

Revisiting Cinderella: Breaking the Stereotypical Beauty Standards

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Abstract

*In Contemporary society, the promotion of narrow and idealized beauty standards has led to the marginalization of bodies that do not confirm to these standards. The study explores the transformative potential of fashion and clothing choices as means to challenge and subvert these beauty ideals from a feminist perspective. Recent emergence of body positivity movement led to the celebration of different body types. By presenting diverse bodies through fashion, the study aims to foster a more inclusive representation of beauty. The study embarks on a transformative journey through the reimagined world of Cinderella. Giving voice to marginalized bodies through fashion choices as examined in Julie Murphy's novel *If the Shoe Fits* (2021). As fashion holds an immense potential beyond mere aesthetic appeal; it serves as powerful medium for constructing and expressing personal identity. The purpose of the study is to critically examine how contemporary literature reacts to the social construction of ideal body image. *If the Shoe Fits* (2021) challenges the exclusive thinking of society through deconstructing beauty ideals, examining the intricate relationship between fashion choices and the subversion of normative standards of physical beauty through presenting positive images of diverse bodies in literature.*

Keywords: *beauty, fashion, body positivity, feminism, Julie Murphy, If the Shoe Fits.*

Introduction

Historically, the concept of beauty has been intimately connected to the female body, with artistic and literary portrayals of idealized women spanning various epochs and civilizations. The patriarchal gaze, often the driving force behind these representations that have commodified and objectified women's bodies, rendering them instruments of desire and control. Consequently, beauty has become an instrument of oppression, with women's value and agency inextricably linked to their adherence to these cultural ideals.

Cinderella, for example, is a classic fairy tale that has been adapted into various forms of literature and media throughout history. The story revolves around a young woman who transforms from a servant to a princess with the help of a magical fairy godmother. However, the portrayal of Cinderella's physical appearance and the emphasis on her attire have contributed to the stereotypical standards of beauty and fashion. Without her beauty and the perfect body shape, Cinderella would remain a maid doing household in her stepmother's house. The prince would not notice her. She was an invisible, powerless girl. Once the prince married her, everyone else noticed her. Her beauty gained her status in society and the love of the wealthiest man in the kingdom. This thesis argues that the

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traditional portrayal of Cinderella perpetuates narrow standards of beauty and fashion, and that a feminist perspective is needed to challenge and disrupt these norms.

Despite its widespread popularity, the story of Cinderella reinforces patriarchal beauty standards that are harmful to women. For centuries, women have been told that they must be thin, white, and conventionally beautiful in order to be considered attractive and valuable.

Cinderella's clothing reflects traditional gender roles, as her ball gown is a symbol of her femininity and her status as a potential wife. As Greer (1971) asserts that "Cinderella's ball gown represents her only means of escape from her oppressive situation, emphasizing the importance of marriage as the only option available to women" (p. 59). The fact that Cinderella's dress is the key to her escape from her miserable life highlights the restrictive gender roles imposed on women, which limit their options and force them to rely on their appearance and social status to achieve success.

Cinderella's story is closely related to the "beauty myth," in which Naomi Wolf argues in her seminal work, *The Beauty Myth* (2002), that the beauty myth is the belief that a woman's worth and success are tied to her bodily attractiveness, and that she is judged primarily by her appearance rather than intelligence, accomplishments, or character. The myth creates unrealistic standards, which cannot be achieved by the majority and lead to body dissatisfaction, and other negative consequences.

Cinderella's story exemplifies the beauty myth in several ways. Her beauty is highlighted and admired by the prince and other characters in the story, and her appearance is transformed by the fairy godmother to make her more attractive and appealing. Cinderella's story reflects the beauty myth by emphasizing the importance of physical beauty and feminine allure over more important qualities, such as intelligence, creativity, or compassion (Brownmiller, 1984).

According to Naomi Wolf (2002), "The beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance" (p. 14), which refers to the social ideal of beauty, it is not only a matter of appearance but also about how women should behave to meet this ideal, conforming to specific expectations and norms that dictate how women should act, think, and behave in order to be considered beautiful. Thus, the beauty myth reveals the price that women must pay to be accepted into a patriarchal system. As a result, Cinderella is not just a story about a girl who marries a prince, it is a story about the unrealistic expectations society puts on women to look a certain way and behave in a certain manner.

Cinderella's physical appearance is frequently described as conventionally beautiful, with a focus on her physical attributes. In the original stories by Charles Perrault, and Grimms brothers, Cinderella is described as having the most beautiful hair and complexion in the world. Cinderella's physical appearance is heavily emphasized through her dress and makeover. Her transformation from a ragged servant to a beautiful princess is celebrated, and her beauty is emphasized through the dress, the hairstyle, and makeup. The emphasis on Cinderella's physical appearance reinforces the notion that beauty is defined by physical features that conform to societal standards.

Cinderella's beauty makes her powerless as Naomi Wolf (2002) argues, "the beauty myth...teaches women to see themselves as objects first and foremost" (p. 50). Cinderella is valued primarily for her physical beauty, which is presented as her only redeeming feature. Her eventual transformation into a beautiful princess reinforces the idea that a woman's worth is only based upon her appearance.

The emphasis on Cinderella's physical appearance, particularly in her transformation from rags to riches, has also been a subject of critique. The fairy tale reinforces traditional beauty standards by suggesting that only conventionally attractive women can achieve success and happiness. Thus, the beauty myth reveals that Cinderella is not herself, and her face and feet are not hers, but are instead transformed by a fairy godmother's magic so

that they meet a prince's notion of beauty. Moreover, Cinderella's transformation into a beautiful princess through magic, reinforces the idea that a woman's worth is solely dependent on her physical appearance. Many women make artificial attempts to achieve unrealistic beauty standards. Regardless of the details, ideal bodies have never been indicative of typical female anatomy. Instead, they have often shown unrealistically thin or otherwise perfect bodies for women to aspire to. Many women, perhaps the vast majority of women, have spent inordinate amounts of time, energy, and emotional resources on hopeless quests to conform to these norms. Women both have been known to constantly compare themselves to ideal beauty standards by analyzing every inch of their bodies. Gillespie (1998) puts it:

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the ...?" Most of the time when the question is raised, the answer isn't you. In fact, most women rarely (as in almost never) look in a mirror and are satisfied with what they see. You are either too short or too tall, too fat, or too thin. Your eyes aren't the shape, size or color that is considered beautiful. Your hair doesn't blow in the wind, or drape on your shoulder, or fluff out on pillow. You worry because you have skinny legs or thunder thighs. You worry about time and wrinkles, stretch marks and cellulite. (p. 186)

The Western ideal of beauty is perpetuated through various mediums such as arts, films, literature, folklore, and toys like Barbie dolls. Fairy tales abound with narratives that depict the victory of aesthetically pleasing characters who are also perceived to possess virtuous qualities. According to Synnott (1990), the concept of the beauty myth is not only rooted in physical appearance and philosophical beliefs, but also in historical literary works. Fairy tales instill children with a sense of enchantment. In the Grimm's version of Cinderella, the protagonist is able to win the affection of the prince due to her exceptional physical attractiveness and moral uprightness. The narratives not only showcase the prevalence of morality but also emphasize the significance of aesthetics. The aforementioned narratives serve to exemplify the enigmatic nature of beauty and impart knowledge to juveniles regarding the universal value and pragmatic usefulness of aesthetic appeal.

However, the feminist movement has provided a platform for resistance and subversion, as scholars and activities alike have sought to contest and redefine the dominant narratives surrounding beauty and the female body.

In contemporary literature there has been a shift towards more inclusive attitudes in fashion, with embracing a diverse range of body types and sizes. The present study employs a feminist approach to fashion in which it seeks to empower individuals to embrace their bodies, regardless of size, shape or ability, and to recognize that beauty comes in many forms. By promoting diversity and inclusivity, fashion becomes a force for change, challenging harmful beauty norms and creating a more equitable and accepting society.

Julie Murphy's novel *If the Shoe Fits* (2021) offers a fresh perspective on body positivity and the role of fashion in redefining the concept of beauty. As delving into the narrative, the study will analyze how the protagonist, Cindy, use fashion as a vehicle for self-expression, defying traditional beauty norms and asserting her autonomy in the process.

Building on the insights of feminist theorists such as Judith Butler, who posited that "performativity cannot be understood outside the process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms" (Butler, 1993, p. 95). Through Butler's lens, fashion is more than just a personal style but it is rather a form of performance that can challenge and subvert traditionally held identities.

Literature Review

The conventional representation of Cinderella has been broadly scrutinized for its promotion of gender stereotypes and the enforcement of unrealistic beauty ideals. Numerous scholars have contended that the narrative of Cinderella reinforces the belief that a woman's value is linked to her beauty and her successful appeal to a male suitor (Baker & Grauerholz, 2003; Zipes, 2012).

Feminist scholarship has been instrumental in examining the ways literature either supports or undermines traditional beauty norms and gender roles. The feminist analysis of Cinderella, has been a subject of considerable interest within the field of literary criticism. Prominent scholars like Karen E. Rowe, investigated the ways in which these tales contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchal norms by confining women to passive roles. Rowe posits that fairy tales shape women's perception of the world, potentially leading to subconscious transference of these narratives into real world. These norms exalt passivity, dependency and self-sacrifice.

Alena Veselá, in her study entitled "Gender Stereotypes in Fairy Tales" (2014), provides an insightful critique of Cinderella's characterization. Veselá, observes that Cinderella, despite her challenging life, remains compliant, obedient and virtuous. She escapes her harsh reality by dreaming of a better life, typically one involving a prince. The narrative suggests that the prince is the only means of escape from a life of despair and inequity. Moreover, Veselá further contends that Cinderella's strategy for winning the prince's heart is entirely reliant upon her physical appearance, accentuated by an exquisite dress.

In response to these critiques, numerous authors have attempted to rewrite classic fairy tales from feminist perspectives to give voice to women such as Dafhne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1979) and Marissa Meyer's *Cinder* (2012), offering alternative stories that challenge conventional gender roles and expectations, as the character ultimately overcomes adversity and takes control of her destiny.

To the best of knowledge, there are no studies that have been conducted upon Julie Murphy's novel *If the Shoe Fits* (2021). The novel can be seen as a broader tradition of feminist reinterpretations, offering a twist on Cinderella's story.

1.1 Modern Representation of Women in Julie Murphy's *If the shoe Fits*

In modern adaptations of princess narratives, the matter is different. The subversion and deconstruction of plots, patterns, and characters serve to transform female cultural identity, molding it into that of a self-reliant, emancipated, and assertive protagonist. According to Tosi (2009), a contemporary generation of intelligent women has the ability to challenge oppressive and conventional notions of femininity by actively engaging in various roles and exploring alternate avenues for self-identification as women.

Challenging unrealistic beauty expectations is evident in contemporary literature as in Julie Murphy's retelling of Cinderella "*If the Shoe Fits*". Julie Murphy is an American author of young adult (YA) and middle-grade fiction. Murphy is best known for her acclaimed YA novels, which often feature diverse characters and explore themes of body positivity, self-acceptance, and empowerment. Her debut novel, "*Side Effects May Vary*" (2014) Her second novel, "*Dumplin*" 2015, it was adapted into a Netflix movie in 2018. Murphy's other novels include "*Ramona Blue*" (2017), which features a queer protagonist, and "*Puddin*" (2018), a companion novel to "*Dumplin*" that follows two secondary characters from the first book. She has also written several middle-grade novels, including "*Dear Sweet Pea*" (2019) and "*If the Shoe Fits*" (2021), which is a contemporary retelling of the Cinderella story with a plus-size protagonist. In addition to her writing, Murphy is a vocal advocate for body positivity and social justice. She has spoken out against fat-phobia and discrimination in the publishing industry. Overall, Julie Murphy is a prominent and influential voice in the world of YA literature, known for her empowering and inclusive stories that resonate with readers of all ages.

Julie Murphy's *If the Shoe Fits* is a modern-day retelling of the classical fairy tale. Written in first person narrator to navigate the life of Cindy. The novel features a plus-size fashion designer named Cindy who is also a recent graduate of the prestigious Parsons School of Design. Cindy joins a reality TV show called "Before Midnight," hoping to gain visibility and recognition for her work. Failing to find clothes that fit her, Cindy, designs her own clothes and makes her own choices in life. From a feminist perspective, the retelling challenges traditional gender roles and societal beauty norms by portraying Cindy as a powerful and confident woman who doesn't need a man to save her.

Cindy deviates from the conventional portrayal of the thin princess and instead she possesses a larger body size. From the beginning of the novel, a character is introduced named Cindy, whose thoughts revolve around the arrival of her prince charming, bringing her pizza.

Along with a princess who promotes body positivity, the protagonist and her prince Charming engage in the narrative but ultimately do not form a lasting union due to his reluctance to make a commitment and her unwillingness to wait her whole life. Cindy successfully secures her dream job breaking the stereotypical image of women.

Murphy is pushing back against narrow definitions of beauty, and she's doing it by creating a character who embraces her size and makes her clothes, using her fashion sense as a way of exerting control over a world that's constantly trying to exert control over her. Cindy's fashion designs are not only a form of resistance, but also a way of asserting her independence and creativity. Cindy's fashion designs are an expression of her personality and her individuality. She's not interested in conforming to society's expectations of how she should look or dress. She wants to be true to herself and create something that reflects her own unique style. Through her fashion designs, Cindy also challenges the notion that women should adhere to a specific way of dressing in order to be considered attractive or desirable. Cindy's designs are not about trying to appeal to men or conform to societal expectations of femininity. She creates clothes that make her feel confident and beautiful, regardless of whether or not they fit within the narrow standards of beauty that society imposes on women.

Julie Murphy's novel "If the Shoe Fits" features the main character Cindy, a 22 years old fashion-loving woman who is passionate about designing her own clothing and shoes expressing herself through fashion. Cindy's love of fashion is evident from the beginning of the novel.

Is it such a crime to love shoes this much? I ask. It sounds materialistic, I know, but each one of these shoes represents a moment in time for me. A pair I saved up for. A pair I bought for a date. For a wedding. A funeral... And even a few pairs I've crafted myself. Shoes aren't just an obsession for me. They're my life's work. (Murphy, 2021, p.1)

Cindy's journey to success is inextricably linked to her passion for fashion and clothing design. Through the exploration of fashion and its relation to Cindy's body, the novel provides a nuanced and critical examination of the ways in which clothing can serve as both a means of empowerment and a reflection of one's identity.

As she is offered a place in a reality TV show, Cindy embraces a feminist notion of empowerment for being the only plus-sized girl in a place that all women are expected to have slender bodies, by deciding to join the show and by becoming the author of her own narrative.

Cindy rejects the idea of getting others to help her, as she refuses the fairy tale narratives of female passivity and dependency. Instead, she strives to achieve her goals and dreams on her own terms. This is evident in the following quote from the novel, "I think fairy tales might be more like cautionary tales than anything else, and fate is just an excuse for people to be inactive participants in their own lives" (Murphy, 2021, p. 24). This statement reflects Cindy's determination to chart her own course in life, rather than

relying on external forces to rescue or validate her. Here, Cindy asserts her own power and agency, refusing to be limited by the notion that her success or failure is predetermined by external forces. She recognizes that she has the ability to shape her own destiny, and is willing to work hard and take risks to achieve her goals.

Her narrative which emphasizes a desire for personal growth employs a jump to a place where her body is celebrated as the register of this self-realization. As Cindy implies “I’ve been hoping for inspiration, for something to get me out of my rut. What if It’s here in front of me. Sierra is getting her shot. What if this is mine wrapped up in a reality-TV-shaped box?” (Murphy, 2021, p. 30).

Being the only plus-sized woman who joins a reality TV show. Murphy challenges the idea that only thin, conventionally attractive women can be successful or find love. She rejects traditional fairy tale tropes and subverts them to create a powerful and empowering narrative for women.

When Cindy participates in the show, she thinks of it as an opportunity to be recognized and to be seen as she puts it:

I’ve been aimless for the last year, but I can’t ignore the little burst of excitement I feel when I think about what I could do if I won. That money, even after taxes, could be a real start to something huge for me and what might someday be my brand. (Murphy, 2021, p. 42)

This opportunity might change her life, as Beck recounts “For a lot of you, this will be a life-changing experience” (Murphy, 2021, p. 43). Cindy’s journey serves as a powerful reminder that women are capable of achieving great things when they refuse to be defined by societal expectations or limited by external constraints.

Cindy stands out from the typical fairy tale protagonists who are often portrayed as damsels in distress waiting for their prince charming to rescue them. She embodies a feminist viewpoint that prioritizes the significance of enabling women to exercise agency in their decision-making and lead autonomous lives. The discourse surrounding feminism, specifically the contemporary feminist language emphasizes self-determination as a means of empowerment. Women have the ability to achieve empowerment by means of their professional pursuits.

Murphy shows how cosmopolitanism can empower women to pursue their dreams, challenge stereotypes, and break barriers. Overall, “If the Shoe Fits” clearly demonstrates the significance of cosmopolitanism both in literature and in real life. As Cindy asserts “I don’t have many rules, but the first and most important among them is: shoes first” (Murphy, 2021, p. 25). She attempts to create a brand of her own where she designs clothes and shoes in a brand named “Cindy Originals”.

Another significant departure from the traditional narrative is the portrayal of female relationships in “If the Shoe Fits.” Instead of perpetuating the stereotype of women as competitive and envious, the novel emphasizes the power of sisterhood and relation with friends. Cindy’s stepsisters, for instance, are not wicked rivals but supportive allies who help her navigate the challenges of her new life. “All around me, my stepsiblings raise their glasses. Erica glows as all our attention turns to her. “Our sweet Cindy is finally home, we love you, I know you’re figuring out your next steps, but whatever you do your future is bright.” (Murphy, 2021, p. 17). This shift underscores the importance of empowering female relationships and dismantles the trope of women as adversaries. Unlike the traditional Cinderella, in which she used to be alone without anyone being on her side, Cindy has friends who encourage her in whatever she does in her life. Whenever Cindy gets frustrated in her life, she has her friend, Sierra, who supports her. Surprised by Cindy for being on the show Sierra writes a letter to her:

If you're going to be there, you have to let yourself stand in the spotlight. Don't be meek or shy... Be the Cindy I know, and stop doing this halfway. Be a showstopper... You've gotta trust yourself. It's what I've been telling you all year. You've made it this far in one piece, right? You're there for a reason. (Murphy, 2021, p. 147)

Further, exploring the complex interplay between love, ambition and personal agency. While the traditional Cinderella narrative prioritizes love as the ultimate goal of women's happiness, Murphy's novel challenges this notion by emphasizing the importance of personal fulfillment and independence. Cindy's success in the fashion industry takes precedence over her romantic relationship with Henry. Cindy faces a defining moment when she must choose between pursuing her dream on going in a job interview in a place where her dreams might come to true or following her heart to be with Henry. As she says:

All he needed to say was I choose you. You win. Just a whisper would've sufficed. But no matter how many times I dreamed that he would, Henry never said that, he never chose me. After putting my life on hold since graduation, I don't think I can put it off any longer if all that's waiting for me is a maybe. (Murphy, 2021, p. 208)

Cindy's decision to prioritize her career over her relationship with Henry is a powerful and subversive act. As she posits "I choose myself" (Murphy, 2021, p. 220). By choosing to prioritize her career and aspirations over the promise of romantic love, Cindy asserts her right to define her own destiny and happiness. This narrative choice reflects a broader shift in contemporary literature, which increasingly acknowledges and celebrates the multifaceted nature of women's lives and desires beyond the confines of traditional romantic narratives.

1.2 Fashion and Identity Formation: Performing Fashion in Julie Murphy's *If the Shoe Fits*

Through fashion, a woman has the ability to reclaim her body as her own, transforming it from an object of male gaze into a tool of her own self-expression. Fashion is not just a frivolous pursuit, but rather a means of expression that allows to carve a woman's own unique identity. In a world that seeks to erase women's bodies, fashion becomes a tool for reclamation and liberation. Through fashion, women can assert their own vision of beauty and challenge the dominant narratives that seek to control them. Through their fashion choices, characters can challenge the construction and assert their identity. In doing so, they become a voice for marginalized bodies in the fashion industry and a symbol of individuality and self-expression in the face of social conformity.

The relation between identity and attire is significant. The presentation of clothing serves as a means to convey, represent, and mold one's identity, endowing it with a tangible, physical manifestation. Dress is associated with expressivity, agency, and choice. The study of clothing serves as a significant means of comprehending the concept of identity in relation to the body (Brumberg, 1997; Entwistle, 2000). Apparel serves as a purpose beyond mere bodily coverage. According to Becker (1997), the act of dressing involves the necessity of obtaining suitable attire to navigate a given situation and convey an identity that aligns with one's personal values. Fashion is a way of performing autonomy and agency through the body. As Arnold (2009), a fashion historian, argues, Fashion is a performance, and clothing is the costume that allows individuals to construct and present their identities.

The relationship between clothing and identity has been analyzed through the lens of performativity, highlighting its significance in acts of self-expression and representation. The aforementioned analyses possess a benefit in that they encompass the dynamic interplay between the self, body, and attire, recognizing the corporeal essence of clothing as it simultaneously communicates identity to the external environment and influences and strengthens it for the individual on a tangible physical level. As Craik (1994)

suggests, clothed bodies serve as instruments for self-regulation. The aforementioned accounts are indicative of postmodern concepts such as expressivity, choice, and agency. These notions align with the portrayal of fashion in consumer culture, which places great importance on the creation of a distinct and personalized identity through the acquisition of consumer goods. The purported significance of choice and agency in attire, as well as in other domains, is subject to considerable emphasis.

Fashion can be viewed as a tool to challenge the dichotomies that constrain the body, by means of a sequence of acts aimed at achieving a continual state of transformation. The fashion industry serves as a platform for both the manifestation of gender expression and the production of performative acts. According to Judith Butler's (1990), gender is a socially constructed concept that can be manipulated in diverse manners to represent distinct identities that are performative in nature. Individuals generate discursive identities that are inherently paradoxical by means of their gestures and appearances, particularly in relation to sexuality. As Butler's assertion, the instability of all physical entities is discernible through their external manifestation. According to Butler, the deconstruction of gender ideologies necessitates an initial deconstruction of the power dynamics associated with the body, a stance that closely aligns with the ideological position embraced by post-rational feminists (Butler, 1990).

Today, women have the opportunity to utilize fashion as a medium for self-expression, rather than solely conforming to societal norms and expectations regarding femininity. The process of performativity, as stated by Plate and Smelik (2013) presents a paradoxical opportunity for "change and agency, as each repetition carries with it the potential for differentiation" (p. 8).

According to Entwistle (2001), there exists a reciprocal relationship between the body and dress, wherein dress imparts social significance to the body, while the body, in return, brings vitality and substance to dress (Entwistle as cited in Entwistle and Wilson, 2001).

Fashion is a process that cannot be fixed or frozen. Fashion often celebrates successful bluff, the transformation from an old identity to a new. Diana Taylor (2003) further argues, "as one of the most visible forms of consumption, [clothing] performs a major role in the social construction of identity" and is "useful in maintaining or subverting symbolic boundaries" (p. 1). Clothes possess significant rhetorical potential, as Kaiser (2001) puts it, "clothing possesses both public and personal significance" (p. 3). Thereby providing valuable insights into the wearer's persona and the prevailing cultural milieu. Moreover, clothing often serves as a medium for wearers to challenge the established social hierarchy.

Despite the wearer's intention, clothing is invariably imbued with meaning. Hence, analyzing attire as a form of communication provides diverse rhetorical perspectives, especially when scrutinizing a particular era and theoretical framework. Butler (1990) argues that gender is performative and constructed through various "stylized repetitions of acts" (p. 179). Attire often fulfills the dual purpose of providing structural support and demarcating gender boundaries. As a performative facade, it holds significant influence. Nevertheless, its potency surpasses the mere distinction between genders. Butler's work serves as a source of inspiration to explore alternative avenues through which clothing, as a performative instrument, can influence the observer's perception of the wearer. Apparel has the potential to challenge conventional ideals and criteria of physical attractiveness. The act of wearing clothes can be considered performative. Characters are known to embody their attire through diverse actions.

In "If the Shoe Fits," Julie Murphy showcases the transformative potential of fashion in the construction of one's identity. Through Cindy's character, the novel promotes the power of self-expression, and the dismantling of norms. By centering the experiences of a plus-size protagonist navigating the fashion industry, Murphy's novel invites readers to

critically examine the ways in which fashion intersects with feminism, ultimately advocating for a more inclusive and empowering approach to style and identity.

Cindy's fashion choices become a form of gender performance that disrupts the traditional expectations placed on women's bodies. Through her clothing and personal style, she challenges the preconceived notions of how a plus-size woman should dress and present herself. In doing so, she highlights the performative nature of fashion and how it can be a powerful tool for expressing one's identity and subverting established norms. Cindy challenges the dominant narrative that associates thinness with beauty and redefines beauty on her own terms. In doing so, she not only constructs her own identity but also encourages other women to reconsider and question the performative aspects of fashion choices.

Fashion scholar Elizabeth Wilson (1984) further expands on this idea, stating, "Fashion is one of the most powerful means through which individuals construct their identities" (p. 122). Fashion allows individuals to project certain images and narratives about themselves, influencing how they are perceived and how they understand themselves. Through the choices of clothing, and personal style, individuals can align themselves with certain subcultures, challenge social norms, or communicate specific aspects of their identity.

In *If the Shoe Fits*, Julie Murphy presents an unconventional character who defies expectations by creating her own path through her sartorial choices by stating "If the shoe doesn't fit, make your own" (Murphy). Presenting Cindy, who navigates the complexities of identity construction through fashion. The story reimagines the classical Cinderella fairy tale, placing Cindy in the world of reality television as she competes for the affections of a prince on a dating show. By using Judith Butler's theory of performativity, and analyzing how Cindy's journey is shaped through her fashion choices. Butler (1990) treats gender as a performative act, meaning that it is constructed through repetitive behaviors and actions, rather than being an innate identity. Applying this framework, one can explore how Cindy's fashion choices serve as a means for her to perform her identity and challenge societal norms around body image and beauty.

From the beginning of the novel fashion is portrayed as a vibrant and integral part in Cindy's life "I don't have many rules, but the first and most important among them is: shoes first" (Murphy, 2021, p. 25). To design her own clothes, she went to Parson's school, "I went to school for design. Shoes. And clothes. And handbags. And anything I could fill the pages of my sketch pad with. But shoes were my first love" (Murphy, p. 26). As Wright comments on the way shoes represent liberation:

The stiletto is associated with glamour, with rebellion: it represents someone who is in some way 'modern' and 'up to date'. Therefore, it may be more accurate to suggest that the stiletto symbolizes liberation rather than subordination. In this sense it could be seen as progressive rather than retrogressive. It symbolizes a rejection of convention. (Wright as cited in Barnard, 2020, p. 281)

From the beginning of the novel Murphy shows that fashion is a central part in Cindy's life and how fashion transforms her character's life from an ordinary person to an iconic figure in the fashion industry. Seeking visibility, Cindy joins the *Before Midnight Show* to reveal the world her clothing and shoe designs that she crafted herself. Beck, representing the modern fairy godmother inspires Cindy to join the TV show "Can you fathom what it's like to go to bed one night totally normal and wake up the next morning with your name on the tip of the entire world's tongue? You want the world to see your work? What better way than once a week on primetime television" (Murphy, 2021, p. 27). Cindy perceives clothing as more than just covering oneself; she views it as a powerful tool for self-expression and transformation. Clothing becomes a tool for Cindy to dismantle stereotypes and break free from social limitations. "Ever since I was a kid, I

loved the way that clothing could transform you” (Murphy, p. 89). Thus, Munford (2007) argues that:

Fashion as an expression of protest and dissent, fashion can be used as a tool of resistance, and individuals design clothes that communicate defiance against the established fashion industry. The celebration of popular modes of femininity such as make-up, fashion and styling are vehicles of self-exploration, self-expression and individual empowerment. (p. 268)

Clothing allows individuals construct the desired image they wish to present. Butler calls “gender identity” a “performative accomplishment” (Butler, 1988, p. 520). Similarly, the construction of one’s identity through fashion choices can be regarded as an achievement. According to Butler, the body can be seen as a medium onto which clothing makes its mark, as it is not simply a physical entity but rather a constant and ongoing manifestation of potentialities. Butler believes that “the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time” (p. 523). Through sartorial choices, an individual can construct identity.

The act of wearing clothes is not a passive expression of gender identity. As Butler (1990) asserts, “gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure” (p. 531).

At the same time as the importance of fashion as a realm of serious investigation has been recognized, there has been a discernable shift away from the notion of fashion as an instrument of oppression to one that embraces it as an avenue of self-expression and creativity, as Cindy states “my style is a chance for me to express myself and to maybe even make someone rethink their snap judgment. But that’s just the small part of it. I love the lines. I love that it’s art you can wear”. (Murphy, 2021, p. 89). Wilson (1984) further explores, “ [fashion], as an aesthetic medium for the expression of ideas, desires and beliefs circulating in society. Fashion is, after all, “a form of visual art, a creation of images with the visible self as its medium” (p. 9). The body can be viewed as a medium for self-expression, where clothing serves as a tool for conveying one's unique internal characteristics through visual presentation. The significance embedded within fashion, particularly with regards to identity, is dynamic and subject to continuous transformation. In the act of presentation, individuals construct their own personal narrative by utilizing various methods, with clothing being a particularly salient and notable instance.

Moreover, Cindy's performance of her identity through fashion can be seen as an act of resistance against beauty standards. When she wears clothing that showcases her body, she is defying societal expectations and asserting her autonomy. Butler (1990) argues that “acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body” (p. 136). In this sense, Cindy's fashion choices become a way for her to create and assert her identity on her own terms.

In one of the competitions, protestants are asked to wear LuMack’s designs. The participants are typically asked to adhere to a certain standard of beauty, one that is often associated with being thin and fitting into a specific size. However, Cindy realizes that none of LuMac’s clothes fit her size commenting that:

Everyone shrieks with delight, but my stomach drops because I know all about LuMack. The history. The strengths. The weaknesses. But most important of all-the size range. And when it comes to size inclusivity, LuMack is still in the Dark Ages, with the size range that only goes to twelve and not even in their full collection. The slip dress, as iconic it is, was always the kind of garment that defined the heroin-chic look on models with producing hip bones and sunken cheeks. (Murphy,2021 p,133)

Asking for a dress in her size, Cindy struggles that LuMack designs do not offer clothing in her size. Provide a dress “In her size”, Beck says as discreetly as she can, like it’s something to hide. But it’s not. In fact, accommodating me is not that hard. If you want me on your damn show, make it possible for me to be included. That’s it. It’s that simple”. (Murphy, 2021, p. 134). Cindy resists dresses that do not fit her. Cindy actively defies societal norms and expectations, using fashion as a vehicle for self-assertion and agency. This resistance aligns with Butler’s notion of “subversive repetition, (Butler, 1990, p. 188). where the performance of gender can be disrupted and transformed through acts of defiance.

Cindy redesigns LuMac’s clothes and crafts a dress for herself so that it fits her body “I need scissors, safety pins, and fabric tape. And maybe a sewing kit” (Murphy, 2021, p.135). Through designing her own dress Cindy creates her own identity. Cindy walks on the runway stage wearing a dress that is a redesign of Marlena cover up and Charlotte shift dress, “I begin to walk, and I do my best to make each step nice and elongated ...keeping my eyes straight ahead for most the part, I glance down and risk a quick smile at Henry, which unfortunately means I see Lucy Mackenzie’s scowl. Well, lady, it was either this or walk the runway naked. Maybe start making clothing in my size and I won’t have to take a pair of scissors to your work” (Murphy, p. 137). By rejecting to wear what does not fit her body, she designs a dress that makes her beautiful, she does not hide her body nor she is ashamed of it, as butler (1990) notes “The body is not a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed; rather it is a practice of signification that both perpetuate and resists cultural norms (p. 12).

Thus, Cindy comments on the way that size options are not available “Clothes can be art, but they’re also a necessity. So many people in this industry act like clothing is for everyone, but fashion is only for a select few” (Murphy, 2021, p. 138). Struggling to find her own size to appear beautiful although every woman has the right to wear whatever they like without being confined to a specific body ideal. “The truth, though, is that clothing is fashion and fashion should be for everyone because clothing should be for everyone. And clothing for everyone is a first, small step to equality for everyone.” (Murphy, p. 138). In that transformative moment, Cindy realizes the immense power of fashion as a tool for self-expression. She recognizes that it is not merely about the clothes she wears but rather the statement she makes and the confidence she exudes. Fashion becomes her armor, allowing her to stand tall and unapologetically embrace her identity.

Going to the Before Midnight show is an opportunity for Cindy so that her clothes and shoes could be seen and to find a job where she sells her own designs. In the first contest of the show, Cindy wears from her collection Cindy originals, a pair of strappy turquoise heels. For Cindy, shoes are her “ultimate confidence” in which she appears in them like “a woman with agenda” (Murphy, 2021, p. 50). Thus, Cindy wins the first contest without getting eliminated.

In the scene from "If the Shoe Fits" by Julie Murphy, Cindy's moment on the runway serves as a transformative milestone. Through fashion, she unapologetically expresses her true self, embracing her individuality and defying societal expectations. It is a powerful reminder that clothing can be more than fabric and thread but it can be a vehicle for self-discovery, empowerment, and personal liberation as Garelick and Spiegelman (2010) state:

To have a style means for the most part to be conscious of making a choice. To choose a style is to engage in a performance, an act of willed self-definition. From our writing to our clothing, we make ourselves, our characters, through such choices. Sometimes we think – naively or idealistically – that the self has been given, that it is a hard core of being that comes with us from birth through our genes or some spiritual fountain. At other times, we realize that we fashion ourselves and also, more pointedly, that everything we do reflects and also constitutes who we are. (p. 6)

After the contest ends, Cindy is called by Lucy Mackenzie. Admitting that Lucy's designs were not fit to Cindy she had to make a statement about it "when I couldn't find anything on the rack in my size, I decided to... reinterpret your work." (Murphy, 2021, p. 138). Lucy steps on the stage. "That's a judicious way of saying you had to make do" (Murphy, p. 138), Lucy crosses her arms "You wear it well, my dear. And I like to see a bit of resourcefulness. The curves...suit you." (Murphy, p. 139). By showcasing her body on the stage, she rejects the rules of old generations and presents new bodies that does not confine to conventions. As Butler states, "one is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's cotemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well" (p. 521). Therefore, Fashion is praised for its inclination towards embracing change and its affinity for experimentation. According to Lipovetsky (1994):

Fashion is less a sign of class ambition than a way out of the world of tradition. It is one of the mirrors that allow us to see what constitutes our most remarkable historical destiny: the negation of the age-old power of the traditional past, the frenzied modern passion for novelty, the celebration of the social present. (p. 4)

The manner in which one dresses is a form of self-expression that involves the display of a distinctive appearance through the imaginative combination of diverse articles obtained from different origins. The promotion of individual creativity is emphasized in the manufacturing of the self, rather than blindly conforming to fashion trends.

Although Cindy does not win the reality TV show, but she made an impact on the show that has been profound. Her bold clothing captured the attention of the fashion world. Cindy gets job offers "my thumb hovers over the folder titled Job Prospects (60) This is why I chose to come on this show, isn't it. To get some visibility. Maybe this could be my silver lining" (Murphy, 2021, p. 201). The fashion company that offered her a job recognized the potential in Cindy's vision and saw an opportunity to collaborate with by giving her a platform to bring about change in the fashion industry. "Dear Cindy, My name is Renee Johnson, and my firm scouts out creatives and helps place them in positions that perfectly match their skill set. (Murphy, 2021, 202). "My client, Crowley Vincent, president of Gossamer, is looking to expand his brand and move into women's footwear. To make that happen, he is in search of a team of fresh, new talent." (Murphy, p. 202). Cindy sartorial choices in the show gives her an opportunity to showcase her designs to the world. Cindy goes to the interview with Vincent Crowley and says "I spent the last year just trying to survive. But I think I'm ready to dive back in. I think it's time" (Murphy, p. 214). without looking up, "use it," he says. "Whatever is that had you hang up. An ex, a death, or just plain old depression. The best part about crossing any bridge is the chance to look back and be able to fully understand where you came from. You're not a machine. You're not a computer. You're an artist, and any good artist knows life feeds into art and art feeds into life." (Murphy, p. 214)

Murphy celebrates what women choose to project to the world through their appearances. Fashion shapes women's social roles and personal identities. Cindy's role in promoting fashion. She dresses in a manner that deviates from conventional beauty standards. "Garments have the potential to express the individual's 'heroic defiance of conventional prejudice' with 'dress' as a manifestation of a possible site of conflict between fashion's idealizing guidelines and life's actual requirements" (Plock, 2019, p. 44). Fashion possesses significant rhetorical influence as it enables individuals to alter their realities by developing unique perspectives on the world (Kaiser, 2001, p. 52). Therefore, Clothing is not merely a passive component of daily life.

1.3 Celebrating Body Positivity: The Positive Representation of Diverse Bodies in Julie Murphy's *If the Shoe Fits*

For decades, women have been subjected to relentless body shaming, perpetuated by a beauty industry that profits from their insecurities. The media bombards with images of

airbrushed and manipulated bodies, creating an unattainable archetype that is detrimental to women's self-esteem. Unrealistic beauty standards not only reinforce negative body image but also foster a culture of comparison, and self-doubt among women. The societal promotion of a "thin ideal" can pose challenges for women in terms of body acceptance. Contemporary societal standards pertaining to the female physique emphasize slender body type, aesthetic appeal, and outward physical features (Paquette & Raine, 2004). Hence, the notion of body image has gained significant attention in contemporary research.

According to Bartky (1990), the act of dieting and closely regulating one's appetite, along with engaging in physical exercise, are practices that are enforced upon the body, particularly in the case of women's bodies. The distinction between physical exercise and societal expectations of femininity can be challenging to discern in the context of fitness. The societal expectation is for women to possess a body that conforms to a specific size and exhibits no indications of the natural ageing process. This is a component of the concept of the "ideal feminine body" (Bartky, 1990, pp. 69-71). Certain feminist perspectives contend that this phenomenon is a manifestation of patriarchal norms and expectations regarding women and their physicality, which have been assimilated by women themselves. Individuals have internalized the societal expectation of possessing a slender physique and experience feelings of shame in relation to their body weight (Bartky, 1990). According to Bordo (2003), there exists a societal perception that associates being overweight with negative moral attributes such as laziness, unattractiveness, non-conformity, and a lack of self-discipline.

The body positivity movement has surfaced as a potent influence in opposition to the detrimental beauty standards. The notion of body positivity has emerged as an idea that has garnered significant attention and scholarly inquiry over the past decade (Halliwell, 2015). It emphasizes the acceptance and celebration of diverse body types, promoting the belief that all bodies are beautiful, regardless of size, shape, or appearance. providing a platform for women to embrace their bodies and reject the harmful beauty ideals imposed upon them. The concept of body positivity encompasses a holistic approach to one's physical self, encompassing positive body image, self-assurance, and acceptance of one's body, irrespective of its size, shape, or weight. Rejecting societal ideals of attractiveness, and a broad conceptualization of beauty (Caldeira & Ridder, 2017; Dalley & Vidal, 2013; Halliwell, 2015; Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, & Augustus-Horvath, 2010). Body positivity emphasizes upon "increasing visibility of diverse representations of individuals who have been misrepresented or underrepresented in traditional mainstream media; promote self-love and acceptance towards stigmatized bodies" (Caldeira & Ridder, 2017, p.327).

Moreover, Cohen et al. (2019) contend that the body positivity serves as a critique against the media's depiction of the idealized female body and argues for embracing inclusivity.

Furthermore, the movement promotes the cultivation of a favourable perception of one's physical image across all aspects of embodiment. The primary tenets of the Body Positivity movement embrace diverse bodies. Cohen et al. (2019) posits that the movement encompasses a diverse range of bodies, including those that are considered "fat", ageing, of certain racial backgrounds such as black, and even those that are queered.

Further, Cohen et al. (2019) argue that the concept of Body Positivity challenges the media's portrayal of the ideal feminine body shape and advocates for the acceptance of diverse body types, despite the media's promotion of unrealistic beauty standards. According to Johansson's (2020) observations, body positivity can be regarded as a theory of practice, in addition to being a social movement, as she highlights that "body positivity is to be considered as a set of ideas, notions, and values and as a set of discursive practices performed within and through primarily digital spaces, travelling across national borders in interconnected ways" (p. 112). From a feminist perspective, the

study utilizes the body positive lens to celebrate fat bodies as beautiful and worthy of love in literature.

Rose (2018) advocates for the celebration of body diversity, “let’s celebrate body diversity, not stigmatize it” (para, 1). She argues that it would be more appropriate for society to embrace and celebrate the diversity of body types, rather than categorizing individuals as either “thin” or “big”. She further contends that people across the globe exhibit a wide range of body shapes and sizes. Despite the prevalence of diverse body types, discussions surrounding inclusivity are often neglected, with a disproportionate emphasis placed on specific body ideals that are deemed attractive and socially acceptable across various cultures.

In recent years, there has been a growing demand for diverse and inclusive representation in literature. Julie Murphy’s novel, “If the Shoe Fits”, stands as a shining example of positive representation of fat women. With her compelling storytelling and authentic portrayal of characters. Authors like Julie Murphy write about characters who deviate from the traditional role of the supportive backup character. Each individual possesses a unique identity, personal narrative, and accomplishments. The societal perception surrounding overweight females has undergone a transformation, enabling readers to not only relate to the main characters but also accept and celebrate their own individual identities.

In Julie Murphy's novel, the theme of body positivity is woven throughout the story. The main character, Cindy, is a plus-size woman who is often judged and underestimated because of her size. However, throughout the course of the novel, Cindy learns to love and accept her body for what it is and not let the opinions of others define her worth. The novel aligns with feminist values that reject the idea of women being judged by their appearance and promotes the idea of positive representation of the body. As the feminist author Roxane Gay (2017) argues that, women's bodies are always under scrutiny and surveillance, and our appearance is so often tied to our value and worth as human beings. It is exhausting and demoralizing, and it has to stop. By creating fashion that celebrates all body types, Cindy and the fashion industry are promoting the message that all bodies are beautiful and deserve to be seen.

One of the most powerful aspects of Cindy's story is her advocacy for inclusivity in the fashion industry. She recognizes that plus-sized women are underrepresented in the industry and works towards changing that. She believes that fashion should be inclusive and should celebrate all body types. Her journey to becoming a fashion designer is not just about achieving her dream but also about changing the narrative of the fashion industry to include more diversity.

Cindy's journey highlights the importance of rejecting patriarchal beauty standards and embracing one's uniqueness. The feminist movement has always been about empowering women to embrace their own power and worth, regardless of societal expectations. Cindy's story is a testament to this movement, as she breaks free from societal norms and embraces her own unique beauty. Murphy challenges these norms and showcases the journey of the protagonist, Cindy, as she learns to love and accept her body while pursuing her dreams in the fashion industry. Cindy’s step-mother tells her that she is unwanted in society because of her weight,

Oh, darling, it’s just a silly show. You wouldn’t want to waste your time with that. You’ve got so much a head of you. Reality TV is a perfect fit for some people, but for others, it can haunt them for years. (Murphy, 2021, p.23)

This quote touches upon the representation of fat bodies in society and the way that they are treated as others, and they are marginalized because they do not conform to mainstream beauty standards. “Is it...Is it because I’m fat? (Murphy, 2021, p. 23). Cindy’s question about her weight indicates a recognition of social biases against fat

bodies and the potential for discrimination or exclusion based on body size. She gasps and then chuckles nervously. “You’re not fat! Don’t say that about yourself” (Murphy, p. 23).

The prevailing perception of “fat” as something shameful and ugly stems from deeply ingrained social biases. The concept of “fat” has become entwined with negative connotations. Erica wants to hide the fact that Cindy is overweight and does not accept her being fat. “The one thing she can’t still seem quite to make sense of is how to talk about my body” Despite the pressure to conform to society standards of ideal bodies, Cindy has chosen a path in which she embraces her own body, unapologetically affirming, “Erica”, She says firmly, “I know what I am. It’s fine” (Murphy, 2021, p. 24). Cindy is not trying to hide her body nor she is ashamed of being fat. Erica’s lower lip quivers for a moment and then she bites it, holding it in place,

Cin, the moment those girls walk into the chateau, they become internet fodder. I know you’re beautiful and perfect, but others might not be so kind. I can’t guarantee you any kind of special treatment once you’re at the chateau. Cameras start rolling and that’s it. (Murphy, 2021, p. 24)

Media platforms perpetuate stigmatization towards fat individuals. Thus, fat women are often depicted in derogatory ways, subject to ridicule, shame, and mockery. The recent study rather challenges these notions that are imposed on fat women through Cindy’s character.

Although Cindy struggles because of society’s expectations and judgments on her appearance. However, Beck recognizes these expectations and encourages Cindy to join the reality TV show as a way to showcase her body and break free the stereotype. Beck convicts that “It’s time for America to see women of all shapes and sizes go after their dreams” (Murphy, 2021, p. 27). Therefore, Beck understands that by stepping forward and sharing their stories, women like Cindy can inspire others and encourage a more inclusive understanding of beauty and success. By featuring a plus-sized woman as the main character, Murphy sends a powerful message that women should not be limited by society’s stereotypes but rather embrace their own bodies and they should be represented in narratives where they are seen and given voice.

As Cindy asserts, “I’ve...I’ve always been fat. Plump as my dad used to say. And people are so quick to make up their minds about me before I even open my mouth” (Murphy, 2021, p. 89). Cindy’s speech highlights the experiences and challenges faced by Cindy, a fat woman, in a society that values thinness. her remark underscores the harmful tendency of people to make assumptions about her based on her body without giving her a chance to showcase her abilities. Individuals who identify as overweight are increasingly adopting the term “fat” as a means of reclaiming agency over their own bodies, as opposed to utilizing euphemistic descriptors such as “heavy-set” or “big-boned” (Gibson 2021; Saguy & Ward 2011). According to Renee Taylor (2017), unapologetic behavior entails a strong conviction that individuals should not feel compelled or apologize for their physical existence as human beings.

Joining the *Before Midnight* show and being the only plus- size woman on a Runway stage sends a powerful message that beauty comes in all shapes and sizes, and everyone deserves a chance to shine. Instead of running away or hiding her body from others, Cindy’s presence on the runway acts as a catalyst for a change within the fashion industry. Through her defiance of social expectations, she sparks a revolution to deconstruct the ideal femininity and beauty. As feminists Braziel and LeBesco (2001) state in *Bodies out of Bound: Fatness and Transgression*, that “one of our objectives, then, is unmasking the fat body, rendering it visible and present, rather than invisible and absent: seen, rather than unsightly” (p. 1). Cindy Captures the hearts of many women through her unapologetic presence on a reality TV show.

“Cindy! They freaking love you!”

“They? Who’s they?”

“The audience! The American people! You’re a hit! And what you said tonight to Henry about your love for fashion _pure gold!” (Murphy, 2021, p. 94). Beck gives Cindy her phone and shows her online comments from women who loved the way a plus-sized girl is on a TV show. Cindy starts reading the comments

@melodydiaz648

Yes, honey! finally, a plus-size queen on this show!

#BeforeMidnight

@notyourgirlfriend202

Is it just me or is the curvy girl the most interesting on this season?

#BeforeMidnight

@messyfeminist359

The Cindy girl is FIERCE! Where I can get those shoes? And that dress?

#BeforeMidnight (Murphy, 2021, p. 95)

These comments change the perspective that fat women are struggling with their bodies. Being on media as a fat woman and challenging the norms gives other marginalized women to speak up and have confidence in their bodies. “Yes, they even called you an up-and-coming designer with an eye for exquisite footwear!” (Murphy. 2021, p. 96).

As a plus-size woman who is proud of her body, Cindy says, “Being here, as a plus-size woman, is turning out to be something bigger than I had imagined. It’s exciting” (Murphy, 2021, p. 128). This quote highlights the impact of visibility for plus-size women. By being visible and occupying space, fat women challenge societal beauty norms and contribute to the broader movement towards body positivity and inclusivity. This recognition emphasizes the importance of representation and highlights the transformative power of visibility for marginalized bodies. Not being afraid of her body size and showing on a reality TV show indicates a powerful shift towards body positivity and the dismantling of beauty norms. As Sonya Renee Taylor (2018) states in *The Body is Not An Apology: The Power of Radical Self-love*, that the body is not an apology. It is not a thing to be pitied, despised, or ignored, but rather a celebration. Women can change the culture by acknowledging and celebrating that bodies come in many different forms and all of them are good. It starts with recognizing that their bodies are not a problem to be fixed or solved, but a unique expression of who they are. When we embrace our bodies as they are, we can start to see the beauty in all bodies.

Body positivity is a feminist issue because it challenges the oppressive beauty standards that have been imposed on women for centuries. Women have been socialized to believe that their worth is tied to their outward appearance, and that they must adhere to certain beauty norms to gain acceptance in society. These standards are often unrealistic and unattainable, leading to negative body image, low self-esteem, and even eating disorders.

Moreover, the promotion of body positivity is a feminist issue because it challenges the patriarchy's control over women's bodies. Women's bodies have been historically policed, controlled, and objectified by men, and body positivity seeks to reclaim women's autonomy over their bodies. It encourages women to prioritize their own comfort and happiness rather than conforming to societal norms and pleasing others.

Murphy subverts the traditional notion of the ideal thin through Cindy, a protagonist who defies expectations by having a larger body. Challenging the prevailing belief that

princesses must be thin to be considered beautiful and worthy of love but rather princesses come in all shapes and sizes.

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