards to many job-related outcomes such as wages, promotions or termination (Rudolph et al. 2009). A number of experimental studies showed that obese people are less likely to be hired in the first place. Pingitore et al. videotaped two normal weight actors’ (one male, one female) job applications, once, in their natural weight (normal), and once as obese (with the help of make-up and prosthetics). They were told to pay specific attention to having the same vocal intonation, body movements, gestures and posture in both applications. All information provided in the “interviews” was job relevant. 320 introductory psychology students were then asked to rate the application videos and point out whether they would hire the person. Additionally, subjects were asked to rate the applicants’ character in order to find out whether more negative personality traits were prescribed to overweight people (Pingitore et al. 911). Results showed that overweight people were less likely to be employed than equally well qualified normal weight people. The discrimination factor is even higher for women than it is for men, indicating an additional influence of gender bias. Overweight people were perceived as having more negative personality traits with once more female obese applicants being perceived the most negatively (Pingitore et al. 912-914). While weight-bias was the most influential on hiring decisions, Rudolph et al. (8) and Roehling, Pichler and Bruce (243) found it to affect salaries or promotions less significantly.

Apart from these real outcomes of weight discrimination, obese people, as Rudolph et al. (2) point out, also face a number of work-related stereotypes such as,

“lacking self-discipline and self-control (e.g., Bellizzi & Norvell, 1991 [...]), being lazy and not trying as hard as others at work (e.g. Bellizzi & Norvell, 1991 [...]), possessing poor work habits, and having less conscientiousness, competency, skill, and ability than individuals of “average” weight (e.g., Klesges et al., 1990 [...]). Moreover, overweight individuals in the workplace are also viewed as more likely to be absent from work (e.g., Klesges et al., 1990), and less likely to get along with, and be accepted by their coworkers and subordinates (e.g., [...] Klesges et al., 1990)”.

The latter is confirmed more recently and extensively by the meta-analysis by Roehling, Pichler and Bruce who found obese people to be regarded as less desirable as working partners by their coworkers (246). This collective rejection of obesity in Western society already starts at school where young children experience weight related discrimination and bias from peers as well as educational professionals, influencing not only their personal relationships but also acceptance into educational facilities (Puhl and Brownell 796).

Apart from affecting one's professional life, obesity also influences medical treatment. A number of studies have found medical practitioners to react negatively towards obese patients (Puhl and Brownell 792). This weight bias along with patients' own feelings of shame and thus reluctance to seek help, influence medical care as well as health care costs (Puhl and Brownell 793-795). Moreover a number of studies suggest that the public and private space (e.g. seats on flights or in cars, length of seat belts) and public as well as private authorities (e.g. jury selection, housing, adoption agencies) frequently discriminate against fat people (Puhl and Brownell 797-798).

4.2. Body Image

The construction of the thin body as the ideal with positive connotations, ranging from attractiveness and beauty to health and social status, and the stigmatization of fatness wields social control over women and their behavior (Foucault qtd. In: McKinley 106-107). Apart from impacting behavior, thin-body-ideal also influences obese people's psychological health and consequently causes body image dissatisfaction (negative self-evaluation) and body image distortion (Friedman and Brownell 10-11), both of which are so common among women that McKinley even calls them “normalizing” (107). Research has consistently shown negative effects on the psyche of individuals caused

by dieting, weight cycling, binge eating or other disordered eating phenomena (Friedman and Brownell 15). Obese people show a tendency to describe themselves negatively with words such as “dirty, unworthy and alienated all because of their weight” (Lee and Shapiro 477). They also tend to experience life events more negatively (Friedman and Brownell 13) and may find teasing more distressing than normal weight people (Friedman and Brownell 15). This has led to the hypothesis that body dissatisfaction causes disordered eating behaviors and low-self esteem.

Self-esteem means “the evaluative component of self-knowledge that refers to the extent that individuals like themselves and believe they are competent” (Noser and Zeigler-Hill 2). It functions as a “buffer against negative experiences”. Low self-esteem then leads individuals to “use self-protective strategies characterized by reluctance to draw attention to themselves, attempts to conceal their bad qualities from being noticed, and effort to avoid potential risks of negative feedback or rejection” (Noser and Zeigler-Hill 3). It has been found that starting in middle-school, external feedback seems to begin to influence children’s feelings of self-worth. Therefore, external judgement of children’s appearance, which already starts at infancy, can negatively affect their self-esteem. Thus it is not surprising that low self-esteem has consistently proven to be a strong predictor of body dissatisfaction (Noser and Zeigler-Hill 4). Moreover, individuals who possess appearance-based contingent self-esteem (i.e. self-esteem that is based on external judgement of one’s appearance) have also been shown to suffer more commonly from negative body image (Noser and Zeigler-Hill 8).

Body dissatisfaction stems from an internalization of the thin-ideal, i.e an acceptance of the ideal as one’s own. How people tend to internalize the thin-ideal so readily has also been the subject of extensive research. The tripartite influence model of body image and eating disturbance focuses very much on environmental risk factors. It combines various already established models to stress the three major influences on body image dissatisfaction and consequently eating disturbances, namely peers, parents and the media. Additionally the internalization of societal standards of appearance and appearance comparison could be found as mediating factors (Thompson, Covert, and Stormer 1999 qtd. In: Shroff and Thompson 17-18). Suisman et al. suggest additional genetic risk factors for thin-ideal internalization and recommend an inclusion of hereditary factors in the tripartite influence model (945). The effects of all these

influencing factors on body image mentioned above lead to body dissatisfaction which most commonly reveals itself in the form of self-discrepancy and internalized shame. Self-discrepancy has been found to be connected to feelings of shame (Higgings 1987 qtd. In Bessenoff and Snow 727) or guilt, and bulimic (Synder 1997 qtd. In: Bessenoff and Snow 728) or anorexic behavior (Higgings, Vookles, & Tykocinski 1992 qtd. In: Bessenoff and Snow 728). In a 2006 study Bessenoff and Snow explore the influence of the thin-ideal on women's body image. They hypothesize that body shame results out of the internalization (not out of mere acknowledgement) of cultural body standards. It was found that participants' personal body ideal was larger than the perceived cultural standard although both were "quite thin". They interpret this finding to show that participants believe "the cultural standard is desirable but not personally attainable" which could possibly lead to "emotional vulnerability on the one hand and cognitive dissonance on the other". It may also "represent a coping mechanism to prevent disordered eating patterns" or "a conscious refusal to endorse these standards" as they were recognized to be "extreme, unhealthy and impossible to achieve" (Bessenoff and Snow 730).

Especially interesting for this thesis is the influence of media on body image issues. As mentioned above, media plays a big part in the tripartite influence model. It has been suggested by a number of studies that the media does have an effect on people's understanding of their own bodies. Harrison found in a study that "exposure to thin-ideal television increases the magnitude of body-specific ideal discrepancies" (310) and a video that promoted "fatness-as-bad activated [...] discrepancies" which then "suggests that regular exposure to traditional thin-ideal content is related to eating disorder symptomatology" (318). This is supported by a number of studies which suggest that exposure to the thin-ideal media generally leads to dissatisfaction with the self instead of the ideal (Harrison 292). Myers and Biocca find that "young females [not only] tend to overestimate their body size" but also show signs of an elastic body image that reacts to cues found, among others, on television, concluding that "[b]ody shape perception can be changed by watching less than 30 minutes of television" (125-126). Interestingly enough they also found that upon watching ideal-body advertisements, women can, contrary to their original hypothesis, also experience feelings of euphoria or relief, relishing in the "You can be thin" messages and by imaging their future thinner selves. Thus they create a self-perception fitting to the internalized ideal (Myers and Biocca 127).

Other than encouraging the internalization, it has been hypothesized that the media moreover encourages unconscious, automatic social comparison (Goethals 1986 qtd. In: Botta 26). Objectification theory claims that women accept society's objectification of their body as their own (Liimakka 16) and critically evaluate themselves according to these ideals (Bessenoff and Snow 730). In a study Botta asked high-school girls how many hours a week they watched (thin) television dramas and how often they compared themselves and others to the characters on TV (29). They were then asked to fill out a questionnaire asking questions about body image dissatisfaction, drive for thinness and bulimic behaviors (31). The results suggest that,

They see these perfect images as representing realistic goals to achieve. They compare themselves and believe they come up short in those comparisons. The more they compare themselves, the more they strive to be thin, the more they dislike their bodies, and the more they engage in unhealthy behaviors (Botta 37).

Thus constant confrontation with a profoundly visual society leads to the critical surveillance of the own body and frequent appearance-based thoughts. In a study with Finnish girls, Liimakka found that “[m]any of the young women described themselves as engaging in self-critical surveillance of their bodies, either momentarily, in particular situations, or even continuously. For some young women, their self-critical body surveillance severely intervened with their daily lives” (19). Although a large majority of women realize the thin-ideal to be unrealistic and even unhealthy, they still aim to achieve it. Showing resistance and failing often results in self-criticism and “a continuous moral self-evaluation” (Liimakka 20). Thus, as Liimakka described in her study, women are “prone to experience both dissatisfaction with their bodies for not being thin and beautiful enough and dissatisfaction with their selves for not being resistant and strong enough in relation to the cultural body ideal” (21).

5. Resistance, Body Positivity and Affirmative Abjection

While the stigmatization of fatness is omnipresent in American culture, there has been some development in the resistance to the commonly conveyed understanding of fatness and fat people. In the 1960s the first fat activist groups started meeting and working, not on discussions of weight loss strategies or commiserating their status in society, but on fat acceptance thus working on breaking down the stigma and challenging people's understanding of fatness (Farrell 8). Generally, it can be said that

the first waves of fat activism were very much interlinked with various other movements, amongst which second-wave feminism stands out most prominently (Farrell 140). Early suffragists had been portrayed in the media as fat, uncivilized beings who proved a threat to the patriarchal order (Farrell 88). To counter, first-wave feminists then employed the same tactic, advertising for their cause with white and thin women as the “highly evolved, able to manage the bounty and pressure of the modern world” (Farrell 97). In their propaganda anyone denying their cause (e.g. men, anti-suffragists, etc.) were portrayed as fat and uncivilized (Farrell 100). Thus first-wave feminists used common ideas of fat denigration. Second-wave feminism on the other hand “encouraged new bodily perspectives” (Farrell 140).

A big step in the beginnings of the movement was the founding of the National Association to Aid Fat Americans in 1969. Their primary goal was improving fat people’s self-esteem as well as integrating them into society. They did not yet question the very roots of the problem itself as did later organizations. The Fat Underground split from the NAAFA for that very reason, to become more political and challenge the notions that uphold fat discrimination in society. Their Fat Liberation Manifesto demanded full rights for fat people and connected fat discrimination with sexism and other kinds of oppression. Moreover they stressed the importance of capitalism in maintaining the system of discrimination (Farrell 141-143). Only later on did the NAAFA change their name to National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance and their tactic, not only to aiding fat people and their integration into society, but beginning to challenge the very notion that excludes them (Farrell 148-149).

Fat activists nowadays work heavily with humor and satire to get their point across and break the stigma (Farrell 138) as well as with active boycotts and even legal action. A huge target of the movement is the limited space that is allotted to fat people in society, as many of them “literally do not fit in” on buses, airplanes, in restaurants or other public spaces (Farrell 158-159). Taking on the notion that obesity is an “epidemic” the Health at Every Size movement challenges the idea of a person’s health being solely dependent on their weight, instead focusing on overall well-being and learning to respect and understand one’s own body as well as access to health care and nutritional food (Boero 12; Bacon, *The Pledge*, HAES).

Apart from outspoken activists group there has also recently been some movement towards a more inclusive and nuanced discussion of obesity, fatness and body size in the general media. Previously it was mentioned that especially the news media and its insistent labeling of the increase in obesity as an “epidemic” has had a huge influence on how people perceive fatness and fat people, and has ensured that the discussion is shaped more by emotional aspects than factual ones. Nevertheless, recent years have seen a slow change in another direction. While in the year 2000 the *New York Times* published a series called “The Fat Epidemic”, focusing heavily on condemning the rise of obesity and with it the obese (“The Fat Epidemic”, *NY Times*), it started a new series in 2016 called “The Science of Fat” (“The Science of Fat”, *NY Times*), taking a slightly more nuanced approach towards the topic by including more critical voices of the “epidemic”.

The increasing importance of social media has had a split effect on this development. While sites like Instagram or Facebook and the recent increasing interest in fitness have undoubtedly intensified young people’s focus on obtaining a thin body and associations of fitness with thinness (and vice versa), there has also been a trend towards body positivity and fat acceptance. The hashtag #bodypositivity currently has over 809,000 entries on Instagram (3 August, 2017). Plus-size models like Ashley Graham with her Sports Illustrated cover have fought their way into mainstream media with influential clothing brands like H&M, Mango, Forever 21 or Nike offering plus-size lines (Watson, “18 Affordable Plus-Size”, *Buzzfeed*). Seeing the images of plus-size models seems to have a positive effect on the viewers, as a study by Clayton, Ridgway and Hendrickse suggests. They found that “images of one’s ideal body type (i.e., thin models) resulted in the greatest amount of dejection-related emotions” and “body satisfaction linearly increased as the models moved further away from one’s ideal” (12).

While this slow inclusion of bigger sizes into the fashion community is commendable and truly needed, the question arises whether brands specifying clothing as being “plus-sized” and marketing it as such is a sign of a slow breakdown of the stigmatization or whether this accentuates the problem at hand, especially as the sizes being considered “plus-size” represent an estimated 67% of the female American population and the average American woman wears size 14-18 (Miller, “We Let You Down”, *Refinery29*). Moreover, the clothing itself and the posing of the models and staging of the photos

does not, in some cases, accentuate their shape but hide body parts which are considered unattractive by conventional standards, such as stomach rolls (e.g. hiding their stomach with loose clothing, hands, accessories, etc.) or thick thighs (photos mid-step, one leg before the other, one leg bent at the knee, etc.). Additionally, plus-size models once more seem to have a certain, preferable body shape (hourglass) with little to no flab. This correlates with what Bordo calls our “fear of flab” (187). She claims that while society is afraid of weight, it is “not the key element in [today’s] changed perceptions” but rather that we have “come to expect a tighter, smoother, more contained body profile” (Bordo 187-188). The ultimate goal in many cases thus still seems to be camouflage, i.e. hiding the fat and undesirable body parts and creating the impression of smallness and smoothness with the help of posing, clothing and Photoshop. Thus the question whether plus-size models actually threaten or further establish and confirm the system of fat denigration remains.

One way of resisting against fat denigration and its idea of fat being not only disgusting and undesirable but also a sign of lesser character is to not only fully embrace the fat body but to proudly show it. Menninghaus calls this “affirmative abjection”, as “it [...] seeks to bring into play feelings of defense that border on disgust and tries to make them accessible to a revaluation, ideally to a direct countercathexis”. Menninghaus analyses that it comes into play when “anti-discrimination politics seem[...] to lose strength and even give way to a reverse trend” (391). In the case of fat discrimination this can be seen most prominently in various cultural installations. On social media more and more fat women are getting undressed under the hashtags #bodypositivity, #bodyconfidence #thickandproud or #donthatetheshake, proudly showing off their fat and dancing in underwear or bikinis. As will be discussed more later on, *Girls* also works by evoking feelings of disgust, actively confronting viewers with their own negative reactions and thereby encouraging a thought-process.

6. Fatness on TV

TV is believed to be a big influence in the shaping and preservation of cultural norms. It is a place where meanings are produced, negotiated and naturalized by the dominant class by acting on an “ideology inscribed in the cultural and social practices of a class and therefore of the members of that class” (Fiske, *Culture, Ideology, Interpellation*, 307). Television uses a composed system of signs, called codes in order to create and

circulate these meanings (Fiske, *Television Culture*, 1088). Thus television depicts reality insofar, as “reality” can only be understood *through* these codes, especially since the reality of a particular culture is already encoded (Fiske, *Television Culture*, 1089). Just as language naturalizes the way we perceive the world, television then does the same. Thus television works within the mode of realism. Before viewing television, we surrender to the assumption that it is not constructed but a mirror of “reality” (Fiske, *Reading Television*, 129). Thus it is important to analyze how fatness is depicted on TV. How does the television “realism” reflect a general agreement within the society about fat stigmatization and how is it used to naturalize viewers’ understanding of fatness?

The effect of fat stigmatization on TV is manifold. First of all there is a strong correlation between disordered eating and other psychological issues (depression, low self-esteem, etc.) and thin-ideal media exposure (e.g. Stice and Shaw 1994, Harrison and Cantor 1997, Harrison 2001, etc.). Stice and Shaw in a 1994 study argue that exposure to the thin ideal on TV leads to ideal-body type internalization and consequently body dissatisfaction and a higher likelihood of disordered eating (302), negative affect (depression, shame, guilt, confidence), which could prompt food binges (303), and increased social comparisons (291). Nevertheless, television’s influence on the development of eating disorders has consistently been shown to be relatively weak compared to the influence of other activities (e.g. magazine reading or peer interaction). Vaughan and Fouts also hypothesize that, as television viewing is typically associated with weight gain, not watching television could be seen as a way to avoid fatness (317). The cultivation theory of George Gerbner claims that “watching a great deal of television will be associated with a tendency to hold specific and distinct conceptions of reality” that are consistent with the conceptions broadcast on TV (Shanahan and Morgan 3). Consequently, it hypothesizes that stereotyping on TV will eventually develop into real expectations and assumptions about the world. Backing this theory a study from 2000 by Kristen Harrison saw male children (elementary school) increasingly fat stereotype big girls after being exposed to the thin-ideal on television (632). Applying the social learning theory (Bandura 1977) to TV, Fouts and Burggraf (1999) stress the role of TV as a marker of acceptability of behavior that communicates strongly through positive and negative reinforcement, leading to the modeling of those behaviors and self-reinforcement (internalization) of the viewers and thus the belief that “(a) self-esteem should be related to how one looks, and (b) in the case of negative self-statements, that

is it acceptable to denigrate oneself based upon how one appears physically” (Fouts and Burggraf, *Female Body Images*, 475).

Generally, thin people have for a long time been over-, fat people underrepresented on television. In 1980 a study conducted by Lois Kaufman found that only 12% of prime-time television characters were overweight. In 1986 Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson and Kelly asked five research assistants and two independent participants to rate 221 characters of 33 television programs (520-522). The results showed that 5% of female TV characters were rated as “heavy” (25,5% for men), whereas 69,1% of female characters were rated as “thin” (17,5% for men) (Silverstein et al. 523-524). In a 2003 study conducted by Greenberg et al. it was found that while nearly 1 in 4 women in real life were overweight, the numbers on television were 3 in 100 (1343). Comparing different television genres Greenberg et al. moreover found situation comedies to be the genre with the most fat characters (1344).

There are two types of fat discrimination on TV, namely fat shaming in the form of fat commentary and/or fat humor, and the portrayal of fat characters with negative and less desirable characteristics. Fat commentary is simply stating the fatness of a person on TV while fat humor means making fun of fat people. Both have the primary goal of promoting the thin ideal and stigmatizing fatness. In 1999 Gregory Fouts and Kimberley Burggraf (1999) analyzed female body types in 28 different prime-time sitcoms (52 female characters) and their own as well as other characters’ reaction to and commentary on their bodies. In the beginning of their paper they stress the importance of positive and negative reinforcement in the influence and modeling on young viewers, quoting the social learning theory of Albert Bandura which claims that people learn through observing, imitating and modeling (1977). Studies suggest that the combination of modeling and vicarious verbal reinforcement may be particularly influencing for young viewers and their understanding of their own bodies (Fouts and Burggraf, *Male Negative Comments*, 926). The results of their study show that 33% of the 52 characters analyzed were below average, 60% average and 7% above average in weight (Fouts and Burggraf, *Female Body Images*, 477). More men than women made positive comments about a female body indicating that judging someone else’s body is (more) acceptable for men. Thinner female characters received more positive comments from males (Fouts and Burggraf, *Female Body Images*, 478). In a follow-up study from 2000 they widened their scope to include negative comments made by males (Fouts and

Burggraf, *Male Negative Comments*, 926) as well as audience reactions of laughter after a negative comment as being an indication of approval of the comment (927). 14% of female characters were commented on negatively by male characters with a heavy tendency towards fat stigmatization - the bigger the woman, the more negative the comment. 80% of the negative comments were followed by audience reactions (Fouts and Burggraf, *Male Negative Comments*, 929-930). In 2007 Himes and Thompson analyzed 25 movies and 10 television series and their use of fat stigmatization (verbal and non-verbal, direct and indirect). Their criteria for analysis included gender and age of commentator and target, as well as the target source (either targeting oneself, someone else or a group) (714-715). Their findings showed that fat shaming was primarily performed by men (three times more often than by women) and verbally, with comments about someone else being more frequent than comments about oneself (716). All of this correlates with and also leads to the fact that fat actors are frequently typecast as comical characters that audiences like to and expect to laugh about (Khean 43). Examples would be Kevin James, Jonah Hill, Zach Galifianakis, Melissa McCarthy, Rebel Wilson etc. all of whom are primarily known for their roles in comedies.

Moreover, a connection between a person's physical appearance and personality traits have existed for thousands of years (e.g. Greek poet Sappho in *Fragments* No. 101, "What is beautiful is good"). A study conducted by Dion, Berscheid and Walster in 1972 was groundbreaking in the sense that for the first time this theory was scientifically proven to be true. In the study sixty college students judged people's personality. It was found that attractive people were assumed to have socially desirable personality traits and live happier lives (Dion, Berscheid and Walster 289). The question now arises whether this theory also applies to television's depiction of fat people. Greenberg et al. analyzed 10 different television series (275 episodes) in regards to their portrayal of fat characters in 2003. The focus of analysis was on the number and types (positive, negative, leadership) of interactions with other characters, characters' attributes and general, sexual and role behavior. Generally married television characters were larger than unmarried ones, implying that in order to get married one needs to have a desirable figure. Larger characters moreover had fewer romantic scenes and positive interactions. While 92% of "thinner" and "middle" characters were judged as attractive, the same can only be said for 49% of the larger women. At the same time, bigger women were also viewed with more respect. Fat women were ridiculed almost twice as

often as females of the other two groups and the middle and larger group of females showed fewer physical affection than the thinner women (Greenberg et al. 1343-1345). Moreover, larger male television characters were more likely to be unemployed, implying that fatter people are lazy and unreliable, more often portrayed while eating, but not as commonly found to be talking about dating (Greenberg et al. 1346). In an analysis of children's media (film and books), Herbozo et al. found that 72% of videos (compared to only 7.5% of books) underlined the importance of physical attractiveness. 60% of videos depict female thinness as desirable and in 72% of videos thin characters have positive character traits, whereas obese characters have negative traits in 64% of videos. In 40% of videos others do not like the fat character(s) (27).

7. *Girls & The Mindy Project*

For a long time TV has been a male sphere. Only recently has the television landscape experienced an influx of female-led shows (e.g. *New Girl*, *Drop Dead Diva*, *Jane the Virgin*, etc.). Above all though, female comedians have entered the field and made their characters much more three-dimensional, brazen and controversial (Fallon, "Women in Sitcoms", *Huffington Post*). Nevertheless, the body shape of females on TV is still rather one-dimensional and "ideal". The first, ground-breaking dive into the sphere for multi-dimensional *and* fat female leads was *Roseanne*, who was strong, opinionated, outspoken, controversial and fat. As Maggie Fremont in an article for *Vulture* puts it, she "didn't look like anyone else on TV, and she never apologized for it" (Fremont, "The Evolution of Fat Women", *Vulture*). She was an "unruly woman", who among other accomplishments, "reconcile[d] the conflict women experience in a society that says 'consume' but look as if you don't", in the process becoming "a source of danger for threatening the conceptual categories which organize our lives" (Rowe, *Roseanne*, 82-84). Despite's *Roseanne*'s groundbreaking success in the late 80s, the body shapes of females on TV are still very much restricted to the thin ideal that is socially acceptable. Especially when it comes to the three-dimensionality of fat characters, TV is still lacking diversity with a lot of story lines for fat women still revolving around their weight and their dissatisfaction with it (Fremont, "The Evolution of Fat Women", *Vulture*). The fact that very few shows, much less sitcoms, have looked at fatness as something *not* "other", but normal, is what in the end has led to the decision to analyze *Girls* and *The Mindy Project*. The two shows were chosen as they both star fat women, but their body shapes are not the premise for their shows. The comedic effects of the

shows are very much based on the main characters' flaws (i.e. Hannah's ignorance and Mindy's shallowness and selfishness) with their weight (at least from the outset) *not* being one of it.

Girls was created by Lena Dunham, who also stars as one of the leading characters, with its first season premiering in 2012 on HBO, a premium cable network service which allowed Dunham to stretch the limits of what is acceptable on television, both in terms of sexuality as well as showing off her body. *Girls* has long been understood as a *Sex and the City* situated in a post-feminist era, only more controversial, critical and biting. *Girls* uses and criticizes feminism, thematizing sexual empowerment and body politics but at the same time constantly re-negotiating feminism itself, often in the form of satire, observation and reflection (Bianco 74-75). The show moreover uses a number of tropes that lead to its characterization of being full of "cringe-worthy" (Wong, "The 15 Most Cringe-Worthy Moments", *Complex*), "self-absorbed, embarrassing and pitiable" moments (Dempster, "Girls", *The Guardian*). At the same time it is often criticized for its portrayal of white privilege and lack of diversity in casting (Nicholson, "Lena Dunham tackles", *The Guardian*). Nevertheless, *Girls* has been revolutionary in a number of ways, one of which being its usage of "affirmative abjection". *Girls* actively provokes disgust, most prominently in its portrayal of Hannah's body and her sexuality. Lena Dunham's body has been the topic of discussion ever since the show premiered. She herself has often been criticized as well as applauded for her self-portrayal, calling her self-absorbed and a "pathological exhibitionist" (Stasi, "New 'Girl' on top", *New York Post*) or calling her portrayal of her body a redefinition of "both female beauty and a woman's value" (Wortham et al.; "6 Ways 'Girls' Changed", *NY Times*). The reception of Dunham's body is somewhat reminiscent of that of other "unruly bodies", such as that of Roseanne Barr, whose bodies are "excessive or fat" and are "unable or unwilling to confine [themselves] to [their] proper place" and whose "behavior is associated with looseness" and "dirt" (Rowe, *The Unruly Woman*, 31). Dunham uses her body in the show in this tradition, as a "a site of humor" but also of "subversive gender politics" (Ford 1036).

The Mindy Project, created by and starring Mindy Kaling, premiered around the same time, on Fox. Thus Kaling was subjected to much stricter regulatory forces than Dunham as a premium cable network is less dependent on public and commercial funding and can thus be more controversial in its contents (something which can also

be seen in the analysis of the scenes and the body politics of both shows). Kaling's show did not garner as much public attention as Lena Dunham's *Girls* but nevertheless has frequently been praised in the mainstream media, in particular in regards to its perceived body-positive portrayal of Mindy Lahiri, calling her body "perfectly, awesomely, average" (Moeschen, "What 'The Mindy Project' gets right", *Huffington Post*). As with *Girls*, *The Mindy Project* frequently discusses issues of body image and fat stigmatization but in an intricately different format than *Girls* does. While the latter often intends to challenge viewers by provoking emotions of disgust or horror, *The Mindy Project* works on a more humorous level, as will be seen in the course of the discussion. Although many critics argue that *The Mindy Project* is anything but feminist (Villarreal, "Is there Any Feminism", *Observer*), I argue that the show simply works through its main character, a female anti-hero, who is a biting parody of society and its double-standards. Mindy is, as *The Guardian* puts it "a navel-gazing asshole whose ethnicity is incidental and whose feminism is intersectional by default" (Iqbal, "Mindy Lahiri", *The Guardian*). She holds the mirror up to society, albeit in a heightened and overdrawn form.

The shows lend themselves to comparison for a number of reason. The main thing the shows *Girls* and *The Mindy Project* have in common are, as previously mentioned, their lead characters' body shapes. Both have thick shapes and their bodies are frequent points of discussion on the show as well as in real life. The former often leads to the labels both shows carry, namely being "realistic" and portraying bigger women "realistically". Generally speaking, women tend to refer to images of plus-size women with the adjectives of "normal", "beautiful" and "happy, confident and caring", as compared to the understanding of thin models as "inauthentic, self-obsessed and heartless" (Beale, Malson and Tischner 382-383). Beale, Malson and Tischner thus worry that this is indicative to a pre-feminist understanding of women and that fat women are seen as a means that "demonises thin women and retains body weight/ shape as a central index of women's worth" (383).

Especially in connection with their bodies, both shows discuss society's ideas of gender and gender performativity. They both try to break from the idea of big women as domestic, caring mother-figures that still seems to perpetuate in our minds. Both, Hannah Horvath of *Girls* and Mindy Lahiri of *The Mindy Project* are self-centered, outspoken, educated yet oftentimes naive and inconsiderate. *Girls* has often been

criticized for being “too white”, whereas *The Mindy Project* has an Indian lead who acts very “white” (in so far as she does not actively discuss her ethnicity, uses it to her advantage when needed and is even at times racist herself). Mindy additionally cares a lot about fashion, wearing bold, bright colors and seemingly attracting attention to her body rather than deflecting from it. Hannah on the other hand cares little for her appearance but rather challenges the viewers by almost caring too little, evoking reactions of disgust or dislike due to the confrontational nature of her appearance. Most importantly though, both shows approach the topic of fatness and fat shame from different angles, as will also be seen in the course of the scene analyses. While *The Mindy Project* uses satire to acknowledge stereotypes, *Girls* more self-reflectively asserts itself and actively rejects them. What both have in common is that „[t]hey’ve used humor to demolish old ways of seeing, dismantling, joke by joke, ideas about a woman’s to-be-looked-at-ness” (Wortham et al.; “6 Ways ‘Girls’ Changed”, *NY Times*).

8. Analysis

In the course of the analysis both shows, *Girls* and *The Mindy Project*, will be analyzed according to certain aspects related to the cultural stigmatization and shaming of fatness. The scenes are roughly grouped according to some of the various forms in which fat discrimination can appear not only in popular culture, as illustrated in the shows, but in society in general. The first scenes all illustrate some of the ways society shames fat people for their bodies - sometimes consciously and obviously, sometimes unconsciously and in a concealed way. The effects of said fat shaming on the object’s own body image will follow as illustrated by the two main characters, Hannah and Mindy. Moreover, examples of the deep roots of fat stigmatization in society will be debated in the upcoming chapters by taking a closer look at fat blame, the importance society lays on weight and consequently weight loss as an achievement and lastly, the connection between fat stigmatization and female sexuality as illustrated with a scene from *Girls*.

8.1. Fat Shaming

Fat shaming as previously mentioned has detrimental effects on fat people’s body image and their self-confidence. It is also frequently found in TV shows and movies. It can be either in the often rather obvious form of fat commentary or fat humor both of

which are very common, and sometimes very subtle and hard to detect (as mentioned in chapter 6). TV and movies have the ability to shape the viewers' reality. Fat shaming on TV can thus, if employed regularly, become the norm and part of the viewers' normal life. This leads to the phenomenon that fat shaming is not only limited to thin people but fat people tend to not only shame other fat people but also themselves, meaning that self-criticism and self-deprecating humor become the norm.

This chapter explores whether *The Mindy Project* uses, employs and/or discusses fat shaming in any way and how it handles it. *Girls* has a strong focus on Hannah's character and her understanding of her own body. While in the show Hannah frequently deals with instances of fat shaming, the focus of the scene is often not the shaming itself but Hannah's reaction to it and what it reveals about her relationship to her body. *The Mindy Project* on the other hand, works with the concept in various ways, in the form of fat commentary, fat humor and also the effect of fatness on the perception of the fat person's competence. *The Mindy Project* uses Mindy's out-going, aggressive nature to its advantage in order to actively and openly oppose verbal attacks on fatness. Nevertheless, the show still demonstrates the way fat shaming affects fat people as well as the surroundings of fat people in particular, who often do not know whether to react with humor or pity.

8.1.1. "If you lost 15 pounds."

The Mindy Project: Season 1, Episode 1: 10:45

MINDY (to girls)	So, do you guys wanna see an amazing first date outfit?
BETSY	Yes!
SHAUNA	Sure.
<i>Mindy steps out of office in sparkly dress.</i>	
BETSY (loud)	Oh My Gosh!
MINDY	I mean, I don't know.
SHAUNA	Gotta give it up, you look hot.
MINDY	Thank you for giving it up, Shauna.
DANNY (looks at Mindy, then mumbling to himself)	Oh boy!
MINDY	I can hear you. What?
DANNY	That's not a good date outfit.

MINDY (laughing)	What are you talking about? It's glamorous and it's awesome.
DANNY	Girls may like that stuff but guys don't.
MINDY	Erm, I think I know what guys like.
DANNY	Maybe, if you have a date with Elton John on New Year's Eve.
<i>Betsy laughs.</i>	
MINDY	That's not funny. That's insensitive to gay men... and to me.
<i>Dr. Shulman steps in.</i>	
DR. SHULMAN	Good morning, everybody.
MINDY	Dr. Shulman, do you like my outfit?
DR. SHULMAN	It's glitzy. Got razzle dazzle... like a fishing lure.
DANNY	But do you like it?
DR. SHULMAN	Danny, you know, I like it because she likes it so much. Mindy, what's the occasion?
MINDY	First date.
DR. SHULMAN (while looking at outfit)	First date? [breathless] Exciting. Remember, you're worth waiting for.
DANNY	He hates it.
MINDY	He didn't say that.
DANNY	Hey that's just my two cents but what do I know, a wealthy, single, heterosexual male.
BETSY	What do you think she should wear Dr. Castellano? She didn't grow up in this country.
MINDY	Actually, I did grow up in this country, Betsy. Thank you. [to Danny] But, answer the question.
DANNY	Easy. Tight dress, shoes that won't make you complain about walking two blocks, not a lot of make-up. Look hot, keep it simple.
MINDY	Okay, thank you.
DANNY	Sure.
MINDY	I'm just gonna take fashion advice from [imitating Danny] Danny Castellano. Because, Danny Castellano, he really gets women, you know?
DANNY	I do, don't I.
MINDY	Just ask his wife. Oh, I'm sorry, his ex-wife.
DANNY	You know what'd really look great?
MINDY	Yeah, what?
DANNY	If you lost 15 pounds.

MINDY	What? Do you wanna get smacked?
DANNY (backing away, smirking)	No, I do not wanna get smacked, Dr. Lahiri, not in my place of work. I wanna peacefully go about my day.
<i>Danny walks into his office.</i>	
DR. JEREMY REED	Do not listen to him. You are beautiful. Don't let anybody tell you otherwise. If you need me, I'll be in my office.

As this is the pilot episode of the show, it focuses very heavily on the main theme of the whole show which is Mindy's love life and/or lack thereof. In this episode Mindy has a date. At the beginning of this scene she asks the other two girls in the office, Shauna and Betsy whether they want to admire her date outfit. Her outfit is a short dress. The skirt of it is tight and a dark blue. The upper part of it is more loose and covered in silver sequins. It is short-sleeved. The dress does not accentuate any part of her figure but seems to even hide her bust and stomach area as the top is not figure hugging. This also means that the width of her hips is not visible. This is made even more prominent by the way she walks and stands in it. As she walks out of her office with the high heels and the dress, her posture and walk seems kind of lumpy, indicating that she may feel a little insecure about the outfit as she would otherwise present it more proudly. The same thing happens when the dress is in full view for the first time. During her clumsy walk her arms present the dress to the girls, but as soon as she comes to a stand she crosses her arms before her body, making herself look smaller and hiding the dress a little. As the bottom part of the dress is a pencil skirt it would lay a special focus on her hips and legs. As she presents the dress, Mindy stands with her legs a little wider apart and all of her weight on one foot, the other one bent, giving the impression of smaller legs while at the same time, making her hips look smaller as well. All of these factors seem to indicate that while Mindy obviously likes to dress well and does not shy away from drawing attention to herself with her outfits, she also feels a little insecure in them. This becomes especially true considering in the scene beforehand, when she walks into the office, she also wears a dress with a belt at her waist, accentuating her curvy shape. While she does not hide her shape with her dress, she does wear a long vest over it, which creates a slimming effect to the viewer.

Fashion is obviously a big part of the show and it is a statement with Mindy wearing clothes that draw attention to herself and her body shape. But the question is, whether this heavy focus on fashion is a double-edged sword. This has previously been

discussed in the analysis of plus-size fashion and clothing. While Mindy as a bigger woman does not shy away from bright colors or figure-accentuating outfits that show off various body parts typically reserved for thin people (e.g. legs, waist), it at the same time raises the question whether these things still promote thinness as the ideal body shape, especially if some “problematic” parts of her body remain hidden in various outfits or a slimming effect is created in one way or the other. This type of camouflage still encourages the stigmatization of fatness as it makes fat out to be undesirable and something that needs to be hidden.

The characters’ reactions to Mindy’s sense of fashion are mixed. When she first introduces the outfit the viewer gets a shot of her feet in high heels before revealing her outfit the same instance Betsy and Shauna first see it. They both react with positive exclamations while Mindy plays coy at the beginning. She immediately starts perking up when the two girls react in a positive way, indicating that she does look for affirmation from outside regarding her fashion choices. As soon as Danny starts mumbling to himself, Mindy’s face falls. Even as she calls him out on his mumbling and laughs his opinion off with “What are you talking about? It’s glamorous and it’s awesome” she fidgets with her hands and shifts her body weight from one foot to the other, showing clearly that she is uncomfortable with his assessment.

Danny’s comment is portrayed as an afterthought on his part. He is busy writing in his chart and only briefly looks up to assess Mindy’s outfit. Judging women on their appearance is portrayed as something that comes natural to him and something which he does not let disturb his work day. Even when he insults her with the Elton John comment he immediately goes back to writing in his chart. Only when Mindy, intent on proving him wrong, draws Dr. Shulman into the conversation to prove a point to Danny does he respond to the challenge. He steps out from behind the counter and opposite her. Mindy now leans on the counter while Danny mirrors her, seeming very confident and letting his gaze move up and down her body a few times during the conversation.

The fact that Dr. Shulman refers to Mindy’s dress as a fishing lure is especially interesting considering it does act as a lure in more than one sense. On the one hand, it can be guessed that Mindy intends it to be a lure on her date as the ensuing discussion with Danny is focused on “what men like”. Thus, while Mindy does not openly admit to

dress the way she does in order to impress her date, it is indicated. On the other hand, it also speaks on a bigger level. The whole scene mirrors society's attitude towards the female body and its relationship with fashion. Fashion for women is often not seen as something they do for themselves but it is transported as something women focus on so heavily in order to draw (male) attention to themselves. Thus fashionable women must be asking to be judged and commented on. Mindy's presentation of her date outfit, which was meant for her girlfriends, lures Danny and with him males in general into sharing their opinion on women's bodies without having been asked to. He does it in passing, as something he is used to and something that does not require much thought on his part. Thus the judgement of women based on their looks is something ingrained in society and something that happens in passing like Danny illustrates in this scene.

Mindy obviously feels uncomfortable with his opinion and assessment which is, as already discussed, visible in her posture as well as expression, but also in the way she reacts to his comments. She immediately gets defensive, mocking Danny and his macho ways for his chauvinism and him claiming to "understand women". His viewpoint was to explain "what guys like". This illustrates the ingrained, ideological chauvinism in society. For Danny it is natural that women dress for men. Mindy mocks him for believing exactly that.

In the course of the mocking she makes fun of him for his failed marriage. Danny is obviously hit harder by this personal insult than by her ridiculing his opinions. In terms of fat stigmatization his reaction is especially interesting as he also becomes personal and tells her that she would look "really great" if she "lost 15 pounds". This is interesting for a number of reasons. Mindy is the first one to become personal in her insults. She mocks him for claiming to understand women and emphasizes her point by bringing up his failed marriage. She thus insinuates that the divorce resulted from him failing to understand women, from a personal failure on his part. Danny reverts to fat shaming in order to counter, thus in the process equating fatness with personal failure. At the same time, the fact that he even reverts to fat shaming illustrates the importance society lays on censoring the female body. He uses Mindy's body as a way to "take her down a notch", as a reminder that she does not conform. Fat people are never seen as fully belonging and fully equal in society. Thus it is okay to remind them of their

“shortcoming” whenever they do not take their “natural” place in society, which is as passive onlookers.

Mindy’s reaction is aggressive at first but passive as soon as Danny is out of view. She reverts into herself with hunched shoulders, looking downwards, her expression turning somber. As soon as she hears Jeremy negating Danny’s insult, she perks up again. While it is progressive to note that she immediately countered Danny’s insult on her body, she reverts to threats of violence thus indicating that what he said “hit home”. The whole scene illustrates that while Mindy often acts as a confident, independent woman, she is also very insecure. She seeks approval from outside for confirmation. This obviously makes the viewer question to what extent her confident exterior is actually more of an act that she puts on. This is very much visible when the small moment of resistance (when she counters Danny’s insult with threats) turns into a moment of self-doubt as soon as the male doing the insulting is out of view. This self-doubt can then only be erased by another male’s confirmation of her own attractiveness.

Thus this scene expresses a number of things. It illustrates the chauvinistic way society promotes fashion for women. It does this by giving Mindy a seemingly confident voice to resist Danny’s judgement. But while the scene tries to fight back against this ingrained chauvinistic ideology, there are also some factors that are counter-productive. Mindy’s reaction to the fat-shaming resists only at first glance, reverting back to the female need for male approval very fast. Moreover, while on first glance Mindy’s way of dressing in this scene becomes a statement for self-determination, there are also some factors that indicate that fashion is still reserved for the thin.

8.1.2. “We should listen to Dr. Reed.”

The Mindy Project: Season 1, Episode 17: 0:00

In Jeremy's office.

JEREMY [to patient] Now, little Tambert is doing great. However, I have some concerns regarding your health, which may risk affecting the pregnancy. Chief among them being your... Just you're a little bit... Just one second.

JEREMY [bursting into Mindy's office] Mindy.

MINDY Oh, cool hat.

JEREMY I need your help. I need you to tell my favorite patient she's fat.

MINDY What? No.

JEREMY Please. I can't tell her. She loves me. It would break her.

MINDY Alright.

Jeremy and Mindy enter Jeremy's office.

JEREMY Dr. Lahiri how dare you?! I think she looks gorgeous the way she is. But what? She needs to lose weight now?

MINDY Okay, relax.

Mindy sits down in Jeremy's chair.

MINDY [to patient] Okay, yes. You could lose some weight.

JEREMY [whispering to patient] I'm sorry.

PATIENT Lose weight while I'm pregnant? I've never heard of anything so crazy.

MINDY I know. But certain complications can arise when...

PATIENT You lose weight.

MINDY Excuse me?

PATIENT You heard me. You're no Keira Knightley.

MINDY First of all, I'm not overweight. I fluctuate between chubby and curvy. Second of all, I'm not the pregnant one here.

PATIENT'S HUSBAND You're not? I coulda sworn.

MINDY I coulda sworn that you were a bouncer at an Orlando strip club, but I kept that to myself.

JEREMY Okay, okay, I think we're losing track of the issue here, okay? Which is that you are a gorgeous, rubenesque plum, and if it was up to me, you'd gain weight.

MINDY No, no, no, no.

JEREMY [to husband] And you would love it, wouldn't you, Jimmy?

MINDY	If you do not lose weight, Simone, your baby will be put at risk.
JEREMY	I... I hate this. I think you are perfect, but, I don't know, maybe there's some validity to what this woman is saying.
PATIENT	I know this is gonna be tough, but we should listen to Dr. Reed.
MINDY	Actually, it was me who...
PATIENT	You're right, Dr. Reed. [to Mindy] You and me, we both gotta face the facts and lose some weight.
MINDY	No, I'm not in this...
PATIENT	It's for our health.
MINDY	Yeah, okay.
JEREMY [laying a hand on Mindy's shoulder]	It's a brave step, Mindy.
MINDY	Get off of me.
JEREMY	Okay.

The scene starts with Jeremy trying to inform his fat female patient of potential health risks regarding her pregnancy due to her size. He feels unable to confront her with it thus asking Mindy for help. When Jeremy first mentions it to his patients he talks about “concerns regarding your health, which may risk affecting the pregnancy. Chief among them being your... Just you're a little bit...”. The camera switches between shots of Jeremy struggling for words and the female patient Simone with her husband, sitting opposite him, wide-eyed and unsuspecting. This already proves to be a humorous interaction. The way the camera switches fast between them and the patients’ obvious oblivion and ignorance regarding her own weight and, more importantly, society’s view on her weight create a comedic effect. This shows that big women who are unaware of their own “shortcomings” are considered funny and it is acceptable to make fun of them. The woman’s red hair is styled in waves. She is dressed elegantly, wearing a black and red satin blouse and a red ruffled cardigan. The ruffles make her appear even larger than she is. Her red hair and the fact that she also wears red adds strength and a touch of aggression but also a certain sinfulness to her character. Her husband is sitting beside her in an oversized leather jacket, making his body appear huge and his head small. The viewer already knows what Jeremy wants to discuss as Simone’s size is noticeable (additionally accentuated by the clothing), making fun not only of Jeremy’s struggle but the patient’s apparent naivety. The show assumes that the fat woman should self-consciously already expect what Jeremy intends to tell her. Simone’s self-

confidence of not automatically seeing her fat as the health risk and her most prominent trait is ridiculed.

Jeremy's behavior in this scene is worth discussing. He feels that he is unable to do his duty as her doctor as it would "break her". This raises the question whether regard of a person's feelings should in fact come in the way of medical recommendations. A study mentioned by Puhl and Brownell demonstrates that medical professionals frequently feel "feelings of discomfort, reluctance or dislike" when confronted with obese patients. Moreover, "[p]hysicians associated obesity and other negatively perceived conditions with poor hygiene, noncompliance, hostility, and dishonesty" (Klein et al. qtd. In: Puhl and Brownell 792). This leads to the fact that, as previously mentioned, fat people often feel discriminated against by medical professionals and are thus more likely to avoid medical treatment. This is reflected in another study mentioning that two third of 318 questioned medical professionals believe "that their obese patients lacked self-control, and 39% stated that their obese patients were lazy" and thus "23% did not recommend treatment to any of their obese patients and 47% said that counseling patients about weight loss was inconvenient" (Price et al. qtd. In: Puhl and Brownell 792-793). Jeremy's behavior, although, as these studies demonstrate, not uncommon, is still deeply unprofessional and raises the question whether for him personally (as well as physicians in real life), keeping a patient (and with them their money) is more important than doing their professional duty.

Moreover, Jeremy's behavior demonstrates a number of other things. First of all, it illustrates that fatness is often "the elephant in the room". Talking about it is avoided so as not to hurt anyone's feelings. It is treated, as mentioned in previous chapters, like an infectious disease (Farrell 9), the patient herself like a bomb that is about to go off. It also illustrates that it is inconceivable for most people that fatness could be something that does *not* gnaw at a person's self-understanding, that pointing out "the obvious" could *not* "break her". It is naturally assumed that her own fatness must be crushing the patient inside. At the same time Jeremy shows understanding of many fat people's anxiety they feel when going to the doctor's as an overweight person (something which will be discussed more extensively in an upcoming chapter).

Nevertheless, Jeremy asks Mindy for help, presumably also because she herself is bigger. When Mindy enters and Jeremy accusatorially acts as if confronting the women

with her weight was Mindy's idea, the patient looks down self-consciously at first but upon facing Mindy looks confrontational and defiant. Mindy sits down in Jeremy's chair, essentially taking over his role, while he is in the background shaking his head and silently contradicting everything Mindy says. The treatment of Mindy in this scene is interesting for her medical expertise is never accepted as valid. Her competence is not only questioned because she is a woman, a fact that has been proven again and again in a multitude of studies (e.g. Lott 1985, Ashbrock 2010, Fiske et al. 2002) but also because she herself is fat and thus her professional suggestion does not matter. This illustrates that a correlation between fatness and stupidity exists in Western culture (Puhl and Brownell 792/798/801). She is reduced to her body weight by the female patient, proving that women's objectification and ensuing self-objectification then frequently leads to the objectification of other women (e.g. Gurung and Chrouser 2007).

Mindy on the other hand remains strictly professional at first (only becoming verbally aggressive when her own body weight is being pointed out to her), talking to the patient in a calm voice. Her professionalism is supported by the rimmed glasses she is wearing, her doctor's coat and the relatively muted colors underneath (dark purple). Moreover, she holds a pen in her hands, adding to the competent impression her character intends to make. Nevertheless, the patient and her husband only accept the suggestion of weight-loss when Jeremy supports Mindy's statement. His support of the statement refers to Mindy as "this woman" thus not giving Mindy herself the seal of approval and undermining her personal competence in front of the patients. The fact that he afterwards patronizingly calls her yielding to the patient's suggestion (of them losing weight together) a "brave step" adds to her being viewed as incompetent and petulant. Moreover, Mindy's refusal to try losing weight herself and the patient's and Jeremy's insistence adds another aspect. In their eyes Mindy could not have been taken seriously before as she was suggesting something that she herself has not done or been able to do. Furthermore, calling it a "brave step" entails the assumption that every fat person is inherently comfortable and happy with their bodies and place in society. It presupposes that stepping out of "being fat" is a choice everyone can easily make if they are just brave enough.

As soon as the patient points out that Mindy herself is fat the latter becomes very defensive and starts verbally attacking the patient's husband. Thus once again Mindy proves to not be as confident in her body as she acts. Although her way of dressing

often points towards a show of confidence, her defensiveness and actions speak otherwise.

In this scene the show also touches on the issue of justifying fat discrimination with the excuse of it being for health reasons. The way the patient addresses Mindy when sarcastically saying “it’s for our health” not only refers to Mindy’s argumentation beforehand but also to society’s overall tendency to refer to obese people’s “health” when in fact discussing their “insufficiencies”.

8.1.3. “Some chubby Indian girl.”

The Mindy Project: Season 1, Episode 9: 14:50

HEATHER [to Josh]	Okay, so this is where you’ve been on all those last-minute trips to Sacramento.... [turns to Mindy] Shaking up in the villlage with some chubby Indian girl!
ALL	Woah.
DANNY	That’s not cool.
MINDY	I will kill you.
DANNY	No, you’re not gonna kill her.
MINDY	I will kill you in my house.
DANNY [to Heather]	That's not called for, okay lady?
MINDY	I will go to prison for life.
HEATHER [to Danny]	You sound familiar. You.... you are that philandering gay florist.
MINDY	Yeah! So what if he is, all right? At least he’s not some psychotic monster bitch who crashes a party and calls a hostess chubby when she's not. She’s just normal American woman size.
MORGAN	And healthy.
MINDY	All right, this is a culture of anorexia starting right there.

The prerequisite for the understanding of the scene is that Mindy is in the midst of throwing a Christmas party for friends and colleagues when Heather, the second girlfriend of Mindy’s boyfriend, crashes the party. The latter is angry as her boyfriend of two years has obviously been cheating on her. First of all, it is interesting to note that women tend to immediately put the blame on the other woman when it comes to cheating (Paul, Foss and Beanninger 311). Heather immediately attacks Mindy with the one thing that will hit her the most and be the most insulting - her weight. Mindy on the other hand does not revert to the same tactic.

She first of all becomes really aggressive threatening Heather with physical violence and murder. This is a well established theme of the show as has previously been mentioned. Mindy, when confronted with her weight, overreacts and resorts to threats of violence. This not only illustrates that Mindy herself seems to be fairly hurt when being shamed for her body, but moreover illustrates that she has created a sure-fire way of handling these insults by diverting the attention from her body to her (threatened) actions. These overreactions seem to save her from the embarrassment of everyone around her regarding her with pity and the possibility of people reacting with slight amusement at having her body insulted. What it also does is normalize the idea of fat women being out-of-control of their instincts, emotions and bodies and prone to acting irrationally.

Notwithstanding, apart from her initial very aggressive reaction, Mindy, in her rage, makes some surprisingly insightful points. Mindy stresses that she herself is “normal American woman size”, contradicting everything that she has been proclaimed to be by Heather. The latter illustrates how our (often very stereotypical) first impression of people is very much based on a few visual cues. First of all, Heather calls Mindy the “Indian girl” which Mindy immediately negates by calling herself an “American woman”. Moreover Heather calls her chubby, which Mindy contradicts by pointing out that her size is actually “normal”. Heather who in every way tries to alienate Mindy from American society by calling her Indian as well as chubby, is contradicted by Mindy who tries to include herself by proclaiming herself to be an average American woman. In the introduction to this thesis the term “normal” was briefly discussed as in its very conception always alienating someone or something as “abnormal”. Mindy, with her statement, actively includes herself in society and refuses to be excluded because of race or weight. Mindy is acutely aware of her body not fitting in in various ways. She is also aware that due to her race and body she is considered to be “less worthy” than the average white and thin male, white and thin female or even just white female. She nevertheless has made the conscious decision to include herself into society and refuses to let herself be reduced to her weight or race.

Moreover, Morgan’s quick retort of “And healthy” in support of Mindy illustrates a few things. First of all, it shows that the first objection to body positive actions is that of health. Society assumes to know what is healthy for every person and what is not. Thus the comment also shows that fatness and body acceptance can only be justified if one

is still considered “healthy”. The public discourse of fatness as being a burden to society because of the costs it causes has ensured that health is no longer a private matter but one of public concern and thus it is within everyone’s rights to comment on it. Unlike health issues caused by smoking or drinking, fatness in itself is a visible marker of being supposedly “unhealthy”.

Mindy’s comment “This is a culture of anorexia starting right there” is in the end thus rather insightful. Mindy most likely means it as an insult to Heather, calling her out on having internalized an ideal that in the end can in many cases only be achieved through disordered eating. While Heather insults Mindy for not fitting in, Mindy insults her for fitting in too much and supporting a system destructive to one’s health. Thus once again the topic of the sub-discussion is health. Mindy and Morgan in a team effort point out that a system judging fat people for their lack of concern for their own health in the process supports an ideal that has contributed to the rise of a disorder and, bluntly put, in its extreme encourages women to starve themselves.

8.2. Body Image

As previously mentioned, fat discrimination and fat bias are primary causes for issues with body image and low self-confidence, leading not only to feelings of body dissatisfaction but also low self-worth (for more see chapter 4.2). Both Hannah and Mindy, although on first glance seemingly confident and secure in their bodies, frequently throughout the shows deal with being confronted with their own fat body and its perceived “insufficiency” and consequently, show their own insecurities at being stigmatized due to their weight. This chapter discusses how Hannah and Mindy deal with the idea that their bodies are considered less worthy and beautiful, and how their struggle with their own bodies influences their behavior, surroundings and personal lives.

As will be shown in the course of the analysis, Hannah seems and at least pretends to be very secure in her body but is acutely aware of how her body is perceived by others and thus tries to control the narrative about herself before others get the chance to. Nevertheless, she sometimes shows her insecurities by become self-deprecating and making light of her feelings of insecurity and shame. On *The Mindy Project*, on the other hand, Mindy’s rather frail body image is exposed through her aggressive nature. She

tends to defend herself very loudly and go into the offensive, but nevertheless also shows that her own body image is affected by outside sources.

8.2.1. “Fat baby angel.”

Girls: Season 1, Episode 1: 4:06

MARNIE [to Charlie with braces]	“Good morning Charlie. Why didn’t you wake me up? I didn’t mean to sleep with Hannah.”
CHARLIE	“Because you two looked so angelic.”
HANNAH	“Victoria’s Secret angel [<i>points to Marnie</i>] - fat baby angel [<i>points to self</i>]”
MARNIE	“Don’t say that.”
CHARLIE	“You look awesome these days.”
<i>Hannah opens the fridge, takes out a cupcake.</i>	
HANNAH [to Charlie while leaving room]	“Please avert your eyes.”

This scene is only the fourth scene in the pilot and only the second scene in which spoken dialogue can be found. In the scene Hannah’s body is not initially the topic of discussion. Hannah actively makes it the topic. Charlie, Marnie’s boyfriend, tries to compliment them by saying that they looked “angelic” during their sleep. This comment not only attests to but also addresses the stereotypical depiction of sleeping women. Typically, females are not portrayed in a natural setting while sleeping. Not only are they often wearing make-up, have their hair styled and wear perfectly ironed, fitted pajamas, but their positioning during sleeping scenes as well as their facial control can be compared to that of babies. They are portrayed as being perfectly at peace, serene creatures (and in that sense comparable to angels), with relaxed faces shown off at their best angles.

Charlie’s comment juxtaposes the second scene of the pilot in which the camera shows Hannah and Marnie spooning while sleeping, moving from their legs upwards (with Hannah having her leg thrown over Marnie’s) to their faces. Their positioning reminds of that of lovers, with Hannah mirroring the “male” position, as she is the “big spoon”, and Marnie portraying the petite female being engulfed. Hannah has a small frown in between her eyes while Marnie, who, as the viewer later finds out, physically fits every stereotype of femininity on TV, is the one sleeping with her mouth open as she is wearing braces, looking comical. Nevertheless, Hannah’s body automatically subjects

her to being considered less feminine thus she represents the “male” part of the “couple”.

As already mentioned, the following scene finds Hannah, Marnie and Charlie in the kitchen. After Charlie comments on their sleeping, Hannah immediately redirects the viewers’ connotation with the comment (as discussed above) towards her body and creates a new association with it, referring to *Victoria’s Secret Angels*. This speaks on two levels. It gives the viewer a glance into Hannah’s psyche and her own preoccupation with her body, specifically her weight. While she could have simply accepted the comment, she immediately turns it into a self-deprecating joke not only illustrating the above mentioned internalization as the beauty ideal but the objectification of this ideal onto herself and her resulting feelings of disappointment and anger. She does not take herself seriously due to her body size. Moreover, Hannah seems to be heavily preoccupied with her size, as she is the one commenting on it. This ties back to culture’s expectation of women that they be critical of their own bodies, bigger women obviously even more so. They are expected to be constantly aware that their body size does not conform and to feel ashamed for it, especially when eating (in front of males). When Hannah takes the cupcake out of the fridge and notices that she is being watched by Charlie and Marnie she immediately feels ashamed, mumbling “Please avert your eyes”. She then leaves the room quickly, with small steps and hunched shoulders, physically as well as vocally expressing her shame. All of this reverts back to the main ideas behind fat stigmatization. Fatness is being seen as a flaw in your personality, something which the “fat” people are responsible for. Thus all of their actions are monitored and judged by society and they are expected to be ashamed not only for being fat, but ashamed because they alone are responsible for their fatness. Hannah seems to be the everyday-woman who struggles with this stigma as well.

This is also supported by the aesthetic aspects of the show. The shot of Hannah grabbing the cupcake from the fridge is medium-long with Hannah in the center of the shot. Her bottom is stretched outwards, directing the viewers attention towards it. She is wearing flowery pajama pants which seem worn. Her grey shirt is scrunched up at her waist. Both, the pants as well as the positioning of the top give the allusion of her backside being even bigger than it is. Her hair is in a messy bun, she wears no make-up

and her skin seems oily. She looks like a realistic depiction of someone who has just gotten out of bed without being satirical or comical.

While this scene says a lot about Hannah's personal understanding of her body, it also speaks of the understanding of the female body in a larger cultural context. Hannah constitutes and openly mentions at the beginning of the show the fact that her body size in no way fits the cultural ideal. She is the one initiating the comparison of herself and her friend, expressing the competition especially women constantly create and comparisons they constantly make between themselves and their peers (again illustrating the main ideas behind objectification theory as mentioned above). In the same process she addresses the fact that Western culture idolizes *Victoria's Secret* models as being the epitome of the sexy, beautiful woman with a perfect shape, big breasts and voluminous hair. Moreover, the fact that Hannah refers to herself as "fat baby angel" brings to mind images of fat baroque baby angels thus even alluding to herself as asexual and out-of-date. She not only situates herself and her own body outside of the cultural ideal but situates her body in contrast to a *Victoria's Secret* model and, consequently, the culture and its expectations of women.

Hannah's comment is heavily negated by Marnie and Charlie. Marnie does not specifically negate the comment itself but admonishes her for speaking self-deprecatingly about herself. Charlie immediately comments on her "look[ing] awesome these days" consequently alluding that there were times when she did not look as "awesome". As fat women are typically used to only being complimented on their body whenever they have noticeably lost weight, this is insinuated.

As this is the first episode of the show, its main purpose is to introduce the characters to the audience and grab their attention. While there are many aspects of Hannah that this episode covers, her body and her own understanding of it are a big part of the pilot. It situates Hannah in her own social sphere as well as the larger cultural context, reminding the viewer that being bigger comes with stigma and pressure, from outside as well as from within, and with a culturally accepted way of living with this stigma. How Hannah does exactly that, is what the show and this analysis want to find out.

8.2.2. “It should actually be the other way around.”

Girls: Season 1, Episode 1: 4:48

HANNAH	Are you gonna leave your towel on?
MARNIE [laughing]	Yes.
HANNAH	But I never see you naked and you always see me naked when it should actually be the other way around.
<i>Hannah takes a bite of her cupcake.</i>	
MARNIE [continues shaving her leg]	You are beautiful. Shut up.
HANNAH [with full mouth]	I don't mean that I just wanna see your boobs.
MARNIE	Well you don't get to, sorry. I only show my boobs to people I'm having sex with.

The scene immediately follows the “fat baby angel” scene. Hannah sits in the bathtub, the cupcake she had taken out of the fridge in the scene before, in her hand. She is leaning over the edge of the tub, making only her shoulder and head visible to the camera. Marnie is sitting on the edge of the bathtub, a towel wrapped around her, and is shaving her legs.

Hannah's comment that she never sees Marnie naked but is always seen naked herself “when it should actually be the other way around” speaks on a number of levels. It says a lot about Hannah's understanding of her own body and her tendency to compare herself to her best friend. In the process of her comparison she seems to find herself lacking the prerequisites to be considered “good” enough or “beautiful” enough to be seen naked. This type of behavior was already illustrated in the scene beforehand. Hannah is acutely aware of society's standards and actively participates in the process of judging the female body - her own as well as others. What is interesting to note is that her negative judgement of herself is not followed by a policing of her body or actions according to social conventions. She is still frequently showing herself naked, admitting to it in the conversation and proving it in the course of the show. Moreover, immediately after the self-deprecating comment Hannah takes a bite of her cupcake. This is interesting for the fact, that the women's relationship with food is subject to multiple social restrictions. There is a strong cultural tie between fat stigmatization, female sexuality and food consumption (which will be discussed in more detail in later chapters). Fatness in society can be traced back to the belief of an uncontrollable desire

regarding sexuality and nourishment (McKinley 105). Thus the fact that Hannah is eating a cupcake is interesting for a number of reasons. She eats a dessert that is a universally understood symbol of “bad” eating habits for breakfast, illustrating that Hannah’s acknowledgement of how her body is received by society and by herself does not influence her actions. The cupcake itself could be argued to be a “womanly” dessert (e.g. it is often pink and a small portion of a “cake”) while at the same time eating it means having to sacrifice “feminine” eating etiquette by being forced to take big bites and still running the risk of having cream smeared over one’s face. Moreover, the way Hannah is shown eating the cupcake indicates that the show is very much aware of the social connotations associated with showing bigger women enjoying food. As there is a clear connection between restricting female sexuality and female food intake, the portrayal of a naked bigger woman eating food that is supposedly the cause of her social unacceptability visibly connects the two concepts. While the context of the scene is not sexual at all, the show explicitly adds a sexualized aspect in the form of the naked female body and through the topic of discussion. The way Hannah eats the cupcake - always in the center of the shot, in either a medium-close or close shot on eye-level, opening her mouth widely when taking bites and speaking right afterwards, with her mouth still full, heightens the effect of disgust. While Hannah obviously accepts society’s judgement of her body as “disgusting” and “not desirable”, she does not act like it (at least at home) and does not let it rule her actions.

So while the show reminds the viewers through Hannah of how bigger women are perceived in society, it then challenges this notion. It does this through the exaggeration of typical representations of fat bodies as “out of control” (Boero 43) thus provoking disgust and actively confronting the viewers with their reactions while at the same time also subverting societal restrictions. The show thus frees fat bodies, despite all the disgust they evoke, from their societal role. It shows Hannah eating a cupcake while sitting naked in a bathtub and talking about her nakedness. She represents a failure of patriarchal society to control the female body as Hannah refuses to restrict herself to what society deems appropriate. She is a bigger female who eats and self-acceptingly claims ownership over her own body, refusing to submit it to the sexualization of the male gaze. Contrasted with Marnie’s understanding of her own body as, firstly a sexual object (as she immediately shifts the topic towards a sexual content upon the discussion of her body) and, secondly, belonging to her sexual partners, Hannah’s statement

becomes even clearer and more powerful. The show thus uses society's understanding of fatness and actively subverts it by showing Hannah as a bigger, naked, cupcake-eating woman in a bathtub discussing her body.

8.2.3. "I'm taking control of my own shape."

Girls: Season 1, Episode 1: 17:00

ADAM	What's all the tattoos?
HANNAH	What do you mean?
ADAM	Why did you do all them?
HANNAH	Erm, they're illustrations from children's books mostly.
<i>Adam takes her shoulder and pushes her forward. Adam squeezes the fat on her back and makes a growling sound.</i>	
ADAM	Even the one on your ass?
HANNAH	Uh, no. That one my friend Jessa did sophomore year with a safety pin. It's a snake wrapped around the moon.
ADAM	When did you do them?
HANNAH	Erm, I did them mostly in high school.
ADAM	Why?
HANNAH	Truthfully? I, erm, gained a bunch of weight very quickly and I just felt very out of control of my own body and it was just like this Riot Grrrl idea like [in high pitched voice], "I'm taking control of my own shape."
<i>Adam leans closer.</i>	
ADAM	You know, I was fat in high school.
HANNAH	Really?
ADAM	Yeah but then I controlled all of it myself. When you're not that fat anymore you can just have them lasered off.
<i>Hannah smiles. Adam kisses her shoulder. Hannah laughs.</i>	

In the scene Hannah and Adam, both naked with just a blanket wrapped around Hannah's upper body and Adam's lower body, sit on his couch. Their conversation centers around Hannah's tattoos and the reasons for having them done. This is the first time in the show Hannah's body shape is openly discussed. Adam's way of asking her about her tattoos is interesting in the sense that it goes a level deeper. He is not asking her what the tattoos mean and why she would choose illustrations from children's

books, which would lead to a discussion of her past, but rather why she felt the need to have them done in the first place. This directs the discussion towards Hannah's mentality in relation to her body. Overall it can be said that the show's inclusion of an honest and direct discussion of fatness and a fat person's feelings in and about their own bodies is very uncommon and highly needed. The scene illustrates the intricacies of fat discrimination that are not always visible to the outside world.

Tattoos, like fatness, are visible signs of voluntary or involuntary resistance to social norms and rules. Both have connotations inscribed in them and are a form of stigma. While tattoos in today's society are associated with rebellion, fat is still regarded as a sign of weakness and failure to conform. While the societal connotations of the latter to this day remain negative, there has been some change towards a more positive and productive self-understanding of fatness with the body positivity movement and the concept of productive shame. This recent development again correlates with the understanding of tattoos in society. Both are seen as a very personal way of inscribing into your body, expressing yourself, individualizing your body and taking control of it. *Girls* is attempting to include this movement in its depiction of Hannah.

When Adam pushes her forward to look at the tattoos on her back he squeezes one of her tattoos by grabbing her back fat. This is the full focus of the camera with Adam's face shown in a medium close shot before and afterwards. He is pulling up his upper lip and making a growling sound. This rather unusual combination of the gesture, facial expression and sound he emits while looking at Hannah's back, already focuses the topic of the conversation less on the tattoos but rather on Hannah's body fat and Adam's reaction to it.

She admits to Adam that she gained weight in high school and felt out of control of her body. While it is not unexpected for her to have felt uncomfortable in her skin after having gained a lot of weight, the reasons she mentions for having felt this way are rather unusual. In her reasoning, Hannah does not equate her body composition with beauty but rather with comfort. Her weight gain was associated with a feeling of a lack of control over herself. She does not explicitly mention that she felt any less beautiful and/or confident because of it. Moreover, her reaction to her gaining weight is not as

would be expected, to try to lose the weight again, but she took control of her body differently, namely by tattoos as symbols of something permanent and static.

All of these reasonings are interesting for the simple fact that her reactions are subversive in the way that the concepts of fatness and beauty are intricately linked in society. Hannah, in this scene, decouples the two concepts from each other. While she concedes that gaining a lot of weight very quickly sparked negative feelings within her, she does not explicitly admit that it had any influence on her feelings of self-worth or confidence. She does not link the negativity to the concept of fatness thus apparently refusing to see fatness as such as something negative. She rather links it to her need for control with the lack of it being the cause of the negative feelings. While society has for a long time been encouraging women to be extremely critical of their bodies, their own feelings are often strongly influenced by or even based on society's opinion *on* their bodies. It does not matter how they physically and emotionally feel themselves but how society regards them. They speak about their own bodies by judging it according to societal standards. Hannah does not conform to the notion that society's opinion on her body overrules her own feelings. In that sense she seems to have a strong sense of self.

This seeming show of confidence obviously stands in stark contrast to Hannah's previous self-deprecating attitude from the scene with Charlie and Marnie in which she seemed to have been acutely aware that her body form does not conform to societal standards of beauty. Thus we can clearly guess that Hannah is not as unaffected by society's judgement of her body as she pretends to be. On closer look, this scene also illustrates that in some ways. In the scene she says that she was "taking control of [her] own shape" in a high pitched voice, accompanying the statement with the gesture of balling her hand into a fist. This has two effects. The high pitched voice is supposed to add a feeling of nonchalance and forced humor to her statement and adds a certain stiltedness to it. Hannah obviously intends for it to come across as "not a big deal" in her past. Especially the hand gesture seems like a display of rebellion and strength. This is aided by her referring to the feminist "Riot Grrrl" movement of the 90s (Barta, "Revolution, Grrrl Style, NOW!", *unique*). She wants her tattoos to be seen as signs of confidence and control. While her expression remains rather neutral, her gaze not wavering from Adam's, the fact that she uses a high pitched voice enhancing it with the

punching gesture makes her comment appear somewhat comical thus adding a layer of insecurity to her statement, suggesting that her “gaining a bunch of weight” was a bigger deal than implied. With her friends she seemed to have been more comfortable admitting that society’s policing of her body and her feelings towards her body have an effect on her. Adam being her romantic interest, she seems to want to impress by coming across as confident and self-assured.

Moreover, she seems to feel somewhat uncomfortable in opening up and discussing her body this openly. The conversation is filmed with a close-up but as soon as Hannah is done recounting her story, the shot changes to a full-shot of the two of them sitting on the sofa. While Adam sits with his legs spread widely making himself wider and leaning back on the couch confidently, Hannah is sitting beside him with her legs pressed together somewhat awkwardly, making herself seem a little smaller. This reinforces the viewers’ feeling that Hannah does not feel entirely comfortable and confident in the situation.

After her explanation Adam mentions that he used to be “fat” in high school. The viewer first gets the feeling that he looks to encourage Hannah in opening up to him. Then he says that he managed to “control” “it” himself. This illustrates a number of things. First of all, Adam shows that he has not really understood Hannah’s reasoning for getting the tattoos. As previously mentioned, Hannah, as it seems in this scene, does not link her weight-gain to the concept of beauty but rather a feeling of a lack of control. This raises the question whether Hannah then sees fatness as something that should be aimed to be changed/reversed. While Hannah does not suggest that she felt that way, Adam concludes that, in his opinion, it should be. He sees fatness as something that needs to be controlled and her tattoos as a cover up for something shameful. He not only makes assumptions about her body by saying that her tattoos are a means to an end - a way of hiding the fatness beneath them - but also about her decisions in regards to her own body. He uses the word “control” like she did but mocks her for it. He implies that she did not “take control” of her body herself but had her tattoos to cover up her own failure. Moreover, Adam implies that fatness is something to be easily controlled, as illustrated by himself, and her still being fat can be seen as a failure on her part. This way of thinking is based on the assumption that all Hannah ultimately strives to be is thin. As

soon as this ultimate goal is achieved, she can “just have them lasered off”. Her tattoos in Adam’s eyes are there to hide the ugly parts of her, namely her fatness.

Adam’s comments do not seem malicious but are rather mentioned as simple statements. This is because Adam’s eyes are downcast making him appear shy or preoccupied. While he says it the camera is focused on Hannah’s face and her smile which does not seem offended in any way. Hannah’s lack of reaction to Adam insulting her is interesting for the fact that she neither negates nor affirms what he says. She only reacts with an amused smile, giving off the impression that she is used to people commenting on her body and/or does not care about what he thinks of it.

One could say that Adam in the show is a, sometimes slightly exaggerated, personification of society’s attitude towards women, their bodies and their fat in so far as that Adam says what most people think about bigger women - that firstly, fat women need to want to *not* be fat anymore, secondly, are responsible for their fatness and thirdly, that fatness is something that can easily be controlled through self-discipline. The fact that he does not seem to be neither aware of the assumptions he is making about Hannah and her body with his statement, nor aware that his statements could be interpreted as insulting is a good illustration of how society treats women’s bodies by constantly, unconsciously judging them and commenting on them. Not letting Hannah react maliciously to Adam’s comments and rather belittling them with her smile ensure that the scene ends with Hannah in control, seemingly unaffected by Adam’s judgement.

8.2.4. “That is like a lap band surgery ad.”

The Mindy Project: Season 1, Episode 5: 0:50

Josh slips into a pair of jeans. He notices that they are too big on him.

JOSH This is weird. What happened to my jeans?

MINDY Oh my god.

JOSH Was the waist always like this?

MINDY Take those off right now.

JOSH This is bizzare there’s all those jolly ranchers in the pocket.

MINDY [shouting] You’re wearing my jeans! Please take them off right now.

JOSH It’s fine, we’re doing the same thing. You’re wearing my shirt, I’m wearing your jeans.

MINDY No, no! It is not the same. This is adorable [points to self], that is like a lap band surgery ad.

JOSH I’ve got room in the back.

MINDY Oh my god [falls back into bed, throws blanket over her head]

JOSH Hey, what kind of coffee do you want?

MINDY I don’t want coffee. I want you to go to work and I want you to take your damn shirt [throws shirt at him].

JOSH Okay, this took a turn.

MINDY [muffled] Are you still here?

JOSH Yeah. Can I have my tie, please?

MINDY [muffled] Leave your tie. I’m gonna use it to hang myself.

The main topic of episode 5 of *The Mindy Project* is Mindy's relationship with her own body and her struggle with her own feelings of shame. The episode starts one morning with Mindy’s new boyfriend Josh having slept over at her place. Mindy is up before him and is wearing his shirt. This is the premise for the scene.

Women wearing men’s shirts (usually to cover their naked bodies and thus implying sex) after getting up is a frequently employed theme in movies and TV shows. It illustrates a few things about the way popular culture depicts women and their relationship to men. On the one hand, it stresses women’s supposed smallness and weakness. It is a way for women to dress up and, on the other hand, a way for men to stake their claim. Wearing a man’s clothing thus stresses the women’s submission and men’s dominance over women. For Mindy, besides this show of female submission, it

also illustrates her relationship to her own body. Mindy specifically dresses herself in her boyfriend's shirt to appear "cute" and "tiny". It is a way of compensating her own insecurities about her body by trying to fit into the stereotypical image of a woman. She draws his attention to the fact that "it doesn't even fit [her] right because [she's] just a girl". The adverb "just" implies that women are naturally "less" and "not quite enough" and, physically, should mirror that by being smaller than the men they are dating. This allows the conclusion that anyone who naturally fits into male clothing because of their size, will not be considered "womanly" or "girly". Fatness is equated with unfeminine and male while a smaller size is automatically female. The fact that Mindy stages herself as the adorable, small girlfriend clearly illustrates that she on the one hand, believes that submitting herself fully to her boyfriend will ensure his devotion and, on the other hand, that smallness and cuteness are the two "characteristics" most attractive to men. When she gets what she intended, namely Josh telling her that the button-up looks "really good" on her and comparing her to Drew Barrymore, she becomes especially girly, playing with her hair and radiating a fake shyness. All of these things are pointedly overdone in the show, satirizing romantic comedies that frequently employ these tropes and criticizing them for the underlying assumptions and implications of using such images.

Farther into the scene Josh gets out of bed with the intention of putting on some clothes so he can grab some coffee and croissants for breakfast. As soon as he notices that the jeans he is wearing are too big for him, Mindy reacts with shock and embarrassment. Her good mood immediately vanishes and she orders him to "take those off right now". When Josh notices the candy wrappers in her pockets she becomes even more upset and asks him more loudly to take them off. Josh then points out the obvious, namely that they're "doing the same thing". This is where the show openly discusses the two-facedness of society with Mindy being its voice. In a high pitched, panicked voice she loudly exclaims what society tells her to believe: that it is not the same thing. Her dressing in too-big male clothing is adorable, a man dressing in too-big female clothing is "like a lap-band ad". Her comparing it to a lap-band advertisement openly addresses the underlying issue of the scene. Mindy is being confronted with the difference between her boyfriend's and her size and reacts by putting herself down. She compares herself to the "before" pictures in any dieting commercial and in the process not only makes fun of herself but of every other fat woman. While the show intends to make the

point that women do not need to act small and submissive to be liked by men, it does this by making fun of Mindy's size and presenting it as unfeminine. Thus the Josh comparing the two scenarios puts an end to Mindy's acting. The fact that she is reminded of her size strips her of her "cute" and "adorable" image and gives her back the power which she had previously submitted by acting like a tiny woman. In the first half of the scene, during Mindy's acting, Josh tells her how they are going to spend their day. In the second part, as soon as Mindy is stripped off her "cuteness" she takes charge and tells him to leave. Although the reason for her initiative is embarrassment, insecurity and shock she nevertheless lets go of the act and becomes more assertive and less submissive in her choices. She does not let him talk her into a continuation of their plans but her embarrassment leads her to change them. Thus in the scene fatness equals unfemininity, embarrassment and insecurity, but also assertiveness and initiative.

Josh on the other hand is never shocked or horrified by his finding but seems to find it fascinating and funny. After finding out that they are her jeans he does not find the situation awkward or unwelcome but compares it to her previous actions, finding nothing troubling about the comparison. He finds the situation slightly amusing and counts on Mindy seeing the humor in it but finds that her insecurities take over when she sends him away.

Another topic this scene openly addresses is that of bodily equality in relationships. Our society considers fat women to be unworthy of romantic relationships. This is also frequently shown in TV shows and movies. If a fat woman is allowed romance she is usually expected to find it with someone her size (e.g. *Mike and Molly*, Sookie and Jackson in *Gilmore Girls*, Kate and Toby in *This is Us* etc.). The same does not always apply to men (e.g. *King of Queens*) (Feeney, "Beauty and the Beast", *Slate*). *The Mindy Project* frequently pairs Mindy with thin, muscular, attractive men. This scene addresses the issue raised in every viewers' mind by doing that. Through her relationships with attractive men, Mindy herself is seen as more attractive as she has proven herself to be capable of attracting thin men. While this type of reversed psychology should be questioned in itself (i.e. defining a woman's worthiness and attractiveness through her partners) it may be the wrong way to go about establishing fatness as normal and worthy of love, it nevertheless is 1) still somewhat of an innovation in popular media and thus 2) definitely a way to reach viewers. Additionally, it does not seem to be Josh who

is minding the “inequality” but rather Mindy, illustrating two things. On the one hand, it normalizes the relationship to the viewer as the male is the one who is accepting of Mindy’s size (and traditionally male opinions weigh more than female ones). On the other hand, it also illustrates fat women’s own constant preoccupation and feelings of unworthiness. Boero’s interviewees describe that fat women believe “it [to be] almost impossible for the heterosexual relationships of fat women to be normal and healthy because there is a de facto pathology on the part of men who are attracted to fat women” (107). Mindy illustrates this mindset clearly. She is humiliated as soon as it is made obvious and pointed out that she is a fat woman with an attractive partner. It shows that women are constantly aware of their body in relation to those of others’ and judging themselves and their self-worth based on these perceptions. Mindy is fine as long as she can pretend to be smaller than Josh. As soon as it is made obvious that she is not, she feels uncomfortable and embarrassed.

The fact that the scene is funny to the viewer lies in the assumption mentioned beforehand. Movies especially love to employ this theme of women putting on men’s shirts after sex, women being smaller than men and in need of their guidance. As *The Mindy Project* frequently works with satiric elements, it uses this trope and turns it around, in the process achieving two things. On the one hand the viewer begins to question the theme itself and in the process asks why it is considered adorable, when the opposite is not. On the other hand, it illustrates the underlying misogynistic meaning of the theme and does so by confronting viewers with a continuation and exploration of the theme. Nevertheless, this point is being made by making fun of fatness and fat people’s insecurities within relationships.

8.3. Fat Blame

Fat people are blamed for their fatness. It is believed that fatness stems from laziness and a lack of willpower and control (see chapter 4.1). Taken farther it reveals the assumption that fatness is a choice and that fat people are believed to be too weak to “choose” to be thin. What all of this presupposes though is the belief that fatness is something horrendous that has various negative effects on not only the person’s life but also that of their surroundings and society in general. The fact that fat people are believed to be at fault for their own fatness thus justifies fat discrimination. It is a vicious cycle that can only be broken by questioning its very core, the “badness” of fatness.

This chapter intends to analyze how *Girls* and *The Mindy Project* discuss fat blame and tries to find out whether they divert from the idea that fatness is a choice and something that people are to be blamed for. As will be seen in the course of the analysis, both shows handle the topic very differently. While *Girls* tries to divert from it, *The Mindy Project* tends to fall back on the idea that fat blame justifies bad treatment.

8.3.1. “Maybe I don’t want my body to be funny.”

Girls: Season 1, Episode 3: 02:35

Hannah sits between Adam’s legs, facing away from him. Adam grabs Hannah’s stomach roll and makes strange noises.

HANNAH [loudly] This is so horrible.

ADAM I think your stomach is funny.

HANNAH [laughing] Oh well, maybe I don’t want my body to be funny, has that ever occurred to you?

ADAM Just three or four pounds. If you hate it so much you can lose four pounds.

HANNAH [struggling to get Adam’s hands off her stomach] Oh, well I don’t lose weight from my stomach, I lose weight from my face, so...

ADAM Did you try a lot? To lose weight?

Hannah turns around to face him.

HANNAH [forcibly but smiling] No, I have not tried a lot to lose weight.

Adam laughs hysterically.

HANNAH Because I decided I was gonna have some other concerns in my life, okay? I apologize, so... [makes flippant hand gesture]

ADAM Do you eat for fun?

HANNAH As opposed to what?

ADAM For fuel. I eat for fuel. I remember to eat when my eyes get cloudy.

HANNAH If you’re trying to get me to tell you, that you have a really good body, then you win. You have a really good body.

ADAM I have fat.

HANNAH You actually really don’t. I’m looking at you and you really don’t.

Adam pushes himself upwards.

ADAM Yes I do. [gets on his knees, shows off his stomach]. Gather my fat.

HANNAH I’m not gonna play a demented game where I....

ADAM [louder]	Gather my fat. You'll feel less alone if you gather my fat.
<i>Hannah grabs at his stomach.</i>	
HANNAH	That's skin. That is all skin.

This scene is very much concerned with the assumptions made about people based on their bodily appearance. In the scene Hannah and Adam sit on the bed in his apartment discussing their bodies. In the beginning Adam sits behind Hannah with her between his legs. She wears a black hoodie, her eye make-up is smudged and her hair looks uncombed. He grabs her stomach, making “rawr” noises and shakes and squeezes her belly fat. His noises are somewhat reminiscent of the ones Sesame Street’s cookie monster makes when eating a cookie, already an indication of how he has pre-made assumptions about Hannah’s eating habits. This is then confirmed when he calls her out on not eating simply “for fuel” but because she enjoys eating and food. All of this ties back to what has been mentioned before. Fat people are believed to be morally corrupt as they are unable to show restraint (Stearns 126). Moreover, it also fits the previously discussed fear of the “obesity epidemic” spread by the media. In their coverage on obesity a sense of chaos and urgency is spread (Boero 42-43). This can be seen when taking a closer look at the words choices, as e.g. in this *New York Times* article from 2000, claiming that: “[food] runs riot through our lives” (Goode, “Watching Volunteers”, *NY Times*). While everyone needs food as energy and consequently, everyone is at risk of becoming the epidemic’s victim (Boero 44), Adam claims to be eating “food for fuel”. The word fuel itself not only implies that eating is a technical necessity (as opposed to a pleasurable and sometimes social act) but he also gives off the impression of being in total control of his food intake and thus representing the person the least likely to “catch the disease”. His superiority is solely based on the cultural assumption that Hannah as a fat person, has no control over her desires, whereas he, as a thin person, is in total control of it. His behavior in the scene clearly mirrors this attitude. He is proud of having little body fat and almost mockingly claims “I have fat” when Hannah calls him out on his display of apparent superiority.

Hannah is visibly uncomfortable with the situation. In the beginning she seems to find it slightly annoying but more amusing than hurtful as she tells him with laughter in her voice that “This is *so* horrible”. Her demeanor changes when Adam comments that he finds her stomach funny. She tries to get away from him, struggling to sit more upright

but he does not let go of her stomach, essentially controlling her body for her and forcing her to remain seated. She counters that she does not want her body to be funny. Hannah speaks out on behalf of herself, voicing that her body is not there for his amusement. This can be seen as a direct reference to the way popular culture often treats fatness - as a reason for laughter and an object to be made fun of. The rhetorical question "has that ever occurred to you" stresses the fact that the stigmatization of fatness and its abuse for comedic effect is not questioned by most people but simply accepted.

Adam asking if she has tried to lose weight before, once again mirror the assumptions society makes about fatness. First of all, it is assumed that every fat person *must* have failed many attempts at losing weight. Moreover, acceptance of the body and/or confidence of fat people is not accepted for what it is but seen as another way of deflecting from their failure. When they fail to lose weight, they become confident in order to cover up the fact that they have been unable to achieve "normality". Additionally, his comment saying that "if you hate it so much, you can lose three or four pounds" indicates that he believes her to have been simply too lazy to lose the weight so far but that it is the desirable, natural consequence of her being uncomfortable. He simply assumes that her being angry and uncomfortable in the situation stems from her body, not his scrutiny and ridicule of it. Adam's loud, ostentatious laughter at Hannah's forcible repositioning of her body after his invasive question stress that he believes there to be nothing wrong with his questioning. Moreover it shows that he finds Hannah taking control of her body in *this particular* situation funny. Adam does not question the fact that Hannah only gets angry when someone else tries to take control of her body. He does realize that being fat is often being lonely but never questions the society that alienates the people but blames the people themselves. Thus, as does society, Adam does not question the underlying problem - the treatment of obese people - but rather believes they "deserve" it as they all have the option of losing the weight and thus becoming an accepted part of society.

Throughout the whole scene the camera remains fairly static. The scene starts with a medium-long shot that makes Hannah's stomach and her rolls clearly visible to the viewer. The camera then begins to move in very slowly as their conversation and Hannah's increasing discomfort progress until Hannah's stomach is no longer visible to

the camera. The movement ensures that the focus of the scene does not remain on Hannah's stomach rolls but rather on her face. The viewer is forced to switch his gaze from Hannah's body to her face and notice her discomfort. Thus the scene starts out with Hannah's body once again being the medium of the message but then redirects the viewer from Hannah's bodily towards her emotional response. Only when Adam asks her if she has tried to lose weight a lot does the shot change. The viewer now gazes through the doorway giving the whole scene a voyeuristic feeling (to illustrate that Adam's line of questioning is very personal and that although society makes fatness their business, it actually is not) but also once again distancing the camera and viewers from the action on screen.

Hannah's body language is especially interesting in this scene. As she becomes increasingly more uncomfortable with his questions, she becomes more forcible in her actions. While at the beginning she accepts his treatment and control of her body, both physically and verbally, she becomes more assured and takes over control when he tells her that she "could lose three or four pounds" thus not only suggesting an "easy solution" to her issues with her own body, but also telling her what to do in order not to be teased. Thus Hannah herself is to blame for being considered "funny" by him. One could say that their conversation represents the relationship between fat people and the rest of culture. Society's belief that discriminating against and making fun of fat people is justified as they are at fault for their not "fitting in" is made especially clear with this scene in which Adam unconsciously blames Hannah for her apparent discomfort in the situation. Hannah herself calls him out on the underlying assumptions in his words, in the end also calling out the viewers who laughed at Adam's treatment of Hannah's body in the beginning.

8.3.2. “Do you exercise?”

The Mindy Project: Season 1, Episode 5: 9:20

DANNY	Do you exercise or play sports?
MINDY	I do the elliptical, 45 minutes, 4 times a week.
<i>Danny stares at her.</i>	
MINDY	30 minutes, 3 times a week.
<i>Danny continues to stare.</i>	
MINDY	There is a cluster of elliptical machines at my gym.
<i>Danny continues to stare.</i>	
MINDY	I’m planning on joining a gym near my house ok?
DANNY [mumbling while writing in the chart]	Sedentary.
MINDY	That’s rude.

As mentioned before, this episode sees Mindy and Danny in a fight, trying to explore the nature of their relationship and whether they would be suitable as OBGYN/patient. Mindy wants to prove to Danny that he’s her friend and thus unable to be her doctor, while Danny tries to prove the opposite. Even before Danny weighs her (a scene which will be explored in the next chapter), he has to conduct an interview with many uncomfortable, deeply personal questions. Danny decides to exploit Mindy’s insecurities, the biggest of which is her body.

Mindy’s clothing style in this scene is more subdued, with dark blue colors dominating the outfit. This relates to the topic of the scene. The darker colors mirror Mindy’s inner turmoil in the episode whenever Danny’s personal questions dig too deep. Besides Mindy’s age and lack of a love life, Danny also targets Mindy’s body in order to unsettle her. In this scene Danny is in the middle of collecting general information on Mindy’s medical past and living situation. Thus he asks her whether she exercises or plays any sports. Mindy’s answer is one out of a medical textbook or women’s magazine on how to “stay fit”. She falls back on the perfectly scripted response for a woman and lies to fit the ideal.

The camera movement of this scene is especially interesting as it closes in on Danny's and Mindy's faces. The scene consists of hard cuts, alternating between shots of Mindy's and Danny's faces. Every cut the camera angle remains the same (eye-level) but the shots move from medium-close to close every time Mindy becomes more truthful. Thus the camera is Danny's gaze piercing her and extracting the truth from her.

The fact that Danny's gaze is the one that unsettles Mindy to the point that she in the end tells the truth about her exercise routine is used for comedic effect. Danny knows that Mindy is lying and thus with his gaze implores her to speak the truth. When considered more closely, the fact that Danny already knows she is lying can on the one hand of course be traced back to them being colleagues and thus knowing the basics of each others' lives and habits. Nevertheless, it is also evidence of the belief that bigger women do not exercise. Thus the fact that Mindy feels the need to lie about her actual level of exercise illustrates numerous assumptions underlying our society.

First of all, It shows that women are expected to exercise in order to be considered healthy, fit and desirable. While exercise undoubtedly has numerous positive effects on humans' health, it is also a cultural way of differentiating between "the good" and "the bad". Exercise is linked to cultural beliefs about fatness, as it is, more so than a nutritious diet, seen as an "antidote". It is the answer to the "fear of the flab" (Bordo 187) and preventive action against fatness. A lack of it (paired with a poor diet) is considered to be the main "culprit" of the "obesity epidemic". The importance society lays on exercise and sports as a divider between the healthy and the unhealthy, the attractive and the unattractive is eminent when looking at this scene. As mentioned before, the 20th century brought about changes in fat stigmatization. The argument of health was seen as a way of criticizing and stigmatizing fatness with the excuse of it being for a good reason. Especially society's obsession with exercise as a way of reducing obesity are controversial. In a *New York Times* article introducing a new study on the rise of obesity in the world, it is mentioned that "the growing accessibility of inexpensive, nutrient-poor packaged foods was probably a major factor [in the rise of obesity] and the general slowdown in physical activity was probably not" (Ritchel, "More Than 10 Percent", *NY Times*), conceding that the main "culprit" seems to be the food industry itself with its wide array of high-fat and high-sugar options. Society nevertheless falls back on blaming the individuals for their "laziness". Danny exploits exactly this trope in

this scene, making it with his line of questioning obvious to Mindy that her lack of exercise and resulting fatness is the reason for a number of things which he mentions later on, namely her lack of a long-lasting relationship and children (the fact that those things are even seen as insufficiencies of women opens a whole other line of questions).

Moreover, it is interesting to note that Mindy chooses the elliptical machine as her exercise of choice. Women generally are told to develop a preference for cardio exercises as cardio aids fat loss. The most “womanly” of the cardio machines in any gym is most likely the elliptical machine. While various studies show that resistance trainings and exercise with weights is equally important for physical health, the fitness industry especially still insists on explaining to women the only way to achieve the body they desire is to focus on cardio exercises with the ultimate goal of “burning fat”. This further illustrates society’s obsession with fat and the “burning” of it (with the word “burning” alone mirroring the very violent ways society treats fatty bodies).

This scene thus shows once more that women are constantly made to feel responsible for their supposed insufficiencies, something Mindy is well aware of. While she radiates a certain confidence, a lot of it is put on as she is well aware of society’s expectations of her and that her body is unable to fulfill them. Her body proves to still be the most uncomfortable topic for her to discuss and also the easiest way to hurt her feelings, as it is for many fat people. Moreover this scene illustrates that a number of things are culturally tied to women’s bodies, namely their ability to attract and keep a partner. While this scene mentions these issues, it does not discuss or question them. Mindy’s insistent lying, although everyone knows her to be untruthful, creates a comedic effect but her reasons for feeling the need to lie are never questioned. In that sense, this scene exploits fat people’s feelings of insufficiency for easy laughs.

8.4. Weight

Society has a strong preoccupation with weight. While the quick medical judgement of a person’s health is based on weight and height (BMI), it also carries with it a very strong societal connotation, due to the fact that, as previously discussed, the ideal is to be thin and to be thin means to care not only about one’s appearance but about oneself in general (McKinley 103). Weight is measurable, a number that has become telling of a

person's worth in society, and is thus also a tool of discrimination that can be used against someone.

Thus weight is not only a medical tool but also a cultural one that differentiates between the ones caring to fit in, and the ones who do not. Society rewards people for trying to fit in (i.e. losing weight) and punishes them for refusing to (i.e. being fat). It deems there to be no greater flattery for women than to comment on their weight loss. Society connects to the concepts of weight and weight loss the concepts of failure and success. It is the only way to become "normal, [...] to blend in, to avoid the stigma and discrimination" (Boero 1). Losing weight means becoming master over a body that is out of control, master over one's desires, master over one's own laziness. It is in every way connected to stepping out of the abnormal and into the normal. Episode 21 of *The Mindy Project* demonstrates this clearly by having Mindy's ex-boyfriend call her and the first sentence he says being, "You sound really pretty, like you lost weight." (*The Mindy Project*, Season 1, Episode 21). The scene clearly illustrates and mocks the fact that the biggest compliment to a fat person is to congratulate them on their weight loss. He calls her "pretty" and immediately connects it to weight loss demonstrating that in society one is unable to be pretty *and* fat. Beauty is exclusively reserved for the thin.

Girls and *The Mindy Project* address weight as discriminating and personal issues. In the first, rather short scene *Girls* focuses on how fat people feel about their own weight by demonstrating Hannah's discomfort at the doctor's office and the idea that she has to justify her weight to her doctor. Although Hannah often so openly rejects society's norms and beliefs about her own body, this scene demonstrates that no one can completely step out of society and the ideals it promotes. In the second scene *The Mindy Project* explores weight as a tool of discrimination by using Mindy's normally loud and outgoing nature and demonstrating how deeply she is affected by weight discrimination.

8.4.1. “The nurse weighed me with my clothes on.”

Girls: Season 1, Episode 2: 23:08

DOCTOR	24 years old?
HANNAH	Mhm.
DOCTOR	145 pounds.
HANNAH	Oh I’m 143 pounds. The nurse weighed me with clothes on so... that was a rude thing to do.

Episode 2 of season 1 with the title “Vagina Panic” is primarily concerned with Hannah’s fear of Sexually Transmitted Diseases. The scene under analysis sees Hannah at the OBGYN being examined. Throughout the conversation described above, the camera shows close static shots of blood vials, medical instruments, an old scale, stirrups and finally Hannah’s feet. These shots cut into one another and are accompanied by cheerful, humorous staccato guitar music that accentuates the humor of the scene.

The first two shots of blood vials and medical instruments are accompanied only by music. The doctor starts speaking when the scale with Hannah’s weight is shown. When Hannah mentions that the nurse weighing her with clothes on “was a rude thing to do” the camera shows her bare feet hanging in the air (reminding the viewer of children sitting down) because she seems to be sitting in the OBGYN seat without her feet up yet. Her toe nails are painted red. When she mentions the words “that was a rude thing to do” she sighs and simultaneously pulls her feet upwards demonstrating her discomfort with the situation. This bouncing of the feet relieves tension and illustrates the viewer that Hannah may be uncomfortable in the whole setting but especially so when the topic of her weight is discussed.

The fact that the visual and auditory stimuli do not correlate in this scene leads to a greater focus on the conversation as viewers have limited bodily information (with the deliberate exception of Hannah’s feet) from which to judge how the characters feel. While the female doctor’s voice sounds professional and friendly, Hannah’s confirmation of her age, which is the first time we hear her in the scene, is very quiet, timid and sounds shy. When the doctor mentions her weight she states it matter-of-factly and not in an accusatory way. Nevertheless Hannah immediately becomes defensive. Her voice grows stronger and accusing. She feels attacked by the mention of her weight and sees the mention of the number as an accusation. This reaction can be traced back to

Western society's strong preoccupation with weight. It not only has a medical implication but also a social and societal one. Hannah's reaction can also be interpreted as feeling ashamed for her weight while pretending to be unaffected. Especially the use of the adverb 'so' as consequential with the consequence never mentioned (so as to indicate that the consequence is obvious), illustrate a certain arrogance as a defense mechanism. She immediately tries to put blame on someone else for the number. This is largely due to the fact that fatness and blame are interrelated concepts in Western society. As already mentioned above, there are various "culprits" for the "obesity epidemic", the biggest group being overweight people themselves. Hannah seems to be aware of this and thus expecting of the reprimanding.

A natural human reaction towards accusation is to either go on the offensive or the defensive, to either react with self-accusation and/or self-abasement, or aggression and shifting of the blame. Hannah chooses the latter option and in the scene blames the nurse for her weight. This could be understood as the show stating that Hannah is unable to accept that she herself is to blame for her overweight and trying to find excuses for why the number in the scale is as high as it is without looking for at herself as the source of the "problem". It also illustrates once again that Hannah likes to be in control of her own narrative, before anyone else can make assumptions about her, her life and her life choices. The production of the scene as funny and humorous would aid this assessment. While the viewers are not laughing about the weight itself, they are laughing about Hannah's behavior. The fact that said behavior was caused by shame and the shame society puts on bigger women is left untouched.

8.4.2. “Weigh me, you son of a bitch.”

The Mindy Project: Season 1, Episode 5: 15:55

Danny enters exam room with a deep breath. He pulls back the curtain revealing Mindy who is sitting on the exam table.

DANNY Hi, Mindy. How are you?

MINDY [holding urine sample in hand] My urine.

DANNY Thank you.

MINDY You're welcome.

DANNY Great work. And now, let's get your weight.

MINDY [taking deep breath] Uh, you're in luck. I weighed myself last night. You can just write that down. 120 pounds.

DANNY Perfect. We'll just verify that. [while walking towards scale] [taps scale] Why don't you hop right up here?

Mindy walking towards scale solemnly.

DANNY Do you want to stop?

MINDY No. Just taking a second.

DANNY Okay.

Mindy steps on scale. Danny breathes in sharply.

DANNY Oh... we'll just... Guess we'll have to add a little bit of weight.

Danny adds weight on scale.

MINDY God, you are such a jerk. How do you sleep at night?

DANNY I sleep pretty good.

MINDY No wonder your wife left you.

DANNY Hey, babe, we can stop this train anytime.

MINDY [whispering to herself] Don't listen to him.

DANNY What's that, Mindy?

MINDY [turning her head to the side, whispering to herself] You're not Mindy, you're a warrior and your warrior name is.... [breathes in deeply] Beyonce pad thai.

MINDY [to Danny] Keep going.

DANNY Are you sure?

MINDY Weigh me, you son of a bitch.

In the course of this episode Mindy and Danny, as previously mentioned, get into a fight about the nature of their relationship. While Danny claims to see her only as his

colleague, Mindy claims that they are friends. They decide to test the nature of their relationship by making Danny Mindy's new gynecologist to see whether this type of doctor/patient relationship is too personal for Danny or Mindy. This scene from episode 5 of *The Mindy Project* takes place after Danny has already conducted a very personal interview with Mindy (as mentioned beforehand in the "Do you exercise" scene). Thus they now move on to the medical examination. In the course of the episode Danny focuses strongly on Mindy's insecurities, the biggest one being her body. Thus he targets her weight as it is one of her most salient reasons for body dissatisfaction and feelings of shame. Besides Hannah, Mindy also struggles with her weight and the societal connotations related to that number. While Hannah lies to herself and tries to shift blame when confronted with her weight, Mindy struggles with feelings of shame and reacts with verbal aggression.

The fact that Mindy anticipated his question, having prepared an answer beforehand, shows her level of involvement in the issue. She knows he is going to exploit this insecurity and prepares a defense mechanism by providing her supposed weight beforehand. As soon as it does not work she goes on the offensive by calling him a "jerk", and exploiting his own weakness by reminding him that his wife left him. She does not assign blame to anyone and does not react with self-abasement but simply steels herself for Danny's comment on her weight. Thus she already knows that the number on the scale will lead to fat-shaming.

Generally one can say that our obsession with health and weight has largely been (ab)used to stigmatize and ostracize fat people. The BMI has been the most commonly used point of reference when it comes to determining a person's "degree of fatness". This degree (anorexic-underweight-normal-sized-overweight-obese) has also come to simultaneously signal a person's health, although it is calculated solely from a person's age, height and weight. While the BMI is a convenient, cheap and easy way to collect information about a person's body, it can be deceiving in regards to a person's health. It fails to include a person's body composition and any other cues for health. It has been found that while a large number of studies do link a high BMI to other health concerns typically associated with obesity (diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, etc.), a closer inspection of those studies suggests that "91% of what accounts for a health outcome has *nothing to do with BMI*". Moreover, there is some unclarity about whether actually

losing weight would reduce the health risk as “the ‘risk factor’ of higher BMI comes from a comparison of always-been-thinner people to fatter people” (Burgard 43). It has been suggested that measuring the body fat percentage would, medically, be a much better alternative of classifying obesity (although the need for a classification of people into categories, which also determine their social belonging, at all *should* be questioned) and discovering the associated health risks (Goacher, Lambert and Moffatt 657, Boero 24). A relatively new movement that has already been mentioned above, Health at Every Size, attempts to support people in finding *their* ideal weight by “enhancing health” without automatically assuming weight loss is the way to go, working on “size and self-acceptance”, “the pleasure of eating well”, “the joy of movement” and putting “an end to weight bias”. Health according to the HAES model is determined by “the process of daily life rather than the outcome of the weight”, as health is a very individual concept and some people *can* be healthy at every weight (Burgard 43-44).

However, the importance society lays on weight, with women’s magazines advertising weight-loss strategies (e.g. “Lose x amount of pounds in 7 days”, etc) and promoting unrealistic expectations and ideals for what the ideal number of weight should be, influences how women view themselves. Thinness has become equated with health (Burgard 42). Besides medical professionals and advisory diet-magazines, advertisements, movies and television with their promotion of the thin-ideal also aid this process. Consequently, women exposed to the idealization of thinness suffer from an increased likelihood of body dissatisfaction, a drive for thinness and disordered eating (Harrison and Cantor 60-62) as well as feelings of shame (Bessenoff and Snow 730) and weight-related thought processes (such as constantly thinking about exercising and dieting) (Bessenoff 244). While most of these effects seem to be less strongly linked to television viewing than to the exposure to other thin-ideal media (e.g. magazines) (Harrison and Cantor 60), they are still relevant and important to consider. Thus the ideal of thinness and the focus on weight as a measurement of it can cause personal feelings of insufficiency and shame. This scene as well as the *Girls* scene at the doctor’s illustrate the emotional stress many bigger women deal with during medical exams. While taking one’s weight is part of a simple physical exam, most women experience it as a huge stress factor and it is often accompanied by feelings of little self-worth and shame. In a study conducted by Olson, Schumaker and Yawn 32% of participants (well-educated and working in a medical field) with a BMI higher than 27

and 55% of participants with a BMI higher than 35 admitted that they “had delayed or canceled physician appointments because they knew that they would be weighed”. 2.6% refused to be weighed at their appointments (889). Among the reasons stated for this behavior were embarrassment, a desire to lose weight before going to the doctor’s or that they did not want to be lectured on their overweight (Olson, Schumaker and Yawn 890). Thus females are not only confronted with their own feelings of shame and dissatisfaction but also with fat-shaming and constant reminders of their insufficiencies and health risks they are exposed to, from medical practitioners.

Mindy’s last resort to Danny taking her weight is to develop an alter ego to shut herself off from the situation. In the course of the episode Morgan suggests to Mindy to create an alter ego so that Danny’s insults and exploitation of her insecurities do not pain her. Mindy chooses the alter ego name “Beyoncé Pad Thai”. In popular culture Beyoncé is celebrated as the epitome of feminism and strength. In her songs and through her actions she promotes female empowerment and self-confidence, self-acceptance and curvaceousness. Moreover she is a woman of color which in this case gives her words even more power by being a member of a large under-privileged and discriminated part of society. Pad Thai on the other hand, is a Thai noodle dish. Mindy’s alter ego thus combines a number of things. Mindy being Indian, her alter ego carries the name of a black woman and an Asian dish (the fact that it is Thai and not Indian pointing towards the Western understanding of Asia as being a homogenous continent). It combines feminism and self-acceptance with food. Thus upon a closer look the alter ego’s name combines reminders of Mindy’s ethnicity with her desired mindset, namely being strong, confident and accepting of her love for food and consequently her body.

Although the alter ego is obviously created for the comedic effect, it says a lot about the way women feel about their body, their weight and being confronted with it. Mindy calls herself a warrior, thus seeing this confrontation with Danny not only as a war, but this confrontation with her own weight as a fight she is determined to win. She engages in a self-confrontational discourse with herself in order to steel herself against the anticipated shame. Mindy even takes on a new identity as she seems to find the confrontation too painful, maybe only speaking aloud what for many women is an inner dialogue. The camera movement mirrors Mindy’s feelings of dread. When she steps off the examination bed and walks towards the scale the camera is situated behind the scale. The scale itself is out of focus but a constant reminder of what awaits. During her

walk the background music is reminiscent of frightening nursery music that can often be found in horror movies. When she steps on the scale the sound is loud and rattling accentuating her heavy frame. During her conversation with herself, Mindy faces away from Danny and the camera closes in on her face, a close-up giving the viewer the feeling of sympathy and really making her first fearful, then determined expression visible. After her little pep-talk she finds new strength, the music picks up and the atmosphere lightens. This is of course also part of what creates the comedic effect of the scene. Mindy speaks to herself and encourages herself in a situation that for many people would be part of a simple routine. Nevertheless she finds it emotionally stressful, not only because of Danny but also because of her own body image. She openly addresses the self-doubt and self-shame many women feel during these situations thus adding a sense of realism and in the process ensuring that many women can identify with Mindy. While the fact that the scene addresses this issue faced by many and Mindy's own positive resolution of the issue can be commended, the main question is whether the scene is funny because or although Mindy feels very out-of-control and insecure. The analysis points towards the latter to be true. Throughout the scene Danny with his bullying has the upper hand, through his actions forcing her to be weighed against her will and then continuing to make fun of her. In this episode Mindy is, although still very eccentric, not overdrawn in a way that makes her obviously satirical and critical of the superficialities of society, as she so often is. Although Mindy does find a way to tackle her own issues and in the end even wins their little battle out of *her own* strength, the whole episode nevertheless also comically exploits Mindy's body and women's insecurities.

8.5. Sexuality

The relationship between fatness and sexuality has already been mentioned in chapter 3.2. Fatness has early on in the beginnings of its stigmatization already been linked to overtly sexual behavior and threatening to the male virility (Bordo 205-206).

In *The Mindy Project*, a network sitcom, Mindy's sexuality is only briefly touched upon in various episodes but it is not constituted as an important part in the understanding of Mindy's character. While the show often implies (and is applauded for it) that she has sex with various stereotypically attractive men (tall, muscular) who are supposedly due to her fatness and ethnic background "out of her league", the show is also criticized for

its lack of diversity in Mindy's sexual partners. While a stronger representation of interracial relationships is needed on television, the fact that Mindy and other shows (e.g. Scandal's Olivia Pope) almost exclusively date white men sends the message that, as the article puts it, "measure of success is not just working your way to the top of your profession but that the ideal signifier for that success is a white partner" (Nededog, "What's With The Mindy Project's", *The Wrap*).

Discussions of female sexuality and bodily freedom are an important part of *Girls*' bigger discourse. Hannah's understanding of her own body as a sexual subject is particularly interesting to explore as the show discusses the topic very openly and honestly. Lena Dunham is moreover very public about her body and is frequently naked on the show (even in scenes that are not sexual to begin with, as in the bathtub-cupcake scene). As Hannah's body and her openness in the discussion of it is such a big part of the show, I have decided to include one scene in my analysis.

8.5.1. "You're feeling pretty frisky."

Girls: Season 1, Episode 1: 11:24

Girls is very much known for its open discussion of female sexuality and nudity. Lena Dunham has been both praised and criticized for her willingness to show her body. Especially in the beginning of the show, her nudity has been a large part of the public discourse on the show. Dunham herself (along with producers Judd Apatow and Jenni Konner) see her frequent nakedness as a realistic depiction of young people's lives (Lacob, "A Reporter Asked", *Buzzfeed*). At the same time it can be seen as an act of rebellion against the censoring of women's bodies and the restrictions on when their nudity is considered acceptable. This scene is the first one in the first season in which the viewers are confronted with Hannah's body and sexuality. In this scene Hannah is visiting Adam after having been fired from her internship. While the viewer understands that Hannah and Adam frequently have sex, they are not in a relationship.

Adam's first appearance is him opening the door to his apartment, shirtless, with the greeting "Hey, doll" which Hannah counters amusedly with "Hey, doll. That's what my dad calls me". While she says it in an amusing fashion, the fact that she compares his way of greeting to that of her dad raises the question whether she calls him out on the

sexism of the greeting, as the term “dolls” refers to an object one can play with and it compares women to a child-like object again (as already discussed in the analysis of the first scene). It is not clear whether Hannah means to do that though as the discussion is abandoned thereafter.

When Hannah enters Adam’s apartment she takes off her coat. Underneath she wears a long-sleeved flowery, white and beige blouse, a beige skirt that ends above her knees and is held together by a brown belt and brown, opaque tights with military-looking boots that end above her ankles. The skirt is not ironed and has some creases. Her hair is the only part of her outfit obviously styled. Otherwise she wears minimal make-up, appearing to only be wearing some eyeliner that is a little smudged. The belt ends at her slightly below her waistline and cuts into her skin lightly making her belly pop out a little above it. The whole outfit accentuates Hannah’s body shape. The belt is not at her waistline which would put the focus on a womanly, hourglass shape, but just below it thus emphasizing her wider waist and bigger stomach. The shot is a full shot to stress how Hannah’s outfit and overall look fit in with the surroundings of Adam’s apartment. Everything about the shot seems old-fashioned and ill-fitted. The general setting of the scene which is held in very earthy, dark colors. Adam’s apartment is cluttered with stuff he has lying around. Everything is held in tones of mustard, brown or black. Hannah’s outfit nearly blends into the scenery making her appear smaller but also actively drawing the viewers’ attention to the fact that Hannah does not seem to care much about fashion. She seems a little messy but not unkempt. Her way of dressing differs starkly from what society, firstly, deems acceptable for women in general and, secondly, for bigger women, who are supposed to hide their bodies. Women much more so than men are expected to care about their appearances and thus adhere to certain sometimes more, sometimes less official, dress codes. Hannah in many ways violates these unofficial expectations. First of all she seems to not care about fashion too much in general, as her outfit seems outdated. This is illustrated even more so by making it fit really well into Adam’s apartment. The colors she is wearing and the style of the clothing make her nearly blend into the background. Moreover, she does not know or care how to make her fashion choices compliment her general appearance, e.g. by wearing colors that do not complement her skin tone or boots to a skirt, which makes her look shorter. She would also be expected to follow a dress code bigger people tend to follow, which seems to be to either make yourself look as small as possible or hide your fat.

Hannah does neither. While the portrayal of bigger women on TV as undesirable and thus often unfashionable is not uncommon, it is usually accompanied by a sense of shame that these women feel for failing to fulfill the requirements for fashionable dress. This can be seen by plus-size fashion frequently focusing on concealing “trouble areas” such as the stomach or thighs. Hannah throughout this episode and even throughout the whole show does not seem to apologize or feel ashamed for her lack of a sense of or interest in fashion. As her outdated outfits hardly ever hide her body shape they do not function as a way of shaming her for not having the fashionable body. She displays her bigger belly, arms and legs on multiple occasions without trying to actively hide them. She simply does not seem to care to adhere to the societal rules.

Nevertheless, Hannah’s confidence regarding her body often depends upon multiple factors, amongst which the main one is the judgement of others. As could be seen in the doctor scene or the “Fat baby angel” scene Hannah’s confidence frequently depends on the other people around her. This scene is very much concerned with Hannah’s self-understanding in the presence of a male. When she stands opposite Adam Hannah has her arms crossed in front her, just below her breasts, hiding her stomach area. She then opens her arms up and puts them behind her body. She has her weight on one foot. Her outfit as well as her stance all illustrate that Hannah is not entirely comfortable in the situation. She looks uneasy and a little insecure being out in the open with Adam being able to freely gaze at her whole form. Only when she sits down she seems more at ease in the situation. Sitting down she on the one hand takes up less space, something society deems particularly important for women, and on the other hand, is able to hide her stomach area. The couch in Adam’s apartment is old and a dark yellow, making Hannah once again blend into the scene due to her outfit. When she first sits down the cushions seem to swallow her. She once again makes herself look smaller by crossing her legs at her ankles and putting her hands into her lap. Only when Adam sits down beside her and angles his body towards hers does she open up some more and align her body opposite his. She puts one knee on the couch, in the process opening up her legs. This illustrates that she has become more at ease with the situation. Since she is wearing a skirt she would be expected to keep her legs closed and sit demurely. The fact that she is spreading her legs with a skirt on, in the presence of a man is not only a sign of comfort but also of a disregard of cultural rules. Hannah’s constant shift between comfort and discomfort in the scene seems to be related to Adam’s behavior and

Adam's relationship to her. Whenever he shows signs of interest and engagement in the situation (e.g. aligning his body towards hers, listening intently without distraction, etc.) she opens up her body. When he shows signs of disregard, distraction or boredom she responds with her body shrinking.

In the course of the scene, they then start talking about their finances, Hannah admitting that until the day before she had gotten all her money from her parents. She feels embarrassed about the fact. Adam counters that he still gets all his money from his grandmother showing no sign of unease in admitting that.

HANNAH	So is that like [stutters] how you support yourself or...?
ADAM	Uh, yeah. I mean, I supplement... but it gives me the freedom that I won't have to be anyone's slave. You should never be anyone's <i>fucking</i> slave. [whispers] Except mine.
<i>Hannah pulls herself towards him, straddles him and kisses him.</i>	
ADAM	You're feeling pretty frisky.
HANNAH	I really despise that word. I hate it so much.

Adam then changes the topic of the conversation from finances and their problematic life situation to sex. So while Hannah is the one initiating the action by straddling him and starting to kiss him, he is the one who turns the situation sexual by telling her she should be his "slave". Adam thus uses the word for two meanings. In his first mention of the word he mentions that he refuses to be a slave to the capitalistic system that forces you to work under a superior and obey their commands in order to earn a living. In the second instance he insinuates that Hannah should be his sex slave, obeying his commands during intercourse. Especially the expletive "fucking" holds an interesting function within the conversation. On the one hand it functions as an intensifier of his previous sentence, on the other hand it also insinuates its literal meaning for the following sentence. While the first mention of being a slave to the system is to be taken more seriously on his account and the second mention is meant in a provocatively playful way, both instances have little to do with actual slavery. He is using a reference to an inhumane system of ownership of another person in order to illustrate on the one hand rebellion against the capitalistic system, on the other hand a playful, consensual sexual relationship. This adheres with the general tendency of the show to portray its characters as either unaware or uncaring of social conventions, restrictions and rules.

While the first mention of slavery is meant in an empowering way, the second part of being a sex slave is the exact opposite. The viewer understands that Adam does not actually mean for Hannah to obey his commands but that he says it to change the topic and mood of the conversation, but it nevertheless illustrates their power relationship, by him taking the initiative and changing the topic to sex and, by him, albeit playfully, expressing that he wishes to be in charge.

The whole conversation is filmed from behind the couch with a medium-close, over-the-shoulder shot of both Hannah and Adam. It is a high-level shot but only slightly above the eye-level of the characters, making it seem as if the viewer was sitting behind them listening to their conversation. The focus is on the characters, the background of Adam's apartment is blurred. Interestingly enough in the background, right between Hannah and Adam an old scale is visible. The placement of it is especially interesting since it is a symbol of not only one of the main topics of this episode, which is Hannah's body, but also of a point that will prove to stand between them in the course of the episode, namely Adam's attitude towards fatness. Moreover, it can also be seen as a scale of wealth. In its shabby look the scale clearly illustrates that Adam is struggling financially while at the same time its placement hints at the importance of body image in Adam's life.

When Hannah pulls herself upwards in order to straddle Adam it seems rather clumsy. The camera angle changes to eye-level, the shot from medium-close to close. Now the characters are filmed from the side, making their kissing fully visible. Only when Hannah nearly cuts Adam off by objecting that she does not like the word "frisky", in the process also objecting to his ridiculing comment on her taking hold of the situation and taking the initiative, the camera angle changes to the one from before (i.e. behind the couch, medium-long, slightly high-level). This interruption of the scene and change in camera angle mirrors Hannah's reaction to his comment, namely being taken aback, and brings the situation back to the conversational level for a second, focusing the viewer on Hannah's feelings as now her face is in the center of the shot. Hannah not only takes the initiative by actively initiating the kiss but also counters a comment that shames her for it. Thus Hannah has proven a number of times that while she clearly acknowledges society's gendered discourse and gendered norms of behavior she objects to them only when feeling personally restricted by them. At the beginning of the scene, when Adam

addresses her with “doll” she does the same thing, objecting to the sexist undertone of the term. In contrast, in the first scene of the first episode, she uses a gendered term herself (“fat baby angel”) as in that instance it suits her need for comparison and self-deprecation. Regarding this aspect one could thus argue that *Girls* is in a constant conversation with post-feministic ideas of femininity. While in some scenes Hannah shows a post-feminist understanding of her femininity by defining “femininity as a bodily product” or illustrating “sexually desiring sexual subjecthood” (Ford 1032), in other scenes she rejects it. As Ford puts it,

“The series signposts that the characters have access to reproductive freedom [...] yet they are trapped by the narrow confines of performing post-feminist femininity and the demands of heterosexual desirability. Despite their privilege, Hannah, Marnie, Jessa, and Shoshanna are all victims of internalized misogyny” (1032).

Right after Hannah voices her unease, Adam cuts her off by grabbing her head and pulling it towards his, kissing her forcefully by taking her lower lip between his teeth and pulling on it. He once again takes hold of the situation. While they are kissing the noises they create are loud and the only sound audible, adding to the uncomfortable feeling the whole situation creates within the viewers. The scene is shot from the side giving the whole scene a voyeuristic effect.

As soon as they lie down on the couch the camera angle once again changes filming them from the back of the couch. Adam rolls himself on top of Hannah. Their kissing is only interrupted by short conversation. Hannah tries to be romantic by whispering “I like you so much; I don’t know where you disappear to”, which Adam counters with “What are you talking about? I’m right here.” She then nervously talks about how it is still light out and while he begins to take off her shoes she talks about the special-skills section on her resumé and admits that she feels like she does not have any special skills. Adam reacts by saying, “I know something you could do but first I have to see if you fulfill all the requirements”, moving down her body and telling her to lie on her stomach. He then lies down on top of her and whispers in her ear, “You modern career woman I know what you like. You think you can just come in here and talk all that noise?”. This shot is filmed with a close shot of Hannah’s and Adam’s face. Hannah looks a little amused and uncomfortable, also illustrated by her questioning answer of “Erm, no?”. Adam then tells her to grab her legs and leaves to get some lube. Hannah questions why they would need lube but he never answers but rather tells her to take her clothes off. When she asks him to get a condom he answers from the other room with “I’ll consider it”. This is

filmed with a close shot of Hannah's face which shows some signs of mild annoyance at his attempt at a joke (i.e. slight eye-roll and raised eyebrows). Adam's continuous vague and domineering comments as well as Hannah's mostly passive, accepting attitude create a certain build-up.

While Adam is in the other room Hannah then remains on her stomach. This is filmed in a full shot with the couch Hannah is still lying on being central in the lower half of the screen. The background and foreground sees some of Adam's messy apartment. She begins by trying to take off her tights, remaining on her stomach with her face pressed into the couch cushions. She moves her body up and down in order to reach the tights with one hand. In the process her bottom and thighs, which are right in the center of the screen, are exposed and can be seen jiggling because of the movement. The mustard-colored background makes her fair skin look slightly sickly. One can see her struggling for a full 20 seconds before Adam comes in to take them off for her. Hannah's "jiggly" bottom and legs are put on full display and are given extensive "screen time".

All of this accentuates the comedic effect created by Hannah trying to take her clothes off. The messy apartment, the background music with pleasant short staccato tones which creates an atmosphere of expectation and comedy and Hannah struggling with taking her tights off, something most women are most likely familiar with. The longitude and stillness of the shot (which puts Hannah's wiggling into even greater focus) benefit the comedic effect even more so. The fact that the camera shot is not a close up of Hannah's body or her face but includes the surrounding set with all its messiness ensures is that the viewers do not laugh at Hannah or her body but at the situation she finds herself in and her struggle with the tights. While the situation itself is awkward to watch, one cannot see any signs of Hannah being uncomfortable in the process of undressing. There is not one moment of hesitation and she even remains in the awkward position she is, i.e. she does not sit up in order to make the whole process look more elegant, comfortable and/or sexy and does not seem to hide her body in any way. The awkwardness remains the same during sex. The camera position switches between the same full shot of the couch with Hannah on her hands and knees and Adam behind her, to close ups of Hannah's face and medium close shots of Adam's face. The camera remains static, thus giving the viewers the opportunity to really focus on certain aspects and adding to the unsettled feeling.

The fact that the camera angles, shot length and auditory depiction of sex scenes in *Girls* are specifically aiming to generate uncomfortableness and disgust by starkly contradicting mainstream sex scenes is becoming abundantly clear here. Camera movement in mainstream sex scenes, especially on prime-time television, usually moves along certain body parts, never remaining steady in one shot but rather switching from one to the other with soft cuts. The sounds (usually hard breathing by men and soft moaning by women) are often either overlaid entirely or at least partly by music fitting the intended feel of the scene. There is either only whispering or no talking at all. *Girls'* sex scenes contradict the mainstream thus in all aspects leading to its frequent comparison with porn. In an interview with National Public Radio (2012) Dunham claimed that the awkward sex in *Girls* was to illustrate the influence of porn on society's understanding of sex (Lewis 179). As it does not glorify the act in any way, it awkwardly shows the viewers how their expectations differ from the "reality" illustrated in *Girls*. At the same time, it illustrates that many women feel a certain pressure to conform to a man's expectation when it comes to relationships and sex, as "[t]he choice between being alone and being with somebody causes women to make compromises, and showing this dynamic between the characters on the show allows the viewer to reflect on this dynamic in their own lives" (Lewis 179). Although Hannah would like to have a relationship with Adam, she refuses to admit it and in the end seems to have sex with him in order to maintain some sort of connection to him. Sex for them is not about an emotional connection but seems to be their way of communicating.

Throughout the whole sex scene Hannah does not take her blouse off so her upper body is never really on display. The naked skin the viewer gets to see is when they are filmed from the side. Hannah's chubby thighs and cellulite are clearly visible but never actively focused on by the camera. They are neither hidden, nor highlighted. While this once again may be cause of disgust for some viewers, it also naturalizes fat and cellulite by portraying it neutrally. In the whole scene Hannah tends to forgo her own wishes in order to please Adam. When he tries to have anal sex without her consent and talking about it first she tells him, "Please don't do that. That feels awful." While it is positive that she refuses to do something she is not comfortable with, she also shows

signs of feeling ashamed for speaking out². Throughout the scene she continues to be very unsure of herself. She continues to talk, asking whether what she does is right and apologizing for not wanting anal sex. Thus she constantly seeks his approval for her actions and apologizes even when Adam was the one failing to ask for consent. On the one hand this situation is an illustration of how Western society fails to understand the difference between explicit consent and not saying “no”. On the other hand Hannah’s reaction also exposes the tendency for victim blaming. She feels she has to apologize although she has been treated wrongfully.

The whole scene itself from start to finish can best be described by calling it messy. The messy apartment, the messy people and the messy sex are all part of *Girls*’ way of confronting the viewers with the unfamiliar and nearly challenging them to a reaction. This also applies to how Hannah herself, especially her outfit and her erratic, awkward behavior, and her body is shown. Her body, as was mentioned in previous chapters, is also the main focus of the cultural reception of the show. It starts in this episode with Hannah undressing and displaying her body and fat for the world to see. The fact that during sex Hannah is not fully undressed and only her thighs are shown create an interesting effect. Especially cellulite is considered unerotic and unappealing and since no erotic part of her body (e.g. her breasts) is on display, inevitably the focus on the thighs is heightened. Consequently, the show is not afraid of showing the “less appealing” aspects of the female body, but will not point a finger at it, as it could then be considered as unnatural and inviting laughter.

A method used to get this across is blank style. Blank style uses a mostly stationary camera and characters, meaningful set decor, unobtrusive cuts separating long-shots. Moreover it is “an attempt to convey a film’s story, no matter how sensationalistic, disturbing or bizarre, with a sense of dampened affect” (Sconce 359 qtd. In: Perkins 95). In this scene blank style is supported by the aforementioned toned down set decor as well as Hannah’s clothing style, but especially the shot in which Hannah gets undressed illustrates the effect of blank style. It “dampens” the sensation and unusualness of

² A very similar scene can be found in the third season (episode 4) of *The Mindy Project* in which Danny (who is then Mindy’s boyfriend), “slipped” and tries to have anal sex with Mindy, who is startled. The show was criticized for failing to give Mindy the voice to express her discomfort accordingly. The episode sparked a larger discussion about consent and the discussion of it on television. In that way it is very similar to this scene in *Girls* in which Hannah does tell him to stop but later on apologizes for it.

Hannah's body on display through understatement and thus refuses to make a spectacle out of it.

The same thing applies to the sex scene. It challenges viewers' expectations of on-screen sex by making it look almost technical and slightly uncomfortable to watch. The fact that the camera remains static and the shot length is long in most cases gives viewers the chance to take in the scene as a whole. So, while it does not direct attention towards Hannah's body, its slow, understated portrayal of it leads to an even greater focus on it by giving the audience the chance and time to react to it. Nevertheless it does not sensationalize her body or the sex, also because there is no eroticism in the scene: no long, moving shots of body parts considered erotic and kissing, moaning or heavy breathing. All of this challenges the way we are used to sex scenes being portrayed, with the female body on display, as an erotic object. Hannah's body does not comply with this in two ways. First of all she puts her fat body, something which our society reads as inadvertently unerotic and even disgusting, on display. Secondly, not only the displaying of the body but also of the sex itself does not revert to the convention of being aesthetically pleasing but rather challenges the whole notion. This confrontation with awkwardness provokes various reactions within viewers, ranging from humor to disgust and is one of the reasons why the show is known for sparking controversy.

9. Conclusion

To come back to the initial question, this thesis intended to discover how and why *The Mindy Project* and *Girls* draw on fat stigmatization in the portrayals of Mindy and Hannah through the analysis of scenes from the first season of both shows. The first question is somewhat easier to answer. Both shows use irony and/or satire as their main medium for their message. Generally, the irony of *Girls* seems a little more nuanced and often a little more subversive than that of *Mindy* which is more obvious and in-your-face. Both main characters are defined by contradiction.

The case of *Girls* is interesting as its use of irony is more alienating in the sense that it likes to challenge the viewers. Hannah herself is a deeply ironic character. She and her body are always both - comfortable and uncomfortable, confident and unconfident, conventionally beautiful and ugly. She is a contradiction of herself in many ways, also in terms of how she feels about her body. Nevertheless, the staging of her body through the use of blank style creates an “emotional intimacy” that “works to collapse any distance created through the use of irony” (Ford 1035). Ford argues that this shows how much *Girls* is part of a larger discourse on feminism (1030) but also on society’s stigmatization of fatness and its treatment of the female body on television. *The Mindy Project* on the other hand is less self-reflective than *Girls* when it comes to its main character but upon closer inspection in some cases just as reflective about society and its shortcomings (one can see a clear progression from the beginnings of the first season to the end). Its commentary of women’s place in society and the stigmatization of fatness is handled more humorously but nevertheless often critically.

In the course of the analysis I have found that Hannah is often openly assertive in her opinions about her body and how her body is being treated. She recognizes social norms of thinness and tries to consciously reject notions of fat as amoral, funny, unsexy, overly sexual or in need to being controlled. She refuses to have anyone prescribe what she feels or is supposed to feel and claims to have very early on decided to “take control of her shape”. Hannah actively asserts points about herself before anyone else can form their opinion and voice it. As Lena Dunham in an Instagram post admits herself,

“I spent so many years loving my body but thinking it wasn't lovable by others- its sole purpose was to be fodder for jokes. I performed the insult so no one else could. I

don't regret any of it- that's my art and that was my truth [...]" (Dunham, Instagram post June 6, 2017).

Just as Lena did, Hannah also tries to take control of her own narrative. It is important to note however that she sometimes only tries. While she does understand societal pressure to be a medium of domination, she nevertheless cannot break with society completely. So although Hannah is very outspoken about her beliefs and rejection of society's norms, she still feels the pressure and sometimes crumbles to it in moments of self doubt (sometimes also triggered by fat-shaming) and resorts to self-deprecation.

The character of Mindy on the other hand is deeply satirical, of its main point of reference, namely romantic comedies, but also of consumerism and fat stigmatization. In her whole being Mindy acts and pretends. She refuses to acknowledge her own body as being conceived as fat or "unfit" for society but is still aware that her body *is* acknowledged as such. This contradiction is what the show plays with and it is also one that many fat people have to live with. The cut of her clothing and the way she sometimes presents them seem to imply a certain degree of modesty, if there was not the vibrant and often inappropriate colors she wears to draw attention to herself. Nevertheless, she is similar to Hannah in her rather fragile body image. Whenever Mindy is confronted with her fatness by some outside source, she reacts either aggressively and loudly or with self-deprecation and shame. Unlike Hannah she often does not assert herself and her own body before someone else does it for her, but she certainly defends herself as well as her body afterwards, albeit sometimes through aggressive threats that heighten the comedic effect and play into the idea of fat women being out-of-control.

Both shows moreover work a lot with quiet and loudness in the voicing of their message. While *Girls* is very quiet and slow in its medium, using blank style and anticipating the real effect as being within the viewer, its character is often loud in her resistance. The aesthetics of *The Mindy Project*, on the other hand, are loud and fast in every way. The colors are bright, the main character herself has a loud and vibrant personality and the conversations move fast. Nevertheless, it can be said that both shows overall seem to aim at sending out a message in favor of body positivity and against fat stigmatization. The extent to which they actively criticize, negate or subvert fat stigmatization varies. While *Girls* uses a lot of "argumentative rejection", actively arguing against aspects of body shaming and addressing the issue "head on", *The*

Mindy Project applies what Schweitzer calls “subversive reappropriation” (64). Simplified one could say that *Girls* tries to work against society with weapons of defense and active resistance (e.g. through telling people off, showing her body off and expressing comfort in her body or caring little about fashion) while *The Mindy Project* tries to beat it at its own game through insistent reappropriation of thin-values to her own fat body (e.g. by wearing bright colors, illustrating the ridiculousness of women looking “cute” in male clothing or ridiculing the idea of weight loss as a compliment). The stylistic choices of both shows to achieve those goals are different. While *Girls* uses tropes of quality TV and “smart television” as well as “indy cinema” (Ford 1034-1035), *The Mindy Project* makes use of the romantic comedy genre and satirizes it (Schweitzer 64-65). What both shows have in common is that upon closer inspection they aim to be socio-cultural critique of many things, among which fat stigmatization is one.

Nevertheless, both shows also have their difficulties. They sometimes do cater to fat stigmatization and discrimination and end the discussion before the critical thought process can be initiated on the part of the viewers. *Girls* tends to be very Hannah-focused, and her self-deprecating humor tends to only point out the problem at the tip of the iceberg. In these scenes, where Hannah makes herself the focus, the show never gets the chance to dive into the roots of the problem or questioning its existence in the first place (e.g. the scene at the doctor’s). All the viewer is in the end left with is a slightly uncomfortable laugh at the fat lady - and although that laugh may be uncomfortable for it is very obviously directed at her body, it nevertheless normalizes the idea of fatness being funny and self-deprecating humor as self-critique being acceptable. *The Mindy Project*’s over-the-top main character on the other hand often diverts the attention from herself and the issue at hand. Mostly, Mindy’s self-defense mechanism is making a joke of it. She does not become self-deprecating like Hannah, thus we never get the impression that Mindy is uncomfortable with who she is, but we notice she is uncomfortable with the niche society tries to put her into because of her body. The jokes the show uses to get this point across sometimes get lost in the crossfire and can only be critically understood upon closer analysis. In the end this sometimes leads to the viewer laughing more at Mindy’s over-reaction (e.g. “If you lost 15 pounds” scene) and thus once again normalizes fat-stigmatization and supports the belief that making fun of people’s bodies is “in good fate”. Why the shows nevertheless often draw on the well-established themes of fat-stigmatization (e.g. fat-shaming, discussions of weight and sport routine, etc.) can be explained by looking once again at

the characters. While both Hannah and Mindy seem to have come to terms with society's treatment of their bodies they nevertheless are not above society and above wanting to be a part of it. They are supposed to be the everyday-women that simply struggle with their bodies a little less than most and in the end, make them more relatable while still showing that being confident in your body and opposing society's treatment of it *is* possible.

Thus finally it can be said that although both shows do show some signs of indulging in fat stigmatization for easy laughs, Hannah's and Mindy's irony and their indecisiveness perfectly illustrate the divisiveness of fat people in a society that stigmatizes, ostracizes and condemns them. They are torn between having internalized an unattainable ideal and mentally wanting to fit into a society that denounces their bodies while at the same time being aware of the fact that this society has no place for their bodies. Although the shows handle this with humor so as not to alienate their audience, they in many scenes get their point across: that fatness is a stigma. It is an invisible battle, one that many thin people are unaware of, but a battle that fat people are forced to fight every day and one that affects their lives even in the most mundane situations.

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11. Abstract (Deutsch)

Die vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Darstellung dicker Frauen in zwei amerikanischen Sitcoms, nämlich *The Mindy Project* und *Girls*. Das Ziel der Arbeit ist herauszufinden, wie und warum die beiden Serien die Stigmatisierung von Fett in ihrer Darstellung zweier fatter Frauen benutzen.

Hierzu wird zunächst die Stigmatisierung von Fett in der westlichen Gesellschaft behandelt, beginnend mit dessen historischen Anfängen. Der Hass von Fett kann zunächst auf das 19. Jahrhundert zurückgeführt werden, als die Industrialisierung Angst vor zu viel Konsum hervorrief und gleichzeitig Fett ein Merkmal für niedere Zivilisationen und Kulturen wurde. Außerdem wurde Fett, speziell den Frauenkörper betreffend, sexualisiert und galt als Merkmal für den unkontrollierten Appetit (sexueller sowie körperlicher Natur). In den 70er Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts entwickelte sich Fett schließlich zu einer Charaktereigenschaft, die Faulheit, Maßlosigkeit, Widerwillen und Amoralität in sich vereinte.

Heutzutage werden Übergewicht und Adipositas im öffentlichen Diskurs wie ansteckende Krankheiten diskutiert, wodurch ein Klima von Angst geschaffen wird. Damit wird die ständige Diskriminierung, die fette Menschen in der heutigen Gesellschaft erfahren, gerechtfertigt. Übergewichtige werden sowohl am Arbeitsmarkt, als auch im Privatleben, in Bildungseinrichtungen oder bei der medizinischen Versorgung benachteiligt. Des Weiteren hat die Stigmatisierung von Fett verheerende Folgen für das Selbstbild und Selbstbewusstsein der Betroffenen.

Des Weiteren werden fette Menschen einerseits zu wenig, andererseits falsch im Fernsehen repräsentiert, weshalb diese Diplomarbeit sich mit den beiden Serien *Girls* und *The Mindy Project* beschäftigt. In beiden Serien sind dicke Frauen die Hauptfiguren und beide Serien wurden für ihre facettenreiche Darstellung von dicken Personen öffentlich gelobt. Im weiteren Verlauf der Arbeit werden einzelne Szenen der Serien analysiert. Hierzu wird besonders geachtet auf Szenen in denen die Hauptcharaktere offen diskriminiert werden, in denen sie mehr über ihr eigenes Körperbild verraten, in denen sie für ihr Fett-Sein verantwortlich gemacht werden und in denen sie mit ihrem Gewicht kämpfen. Zuletzt wird noch das Sexualleben der Hauptfigur in *Girls* analysiert.

12. Abstract (English)

This thesis explores the depiction of fat women in two contemporary American television sitcoms, namely *The Mindy Project* and *Girls*. The aim of this thesis is to discover how and why the two shows use fat stigmatization in their depiction of their fat female leads.

First of all, the history of fat stigmatization will be discussed. Society's hate of fat can be traced back to the 19th century, when industrialization caused fears of consumerism and simultaneously, fat become a marker for civilization. Moreover, fat was increasingly sexualized and became a sign of uncontrollable appetite (sexually as well as bodily). The 1970s then saw the development of fat into a distinct human characteristic that signified laziness, amorality, or defiance.

Today, overweight and obesity are being discussed as an "epidemic", bringing with it connotations of disease and infectiousness. This creates a climate of fear and panic and ultimately justifies the discrimination of fat people. They are being discriminated against on the job market, at the workplace and in educational and medical facilities. Moreover, the stigmatization of fat negatively effects the body image and self-confidence levels of fat people.

Furthermore, fat people are on the one hand, underrepresented on TV, on the other hand they are often depicted stereotypically and are made fun of. Thus, this thesis takes a closer look at the two shows *Girls* and *The Mindy Project* which both star fat women in leading roles and have been praised for their depiction of fat bodies. Specific scenes from both shows that deal with fat shaming, body image issues, fat blame and weight will be analyzed. Finally, a sex scene from *Girls* will be discussed more closely.