

# Reclaiming Body Autonomy: Fatphobia and Self-Acceptance in Roxane Gay's *Hunger*

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## Abstract

In the United States, society's attitude towards fat women is complex and can be quite harsh. There is often a lot of stigma and discrimination against women who are perceived as overweight or obese. Fat women may face stereotypes that they are lazy, lack self-discipline, or are unhealthy, regardless of their actual lifestyle or health status. These challenges are compounded for Black fat women, who not only have to contend with the stigma of fatness but also face racialized discrimination, which further marginalizes their identities. Roxane Gay's memoir *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* (2017) provides an authentic account of the complexities surrounding fatness, trauma, and self-acceptance. This paper analyzes Gay's narrative through the lens of fat studies, examining her personal experiences with weight gain, societal stigma, and her journey toward self-acceptance. Fat Studies challenges the negative stereotypes that are associated with fatness, thus advocating for body diversity and acceptance. While studying Gay's experiences with a fat body in mainstream society, insights have been drawn from fat theorists namely Esther Rothblum, Marilyn Wann and Meghan Crabbe. By situating Gay's memoir within the broader context of fat studies, this study highlights how Gay's experiences reflect systemic issues of fatphobia and societal norms related to body size. The paper also critiques the medical and societal assumptions about obesity and explores Gay's resistance to these normative pressures. Through a detailed examination of Gay's account, this paper underscores the importance of challenging harmful societal attitudes and embracing body diversity, aligning with fat studies' advocacy for inclusivity and acceptance.

**Keywords:** Body Positivity; Fatphobia; Fatness; Self-acceptance; Trauma.

## Introduction

In the United States, women who are considered overweight or obese often face unfair treatment and negative stereotypes. Society tends to value thinness, which leads to discrimination against those who do not fit this ideal. Fat women are frequently judged more harshly, facing issues like reduced job opportunities and lower wages. Esther Rothblum in her essay titled "Fat Studies" published in the book *The Oxford Handbook of the Social Science of Obesity* (2011) aptly writes, ". . . women's appearance is often considered the most precious asset for marital and professional success. . . It is difficult to be female in the United States and not be aware of one's physical appearance" (174). Black fat women, in particular, face the added burden of racialized discrimination, as they are often devalued both for their body size and their race. They are seen as less capable or less attractive, which can hurt their self-esteem and limit their chances for success. This bias is sometimes supported by exaggerated health concerns about weight, overshadowing the real social and emotional challenges these women face. Fat studies work to challenge these unfair attitudes and push for a more accepting view of body diversity, aiming to create a society where women of all sizes are treated with respect and equality.

Roxane Gay's memoir *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* published in 2017, details her personal experience with weight, trauma and self-acceptance. In the memoir, Gay, a prominent voice in the fat acceptance movement addresses the stigma faced by people with fat bodies in a society where thinness is the norm. For Black fat women like Gay, these experiences are further compounded by the intersection of racialized oppression and body size discrimination, leading to unique challenges in navigating a world that marginalizes both their race and their bodies. While Roxane Gay's *Hunger* presents a deeply personal account of fatphobia in the United States, it is important to recognize that such experiences are not confined to one cultural or geographic context. Fatphobia manifests differently in various cultures, often influenced by local norms and values. The present paper attempts to study the embodied experience of Gay with weight gain, fatphobia and finally, self-acceptance through the lens of fat studies. It aims to explore how Gay's *Hunger* not only reflects but also challenges systemic fatphobia, and how her personal narrative contributes to the broader field of fat studies. By examining her experiences through various theoretical lenses, this analysis will highlight the intersections of identity and the societal impacts of fatphobia.

## Fat Studies

Fat studies is an interdisciplinary field that examines the social, cultural, and political dimensions of fatness and body size. It emerged in the late 20th century as a response to the stigmatization of larger bodies and the pervasive societal norms surrounding weight and health. In her essay titled "Fat Studies: An Invitation to Revolution," Marilyn Wann published in the book *The Fat Studies Reader* (2009) writes about what fat studies is not, "... if you believe that fat people could (and should) lose weight, then you are not doing fat studies. ... If you believe that being fat is a disease and that fat people cannot possibly enjoy good health or long life, then you are not doing fat studies" (ix). Fat studies trace its roots to the fat acceptance movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which sought to challenge societal norms and advocate for the rights of individuals with larger bodies. The field critiques the medicalization of fatness and the ways in which obesity is often pathologized. Fat studies explore how media representations of fat bodies contribute to societal attitudes and biases. This includes analyzing portrayals in film, television, advertising, and literature. It examines the intersection of fatness with other identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, highlighting how these intersections affect experiences of discrimination and privilege. The field critiques the dominant narratives around obesity and health, questioning the assumptions that equate thinness with health and fatness with illness.

Fat studies advocate for a more nuanced understanding of health that considers social determinants, mental health, and the lived experiences of individuals in larger bodies. Fat studies are closely linked to activism aimed at promoting body positivity and challenging weight-based discrimination in various settings, including workplaces, healthcare, and education. It supports policies that protect individuals from weight-based discrimination and promotes inclusivity in fashion, media, and public spaces. A health and nutrition researcher, Linda Bacon, a fat theorist in her book *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight* (2010) critiques the conventional understanding of health and obesity, arguing against fatphobia and promoting body acceptance.

Scholars in fat studies draw on various theoretical frameworks, including feminist theory, queer theory, and critical race theory, to analyze the complexities of fatness. Fat studies scholars examine the reason behind the preoccupation of people in Western countries with weight where more stigma is attached to women with fat bodies as Esther Rothblum in her essay titled "Fat Studies" published in the book *The Oxford Handbook of the*

*Social Science of Obesity* (2011) writes, "People in the United States, regardless of their own weight, have strong negative attitudes about fat people, and the stigma of weight is particularly apparent for women" (174).

One of the key works in fat studies is *Bodies Out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression* (2001), edited by fat theorists namely Kathleen LeBesco and Jana Evans Braziel. The anthology gathers diverse perspectives on fatness, with contributions from scholars across various disciplines like sociology, literature, and feminist theory. The book challenges the conventional view of obesity as an individual failing or medical condition, instead positioning fatness as a transgressive act that defies societal norms around body size. It explores how cultural representations of fat bodies reflect broader anxieties about control, discipline, and the politics of the "ideal" body.

Jeannine A. Gailey's book *The Hyper (In)Visible Fat Woman: Weight and Gender Discourse in Contemporary Society* (2014) focuses specifically on the intersection of fatness and gender. Gailey examines how fat women are uniquely situated within cultural and media discourses, often portrayed as hyper visible yet simultaneously rendered invisible in terms of their personhood, agency, and complexity. Her book critically examines how fat women's bodies are subjected to intense surveillance and judgment, contrasting these experiences with the pressures placed on women to conform to conventional standards of beauty. Gailey also considers how fat women resist or subvert these societal expectations, offering a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which fatness and gender are intertwined. Through her analysis, she critiques the intersection of weight and gender discourses, revealing the ways in which fatness is not only about the body but also about the lived realities of identity, oppression, and power.

The field of fat studies encourages critical reflection on personal biases and societal norms regarding body size and encourages a more inclusive understanding of body diversity. Fat studies foster a sense of community among individuals who identify as fat or who advocate for fat rights, creating spaces for dialogue and support. It emphasizes the importance of self-acceptance and the celebration of body diversity, challenging the stigma associated with larger bodies. Fat studies is a vital field that seeks to understand and dismantle the societal structures that perpetuate fatphobia and discrimination. By examining the cultural, political, and personal dimensions of fatness, it advocates for a more inclusive and equitable society that values all bodies.

## Memoirs and Fat Acceptance Movement

A memoir is a literary genre that presents a personal account of specific events or periods in the author's life, offering insights into their experiences and reflections. Unlike autobiographies, which cover the author's entire life, memoirs focus on particular themes or moments that have had a significant impact on the author's life. In the context of fatness, a memoir exploring this theme provides a deeply personal narrative that examines how societal attitudes toward fatness affect an individual's self-perception and experiences. By recounting personal struggles, triumphs, and moments of self-realization, such a memoir sheds light on the broader implications of fatphobia, illustrating how societal biases shape one's identity and social interactions. It offers an intimate perspective on the lived experiences of fat individuals, challenging stereotypes and fostering empathy and understanding.

The origin of memoirs focusing on fatness can be traced back to the broader movement of fat acceptance and body positivity that gained momentum in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Historically, fatness has been marginalized or stigmatized in many cultures, leading to a lack of representation and understanding in mainstream literature. However, as the fat acceptance movement challenged societal norms and advocated for the rights and dignity of fat individuals, personal narratives began to emerge more prominently. In the 1970s and 1980s, fat acceptance pioneers like Susie Orbach and her seminal work *Fat is a Feminist Issue* contributed to the growing discourse on body image and fatness. Their work laid the groundwork for subsequent personal narratives and memoirs.

### Roxane Gay's Journey from Fatphobia to Self-Acceptance

In her memoir *Hunger* (2017), Roxane Gay, an American writer and a Black woman, recounts her experience with weight and body image and building a positive relationship with food. At the very beginning of the memoir, Gay acknowledges that she is super morbidly overweight. She weighs about 577 pounds. Despite losing some weight, she is still fat. She is so overweight that people do not recognize her gender. She is mistaken for a man, because in Western societies, women are expected to be thin and beautiful. They are taught to be small, pleasing to men, and acceptable to society. She writes, "My fat body empowers people to erase my gender. I am a woman, but they do not see me as a woman. I am often mistaken for a man. I am called "Sir," because people look at the bulk of me and ignore my face, my styled hair, my very ample breasts and other curves"

(233). Gay's fatness, combined with her blackness, rendered her doubly invisible, emphasizing how she was devalued in a society that prizes a particular, narrow image of beauty. Her fatness, compounded by society's attitude toward it, made her feel invisible and devalued.

In this regard, Susie Orbach in her book *Fat Is a Feminist Issue* (1978) aptly writes, "Being fat isolates and invalidates a woman. Almost inevitably, the explanations offered for fatness point a finger at the failure of women to control their weight, control their appetites and control their impulses" (5). For Gay, this isolation was compounded not only by her size but also by her race, creating a layered sense of alienation.

Gay recounts the painful incident of how she began to gain weight. She painfully recalls that at the age of twelve, she was gang-raped by a boy named Christopher and two of his friends in the woods. Christopher was her classmate and she loved him but he betrayed her and molested her. After the incident, she began to eat more and more because she thought that if she gained more weight, her body would be safe. She writes, "I began eating to change my body. I was willful in this. Some boys had destroyed me, and I barely survived it. I knew I wouldn't be able to endure another such violation, and so I ate because I thought that if my body became repulsive, I could keep men away" (11)

After the traumatic incident, Gay's sense of safety and happiness was profoundly affected. She became more and more withdrawn and her faith in God shattered. As she felt lonely, food provided her with immediate satisfaction. It made her feel better and comfortable as she writes, "I was lonely and scared and food offered an immediate satisfaction. Food offered comfort when I needed to be comforted and did not know how to ask for what I needed from those who loved me. Food tasted good and made me feel better. Food was the one thing within my reach" (47). The comfort Gay derived from food in the wake of trauma could be interpreted as a coping mechanism shaped by both personal experience and the larger socio-cultural forces that define how Black women are expected to look and feel about themselves. At the age of thirteen, Gay went to boarding school and she never regretted it because she did not want to discuss the incident with her parents. She just wanted to leave home and finally decided to study at Exeter school where she lost control over her weight totally. She writes:

Left to my own devices at boarding school, I lost any semblance of control over what I put into my body. Suddenly, there

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were all kinds of food available to me. The dining hall was an all-you-can-eat-extravaganza. . . I could order pizza, and within thirty minutes, it would be delivered to my dorm and I could eat the entire thing by myself and there was no one to stop me from my naked, shameless indulgence. (54)

After the trauma, it seems that the one thing Gay could control was what she consumed. Overeating here may be symbolic of her desire to exert control in an otherwise chaotic or powerless existence. The indulgence in food also shows how she turned to comfort eating to fill the emotional void left by her trauma. She recalls when she went home for the first Thanksgiving holiday, her parents were shocked to see the transformation. She was unrecognizable. She had gained at least thirty pounds in only two and a half months. Her weight gain serves as an outward manifestation of her internal struggles. Seeing her physical transformation, her parents were worried.

Though she was reluctant to go, her parents took her to the doctor to know the reason behind her bodily change. She writes, "My parents had no idea what to do, but they were incredibly alarmed and immediately began to treat my body as something of a crisis" (56). Bodily transformation in this context is not merely a matter of overeating but a manifestation of deeper psychological and emotional issues, including trauma, loneliness, and perhaps a growing sense of disempowerment.

For Gay's parents, her physical transformation was a stark signal of something being wrong. They seemed to view her body as something to be "fixed" or managed, which again reflects their inability to address or understand the emotional or psychological causes of her weight gain. This shows that in many cultures, especially in the context of mainstream Western society, the body is often seen as a project to be controlled, particularly when it deviates from socially accepted standards.

Gay further recounts that during the first two years of high school, she ate excessively in secret, revealing her internal conflict between societal expectations to be thin and her emotional need to eat for comfort. Despite pretending to diet during holidays, she continued to overeat in secret, which led to further weight gain. Her experience reflects a common struggle for individuals with weight issues, where societal pressures intersect

with personal challenges. Pat Lyon in the essay titled "Prescription for Harm" published in the book *The Fat Studies Reader* (2009) writes, "... dieting not only failed to make people thinner, but also contributed to poor health, lowered self-esteem, and higher weight over time" (84). Gay's parents, concerned about her physical changes, put her on a medically supervised liquid diet. Though she initially lost weight, she soon returned to overeating, using food to fill an emotional void. Her growing disgust with her body reflects a deeper internal struggle with self-worth and identity.

Gay's parents, who were thin, were especially keen for Gay to lose weight and even sent her to Camp Kingmont, a weight loss camp, in hopes of addressing her weight. Their insistence highlights the societal oppression faced by fat individuals in a world that prizes thinness. Marilyn Wann, in "Fat Studies: An Invitation to Revolution" published in *The Fat Studies Reader* (2009), writes, "Fat functions as a floating signifier, attaching to individuals based on a power relationship, not a physical measurement. People all along the weight spectrum may experience fat oppression" (xv).

Gay admits that she hated camping and outdoors. Further, she did not want to exercise and once she returned back to her normal life, she gained the weight that she had lost. With every passing year, she became more and more disgusted with herself. She could not sleep because whenever she used to close her eyes, she began to feel how the boys crushed her body:

I became more and more detached from my body, continuing to eat too much and gain weight. I only tried to lose weight when my parents made me or nagged me enough to give dieting a half-hearted try. I didn't care about getting fat, to be big, to be ignored by men, to be safe. During the four years of high school, I probably gained 120 pounds. (76)

Gay also developed feelings of worthlessness, failure, inadequacy and incompetence for what she was doing to her body by gaining so much weight and being unable to function like a normal person and the ways she was disappointing her parents by gaining so much weight.

After completing high school, Gay was admitted to New York University. Her parents were terrified to leave her alone at college because they believed that she would gain more weight. Again, on her own, she had excess to a lot of food on both campus and off campus. She writes, "I loved going to Atticus, part bookstore, part cafe, with delicious salads and



sandwiches. I rarely went to class, and when I was in class, little made sense" (80). The solace she found in food is a continuation of her coping mechanism, using it to numb the disorientation and emotional void she feels. When she reached college, her parents bought a laptop for her to help her in her studies but she began to use it for chatting with strangers because nobody would bully her for her fatness. For the first time, she felt connected otherwise she always felt invisible because of her size and color. Jeannine A. Gailey in the book titled *The Hyper (In)Visible Fat Woman: Weight and Gender Discourse in Contemporary Society* (2014) discusses about the invisibility of fat women in Western societies. She writes, "However, as visible as they appear and feel, they also experience invisibility in numerous social contexts, to the extent that they become hyper(in)visible" (10).

Gay recalls a couple of weeks before her junior year was supposed to begin, she disappeared without informing anyone. Her running away can be seen as an attempt to escape not just from physical or external pressures (like her parents) but from the internal turmoil she was experiencing. She went to San Francisco and spent nearly a year in Phoenix, continuing to eat, in effort to get even fatter. Her use of food here highlights her ongoing struggle with feelings of worthlessness. Further, she used food as a substitute for dealing with complex emotions like guilt, anger, and shame. Eventually, her parents found her and she came back home. As she wanted to be a writer, so she enrolled in creative writing at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. She painfully recounts that there she rarely slept because in sleep she was forced to confront herself i.e. her traumatic past and thus, continued to eat more. She also started teaching in school. She recounts on the first day of teaching she was afraid not of teaching but of how students would react to her body. She was worried that her physicality, particularly her weight would become a source of ridicule as she writes, "What I feared was my appearance and what they would think of me. I worried that if they didn't like me, they would make fun of me, mocking my weight, and I was not at all sure how to make them like me when I felt so very unlikable, and always had" (97). At the end of her first class, she felt relieved that nobody made comments about her fatness.

Gay writes that the period of twenties was the worst part of her life. She felt alone and food was the only thing that provided her solace. Alone in her apartment, she began to soothe herself with food because she felt that it did not judge or demand anything from her. She ate and ate and gained a hundred pounds, and then another hundred and again another hundred. She writes, "In some ways, it feels like the weight just appeared

on my body one day. I was size 8 and then I was a size 16 and then I was a size 28 and then I was a size 42" (106). Her family became worried and continually reminded her that she was a failure in the most basic of her human responsibilities in maintaining her weight. They gave her advice and offered to send her to specialists and spas. They frequently reminded her that there would be no room for people of her size. She writes, "There was a time when every conversation included some kind of question about my weight. My parents, and my father in particular, make inquiries as to whether I am dieting, exercising, and/or losing weight as if all I am is my big fat body" (107).

Gay recalls that her father was keen that she should lose weight. He gifted her various weight loss programs and books on weight loss. He used to tell her that her degrees would be of no use because no one would hire her at her size. Whenever he heard about any new weight loss program on the radio or TV, at the airport, he quickly called her. Her mother felt that her fatness would impact her health. In this context, Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay in the "Introduction" to the book *The Fat Studies Reader* (2009) aptly write, ". . . the assumption that fat people are unhealthy is so ingrained in western society that it is hard to get people to face the facts" (3). Her mother discussed with her the side effects of obesity like diabetes, heart attack and stroke. She writes:

My family's constant pressure to lose weight made me stubborn, even though the only person I was really hurting was myself. The constant pressure made me refuse to lose weight to punish these people who claimed to love me but wouldn't accept me as I was. (108)

Gay recalls that due to the negative attitude of society towards her fatness, she began to hate herself and her body. She internalized the fatphobia which impacted her self-esteem and personal identity. She avoided public places where people would stare at her. She even stopped using public transportation to avoid the stigma associated with her body. She was conscious that she took a large space. She stopped using bright colours in her daily clothing choices so that she would not look fatter. She used men's clothes. She stopped doing things that are considered typical for women, like painting her nails. She began to feel like she could not call herself a woman because she did not meet the usual expectations, like being slimmer or taking up less space. This trauma is not only a personal struggle but also reflects broader societal attitudes toward fat bodies.

Gay recounts the painful impact society's treatment of her fatness had on her self-esteem. The negative attitudes and cruel comments she faced developed deep self-hatred, making her despise her body and fear the judgment of others. She realized that her body did not fit society's narrow beauty standards for women, and this caused her to feel alienated. However, through self-reflection, Gay ultimately accepted herself as she was, recognizing that the problem was not her body, but the societal obsession with thinness. In this regard, Linda Bacon in her book *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight* (2010) writes that the problem is not the size of the people's bodies but it is the way society devalues and discriminates against people who do not fit a narrow definition of beauty and health. She writes:

It is only now, in my forties, that I am able to admit that I like myself, even though I am nagged by this suspicion that I shouldn't. For so long, I gave in to my self-loathing. I refused to allow myself the simple pleasure of accepting who I am and how I live and love and think and see the world. But then, I got older and I cared less about what other people think. (132-133)

Gay also describes her experiences in public with her obese body. She writes that people often try to make her feel ashamed for being fat. When she was walking down the street, men leaned out of their car windows and passed vulgar comments at her about her body. The comments Gay received on the street are indicative of how fatphobia is often experienced differently based on one's race. In American culture, Black women are frequently subjected to a unique set of beauty standards that differ from those applied to white women. These standards, while sometimes more lenient in accepting curvier bodies in Black communities, do not protect Black women from the intense societal pressure to conform to Eurocentric ideals of beauty, which often prioritize thinness and an absence of "undesirable" physical traits like fat. The comments of the men show that her body was not catering to their gaze, needs as well as desires and she was forced to feel as if her body was the problem. In this context, Marilyn Wann in her essay titled "Fat Studies: An Invitation to Revolution" published in *The Fat Studies Reader* (2009) writes, "American culture is engaged in a pervasive witch hunt targeting fatness and fat people" (x). Whenever people made her feel shame for being fat, she felt rage and got stubborn. About fat shaming, she writes:

Fat Shaming is real, constant, and rather pointed. There are a shocking number of people who believe they can simply torment

fat people into weight loss and disciplining their bodies or disappearing their bodies from the public sphere. They believe they are medical experts, listing a litany of health problems associated with fatness as personal affronts. (172)

Gay recalls that the negative attitude of the society to her body made her feel miserable. Once, when she went to airport, people started staring at her right from the entry. People had uncomfortable looks as if saying that they did not want to sit next to her and when they got to know that they would not be sitting next to her, they had a huge sense of relief. This instance is evident of fatphobia that exists in the normal society that devalues people whose size is big. Linda Bacon in her book *Health at Everyday Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight* (2010) writes, "Fatphobia is deeply ingrained in our culture and operates to devalue people based on their size often under the guise of health and moral concern" (11)

Gay did not enjoy buying clothes. For her, shopping was an ordeal that often left her feeling humiliated. Due to her excessive size, she did not get the clothes she actually wanted to wear. Sometimes, when she went to stores that offered plus-sized clothes, these stores did not have anything to offer for super morbidly obese Gay. For her at such a size, very limited options were available. So, sometimes, she preferred men's clothing which was not designed according to a woman's needs. She felt disappointed that the fashion industry did not design clothes for diverse human bodies. She recalls that when she used to go shopping with her mother in her teens and early twenties, her mother felt disappointed and humiliated when no clothes were available for her size. In this context, Joyce L. Huff in the essay titled "Access to the Sky: Airplane Seats and Fat Bodies as Contested Space" published in the book *The Fat Studies Reader* (2009) writes, "Clothes marketed specifically to larger women, for instance, still come in standard sizes with fixed proportions to which individual bodies must adapt" (176).

In the memoir, Gay also recounts the humiliation that she faced at the doctor's office, which was ill-equipped for her obese body. There were scales that could not weigh over 250 pounds. But whenever she stepped on the scale, she could see the nurses' disgust which they mostly tried to hide. Sometimes, they looked at her with pity, which was almost worse because she did not want to be pitied for her body. Blood pressure cuffs were always too small for her arm and even the hospital gowns were not according to size. It was difficult for her to climb onto the examination table and lie back. Marilyn Wann in her essay titled "Fat Studies: An Invitation to Revolution" published in *The Fat Studies Reader* (2009) also presents

a similar opinion:

Fat people are at risk in the medical setting itself. Imaging equipment like MRIs or CT scans often have weight limits. Finding machines that accommodate higher weights is left to patients, who may face life-or-death consequences from the result of their search (and information about accessible imaging devices is not reliably available from providers, accrediting bodies, or device manufacturers). The fatter a patient is, the more likely a surgeon is to leave sponges or even surgical instruments behind, an error that necessitates further surgery for 70 percent of such cases. (xx)

Gay writes that in the field of medicine, fatness is considered a problem. It is believed that fat people are ill and most prone to diseases. When she visits doctors, they are surprised that she is not diabetic and not on a hundred medications. Although she has a high blood pressure, doctors are not surprised. They look at her weight and advise her about the importance of losing weight. In this way, they feel happy when they use their expertise and force her to bring her body under control. They regard her body as a problem and attribute her high blood pressure to being overweight. In this context, Kayla R. Mehl, in the article titled “The Medical Model of ‘Obesity’ and the Values Behind the Guise of Health” published in the journal *Synthese* in 2023 writes, “Assumptions about obesity – e.g., its connection to ill health, its causes, etc. – are still prevalent today, and they make up what I call the medical model of fatness” (1). Gay’s experiences highlight the limitations of this medical perspective, illustrating how it can exacerbate feelings of shame and inadequacy. Her memoir challenges these dominant narratives by presenting a more nuanced view of health and body size.

In the memoir, Gay asserts that she is overweight and she is coming to terms with her body and trying to feel less ashamed of it. She admits that she loves her body. She does not want to change but she wants to change the attitude of the society towards obese bodies to make it realise that intellectually her body is not the problem. The society’s unwillingness to accommodate and accept her size is the problem. Her embodied experience with her body has developed empathy for all body types. She strongly stresses the inclusivity and acceptance of diverse body types. She sees her body as a part of her identity. She believes that women should feel comfortable in their bodies without changing anything about their bodies. She strongly holds the view that her worth as a human being does not reside in her size or appearance.

She writes, “. . . I also try to find ways to honour my body. This body is resilient. It can endure all kinds of things. My body offers me the power of presence. My body is powerful” (272). So, in the memoir, she disseminates among the society to promote body-positivity i.e. to accept bodies of different sizes and challenges the norms of the society that stigmatize larger bodies. By promoting body positivity, she seeks to create an environment where individuals of all sizes feel valued and accepted. Meghan Crabbe, a body-positive activist in the book *Body Positive Power* (2017) describes body positivity in the following way:

Body positivity is about accepting our bodies as they are, at any size, and challenging the oppressive system that teach us we aren't allowed to do that. . . it's counter-culture to fatphobia and thin obsession, it was created as an alternative to buying into the messages that kept small and at war with our bodies. Body positivity is an escape route from diet culture. (76)

Gay through body positivity does not promote obesity. She promotes the idea that healthy lifestyle does not go hand in hand with fatness and that thinness is not necessarily an indicator of healthy body. She is critical of the societal norms that dictate how women bodies should be like and how they should treat their bodies. Gay's advocacy for self-acceptance and body positivity offers practical implications for individuals and society. By challenging harmful stereotypes and promoting a more inclusive view of body size, her memoir encourages the individuals to engage in self-acceptance and advocate for more equitable policies and representations.

## **Conclusion**

The memoir *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* by Roxane Gay traces her journey with fatness in a society where fatness is not meant for women. It is a profound contribution to the discourse on body size, fatphobia, and self-acceptance, providing a personal lens through which broader societal issues can be examined. Her memoir vividly illustrates the pervasive stigma and discrimination faced by individuals with larger bodies, revealing how societal norms and medical assumptions contribute to the marginalization of fat people. Gay's memoir aligns with the principles of fat studies by critiquing the pathologization of fatness and challenging the conventional equating of thinness with health and worth. Her journey from self-loathing to self-acceptance highlights the need for a more inclusive understanding of body diversity and the importance of combating societal prejudices.

As a Black woman, Gay's experiences with fatphobia are compounded by the intersections of race and gender, exposing a unique dimension of marginalization. Black women, in particular, face a double burden of both racial and body-based discrimination, where societal beauty standards are shaped by Eurocentric ideals that often exclude larger, darker bodies. Through Gay's experiences, this paper emphasizes that the real issue lies not with individuals' bodies but with societal structures and attitudes that perpetuate fatphobia. The memoir serves as a call for empathy and inclusivity, urging readers to reconsider and challenge the harmful norms that dictate acceptable body sizes and shapes. Gay's advocacy for body positivity and her resistance to societal pressures underscore the critical need for reform in both social attitudes and medical practices. By embracing a more nuanced and inclusive perspective on body size, society can work towards a more equitable and accepting environment for all individuals, regardless of their body type.

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