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APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy 24, no. 2 is dedicated to celebrating and reflecting on the work of Kate Manne in her 2024 book, *Unshrinking: How to Face Fatphobia*. The issue showcases six invited commentaries on the book, followed by the author's response.

In "Go Big or Go Home: Kate Manne Directs Her Philosophical Gaze at Fatphobia," Alison Reiheld highlights key facets of Manne's takedown of prevailing views on fatness. As Reiheld notes, Manne's text productively identifies fatphobia not as an individual problem, but as a structural phenomenon in need of structural intervention. Reiheld outlines methodological continuities across Manne's philosophical work, and considers in particular how, in addition to her systematic challenging of faulty arguments about the harms of fatness, the autobiographical aspect of Manne's methodology allows for showing the actual suffering that comes from real-life, normalized experiences of fatphobia.

In "What Is Body Reflexivity? A Critical Assessment of Manne's Alternative to Body Positivity and Body Neutrality," Céline Leboeuf focuses on Manne's reflection on longstanding notions of body positivity and body neutrality within movements against fatphobia. As the names suggest, the body positivity and body neutrality movements promote having positive or neutral attitudes toward one's body, respectively. While showing there is much to be learned from the concepts, Manne provides critiques of both body positivity and body neutrality, and offers instead a concept of body reflexivity, which encourages shifting attention from judging bodies to suspending judgment. Here Leboeuf raises two questions: first, whether Manne's view sufficiently portrays the merits of body positivity; and second, whether all aspects of the distinction between body reflexivity and body neutrality are fully clear.

In "Hungry for More Intersectionality: A Review of *Unshrinking* by Kate Manne," Clarisse Paron highlights the importance of Manne's work to challenge fatphobia, in particular praising Manne's fourth chapter on "Demoralizing Fatness," which challenges presumptions of individuals' duties to lose weight (or stay skinny). Paron considers possible expansions of Manne's work to connect with other intersectional analyses, exploring in particular the connections between fatphobia, ableism, racism, and heteronormativity. On the connection with ableism, Paron underscores the shared history of eugenics practices of targeting individuals with size and other physical and psychological impairments.

In "The Fallacies and Figleaves of Fatphobia: Expanding on Arguments in Manne's *Unshrinking*," Vanessa Voss considers Manne's exploration of fat stigma in academia as a whole and philosophy especially. Building on Manne's focus on fatphobia in philosophical works from Plato and Aristotle onward, Voss expands the scope to argue that fatphobic beliefs and actions perpetuate bad reasoning, bad rhetoric, and thought clichés. Voss summarizes her argument as follows: fatphobia is a "threat to the health of one's critical thinking skills. *And aren't you worried about your health*?"

In "The Future of Facing Fatphobia," Cheryl Frazier commends *Unshrinking* for its success in bringing fat scholarship and activism into conversation with philosophy with such care. Frazier considers Manne's identification of the harms of fatphobia as laudable, while suggesting that, if fat liberation is our goal, we need also to consider all the things that are right and valuable about being fat. Frazier outlines the importance of framing philosophical conversations about fatness in ways which do not preclude celebrations of fatness and recognitions of its benefit.

In our final commentary piece of the issue, "What I Love about *Unshrinking*, Why *Unshrinking* Makes Me Sad, and Six Things I'd Like to Talk about with Kate Manne," Samantha Brennan describes her own sadness and anger at the contexts which gave rise to some of Manne's first-person descriptions of the harms of fatphobia, including those which brought Manne to feel worried enough about how others would think about her body that she "flinched from the prospect" of usual book tour appearances. Noting her thorough appreciation for the book, Brennan outlines six points she'd like to talk about with Manne: 1) the connection between bodily shame and moral shame; 2) how different experiences of fatness in a range of sizes can be complexly related to shame; 3) possibilities for more expansive understandings of body positivity; 4) fatphobia and overstating the effects of parenting; 5) the variations in experiences of hunger; and 6) the harmful effects of fatphobia on stopping fat people from involvement in exercise.

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What Is Body Reflexivity? A Critical Assessment of Manne's Alternative to Body Positivity and Body Neutrality

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In *Unshrinking*, Kate Manne confronts fatphobia, tackling, among other issues, the challenges fat persons encounter in medical settings, the pressures that diet culture exerts on them, and the discrimination they meet daily. She concludes with reflections on how to fight fat oppression and addresses the body positivity and body neutrality movements, which have both positioned themselves as paths toward greater body acceptance. Manne reviews longstanding criticisms of these movements and articulates an alternative notion she dubs "body reflexivity" (196).

As a philosopher who has written on body positivity, I believe this is the most useful entry point to dialogue with Manne. As part of these preliminary remarks, I also want to acknowledge my positionality as someone who has been thin their entire life. Since the modern-day body positivity movement owes much to the fat acceptance and fat liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, it is important to recognize this indebtedness along with the cooption of the movement by smaller persons today. In crafting my responses to Manne, I strive to be mindful of this history.

The body positivity movement, as its name suggests, promotes having a positive attitude toward one's body. To put things simply, proponents of body positivity encourage us to embrace a positive outlook to counter the "negativity" many of us experience because our bodies do not measure up to dominant beauty standards, including those regarding body shape and fatness. According to Manne, if this movement requires "feeling uniformly positive about own's own body," then it is not "realistic" (202). Indeed, it would fail to consider the lived experiences of trans people, "some of whom need or want to change their bodies in significant ways," or those of "chronically or disabled people who may feel, at least at moments, that their bodies have betrayed them" (202). I agree. Further, as Manne points out, body positivity so construed intersects with the broader notion of "toxic positivity"—that is, the mandate to only embrace positive emotions and reject negative ones. Such positivity ultimately backfires by forcing people to ignore their emotions about their bodies, which, in turn, prevents self-integration (204). Despite its intuitive pull, body positivity stifles the agency of those who struggle to marshal sunny feelings about their bodies.

In response to the perceived shortcomings of the body positivity movement, some have adopted a position called "body neutrality." Its defenders include such celebrities as the actor Jameela Jamila and, more recently, the singer and songwriter Lizzo. According to this alternative, we ought to adopt a neutral attitude toward our bodies. Drawing on psychological research, Manne worries that "a truly neutral attitude is hard to maintain" (204). She adds that this notion may, to some, be "tinged with negativity." Moreover, given how bodies are so often subject to scrutiny, body neutrality is "surely hard to conjure routinely" (204). Ultimately, according to Manne, "body neutrality seems at best a precarious retreat from judgment, not a stable resting place" (204). Or, to put a different spin on it, this position suffers from one of the same worries as body positivity, at least in its toxic expressions: it is impracticable.

Manne enters this debate by recommending a third notion: *body reflexivity*. This alternative "doesn't require one monolithic attitude toward our own body or that of others" (202). Instead, it "offers an escape from the apparently exhaustive options of positivity, negativity, or neutrality, by proposing a different focus" (205). As Manne puts it, "rather than changing how bodies are assessed, it urges us to transcend the mode of assessment entirely" (205). In other words, she encourages us to shift our attention from judging our bodies to suspending judgment. She elaborates that "a body is not something good or bad or neutral for people generally, but rather something that may suit and work better or worse for its denizen—in other words, the person who inhabits it" (205) since that person's "perspective on her body is the only one that matters" (205).

Manne cites the following merits of "body reflexivity." First, it is tied to a "politics of autonomy that would vindicate the right to be fat, or trans, or nonbinary, or queer, or disabled" (205). Second, "body reflexivity can recognize the psychological consequences of our current political predicament" (205). That is, it is understandable to "*feel* insecure" in a world in which some "are *made* to be insecure" in their embodiment (205, emphases in the original). That is, Manne wants to resist the toxic strands of body positivity, which fail to acknowledge the difficulties people living in non-normative bodies face. In so doing, she seeks to offer a more realistic option than the hotly debated movement has.

Body reflexivity mirrors Manne's structural critique of fatphobia. Just as fatphobia is not merely a matter of individual prejudice, so too making peace with one's body is not a requirement of individuals. Rather than insisting that we adopt either a positive or neutral attitude towards our bodies in the face of body shaming, Manne calls on us, as a society, to accommodate the diversity of human embodiment. Or, as she puts it, "the world has to be remade; it has to serve you better" (206). After describing body reflexivity, Manne briefly pauses on how to challenge fatphobia specifically. In that context, she asserts that we ought not to rely on "reforming beauty standards"

(206). Responding to the works of A.W. Eaton and Cheryl Frazier, who contend that beauty has a place in resisting fat oppression, Manne offers what she calls a "blunter and less nuanced" suggestion: "fuck beauty culture, along with diet culture" (206).[1] She enjoins us to "dress and look how you want not in the name of any kind of beauty but for the sake of being the most yourself that you can presently imagine" (207). While Manne acknowledges we are far from reaching this point, she hopes for a "total divestment from beauty and diet culture" (207). Instead of using beauty as a way of reforming others' perception of fat (and other nonnormative) bodies, it need not figure in our strategies for facing fatphobia.

Having sketched Manne's alternative to body positivity and body neutrality, I now raise two critical questions about her view. First, is Manne fair to body positivity? Second, is body reflexivity truly different from body neutrality?

To begin, let's consider Manne's objections to body positivity. Manne singles out forms of body positivity that require us to have an unendingly positive attitude toward our bodies. By using phrases like "one monolithic attitude toward our own body or that of others" (202), "feeling uniformly positive about one's body" (202), or "the general mandate to be positive about our bodies" (204), she pinpoints a form of positivity that is tantamount to an imperative: Thou shalt always have a positive attitude toward your body! Framed in this way, body positivity is surely unrealistic. But has Manne painted body positivity in overly broad brushstrokes? Are there forms of body positivity deserving of consideration?

To achieve greater clarity on these questions, we should first distinguish having a positive body image from body positivity. In a recent article published in *Body Image*, Nichole Wood-Barcalow, Jessica Alleva, and Tracy Tylka disentangle positive body image and body positivity. Positive body image, as studied by psychologists, is taken to include appreciating one's body and caring for it. As Tylka and Wood-Barcalow indicate in an earlier article, positive body image is "a distinct construct from negative body image, *multifaceted* (with the facets including body appreciation, body acceptance and love, adaptive appearance investment, broadly conceptualizing beauty . . . filtering information in a body-protective manner)."[2] Thus, in the scientific literature on the topic, having a positive body image does not mean having a single attitude about one's body but rather encompasses a range of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. It is also worth emphasizing that psychological studies of positive body image have suggested that embodying the associated attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors is within reach.[3] This implies that the motivation to embrace body neutrality as a more realistic alternative to body positivity is misguided and rests on a conflation between having a positive body image and "being body-positive" as touted on online platforms.[4] In contrast, the body positivity movement, as it is channeled in social media environments (usually under the hashtag #BoPo), often has toxic elements: "body positivity content typically does not normalize the experience of negative body-related thoughts and emotions. This narrowed scope aligns with toxic body positivity, or the belief that people should always think positively about their body, which is the body-specific form of the larger concept of toxic positivity."[5] On this point, Manne and body image researchers would agree: body positivity threatens to veer into toxic positivity.

With the distinction between positive body image and body positivity on the table, let's consider an instantiation of the ethos to promote positive body image without policing us. Consider the activist work done by Connie Sobczak and Elizabeth Scott with The Body Positive, an organization they founded in 1996 and whose tenets are outlined by Sobczak in her 2014 book *Embody: Learning to love your unique body (and quiet that critical voice!)*. The five pillars of their work are the following. First, they call on us to reclaim health, in particular, by challenging fatphobic biases in medicine. Second, they encourage us and offer practices for practicing intuitive self-care—notably, the practice of intuitive eating. Third, they call on us to cultivate self-love: here, they rely on Rousseau's distinction between *amour propre*, which involves hierarchical thinking, and *amour de soi*, which entails pursuing one's well-being.[6] For Sobczak and Scott, self-love does not require a nonstop positive view of oneself (or one's body) but rather self-compassion and self-forgiveness.[7] Fourth, they ask that we redefine beauty in inclusive ways. Fifth, they sketch the need for community-building as part of resistance to toxic messages about our bodies. While Manne might disagree with the fourth pillar, I imagine that some of their other messages would resonate with her. And yet, if we stick to the letter of the organization's branding, Scott and Sobczak seem to embrace some version of body *positivity*.

Similarly, in my article "What Is Body Positivity? The Path from Shame to Pride" (2019), I describe body positivity as a rejection of *limiting* body shame and a transition to *proper* body pride. Using the work of Luna Dolezal, I define "limiting body shame" as shame that "can be restricting and must be overcome for life to have the possibility of dignity and fulfillment."[8] On the flip side, "proper body pride," as I argue, involves "overcoming unwarranted shame about one's own body and valuing all body types, especially stigmatized ones."[9] Thus, body positivity means transitioning from limiting body shame to proper body pride. I further explain that there are different avenues toward experiencing *proper* body pride: these may include re-envisioning human beauty or pursuing physical activities for the sake of the pleasure they afford.[10] Manne might object to the idea that we *ought* to feel proper pride about our bodies. But, as I see it, such pride is not a mandate. Rather, it is a description of the lives of those who labor, either individually or in concert with others, to overcome the shaming messages that prevent many from seeing the doctor when in need of medical attention, freely going about everyday activities, wearing what one wants, and so on. As I view things, body positivity functions as a regulative ideal. What would our lives look like if we faced fatphobia and other forms of body oppression? How can we embody this ideal and help others do the same?

Now, if body positivity is compatible with a range of affects regarding one's body, then Manne's criticisms seem uncharitable. But I may now be accused of describing

the movement in overly generous terms! Like any good philosophical debate, this discussion reveals the need to be clear about what we take body positivity to entail. The distinction between having a positive body image and the body positivity movement helps us circumscribe the target of Manne's criticisms: the mainstream messaging primarily operant on social media.

Let's now turn to Manne's contention that body reflexivity is superior to body neutrality. As mentioned, her criticisms of body neutrality are several: first, "a truly neutral attitude is hard to maintain" (204); second, body neutrality to some seems "tinged with negativity" (204); third, the position may "imply a blankness that is surely hard to conjure routinely about a subject matter as fraught as our own bodies" (204). Having voiced these concerns, Manne judges that "body neutrality seems at best a precarious retreat from judgment, not a stable resting place" (204). In her rebuttal to body neutrality, Manne urges us to "transcend the mode of assessment entirely" by giving up on evaluating our bodies positively, negatively, or neutrally (205). By appealing to the language of "working" for an individual, Manne harkens to the attitude, often associated with body neutrality, of valuing our bodies for what they can do rather than what they look like. For example, Anne Poirier, the counselor and intuitive eating specialist whose work has been hailed as a turning point in the move from body positivity to body neutrality, states, "Body neutrality prioritizes the body's function, and what the body can do, rather than its appearance."[11] Is this emphasis on functionality what Manne means by "working" for oneself? If this is the case, is body reflexivity distinct from neutrality?

To answer these questions, let's pause and study her language more closely. Manne draws a helpful comparison between body reflexivity and her husband's words, "I don't look at you with a critical eye" (205). To use this comparison as a guidepost, we will need to better understand the content of this uncritical gaze. Surely, it contains some sort of apprehension of Manne's body since this is a description of a way of looking at someone. Yet, how should we understand the *affective* character of this gaze (assuming there is one)? If it's not negative (i.e., "critical"), then is it neutral? Or is it even positive? Likewise, wouldn't one's own (uncritical) gaze toward one's body be neutral or positive? Does body reflexivity collapse into the two options Manne has rejected? At first blush, it does not appear we made any progress beyond body positivity or neutrality. But we have. And to see why, I propose taking a step back in time—to a period long before the body positivity vs. neutrality debate—and consider Marilyn Frye's notion of the *loving eye*.

Frye develops the concept of a loving eye in "In and Out of Harm's Way," an essay included in her 1983 classic, *The Politics of Reality*. There, Frye contrasts what she dubs the "arrogant eye" and the "loving eye." For the arrogant perceiver, "everything is either 'for me' or 'against me.' This is the kind of vision that interprets the rock one trips on as hostile, the bolt one cannot unloosen as stubborn, the woman who made meatloaf when he wanted spaghetti as 'bad' (though he didn't say what he wanted)."[12] By contrast, the loving perceiver is "one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination."[13] This is someone who "can see without the presupposition that the other poses a constant threat or that the other exists for the seer's service."[14] By analogy, a loving perception of someone's body would look at that body without invoking any evaluative categories (such as a "bad body" or a body that's "too fat," and so on). Likewise, it would not expect bodies to conform to one's aesthetic preferences. Perhaps this is how we ought to interpret the "uncritical" gaze Manne attributes to her husband.

Now consider Frye's ideas about the seer's agency and relations to the seen. The arrogant gaze lays the ground for *coercion*, while the loving gaze recognizes the *independence* of the seen. Seeing another as "not good enough" can lead to coercing that person to better suit one's needs. As Frye puts it, the arrogant perceiver "coerces the objects of his perception into satisfying the conditions his perception imposes."[15] In contrast, loving perception makes room for the other—for her to exercise her *autonomy*.

What does this appeal to Frye teach us about body reflexivity? I would argue that body reflexivity could be redescribed as a *loving perception of one's body*. It is not a neutral perception of oneself; it has an affective character. Yet, unlike Frye's loving perceiver, the subject and object of the gaze are the same. To adopt Frye's language, body reflexivity would mean that *one consults one's own will and interests*. This now allows us to connect to Manne's original formulation: "a body is not something good or bad or neutral for people generally, but rather something that may suit and work better or worse for its denizen—in other words, the person who inhabits it" (205). Frye's concept sheds light on the liberatory potential of Manne's view. Looking at oneself with a loving eye means divesting oneself from others' expectations. In fact, the notion of divestment leads us full circle back to Manne's statement: "body reflexivity is tied, as body positivity and body neutrality are not, to a political ethos—a radical politics of autonomy that would vindicate the right to be fat, or trans, or nonbinary, or queer, or disabled" (205). Whereas the label "body reflexivity" makes Manne's position look like just another one in the body acceptance potpourri, Frye's notion helps us better savor its distinctive political character. Body reflexivity is not merely about appreciating the body's functionality and, as such, it differs from everyday body neutrality. Moreover, by invoking love, I also wanted to add a—dare I say?—positive touch to Manne's "body reflexivity," which, without further commentary, may feel as bland as body neutrality.

Considering this discussion, we have reason to embrace Manne's alternative to body positivity and body neutrality. First, body reflexivity has the merit of avoiding the toxic and coercive elements of conventional body positivity messaging. That said, further research would be needed to situate Manne's proposal alongside more flexible forms of body positivity and to determine where the notion of having a positive body image fits within her framework. Second, body reflexivity has a political dimension that highlights the importance of autonomy in a way that "garden-variety" body positivity and neutrality do not. I hope these reflections will

spur a much-needed conversation about the limits of the body positivity vs. neutrality debate and will help us better theorize resistance to fatphobia and forms of oppression.

NOTES

1. Here, Manne refers to A.W. Eaton's "Taste in Bodies and Fat Oppression" in *Body Aesthetics*, ed. Sherri Irvin (Oxford University Press, 2016) and Cheryl Frazier's "Beauty Labor as a Tool to Resist Antifatness," *Hypatia* 38, no. 2 (2023): 231–50.
2. Tylka and Wood-Barcalow, "What Is and What Is Not Positive Body Image?" 127.
3. Wood-Barcalow, Alleva, and Tylka, "Revisiting Positive Body Image to Demonstrate How Body Neutrality Is Not New," 6.
4. Wood-Barcalow, Alleva, and Tylka 2024, "Revisiting Positive Body Image to Demonstrate How Body Neutrality Is Not New," 7–8.
5. Wood-Barcalow, Alleava, and Tylka, "Revisiting Positive Body Image to Demonstrate How Body Neutrality Is Not New," 6.
6. Sobczak, *Embody*, 133.
7. Sobczak, *Embody*, 125.
8. Dolezal, *The Body and Shame*, xv; quoted in Leboeuf, "What Is Body Positivity? 118.
9. Leboeuf, "What Is Body Positivity? 122.
10. Leboeuf, "What Is Body Positivity? 123–26.
11. Anne Poirier is quoted in Charlotte Cowles's article, "Can 'Body Neutrality' Change the Way You Work Out? The Key to Staying Active Long Term May Be to Care Less about How You Look and More about How You Feel," *The New York Times*, June 22, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/02/well/move/body-neutrality-exercise.html.
12. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 67.
13. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 75.
14. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 74.
15. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 67.

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Hungry for More Intersectionality: A Review of Unshrinking *by Kate Manne*

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Overall, *Unshrinking: How to Face Fatphobia* is a successful work of public philosophy. Manne's (2024) book provides a thorough introduction to fat studies. She engages with a wide range of literature, citing authors who have criticized fatphobia in medicine and epidemiology; to those who work from intersectional positions on race, class, sex/gender, and sexuality; to historical analyses and representations in media and popular culture. She enriches and extends discussions of fatphobia with her interlocutors as she reflects on her experiences of fatphobia throughout her life. Her analysis expertly weaves together the voices of many fat studies scholars and activists, making her conclusions and arguments plausible and intuitive.

As someone who is familiar with the field (and working on my dissertation in the area), I appreciate Manne's expansive survey on analyses of fatphobia across disciplines and contexts, and admire her ability to extract important ideas, concepts, and themes from various authors and place them in conversation with each other. *Unshrinking* is an accessible work in public-facing philosophy. Manne's purpose is to challenge the "everyday" fatphobia that affects us all. After she debunks fatphobic beliefs, challenges stereotypes, and explains how individuals in a fatphobic society respond to fatphobia, she presents a moral argument to convince her audience to reflect on how they perpetuate these attitudes in their own actions and discourses. Addressing fatphobia is a project of social justice, and no one deserves to be persecuted for their size. Whereas *Down Girl* offers an original argument with the goal of reconceptualizing "misogyny," *Unshrinking* recognizes that there is widespread resistance to the fat liberation movement, and it aims to challenge this resistance. Although I was (selfishly) looking forward to the new directions Manne would take fat studies, Manne clearly knows her audience. To ensure these arguments are received, Manne's decision to share personal experiences and present extensive research supporting her claims will better encourage sympathy from her readers.

In particular, I enjoyed her fourth chapter, "Demoralizing Fatness," which expertly debunks myths and narratives that condemn fat individuals for their size and consequently entail (either implicitly or explicitly) a duty to lose weight (or stay skinny). In this chapter, Manne argues, "Not being fat is simply not a moral obligation" (83). For one, science has not been able to tell us how to help people reliably lose weight or prevent people from gaining weight: "Weight is at best a proxy for the health concerns that we can, and should, care about" (88). Second, even if fatness is to some extent under people's control, being fat is not a "burden on the healthcare system" (90). Manne points out the malicious contradiction that fat people face—in our liberal society, individual choice for how one wants to live their best life only seems to apply to skinny (read: *healthy*) people.