Women Artists Who Subvert Stereotypes around Body Image through Social Media

I will be arguing in this essay, that the female artists that I have looked at, subvert and challenge the stereotypes around body image using social media and humour. This allows feminists to shift the patriarchal discourse of social media, as an alternative communication space that provides a platform for resistance, this changes how we perceive female bodies despite social media such as Instagram being mostly photo-based, allowing females to present alternative representations of women bodies than those portrayed by traditional media, with the majority of images on the app reproduce the same as those presented by corporate ‘mass media’.

A person’s body image is constructed around the idea and concepts that are presented by a society of how bodies should appear. According to our expectation “most recent research suggests that for women, negative body image is caused either by them perceiving their bodies as being different than they actually are, or because unrealistic expectations or distorted beliefs, which are often shaped by images in their external environments (blood 2005:2 in Rassi 2016 p.9.) this is obvious through the use of mass media image that circulates through social media. An example of this mass media image that circulates through social media is by Mayan Toledano, who created a photograph of a women with glowing sun kissed skin, with her back decorated with cute butterfly and rainbow stickers and simple underwear ,with the word feminist printed across them(Figure10) Circulated from the new York times to Tumblr (JANSEN, 2019 p8). This photograph spread across the mass media, feeding the competitivity of women and favouring the male gaze “there is a fundamental pleasure in looking at women that is undeniable and unavoidable and tends to complicate the central place women have in visual culture” (JANSEN, 2019 p8) This photograph captured the cultural predicament of the age of the female gaze and how women look to the gaze of men .

My own personal experience to unrealistic body size is constantly communicated in everyday life through the media. I have found that clothing stores have unrealistic expectations for women “I’m a typical size 10, in H&M I couldn’t zip up a size 10 black dress but a 16 fitted perfect” (Farhoud, 2019). This is downgrading and painful to many women, I feel unable to buy something that is just a number due to the humiliation that I will feel “too big” ”Why is it OK for a brand to label an item of clothing as a size which it clearly isn't' (BBC News, 2019) Parker questions why it is acceptable for clothing brands, to label clothing in the wrong number adding to the emotions, that women have when shopping which I personally relate to. I have looked at women artists such as Jameela Jamil, an actress presenter and female activist, creating her own campaigns on Instagram specifically with her ‘I weigh’ movement, that celebrates people’s achievements rather than their weight average. This undermines the stereotype around body image, and also encourages her audience to ignore the label numbers of clothes, but to be appreciative for the person they are. Spreading awareness on how the media is behind most body issues created in this day and age and media can change its styles and opinions whenever it likes to. Jameela reaches out on Instagram to her followers to express the positive aspects of themselves.

Targeting social media influencers, Jameela’s approach can make a real change on how young women see themselves, as a person, but mostly as a woman. “This is how I measure myself.

What I did, how I made people feel and how much I have enjoyed myself. It has taken me 10 years to get to the realisation that I am worth more than the digits on a measuring tape." (Jameela Jamil 2018) Jamil's voice on this is increasingly loud and insistent rising up and challenging the impossible standards, that are perpetuated by the mass media industry of physical beauty, where your worth is consistently tied to your weight and looks. Jameela, created this social media account for people to feel valued, and see how amazing they are, with a light-hearted funny hit back at how people see themselves as people, by using this humorous account she was able to spread a serious message. This could have been taken as a strong aggressive comment, but instead is humorous, hitting back at the stereotype therefore softening the aggressive tone. Jameela uses her social movement to support celebrities in the media and how they are judged by their audience, as this is observed by young adults. Jameela's social media movement started when she expertly called out a viral meme on Instagram, body shaming the Kardashian/Jenner sisters(figure1), which just happened to be yet another example of society glorifying unrealistic beauty standards, after commenting on their individual weights.

The horrendous body shaming in this particular case encouraged Jameela to hit back on Instagram creating a post saying that 'I weigh', and plenty of different compliments on herself that are not related to her weight or stretch marks but instead speaks of all of her positive life achievements. 'I weigh' targets the hate expressed through the social media site aimed at young people, Jamil's movement makes light of a serious issue that would not be preserved as funny, due to the severity of the comments aimed at weight. "Every minute you spend thinking about how thin or gorgeous you aren't, is a minute you aren't spending on growing your business or your life"(Jameela Jamil 2018), Jamil can relate her own personal perceptions with all types of people affected by the same issues, giving the audience a chance to create their own versions of the humour that Jameela uses.

Stephanie Tedboah is a blogger and advocate of fat acceptance who also uses social media to spread body positivity and self-worth, inspiring her followers the same as Jameela to show your worth. Stephanie says in one of her Instagram posts "Taking pictures of yourself (or just looking at yourself) looking amazing has such an amazing effect on how you feel towards your body, and it's so important that bodies like mine and yours are normalised within the media, within modelling, underwear catalogues, lingerie campaigns etc, because other bodies matter too!" (figure 4) the photograph used alongside this statement has humour and untouched honesty alongside influenceable use of media and words. The 'I weigh' movement, arguably uses a modern style of Barbara Kruger's work, her trademark white letters against a splash of red background, some of her instantly recognizable slogans "Your body is a battleground." Much of her writing questions the audience about feminism, consumerism (Figure 2 and 3), and individual desire, although her black-and-white images Looking like a mass media image in a magazine that sell the very ideas she is arguing, the red slash of writing reminds me of how Jameela promotes her brand and has bold statements feminist related. Jamil says that we should 'celebrate your cellulite and your bingo wings and whatever'(Jameela Jamil 2018), which sends a very powerful message using her celebrity status, to express her concerns for how we see ourselves, whilst looking at her own body image and how she has overcome her own body image issues. Jameela spoke of her struggles with anorexia saying that she went three years without eating a meal when she was a teenager which shows us why she chooses to aim her message towards young women, 'I'm a woman, my own body happens to be a female body, that's who I am, that's what I am' (JANSEN, 2019) it was only after Jameela broke her back after she was hit by a car that her relationship with her body changed. Jameela says that this

incident probably saved her life and that she would probably still suffer from anorexia today if it had not happened.

The social media application Instagram consists of a younger demographic (Wordstream.com, 2019)(figure 5), this form of social media is largely used by young adults, particularly women between the ages of 18 and 29. Individuals, using social media of that age are at an important stage of their identity construction, social media can offer increased diverse representations of female bodies and allow women to be the producers of this. Tess Holliday who is a Plus size model is making headlines with her weight, on the magazine Cosmopolitan whilst also creating her own body positive campaign, on social media called '#EffYourBeautyStandards'. This pursues to empower people from everywhere, to embrace the body they are in right now. A woman's body image is constructed around ideas of expectations, this is presented by a society of how bodies should appear, and so social media could be a platform to provoke positive change to how young adults see themselves and present themselves. Examples of women being judged on their appearance is the world's biggest female tennis star Serena Williams, gets told off for wearing too much clothing (figure 7) on the court after a long break to recover after having a baby, Williams had felt more comfortable covering up and to help reduce blood clots which she had been affected by (Eliott C. McLaughlin, 2019).

The critics howled when French Tennis Federation President Bernard Guidicelli announced the new dress code at Roland-Garros, saying that players 'must respect the game and the place. "Now, in the latest problem is the relentless war on body positivity, a women's magazine Cosmopolitans is accused of promoting obesity after it features a plus-size model on the cover. Tess Holliday, a size 24 woman is on the front cover of Cosmopolitan for the October Issue for 2018 (figure 6) , which caused a considerable amount of controversy concerning her weight comments saying that the depiction of an unapologetic fat woman on a national magazine' front cover is "dangerous" and that we should hide them away and forbid anyone over a certain weight from having a platform or voice(Catriona Harvey Jenner 2018). Plus size model Tess Holliday has made arguably history being the first female of her size and height to be signed by a major modelling company (Gordon, 2019). This stride took in modelling as a plus size model encouraged Tess to spread her message of body positivity beyond her of life and create her social media campaign designed to help women of all shapes and sizes embrace their bodies. The Instagram campaign has a huge following, which first launched her into the spotlight when she created the hashtag in 2012, as a way to "show the middle finger" to everyone who says you can't be beautiful if you happen to be over a size 10.

The aim of this campaign according to Tess Holiday 'Is wearing daring fashion and stop hiding your body because society tells you to break out of those horizontal stripes and hashtag effyourbeautystandards' (Gordon, 2019) Tess Holliday already having her own campaign encouraging people to show themselves off and be confident, this statement reminded the critics that 'my message isn't 'let's all be fat', my message is 'let's love yourself''(This morning show, Tess Holiday 2018). The reason that Tess was put on the front cover is to show there is a different way to look, explains the editor of Cosmopolitan In the comments of this magazine cover beyond all of the hate towards how "unhealthy" Tess looks are people proud of the magazines outgoing nature encouraging young women to enjoy their life knowing they are beautiful at any size rather than cry over other magazine covers that they "should" look like. The media is a conveyor of socio-cultural values regarding ideal body shape and size, which creates an understanding of the ideal man and woman (McCabe, Butler & Watt, 2007) and I think that is about time that we used the media to express are need to see more diversity in

body shapes, like Holliday and Cosmo express to us, this encourages us their audience to embrace our own weight and be proud of it and to take a humorous approach to people's opinions.

I believe that this magazine has taken great strides in fashion and through the media challenging its critics to diversify, Tess subtitle on the front cover reads “Tess Holliday wants the haters to kiss her ass” in a humorous and bold statement the magazine is already confronting the audience, before they have had time to react to her image, perhaps adding to the controversy and encouraging an argument. This was an argument that needed to happen as it is about time that all of the hard work that people go through to express themselves has not fallen on deaf ears, instead is making a positive influence on the younger generation and influencing fashion companies and magazines to diversify. My research has also directed me to look at the ‘I am all women project’ with photographer’s Lily Cummings and Heather Hazzan, a body positive campaign against retouching and for diversity in women not limited by their skin colour or size of their pants “the facts that women are taking more photographs of women-both themselves and others- than ever before is something that deserves attention” (JANSEN, 2019: p8) which is what ‘I am all women’ sue to their advantage in the 21st century. The main policies that the ‘all-woman project’ lives by is for younger women to look at the media and themselves and see diversity to overcome anything and be their own dream.

The ‘All woman project’ illuminates the idea that all women are more similar than the media portrays us, we’ll all have physical flaws and imperfections (figure9) and that it does not make us more or less beautiful. Last year, model Charli Howard made waves when she stood up to her modelling agency, the 25-year-old took to Facebook, writing, 'Here's a big F*** YOU to my (now ex) model agency, for saying that at 5'8' tall and a UK size 6-8, I'm 'too big' and 'out of shape' to work in the fashion industry.' Howard moved to work with a new agency, MUSE Management, and it's there she met French plus-size model and body-positive blogger Clementine 'Clem' Dessau, 28, the two teamed up and created the campaign ‘All woman project’. Alike, Charli Howard, Social influencer and model, Jessica Megan focuses on the importance of body confidence and female empowerment through the use of social media, expressing the importance of loving yourself as a woman. Using Instagram, Jessica posts a photograph tagging her modelling agency saying (figure8) “For me, body confidence and acceptance isn’t so much about my size and shape, although that is a part of it. It’s mostly about reclaiming my body after years of its parts being taken away from me and sold to men as a fantasy.” (Instagram.com, 2019) being part of agency that promote people of all sizes and shapes gives Jessica the opportunity to share her body confidence. As this is a body positive movement, I believe that the photographers and models’ intentions were to create the series of photographs, to promote the movement as not high fashion or serious but as fun and natural for a reason.

I believe that by having body positive models looking natural will encourage us to not only uses a range of models, but to encourage models to be comfortable in their own skin in their photographs, going against the arguably usual underweight and serious approach that the industries have towards fashion and brand promotion. “Countless studies have shown that beauty magazines for women which portray a thin body type influence’s judgement of both men and women’s bodies and can be one of the sources related to eating problems (Paquette & Raine 2004; Halliwell 2015:186; Sides-Moore & Tochkov 2011)”. The photographs inspire me as a young female to be natural, to not worry about how I am supposed to look to not care about my body weight and to be happy with my natural and un-photoshopped body. All of these

campaigns and women that work together in different forms of media, to express the need to document diversity through social media and magazines, creating relatable campaigns that work to abolish the negativity and stigma revolved around body image in the media, do this using body positivity. ‘No genuine social revolution can be accomplished by the male’ (JANSEN, 2019: p9) they are all strong in their opinion’s and need for change. All of these campaigns together have targeted celebrity’s, self-image relating to all gender and also involving companies that use models for their magazine and commercial advertisement. With these artists targeting all of these places as a way of making body image a comfortable subject and become more open-minded they are making a real change to all ages. After looking at all of these women, who use social media and body positivity as a successful form of feminist resistance, allowing the younger generation to shift the patriarchal discourse of social media as an alternative communication Arguably, they have changed the opinions of the media, being magazines, mass media images and social media, pathing a new generation of young women who will be confident in themselves and encourage others to be comfortable in their skin but does not conclude its impact.