Vol. 26, no. 4, Summer 2024

The Dilemma of Embodied Insecurity: A Subtle Feminist Approach for Embracing Moments of Good and Bad Advocacy

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Abstract: The author argues for building a community of scholarship that acknowledges the difficult and sometimes contradictory work of being an embodied advocate. Using her personal experience as a fat woman and a cancer survivor, the author shares the challenges of being an advocate for her own embodiment, particularly with the conflicting social narratives of being shamed for being fat and being praised for being a cancer survivor. Using feminist, rhetorical, and embodiment theories as well as Roxane Gay's idea of a *Bad Feminist*, the author asserts that recognizing both the ways that we advocate for our bodies and the ways we struggle to accept our bodies often requires small feminist acts. Rather than subjugate ourselves for perceived shortcomings,, the author encourages the subtle shift of existing as both a "good" and "bad" advocate at the same time.

Tags: embodiment, fat, breast cancer, advocacy, body neutrality

Doi: https://doi.org/10.37514/PEI-J.2024.26.4.06

Sometimes when I wear a shirt with a wide neck, I have a visible scar that is a small indentation about an inch wide. People may not notice it right away and sometimes I cover it by wearing a shirt with a higher neckline. The scar denotes where my chemotherapy port once resided. The port was a small device used to streamline my treatment for breast cancer. The port lived in my chest for about a year and a half, and its removal left this indentation. That scar represents the impact my diagnosis and treatment for cancer had on my body as well as on my mind. The scar serves as a reminder that I am marked by this disease, and when I let others see that scar, they see my marking. As an embodiment scholar my scars represent an intersection between what I study and who I am. I was studying embodiment long before my cancer diagnosis, but the diagnosis has marked me. It changed my perspective. In some ways it made my desire for bodily acceptance more urgent, and, in others, it deepened my own bodily insecurities that bear scars from years of being in a fat body that society has deemed unworthy. Recognizing the impact of these scars provides a subtle shift in my feminist work. That shift reframes both the way I look at myself as well as the ways I engage in my scholarship.

While they are fully embodied, scars are also rhetorical with meanings that shift depending on the audience and situation. They also have an impact on my ethos, which can shift from a fat woman who chooses not to be defined by societal standards to a breast cancer survivor—oftentimes both at the same time. When I talk about the scar from my port, many have called it my "battle scar," a small blemish that denotes

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my survivor status. But, in a sense, all my scars, both physical and metaphorical, are battle scars, metaphorical markings left by the marginalization of my fat body and physical markings that remind me of the way my body survived cancer. These scars are residue from a capitalistic culture that treats my fatness as a problem to be solved and my cancer survival as a hero narrative used to sell merchandise to women under the guise of supporting the cause. While wearing pink ribbons[1]seemingly supports women, for me the pink ribbon is just another scar, a reminder of the wounds inflicted by my "battle" with cancer.

Because I am both a survivor and a feminist scholar, I lean on feminist research and teachings to guide my advocacy. I comprehend that my existence as both a fat woman and as a cancer survivor is liminal, a state where my experiences can both be seen and ignored at the same time. This liminality aligns with Jeannine A. Gailey's theory of the hyper(in)visibility of fatness. Gailey asserts that fat women are simultaneously hypervisible, as people who take up more space, and hyperinvisible, as people who are marginalized and often ignored or treated inhumanely (7-8). That hyper(in)visibility also applies to being a cancer survivor. Once people see me as a survivor, it makes me seen in ways that I was often ignored as a fat woman. What people choose to see is a cancer survivor, but what remains hyperinvisible is that my survival was not an individual achievement, but rather a combination of luck, determination, and a community of support from doctors, nurses, medical technicians, family, friends, and co-workers. Keeping this aspect of my survival invisible implies that I actively fought the cancer when I allowed treatments to happen to me. While I made the choice to do the treatment and followed the medical recommendations, surviving cancer was not a meritocratic achievement, despite the way it can often be framed. Much like being fat makes me both visible and invisible, disclosing my status as a cancer survivor makes me visible in some ways, but my personalized experience becomes invisible, subsumed by the expectations of cancer narratives. This push and pull of visibility is liminal, a space where I struggle with both my own interpretation of my embodiment and the labels and ideas that others placed upon me.

As a scholar of embodied rhetorics, I want acceptance for how bodies *do* exist rather than some idealized, media-created version of how bodies *should* exist. While I can theorize this space for acceptance, it does not mean that I can always exist in that space. The theory and praxis do not always align. Some days, particularly when I bear the scars of fatness and cancer, that acceptance is difficult. On those days, I feel as if I am not being a good feminist or even a good advocate. Those are the days that are not discussed as readily in our scholarly work. As an embodied rhetorics scholar I need to acknowledge both my advocacy and the difficult days when I allow myself to listen to the structures that tell me that my body is inadequate, unhealthy, and/or unattractive. As a scholar, I know how rhetoric functions to marginalize bodies, to promote essentialized "normal" bodies that are limited by dichotomous approaches to identity. In my work, I complicate the ways we consider embodiment by supporting a more liminal approach. Even with this knowl-

1 Some scholarship has analyzed counternarratives and counterpublics in relation to "Breast Cancer Awareness." Two examples are Lori Kelly's examination of David Jay's "SCAR project" and Phaedra Pezzullo's analysis of the Toxic Links Coalition. In this essay, I focus more on specific personal narratives in relation to breast cancer rather than larger scale projects that resist pink ribbon culture.

edge, with my scholarly tools and research, these theories can never fully address my ontology. I can desire change and even promote for more inclusivity, but still feel insecure and unsure in my own skin. Recognizing my insecurities as well as my desire to advocate for change at the same time is a small feminist act, one that seemingly affects only me but has the potential to create a community of feminist scholars who also struggle with their own insecurities.

Because this process remains internal, it does not involve shouting in the streets or include a specific call to action; it is a small and subtle shift. Like Sara Ahmed suggests, the process is "*sensational*": "Feminism can begin with a body, a body in touch with a world, a body that is not at ease in a world; a body that fidgets and moves around. Things don't seem right" (21-22, original emphasis). Coming to terms with my own body is a feminist act that is not showy or loud. It is quiet and subtle. It may only be clear in the ways I carry myself or how I interact in the world. It may not be seen by others, but it is deeply known by me. It is not a protest in a traditional sense, but it is my own internalized protest against the ways in which I am told to dislike myself. This act is simply taking the time to consider my own positionality, my own experiences. It is knowing that I want the rhetoric about fatness and breast cancer to be more expansive and inclusive, but also learning to tell my own story. This act involves vulnerability, learning to share some of my interiority in a way to help others. That, in turn, encourages others to do the same, to share their own vulnerable moments to connect and point out the ways that the oppressive structures affect our own internalized bodily acceptance.

While I want to identify with the fat activists who promote acceptance of fat bodies, that connection can sometimes be difficult. The marginalization of fat people so pervades and stains our culture, that it can be difficult to recognize (Wann 34). There are dozens of narratives that are both overt and subtle criticisms of fatness, from advertisements for diet plans to social media posts that condemn people for "choosing" to be fat. Many of these narratives portray fat people as ignorant of the health benefits of losing weight when they, like me, are hyper aware of the rhetorics of health and how those rhetorics marginalize. We know that the medical community deems us unhealthy, and that everyday people do the same. We internalize the trauma of these experiences, the hyper(in)visibility that Gailey asserts. Our marked bodies serve as examples of what not to be, and we are constantly reminded that if we just worked harder, our bodies could be more "normal." These narratives remind us that our bodies are unhealthy, undesired, and a societal problem that needs to be fixed.

Fat activism and the Health at Any Size movements resist these narratives and portray more complicated experiences of fatness. In advocating for the acceptance of fat people, it can be difficult to resist the constant pressure to conform to a "normal" body. Also, the constantly changing standards of normality make it even more difficult to conform. Scholars, such as Tressie McMillan Cottom, define these changing standards as tools to support whiteness: "That is because beauty isn't actually what you look like; beauty is the preferences that reproduce the existing social order. What is beautiful is whatever will keep weekend lake parties safe from strange darker people" (44). Thus, these "norms" are designed both to make me, as a white woman, participate in the capitalist enterprise (buy products, join a diet program, pay for miracle cures) and

to exclude BIPOC women from being included in these norms. Scholars such as Sabrina Strings explains how anti-fatness is rooted in anti-blackness, saying that critiques of fat bodies "have been one way the body has been used to craft and legitimate race, sex, and class hierarchies" (6). Although Strings outlines how this hierarchical structure has historical roots, these hierarchical structures persist, deeming some bodies as less valuable than others.

Despite my knowledge of these oppressive structures of normality and beauty standards, I cannot fully erase that subconscious desire for a "normal" body. Roxane Gay discusses this at length in her memoir *Hunger*:

> Every woman I know is on a perpetual diet. I know I don't feel comfortable in my body, but I want to and that's what I am working toward. I am working toward abandoning the damaging cultural messages that tell me my worth is strictly tied up in my body. I am trying to undo all the hateful things I tell myself. I am trying to find ways to hold my head high when I walk into a room, and to stare right back when people stare at me. (Gay, *Hunger* 300-301)

I think many of us feel this push and pull between wanting to live our lives and feeling the pressure to conform to societal standards. For me, I feel that same push and pull whenever I fly. As I prepare for the trip, I brace myself for the discomfort (seat belts that may not fit and a seat width that barely contains my hips) and the look of disappointment on the face of the person who must share the same row with me. As I sit on that plane, there is always a moment when I wish I were thin, so flying would be more comfortable. I even wish I were invisible, that I could be just another person on the plane rather than the "problem" that someone who sits next to me must deal with. I try to make myself as small as possible; I try to take up as little space as possible. On a plane, as with a lot of shared spaces, I am hyper(in)visible. Others watch my body size and render my existence as a person invisible. I feel the stares, the discomfort, the pressure to conform. Then, I remember that no one on the plane is comfortable and that planes are now designed to cram as many bodies as possible into a small space. I remember that my discomfort comes from the ways that planes exist and how society has chosen to blame the fat person on the plane rather than acknowledge that the seats are smaller and closer to each other. In that moment, the advocate takes over, the person who recognizes the injustice of the situation rather than the fat phobia. Even still, the small nagging voice of inadequacy remains; I have just quelled it in a moment.

Recognizing this liminality of the desire to advocate for oneself while also feeling the pressure to conform can be a small form of feminism. It is, as Ahmed said, sensational, understanding the multiple sensations that are occurring at the same time. Additionally, my experience with airplanes offers an example of how I have learned from my body. There are emotions and experiences tied directly to my body and those experiences are a form of knowledge: "Knowledge and meaning are never disembodied—they are always made by some*body*" (Knoblauch and Moeller 8, original emphasis). I do not want to ignore the knowledge that I gained from my embodied experiences, but I also want to stress that there are multiple ways of gain-

ing embodied knowledge, and I allow myself to be frustrated or even angry about the ways I learn from my own embodied experiences. I also allow myself to sometimes wish I did not have those experiences, such as occasionally wondering what my life would have been like without cancer or if I had been thin. Because I know of the deep connection between embodiment and knowledge, I know I would not be the same person. I would not be a person who could vulnerably tell you about how it is to live in my own body and to advocate for more acceptance of the heterogeneity of embodied experiences.

As a fat person there are many moments where others ignore my humanity and look at my body as a problem I can fix. I experience their stares of disgust, their passive aggressive and sometimes outright aggressive condemnation of my "choices," and their ignorance that equates all my health issues to my fatness. But now that I am a cancer survivor, I sometimes receive a reprieve from these condemnations. In a sense, my cancer gave me a free pass to be fat. Strangers certainly still treat me in the same way, but once people discover I am a cancer survivor that disdain for fatness morphs into a battle narrative where I have conquered the disease that scares them. Sharing my cancer narrative makes the audience feel vulnerable because they know that cancer can affect anyone. My vulnerability reminds them of their own vulnerability, which in turn leads to their empathy. In that sense, sharing my survivor status becomes a form of advocacy, where people see me as a survivor in the battle against cancer rather than a victim of fatness.

There are battle metaphors that pervade both fatness and cancer narratives. Both must be "defeated" through battles that happen on a societal level as well as on an individual level. The anti-obesity rhetoric frames fat as a national problem that can be solved through individual hard work, whereas breast cancer rhetorics focus on awareness and individual "heroes" who fight the disease. Many of these rhetorics suggest that fatness is caused by individual behavior whereas cancer happens to people. For example, Kathleen LeBesco suggests that "Fatness also marks one as a failure" (*Revolting Bodies* 58). Fat people are painted in terms of excess and the incapacity for self-control. Similarly, cancer is literally cells that grow uncontrollably, and thus, as Barbara Ehrenreich suggests, sometimes: "cancer is our metaphor for so many runaway social processes, like corruption and 'moral decay': we are no less out of control ourselves" (44). Being diagnosed with cancer can feel out of control, just as we can sometimes feel out of control when we gain weight. We can do all the things we are told are healthy and still gain weight or be diagnosed with a disease like cancer. Fatness and cancer can both occur because of myriad factors including genetics, environment, age, ethnicity, and social class. Most mainstream narratives about these experiences offer more unified narratives where people conquer fatness or cancer. Instead of endorsing more of these limiting narratives, we need complex narratives that address the experiences our bodies undergo and/or the mental weight of coping with those experiences. Rather than just advocating for acceptance, we should advocate for more nuanced and complicated narratives that show a spectrum of embodied experiences.

Another way that fatness and cancer connect is the ways they can both be incredibly isolating experiences and can include an underlying shame in "choosing" to be fat or succumbing to cancer. We use war metaphors to discuss losing weight and dealing with cancer because we look at both as if they are enemies

that need to be defeated. Gailey describes how "Fat is often discussed in hyperbolic terms of 'fighting fat,' 'battling fat,' or the 'catastrophic effects of fat'" (2). These metaphors paint fatness as an enemy that needs to be conquered, and failure to conquer fatness can be detrimental to an individual's health. There are similar metaphorical battles against cancer where, particularly breast cancer survivors are expected to be "chemotherapy warrior[s]" (Haas). People have called me a warrior and it seems like such a misrepresentation of what I experienced. As I already said, treatment is a passive process where you allow doctors to give you treatments that are incredibly difficult on your body. Marjorie Haas points out that the bald image you see of cancer survivors does not come from having cancer, but from the treatment for cancer. Chemotherapy caused me to lose my hair, but it is easier to blame cancer than the medical treatment because that treatment is how we "win the war" against cancer.

By using these battle metaphors, we ignore the human experiences tied to bodies. It is easier to hear the success stories of these "battles"—those who lost weight and those who survived cancer—rather than advocate for existing in fat bodies or even acknowledge the experience of succumbing to cancer. We want to tell people to lose weight rather than make the plane seats bigger. We do not want to discuss how cancer changes our bodies forever and how it does not always provide wisdom or insight. People often expect me to share some great life lessons I acquired from surviving the trauma of cancer. While certainly I have learned many things about myself, I like to remind people that I would have been happy to learn those life lessons without cancer. I also know that people don't want to hear that cancer makes me insecure and fearful, but being an advocate for a more honest representation of that experience means sharing my vulnerability, which sometimes can make people uncomfortable. People are more comfortable with the mainstream cancer narratives where people triumph over the disease. Even as I write this, I understand the irony that I am complaining about not learning lessons through cancer while sharing my experience, but I share my story because it is just that, my story, not some monolithic representation of all cancer narratives. Cancer did provide some insights, but it was not a prosthesis to replace other ways of learning such as age, experiences, and social interactions. Just like any embodied experience, cancer helped me learn, but it neither defines me nor represents my only embodied learning experience.

Therefore, I want to reframe my survivor identity. I survived cancer and now get to advocate by sharing how difficult that work is. Many breast cancer narratives focus on what Kristen Garrison describes as a "rhetoric of triumph," which she says ultimately has a negative effect not only on those who are fighting breast cancer, but also "on those of us who haven't had cancer yet." Additionally, Garrison points out that this rhetoric creates "unreasonable expectations for ourselves and others." By always positioning cancer as a battle, it creates those who win and lose the battle, but there are so many ways of experiencing cancer that are not beholden to a win/lose scenario. That binary, like most binaries, cannot express the complexities of embodied experiences. When I talk with other cancer survivors or read stories of cancer survivorship, they can be similar, but our own individual experiences are so different. Acknowledging those differences is a form of feminist work we can do. It may be a subtle shift, but it can have a more profound impact.

There is a similar "rhetoric of triumph" narrative tied to fatness. These often come in the form of weight loss testimonials, where someone finally starts to "enjoy their life" after losing weight. I will not use a specific example here because there are dozens of these displayed across multiple media every day. These narratives often use a battle narrative to suggest that the fat was defeated and now the person is healthy. We associate fatness and its pejorative partner, obesity, with myriad fatal diseases, even if those same diseases afflict thin and medium size people as well. Even fat activists struggle to fight back to these narratives. Using research from Carla Pfeffer, Kathleen LeBesco says many fat activists have taken measures to "manage" their weight ("On Fatness and Fluidity" 51). This shows that even fat activists struggle to acknowledge the complicated ways in which we exist in our bodies. LeBesco argues for a more fluid view of fatness, one that is not predicated on standards but on the fluidity of individual embodiment so "that we figure out how to give reign to fluidity without demanding it universally" ("On Fatness and Fluidity" 58). LeBesco points toward another issue with a binary of fat/thin and recognizing there are multiple sizes of bodies that do not have to exist as fat or thin. She also recognizes this struggle to accept one's own body while at the same time existing in a world that marginalizes and shames that same body type. Again, recognizing that struggle for internal acceptance is a form of feminism that may not be overt, but can be impactful.

We are all subjected to the societal structures that promote essentialized bodies while criticizing those who do not fulfill those expectations. We know that bodily control regulates how bodies must look, act, or perform, which Michel Foucault would call docile bodies. Docile bodies follow the expectations set forth by oppressive structures; docile bodies conform to standards and "improve" themselves to fit into these standards (Foucault 136). Docile bodies follow essentialist standards for bodies that Jay Dolmage traces back to Aristotelian roots (24). Docile bodies and, in turn, norms are designed to silence those bodies who do not conform to these standards. Norms compose a monolith that erases differences and promotes homogeneity.

The battle against cancer and the battle against obesity creates an essentialized view of both, in which stories become a monolith that erases difference. Through this essentializing, it creates only two ways of existing, either defeating fatness and cancer or becoming an unworthy participant who lost those battles. Narratives about both become subsumed by capitalistic culture that promotes "normality." For example, breast cancer awareness began as a grassroots feminist-centered campaign to get women compassionate and effective treatment, but it has become "an attractive object of corporate charity and a way for companies to brand themselves friends of the middle-aged female market" (Ehrenreich 48). Thus, challenging prevalent breast cancer narratives becomes a challenge to capitalism rather than just creating a space to talk about a more complicated experience. Similarly, Gailey points out fat being used as a war metaphor also suggests that fatness is seen as a disruption to our national security, something that we as a nation need to fight against (2). Existing in fat bodies resists the docile body and thus requires discipline to control. Both the battle against cancer and fat exists as a mythos that ultimately ignores embodied experiences. My body resists essentialism in size, in disease, in survival. Bodies like mine are told we should not exist as they are, but I am advocating that we change that in small feminist acts every day. We do this work by acknowledging that even if we want to conform to these capitalistic standards, our bodies change on their own. Bodies have their own wisdom,

their own knowledges. We must advocate for bodies existing as they are, not as society decides they should be.

These embodied experiences show the complicated expectations placed upon bodies to both exert individual strength and control despite the factors that affect that ability. Narratives have a way of controlling embodied experiences or protecting the stigmas that attempt to control bodies. As G. Thomas Couser points out, "Stigma serves to silence the stigmatized" (79). Couser's analysis of disability memoirs highlights how these narratives reinforce normalized perspectives that endorse a series of disability conventions rather than highlight the actual lived experiences of bodies. As a breast cancer survivor, I feel as if my lived experience does not fit neatly into the experiences of other survivors, and it should not. A pink ribbon cannot convey all the loss and gains I experienced through my treatment and recovery. My own narrative cannot fully erase the feelings of fear, inadequacy, and weakness that exist even now that I am past the all-important five-year cancer free milestone.[2] Language is a tool that has gotten me through so many aspects of my life, and yet it is inadequate to explain my experiences.

Because language alone is not how rhetoric functions. Rhetoric is deeply embedded in our bodies because "the body is also text" (Knoblauch and Moeller 10). Our bodies engage in rhetoric as well as receive and interpret rhetoric. Our knowledge comes from our bodies and my knowledge comes from existing in a body that has both experienced the shame of being fat and the praise for surviving cancer. That shame and praise exist simultaneously, and they shape how I engage with my body as well as how I engage with the world. Thus, I can both advocate for body size acceptance and feel inadequate in my body. I can both encourage friends to get mammograms and remain terrified to get my mammogram every year. Ahmed would describe that as my body's memory and this essay is about how I am trying to put my "body into words" (23). But the words are difficult because our bodies are material beings that words cannot always adequately describe. In a sense, we are all a series of paradoxes because none of us easily fit into the categories that are that are supposed to define us[3]. The same holds true for existing in feminist spaces. We can espouse the importance of equity and inclusion, but enacting these practices is much more difficult. Black feminist scholars, such as the late Audre Lorde and bell hooks, made this point decades ago by pointing out that feminism was mostly focused on issues that affect white women: "There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* that does not in fact exist" (Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex" 116, original emphasis). In many breast cancer narratives, there is an implied sisterhood of survival, but that can be limiting and does not acknowledge the individual experiences of being a survivor (even the word survivor is not a term that works for everyone). As feminists, we should recognize the complicated experience of people and not erase identities of Black women (hooks 7) or solely promote equality for one's own demographic group. Some of us cannot change our bodies or the way the world responds to our bodies, but we can still use our bodies as a form of resistance (Mckoy 221).

2 Five years denotes a period in which the likelihood of cancer recurrence diminishes significantly.

3 As David Valentine says: "This is, indeed, the basic problem of language: to describe something as seamless as lived experience, one needs categories. Yet a danger arises when those categories come to be seen as valid descriptions of experience rather than as tools used to apprehend that experience" (Valentine 217).

That resistance begins with the interior work of existing as a feminist in a world that does not want feminism (or to eliminate racism, classism or other hierarchical structures). Our everyday lives are inundated with a push for "normality," a homogeneity that erases our individuality and creates hierarchies that marginalize people. That does not mean there is an active push every minute of our days to conform, rather it is a slowly invading process that manifests in small ways every day. For example, how often do you hear someone talk about how they need to lose weight? How many ads do you come across for "superfoods" or "cancer-fighting foods" or even weight loss companies? All these solely seep into your psyche, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to ignore them.

Therefore, there are moments, even in my advocacy and pushing to support my existence, that I fall prey to these norms. I see a diet commercial and think, maybe I should lose weight. I see an ad for a gummy that "miraculously" makes you lose weight, and I wonder, should I buy those? Then there are the moments of guilt, guilt for not being thinner, guilt for feeling I should be thinner, guilt for not being feminist enough. Much like Gay talks about being a bad feminist, I feel like a bad feminist for not accepting my body. But at the same time, pointing out these contradictions is a small feminist act. It is easy to point out the problems with societal standards, it can be harder, more vulnerable, to share how those standards influence us. Sharing that internal struggle is feminist, even if it sometimes makes me feel like a bad feminist.

I know I am not alone in this. There is a growing body neutrality movement which is about not loving or hating your body, rather just accepting it for what it is: "Body neutrality turns the focus to not thinking about appearance at all, instead observing your body with no judgment" (Haupt). I like the idea of body neutrality, but in practice even body neutrality requires work. Again, you must let go of the societal pressures and accept your body for what it is. Unlike other forms of bodily acceptance though, Angela Haupt's article does acknowledge how this is not an easy process. Its last tenet is "Be patient," which acknowledges that this is an everyday process, one that does not just happen in a day. Haupt quotes fitness instructor Bethany C. Meyers, who says: "It's never too late to begin to unlearn some of the things that we've been taught for so long" (Haupt). This unlearning concept sticks with me. In many ways, unlearning is the foundation of all movements that push back against oppression, including feminism. We must unlearn the expectations of "normal" and embrace heterogeneity. To be feminist is to recognize the inherent hierarchical systems that are designed to separate us, make us feel inferior and promote whiteness, particularly white masculinity. To be feminist is to see these power structures, but also unlearn those practices that promote misogyny, misogynoir, racism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, and other oppressive structures. Unlearning is not an easy process. It is a slow and constant process that requires us to be patient with ourselves, but also not inflict harm on others while we work through this unlearning process.

With this in mind, I am carefully considering how I unlearn and how I can be patient with myself as I do so. Like Ahmed's point I noted earlier, feminism is grounded in the body (22). Taking this to heart, my body experiences feminism in ways that others do not. As I mentioned earlier, I am a woman in a fat body, who is also a cancer survivor. I have felt marginalization in these aspects of my identity, but I also have a

great number of privileges as a white heterosexual woman with an advanced degree. Even using Ahmed to discuss my own feminism gives me pause to wonder if I am appropriating or connecting. That pause is the difficult kind of work I am talking about here. It is the insecurity that I am not being feminist enough or that I do not understand how my positionality affects those around me. That careful consideration is important to feminism. Sometimes I do that well; other times I do not. I need to acknowledge when I do it poorly, apologize to those I hurt, and learn to do it better next time.

By the same token, when I think about my own position as a fat woman, I am less forgiving. Why do I look at myself in the mirror sometimes and think I am unattractive or refuse to take a neutral look at my body? The aspects of my body that I have always liked were my skin and my hair, and cancer treatment had a heavy effect on those. I temporarily lost my hair, fingernails, and toenails. I have the aforementioned scar on my chest, and small dots were tattooed on my body for radiation treatment. When I look at my body, I struggle sometimes to see past those signs of illness, which makes me feel others would do the same. As a body that has literally been marked by cancer and remains marked through fatness, bodily acceptance, or even neutrality, can be difficult. Much like Gay says: "One of my biggest fears is that I will never cut away all that scar tissue. One of my biggest hopes is that one day, I will have cut away most of that scar tissue" (*Hunger* 301). As someone who bears scars from fatness and cancer and who now moves through the world slower and is more susceptible to minor illnesses, I see that my body has changed. How can I find neutrality when my body won't do things it used to be able to do?

To even think these thoughts seems inherently unfeminist or even a problem for a scholar of embodiment. Spending so much time recognizing how my body is not normal can feel as if I am embracing the idea of my body not being normal, but I also know that "norms *norm*alize; they exert a near-magnetic effect on people, compelling them, often unwittingly, to fit in or risk censure, condemnation, and in some instances, danger" (Bobel and Kwan 1, original emphasis). Pushing back against norms requires constant vigilance; it is daunting and difficult. Resistance also does not always look the same for everyone. As Chris Bobel and Samantha Kwan say, embodied resistance "comes in many forms" (2). Embodied resistance resists norms whether through direct action or even inaction.

Oppressive systems tell us "how to be," not who we are. Resisting the narrative of "how to be" is a feminist act, even if I am only doing that work internally. In that sense, my choosing my own existence is a subtle form of feminism, a quiet but recursive process that I am constantly reinventing. I do this by talking about surviving breast cancer, but not wearing pink ribbons or other outward symbols of the disease. I do this by existing in my fat body and taking up space rather than trying to shrink myself. But I also do this by acknowledging that I am terrified of cancer returning or going through chemotherapy again. I do this by acknowledging my frustration that I do not fit comfortably in some spaces and sometimes I do not feel attractive. These dichotomous thoughts exist in me, and acknowledging the paradoxes is a feminist act.

Thus, even existing in a nonnormative body is a form of resistance. My fat body is resistance. Not wearing a pink ribbon is resistance. Showing off my scar is resistance. The way to recover from the spiral of insecurities that surround my body is remembering that my body's existence is resistance. Acknowledging that being in a nonnormative body is difficult and that sometimes I am not a good advocate even for myself can also be resistance. When we talk about feminism and embodied resistance, we also need to talk about how difficult it is. I am not saying we should not celebrate the moments when we show our feminist strength, but we need to also talk about the moments, even those private moments, where we are unsure. Where it seems easier if we would just conform. We need to remember as Sara Hendren says: "Our bodies are not just the sacks of flesh that hold our 'real' intellectual selves; they are not fixed entities but mind-bogglingly adaptive, responsive instruments" (29). Our bodies are not designed to be static neutral objects, but rather ever-changing material entities that adapt to the world as it changes. Resisting the allure of normal and all the negative associations it inflicts on our bodies is difficult work. We need more spaces where we talk about that difficulty.

The ability to talk about these paradoxes within ourselves can serve as a sort of feminist acceptance. Embracing our struggles with self-identity alongside our drive for inclusion is accepting both the world as it is and the world as we want it to be. But as we have those conversations, we need to do them with care and not to harm. As Audre Lorde said in her *Cancer Journals*: "Each of us struggles daily with the pressures of conformity and the loneliness of difference from which those choices seem to offer escape" (2). Recognizing that sometimes I want my body to be considered normal does not mean I want to be invisible or even hyper-(in)visible. I need to recognize those moments of insecurity as part of human existence and a symptom of oppressive structures, not a real representation of the complicated ways in which we exist.

Although this is challenging work, we can connect with one another and see these myriad ways of existing through vulnerability, which is the way we connect to one another. We need spaces where we can share our experiences, both the days when we love ourselves and the days when we feel the weight of conformity. We need to acknowledge that we all live with the contradictions that are inherent in existing in a society that deems some people normal while marginalizing the majority of people. We need to show ourselves kindness, even in those moments when we feel as if our bodies are not accepted or wanted by society. We need grace that recognizes letting go of the myriad voices that support oppression does not happen quickly. As Gloria Anzaldúa said: "For if she changed her relationship to her body and that in turn changed her relationship to another's body then she would change her relationship to the world. And when *that* happened she would *change* the world" (71, original emphasis). We need to recognize that the change within ourselves can be just as difficult as change in the world.

I believe that all feminist scholars are really embodiment scholars. After all, our bodies are at the center of all feminist scholarship. Thus, coming to terms with how we think about our bodies, knowing sometimes we feel empowered to find spaces for our particular bodies and other times we feel the pressure to conform is important but sometimes under recognized feminist work. These are sometimes the small femi-

nist acts we perform every day. We engage in small feminist acts both when we loudly declare our existence and when we internally acknowledge our own insecurities. Our feminist work exists both in the loud declarations and the quiet moments of insecurity as well all of the volumes in between. I don't want to pretend I am the only scholar who has made this point, but I feel my own intersections, being a fat cancer survivor, may be recognized by others who have similar experiences.

I also want to say, it is important that we regularly recognize that coming to terms with our bodies and how they affect our scholarship is never ending. Just as society shifts normal to make it impossible for the global majority to achieve, we must re-examine our own relationships with our bodies and come to terms with our own feminist positionality. Feminist work does not just involve declaring you are feminist; it is a series of small everyday acts that sometimes we do well and sometimes we do not. We must remember that sometimes we feel that pressure to conform and not punish ourselves for not being feminist enough. We must return to our bodies, our own experiences, and choose our own ways to be. Being true to that internalized work involves vulnerability, the vulnerability that allows you to exist in the contradictions of being both a good and bad feminist as well as the contradictions of being an advocate for bodily acceptance and still feeling the desire to conform to body standards. Coming to terms with these internalized contradictions and still choosing to advocate for your bodies and other people's bodies is a small feminist act, but one that can be powerful and influential. We need not only to find the subtle ways for us to exist that feel true to us but accept and embrace the subtle ways each of us comes to terms with our own internalized insecurities as well as our bodies. Recognizing your own contradictions provides a small feminist building block that we can use to build inclusive and heterogeneous feminist environments.

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