Against Community Guidelines

by

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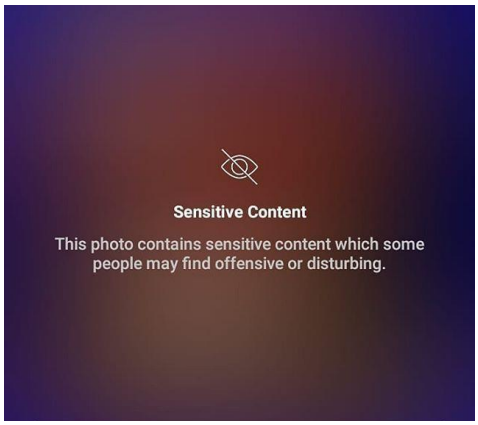
"Against Community Guidelines" explores the misrepresentation of bodies in media. This body of work focuses on plus size bodies being censored in social media. Social media is a big part of our lives but not everyone is given the same freedom to express themselves online. Although there have been body positivity movements; there is still a lack of inclusivity. Both women and men are reported if their bodies and photos do not fit an exact mold of the idealized body. When one is censored, this alters the perception one has of oneself. This leads to self-esteem issues, body dysmorphia, eating disorders, and self-doubt. With these photos being censored, this also encourages the same mindset for generations to come.

Directly sourced from Instagram's Community Guidelines; they state, "We want Instagram to continue to be an authentic and safe place for inspiration and expression. Help us foster this community. Post only your own photos and videos and always follow the law. Respect everyone on Instagram, don't spam people or post nudity." They only allow, "photos and videos that are appropriate for a diverse audience." They add, "We know that there are times when people might want to share nude images that are artistic or creative in nature, but for a variety of reasons, we don't allow nudity on Instagram. This includes photos, videos, and some digitally created content that show sexual intercourse, genitals, and close-ups of fully nude buttocks. It also includes some photos of female nipples, but photos of post-mastectomy scarring and women actively breastfeeding are allowed. Nudity in photos of paintings and sculptures is OK, too,"(Instagram Help Center). However, they go against their own guidelines when not reporting celebrities who ignore this statement entirely. Their guidelines explicitly state that a person is not allowed to post nudity even if it's in an artistic attempt.

Instagram's removal of post

The notorious Dan Blizerian gets away with breaking the rules daily. He is a masculine man that promotes his business with women, drugs, alcohol, and money. He has an apparel company called Ignite which is promoted by women who fit the idealized thin body. Almost all the models promoting his apparel violate community guidelines. A list of usernames include @hailey_grice, missbkreutz, elebertoli, terezekalman, shantalmonique, chanel.uzi, katiebellofficial, biancaghezzi, and desireescholtz. Each of these models have more than one image that is either completely nude or close-ups of fully nude buttocks. Some do blur out their nipples or genitals. However, there are many pictures of completely see through bikinis or lingerie that do not get removed.

In contrast, when a female identifying plus size body wears the same exact outfit or similar post, they will either automatically be taken down or receive a sensitive content over the picture. This sensitive content will give the viewer a warning before accepting to view the photograph. Sometimes this happens without any violation to their guidelines. This includes posting in their bathing suit or a tight fitted dress. It begins to create a double standard where it's okay for the socially accepted body type to post these photos, but not those of plus size people.



Instagram's Sensitive Content Warning

Sensitive, Spanx, thread, 2020

Whether it be body hair or fat rolls; usually people with more natural looking bodies are the ones who are getting censored. Plus size queer and female identifying bodies feel like they are personally being attacked when censored. Representation matters and when most plus size bodies are being censored; it is hard for others to feel like they are being supported. When shadow banning happens, this means the post will not show up when searched or in the tags they have created. As Ragan Chastain, from Ravishly, states, "@fullerfigurefullerbust put it 'I've definitely been shadow banned on Instagram - I can tell because my posts never make 'top posts' on hashtags with few posts, and my likes have vastly depleted. If I were a slim woman posting similar content, then this wouldn't happen. Fat bodies are being muted, and I'm not ok with that. I post content that I know for a FACT empowers and emboldens others, and yet because my body isn't 'perfect', I'm given a disadvantage. The size 10 women showing how at some angles they have chins and a stomach roll get 468010k likes - because that's acceptable. That's temporary. My big fat body isn't. And it's punished,'" (Chastain).

Untitled, mixed media, 2020

Renovamen, Latex, Nylon, 2019

Plus size bodies are not bashing thinner bodies; they are bashing the social media content mediators. It is not fair that a select group of people get to decide what is appropriate and inappropriate. This led to fat positivity activists, Sarah Rosen @sehustlerosen and Lou Xavier @misslouxavier, to fight back with an online protest using the hashtag #fatisnotaviolation. They state, “In response to Instagram deleting so many non-violating pictures of fierce fat bodies because of bias & bigotry, we are calling to the #fatpositive & #bodypositive community to help bombard IG with photos of fat babes! To be a part of this online demonstration, post a photo of yourself in whatever level of undress you feel comfortable on Friday, October 5th, 2018 and use the tag #fatisnotaviolation. Please be sure that your photo doesn’t violate Instagram's actual terms, no uncensored genitalia or female-identifying nipples. #FATISNOTAVIOLATION, (Chastain). This protest led to the flooding of many fat bodies on multiple platforms including Twitter and Tumblr. However, many still got censored even if they were following the guidelines.

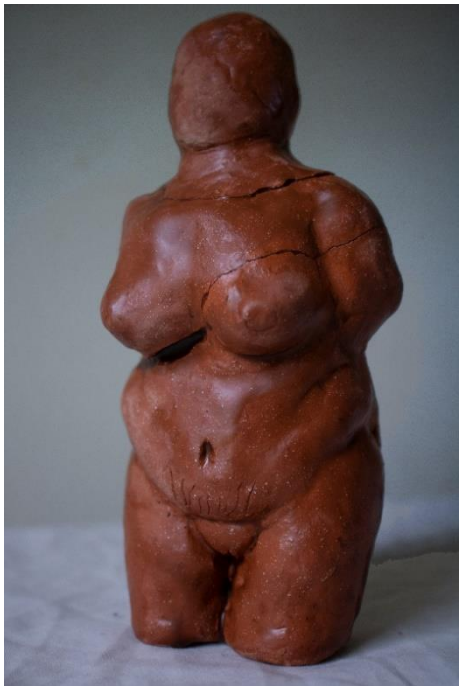
Plus size women should have others to look up to or a way to set examples for future generations. Representation matters and this is not it. Advertising has become a very common thread on Instagram, where you are drowned in cheap clothing brands and wacko diets. This is

toxic to anyone who is above a size 12. They have begun to use this platform as a sales pitch rather than what it was intended for; to stay connected and empowered.

Therefore, hashtags are extremely important in the plus size community. It allows the community to stay connected because of shadow banning. Instagram users need to be extremely cautious of who they follow and what trends they watch. This allows certain profiles to have access which can be very toxic such as promoting diet culture or trying to censor their photos. Social media gives us the freedom to report a photo if it is spam or inappropriate. They then give a list; if it is nudity or sexual activity, hate speech or symbols, violence or dangerous organizations, sale of illegal or regulated goods, bullying or harassment, intellectual property violation, suicide, self-injury or eating disorders, scam or fraud, false information, and I just don't like it. Then it is sent to a group of content mediators to decide if these allegations are true. However, we do not know if these content mediators are trained to not have bias.

Banned, Plaster, Cotton, 2020

To challenge inclusivity, I have made ceramic bodies directly modeled from people who have been censored on social media. Turning their bodies into a piece of art makes it less likely to be taken down off a platform. Most of my pieces are inspired by art history, such as the Venus Of Willendorf or Peter Paul Rubens paintings where fatness is looked as a positive aspect. The Venus of Willendorf is one of the oldest pieces of art coming from around "30,000 BCE where historians believe that they served a ritual purpose and likely celebrated ideas linked to fertility, including femininity, goddesses, and eroticism,"(Richman-Abdou). The word Rubenesque is defined as characteristic or reminiscent of the paintings of Rubens, especially with reference to his voluptuous female nudes. He was a 17th century Flemish Baroque painter who was praised for his large plump bodies. During this time, if you were Rubenesque you were perceived as being rich and having great health whereas smaller bodies were viewed as showing poverty and illness. Being fat is now considered a death sentence in the world of science. Anne Hollander of the NY Times explains, "The look of actual human bodies obviously changes very little through history. But the look of ideal bodies changes a great deal all the time, and so the perception of corporeal facts is edited to match. In ordinary life, a common vehicle of expression for this changing physical ideal is the changing fashion in clothes.



Venus, Ceramic, wax, 2020

Elaine, Ceramic, 2020

In art, the nude (whether it is offered by Rubens or Playboy) tends to reflect the same changing standards. Rubens's nude ladies are expertly conceived versions of the fashionable apparel of the day, which favored bunchy satin dresses arranged in thick but mobile folds, especially around the middle. In nude art, shiny satin skin over thick and mobile folds of flesh produced a body perfectly tailored to the chic, erotic taste of the moment. Meanwhile, in real life, people who were thin wore lush, fluid and bulky garments to suggest that they resembled a Rubens nude underneath… Fatness and softness-status symbols for centuries—have become thoroughly déclassé in two generations. They are now in fact the accepted signs of mental slavery—weakness of will, neurosis or bondage to ethnic traditions that are dependent on starchy foods as a staple of diet. Even worse, fatness suggests unhealthiness and early death—just as hollow cheeks and bony frames used to do," (Hollander). I use my contemporary ceramic figure sculpture to work towards body positivity which is to respect all body types. I focus on body parts that society is usually repulsed by such as large stomachs, thighs, or breasts. Creating a conversation around fat art is important for representation which is lacking due to censorship.

ACG, Ceramic, 2020

Venus and Adonis, mid 1630s, Peter Paul Rubens

Venus, wax, 2020

My bronze wax sculpture pulls from past art history and brings it into the contemporary. The halo represents worship and signifies the value placed upon the figure. Being plus size was a symbol of fertility which was extremely valuable. Long ago, they valued, both male and female, the function of the body rather than it's apperance. This relates to the movement of body neutrality. As a society, we are so caught up in diet culture and being thin, that we don't appreciate what our bodies can do.

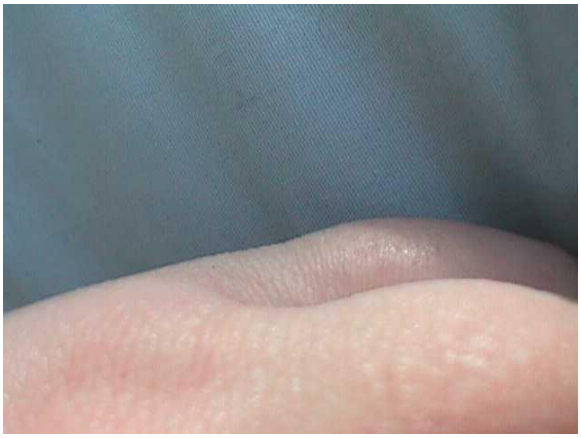
I use soft sculpture to explore finding comfort or solace in things that are undesirable. My fiber art, specifically my *Body Pillow* and *Stay Fat*, are used to find comfort in something that was once toxic to the individual. It encourages self-care, especially if that self-care is relaxing and finding peace with doing nothing. The societal norm is that a person must stay busy and working towards a goal. Unrealistic or conflicting goals takes a toll on one's mental health and body image.

Artist with *Body Pillow*, 2019

The *Body Pillow* is made of old clothes that do not fit the subject anymore. Repurposing these clothes allows the subject to let go of the expectation to fit into them again and the control the clothes have over one's body image. This mentality is extremely rooted in diet culture and contributes to the fat phobia culture that has led to many eating disorders. I trace the subjects' body as a sewing pattern to create the base of the pillow. This piece allows the subject to understand that bodies are always changing and that is okay.

Body Pillow, 2019

Cindy Baker, a Canadian artist, has a photography series called *Self-portraits of my hands* that is parallel with my fiber art. She explains, "I am trying to evoke the dual sensations of attraction and repulsion inherent in our society's relationship to fat women, creating ridiculous bodyscapes using only my hand. These farcical sexscapes, intended to be mistaken for other, larger bodyparts, will remain, to the average viewer, alien even after they come to understand what the subject of the photographs is because our collective denial of the fat woman's body includes all of her parts, including her hands.



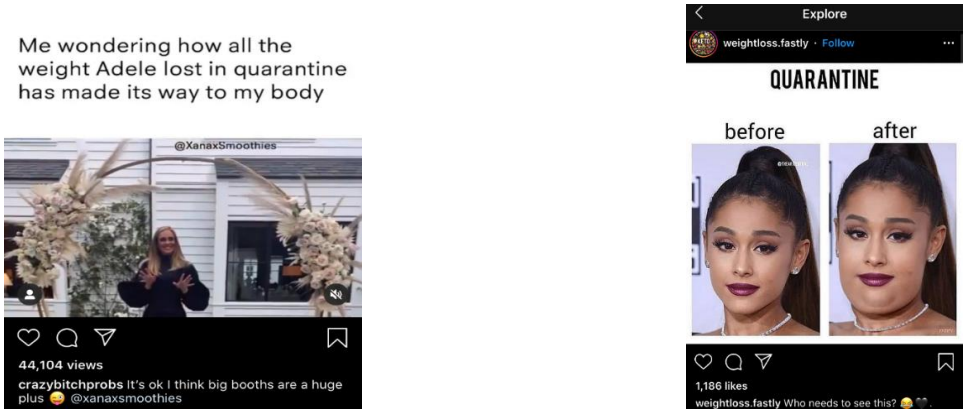
Self-Portrait of my hands lounging naked in bed, Cindy Baker, 2012

The natural lighting, and pictures taken at various times during the day, are meant to suggest a comfortable, placid environment and a day filled with self-indulgent lounging. The subject of a partner or a second body is never broached, except when the viewer imagines one amidst the creases and bumps. This atmosphere set up through the series subtly confirms our learned suppositions of fat women as self-indulgent, and resists confrontationalism by refusing to suggest the viewer's role in this taboo sexcapade, thus allowing us to let our guard down enough to explore the attraction/repulsion element of the physicality of the body, which we normally are forbidden from engaging,"(Baker).

Stay Fat, Clothing, Thread, 2020

Stay Fat is a quilt made from the same concept as the *Body Pillow*. However, I used my own clothing that doesn't fit anymore instead of another subjects. This quilt is used to provide comfort during the Covid-19 quarantine/self-isolation where many are scared to become fat. There are many posts on Instagram about overeating or gaining a few pounds. A pandemic is a traumatic event to go through and the last thing people should be concerned about is becoming fat. This is an example of how fat phobia has become engrained into society. Eating

and resting have become major coping mechanisms during a time of the unknown. This quilt speaks to prioritizing rest and being gentle to oneself. It also directly speaks to the individuals creating these posts where I don't expect them to understand why I want to *Stay Fat*.



Instagram Posts from May 5, 2020 and May 7, 2020

Against Community Guidelines is trying to change platforms to become encouraging and accepting of all body types. By using different materials, I continue to challenge the idea that all bodies are different. Being around others who do not have this idealized body shows that one body is not superior to any other body. This project is a catalyst for social change of the idea of an idealized body. I plan to make an Instagram account to repost the censored photos of plus size and #fatbabes that have been censored to encourage the correct representation of these bodies, body diversity and fat liberation. Virgie Tovar, an expert on fat discrimination and body image sums it up perfectly, "To me, fat liberation is understanding that is it not my fat body that has failed; it is the culture that has failed for oppressing this body. To me, fat liberation is knowing that my body is not wrong because it is fat; it is the culture that is wrong for discriminating against and stigmatizing my body," (Tovar). If you can accept my fat art, why can't you accept my fat body?

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