Fat Studies

An Interdisciplinary Journal of Body Weight and Society

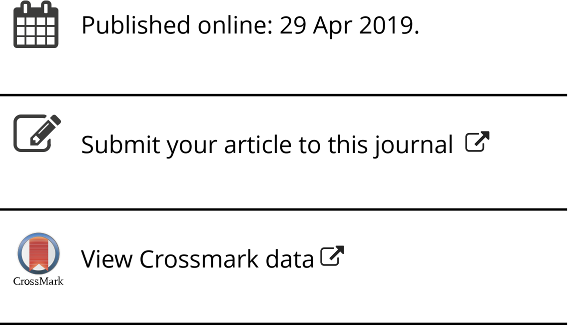
ISSN: 2160-4851 (Print) 2160-486X (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ufts20

Rock and Rolls: Exploring Body Positivity at Girls Rock Camp

Trisha L. Crawshaw

To cite this article: Trisha L. Crawshaw (2019): Rock and Rolls: Exploring Body Positivity at Girls Rock Camp, Fat Studies, DOI: 10.1080/21604851.2019.1603502

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/21604851.2019.1603502



Published online: 29 Apr 2019.

Submit your article to this journal

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=ufts20

FAT STUDIES
null, VOL. 0, NO. 0, 1–20
https://doi.org/10.1080/21604851.2019.1603502

Rock and Rolls: Exploring Body Positivity at Girls Rock Camp

Trisha L. Crawshaw

Department of Sociology, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, USA

ABSTRACT
Size scholars routinely discuss the negative effects of fat stigma within youth culture. For example, fat kids are more likely to be bullied than their thinner peers, increasing their risk for depression, loneliness, anxiety, and behavior problems. These studies, however, do not adequately address kids' active resistance to fatphobia and size discrimination. In this chapter, I highlight the importance of kids' resistance work at Girls Rock Camp. Pulling from my own experiences as a (fat) camp counselor, I explore the different ways campers push-back against fat stereotypes. While this push-back creates dialogue around size privilege and oppression, organizational obstacles for fat bodies result in conflicting messages about body positivity. Kids challenge size discrimination on an interpersonal level by showing their stomachs, writing anti-shame lyrics, and criticizing unrealistic beauty standards. Adult volunteers, though, continue to navigate organizational sizeism through inaccessible seating, a culture of fat talk, and anti-fat emotional labor. I argue that while Girls Rock Camp indeed helps kids fight against fat prejudice within youth culture, it simultaneously privileges thin adult bodies at an organizational level.

KEYWORDS
Body positivity; fat acceptance; youth studies; girls rock camp; size discrimination; fat talk; youth resistance

There are fifteen young campers sitting in a large semi-circle. Some are in chairs, but most are splayed out on the hard, tiled floor. It is the second day of Girls Rock Camp – a music education program for girls and gender-nonconforming kids – and I am leading a workshop on media literacy (Figure 1).

"What does the media tell us about our bodies?" I ask the room full of kids, ages eight to sixteen-years-old.

I call on the first hand that shoots into the air.

"Like, you have to have a really skinny waist and then your hips and stuff have to go like this," the camper answers, as her hands pantomime an hourglass figure.

"Yeah," another camper adds. "Otherwise, you can't wear crop tops!"

"WHOA," I interrupt, "Anyone can wear a crop top."

CONTACT Trisha L. Crawshaw tlanaec@siu.edu Southern Illinois University, Carbondale Faner Hall 3384, Mail Code 4524, Carbondale, IL

Color versions of one or more of the figures in the article can be found online at www.tandfonline.com/ufts.

© 2019 Taylor & Francis

Figure 1. The author leads a media literacy workshop at Girls Rock Camp.

I assess the skepticism that fills the room.

"I'm serious." I assert. "Anyone can wear a crop top. Anyone can put a crop top on their body." I wait for the giggles to die down before I continue. "For real, there is no wrong way to have a body."

I did not anticipate this conversational turn, but, in the moment, nothing is more important than conveying this point.

"Repeat after me," I instruct them, "There is no wrong way to have a body."

"There is no wrong way to have a body," they echo.

"Again. There is no wrong way to have a body!" I am fully animated now.

It starts slowly, but the chanting builds – louder and louder until a chorus of "THERE IS NO WRONG WAY TO HAVE A BODY!" fills the small classroom.

These are important conversations to have with kids. After all, it's difficult to believe that "there is no wrong way to have a body" when the whole world is telling them otherwise. Research shows that young people are inundated with negative media messages about their bodies (Martin 2010). So much, in fact, that by six-years-old young girls start to express concerns about their body weight and size (Smolak 2011). By the time they reach elementary school, 40% of girls ages six to twelve-years-old are concerned about becoming "too fat" or "too big" (Smolak 2011).

In an effort to confront critical body image among kids, health care professionals encourage adults to teach kids about "body positivity" (Hayes

2018; Kroon Van Diest 2018). According to pediatric psychologist, Ashley Kroon Van Diest (2018), teaching kids different ways to be "positive" about their bodies helps decrease bullying, protects against negative self-image, and prevents kids from changing their body weight in unhealthy ways.

Despite the potential benefits, few kids' camps and organizations tackle body positivity in either philosophy or practice. While researchers report that kids might be engaging with a social justice curriculum outside of the home (Bartell 2013; Darling-Hammond, French, and Garcia-Lopez 2002; Gutstein 2006; Nygreen 2013), none discuss how youth organizations might be implementing body positive programming for kids.

Girls Rock Camp is an exception. On the surface, Girls Rock Camp is a kids' summer program where participants learn instruments, form bands, and write songs. Although make no mistake, Girls Rock Camp is a political project. This radical, youth-centered organization encourages girls and gender-nonconforming kids to get loud, make noise, and take up space. Girls Rock Camp prides itself as a pro-feminist, body positive space where kids and adults are free to express themselves regardless of size or ability.

In this study, I highlight the importance of kids' resistance work, with special attention to kid-led body positivity at Girls Rock Camp. Using this site as a case study, I ask the following research questions: 1) How do adult volunteers and youth campers work to make Girls Rock Camp a body positive space? 2) In what ways do kids resist oppressive beauty and body norms? And, finally, 3) Does fat stigma still persist in body positive spaces? Pulling from my own experiences as a (fat) camp counselor, I utilize over 45-hours of participant observation in order to answer these questions. This research emphasizes the unequal work that kids – and fat people – must do in order to make body positive spaces more inclusive. Furthermore, this project highlights the important role of youth activism in fat acceptance while also exposing the constraints that make body positivity difficult to achieve, even in a feminist, activist-oriented organization.

Literature review

Body positivity is in vogue. Born from the early Fat Liberation Movement, body positivity was originally lauded as the cure-all for discriminatory practices against marginalized bodies (Cooper 2016; Mull 2018). Designed to celebrate bodies that did not fit hegemonic beauty standards, body positivity became a subversive tactic used to defy cultural messages that suggest fat, queer, Black, brown, or disabled bodies are socially undesirable (Mull 2018). This, however, is no longer the case. Contemporary fat activists assert that body positivity was co-opted by capitalist endeavors (Dionne 2017; West 2018). Now, as feminist writer, Evette Dionne (2017) argues, capitalism has

warped body positivity into "selling, not protecting, marginalized bodies" (p. 1).

Specifically, contemporary (or, rather, co-opted) body positivity does little to address fat stigma and discrimination. After all, "body" positive does not necessarily mean "fat" positive. Fatphobia continues to permeate through body positive culture and spaces. For example, many young girls and women engage in "fat talk" as a form of emotional labor (Gruys 2012; Nichter 2001). Fat talk works to validate people while simultaneously disassociating them from fatness. This often sounds like, "You're not fat, you're perfect!" By othering fat folks as the antithesis of desire, fat talk perpetuates a culture of fatphobia and discrimination. This creates an unequal hierarchy that privileges thin bodies and punishes fatness. Pro-fat feminists lament that true and radical body positivity is not possible in cultures that continue to shame fat bodies (Rutter 2017). True body positivity works to protect marginalized bodies from discrimination and oppression. Evette Dionne (2017) captures this sentiment when she writes: "If it's not about upending the dieting industry or protecting fat, trans, and disabled people from discrimination, it's not body positive" (p. 1).

Another problem with contemporary body positivity is that it asserts that people, especially women, are responsible for loving themselves unconditionally. Although seemingly innocuous, many feminist critics say that this brand of body positivity is just another way to victim blame marginalized communities. According to feminist writer, Amanda Mull (2018), "Contemporary body positivity makes it incumbent on people with non-conforming bodies to change their own self-perception without requiring anyone with any power to question what created the phenomenon in the first place" (p. 1). Instead of challenging macro institutions that dehumanize noncompliant bodies, this brand of body positivity shames women for their internalized insecurity. Nowadays, body positive movements erase systemic responsibility. Instead, they dictate how marginalized people should relate to their own bodies.

Contemporary body positivity also suppresses expressions of body dissatisfaction. Scholars note that corporeal insecurity is a byproduct of toxic cultural environments (Thompson and Stice 2001; Kilbourne 2000; MacNevin 2003; McDonald and Thompson 1992; Pipher 1994). Yet, in this model of "self-love," insecurity is considered a personal failure. Critics point to these pressures in body positive spaces. Adherents are expected to present themselves as pro-body all the time (Mull 2018; Rutter 2017). Not only does this silence dissent, but it also suggests that there is a "right" way to engage with our bodies. Feminist scholar, Susan Bordo (1993, 1999), discusses this phenomenon when she writes about the contradictory "double bind." According to Bordo (1999), on one hand, society "encourages women to see themselves as defective; on the other hand, it chastises them for their

insecurities" (p. 250). Unable to win, women are forced to experience both the insecurity and the shame of body positive propaganda.

Regardless of its potential shortcomings, parents and pediatricians continue to push for a "body positive" culture for kids and young adults. As youth organizations start to implement body positive curriculum for kids, the question remains: how do we see kids and adults make these spaces move inclusive? And, furthermore, do contemporary models of body positivity translate into fat acceptance and inclusion in these spaces?

Girls Rock Camp

In many ways, Girls Rock Camp is an enclave of resistance. Kids, ages eight through sixteen, work closely with adult volunteers and other kids to form their own rock band. They take up the guitar, drums, keys, or bass for the first time, start a band, write an original song, and, at the end of the week, perform their song live for family, friends, and local community members at a Girls Rock Showcase. According to their website, Girls Rock Camp is "a youth-centered music organization that cultivates an empowering space for girls, women, trans, and gender non-conforming people to collaborate and experiment in music, expression, performance, and collective care" (Girls Rock Carbondale 2017).

But unlike other summer camps, Girls Rock engages a political praxis. It incorporates a social justice curriculum revolving around workshops that teach self-defense and zine making, confronts racial, gender, and class privileges, defines and identifies consent, and teaches media literacy. Built on tenets of implicit feminism (Gifford 2011), Girls Rock prides itself as a political, action-oriented organization that serves local and global communities.

At the international level, the Girls Rock Camp Alliance claims that it "strive(s) to shift leadership towards our membership, people of color – particularly black and indigenous people, trans and gender non-conforming folks, people with disabilities, neuro-diverse people, poor and working-class people, queer folks, femmes and feminine people, fat people and people of size, and people outside the U.S. and the West" (Girls Rock Camp Alliance 2018). In order to challenge systematic oppression, Girls Rock actively incorporates marginalized voices at the top levels of their leadership. Then, from the top down, it works to make space for folks who are politically and socially disenfranchised. This is no small feat for a kids' summer camp. However, Girls Rock is an ambitious program that aims to create safe spaces where both campers and volunteers can express themselves regardless of ability or size.

Methods

I utilize participant observation to analyze interactions among youth campers and adult volunteers at Girls Rock Camp. In the summer of 2018, I spent nine hours a day for five consecutive days at Girls Rock Camp. Before camp started, I gained written permission from the camp director to be a participant observer in this space. My researcher status was well-known among all of the camp volunteers. I was also open with campers about my role as 1) a social researcher, and 2) a mandated reporter. Ethically, it was important for me to be forthright with everyone at camp. While most campers were initially curious about my "school project," many of them quickly forgot about it and treated me like an ordinary camp counselor.

I consistently wore a backpack at camp. This is where I kept all of my research tools. I made sure to carry a notebook with lots of pens – along with my essential water bottle, earplugs, and camp bandana. Whenever I witnessed an interesting conversation or interaction, I would pull out my notebook and jot down a quick note in order to remind myself about it later. I took numerous field notes in my research journal, cataloging "magnified moments" (Messner 2000, 766) that resisted, or, perhaps, reproduced fat stigma and discrimination in this site. Later, once at home, I elaborated on my initial notes. I would often journal for up to an hour every night after camp. This was an opportunity for me to think critically about the day's events and to organize my thoughts and observations. After camp week was over, I started to code my research journal. I looked for recurring themes and patterns that might illustrate how campers engaged in body positive resistance work, and what this activism might mean for fat folks at camp.

Although research was my primary goal, I also served as a camp counselor in this space. I occupied both of these roles – that of researcher and counselor – simultaneously. As a counselor, my main responsibilities were to make sure that campers were physically safe, hydrated, and emotionally content. This was no small task. After all, it is difficult to manage thirty-five rockstars who are constantly misplacing their water bottles. In spite of these challenges, I provided emotional support, boundless enthusiasm, and served as a willing participant during spontaneous dance parties. It was also important to be there for instrumental tasks. During camp, it was my duty to escort campers to and from music instruction, remind them to clean up after themselves, and make sure that everyone wore their earplugs during band practice.

Counseling also provided a unique vantage point at camp. As a camp counselor, I was privy to both frontstage and backstage operations (Goffman 1959). I followed my band to social justice workshops, listened to them collaborate during band practice, and helped them design an original band logo during the merchandising workshop. This access allowed me to get closer with campers and fellow volunteers. I was, after all, an insider at camp. I developed emotional relationships with

many of the people in this space. Although everyone was aware of my researcher status, many of them opened up to me as a friend or mentor.

I was also an emotional caretaker at camp. In addition to my role as a camp counselor, I served as a volunteer coordinator. It was my responsibility to vet potential volunteers, manage camp scheduling, and address adult participants' needs or concerns. Typically, this meant that I resolved the occasional scheduling mishap. Other times, however, I would lend a listening ear or shoulder to cry on. I mediated interpersonal volunteer conflicts, consoled campers (and some counselors) during emotional meltdowns, and reminded everyone that they were doing a great job.

Not only was this role emotionally taxing, but it was also physical. As a fat, white, cisgender woman, several of my identities (both visible and invisible) shaped my experiences at camp. All of my interactions – with campers, parents, and volunteers – were processed through a lens of fat visibility. Embodying white femme fatness provided a unique perspective while at camp. Operating as a fat body, there, at camp, allowed me to occupy a critical in-between: both as a social researcher and marginalized body. My observations, as a fat researcher, work to expose the constraints that make body positivity difficult to achieve, even in a feminist, activist-oriented organization.

Findings

Below, I present my findings on how Girls Rock Camp strives to promote a body positive culture for both kids and adults. I argue that campers actively challenge fat stigma and hegemonic beauty norms. They show their stomachs, write anti-shame lyrics, and create zines that showcase diverse beauty and body types. However, echoes of fatphobia are still present at camp. For instance, campers draw on fat stigma to police other kids for what, and how much, they eat at lunch. Campers, as well as adult volunteers, engage in validating fat talk to let others know that "they aren't fat, they're beautiful!" And, finally, adult volunteers and campers encounter (and struggle with) pressures to model body positivity in this space. While Girls Rock Camp indeed helps kids fight against oppressive body norms, it simultaneously privileges thin adult bodies at an organizational level.

Policing bodies

The cafeteria is crowded. Campers and counselors fill the long, picnic-style lunch tables. Kids as young as eight-years-old run around the outer hallways while the older campers, at a cool sixteen years, converse on tabletops. One camper, sporting a fresh electric-blue hairdo, taps a drumstick against the cafeteria wall. Tap..tap..tap-tap-tap..tap.

Exiting the food line with a slice of pizza, I make my way into the lunch room. My eyes scan the room as I look for a seat big enough to accommodate

my body. I'm still searching for a spot when I notice a small camper re-enter the food line for seconds. There is always plenty of food at camp and it is not unusual for folks to go back for seconds – or even thirds.

"Whoa!" I hear someone exclaim as she makes her way back to the table. "How many slices have you had?" a fellow camper asks her.

"Three," she grins as she starts to devour her fourth slice of pepperoni pizza.

"That's what I thought," her friend chides. "You better watch out or you're gonna get fat!" Both laugh as they continue to eat lunch.

Young campers police food consumption regularly at Girls Rock Camp. After all, they warn, the penalty for overeating is fatness. Although Girls Rock actively claims to be a "body positive" space, there are several instances where campers make anti-fat statements. Encouraged by camp staff to challenge hegemonic beauty standards, campers can easily criticize media messages surrounding size at workshops and through song writing. These conversations, however, revolve around unrealistic pressures to be thin. Campers never broach the subject of fat acceptance or celebration. Fatness is the borderland. While campers expressed frustrations with cultural fixations on thinness, no one was willing to embrace the alternative. For example, one camper exclaimed, "I don't think dieting is very healthy. Like, no one is supposed to be as thin as these models." Pushing back against heterofeminine size standards that keep women small, campers agree that you shouldn't have to lose weight to be socially acceptable. Fatness, on the other hand, is still an undesirable physical state. Body positivity, as practiced at camp, is a static phenomenon. Accepting your body – in its current state – is OK. Change, especially in the context of weight gain or loss, however, is met with peer policing (Figure 2).

Campers are especially anxious about fat stigma. Although many of them speak out against peer bullying and discrimination, no one wanted to be the fat kid at camp. After all, fat youth experience increased levels of social harassment and violence (Hayden-Wade et al. 2005; Latner and Stunkard 2003; Puhl and Latner 2007; Weinstock and Krehbiel 2009). And, while I never directly observed weight-related bullying at camp, size-policing comments imply that it wasn't an impossibility.

In an interesting twist, campers actively resisted the idea that they should have to appeal to anyone else's idea of beauty. Specifically, in an original camp song, campers write:

"Hiding in a violent storm
No one wants to see my form
I don't wanna care what people think
My thoughts should only matter to me
I just wanna be free."

Figure 2. Camper's original zine page that challenges societal pressures and censure.

This song suggests that campers don't want to care about what others think about their "form." Instead, they want to be "free" from social expectations and body policing. Even as kids speak out to disrupt mainstream narratives about societal pressure, they are harassed for eating too much pizza at lunchtime. Echoing Rutter's (2017) findings, interactions at Girls Rock Camp demonstrate that contemporary body positivity does little to combat fat stigma in youth culture. Fatphobia continues to permeate through body positive culture and spaces – even in a feminist, activist-oriented organization.

Structural barriers also work to police adult bodies at camp. Specifically, the biggest challenge for counselors of size was fitting into the long, picnic-style tables in the cafeteria. Campers and counselors ate both breakfast and lunch at these tables every day. These tables, however, were not accommodating for everybody at camp. Fat and/or disabled participants were barred from group participation in the cafeteria. I experienced this first-hand while at camp. As one of the only fat women there, I frequently found that mealtime was an isolating experience. After all, accepting a camper's sitting invitation at lunch meant having to squeeze my size-28 frame into bench-style cafeteria seating.

"Come and sit with us," campers would exclaim. "We saved you a seat!"

"For sure," I lied. "I just have to go and do something first."

I used this excuse, almost daily at camp, right before I sneaked off to the volunteer breakroom. Unwilling to explain how I could not fit, and without an available alternative, I excused myself from group activities in the cafeteria.

This exclusion was a sizeist oversight. Structural barriers, like seating accommodations, police whose bodies can, and cannot, be included at tables of power (or breakfast foods). Unable to access a seat, I was rendered invisible to both campers and counselors during lunchtime. This was problematic in many ways. Specifically, this suggests that body positivity does not necessarily mean fat accessibility or inclusivity. Despite their attempts to cultivate a body positive environment for "everybody," Girls Rock Camp obviously falls short. This program, as organized by thin, standard-size adults, upholds thin and able-bodied privilege at the organizational level. Despite the resistance work that kids are doing at the interpersonal-level, Girls Rock Camp continues to police fat bodies' access to power and space. This reproduces the shame and stigma associated with being fat in the social world.

"Reassuring" fat talk

Back at the media literacy workshop, I pass out a stack of glossy beauty magazines. Campers share the magazines among themselves, taking one from the pile before they pass the rest around.

"Here, I want you to look through these magazines. Do you see yourself represented in any of them?" I ask the group of campers sitting around me.

I watch as they flip through dog-eared issues of *Cosmopolitan, Vogue*, and *InStyle*. I notice that a few of them start to shake their heads "no," eyebrows furrowed, expressions serious.

"Who don't we see?" I probe.

"Black people, or really, anyone who isn't white," answers an older camper.

"I don't see anyone with zits! Like, their skin is always perfect," another preteen laments.

Another girl raises her hand, slowly, and waits on me to call on her.

"They're all really skinny. I'm not like that," she says quietly.

"You're all right," I nod. "Not everyone is represented in these pictures. In fact, none of these people are fat like me." I feel their eyes travel the length of my full-sized body, assessing the weighted curve of my thighs, waist, and chest. "The closest representation of my body is probably the 'before' picture in a weight loss ad."

I hear a few sharp inhales and I watch as they shift uncomfortably in their seats. My body occupies space, like the metaphorical elephant in the room. Unsightly, and, therefore not seen. Or, at least, not mentioned. After all, it is not polite to point out the obvious. I feel other campers pick up on the shared tension.

One of them breaks: "You're not fat! You're beautiful!" a young camper exclaims.

I pause. *But why can't I be both?*

While at camp, campers expressed affection for me in a lot of ways. They chatted with me during free time, they were excited to share their snacks, and several of them gifted me with original artwork and band buttons. At the workshop, however, campers revert to fat talk in order to reassure me that I am "beautiful." By resorting to fat talk, campers assume that I do not want to be fat. In their attempt to disassociate me from fatness, kids reinforce the notion that beauty cannot coincide with physical fatness. Refusing to categorize me as a transgressive (or bad) social body, they expose internalized fatphobia. This demonstrates how care work is constructed to erase fat identities while simultaneously privileging hegemonic heterofemininity.

Even though campers encourage women to "break the norms" in original zine art (Figure 3), they are unable to endorse identities that challenge thin beauty standards. In this instance, I feel responsible to remind youth campers that fat identities (and bodies) are OK. I argue that this – resisting fat talk in social situations – is another form of emotional labor. By carefully challenging the youth, I actively (and unequally) work to disrupt hegemonic norms that privilege thin bodies as exclusively beautiful. This demonstrates how Girls Rock unintentionally privileges thin bodies at an organizational level. Fat people must do unequal work in order to make body positive spaces more inclusive. This is yet another way in which fat bodies are expected to appeal for equal consideration in a world that discriminates against them.

Fat talk was not exclusive to my relationship with campers. My body frequently held tension as other volunteers reaffirmed their size privilege through self-deprecating fat talk. Adult volunteers also used fat talk to reassure me that I wasn't "too fat" or "that big" at camp. Specifically, this occurred during a do-it-yourself screen-printing workshop. After designing an original band logo, campers (and their counselors) get to print their design on a camp t-shirt using ink, screens, and squeegees.

After our band finished screen-printing, we hung our t-shirts to dry with the others on a wooden clothes rack. Unlike my campers, however, I forgot

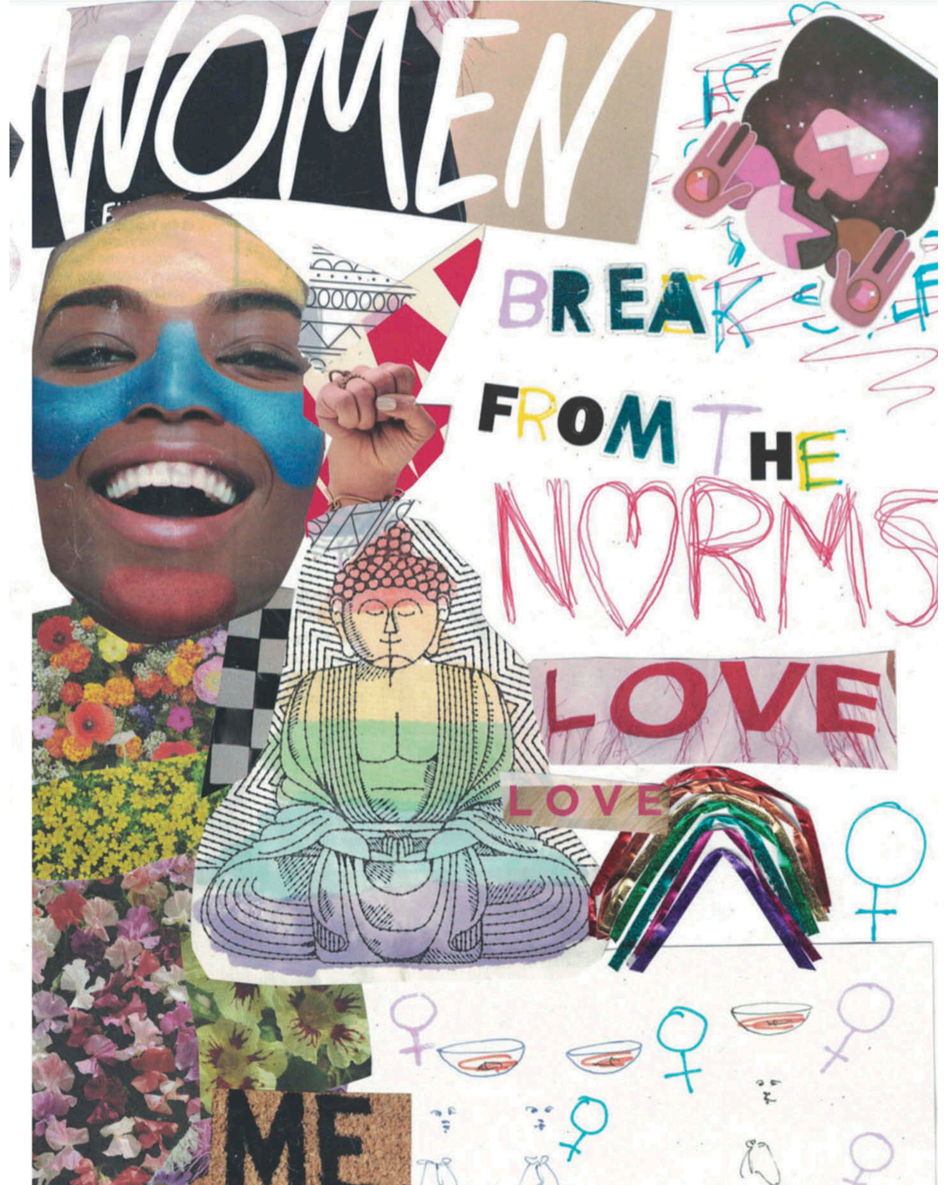


Figure 3. Camper's original zine page that encourages women to "break from the norms".

to write my name on the t-shirt tag. Brie, a first-time camp counselor, was quick to catch my mistake.

"Umm, someone forgot to write their name inside their shirt," she informed us as we waited for our shirts to dry. I instantly realized that I was the culprit.

"Oh, it's mine. I'm sorry," I offered. "None of my campers wear a 3X."

I watched my joke fall flat as her face flushed with color.

"Well, I mean, I didn't know," she stuttered. "Besides," she assured, "You don't look that big."

Brie uses fat talk to reassure me that I don't "look" as big as my actual size. Specifically, she uses fat talk as a tool to disembody me from my transgressive fatness. This device, as Brie employs it, is supposed to reassure me that I am still attractive according to heterofeminine measures. Her reaction recalls previous research that finds that women are not supposed to be "that big," but are meant to be smaller and to take up less space than men (Bartky 1988; Bordo 1990, 1993; Chernin 1981; Mazur 1986). Brie's exclamation, that I don't look "that big," is a coded compliment. After all, if Brie admits that I am too large – or worse, fat – I could be socially undesirable (Bordo 1993; Braziel and LeBesco 2001; Braziel 2001; Mull 2018; Popenoe 2005). Although Girls Rock Camp claims to be an accepting place for "fat people and people of size," reoccurring fat talk exposes internalized fatphobia (Girls Rock Camp Alliance 2018). This illustrates how kids, and fat folks, do unequal work to make spaces more size inclusive.

Pressure to be body positive

I'm excited to go to lunch. It's been a long morning at camp and I am ready to sit down and recharge. As I am walking into the cafeteria, however, Dani, a fellow camp counselor, stops me.

"Hey, can I talk to you about something?"

It is the fourth day of camp and I am accustomed to these conversational starters. As a camp organizer, I am routinely approached with other volunteers' problems or concerns.

"Of course! What's up?"

"I mean, umm, can I talk with you privately?" For the first time, I notice that her eyes are brimming with tears.

"How can I help?" I start cautiously, as I walk with her to the outside playground. I'm not sure where this is headed. We both take a seat at a shaded picnic table.

"Like, I get it. I know we are supposed to be all 'body positive' here. But, I can't be. I've gained 20 pounds this past year and I feel it. Everywhere. I don't know who I am. I don't know how to deal with it." Her words come faster as tears stream down her face.

I freeze.

"What am I supposed to do?" She asks me.

Dani relays that she is "supposed" to feel good about her body at Girls Rock Camp. Citing pressure to be "all body positive" in this space, she addresses a fundamental concern about contemporary body positivity movements: is radical self-love just another performance piece? Are socially marginalized people expected to "perform" body positivity in the service of

others? The pressure to be body positive in this feminist space conflicts with (and suppresses) Dani's feelings about her body. She views her insecurity as a personal failure. Dani is experiencing a double bind – as she feels both defective about gaining weight *and* insecure about her poor body image (Bordo 1993, 1999). Instead of examining external conditions that fuel internalized fatphobia, Dani attaches herself to the idea that she is doing body positivity poorly. After all, mainstream body positivity movements demand that noncompliant bodies uphold societal pretense at all cost. This echoes Rutter's (2017) findings about self-expression and the body positive movement. Social displays of body positivity do little to address fat stigma in its contemporary form. My interaction with Dani suggests that fatphobia remains present in this space. It is a persistent constraint that makes body positivity difficult to achieve, even in a feminist, activist-oriented organization (Figure 4).

I, too, experienced pressure to be body positive at camp. Specifically, I felt the pressure to model hyper-positivity about my fat body. Fatphobia and stigma make it difficult to live in the "real world" (Bordo 1993; Braziel 2001; Braziel and LeBesco 2001; Mull 2018; Popenoe 2005). Therefore, at camp, I

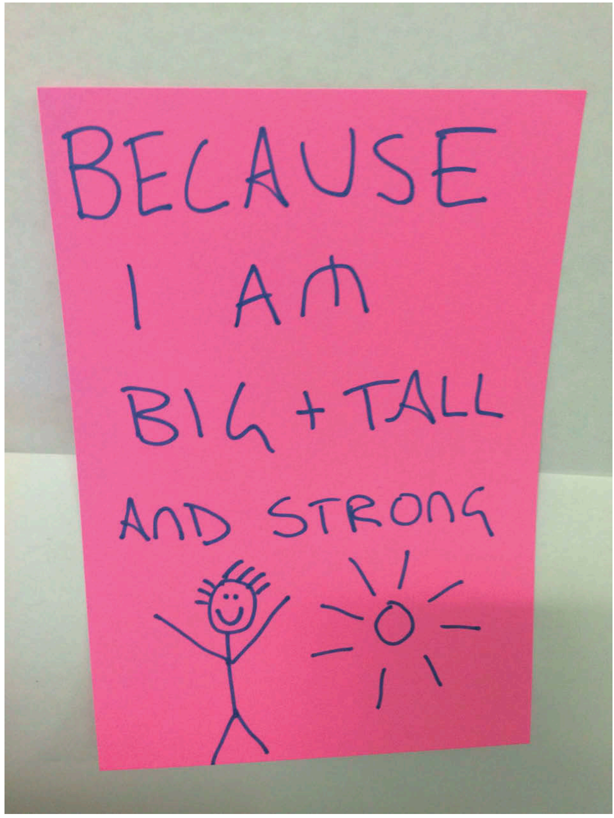


Figure 4. A camper cites size and strength as a reason why they rock.

worked unequally hard to make sure that fat bodies were welcome and celebrated. In order to do this, I actively challenged implicit fatphobia from campers, adult volunteers, and even parents.

This happened on the first day of camp. While I stood at the front door, welcoming the arriving parents and campers, a camper's mother carefully approached me before registering her daughter.

"Hi, uh, I'm Allie's mom," she started.

"It's nice to meet you," I replied, smiling brightly at her young, round-faced kid. "We're going to have a great time this week!"

"Uh, listen," the mom continued as her daughter joined the other kids in the morning assembly room. "This is Allie's first time at camp, and I'm worried that she won't make any friends. You don't think the other kids are going to make fun of her, right? Because she's, uh, bigger?"

I raised my eyebrows and lowered my voice, "Absolutely not," I reassured her. "We work really hard to make sure everyone has a good time at camp. Although I can keep an eye out if that makes you feel better."

"Yes, please. I'm sure this seems silly," she broached, "But I knew *you* could understand."

This interaction is embedded with social meaning. First, Allie's mom is scared that her plus-size daughter won't be able to make any friends. This is not unfounded given that fat kids, and adults, experience higher levels of weight-related bullying and discrimination. However, Allie's mom continues to insinuate that I can relate to weight-related bullying. This assumption suggests that Allie's mom 1) reads me as a fat body in this space, and 2) expects that I, too, have experienced size discrimination. Allie's mom relays her suspicions in coded fat talk. She will not openly acknowledge my fatness; but expects me to "understand" her daughter's predicament. Allie's mom expects me to do more work (as a fat body at camp) in order to protect her daughter from bullies.

Not only do parents expect me to do more work for their fat kids, but I feel this pressure as well. Allie's welfare becomes my personal undertaking. Being a fellow fat person (and, perhaps, adult role model), I am compelled to behave in a hyper-positive way about my own fatness. Like Dani, I know that I am supposed to be "all body positive" while at camp. In this case, however, I feel an added pressure to specifically model fat positivity and acceptance. This illustrates the emotional care and labor that fat bodies must do in order to make body positive spaces, like Girls Rock Camp, more inclusive.

There was, however, kid-led resistance to these pressures at camp. Although both adult volunteers and youth campers expressed anxiety about doing body confidence or mentorship the "right way," campers chose to actively speak out against its effects. Specifically, campers address the pressure to engage in false personas while writing the original song, "Let Me Be

Free." According to the lyrics, campers are distressed about the need to falsely present authenticity to other people. They sing:

> "Feeling oppressed, I'm upset
> Ashamed to show who I am
> And they wanna tell us to be ourselves
> I feel like this is all a scam
> I just wanna be me."

Campers imply that "they," or, others in society, tell them that they should just be themselves. The youth disclose, however, that they feel "ashamed" to show their true selves. This leads to feelings of oppression and disconnect. Calling it all a "scam," campers actively resist the notion that there is a standard model for self-expression. Echoing Mull's (2018) own assessment of body positivity, the campers assert that "others" are not sincere when they tell youth to "be themselves." Kids, and, by extension, marginalized bodies, are only allowed to be themselves when their identities align with socially acceptable norms. This, however, is not true expression or freedom. Campers call out all systems of oppression that shame marginalized identities and claim that they, "just wanna be me."

This piece demonstrates the work that young people do to resist hegemonic norms and discriminatory practices. Campers claim that they want to be free from social systems that tell them how they should feel about their bodies and identities. This critique challenges macro institutions that dehumanize noncompliant bodies and identities. It illustrates the important work that kids are doing in order to change social scripts about privilege, marginalized identities, and oppression.

Conclusion

The daily merch workshop is about to start. This is where campers get hands-on experience with do-it-yourself merchandise design and creation. Half of my band members are designing buttons to sell at the showcase, while others are decorating old denim patches with puffy paint (Figure 5).

"Hey, what's up?" I greet a table of campers as I take an empty seat next to them.

"Does anyone want to finish screen printing our band logo?" I suggest before I notice a camper holding a pair of scissors to the hem of her band t-shirt. Without preamble, she cuts a jagged line across the bottom of her cotton shirt.

"There," she exclaims. "Now it's a crop top!"

"Cool!" Another camper chimes in. "I want a crop top, too!"

I watch as multiple kids start cutting off their t-shirt bottoms. Some of their lines are steady and smooth, others are a bit rougher – asymmetrical edges that are beginning to curl upward – exposing soft, round bellies.

Figure 5. Campers pose with self-made crop tops for their band photos.

One of my band members grins at me as she tugs her new shirt over her head.

"Anybody can wear a crop top!" She beams. "What do you think?"

Resistance narratives are complicated stories that demonstrate the constraints and contradictions that make change difficult to achieve (Hollander and Einwohner 2004). This, I argue, is the case at Girls Rock Camp. Campers draw on fat stigma to police kids for what, and how much, they eat. Kids, as well as adult volunteers, engage in validating fat talk to let others know that they are valued. And, finally, adults and kids encounter (and struggle with) pressures to model body positivity while at camp. Using Girls Rock Camp as a case study, I argue that body positivity is not enough. Fat activists must work harder to ensure that spaces (even radical kids' camps) are inclusive and welcoming towards fat folks. Although part of the picture, this is not the complete story. Kids and adults still do important resistance work in these spaces. Specifically, kids challenge size discrimination on an interpersonal level by cropping t-shirts, performing anti-shame songs, and questioning unrealistic beauty standards. Adults also work to support youth activism in a movement that "amplifies voices that have otherwise been told to be silent" (Girls Rock Camp Alliance 2018). Together they attempt to build an inclusive world where, truly, there is no wrong way to have a body. In an effort to highlight the importance of their fat activism, this project works to expose the constraints that make body positivity difficult to achieve, while celebrating the hard-won battles that they accomplish.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Trisha L. Crawshaw is a Doctoral Candidate at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Her research interests include gender, youth studies, and resistance narratives.

References

Bartell, Tonya Gau. 2013. "Learning to Teach Mathematics for Social Justice: Negotiating Social Justice and Mathematical Goals." *Journal for Research in Mathematical Education* 44 (1):129–63.

Bartky, S. L. 1988. ""Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power." In *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior*, edited by R. Weitz. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Bordo, Susan. 1990. "Material Girl: The Effacements of Postmodern Culture." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 29:653–77.

Bordo, Susan. 1993. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bordo, Susan. 1999. "Feminism, Foucault, and the Politics of the Body." In *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, edited by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, 246–57. New York, NY: Routledge.

Braziel, Jana Evans. 2001. "Sex and Fat Chics: Deterritorializing the Fat Female Body." In *Bodies Out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*, edited by J. E. Braziel and K. LeBesco, 231–56. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Braziel, Jana Evans, and Kathleen LeBesco, eds. 2001. *Bodies Out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chernin, Kim. 1981. *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Cooper, Charlotte. 2016. *Fat Activism: A Radical Social Movement*. Bristol: HammerOn Press.

Darling-Hammond, Linda, Jennifer C. French, and Silvia Paloma Garcia-Lopez. 2002. *Learning to Teach for Social Justice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Dionne, Evette. 2017. "The Fragility of Body Positivity: How a Radical Movement Lost Its Way." Retrieved February 2, 2019 (https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/fragility-body-positivity).

Gifford, Danielle. 2011. "Show or Tell? Feminist Dilemmas and Implicit Feminism at Girls' Rock Camp." *Gender & Society* 25 (5):569–88. doi:10.1177/0891243211415978

Girls Rock Camp Alliance. 2018. "Points of Unity." Retrieved July 10, 2018 (https://www.girlsrockcampalliance.org/about).

Girls Rock Carbondale. 2017. "Girls Rock Carbondale." Retrieved July 10, 2018 (http://www.girlsrockcarbondale.com).

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Double Day Anchor Books.

Gruys, Kjerstin. 2012. "Does This Make Me Look Fat? Aesthetic Labor and Fat Talk as Emotional Labor in a Women's Plus-Size Clothing Store." *Social Problems* 59 (4):481–500. doi:10.1525/sp.2012.59.4.481

Gutstein, Eric. 2006. *Reading and Writing the World with Mathematics: Toward a Pedagogy for Social Justice*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hayden-Wade, H. A., R. I. Stein, A. Ghaderi, B. E. Saelens, M. F. Zabinski, and D. E. Wilfley. 2005. "Prevalence, Characteristics, and Correlates of Teasing Experiences among Overweight Children Vs. Non-Overweight Peers." *Obesity Research* 13: 1381–92. doi: 10.1038/oby.2005.167.

Hayes, Dayle. 2018. "5 Ways to Promote a Positive Body Image for Kids." Retrieved February 2, 2019 (https://www.eatright.org/health/weight-loss/your-health-and-your-weight/5-ways-to-promote-a-positive-body-image-for-kids).

Hollander, Jocelyn A., and Rachel L. Einwohner. 2004. "Conceptualizing Resistance." *Sociological Forum* 19 (4):533–54. doi:10.1007/s11206-004-0694-5

Kevin, Thompson, J., and Eric Stice. 2001. "Thin Ideal Internalization: Mounting Evidence for a New Risk Factor for Body Image Disturbance and Eating Pathology." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 10 (5):181–83. doi:10.1111/1467-8721.00144

Kilbourne, Jean. 2000. *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Kroon Van Diest, Ashley. 2018. "Body Positivity: An Important Message for Girls, AND Boys." Retrieved February 2, 2019 (https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/family-resources-education/700childrens/2018/10/body-positivity).

Latner, Janet D., and Albert J. Stunkard. 2003. "Getting Worse: The Stigmatization of Obese Children." *Obesity Research* 11: 452–56. doi: 10.1038/oby.2003.61.

MacNevin, Audrey. 2003. "Exercising Options: Holistic Health and Technical Beauty in Gendered Accounts of Bodywork." *The Sociological Quarterly* 44 (2):271–89. doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.2003.tb00558.x

Martin, J. B. 2010. "The Development of Ideal Body Image Perceptions in the United States." *Nutrition Today* 45 (3):98–100. doi:10.1097/NT.0b013e3181dec6a2

Mazur, Allan. 1986. "U.S. Trends in Feminine Beauty and Overadaptation." *The Journal of Sex Research* 22 (3):281–303. doi:10.1080/00224498609551309

McDonald, K., and K. L. Thompson. 1992. "Eating Disturbances, Body Image Dissatisfaction, and Reasons for Exercising: Gender Differences and Coorelational Findings." *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 11 (3):289–92. doi:10.1002/1098-108X(199204)11:3<289::AID-EAT2260110314>3.0.CO;2-F

Messner, Michael A. 2000. "The Barbie Girls versus the Sea Monsters: Children Constructing Gender." *Gender & Society* 14 (6):765–84. doi:10.1177/089124300014006004

Mull, Amanda. 2018. "Body Positivity Is a Scam: How a Movement Intended to Lift up Women Really Just Limits Their Acceptable Emotions. Again." Retrieved July 12, 2018 (https://www.racked.com/2018/6/5/17236212/body-positivity-scam-dove-campaign-ads).

Nichter, Mimi. 2001. *Fat Talk: What Girls and Their Parents Say about Dieting*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Nygreen, Kysa. 2013. *These Kids: Identity, Agency, and Social Justice at a Last Chance High School*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Pipher, Mary Bray. 1994. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. New York, NY: Putnam.

Popenoe, Rebecca. 2005. "Ideal." In *Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession*, edited by D. Kulick and A. Meneley, 9–28. New York, NY: Tarcher/Penguin.

Puhl, Rebecca M., and J. D. Latner. 2007. "Stigma, Obesity, and the Health of the Nation'S Children." *Psychological Bulletin* 133 (4):557–80. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.133.4.557

Rutter, Bethany. 2017. "How 'Body Positivity' Lost Its True and Radical Meaning." Retrieved July 20, 2018 (http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/35746/1/how-body-positivity-lost-its-true-and-radical-meaning).

Smolak, Linda. 2011. "Body Image Development in Childhood." In *Body Image: A Handbook of Science, Practice, and Prevention*, edited by T. F. Cash and L. Smolak, 67–75. New York, NY: Guilford.

Weinstock, Jacqueline, and Michelle Krehbiel. 2009. "Fat Youth as Common Targets for Bullying." In *The Fat Studies Reader*, edited by E. Rothblum and S. Solovay, 120–26. New York: New York University Press.

West, Lindy. 2018. "The Way We Talk About Bodies Has Changed. What We Do About It Comes Next." Retrieved February 2, 2019 (https://www.self.com/story/the-way-we-talk-about-bodies).