

**Exploring and Documenting the Stories and Experiences of Plus-Size
Cisgender Women in Karachi**

**By
Khush Bakht Memon**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Community Engagement**

**School of Public Health
University of Alberta**

Abstract

The research documents and explores the living stories and experiences of five cisgender plus-size women from Karachi, Pakistan, from the ages of 25-30 years, through an intersectional lens and feminist approach, to understand their relationship with their bodies since childhood to their daily experiences in society that includes their mobility in public and private spaces. Each participant also discusses the representation of plus-size bodies within Karachi society to provide representation in the academia and validate their stories. Plus-size women have complicated relationships with their bodies due to society's prejudice against big bodies, which is projected in the form of body shaming, policing, and hypersexualization. As a result, this induces body image issues impacting their mobility in public and private spaces. The lack of representation across different mediums such as mass media, social media, literature, and fashion industry plays a huge role in cementing the prejudices embedded in Pakistani society against plus-size women.

In conclusion, regardless of all the aforementioned discrimination, disparity, invisibility, and lack of representation, the interviewed women have been resilient, and this thesis is an attempt to reclaim the narratives of plus-size cisgender women in Karachi; provide visibility; validate their stories by making space for them in academia to support future community engaged scholarship; and, native community engagement workers to create strength-based resources.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Khush Bakht Memon. The research project received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Exploring and Documenting Stories and Experiences of Plus-Size Cisgender Women in Karachi “No. Pro00119965, May 17, 2022

Dedication

Our story isn't over yet;

This thesis is dedicated to all neurodivergent BIPOC International graduate students and my fellow big-bodied AFAB (assigned female at birth) folk in Pakistan.

Acknowledgments

This research would have not been possible without the support of my chosen family and beloved friends. These people had my back whenever I would crash; which happened a lot, as I am one of those students who started their masters in 2020, the year COVID-19 was at its peak and for this I am truly grateful.

Besides my troupe I would like to wholeheartedly thank all five fellow plus-size women who agreed to share their resilient stories for this research. Secondly, I would like to sincerely thank three teachers at The University of Alberta whose support helped me get through this degree, Dr. Kyle Whitfield, Dr. Fay Fletcher and lastly my supervisor Dr. Lana Whiskeyjack. Thirdly I would like to express my gratitude to my committee member, Dr. Michelle Meagher, and my mentors Dr. Ghazala Rahman and Bilal Zubedi for always having faith in me. I would also like to express my gratitude to my teacher Abbas Husain, my therapist Sidra Javed and my psychiatrist Dr. Aneel Kumar.

P!nk's music, Amy Bleuel's Project Semicolon, Sabeen Mehmud's resilient work, and Mary Lambert's inspiring art and Babe Workshop also played a huge role in grounding me through this process, for which I am indebted.

Special thanks to Zee, Nanu, Ami, Baba, Abid, and Dani.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Preface	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Glossary of Terms.....	1
Purpose Statement.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Research Question:	2
Research Objectives.....	2
Significance of Research.....	2
Personal Positionality.....	3
My story	4
Khushu and Toys	6
Khushu and Movies, Cartoons, and Shows.....	7
Khushu and School	9
Khushu, Parks and Gyms	12
Khushu and Clothes	13
Khushu and Bullying	15
Khushu and Mental Health	15
Khushu and Dance	16
Khushu and Healing.....	16
Khushu and Intersectionality	17
Khushu and Master of Arts in Community Engagement.....	18
Chapter 2: Literature Review	20
Body ideals promoted by colonializers.....	20
Origin and meaning of the word plus-size	22
Plus-size body and representation.....	23
Plus-size body and Society	26
Mobility and Plus Size women	30
Body autonomy, rights, and Pakistan.....	31
Chapter 3: Methodology	35

Research Paradigm.....	35
Theoretical Perspective.....	36
Methods	37
Methodological Limitations.....	41
Research Limitation.....	41
Ethics	41
Chapter 4: Tales of Plus Size Karachiwalis	43
Story 1: Anza	43
Story 2: Zohra.....	61
Story 3: Khadeja	85
Story 4: Sundus.....	96
Story 5: Ayesha.....	103
Chapter 5: Findings.....	113
1. “ <i>Moti</i> ” vs The world	113
2. Sirf <i>Moti</i> ho tum.....	114
Family	114
Society.....	116
Media and Literature.....	117
Clothing/Fashion.....	119
3. “ <i>Buri Aurat</i> ”-Hypersexualization of young fat girls.....	122
4. Mobility and plus-size bodies	123
5. No healthcare for you.....	125
6. <i>Main apni favorite hoon: One step at a time</i>	126
7. Plus-size label and Pakistan	127
Awareness of the label Plus-size.....	127
Pakistan isn’t ready for the word Fat.	129
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion	131
“ <i>Moti</i> ” vs The world and Sirf <i>Moti</i> ho tum.....	132
“ <i>Buri Aurat</i> ”-Hypersexualization of young fat girls.....	139
No healthcare for you.....	140
<i>Main apni favorite hoon: One step at a time</i>	141
Mobility and plus-size bodies	142
Plus-size label and Pakistan	143
Scholarship of Engagement and Future Research.....	145
Knowledge Translation.....	146
References.....	148

Appendix A: Recruitment Post 157
Appendix B: Information and Consent Form 157

Chapter 1: Introduction

Glossary of Terms

- Bhains - Buffalo
- Body policing – Body policing attempts to establish authority over bodies and social spaces by deciding who controls women’s bodies and appearances, social behaviors, and leisure activities (Guydish, 2017, p. 150).
- Body shaming - mocking someone’s physical appearance and features
- Chhote - A term for a short-heighted person
- Dawat - A feast
- Dupatta - A traditional scarf/ cloth worn to cover breasts, mainly
- Fat phobia – a bias and fear against fatness
- Hakla - Someone with speech impediment/ someone who stutters
- Jubba - Gown
- Kaakri - Dry stick
- Kaale - Black/ dark-skinned
- Kacchhi hona - An expression for when someone is proven wrong
- Langrra - Someone with a limp/ feet impediment
- Moti - Fatso, a term used for bigger people
- Nani - Maternal grandmother
- Salam - A local greeting meaning peace
- Shaadi - Wedding
- Shalwar Kameez - A local attire
- V - A scarf that is a part of girls’ school uniforms, mainly. Used to cover chest

Purpose Statement

The research goal was to explore and document stories of five (N=5) cisgender plus-size women from Karachi from the ages of 25 to 30 years, to understand their relationship with their bodies since childhood, the experience they have had in society, and their mobility in public and private spaces. Also discussed is the representation of plus-size bodies within society. This research attempted to provide representation to plus-size cisgender women in academia and validate their stories.

Statement of the Problem

Research Question:

What is the relationship of plus-size cisgender women with their bodies since childhood and how does the lack of representation affect their mobility in private and public spaces in Karachi?

Research Objectives

1. To explore the relationship of plus-size cisgender women with their bodies.
2. To document and analyze the relationship of plus-size cisgender women with their bodies
3. To understand how the representation across mediums affects their mobility in private and public spaces.

Significance of Research

The research aims to create a pilot brave space for women to start sharing and documenting their lived experiences and find healing communally. This research is attempting to

contribute to fill a gap in academia by validating and documenting stories of Karachi's plus-size women so that the native community engagement workers can access data to assist them in creating strength-based resources and future engaged scholarships. It will also highlight the issues that Pakistani plus-size urban women struggle with that are specific to the culture that they live in. Moreover, the research is voicing the narrative of plus-size women in Karachi; something which has been missing from not just academic discourse but also general conversations.

Personal Positionality

It has been a journey learning to love my plus-size body, to take up space without shrinking myself so that people around me do not notice my "big-ness" and are comfortable with a plus-size body existing around them in personal and public spaces, and move without feeling ugly, ashamed, and heavy. I have used self-reflection, therapy, support groups, writing, and art to heal and be kind to my body but it is still hard on some days to fully embrace myself due to years of conditioning of feeling too big, not beautiful, and unacceptable for society. In the city I was born and raised, I experienced extreme oppression, body policing, and bullying targeted at my fat female body which led to a lot of trauma. When I moved to a metropolitan city in my country, I finally had the chance to reflect and express myself to the fullest as I had social privileges. My privileges made me realize the stigma and unkindness of people attacking women of a different socio-economic class. That motivated me to document my story and of fellow Pakistani cisgender plus-size women in Karachi to fill a gap in the academic literature with our narratives.

This research aims to assist in reclaiming and representing our voices and bodies in a Pakistani context so that our stories are documented and validated. This work attempts to highlight the native experiences to create brave spaces in the future for our bodies to heal and

express ourselves without anyone telling us we are too big and should shrink our bodies as per the unrealistic standards of society.

My story

My relationship with my body has always been complicated because it was established quite early on that I was a misfit because of being fat and all my experiences were governed by how much I weighed. The earliest memory, one where I felt I was an odd one out, was when my parents fed me heavy meals but with soft policing. I loved food but was told that I was eating too much. I used to hear my parents talking about rationing my meals, and this left a mark.

I would ask for Cerelac as a toddler whenever my newborn brother was eating it but was told that it wasn't for me. I had to get it, so I developed the habit of sneaking food and snacks from the kitchen whenever no one was watching, especially these cookies that my Ami made for us called "Meethi Mani". This kind of policing wasn't always so. Initially, I was served food wholeheartedly, but with a hint of precaution. But when my parents started noticing that my appetite was beyond what they thought was *normal*, their policing became apparent.

Things like that started impacting my relationship with food, and the fact that my brothers were skinny, only added to my misery. Even though both were fed fatty and oily food items, I was scolded if I ever took a bigger portion of food. I remember getting chocolates and other small treats from my savings, or as gifts from my maternal family. But the guilt in my heart had already taken root, and I used to be scared of my parents finding out if I was eating more.

Diet culture entered my life quite early. When you're the only fat kid in your extended family and class, you stand out, and this was a problem. Imagine skipping meals in your early teens to get thin and fit in! I also started praying with tears in my eyes, imagining that I would

wake up someday and be magically thin. Until my late teenage years, my new year's resolution was to shed all the weight. I was the ugly duckling waiting to be the white swan, I was stuck in the first half of the fairy tale, and desperate for a happy ever after.

As I approached my adulthood, I met someone who had been lurking around the shadows: depression.

I was 17, and my behavior started changing. I started eating alone in my room because I didn't want someone to control my diet, so I just used to take my food and run to my room. I also became uncomfortable eating with other people, because if my parents would see my portion, they would actively ask me to put some food back. All this eventually led to screaming matches between me and them for making me feel like shit about my body. They would say they're concerned for my health, but I know it was because they saw their daughter as ugly and unhealthy, and this made me feel miserable in my own body. During the first half of my 20s, and by that time anyone commenting on my food or eating habits would trigger panic attacks, I would stress-eat. Even now, when I am in my late 20s, I still have to actively work on establishing a healthier relationship with food. I remember recently I had to hide my food and bring it to my room because my father was around, and my family is still not the best at keeping their opinions to themselves.

Here's something I wrote in the November of 2021:

Mother said the other day you should get thinner to fit into that dress, I told her I would just get a new dress that fits me

My father looks at me with so much pity

I feel the stares translate into "look at my intelligent daughter, I wish she was thinner then she might get married"

I sometimes want to yell at him that I just want to stay imperfectly perfect, not your kind of perfect.

I feel he invests more in education because he believes I would end up alone, what if I do?

I am not worried, why are you?

-Khushu

I now eat whatever I want and don't starve myself and have created boundaries that no one will comment on what I eat and what I don't, and this has been a part of my work towards developing a healthy relationship with food. I want to enjoy food without guilt and shame. I have reached this point after a lot of fights with my family and my inner guilt. I get my general tests done every six months and I plan to eventually eat more mindfully but I want to do it all at my own pace, not because of people around me.

Khushu and Toys

Barbie, the toy that is imposed on you if you're a girl and that only added to my body-related issues. I mean, what was in my hands was someone that wasn't me! Thin, fair, with a certain breast and hip size, and even blonde hair! Every kid wanted to have that body and so did I. I had curly hair, I was big and brown, and I didn't even call Barbie by my own name. I was scared that I would be mocked for it. Of course, no one realized what I was going through; no one came and told me my body was normal. There was no representation in the market for kids like me and it was ingrained into my tiny brain that this is what pretty is and acceptable, which was not far from the truth. Later, the Barbie movies that were shown on TV portrayed the same.

Khushu and Movies, Cartoons, and Shows

As a kid, whatever I saw on television was different from me. The animated films I watched also didn't have fat princesses. I remember Ursula from *The Little Mermaid* was fat but she was evil, so she didn't really save the day. The first fat princess I saw was a green ogre in *Shrek*. But the irony here was, she had silky straight hair and was fair when human!

I wanted to see myself in what I watched, but never really happened. I remember the first rom-com that I found in my teen years which had a fat woman as a protagonist was *Bridget Jones Diary*. It was a story about a big, clumsy woman who spoke without any filters, and was awkward. But two handsome leading men fell in love with her! I loved that movie for really long time until I realized after being introduced to feminism that it had so many undertones of anti-fat bias.

When it comes to books, all teen romantic or fantasy fiction novels that I was obsessively consuming didn't have a single fat girl as the lead protagonist. No prince charming was falling in love with a girl like me and I had no other choice but to wish to be thin! I thought that was the only way I could find the love of my life, and that further intensified the self-hatred towards my body. It was also around that time that I developed these dark thoughts of cutting the extra fat off my body. I daydreamed about getting some 'life saving' surgery done, that would make me thin and worthy! My dreams about a partner also involved him having magic or some power to make me thin. Now when I look back, I just want to go back and hug the tiny me and tell her that "you are worthy".

Arguably the major change that happened, which in a way saved my life, was this one artist that I first listened to when I was 17, was Pink (stylized as P!nk). Whenever I would feel unworthy or my family body-shamed me, or I was bullied or felt forgotten, I listened to "Fucking Perfect". It is still my favorite song that grounds me. When I watched the video for

the first time and listened to the following words, I felt seen and heard, I felt that P!nk gets me and I am not alone. I still feel she wrote that song to save my life especially these lyrics that I keep listening to, reading and quoting from *Pink - Fuckin' Perfect Lyrics | AZLyrics.Com* (n.d.):

*“Pretty, pretty please, don't you ever, ever feel
Like you're less than fuckin' perfect
Pretty, pretty please, if you ever, ever feel like you're nothing
You're fuckin' perfect to me
You're so mean (you're so mean)
When you talk (when you talk)
About yourself, you were wrong
Change the voices (change the voices)
In your head (in your head)
Make them like you instead
So complicated, look happy, you'll make it
Filled with so much hatred, such a tired game
It's enough, I've done all I can think of
Chased down all my demons, I've seen you do the same, oh
Pretty, pretty please, don't you ever, ever feel
Like you're less than fuckin' perfect*

Even now, I still don't feel represented in rom-com movies and books or in fantasy fiction, and it makes me feel invisible. However, there are some other artists who I found that helped me feel less alone. Mary Lambert being one of them, another singer, poet, and body love activist who has taught me a lot on my journey. Her poetry, social media posts, and even her music videos helped me through a lot. Luckily, I had the chance of being a part of a course she had designed, too. So, I always feel this personal connection to her.

The rest of the media, such as local Pakistani cinema and Hollywood, has been fatphobic too, and looking back I could see how that must have affected me. For instance, how fat people are always made fun of and ridiculed. However, I was able to find representation later on through social media. Here are some current Instagram accounts that help me navigate my emotions, celebrate communally and ground me:

@sheerahr

@alwaysalittleextra

@simranjat_

@thechubbytwirler

@aashna_bhagwani

@sofiehagendk

@stylemeupwithsakshi

@raffela_mancuso

@vipasha.malhotra

@marylambertsing

@lizzobeeating

@dancingtoes.20

Khushu and School

I mentioned earlier how my bigger body made me stand out not just in my house but also school. The word “moti” (Fat) became a label for me in kindergarten because other kids were tiny as compared to me. Kids would call me fat, as there was already a culture among the adults to call people names based on a person’s looks. Of course, I didn't know back then that it was bullying! I remember I was in the 5th grade when I first told my family that I was

being bullied for being sensitive and fat. Before that, I just knew that everyone *teases* me and I am different from others.

I have loved dancing since I was a kid. I got selected to be in this group dance performance in kindergarten for the annual function. We were performing on Falguni Pathak's "Maine Payal Hai Chhankai", which was my favorite song at the time and I went home and told my parents excitedly. My father refused me to dance in the performance. I remember crying so much. He was overly conservative at that time and a girl child dancing on stage was a big no for him. This wasn't helped by the fact that I was *also* a fat child.

When I was in grades 1 or 2, I must have been around age 6-7. Around then, I was asked not to go to shops to get *cheez* (snacks/ confectionary items) which was something kids used to do. One *Eid* (Muslim festival), when all my cousins and I went to the big shop to get sweets with our *Eidi* (festival allowance), I was told that I won't be allowed anymore. Shortly after, came another restriction: I can't play outside. As a result, I never rode a bicycle on the road, and never learned how to ride a bike because I wasn't allowed to. We lived in an apartment and later in a house that didn't have enough space to ride indoors either.

As I was 'bigger' I was sexualized by society quite early on, I believe it scared my parents and they tried to protect me by taking away my childhood by not allowing me to do all things that children of my age did. Once in the first grade, a teacher called me out during recess and asked me to stop wearing leggings and wear *shalwar* (loose pakistani pants) because I had thick thighs and leggings 'didn't look good on me'. I am still astonished to this date, how can this female teacher of mine sexualize a primary-school kid? I just went home and asked my mother to get me a shalwar. I just accepted it, but that didn't end there. As I grew older,

teachers told me that the V (a kind of sash) I wore should be replaced with a dupatta (a big scarf to cover body) due to my bigger breasts, which I did for a while but then it made me stand out even more, so I stopped wearing dupatta.

These experiences made me hate my body and chipped away my confidence. I used to walk backward out of classroom and other rooms so that nobody could see my hips or lower my backpack to cover myself and would have books to cover my breasts too all the time through the secondary school. I was told by my father that he will have me transferred to a girls only school so I had to be more masculine and scary around boys in school after a certain age so he does not transfer me and that affected my femininity. I would walk in a masculine manner and later on it took a lot of effort to reconnect with my feminine side.

I wasn't allowed to make male friends or play with them until 8th grade and was in an all-girls section. It satisfied my parents even though I was in a co-ed school. In the high school, I had boys in my class but by then I had such a walled and masculine personality that I was a *bro* to the boys and I let that be because this is how a fat girl could fit in. I was okay playing the role of the fat best friend. Later I was sexualized for my body, but boys never fell in love with me for who I was because dating the fat girl was shameful for them. They also used to make fat jokes and I would laugh along because I had to be a tough girl or else my dream of higher studies without restrictions would never see the light of the day. I embraced that I was unworthy and unwanted.

Feeling of unworthiness and unwanted also led to me getting groomed on online chats by older men who told me that even though I am fat, men want it and that is where for the first time I was made to feel attractive. I had a secret life online and in high school I had accepted

being the fat and ugly one. When you are devalued and made to feel unloved by everyone in your life for how you look, this usually leads to getting external validation by others and sometimes those are older digital predators. I am glad I never got into any physical danger, but I did face a lot of emotional and mental abuse which later made my relationship with my body worse.

I also started blogging around this time, but all my romantic writings were in a secret blog because a fat girl talking about love was funny for many and I did not want to be made fun of.

*Every inch of my body trembles, I can't breathe.
Skin gets blazing hot, I switch to combat mode.
But I feel glued to the ground, I am stuck.
Heart starts drowning, throat dries up.
Tears trickle down and all memories of the times I felt unsafe flash in front of me.
Fists clenched, I repeat to myself, I am safe. I am safe. I am safe.
But is that true?
I was safe that time too.*

*I try to breathe, try to explain myself but I fumble.
I think I might scare them away... *sigh**

*Do you wanna know what happened?
They just said you are beautiful and I like you.*

-Khushu.

Khushu, Parks and Gyms

Kids around me loved parks, I didn't. I hated going there because kids and their mothers would ask me to get off swings and other rides by saying I am an older kid, and I shouldn't be there, even though I was exactly in the age group allowed in the play area! Also, other kids would call me moti and I would go back to my mother. I wouldn't tell anyone what was happening, and I just started hating going to parks that continued being a problem until my

early 20s. Hence, I developed this anxious association with doing physical activities outdoors and in groups where they could judge me for my size and how I move. I found solace in my books and art activities, where I could be anyone and do anything without the judgements and pitiful gaze hovering over me.

In recent years I started going more to the parks, but just to have park picnics and that too because I have worked on reestablishing the relationship of my body with the parks. Also, now no mother is going to ask me to leave the park, or a kid won't tease me. I still love swings but then they don't really make adult playgrounds with stronger swings, that too for plus-size people, so swinging on a swing is more of a desire that rarely gets fulfilled.

Local gyms in my hometown and in Karachi aren't fat friendly and they aren't about losing weight, nor about getting healthy. The marketing is also targeted at losing weight to become beautiful and quite a few times I have tried to enroll myself and go regularly. I have run out of quite a few gyms till date after having a panic attack, as the environment made me hate myself more. I do plan to learn how to swim after I graduate as I have the social privilege and mobility rights since I live in a bigger city and my family has grown more progressive.

Khushu and Clothes

I hate shopping for clothes, always have and I believe it is due to a lack of variety in clothes in my size. Also, my clothes have always been policed by my father and the society.

Everyone still finds cute clothing in smaller sizes but the brands here in Pakistan don't make sizes beyond large and those too didn't fit me when I was that size. There was only one brand in recent years which did make sizes 16 and 18, which would fit me depending on the design and they did lack consistency, but since last year they have stopped fitting me properly too.

They do still market themselves as an inclusive brand but that is a facade at this point. I have

seen a few more brands popping up and advertising themselves as plus-size inclusive this year but the variety in it doesn't exist.

Also, for big women in Pakistan, finding a bra is such a hard job. If we do find something that does fit us it's always in boring colors like white and skin color, and those too are quite overpriced. No fancy lingerie is ever available in our sizes so the market also takes away the right of wearing sexy lingerie.

Growing up in a conservative household and city, I wasn't allowed to wear tight clothing like jeans since I was in grade 1 and I have had the worse experiences of being asked to change if I ever do end up wearing a pair of jeans and at the same time my skinny cousins of the same age were wearing jeans. I was repeatedly reminded of my size and all it did was break my heart. Now, I wear whatever I want, keeping in mind the cultural acceptance of the city and neighborhood I am in, but I don't let anyone police me because of my size. I had to hide my wardrobe from my father for a long time and only wear clothing of my choice when he wasn't around. Also, I have got into many fights where my father would tell me it isn't suitable because of how I look. On the other hand, men have made me feel objectified in public spaces, being catcalled, which does validate his safety concerns but I do wish if my parents had taken a different strategy to explain to me the dangers in public and helped to empower me with the skills and tools to face the world, I wouldn't have developed such a complicated relationship with my body.

I was 9 years old when a man touched my behind in a busy market, and it had changed me completely. My mother tells me that once she noticed a shopkeeper eyeing my 9-year-old body sexually and that is when she became overprotective. In undergrad school a friend made

me notice that boys don't talk to me by making eye contact, rather look at my breasts instead. He and I did an experiment by roaming around the campus and talking to various boys and the majority did stare at my breasts instead of looking into my eyes. It made me feel shocked and disgusted.

When I went to the United States of America for an educational exchange program, I still was awkward and really didn't dress the way I ideally would have wanted, and even in Pakistan during private beach parties I wouldn't wear what I wanted. But when I went to Canada recently, a friend bought me dresses and I got myself shorts. The first time I went to a club wearing a cute dress in a size that fit me made me look pretty. I felt this amazing feeling of comfort in my own skin which I rarely get because pretty clothes in my size are so rare to find. I remember the first time I wore shorts and a tank top outside, it was odd yet freeing, no one stared. My plus-size body could exist in a public space without being standing out.

Khushu and Bullying

'Moti', 'Thuli', 'Bomb', 'The lift will fall because of her', 'The car is heavy due to me'; jokes in class, around family, TV, everywhere. Fat people are the butt of jokes, and it took me many years to tell people to shut up and cut as many fatphobic friends as I could.

It's an attack on you and it feels like the whole world is trying to make you hate yourself and feel unworthy. Also, I don't know why people think they need to remind us of being fat as if we don't know; as if we don't have a mirror at home. I have witnessed people explicitly hating the existence of fat people around them.

Khushu and Mental Health

I started struggling with depression at the age of 17 as I mentioned earlier and then was later diagnosed with clinical depression and Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) with severe

anxiety. I have been living with a bucket of mental issues for a decade now and it made grounding and loving my body harder. I also did have some self-harm tendencies and experienced traumatic experiences which made me feel unsafe in my own body and it has been a struggle to not give up on myself. Taking medication made it worse initially because I had to accept that this medication would increase my weight and for a really long time whenever someone pointed out my weight, I would go on this explanation ride and get agitated that they think I am lazy even though the medicines make it worse. Now I don't give any explanation and just call them out on their body shaming attitude and mental health unfriendliness.

Khushu and Dance

If anyone asks me if I like dancing? I always tell them I danced my way out of my mother's womb! Though there came a period when I stopped dancing due to depression and bullying. There are some awful memories where I wasn't allowed to dance at weddings by my father and I never took part in any school functions as I mentioned earlier. Nobody in my school knew I could dance well. That led to a period where I felt so heavy in my body that I didn't feel like dancing, I know it was more in my head than actually an issue of mobility and it took me some time to be okay with it, but still there are days when I feel very heavy in my head and I can't dance. I started making short videos of myself during the first COVID lockdown and have continued to do so, which I share with close friends and family. My inner child is quite happy that I can share my art with a small audience and have high dancing dreams for myself in the future.

Khushu and Healing

It has been a tough journey of healing but I am proud of my resilience. I am grateful that I am surrounded by love, care and with that I also had the financial privilege and support from my parents who paid for my mental health treatments until last year, sent me to renowned higher

educational institutes and in their own way supported my dreams. As per Pakistani middle-class standards, I have huge social privilege and I try to be as mindful of it as much as possible. Hence, my journey with my body is intersectional and mindful of all the limitations and I have promised myself to be the one to play my role in breaking the intergenerational trauma related to my body. I have used art, students' politics and am using an academic platform to take charge of the narrative and continue my healing process.

Khushu and Intersectionality

Fantasy fiction books and movies that I have read and watched throughout my life, where anything is possible and all the unique creatures are accepted, have home and purpose; that has been my solace. They taught me that misfits can do wonders, embark upon adventures and find love and friendship while fighting the evil which usually is the status quo wrapped in some evil metaphorical characters. *Inheritance Cycle* by Christopher Paolini, *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling because she is a TERF (trans exclusionary radical feminist), *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott and *Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery are some of the examples.

Besides books and movies, the other art form that aided my journey is poetry where I found feminist gems like *I Am an Emotional Creature* by Eve Ensler, poetry by Sylvia Plath and Kishwar Naheed etc which validated my struggles and thoughts. Then in undergraduate school, I was introduced to feminist theories and student politics. I started off as a radical feminist until I was introduced to Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of Intersectionality, it resonated with me the most. As my community and political work involved interacting and working with people from various classes, ethnicities, sexualities, and gender, I had to open my mind and heart to a worldview which isn't promoting discrimination, is neurotypical and builds its basis in violence. This journey of learning, unlearning and relearning gave me a

voice and tools to self-reflect via conversation, performance, political and community work to stand up for myself and all the causes I believed in. Understanding feminism and queerness from the lens of intersectionality, that each person depending on their race, class, age, rural/urban, mobility, education, gender, sexuality, and life experiences, will have their own narratives has brought the change in me to work on my body, being kind to it and to heal. I do love myself now and I am learning to be kinder so I can wash away the guilt, shame, and hate away.

Khushu and Master of Arts in Community Engagement

I remember being teary eyed in one of my first classes on campus during a sharing circle because in that moment I had realized that I was meant to be here and study community engagement with this cohort and these professors. The circle process is a brave space where everyone has an equal voice as well as participates as active listeners. I learned from the readings that “self-location” (Kovach et al., 2013, p. 488) is important in indigenous research methodology which resonated with me. As a spoken word artist, I have usually written and performed about personal experiences in connecting with the audience. When I started writing this paper, I asked myself questions like who am I? Where do I come from? What is my origin story? These questions and also as Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo (2009) describe life writers as “sojourners engaged in a lively life-time pilgrimage of seeking and searching, researching the past, present and future: writing autobiography-ically, we remember where we have been, attend to where we are, imagine where we might go” as cited in (Kovach et al., 2013, p. 489) helped me further locate myself which led me to share the above self-location story in this paper

In later courses I was introduced to concepts of community engagement, community engaged scholarship which is defined as “Community-engaged scholarship (CES) involves the faculty member in a mutually beneficial partnership with the community and results in scholarship

deriving from teaching, discovery, integration, application or engagement” University of South Florida (n.d, para. 10), indigenous research methodology including story work and arts-based research which have broadened my horizons as a qualitative researcher. I didn’t know before starting this degree that one could situate themselves *in* their communities; giving a stronger basis to the engaged scholarship being undertaken. This research is an attempt to work *with* the community and *for* the community.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As the world begins to open space to accommodate discourses on plus-size bodies, the literature available is limited in the context of Pakistan. In Pakistan, basic bodily agency is still debated by patriarchal systems and the narratives of plus-size body rights are only now beginning to find footing. With that in mind, this objective of the literature review in this study is to inform and support methodology to explore and document the stories of five self-identified cisgender plus-size women which is the major goal of this research study.

Mostly popular references are used as to make the study accessible for people in Pakistan as those have less specialized language which is easier to utilize in community building and mobilization.

The literature review examines body ideals promoted by colonizers; erasure of black and native bodies; the origin and definition of plus-size; representation of plus-size bodies in media and fashion; and, society's treatment of fat bodies and their mobility. It also sketches out the available literature around body autonomy in Pakistan.

Body ideals promoted by colonializers

The former colonies are still struggling with the impacts of colonization, which forced native communities to accept colonialist values. Pakistan came out of colonial India, and also inherited various laws and values which were problematic in nature. One notion that continues to affect the country is the notion of what an ideal body should be like. As it is stated by Fanon "Colonialism is not satisfied with snaring the people in its net or of draining the colonized brain of any form or substance. With a kind of perverted logic, it turns its attention to the past of the colonized people, and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it." (2004, p. 337). This quote captures the after effects of colonization on the intellectual

discourse amongst the people of Pakistan who are still struggling to attain their own identities free off colonial standards.

The standardization of bodies is a questionable practice that is not biological. As Salen (2014) explains, the:

concept of “bodies” exists due to social and cultural constructs, which evolve through socio-cultural practices and conversations. Using the construct of objectification, they argue that internalized ideals about the body are cultivated by what others think and are targeted at women and serve as a way to oppress and marginalize women. These ideals force girls and women to have an adopted view of self. Furthermore, looking through a feminist perspective along with a sociocultural lens, Fredrickson and Roberts suggest that body image has less to do with biology and more to do with gendered and socialized constructs (p. 5).

Sabrina Strings in her book *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* argues that “two critical historical developments contributed to a fetish for svelteness and a phobia about fatness: the rise of the transatlantic slave trade and the spread of Protestantism. Racial scientific rhetoric about slavery linked fatness to “greedy” Africans. And religious discourse suggested that overeating was ungodly.” (2019, p. 16). This supports the aforementioned stance that body image and ideas permeating through our cultures are gendered and socialized and orchestrated by colonizers.

The literature further elaborates on the role that colonization has played in discriminating against big, fat, and fuller bodies. In Hannah Carlan’s book review of *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* (2020) by the author Sabrina Strings, she writes that

What Strings demonstrates is that the subsequent waves of racial formation in which whiteness emerged and was consolidated, not only involved the demonization of Black skin, but also relied on the identification of fat with Black femininity, seen as simultaneously excessive and inferior. But it wasn’t always this way, as a stroll through the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York would reveal countless images of voluptuous women idealized by the early moderns as the epitome of beauty. In today’s context, fat is synonymous with everything from disease to laziness. (para. 2)

Strings (2019) states that “During the long eighteenth century, as eating and drinking less became evidence of refinement, so too did the thinner figures such behavior produced.

Therefore, at the same time, that gluttony and fatness were becoming associated with African women in scientific racial literature” (p. 177).

Sarah Baartman, a black woman is a prime example of this. In 1810 as per an article by Parkinson (2016) was brought to Europe to be paraded around in freak shows in London and Paris because she had large buttocks and later her brain, skeleton and sexual organs were placed in a museum till 2002. Such extreme objectification was just one instance where colonial domination was visible; demarcating how colonizers were civilized, and different from the other people around the world.

Farrel (2011) discusses in their book work of Cesare Lombroso, he stated that:

[T]he typical characteristic of prostitutes as fatness, an atavistic tendency found, according to him, in some deviant white women and in all “native” and African women. And these ideas continue to resonate, whether in the novels of writers like Toni Morrison who challenge their authority, or their endless rehearsal in popular culture narratives about figures like Britney Spears, Monica Lewinsky, and Oprah Winfrey (p. 121).

This literature echoes the stance that colonizers have had an impact in creating harsh notions and unsafe environments for women with plus-size bodies and it originated with them objectifying the native and African bodies, and since brown South Asian bodies were also considered ‘others’, the prejudice carried on.

Origin and meaning of the word plus-size

The term ‘plus-size’ was coined in the Fashion industry by retail chain Lane Bryant. Zimmer (2015, para. 6) in an online article states that “In 1922, the chain began advertising “Misses

Plus Sizes,” which offered roomier versions of clothing from the “misses” size category. Five years later, newspaper ads for the chain showcased “plus-sizes” without the “misses.” and after a few decades a person wearing plus-size clothes was also being referred to as plus-size.

Historically, there has also been a capitalistic reason for excluding bigger people as it favored mass manufacturing by cutting costs and added to the frustrating era of limited clothing sizes.

Crosby (2019) writes in a digital article that,

Curves had reigned supreme for about 400 years but they went out of fashion quickly with the emergence of the ‘Flapper Girl style. Following the first World War, technology had advanced dramatically and mass manufacturing became the new norm. As a result, clothing was only made in a small range of sizes to keep manufacturing costs low – leaving fuller figured women without any options. (para. 6)

To date, plus-size women are struggling to find trendy, feasible, and comfortable clothing options which only add to the ill experiences in association with their bodies.

Plus-size body and representation

There exists an immense stigma around plus-size bodies in countries still facing the aftermath of colonization, which clearly has influenced their cultures, subcultures, pop culture, and media and has caused a representation crisis. The popular toy amongst girls here in Pakistan has been the famous Barbie which for decades was a doll with “blond hair and fair complexion and she wears Western clothes. The doll has an ideal, almost impossible figure.” stated Sohail et al. (2014, p. 6951) in their paper, which instilled unrealistic beauty standards and added to the stigma associated with bigger bodies and girls had no Barbie dolls that looked like them.

In pop culture and everyday social humor “fat jokes” are still common and the sentiments of people with bigger bodies are disregarded. In *Appreciation for Fat Jokes, Belief in Obese*

Stereotypes Linked, (2014, para. 1) states that “From movies to television, obesity is still considered ‘fair game’ for jokes and ridicule”. This has the implication that anybody that doesn’t adhere to *thinness*, should be subjected to ridicule.

For example, “Television shows like *The Biggest Loser* encourage dangerous and unsustainable exercise and food restrictions from their contestants while using their bodies as fodder for our entertainment and reinforcing the notion that the most undesirable body one can have is a fat body.”, as shared by Taylor (2018, p. 18). There is a lack of empathy, acceptance and violence directed at bigger bodies through television, movies and social media. Another example of negative representation of bigger bodies is from Disney-Pixar’s 2008 children’s film *Wall-E*, the decline of society was portrayed in a rather troubling manner, and Farrell (2011) in their book highlights and identifies the prejudice by stating:

The creators of WALL-E could have chosen to represent the colony’s inhabitants in any number of ways to illuminate the tragic effects of overreliance on technology. Perhaps the people could have lost their hands (the robots did the grasping), mutated into snakelike bodies without bones (no need to stand), or developed tiny heads with no eyes, mouth, or ears (the robots had taken over the need for sight, speaking, hearing, and even thinking). But the creators chose a powerful, easily understandable shorthand to designate the downward evolution of these people: fat. I would suggest it is not just because we are in an “obesity epidemic” that the creators could rely so easily on this shorthand, but also precisely because the 19th- and early 20th-century meanings of fat as designating an uncivilized body are alive and well today. (p. 117)

Media often equates fat to lack of mobility and laziness.

The media is quick to highlight celebrities and public figures gaining weight like Demi Lovato while also celebrating them losing weight like Jennifer Hudson or Oprah. It is a common pattern in the media to portray the downfall of celebrities with them gaining weight as it is linked to the non-civilized bodies. The Stanley (2012) article gives an explanation of this hypocritical representation by stating,

Accordingly, society makes a show of supporting people who make peace with their extra pounds, but we really celebrate those who declare war on their bodies. Jennifer Livingston, a news anchor in Wisconsin, went on the air to publicly scold a viewer who wrote her an e-mail suggesting that her excess weight made her a poor role model, and she became a cause célèbre. But on its daily news crawl, CNN gives the same breaking-news urgency to an item about the death toll in Syria and a comedian who underwent gastric surgery. (para. 15)

Most brands that are available in the west advertise to be size inclusive, but the reality is different. Tonic (2021) shares,

The majority of the plus-size community is sold clothing on models that fall on the smallest end of the size spectrum - but what about the rest of us? These bare minimum attempts at inclusion aren't acceptable. "I don't think it is dramatic to say that it feels like I am being gaslit by these brands who present themselves as inclusive, but top out at a size 16/18, especially when inclusivity is central to their comms," ;" Alanna, a 32-year-old lecturer in fashion communication who wears a size 22/24, tells me. "I think this also sends the message that if you are fat, you are not worth dressing. It lets brands get away with shifting the focus back to the consumer. (para. 8)

The one-size-fits-all isn't a realistic approach. There are quite a few factors that impact the sizing of clothing and should be accounted for like genetics, diet, ethnicity and cultural norms. DeLallo (2021, para. 13) shares that besides "fatphobia in the fashion industry, classism has also infected it for centuries. Luxury and high-end names have long kept their items exorbitantly priced and far from the reach of the general public, and popular brands are following suit. Maintaining inaccessibility is a priority of the industry — but sometimes the measures committed to achieve it are astonishing." In the beauty industry too, things have changed and it's more inclusive but in the past that wasn't the case. Agricultural societies were able to create their own materials, many made their own clothing that was personalized for their body types. Beauty is also a social construction.

Dall'Asen (2021) asks in her article

"With this in mind, consider all the beauty advertisements you've seen in your life and combine them into one image. What do you picture? Here's what I see: A thin, white woman. Her skin is taut, tan, and free of blemishes, stretch marks, and scars. She's either giving a "smize" or is happily displaying virtually flawless teeth. Of course,

there's nothing wrong with being white and thin, but when you consider the purpose of a beauty advertisement — for a brand to convince you that their product will make you more beautiful — we run into a problem. Because when you're consistently taught to believe that the only definition of beautiful is white and thin (or proportioned in a very specific way), it can really mess with a person's self-image if they don't fit that mold (and many, *many* people do not fit that mold). Meanwhile, the people who are actually buying those products represent the full range of body sizes and shapes. (para. 5)

The representation in media, fashion, and other spaces is tokenistic as the brands and platforms continuously are trying to become 'woke' so that they are not *canceled* or boycotted; in reality, however, fat bodies are still unpleasant and disliked.

Plus-size body and Society

The general expectation from fat people in our society is that they should feel unhappy in their own bodies and feel less of a person, unworthy and devalued because they are not thin. Elaborating on the same notion, Schwartz & Brownell (2004) emphasize the difficulties of facing stigma related to weight by arguing that “Western culture highlights the ideal for thinness and is critical of those with excess weight, and demoralizes the person of size, suggesting that the person of size internalizes these messages making it impossible for them to feel good about themselves because of the physical presence” (p. 43). Feeling bad about being in their own skin contributes to the oppressive beauty ideals, making anti-fat sentiment normalized.

Most fat people are surrounded by concerned trolls. Janardhan (2017) in her article online explains who concerned trolls are and how they behave, she states:

I have dealt with concerned trolls literally all my life. For those of you who might be unfamiliar with the term – a concern troll is a person who feigns concern about you when you are doing something that makes them uncomfortable. They pretend to care about you when what they really want you to do is stop doing something that makes them uncomfortable. It's not really about you, it's about them. (para. 1)

This kind of normalized prejudice against fat people has only led to a more hostile society for people with bigger bodies. Brandheim (2017) shared in their research that “Studies have found that 40-55% of young, so-called overweight and obese individuals report being stigmatized on a daily basis by their peers and family members” (p. 21).

Usually, the discrimination and ill behavior starts from home and by family members then people in school, and other people in different public spaces that the kid interacts with join the bandwagon of being violent and prejudice against fat bodies.

Family induces *sharam* (shame) into fat girls and distorts their relationship with their bodies.

That also leads to hypersexualization. Q., M. (2018, Gracefulness, Vulgarly and

Transgression section) in her article recalls her middle school memory and shares

I read for class in middle school, Maupassant’s portrait of Boule de Suif (‘Ball of Fat’). She was the hero of the novella, a curvy prostitute, whose physical description uses three different lexical fields: food metaphors, fat/roundness, and sexual desire. When reading it, you get a feeling of both disgust and appeal, and I felt that’s what people projected on me, and even maybe what I projected on myself. (para. 18)

Rahimi and Liston (2009, p. 514) confirmed that “sexual labeling is a clear form of sexual harassment and, in many cases, it serves to remind young girls of their gendered role in the heterosexual script.” Sexual violence is internalized and created further self-image harm.

Mann (2022) shares her experience that

As a young girl, I remember feeling like needing a bra was something to be ashamed of. Boobs also meant unwanted attention and that your clothes didn’t always fit right. As I grew older, I realized that breasts along with hips also meant that there was an expectation that you hide them—they were not meant to be seen. Many people who grew up in South Asian households can relate to feeling like there is a link between our bodies and shame. We did not get to choose their size or shape. We did not get to choose whose gaze lingered, and why. Yet as soon as we were introduced to womanhood, we were also introduced to shame. As young girls we were taught to cover up in the presence of men. As young women, the pattern continues when we are told to change our clothes or not dress a certain way in the presence of anyone who will judge us. We carry shame from the moment we are born simply for existing as women, and our autonomy over our bodies is taken away not just when we are told

how to dress and what parts of ourselves to hide, but even in how we are taught to interact with the people around us. (paras. 1-4)

This shame and policing heightens when it comes to fat young girls. Fat bodies are also judged by people in public spaces of exercise such as gyms, sports grounds, etc. Harjunen, (2019, p. 173) writes “exercise is not always a source of well-being, empowerment, or positive embodied experiences—some body types are not so welcome in the field of exercise. Exercising can be a challenging and sensitive issue for those whose bodies are perceived in some way as non-normative. This includes, for example, fat, aging, and disabled bodies (e.g., Gailey 2014; Harjunen 2002)”.

Such prejudiced behavior is also visible in another part of society - health care. It is a common practice in health care facilities to attribute every health issue to having a bigger body, as Angela Alberga, assistant professor in the department of health, kinesiology and applied physiology at Concordia University, shares, “Anti-fat bias is rampant in all parts of society, including medicine, said Angela Alberga... More than three in five adults with obesity encounter weight bias from health professionals, according to Obesity Canada” (Vogel, 2019, para. 2). This kind of bias hinders fat people from reaching out for medical assistance in time, and the chances of self-invalidation of health issues increase. Further in the article, it is stated how certain studies have shown how exposure to weight bias triggers physiological and behavioral changes, which are connected to increased weight gain and poor metabolic health. This also results in decreased self-control which usually leads to binge eating.

Taylor (2018) unpacks how of the anti-fat bias has been functioning explaining:

Rather than acknowledging and basing research on the premise that diversity in weight and size are natural occurrences in humans, we treat larger bodies with poodle science and then pathologize those bodies by using the rhetoric of health. “I just want this complete stranger, whose life I know nothing about and who I have made no

effort to get to know beyond this Twitter thread, to be healthy.” This is called health trolling or concern trolling, and it is just another sinister body shame tactic. Given that we can make no accurate assessment of any individual’s health based simply on their weight (or photo on social media), it is evident that such behavior is not really about the person’s health but more likely about the ways in which we expect other bodies to conform to our standards and beliefs about what a body should or should not look like. Equally damaging is our insistence that all bodies should be healthy. Health is not a state we owe the world. We are not less valuable, worthy, or loveable because we are not healthy. Lastly, there is no standard of health that is achievable for all bodies. Our belief that there should be anchors the systemic oppression of ableism and reinforces the notion that people with illnesses and disabilities have defective bodies rather than different bodies. Each of us will have varying degrees of health and wellness throughout our lives and our arbitrary demands and expectations as it relates to the health and size of people’s bodies fuels inequality and injustice. Quite simply, everyone is not a poodle, and that is okay. Boy would the world be a boring, yappy place if we all were. (pp. 26-27)

Health trolling may have its roots in the colonial systems of controlling health and wellness. Many health professions rely on the Body Mass Index (BMI) which was invented nearly 200 years ago by Adolphe Quetelet, who was not a physician, nor did he study medicine. He was best known for his sociological work and contributed to racist science in the 19th century. Friend (2019, The increasingly complex science of fatness section, para. 23) states that “the Body Mass Index is a product of its social context. And, even according to its biggest champions, it’s not an effective measure of fatness, much less overall health.” In conclusion BMI is not necessarily an accurate way to measure health and wellness as it deems bigger bodies always as a sign of unhealthiness.

In Pakistan, there is no conversation, let alone *any* documentation regarding the ill-treatment of bigger bodies at the hand of health care providers, which could validate everyday stigmatic lived experiences of the ones being affected. The health care system privileges thin people who have different experiences than the normalized stigma against marginalized bodies and “The luxury of not having to think about one's body always comes at another body's expense.” (Taylor, 2018, p. 107). In most spaces, it is at the expense of fat bodies.

Mobility and Plus Size women

Bielskytė (2017, Women just don't have the same right to physically exist section, para 4) writes, "As girls we're taught not to take up too much space, not to spread our legs, to act politely, and not argue...". These gendered ideologies continue to dictate women's movement and mobility and stigmatize our bodies. In the article titled Female mobility (2021, para. 1), it is highlighted that "Mobility is not gender-neutral, but instead shaped by the male perspective. On the one hand, social roles and gender stereotypes that we learn from an early age influence us in our choice of transport. This way typically male and female mobility patterns are created." The mobility issue worsens for fat bodies of women and their everyday life is affected. Kwan, (2010, p. 149) writes, "As overweight participants perform mundane tasks, others remind them that they cannot take certain comforts for granted. Daily, they confront the reality that thin is the privileged norm. While body privilege enables thin individuals to perform simple tasks comfortably, for overweight individuals, at times these tasks elicit hurtful and insulting comments and stares." Normal everyday tasks that challenge fat bodies also contributes to their value within public and private spaces.

Public spaces aren't accessible in most countries, especially within the confines of public transportation. In an article titled Being Fat on Public Transportation (2015), the writer describes the situation in San Francisco:

Being in or around shared public space really seems to bring out the bigotry in people. I imagine it has something to do with the anti-humanitarian, zero-sum mentality that capitalism teaches us - the more room you take up, the less room I have. I think it has to do with internalized sexism and women keeping other women down on behalf of patriarchy. I think it has to do with the "audacity" of a fat brown woman living in rapidly gentrifying San Francisco. (para. 5)

Fat brown women are target of patriarchy and sexism. Attitudes of fatphobic people get worse if you are a person of color as Taylor (2021) in their book shares,

Whether we perceived ourselves as making the passenger beside us uncomfortable by taking up “too much” space in our airplane seat or we believed that our brown skin frightened the White woman who clutched her purse and crossed the street when she saw us approaching, either way it was in these moments that we found our heads bowed in shame, certain that our too fat, too dark, too muchness was the offense. It is never the failure of the seat or of its makers, who opted not to design it for myriad bodies. (pp. 21-22)

Hence, mobility of plus-size women is restrictive. Sexism, capitalism and patriarchy play a vital role in creating an everyday hindrance in brown plus-size women’s movement in public and private spaces.

Body autonomy, rights, and Pakistan

Bodily autonomy is defined as the right to self-governance over one’s own body without external influence or coercion. “Not only is bodily autonomy a human right, it is the foundation upon which other human rights are built.” (*Bodily autonomy: Busting 7 myths that undermine individual rights and Freedoms*, 2021, Myth 2: There is no right to bodily autonomy section, para. 8). In developed countries, there are movements that have been supporting plus-size bodies to have representation, and visibility and also end the bullying they have suffered. As Hudson (2020, Movements section, para. 18) says in an online article that there are, “many movements in fashion, food, or social media that have fought against size discrimination and for inclusivity.” Some of the movements are: Body Neutrality, Body Positivity, Fat Acceptance/Fat Activism, Health at Every Size, Intuitive Eating, and Victorian Dress Reform. Such movements revolve around body autonomy or essentially stem from the notion that body autonomy is a right. Such movements never truly found any footing in Pakistan, and any progressive discourse on such suffered greatly.

Pre 1970s Pakistan still had the potential to become a country where gender equality was of utmost importance. But the political events that followed changed the whole landscape and

the feminists here still are struggling to strive for constitutional safety. Rotter (2019) in their paper state that,

The four major events of 1979, the execution of former president Z. A. Bhutto by hanging through the US-backed military regime of Zia, the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the introduction of the Hudood Ordinance by the new regime had a profound impact on the Pakistani society (Imran, 2005). In search of legitimacy and acceptance of the orthodox religious groups, Zia embarked upon a series of measures that were designed to undermine what little existed by way of women's legal rights, educational facilities, and career opportunities - as well as the simple right for freedom of movement and protection from molestation by males (Alavi, 1991:1). (p.36)

Our former Prime Minister last year blamed the crime against women, Trans, and non binary folk on the increasing Fahashi (Vulgarity) in society, and popular religious scholars blamed Covid-19 on women's dressing and immodesty. Women and gender diverse people are targets of public blaming without any to little protections from violence.

The feminist battles that have followed on the ground have been very hard, many feel that the whole world has moved forward while we are still stuck a century back. Patriarchy still infests the country and Rashid (2009, p. 568) aptly describes the patriarchal mentality of Pakistan by writing, "They deem female bodies vulnerable and mortal while men's bodies are not marked with such connotations, allowing them to project their fears and hatred of frailty and mortality onto women's flesh. Women are told in countless subtle and not-so-subtle ways that they are essentially bodies only – reproducers, therefore sex-objects." These notions further marginalize plus-size women as they are discarded as ugly, unhealthy, and not worthy of respect and it feeds into the public and private spaces being hostile towards them.

In 2018, the women's march was revived in a few cities of Pakistan by local feminists, including Karachi. Many women attended and they came with their chants and posters, and in return faced a lot of backlash for standing up for their rights. "*Mera Jism, Meri Marzi*" which

translates to “my body, my choice” was scrutinized by people, especially men, heavily.

Misogyny is threatened by feminism, especially when women and gender diverse people stand up for body sovereignty.

Ali (2020) explains the backlash by writing

One of the main slogans of the women's march, "mera jism, meri marzi" (my body, my choice), has been a subject of a heated debate on social media for days. Nida Kirmani, a professor of sociology at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), says that "my body, my choice" is being interpreted as a promiscuous demand, however, it is about women's rights to have autonomy over their lives. ('My body, my choice' section, paras, 13-14)

Shehzil Malik, an artist, says the slogan is about bodily autonomy. "It means that it is my body and no one can violate it, abuse it, harass it, grope it, or do anything with it without my consent." (para. 15)

Body autonomy must also include safety for women of all sizes in public and private spaces, without any threats to their mobility and autonomy.

These explanations, however, have failed to convince many Pakistanis. A parliamentarian linked with the opposition Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) lashed out at women's march participants. "My body, my choice is aimed at spreading vulgarity," he said. "They want to destroy this country's social structures. Critiquing the patriarchal system of violence towards women is being heavily protected by those who benefit from oppressing and controlling women bodies.

The debate continues to date and whenever feminist issues are raised, the vitriol rises with it. Feminists in Pakistan are tirelessly still explaining what it means and want to put the grilling attitude of the masses behind. Bina Shah, a prominent Pakistani columnist, explains that “the real meaning of Mera Jism Meri Marzi boils down to a single word: consent. Giving

permission for something to happen. The women who talk about this slogan are referring to women having control over their own bodies”. (*Explainer: What does Mera Jism Meri Marzi mean?* 2020, para. 6)

The summary of the literature review is that in Pakistan, internal misogyny and stigma are so prevalent that the discourse around plus-size inclusivity is uncommon and representation is minimal. The plus-size bodies, as discussed, have been grossly misrepresented through stigma, jokes, and lack of body autonomy around the world. Body ideals that resulted from colonization, took root in the invaded region. As the discourse on plus-size bodies is continued, it highlights how certain notions have led to unhealthy relationships that women have with their bodies. This also highlights how through such subjugation, women lose control of their bodily agency. All these issues become even more magnified in a country such as Pakistan, where the narrative still continues to be against plus-size women.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Paradigm

I am a Brown, Sindhi woman from Pakistan, and to represent my brown and indigenous voice, a multi-paradigmatic approach seems satisfactory. Held (2019) explains that “All scholarly research, whether explicitly stated or not, is informed by a research paradigm which in turn informs the methodology and the method(s)” (p. 1)

As there is no Sindhi research approach and methodology available, the closest worldviews are Indigenous and Transformative. As Lather (1986, p. 259) discusses that “a research paradigm inherently reflects the researcher’s beliefs about the world that they live in, and want to live in”. I have explored and documented stories with the least influence of colonial approaches. It's only possible “if it is done in partnership, for decolonization is a mutual endeavor that involves the formerly colonized and the former colonizer (Held, 2019, p. 11). The approaches assisted me in exploring and documenting the narratives of brown women without compromising on their positionality, experiences, and politics. That I feel was the best way to create a representation for myself and the women like me in the academic literature.

Indigenous and transformative paradigms do share philosophical assumptions such as “ontology-based on multiple socially constructed realities, an intersubjective and experiential epistemology, and an emancipatory axiology as both paradigms take a critical and liberatory stance” (Held, 2019, p.7). That is how using both approaches became suitable for this research I conducted in Karachi, Pakistan. Pakistan is a country, which came from a former British colony, India. Indigenous and transformative approaches validated the reality and stories that were documented as the history of land and people, the post-colonial impact, and the cultural status quo were taken into account.

The research uses the word “indigenized” in (Morris & Staikidis, 2017, p. 12) instead of decolonization as explained in Chapter 1, “Kanto Teocintle Restor(y)ing Ourselves..” in Morris & Staikidis (2017)

[T]he colonization/decolonization binary is problematic. In particular, the settler colonial dominant society is the normalized referent from which decolonization is derived (Kovech, 2009). It seems to imply that colonization is reversible or correctable, disconnected from the material reality of difference -or from the permanent physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual disfigurements that result from lifetimes of internal and external oppression. (p. 12)

Based on these learnings, indigenous and transformative methodologies will be followed so the research is an attempt to document indigenized stories of plus-size women in Karachi.

Theoretical Perspective

The intersectional feminist theory was used to inform the exploration and documentation of the stories with a transformative and indigenous approach as it accommodated the brown female voices and narratives from multiple socio-economic classes, areas, and ethnicities that the research is documenting and exploring. Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American law professor who coined the term “Intersectionality” in 1989 explained Intersectional feminism as, “a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other,” in an interview with Time (*Intersectional Feminism: What It Means and Why It Matters Right Now*, 2020, para. 2). This theory would assist in the thematic analyses of the stories while being mindful of privileges and diversity.

The following quotes also emphasize my learning which helped in concluding that intersectional feminist theory was the best fit for this research as its lens informed the methodology of exploration and documentation. The theory helped taking into account class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, etc., so that the research is as inclusive as possible, and it also helped in keeping me mindful and accountable.

Rodriguez, J. (2018) states

Intersectionality is one of the most influential advances in the theory, research, and practice of gender and diversity scholarship. It is considered an instrumental tool to study the reciprocities of gender and other categories of difference and how these are created, reproduced, and perpetuated as part of systems of power and inequality that sustain privilege and disadvantage in everyday life (Anthias, 2005; Phoenix, 2006; Winker & Degele, 2011). (p. 429)

It helped in keeping my privilege in check which is important in the process of the work that I hoped to undertake and which frames my general approach to community engaged scholarship.

Atewologun (2018) explains that

Intersectionality is relevant for researchers and for practitioners because it enhances analytical sophistication and offers theoretical explanations of the ways in which heterogeneous members of specific groups (such as women) might experience the workplace differently depending on their ethnicity, sexual orientation, and/or class and other social locations. Sensitivity to such differences enhances insight into issues of social justice and inequality in organizations and other institutions, thus maximizing the chance of social change. (para. 1)

My study is an aim to take charge of the narrative which does come under an effort to create space for our stories and for that intersectional feminist lens played a vital role to keep my work as inclusive as possible without compromising on my native values.

I utilized the lens to analyze the patterns in association with gender, class, ethnicities and other social categories. These categories often overlap each other and helps in understanding the implication of having bigger bodies in their everyday lives.

Methods

The method I used in the research is *Narrative* and theming; both are analytical techniques for documenting and exploring stories. The participants for this research are women who identify as plus-size from various socio-economic classes within different areas of Karachi city and were willing to share their stories after being informed about the sensitivity of the subject. I

shared my story to give context of my personal positionality, to build relations, and establish the basis of research done with the community and for the community as an insider but also as an outsider of being a researcher. Sharing my position as an insider/outsider helped strengthen my connection with the community of plus-size woman in Karachi.

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for this research. I posted a recruitment poster on my Instagram account and asked women to contact me if they self-identify as plus-size cisgender woman living in Karachi, and if they believe they are on a stage in their healing journey on which they have taken needful steps to aid their mental health and would like to be part of qualitative research that requires them to share their life stories in association with their bodies; their views about plus-size representation across mediums; and, their mobility in public and private spaces in form of multiple open-ended questions. The women who fit into the criteria mentioned above were recruited subsequently. The participants were individually interviewed two times to record their stories in a span of one week. I mindfully conducted two interviews so they could manage their energies accordingly while sharing personal and vulnerable stories as it was potentially a draining process. This ensured that they were not forced to narrate their story in one sitting.

The sample consists of *five (N=5) plus-size cisgender women* between the ages of 25 to 30, excluding me, who were willing and ready to share their stories as they believed they are on a stage of their healing journey where it won't trigger them. The reason for the focus on this age bracket is that I belong to the same age group, which means many generational similarities. Being in the same age group contributed to the research as it gave a consistent exploration of shared stories of women who experienced their childhood in the 1990s, teenage years in the 2000s, and have personally seen the arrival of the internet and the rise of social media.

The data collection was done by conducting *two open-ended interviews* in a setting that was comfortable for the participants in a span of one week. The participants were given the choice of taking part in the research *in-person* or *digitally*. They were facilitated according to their comfort. *Zoom* was used to conduct digital interviews. The participants were given a choice to participate with their video or not as per their comfort level; a video option was given if they needed to interact and connect with me visually to assist them in sharing. I reassured them that they are not obligated to turn their video on as the interview's audio will only be analyzed for the study. The in-person location was picked according to the feasibility and comfort of the participants.

Interview Questions that were used and at times paraphrased as per the flow of conversation:

1. How has your journey been with your body since you were a child?
2. How did you come across the label 'plus-size'? What made you relate to it? Are you comfortable with this label?
3. Do you think their less representation in the society of plus-size cisgender women?
4. How does the absence of representation of fat bodies affect your everyday movement and mobility in private and public spaces?
5. What do they think about the term Fat?

The stories were used to explore the relationships the participants have with their bodies, and experiences they had to go through in relation to society, and how the representation of plus-size bodies has affected their mobility in public and private spaces. The location and medium were chosen while keeping in mind the pandemic situation and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Additionally, the ones who opted for in-person interviews were offered free transport and provided with food as the Sindhi tradition is never to let guests leave homes and other community places with empty stomachs as I am a Sindhi myself. This Indigenous practice was

followed as part of the research methodology. When the participants who were digitally participating were willing and comfortable, I delivered a meal to them.

The consent form was emailed to all the participants, and they were given an option to contact me via their choice of communication medium to ask questions or more information. The consent was recorded *verbally* at the start of the interviews. I assigned pseudonyms to those who wanted to stay anonymous. The transcription of all interviews were each shared with the participants and they were given an option to opt-out of research in the timeframe of 5 days after the final interview and notes transcription is provided to them for review, and no participant withdrew. Approval was taken for the final stories that were added to the thesis.

The process of withdrawal was as follow:

If the participant changed their mind and withdrew the consent within the timeframe of 5 days after being provided with the transcription of the interview and field notes, then no explanation would be asked. But if they change their mind after the period has passed, then their reason would be inquired, but unfortunately for this study their withdrawal won't be entertained as the deadline of my thesis requires me to finish in a fixed period and the data would have been analyzed.

As the nature of the data demands, strategies used in qualitative research were incorporated. Narrative data analysis was conducted coupled with latent content analysis, to document and explore the stories. As Mayan (2019, p. 94) writes “latent content analysis as “the process of identifying, coding and categorizing the primary patterns in the data” to form themes and conclusions that will assist in the narration of stories and in answering the research question.

For inclusion of the stories in the written thesis, a sequential draft of the stories was edited and shared with the participants for approval. Then later added to the chapter 4.

Methodological Limitations

I attended only 1.5 months of classes for this degree in person and that was a huge limitation in the completion of this degree and thesis as I did sometimes feel disconnected from this long-awaited learning experience and my graduate community but the determination to learn as much as I can against the odds and my passion to contribute to my communities has made me come this far. As I had moved back to Pakistan due to the mental health and financial crisis that I faced due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I didn't have access to campus facilities that eventually were accessible to graduate students in person such as libraries. I had problems with electrical power and internet outages which are part of everyday life in Pakistan.

Research Limitation

The limitation of this research was that I couldn't dive deep into the topic of sexuality, sexual experiences, and religion in relation with plus-size bodies as it isn't safe for myself and any of the participants if our stories in this context are publicly available at this stage of our lives and as per the current status quo of Pakistan. I had to opt out of these topics which was saddening, and frustrating.

This was a conscious decision taken to protect myself and the participants from coming under any scrutiny because we live in country where open discourses on the above mentioned themes are not welcomed without violent repercussions. I hope and wish the times would come where I could freely document and explore these topics too.

Ethics

The research conducted was approved by the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board (REB). The research topic is sensitive as such discourse is not common in Pakistan. My mental health first aid training from the Mental Health Commission of Canada aided interview

procedure and research and it was ensured that there is a safe space in place for the participants, where their stories were listened to and documented. Moreover, utmost confidentiality was in place, so that they feel safe while sharing their stories. I was diligent including in the process to be as mindful and empathetic as possible, as I myself am a plus-size woman, and my own struggles, experiences, and understanding were part of the research that surely helped. Furthermore, as research participants, the women, were given due respect.

Verbal consent from the participants was taken. Everything that pertains to this research, including its nature and reaches, was explained in detail before the interviews. They were asked if they'd like to receive a copy of the full research once it's completed.

Any queries that the participants had, were answered with utmost care. Moreover, it was ensured that the participants don't feel any kind of discomfort or feel triggered; and space for open communication was created. For the participants who opted for in-person interviews, COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were followed to avoid health risks. Also, the participants were given an incentive of PKR 2000 for self-care which they were encouraged to spend as per their needs. Furthermore, after the completion of the research, it would be shared with the participants (the ones who had consented to it).

Chapter 4: Tales of Plus Size Karachiwalis

Karachiwalis means the women of Karachi and this research gave me an opportunity to document stories of five Karachiwalis. They shared with me their journeys with their bodies, their understanding of the term plus-size, their take on lack of representation of plus-size women and their struggles with movement and mobility in public and private spaces.

It is an unusual practice to add a whole chapter of the interview in a research study but for this particular study it was significant to the research question and objective to include all stories because the intention is to take charge of our narrative as brown urban Pakistan cisgender women and to co-create academic literature because its high-time that instead of cis-het men or foreign folk the natives share their stories and take up their deserving space.

It also is important to document these stories for our present and future generation to find relatable stories so that they have primary knowledge to further research on and also for communal support.

The interviews were initially transcribed word to word then a sequential draft of the stories was edited and shared with the participants for approval. Following are their stories:

Story 1: Anza

I was born and raised in Karachi. I have a younger and an older sister. Growing up, my sisters were always 'normal bodied'... and me? I was the fat kid. Always a fat kid. I was nicknamed *moti (fatso)*, *bhains (buffalo)*, etc. Particularly, by my father, using such names was considered normal, and this was his way of showing his love for me. People around me used to say that I am fat, but also adorable, you know? My body didn't change later on too, I was still fat in later years. That was when fat jokes like, *Kis chakki ka aata khati ho?* ('What kind

of flour do you eat?') started being made, and something like that took its toll on me, which I realized way later. Imagine if your entire identity became a fat kid who read books!

The most pivotal moment I can remember related to my body happened when I was around 12-13, I believe. I was in a pretty prestigious school in Karachi. It was a Cambridge system school and took a higher fee. One of those schools, you know. It was an all-girls school, and they had this dance competition going on. Despite being a plus-size girl, I really loved dancing. It was one of my hobbies. I adored dancing. I adored swimming. Suffice to say I dance pretty intensely, I did proper choreography back then too. So, I wanted to do this dance routine at the school, and choreograph it for the competition for the whole group.

On the competition day, as we were getting on the bus, my principal didn't let me get on the bus. The reason? Her exact words, as I recall, were *'You can't have her things letting out and jiggling in front of the male professors!'* Can you imagine that? I must have been in the 6th grade, and I had choreographed this whole dance routine. Other girls were going to do the dance that I made, that I was a part of. And that's what I heard. Literally, a kid being objectified and sexualized. It really shook me. I remember walking around the school, asking all the professors that I did like, *'Am I really that fat?'* And understandably so, because the teachers couldn't speak anything against her, couldn't answer. And this incident left a huge mark on me. Now that I think about it, my body wasn't even that developed. Yes, I was fat, but I didn't have tits hanging out! And even if that was the situation, and somehow the principal, who mind you was a woman, was seeing those, then how in the world was that my fault? And, why didn't she stop me earlier? Why did she encourage me in the first place, only to insult me like this? I remember being shattered and coming back home crying. I swore that day that I would stop participating in extracurricular activities.

After that, I believe between ages 12 and 16 I went through gender dysphoria. I tried getting over it through some painful habits. I would actively berate myself; go on forums that make fun of people like me. I took it all in. It didn't stop... It never stopped. I remember being counted as 'one of the boys'. Why? Because I was a fat girl, and fat girls aren't allowed to be delicate and feminine. I was the *protector*. I remember this clearly that I had a cousin my age, extremely beautiful. She was very thin, and I would always be designated as her protector. Whenever we were going out, I was told to protect her, and I used to think of course, after all I was her sister. But I didn't realize back then what the idea was behind that. The assumption was that no one was going to look at me 'that' way. Because I was too ugly to be looked at. It was such a weird thing, you know? Like, I didn't want attention from perverts. But of course, I was too fat. That really makes you feel like you don't have the identity of a woman. One other thing I remember, I was supposed to be a boy, as in, my mother never got her ultrasound scan. I was supposed to be called Sher Ali. And when I was born and turned out to be a girl, my dad thanked God that it was a daughter, as he didn't want another boy. That was also something that led to me being raised a tomboy.

After getting bullied for my weight, and certain other incidents, I stopped wearing the clothes my mother wanted me to. A very fashion-forward person, she used to dress me up in skirts, and blouses, and she was always very liberal in that sense. I just cut her off. I wouldn't wear my mother's clothes and became more of a tomboy. I had trauma happen to me as a child too, and that was on the backburner too. Eventually, I decided that I already look 'like a man' because of my body, and might as well *be* a man.

I remember in my later teenage years I did get some comfort when I got into relationships with two people specifically. One was someone I met from India, a very sweet boy. He really helped me. Then the one currently, my fiancé. He is also a fat guy. But guys don't get treated

the same way. For being fat in the society. But regardless, he really helped me get more comfortable with my own body.

Later on, I got into one of the best medical schools in my city, as well as the country. That was also the time when I faced bullying and harassment related to my body too but of a very different kind. At my house job in my college, all of the girls at my time were normal size. I was the fattest one. I used to wear jeans and T-shirts, without *dupattas*. Because dupattas are a hazard. In dentistry specifically. I remember people saying ‘Oh you're not wearing anything on your shirt’... No, because dupatta is an absolute hazard, because it’s literally a hanging cloth which can get into anything, including a drill! It will die, and it's expensive!

So, I did not wear a dupatta, and it was a safe environment. It's a hospital for God's sake! I was just wearing a lab coat on top of me. To give a bit of context, my head of the department was always rude to me. Even though she herself was a plus-size woman. To all the other girls she was like, ‘*Oh, how sweet you are!*’ It was one of those weird things that I noticed.

So, once, I remember I was working on a patient, and it was a female child. I was working on her. And the head of the department said, ‘*Close your button!*’ It was a suffocating environment, and she had noticed one of my button was open. I ignored at first, and then she screams in front of the entire ward, ‘*Close your front, you don't know how big you are?*’ I looked around at my other colleagues, and all of those girls were wearing light colored *kurtis*, they weren't wearing any dupatta. Oh, and by the way, I didn't engage much with my group. I didn't talk to many people in college, I was very alienated. So, these other girls used to talk to guys and all, and my teacher never screamed at them. She never singled them out... But she singled *me* out. Then she said later, ‘*I had to say something, your body is developed...*’ and I looked at her dead straight in the eye, and had wanted to say, ‘*What the hell are you talking about? If I am developed, what are you? Why are you policing a 24 year old's body?*’

One other thing I remembered when I was self-harming,, was that people thought I was doing it for a boy. Because I was fat. How can a guy like me? Which was insulting. So yes, incidents like these happened there, and they further affected my relationship with my body.

The first time I was introduced to the term plus-size was around 2013, 2014. It was through the song 'All About That Bass' by Meghan Trainor? So, when that song came out, I really loved the song. In hindsight it's a pretty bad song, but at the time it was revolutionary. You don't really have a song talking about men liking big girls and men wanting to hold on a little more at night. It's a pretty romantic notion that somebody might love me, not despite my fatness but because they liked it. And it's really an empowering part. Like, someone would look at me at night and think there's so much for me to keep. The kind of neurodivergence I have grown into, the kind of person I am, I want to do more. I want to be more to the point where I over [I am not sure what this means?} ... because I was always very quiet. I kept it to myself. I don't want to be that anymore. So, I speak more, I am louder.

So yes, I am very comfortable with the plus-size label. But also, I don't like the way we have distributed women into these demographics. Like you are either plus-size or normal size.

When the entire point of body positivity is body neutrality. Your body should not matter, size or shape. Though I understand for certain purposes, the ratio is important. I am comfortable with it in scientific and analytical terms, but I get miffed off when I like I hear, 'She's one of the most beautiful plus-size women I have ever seen'. You don't ever say to me. 'She's the most non-plus-size beautiful woman ever'. You don't call people like Barbara or Kendal Jenner as the most beautiful non-plus-size women. She's the best supermodel in the world, never the best plus-size model. I feel plus-size alienates those women more. In a weird way it alienates you from being on the shelves. A lot of famous boutiques on Instagram have their normal boutique and then there's plus-size, separately. And I never understood that. Because

they are clothes. Our clothes are somehow demographically different beyond size. And then, be like it is size. But then you don't show that same difference from small to large. So why from large onwards. Why does an entire market shift, large onward extra small? You don't have petit-specific boutiques, now do we? You don't see them. Anywhere. You don't see such websites either. They are all just part of a website. Then you have Fashionova I guess if that's the one. They are always something stupid.

I watched this TikTok the other day, I don't usually watch that many TikToks. I am not a fan. I actually watched this video. There was this girl who was explaining, who is a plus-size model, but she carried extra padding with her. And she explained, that women who are being shot, and women who aren't plus-size, just wear padding, where her body looks plus-size but her face looks sharp; sculpted. Which is bizarre to me because, even those bodies need to be very specific. You know they have to be plus-size in the waist, and the breast to hip size, must be a perfect dip. And she said I am going to reveal this, because it does happen in the industry. What they need is a sharp jaw; when you're talking to such women, they must look thin, even if their bodies are fat. You look at their face. So is that *really* plus-size? Doesn't that really alienate fat women. Why does Givenchy need a separate section for plus-size? There is something to be said about alienation of women. Plus-size women. Because I don't see the same happening to thin size women.

Coming back plus-size women in Pakistan, they are considered dirty. Something I learned at a very young age. Things like stretch marks, and body acne. I had an ample bosom, as a kid even, a pretty giant chest even as a teen, so there are stretch marks, and veins. Moreover, I remember, at one point, my own mother came to me, not going to excuse her, and said why are there marks on your chest like dirty/ bad women? She's not from a very educated background and has her own trauma. Not going to judge her for it. The way she said it, it left

me puzzled. To be honest, back then I wasn't very learned either. She is better now. However, the way she said it was so weird. Anyway, so I asked her what she meant by that, and she told me that plus-size women are almost always prostitutes. For instance, in old Pakistani films they are courtesans, and prostitutes, they are the femme fatales. And it's weird, we hate how plus-size women look, as far as I can remember Pakistan has always fetishized them. You make fun of *mujras* (a kind of dance) and at the same time plus-size women are carrying it. You make fun of how you are never gonna marry a fat woman, but the prostitute you picked is a fat woman? It's a dichotomy, and the way I have seen people leer at me, I have had a woman take a grown ass man away from me because I was developed and I was talking to him. Grown ass woman. And I, for all intents and purposes, was not a smart, or socially aware person. Though I never know when people are hitting on me. Or, you know being weird. Because I wasn't raised in that kind of household. My dad never stopped me from making friends with men. It was also maybe because I was a very lonely kid, anyone would work. I was not used to that. And when you are a fat girl, you develop assets. You are automatically a threat. You have something people want to touch. Pakistani relationships, with plus-size, are the same. They are ugly fat feminists. That's the truth. It's both delicious, but also very morbid. You have no value, but whatever value you have is fetishized.

Over the past few years, whatever progress I had related to my body came crashing down when I got COVID. I lost all this weight because of diagnosis and all. I am still over 60 kg I think. I don't know if it still counts as plus-size. And people who see me, tell my mother, how sweet I look. That I have gotten so beautiful. '*What is her secret?*' She was asked by someone, and my mother said she was sick. There's *no* secret there.

So, I have an aunt and she has a daughter who is 29 or 30. She calls up my mother and she's like ask Anza to talk to her daughter about weight loss. Because she keeps eating. Of course,

I'd feel horrible for this, because I will not call up a girl and tell her *'Oh you're fucking fat, lose some weight. Get married!'* Because when I got engaged I was fat. The person that liked me liked me for who I was, all I was, and all I will ever be. But her response to my mother telling Anza was sick was, *'Say what you will but Anza is pretty now. No one is gonna look at her outside of that. Nobody is gonna care if she were ever fat. But now she's adorable, yes?'* It broke me. Because holy shit! I will never be anything more than my body, will I? It doesn't matter if I graduated from one of the top universities in Karachi, probably Pakistan. It doesn't matter that I am a STEM student, from a family of STEM graduates. It doesn't matter if I am earning money through something I love, which I think is amazing! It doesn't matter that I am an artist, I am a writer, I am a dancer, none of those things matter. *All* that matters is I have lost 33 kg. Through vomiting. None of that matters.

Up until two years ago, that was what I was known for. My body first, name second, and my profession third. And it is horrible. I was known as the kid who ate four sandwiches in the class, I had professors and teachers single me out. Because I was fat. And, you know I didn't go into sports, because fat girls don't go into sports. It took its toll on me, it really did. I grew up thinking ... You know how body positivity is a thing now, it is a beautiful thing and it should be. But, you don't have a lot of positivity for yourself, let alone for the body that you hate. And I - And it took a very long time to learn to love my body. And, I have realized that it didn't really work.

I had so much body positivity. In 2020. Now I look at the mirror and wonder who that is. It was a time when I didn't love my body but I supported fat bodies. Now everyone else loves my body and I am sitting here, hating every second of it. Because I love her, I see the appeal that people see in her, and I hate the fact that it took me that long to love my old body. Takes me no time to love this body. I don't know what it says about me, as a feminist, as a body

positive person, it's not body positivity when I look at myself, in my old pictures, and look at my recent ones, and feel damn I am hot now. That's not body positivity. And now everyone's coming back to me and treating me like a woman.

Sometime back, I went to my old alma mater. My university. My sister has her dental appointments there. So, there's a guy from my class. I met him after a very long time. I think after 8, 10 months. He was seeing me properly after that much time. And he had seen me pre-COVID before that. So, obviously, I looked different. When I was in the uni, I was one of the boys, as I mentioned earlier I wasn't a girl. I wasn't talked to in a polite way, or in that 'flowery' language. It wasn't that I wasn't respected, there were my peers, and they had to respect me. They just didn't treat me like a woman. I was like a dudebro. I was a guy, for all intents and purposes. So, this guy, he comes to me and says Anza is that you? Yeah, he was like politely talking to me. And he had never talked to me like that before, and now he's talking to me as if he's trying to pick me up! And I was like, yeah I was waiting for my fiancé and all. I saw a slight disappointment on his face. I was like, this cannot be happening to me. For 5 years we knew each other, you were not like this, and now suddenly I am worthy of being treated with delicacy, delicateness, flowery language, and politeness. I am allowed to be treated like a woman now. It's so fucked up.

So, dude, you come back to me and be all kind. Before my collar bone wasn't showing, now it does. And suddenly I am beautiful for you? I now see the difference now. So, recently, I got on the green bus, and the guy stopped the bus, because a doctor, me, was coming. Things like that didn't happen before. Men opening doors, or leaving the seat so I could sit. And it's so stupid. And I never cared about those things before. Like, I was very much my father's daughter, and I am not used to this. The only way I am being treated like a femme is because I am *not a* femme.

See, I had gender dysmorphia for a very long time. I am very feminine now. A part of me is queer. I am a bisexual one. Bisexual Muslim woman. Part of it stems from my identity as a queer woman. The problem with that is - My mother makes fun like I was a tomboy and all. My sisters were fashionistas. But I am starting to make more effort now. My sister's clothes fit me now. So I wear her clothes, I wear jewelry. And this happened literally yesterday.

Let me also discuss how fat people are treated by doctors here, because I have literally been misdiagnosed because of my fat. I have been told by my dermatologist that their acne treatment didn't work because it made my periods very, very bad. I was literally told '*Oh, maybe try losing weight and you'd lose your acne*'. Now, guess what? Turns out I just needed a higher concentration of salicylic acid, and something else. But this doctor was really confident in telling me that I needed to lose weight. Maybe I did, maybe I'd have felt better. And I had more stamina... So, that was a lie. I used to run marathons in house job. You are running, standing. It's a very harsh job. Its dentistry. I had to run marathons. Now my sister doesn't let me go out, because I might faint again. This has happened to me twice now. It's because I am thinner now. People don't see that. They think you look so healthy, and what's your diet routine. My routine is literally a bunch of chronic issues and a lot of anxiety.

There's nothing there to celebrate and people are celebrating it. It says a lot about how we treat fat women. The worst thing we do to them is to make them protectors. The wild women. They won't get raped, so they need to look out for other girls. It's cruel. It's very ableist. It's true.

Let me talk a bit more about that, the three dermatologists I went to have always called my fatness out as being the reason I have acne. And I have had a big acne problem. I still have it... So it wasn't fat that was affecting me. It was never fat. I have fungal acne. And no doctor would think of that, and they called out my weight. When their retinol treatment didn't work.

By the way, a lot of women take retinol for acne. They shouldn't. Retinol blows off your entire uterine wall. Very, very harsh for a reason. That's why doctors always ask you, are you planning on being pregnant. You will suffer like consequences. That's because of acne ... very harsh medication. So, for me, acne was very painful. And I told my doctor that. And he put me on some other course, bullshit, like DermaV ... But then they tell, try to lose weight as well! No, I came to you for my skin. What does my skin have to do with my body? My fat? My BMI does not affect my skin. Do you know what does? Bad products. Bad eating habits. But not weight loss. I know that for a fact. And then people say, *oh you're fat, you shouldn't feel pain. Oh, how did you faint? You're fat.* I am sorry, I guess? And then they say, *oh you're fat, oh, you probably have high blood sugar.* No, I don't. None of you actually look at me properly and consider all my tests, and then give me a diagnosis. And that is an issue. And that part is an issue with the Pakistani healthcare system as well. And the teaching system. I have been through that teaching system ... And in Pakistan, you are not taught bedside manners. Nothing. My professors would actively say, *come here moti!* There was no respect. There was no ease, if you're a fat girl. You don't get anything. You don't get to like, you don't even get basic courtesy if you're fat girl. And whenever you go to a doctor, they'd tell you your issue, and very quietly whisper, lose some weight too, you'll feel better. Or, you could just do my biopsy and tell me if I am dying. It's not hard. I am paying you to do that. I am not paying you to tell me to lose weight. I know I have to. In fact, I have to, I will. But yeah.

I never used to fear being targeted by men before. I used to fight people at the bus station. My elder sister ran after a man who groped my younger sister, with a rock. And beat him with it. My sister was big on fighting. Now I can't do that because I am weak. I am seen as a target. I see it in people's eyes. In addition, people think it happened because I got a fiancé. The weight loss thing. Which doesn't work. Because I was engaged back in 2019. And lost weight in 2021. Therefore, like it doesn't add up. If you are gonna believe that, it's on you. So I was

never taken seriously, I was always told I cannot do this or that, whenever I took my cousin to modelling, because she was like a model, and I was her manager. And that's the other thing. For my cousin, I was the protector, so I went with her as her manager. And when they asked are you married or engaged? Like, yeah I am. And they looked surprised. Like, they thought this fat bitch has a husband, but this beautiful woman doesn't. They were like how. I don't know. My relationship with my body has been tortuous, as you can see.

I have this to say: eww no! I hate the whole idea. Holy fucking shit. As a doctor, from a family of doctors, I will tell you this. You cannot judge people by their BMIs anymore. BMI is a lie. Okay, this reminds me of something. I went to this store the other day, a pretty upscale store. They were having this PediaSure/ Ensure (food supplement) publicity stunt. They were checking your BMI. Now, I have been monitoring my weight, every day I have to do it. I stand on a scale, and I have to note down even if I lose 0.2 kilos. And I have to lie to my sister that I am not losing weight anymore. It's so fucked up. Before all of this, I was actively trying to lose weight. Now, I am trying to gain it. Now I have to actively try to gain it. It's such a fucked up thing. Anyway, I go to this publicity stunt stall, and my mother is there too, getting her BMI checked and it was perfect. And I get it checked and I know what was going to happen. And I stepped on it and was told that my BMI is okay, but I could lose more weight. And I hold in the laughter. It's not traumatizing anymore. And I looked at her. *But you said my BMI was okay?* They said, yes, but you could still lose some more weight. You are on the borderline. BMI is a fucking lie. It is a lie. Because I am not fat anymore. To what I was before. I was 88, 89 kg, I am currently 60 kg. I have lost a lot of weight in 1 year. Last year this time around I was diagnosed with issues. And yet you could have told that my BMI was normal. It's borderline. You didn't have to say I could still lose some more. Especially because those girls weren't diet experts. They were just like publicity people. They were. And that we are conditioned to think like that.

And also, related to this, people go on and on about normalizing obesity. Lizzo showing off her ass does not make everyone else fat. Things like that don't normalize obesity. Do you know what does normalize obesity? Eating disorders. You know what does normalize obesity? Having food that is made of saturated fats, and *not* promoting indigenous healthy foods, because those existed. In Canada, indigenous people in colder regions, depend a lot on of unsaturated fat. Up there, in that weather, you need fat, to keep you warm. That is considered healthy. That keeps them alive. So, what is healthy and what isn't really depends on the region, and environment. That is what I believe. Now I am not saying you go ahead and live your 500-pound life. That is unhealthy from a scientific point of view. But people like us, we are normal. We are healthy, and no BMI can tell us we aren't. Because that would be a lie. Unless you are telling me that you have heart disease, or have diabetes. Oh, and then there is this other thing, When I was fat, my mother, I was a very angry kid, I still am. So, my mother used to say that I have high blood pressure because I get angry a lot. At this point, my blood pressure *is a* medical emergency - I have orthostatic hypertension. I am the opposite of high BP. My blood sugar drops down to a medical emergency, at times. You *cannot* tell when a fat body is healthy and a thin body isn't. You never can guess.

Just say that fat women make you uncomfortable. Don't tell me we are normalizing obesity. You never said that when Victoria's Secret was out there, with their fucking angel shows. Don't tell me what is normalizing what. Don't tell me Kardashians are shit upon. No, not the way *you* shit upon every basic fat woman in the world that doesn't have the same star power as Kardashians. They get shit upon because of their abusive diet habits. Yeah, they are on a platform. I am not. You don't come at me - *Oh, you shouldn't be eating a zinger*. Oh, fuck I will. I am not normalizing obesity by eating it. Just like *you* are not a paragon of health either.

Coming back to the plus-size debate, I feel Pakistani women would still prefer plus-size over being called fat because fat still has a negative connotation. It does, I am not gonna lie about it. I know if someone calls me fat, because they did, gosh. I remember once a kid patient did something. Kids are horrible. Kids are spawns of the devil. I love them, I want to be a mom someday, but I am terrified of them! So, I was treating this kid for a root canal for a filling. I was trying to calm him down, he was an annoying little shit. The first thing he tells me, when all people are holding him down, I don't want to get this done by a fat woman. This is a 9 year old at best. And I felt horrible. And his sister... she was right there! And I literally thought, maybe teach your kids some manners? And I know am not supposed to feel affected by this, I am a doctor. But fuck, of course I felt so. I was a student, I am a girl. Him calling me fat was horrible. He is just a kid, sure, but somebody taught him that. Somebody normalized that around him. They don't normalize obesity around him. They normalize demeaning fat people. I feel like - women in Pakistan don't like being called fat. And I am telling you they don't like being called plus-size either. They don't like not being conventional.

When it comes to plus-size representation in Pakistan, I can name like one plus-size person in media. Who always gets to be made the butt of the fat jokes. And that's Faiza Saleem. There's not much representation of fat girls, besides her. And even then it's not the best depiction.

For me, there is no plus-size representation in Pakistani society. I have not met, or looked up to any plus-size person. Like oh, there is an influencer, or actress, or even politicians. The only plus-size politician is Shireen Mazari. And she gets made fun of. You know there aren't a lot of people I can look up to and be like, oh, you know, that's a fat dentist that is popular. Or, that's a doctor that's really, really respected. Or there's a social media influencer, or a

fashion influencer. And the only one I can think of is Xera Hussain, and that's because of the group that she has. It's probably the only plus-size group I know. There isn't any representation, and even if you go for it, Generation ads for instance are supposed to be very influential, right? It often portrays itself as plus-size friendly. The problem is every time, as a kid, whenever I went there to get clothes, they never had size 12 or up. They barely have 14. Size 16 didn't even exist. *Oh, we don't carry that in our stores.* Then why market it? Then places like Outfitters. They told me to my face, that we don't carry jeans above 32. They said we only carry teen sizes, and I was 17-18! It's a very strange thing. They would make the mannequin look a certain way, you know? The only places you can really find plus-size stuff are overpriced like import shops. Other places I could think of are those flea markets.

I could find my clothes at Sunday Bazar. Clothing is the only thing that really matters. Body type doesn't. But in order to afford that clothing, you have to have money. And simply put, I did not have that kind of money. To put into import shops like Mango, Debenhams, and stuff. I couldn't afford that. So, of course, I couldn't look good either. If you have money, you automatically look good.

Another place is Playhouse at Clifton. The place is just like Zainab Market (another market for cheaper plus-size clothes) and Sunday Bazar combined. My Sunday bazar is nearby. That is the only place you'd find bras of my specific size. I am a double D. And they have actual good brands. Last time I went I found Victoria's Secret, in my size. You don't get that here for cheap!

There aren't any places that sell swim clothes for us. They don't sell swim clothes for anyone here, to be honest. But there aren't any lingerie shops where you can go in and ask for plus-size, underwear, and stuff. There isn't any representation for plus-size women in Pakistan. There has never been. And I don't think that is changing in the future as well.

When we talk about mobility and movement related to plus-size bodies, there's a lot to discuss. For me, in private spaces, for example, it's not much. My family is fine with it. It only happens when I am in my home looking at myself in the mirror, oh, no that's flabby. That's this. That's that. There aren't any issues as such. Luckily, I was raised in a house that is very open about showing skin. They are very comfortable about... So that wasn't an issue. The issue is, that when you are outside, you're constantly aware of how you look.

I have had this happen to me in my childhood. Later on as well. And that is the thing. When you're fat... fat is directly related to being 'seen', and that's where it gets really hard to move in public. I remember my mother would actively make me wear that lab coat, just because I wouldn't look too big from the angle. So people wouldn't stare at my chest. People would actively point out how fat I am; I heard things like *please move, aunty, move there*, I know I shouldn't feel bad about being called an aunty, but it is a slur in our society. So being offended over this *is* valid.

You go into public spaces, and for example, you're in public transport, and it's very hard to move around. Because you don't know if someone's slight touch of the hand was purposeful or by accident, and you don't know whether you should say something or not. I have had a harasser in front of me say, that if you complain who would save you. Utterly despicable. Things like that mean that I avoid transport like rickshaws, and buses too. I remembering getting into buses, after covering myself, head to toe, even if it was the hottest day. I would have breathing issues. Like I would come home and I am literally dripping sweat, and I am dying. But I have covered myself up.

I have already mentioned how my weight loss changed my life, and how people looked at me. While, I am still technically plus-size by societal standards, by my own standards, this is the thinnest I have been. And you'd think I'd be happier about it, I am not. Because of the way I

lost my weight. It was very rapid. My body didn't have time to catch up. Residual skin is all over my body ... So when I look at myself, sometimes I feel like myself, I *like* myself, my stomach is soft, it's mushy, it isn't the way it used to be before. I feel very good about it. And then I see my arms, and then I see my sagging skin. How my collarbone has started to come out, and I feel where this is this gonna stop? And how am I gonna feel about it? I don't feel good with my body. I don't feel like it's my body, and that's body dysmorphia coming in. Imagine wearing jeans one day, and then the next day those jeans don't fit. And the next day those other jeans don't fit either. That I just bought. On, and on and on. That's how it has been for me. And because of my condition I have to keep a track of my weight, and that messes you up. If it goes down that's a bad sign. But if it goes up in your head that's also a bad sign. Because at this point I have been conditioned. *You look so good now, don't get fatter than this.* Say I went from 62 to 61 kg, I was already underweight at 62, but now I am 61 kg. I can't go lower than that. But if I go higher than 61 kg now, I am panicking; I am gonna be fat again. Which is not something I should be worrying about. My health should come first. It's not how my brain works. My brain instantly thinks, oh it's going down. You are gonna die. Oh, it's going up, the society is going to kill you anyway. So you're stuck trying to stay in that golden goose period unless the time it goes down again, and then you have to accept that. So on and so forth. I thought my ideal weight would be 72, it's not. It keeps going down. I felt I'd stop losing weight at 65, then 63, then 61. I counted my weight again. 60.9. And I don't know what to do with that. Because a month ago I was maintaining 62.5. And every decimal down just gives me a heart attack. Whether it goes down, or it goes up. And knowing... even when I lose weight, nobody's gonna have my body type. You know, nobody's gonna have a body type of someone who has lost weight, so she has flabby skin, she still looks thicker than she is. They are not gonna hire models that look like me. They are not gonna hire models that look like you. Maybe they'd do it for a social media campaign, or

something. But they won't actually hire you. So what's the point? In my head space I berate myself enough. If I see a plus-size model, I don't think that's gonna change anything. Because I know somebody would go around. My own mother would go around and say, look what a fat woman they have selected. And that's a fault on her part, I know, technically it's a fault on all of ours as well.

The label plus-size, however, should be normalized in Pakistan. We already know what kind of societal pressures we have on women in Pakistan. You already know the trauma. So, Pakistani women already have shitload of expectations on them.

Story 2: Zohra

I was always the big girl, and I knew it. I knew it because nobody shied away from telling me I am big. Be it jokes, or who can carry the things. Carry the groceries, outside. Or, the kid who wants most food. Or, the kid who won't fit into clothes. It was just said in front of me. All the time. I know for sure that when I was six, even then I knew I was a big kid. Not the word fat, but I knew I was a big kid. In school, if a kid fell next to me, it was easily assumed that it was me who did it. Things like these.

But when I turned 10, I knew I was fat, but also thick. I have boobs, and I have an ass. Because my mother gave me first bra around that age. She told me you're not at an age where you wear a slip anymore. So you wear a bra. I remember, we had store room changing room, my mother just gave it to me and said just go and wear it. She didn't explain anything. I remember I cried so much. Because that was the same year I got my periods too. Like, class 5 is when you're going from primary to secondary, and you're growing up. Even in school you're told not to wear a frock, but trousers from that point. Or wear a pajama. You have to wear a V* now. I was given my first pad and first bra in the same way.

In retrospect, 10 is a very young age. To know you're a woman and you have to hide things now. And you're a fat person so you have to hide more. In my school it happened less, weirdly, we had a lot of big girls in our school. We used to be a bit confident about these things. I became... not a bully, but if someone used to say something to me, I used to scare them. Like, if you're saying I am big, then I am big. I'll see when you scam away. This used to be like that ... but like teachers didn't say anything either. I remember once a teacher said about me that I was bold. My mother scolded her. Her whole problem was that I walk with my 'chest out'. I was like, I have that, so I walk like that. How is it my fault?

Then, I got a gown* when in class 9th. One teacher, literally told the admin that I want Zohra to be removed because she walks like a man. I have a big ass. I can't do anything about it. I can't walk like a fucking cat for you. Only because I am a big girl, get it in your head that I can't walk or sit with my legs closed all the time. I need to breathe. Even our uniforms aren't forgiving, right? They are made of a thick material, in which chafing happens. We are told since early, that clothes would be like this only. Be it jeans, be it sleeveless frock, I knew I would have to leave these things because I am growing big in these clothes. I remember my clothes would shear so badly, they would tear apart within months. My mother used to say that she'd get me new ones, but I used to have chafing marks. Still have them.

Even after growing up I haven't worn fitting clothes, because I am unable to breathe. Fitting trousers start hurting me. I get cuts, or pimples even. It's always been like you have to fit in your clothes. I knew this as a kid.

This is a parenthood issue. So, my sister is very thin and small, and she's just one year younger than me, but there's a height difference of 6 inches or something. She's really tiny. She's probably not even half my weight. I would say. And who hasn't compared me to her?

Between us, however, we never used to compare ourselves. I remember only once she called me an elephant, and I slapped her. If I were an elephant, she was an ant! And kids do that, they don't have any clue, to say if they're hurt or something. So I just slapped her, and she never said it again. She never has a comment on my body, and she's the only one in my family who doesn't. She will still tell me if something is looking good on me or not because I want that critique from her. But she won't think of me as a big person. She's always been like, she's my sister, and it is how it is. For instance, this word moti, this uncle of mine (khalu) calls me by that. Hey, moti. I feel like smacking his head or something. It's also very internalized, you know. He himself is fat. I am fat, and so is he. So, what's the problem? Why

do you call me that? A woman can't be fat? A man's fat belly isn't noticed. A woman's is. I have had whole fights over the word *moti*. I have cried, ran away. I have fought. I have had a proper hunger strike at home over this. I won't eat at all if you think I am fat! Not at all. I will just live off water. But yeah, I have known this for a long time. Now, if I remind my relatives of this, how they treated me, they'd say you're minding a very stupid thing.

So, back then, there were days when I loved my body. I loved it. I wanted to see my curves. I was kinda really obsessed with my face, and my curves, etc. This would happen for 3 days, and for the next 4 days, I would hate my body, because I wouldn't fit in something. The most anxiety I still get is when a big event is approaching. Be it my birthday, be it Eid (Muslim religious celebratory event), be it someone's wedding, be it my own wedding! The only thing is... I just can't get past the fact that I can get bigger clothes made now. Plus-size people can also look more very hot when they wear what they like to wear. It's not only about your clothes, but it's also about your confidence. About how you feel in the clothes. Even now, that thing I say to myself again and again, that goes away completely... if I am wearing something high waist, I feel really weird. I feel like I have a bump. I feel I don't deserve to wear this. I wear it on my good days, but I mostly shy away from it. I guess.

You have seen my clothing get shorter over the years. But I always grew up hearing, that I must wear a dupatta. So, I always used to have a dupatta. Not anymore. But before my marriage, I still used to have a dupatta. Even now when I go to my mother's place, I take dupatta. That's how it has been. On the other hand, my sister doesn't wear it. She wears the shortest of the crop tops, weirdest jeans, that is torn from head to toe, and she only hears 'What have you dressed like?' from my parents. They never say that clothes are short, or something is visible. But with me it's been like, I should be aware of this because I am a big girl. So, you should know more about your body. You can see it's bulging out of places. You

should be more responsible, with how you look when people are looking. And these things, they make you a grown up really quick. Basically, by handing me a bra and stuff, or making me wear a dupatta early, they sexualized my body too quick. They were like, oh she's grown up. Literally, a distant aunt said, 'If we get her married at 19, she wouldn't look 19. Even at 19 she can birth kids, because she has wide thighs, and those are good for birthing babies'.

So, yeah, it was always like a body dysmorphia situation. Which I was always going through. I also have Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), which used to layer too. Some days I was just obsessed with myself, and some days I hated myself so I wanted to jump; from anywhere. You know I have had too many fat diets, herbal teas; so many dinners skipped. Why? Just because dinner should be skipped, and breakfast should be good. All of these things are things a kid shouldn't know. I wasn't worried about my color because I guess I am a little fair. Because of which I didn't get to hear that much, and not much trauma is associated with it. That's why I don't have any interest in makeup. My only concern was with my weight, like if I lose it, nobody would be hotter than me. So, why is this thing in the head of a kid? You have to be acceptable to be liked. Because, in a way, the way boys see you, the way men saw me, I was like it was the same way my family saw me. Because I am only worth my transaction. You understand? I am only worth...like worth of a man. If a man is liking it, then my family is liking it too. I had to let go of a lot. And that wasn't because of body positivity or anything. It came to a point where I just started crying in front of them. I didn't use to say... but my parents, if they saw their kids being weak or vulnerable, they would come right away to handle the situation. So if I cry, or say I am too fat to go anywhere, or that I won't ever look good. My parents used to come and console. But other times, my father didn't let me eat bananas all my life, and always gave food in proportions. So, my sister and I used to get equal food. There was a thing about everything being equal in my house. If chocolates came to my house, the big person of my house, my father, would divide them.

Similarly, if there's good food, everyone would get equal food. It was weird. They used to acknowledge my big body, but didn't realize that a bigger person has bigger needs! They didn't cater to those needs. They think so, though. They still do. But I don't think they did what they should have done.

I have had body dysmorphia. I know I have it. I have talked a lot about it in my therapy. Now, I have confidence, actually no, it was when I started getting attention from men. A lot. Since I was 16. A lot of attention! I had boobs and ass; I had curves. Men love it. Like when they are young, men want to honk you. Some way or the other. So I got a lot of attention... and I was like, nothing of that matters. You and we are the same. Sometimes I also felt as if they were choosing me over the thin ones. So, I felt my body is better. Like, 'fuck you!' other people! Feels weird, but all this external praise made me feel better. Like, I am considered a human and not just a fat girl. I don't think any man has ever rejected me only because I was a fat girl. I wouldn't even talk to someone... Like of course people go sore after breakups. But otherwise, no man made me feel bad about my body. As if I am a blob. Like everyone else made me feel. People, my friends that really loved me, they never really made me feel that I am not a human. Mostly it was people who were part of the society and pretended to care.

They are telling you to watch your weight. I have always been a big girl. I always wanted to play games, outrun people! I exercise, I do a lot of yoga. I do all that. My body has its issues, like every other person. But my body is fit as the way it is. But to the world it's not fit! I have to be a certain size to be fit, and I have been that size too. But I was always unhealthy. I used to have those water vomits. I fainted quite a lot too. I would just not eat. And, when you study and work hard ... Like once I didn't eat for 3 days straight! Because somebody had said that I'll lose weight, and I was ready to get on that train. So, I decided to do it, and quit

sustenance of any kind. I will just chew gum. So, I got this sugar free gum from my Eidi, and I literally chewed gum for 3 days. And I faked that I was eating.

Later, I had to get electrolyte drips and saline water. I had lost too much energy, and I needed that to get off the wheelchair. Yes, I couldn't walk, I kept falling, so they put me on it. I went to this extent, and even after all this I was ready to get on a fat diet. Just so my arms... So, every time it was a new problem. Every time my body dysmorphia would show me something new. Sometimes it would be my arms. They are so fat, I need to do something about it. Also, it doesn't help in your growing years when everyone you see on TV, etc. is thin! That too in a specific way. It took me a long time to make peace with the fact that... and like, it wasn't that I got okay with my body. I had to make peace with the fact that if I have to control everything, even then I can't be like that. My body is made in a certain way. I can't lose this. Even if I go really thin, even then I'd be sexualized. I am someone with broad shoulders, and I can't do anything about that because that is my skeleton. It took time to get to that point.

Later, it took even more time to reach a point where I thought 'It is fine just the way it is'. To change it, you don't need to do anything. If you want to change something, see if you're not feeling well. That's it. There shouldn't be any medical issues. Everything apart from that is all right. Even during recent Ramzan when I was doing intermediate fasting, I was only doing it because I have acid reflux issues, and I really needed to fix that, and the only way could do that was through changing food times. So I never did a proper intermittent. I never saw calories in my food. So, in intermittent fasting, you have to watch the calories of your meals as well, but I didn't see any of that. I just saw the times of my meals, so that my acid reflux remains okay.

I never controlled myself during that. As in, I can have this or only that. I had found out acid reflux happens because of fried food etc. So, I didn't have it for 2 weeks. After that, I felt I should have it. I decided I won't stop myself from having something sweet. So, I remember someone mentioned about my fasting... I was having Slice juice, and someone said doesn't Slice only have sugar in it? What kind of intermittent fasting is this? I got so pissed. Why was this person trying to teach me fasting? Let me have my damn juice. I am not watching my calories, I am just trying to take care of my reflux issue. But this time in my life, my body-related perceptions come and go. These days, or this time in my life, I am very comfortable. I am home in this body. Sometimes I want to tear it up. I just look like... I see myself. I always see myself... and sometimes I can't even recognize my face. I just feel I have bigger eyes than I actually have. I have higher cheeks than I have.

Also, I feel my body type is also not exactly the same, and my feelings tend to change. I still have a lot of it, but sometimes I feel, is it really like that? If I get a side picture taken of me, think I am not like this? In some pictures, I look really skinny from the side. Like, is that a photo issue? Or, am I not looking at myself the right way? Can I not see what is happening. Am I literally this huge? Is my head this small in front of my body? In photos, especially, this happens. I feel if I don't see myself this way, then there's something wrong. Like, they have changed the angle in the photo or something?

This has been a difficult journey. My understanding of this, has a lot to do with therapy. It has a lot to do with where I am right now in my life. It also has a lot to do with the journey I have had so far. So, my therapy has helped me in loving my body even during the worst of times. I can say to myself, what you're thinking is crap. You are fine the way you are. I can say it now at least. Initially, I couldn't say that even. If you see with my marriage situation

and everything, like 'kachhi' situation? Where you feel you have got an upper hand? On a lot of body things?

Being honest, from this society's perspective, getting a fat girl married is difficult, but once she's married it becomes a different story. So, now my parents don't have an issue with my body, as such. They want to force feed me. They want to make me eat elaborate stuff, like ghee items... stuff I don't even eat! Things I was never allowed to enjoy, so I don't even have a taste for them. They will force feed. They pack a lot of stuff for me too. In a similar vein, my clothing-related boundaries have been changed too. I will wear a capri (short pants) and a short shirt, and go out of the house, and it's okay now. Before, if my shirt or kameez was not below my ass, I wasn't allowed to step out of the house. I would keep extra clothes, and was forced to change if it comes to that. And I'll change back after. Now it's like fucking okay?

Even when my mother-in-law came for the first time to meet us, she said referring to me, "her body is okay, but why is her face so broad"? And now she doesn't have issues with me gaining weight. But has an issue with her son gaining weight. I guess once you're married, your parents literally feel they have done their job. The responsibility they had has been fulfilled. They literally think, 'We had told you to do whatever you want after marriage, so now you have that free pass. Now, the husband is supposed to stop you. Now, you, the woman, has to stay fit for her husband. So, the husband doesn't go away somewhere'. Now, the woman has to wake up early, make breakfast, etc. These body issues don't go away. So, they still want you to have a baby, but they don't care about you anymore. You have served your purpose. Signed, sealed, and delivered! Now parents are done. So now, if your husband demands the same things, you have to do the same for him. I know women who are told to remain fit, etc. And told, don't you want to keep your husband? I have heard this from so many aunts, like when they were married they had small waist, and weighed around 45kg,

and now they are expanding. The pressure is not from their parents anymore, it's from the in-laws, husband, or society.

You have to dress a certain way, or look a certain way. To be young, like this new phenomenon of being a young mom. Like you're fit as fuck after you have delivered a baby. You have to be fit as fuck! Your stomach should be tucked in completely. You have literally expanded your vagina, and are expected to be small again! Our parents don't really care about that. They never even cared about my health... I fainted right in front of them. They ridiculed me for the same thing. Till my marriage, I was ridiculed for the same things. Like, with my mother, I was like whose measurements did you give for these 15 clothes? I can't even wear them. So I returned them. Like I don't even need them anymore.

Why this happened? Because my mother had that perception that women lose weight before their marriage to look good. I never did anything like that. And she gave certain measurements which were lower than my normal size. So, I was eating a lot of fruits and salad, right? Right before marriage. I did that for my skin. Not for weight. In winters, I have dry skin, and I get patches all over, and my dermatologist said that the only way you can have good skin forever is to have watery fruits. They keep water in your body. Okay, so I wanted my face to be fine. I don't care about anything else. So, I was having a lot of fruits and veggies. I didn't care for food... I had... khousay, whole Domino's pizza one afternoon, and 2 Hanifia burgers. Too much food before my wedding! I was stressed, so I kept eating. And they were like, she'd be fit. So, they never asked, just assumed. The measurements I gave, they didn't even make clothes according to those. She never communicated... just assumed. I gave those clothes back.

The whole thing was embarrassing, it made me feel I had too many clothes, but I can't wear anything. My mother said that she thought I'd lose some weight. Why would she even think

of that? And I kept saying that I won't lose weight. I will be wearing the same damn clothes. Same shirts, long trousers, and same slippers! I wouldn't retire my things just because you want me to. They are okay with me wearing sleeveless now. They like to see my pictures in dresses. They'd be okay if I send pictures from a party I recently attended. Can you imagine? I am half-naked in it. They'd be okay. They'd be happy. That I am enjoying. So, for them, they had said you can do everything after marriage... they have done it. They have fulfilled their responsibility. I have given them what they wanted, why won't they like me? I cash it too! Like I am here at this point, but I had to get married for this. My life didn't become good because I found a good man. Marrying his whole family made my life good. Such an absurd idea.

The first time I came across the term plus-size was through an ad. Some Pakistani brand and there was this model, an old Pakistani actress who used to come on TV, and she was plus-size. But I couldn't relate to her. Literally, my first thought was, that plus-size are clothes for older people. Plus referring to age. Older female bodies change in a different way, right? Even the thinnest ones. Their boobs, their ass, their stomach, everything. So, I was like, they have an extra size they cater to. I have seen older women complain about clothes that have certain designs and they aren't comfortable with it. I remember once, an aunty saying that she wanted fitting shirt from the back, and loose in front because she has sagging boobs and stomach; my ass is flat now. I thought the term plus-size referred to more of that.

But then I was like, if they are making funky clothes for older aunties, they are cool, so I googled and wondered if it was something that happened everywhere. I thought that was nice, doing something for the elderly. Then I thought, wow, you're saying a younger woman shouldn't be plus-size? You have to be an older person to be so. That's how I actually found out about it! Then when I got comfortable with wearing a shirt or something, from

Wednesday or Sunday Bazar. I would get clothes there. And clothes of that size used to be only there. XL, or XXL, and because of that, I started wearing western clothes too. Here, even if you go to a tailor, they'd have views on your body too. He'll tell you in what style would you look flattering. That's how I got to know.

I started relating to the label plus-size mainly because of the clothes thing. It started that way. Because I didn't have to fit in the medium; not wear a big dupatta. I can get one size bigger then I'll be comfortable with the clothes. So, if you get a large stitched pajama, it's never large. It's always more medium, trying to be large. I remember cigarette pants, which were straight pants. I got a lot of stitched ones because everyone was wearing those in my university, back then.

I remember they used to be so tight around my waist region, it hurt at night. But I used to wear those every day. I had gotten every color, and I used to wear those with every suit. I did that to myself for years. My pants, ones I used to get, got stuck here, around the thigh, which is a very solid part of my body. Lower leg. My maternal side has that. My sister literally has the same. Once I saw these pants at Sunday bazar, which were very sleek. It looked like those cigarette pants that I had, but stretchable. That made my life so much easier. Because I got the same look, but because they were stretchable I wasn't killing myself every day.

That was my association with the term plus-size, and it didn't come up in normal conversations. Like you're either thin or healthy. Or you're fat. No in between. You're a kaakri (dry stick). That bullshit. Then there's a size that not many hate, they are like, you're tall, but not big. You have boobs but not a lot of boobs. You have a back but not that wide. They want their girl to be that size, packet-sized medium. In Pakistan people run after the medium thing. They don't want their kids to be dying thin, but not an inch wider. My sister used to fit in. She was medium. Small, at times, but generally she wore a medium. Only issue

they had with her was her color and her height. Like a door of ours had marks, like on this date she was this tall, and so on. It's funny because I have seen my sister 4, 5, 6 years, and so on. When she was 15 she had those marks. It was one wall we never had painted. There used to be this pane, of cement, and it was like a scale. So, my sister was considered healthy but short.

The term plus-size is not common. Usually, they use overweight. We find a term like the plus-size in books, or not even there, rather on the Internet. And that too after searching. During last Eid I noticed something new. That to make bigger sizes ... they realize it suddenly that most women in Pakistan are of that size. So they have made...my mother calls it jubba (gown) size. A big jubba size. There's no finesse in the arms or anything. It's just a blob of clothes. They might as well put a dupatta on you and you'd look the same. Jubba size is in, but it's also because they wanted to cater to those women. But like never clothes in which a plus-size person can look sexy. It's like why is it from chest to bottom, like a blob of cloth? It's like I am in a box or something.

I am very comfortable with the label plus-size. I found community. People around me. Like I told you the three things? Like I don't have such company anymore. Who say mean stuff. I don't hang out with my family as such. If they still say something problematic regarding my size, then I give them a smacking response. But they don't call me plus-size, because plus-size is a size. It's not a cause. It's not a problem to work on. It's just like saying small, medium, large. Like if there's a size on your clothing, that is your size. It shouldn't be your label. But that becomes our label. If we talk like that in our homes. The term for me is definitely empowering. I didn't have anything to relate with before, and if I felt like relating before, it was like, 'Oh, I am not like this?' I said to my sister recently, I feel fat before I feel

like a woman, and that's scary. Why does the world make me feel that I am fat before I am a human? They don't see a human at times. Just fat.

The word fat, I have my reservations with it. The only reason is, that they don't use it the way it should be used. Whenever I have seen it in a conversation, it's always said it is. When you say a fat joint, even then I have an issue with it. So, you thought of something when you called it fat. Why does the size matter? My main reason for not being okay with the term fat is that it was always used as an insult. For me, too, as I mentioned earlier. In our society, jokes revolve a lot around appearances. Terms like, naatay and chhote (terms for a short-heighted person), kale (black/ dark-skinned), or hakla (someone with speech impediment/ someone who stutters). If someone has got some kind of impairment, they'd call them langgra (someone with a leg disability). Like, that person isn't a human. Just a label. Because it is used so much as a label in our society, that makes me uncomfortable with the term fat.

If I am saying it, I am okay with it, for me. I think it's also not okay for me to call someone else fat. I do feel it to an extent. The way it is used it's so harmful. The discussion does come up...are you supposed to say things that are this harmful? Like, really off theme, but Depp/ Heard situation, the kind of things that are being said, or how it's being showed, like whatever's happening to them aside, the stigma surrounding mental health, or not being trusted with their harassment stories, abuse, like all this is taking the movement a step back. I feel the word fat does the same for me. If I call someone that, it's weird. I also feel that way. If someone says to me that, I won't feel okay. So if I don't like it, then how can I say that to someone.

People who are reclaiming the term fat, all those positivity movements, it's empowering for them. But for myself, I am not. For instance, a few days ago, my husband was walking with me, and there were three boys, they said out loud, 'Thin husband, and fat wife'. I heard and I

was so furious. Like what bullshit is this? It was lesser about me being fat, and more about who the fuck they are to talk about me? It did feel hurtful because a thin guy and fat girl are not okay, but a fat guy and thin girl are in our society. That makes me feel conflicted. Why does my size matter? And then I went into this spiral, that I am so fat, I felt big. Like if I am hugging him, he's not covering me, but I am. All of those things came back. In this society, I am not okay with the term. Again, if someone says they are okay with the term, then I have no issues. It has to do with how the other person feels about it, to be honest.

I do have plus-size women around me. But when it comes to media, like TV, on all the avenues, the plus-size representation has not been that great. No. I won't say plus-size, but broader size. The sizes we used to see in Rahat Kazmi dramas. Marina Khan was someone who was okay with whatever size. The protagonists used to be thin, and feeble. Or very shy. For instance, if you saw magazines, my nana (maternal grandfather) used to bring Herald, like we used to have Reader's Digest and all, even in those I used to see fashion photos, women who were weren't even 18, most of the time... they were little girls! They were thin.

If you look at a model who is 23, as a 23 year old, turns out the model is a 14 year old kid. So, you cannot even compare beauty standards, you cannot even compare size. Now, when there's social media, you can see some people. Even there, you'd want the people to feel empowered the way they are, you're always looking for clothes that fit your body? Like how can I relate to someone? So yeah, it gets narrower for you.

There are some people, yeah, but representation is super low. I don't remember having anyone around me, who I could take inspiration from. It was always about thin images. Growing up, I remember there used to be this model/ actor called Aaminah Haq, who was also in a Faakhir music video. Other really thin models were there too, like Iffat Omer, ZQ, Vaneeza, all of these were supermodels. Tall, thin, basically like starving thin. Hair in a

certain way, face in a certain way, back in a certain way, ass in a certain way, no boobs.

Boobs are not allowed! I would say. Boobs are still not in the fashion I would say, I don't know why. They're such a great asset, and they are still like, anyone you walking on a ramp, or any of these things. You have to have no assets, in modelling too. I don't know why.

Also, when for me, when say assets, my definition is way broader. I am of a perspective now, that whatever I have, how much ever, is an asset to me, because it's all serving a purpose for my body. It's how it is. Supposed to be like this. There's nothing to hate. I have always hated on my boobs, ass, and a lot of my parts. Now I don't. Of course, I have been sexualized a lot because of all these since childhood, so there was a reason for this hate. I was always asked to not show it, but then also show it. It was very weird.

I was made very conscious of the concept of me, having to wear a bra whenever I am in front of my family. Or wearing a dupatta since I was a child. This was a daily routine thing, right? Like, asking one kid to wear a dupatta when they are going to see who is at the door? Or whenever asked to come to the table, you have to wear a bra. If I don't then clothes stick to my skin? So that was wrong. Because it wasn't decent? And because of that, I don't have a habit of wearing clothes that stick to my skin. Especially when I am not wearing a bra. I cannot still. Only because I was told so. Even when I am wearing a shalwar kameez at home without a bra, I used to get scolded. Go, and correct your huliya (appearance). If I am wearing a deep-neck shirt... everything was a problem, to be honest. With fat body, whatever I am gonna do it's not gonna be enough for you... Why? Because you are not thin. Because you think of me as thin, and whenever you see me you don't see thin. So, there's always an issue, and I can't win. Assets are all things that I have.

Also, thinking of representation in media, I'll talk about books. Even in books, the ones I read, they would never have the focus on the plus-size person. And when it was, it was very

specific. They would mention them as being plus-size every time. If it's a thin girl, it's a beautiful girl for them, she would not be thin every time. Just beautiful. Her hands are like this... like a swan. Things that would make you feel more unrepresented. Okay, so like if I have to be a protagonist somewhere I have to fit in some other place. This is why I was always more attracted to people who had great minds. Oh, it doesn't matter if you're fat or not, when you have a great mind. But as a kid, I was used to think only ugly people think about brains. Even kids in school used to say, that girls who aren't pretty go for brains. I only found representation in people who didn't care about bodies. Who were like, talk about things apart from the body. Talk about my mind, talk about what I have to say.

We didn't really talk about men in our school. It was more like a forbidden concept. Like, if a man looks at you, we were supposed to think: you don't really need a man to define you. Things like that. One good thing that my school taught me well. Because of which we were very hoity-toity. Like if an Aitchison boy would come and flirt with us, we used to say we'd break your face. Or, if we went to go to competitions and all, we'd just be the girls who are bold and rude. And that boldness, I think it helped me a lot with my body issues. I was like, I am who I am [powerful statement]. No matter what.

Even though as a kid, I was trying to get out of the body I was in, but outside, no one could dare. Like I am perfect the way I am. Look at the way I speak, look, present, sing, or speak. Can you contest any of that? Especially in a school setup. But it used to happen. Honestly, I lost... I stood for the position of head girl... I literally lost to a thin little girl! It was nothing else. She did nothing in her year, and nobody knew her from before. Everybody knew me. Because I made the effort of being known. I knew every kid's name. Out of 10, I was a perfect for 7 years, and monitor in every class, and was active in every curricular/ extracurricular activity. During breaks I used to have canteen duties because I could handle

kids at canteen. And if you could do that, you can definitely handle kids anywhere. Because of that I knew the name of every kid. Everybody knew me, and not that girl. She was beautiful. She did nothing in her year. Things like these take your morale down, right? Like the world is of the tiny, beautiful person.

I think the Internet has really made a difference for people who want to take inspiration, yes, for people who don't want to, it's something that makes or kills a person both. For instance, I might follow 12-15 pages where plus-size women are highlighted. Women who are doing great things in life. But then I have like a thousand thin bitches on Instagram! Who will make me feel way worse. I do feel related to someone, I do have some representation. Some people... most of them are also not from Pakistan. Most of them are people I don't see around myself. I don't even remember a lot of my friends being plus-size. Which is so weird? Did I like not attract people who were my size? But now I have more people I can relate to, around me. Which of course I can share clothes with, finally. Which is rare for me.

Apart from that, the Internet does give me power on some days, but also pulls me down so much. There's a need to be always on your top game! Everyone is doing something. But literally, not everyone is doing everything. People are still slow-paced. But it just shows everyone's life is still great, yours isn't. Still shows... I am always like, if people want to better themselves, get thin, or whatever. I don't want their speeches. Like my life changed, etc. Those stories would never get to me. Fucking Shahzad Ghias shit never got to me. For a month I was so obsessed with it, thinking about it. Fuck you, and fuck every other person who does this to me. I know a friend who got a liposuction. That friend of mine, I have known since I was in class 1. And we studied till 10th. And we were not friends, because she wasn't my type, nature wise, I was chaotic in my own way, but I wasn't a pampered bitch. She was. She expected her friends to work for her. Then later, she was in university maybe, I

found out she got a liposuction done. And my heart fucking dropped. I was like... fuck. Someone was bullied this much. And I know it was bullying, because I saw her getting bullied in school. It was not something she wanted to do, it was plain bullying. And her parents supported it. And her family is happy about it. It's so fucking crazy. She is skinny now. Not skinny skinny, but a different size. The thought of someone going through such a huge operation to change the way they look, sounds very relatable but also so absurd. Like if I didn't have enough exposure, I'd have found people around me, and gotten my courage at slow pace. Thin people are always around me. I don't need to see Kim Kardashian, or just forcing children to become size zero. Just losing 10 kg to fit in Marilyn Monroe's dress. Or any of that shit. For me most of Internet is not that empowering, I think. I see how people are showing how their lives are perfect.

Plus-size also affects one's mobility. At a very young age, I have been sexualized at another level. So, the parents would want to protect. Then either they would ask you to not go, or not be around people. Or they'd ask you to cover yourself up. In a way that you're nothing, a block. A rectangle, basically. Along with that, events like weddings, or occasions like Eid used to annoy me. And like I looked around and there was no one who looked like me, of my age. Even if someone is, they have sucked them into this thin thing so much, so either they are dreading it, or dreading thin. Fat diets and all. None of my cousins look like me. My sister doesn't look like me. So it was always, even at Eid event or something, someone would say something about gaining weight, or me looking thin in clothes.

Also, walking on the roads is not my most favorite thing to do. Because I am just like... everyone is looking at me, normally as a woman, but also a big woman? This is still about my younger years. Till sometime back I was okay with being sexualized. Which is your choice. But when I was growing up, I didn't want to be sexualized. I just wanted to cross the damn

road! I used to hear comments about my body, boobs, or anything. So it definitely restricted a lot of my movement. Even in Karachi, I didn't walk alone. If someone was with me then fine, otherwise I took a rickshaw. And I had a whole process of getting into a rickshaw. My dupatta, I used to hang on both sides, and tuck it here, to look like a square. No one, rickshaw driver or someone, could see anything. I would always buy clothes of size bigger. Just to not show what's inside. The thought being, if I buy bigger size, no one would know my size. And, if somebody says I am getting bigger, I'll just say no, it's just a bigger size. But yeah, there's been a lot of harassment that has happened because of this.

I remember these boys from my neighborhood used to sit outside, even though I was a kid and they were probably in their late 20s, I was 14-15, they would pass comments. They would look at me in a way they are looking at a woman. Sexualizing a woman. But I was a child. And then I started feeling the same things, like my own body made me feel sick. I didn't want to go outside, and even if I did I would take a whole sheet-like cloth to cover me so that nobody sees me. Once, I even begged my mother to buy me a burka or abaya. Just get me a cloak, so I can cover my body and nobody sees what's happening! My mother said no, but her solution was I should start going to the gym! I should walk at least 10 rounds a day at a park nearby. I should go to the gym and I should eat less. She said if you don't want to be this size then change. Like, if I can't embrace it, change. Like it was not the fault of those boys, or the society who sees us and mocks us. Like so many times I was just called moti, and I have heard people say in my university that who would go with this moti? And in the car I used to be given the front seat, and at times I was like I don't want it, like I could sit in the back too. But I was told that I needed space. If I am not asking for it, just don't... If you had to go in rickshaws, and they used to make people sit on you, on me. Didn't matter if I was in pain, but I was big right? So I could handle it. And we cannot make Gul sit on us, because it would mean bones getting broken. So yeah, there were issues like that.

I remember my *phopho* (aunt) used to take us cousins to Tariq Road, or water park, in a rickshaw, and they would not take me. Because we couldn't fit into one rickshaw. So yeah, things like that. Yes, mobility did get affected. I think in our society people are used to seeing fat women in a particular attire. They are uncomfortable when our fat shows. And if we wear the same clothes as them, it's always like, oh my God you look so good. And it's literally the same thing. Chill. I don't like such comments. They sound so fake, and condescending. I am literally wearing a jacket with a jeans, I know I look fine, I look good. But I am not looking the best of all. Don't make me feel... like I am wearing something that you wear. You have to directly compliment me so you don't sound fatphobic. It's a thing. It's happened a lot. Like if at times I am claiming my body, or reclaiming my body, or when I am wearing shorts, and I didn't use to, and then I don't want people to say stuff. I don't want a medal for it. Coz it's my own damn body I am reclaiming. I am not doing it for you. You don't do it for anyone else, but you're doing it to me specifically. That sounds fatphobic. This happened a lot. On my birthday recently I wore a strapless bra for the first time, or whatever it's called...off-shoulder, I think. I had major anxiety buying something for it at the Playhouse. I was like I'd never find something my size. I should just stop. And I was sweating in the AC rooms, and my husband asked me If I was okay. And I said I just have to pull through. Like I knew I was feeling shit, but I knew when I'd go home I'd feel better. Eventually, I found that rib knit is something anybody can wear. It's elastic. But they show your body in a way you might not be comfortable with.

So you have to get okay with the fact that your boobs are out. Like thin girls, when it's rib knit for them, their boobs and back are aligned. But because my boobs are so big, my rib knit only comes at my boobs. Like I wear a high waist. I am not comfortable with showing all my skin. So I wear high-waist pants. I look at myself and I thought I look great. It's not how it's supposed to be; I have only seen it on thin women. I really wanted to wear something so

sultry that I like myself. That was my only goal. And right before my birthday week I felt shit about myself. I hated how I looked. I was again at the cycle where I was like, why even try, I'll look bad.

It went away of course. It went away when the birthday actually ended. When I got around 100 compliments from people, some of them were really genuine. Because some of them came from plus-size women. So, I was like listen, you I can hear, because you see and you're like, hmm, this looks good! So, I understand what you're saying. But thin people... Like some people really complimented the way I wanted. Like not, Oh my God this fits, etc. Nothing like this. This color suits you, this design suits you, I think you should do this more often. Things like these, that make you actually feel better about yourself. And like saying, you slay girl...

When it comes to men's compliments, I know for a fact that I am not surrounded by assholes. So, like, a friend said you look great. I took it. Because I know this person really cares for me. Another friend said I look good, and I took it. He said he was talking about me since 15 minutes when I arrived ... going on about the way it frills, the way it does that. I was like that's so sweet, thank you so much for talking about me for 15 minutes. Another person I know said it looks really good. I had good people around, and that's why I felt good about those comments. And I knew I looked good. I was also wearing it with my lilac eye shadow. That matches my top. My top matched my slippers. I had a white, slit pajama. It was something I also thought was flattering. On my body. The combination I also liked.

But like when this other person said, Oh my God you look so good, I was like in my head that it sounded fake. I am sorry. It was not real. I am not saying they are fatphobic or something. But it wasn't really honest. It was just like just because you're the birthday girl I have to comment. So I was like thanks. You can see through things like that. But this year I made a

point that this year I would do something that I haven't done. In regards to wearing something outside. In the new home now, I wear whatever I am comfortable with. And that's because I have a partner who loves me too much. And also doesn't see my body, only sees me. He takes the worst pictures of me, and I tell him I look horrendous and he says I look the best. I say no, I don't. I look like I am balding, I look 10 time my size I feel, and he says no, you look perfect, you are blind.

Do you know how they say beauty lies in the eye of the beholder? When you really love someone, yes. A beholder can be an asshole also. A beholder can also be kind, and that is what I want. Eventually, I don't want it to be about my weight. Just like it isn't for so many people. I am all in for being a plus-size person and standing up for myself, the whole journey, having people who are really supporting, all of that. I am grateful I am getting that. But I really want a day to come when the conversation doesn't revolve around that, for me or others... I guess that's what everyone wants at some point. Like before wearing clothes, or after undressing, that I don't find myself strange because of someone else. Because I know wasn't born with all this, others put this in my head.

I didn't make the body this way too, these were my parents' genetics, and I didn't comment on this either. Others did it. How about just throw that conversation away. And that I feel in my house. Like we don't talk about weight at all. It's wild. Like I told you my husband is wearing my shirts and all. Even now, still such a joyous thing that he can now wear my clothes. It's not like I want to start gym or something. Everything is celebrated. Your weight is too. It really eradicates the question. I think that's the only way to eradicate it. That you celebrate it so much, that it's not a matter of celebration anymore. It's just normal life.

Even I was thinking on my birthday, I had to wear something else to the beach, given how things can get in the city. My sister can wear the same thing to the beach. And I couldn't. Because if someone, a policeman looks at me, he'll stop us. I look like a grown-up woman and my sister looks like a baby. She's only one year younger! But she's a baby, she can wear anything. But I am a woman, if my strap shows, or if there's no strap here, it's an issue. I had to wear something else. And change over there. And change again when I had to leave. So mobility really like changes when you are plus-size.

I don't feel heavy, such, in my head. But sometimes in my body, yes. Mostly when I feel bloated, and I am just like I am so heavy for me. But it's not weight related. Mostly related to periods or something.

Also, your relationship with your clothes and body depends a lot on your family. Mine didn't support me at all. My cousin and I used to live in the same area all our lives. And she's not a plus-size person, but she had boobs. Her parents never stopped her from wearing crop tops, small shirts, and fitted jeans. She doesn't have any issues with it. She wears it everywhere. Everything that happened to me, happened to her. She still used to wear such clothes, because at home, she had people who supported her. Like no one can dare do anything, because her family supported her. My case was different, my family and all. She is one year older than me. Her family was okay with it. It's bizarre how her mother never sexualized her, but she did that to us! She used to say that my sister has an ass. She sexualized other's kids but not hers. But you did give freedom your kid, and wearing stuff like that, and you cannot stop her. Nobody can. If you have that confidence that you can wear something like that. Not with us. She used to work at the airport, she would have late hours, and coming home 5 in the morning, coming at 3, or leaving at 3, because they have shifts right? My phupho (paternal aunt) never questioned her ever.

My cousin even took a trip to Islamabad for three days, without telling her mother. Just saying that she has shifts. She just never questioned her child about her body, clothes, the way she came, went. So yeah, it does make a difference.

Story 3: Khadeja

So, let's start at the start. I was always a chubby kid. But then between ages 12 and 14, right before puberty, I became skinny. And I started to gain weight after I hit puberty. Those are your formative years. That is when your body is developing. So, teenage years and beyond, I was plus-size. I never had a non plus-size body, from what I can remember. After all, you don't always remember much from your childhood. So, my life, so far, has been as a plus-size person. But obviously, in your puberty years, or around age 20, it's important to have a skinny body in our desi society. Because a lot depends on your body, and your future marriage proposals are based on it too. Same with opportunities, everything is based on your weight. So, I have always been a plus-size woman.

I never had a problem with my body personally, but people ingrained the problems I that I later had by how they acted around me. I was always into sports, I was a fit and healthy person. Someone, who would play around all day long. Playing for hours. It wasn't as if I was unfit or inactive. It was just that I was fat. And that became associated to unhealthiness and ugliness, because that's how desi people behave. My maternal side has 7-8 girls, and we were the latest generation, so the focus was always on the body on my maternal side. So, whenever we used to go there, instead of *salam* (a greeting, means peace), we used to be told how 'healthy' we are. I used to say salam, and in return I was told how healthy I was! They would greet me by reminding me that I was fat.

Such situations happened outside homes too. For example, in my school, I was also reminded of this. In my class, I was the only plus-size kid. Yes, there were others who were chubby and all, but I was the fattest. So, even in the class, I was reminded that I wasn't normal. Even though I was at the same fitness level as them. I used to participate in everything. So, this, my family's behaviour, and then this seeped into my life when I started going out, for college and

later, work. So, I used to travel by rickshaw (A local three wheeled vehicle) or on foot, and random strangers would just like come and tell me to lose weight. Because I was fat. Such incidents are countless.

Once, I was going to my university, and this rickshaw-wallah said, *“Don't mind, but I want to say something. You should try to lose weight...”* I responded, *“I didn't ask you. I wasn't talking to you.”* Nothing about this warranted such behavior! Once, I remember, I was at this amusement park, we were getting our belts put on by this helper, and she goes, *“Oh you're so healthy, even the belt is unable go around you.”* She just *had* to comment on my body.

In Karachi, or Pakistan in general, it's a very common thing to comment on one's body. They feel entitled to. Once, at work, I was talking to a friend, and he said that he saw me in the lift, and this other person who was with him said that you should try this diet to lose weight if you're going to the gym. I responded, “Did I ask you?” So yes, people don't think and just comment like that. Also, I had started going to gym to stay active. I didn't want to go home after work, so I decided to join a gym to stay away from home. It was like a nice thing, I had a friend there. We chilled, worked out. I was losing fat, but gaining muscles. So weight remained the same. But I was just more active. For years and years, my dad had been trying to force me to go to gym. I refused to do it in rebellion. I thought, *“I am okay with the body, I don't want to go. I would wear baggy clothes”*. And people were like, *why are you wearing such clothes they make you look fatter*. And like, when I put tight clothes on, they said, *“Oh don't do that your body would be more visible?”*

My dad started behaving too because I was going to the gym. But when I quit gym, because my trainer had left, and I didn't have time either, my dad started bothering me. Saying I should join a gym again. So, when people tell me to go to the gym now, I say it's only because I should not be fat and it has nothing to do with my health.

People have often been just like *"Hello, you're fat!"* That's the line people have led with. Once, my cousin was throwing up blood, it's a medical condition, and I went to get it checked. And the doctor kept talking to me, she was trying to diagnose me with PCOS [What is this?], saying why aren't you losing weight. She said I saw you last time too, and you had the same weight. You are going to the gym, so why aren't you losing weight. Maybe you have PCOS. She went on about this! I said, *"I am not the patient here, and not here to get diagnosed either."* So people would generally not engage with me about anything but my body. It was the first thing they noticed, and the first they wanted to talk about, even though they had no permission. First identifier of me as a person was my body. My fatness. It wasn't like this is Khadeeja, she's a bachelor's student, or a writer, reads a lot, watches shows, or this or that. The first thing people noticed or talked about was my weight. Always, since I was 12.

There's a whole thing about being fat, you know. People say you won't get marriage proposals if you're fat. Interestingly, in all my relationships throughout the years, my boyfriends have never made me feel bad about my weight. They had never commented like other people had. No comment. Partners at times enjoy that, and you do find people who are willing to love you for who you are. Society will make you feel that you have to lose weight or you would remain unworthy. For years, I didn't even know what kind of relationship I had with my body. I always hated the way I looked, because others hated it, and that's how it was.

So, when I started listening to BTS [What is this? a music band?], it was after a breakup with a BF of 4 years. After a few months, they released this song, 2018, Love Myself, and RM also released this album called Mono. I listened to it during October. It's basically a journey, how you have these thoughts, and feel depressed, then you feel better. It's like a cycle. So, the album is a cycle. And they had other songs about loving yourself. That was when I was

introduced to the concept of loving oneself. I had no clue that people strive for it. I wasn't even aware! So, I had that in my mind.

Once, I went on this trip with my friends, and we got high on the trip, and I listened to the Mono album and ended up with an epiphany. Something like, there are a lot of trials and tribulations in your life, and you can't fix all of them. At the end of the day, the best you can do is love yourself, and be kind to yourself. Take care of yourself. I realized I *can* love myself. After 2-3 years I was like I *can* love myself. I have been fat for a decade or more, and my entire life I was told you suck, this sucks. You are fat. That's the epiphany I had!

They do body positivity now, making a fat girl stand among thin girls. But the bias against fatness still stands. In education, in everyday interactions with people, medical care... everything! You aren't detached from institutions. I have been on a whole journey. It's still not ended. There's never been a time when I have been like, yes I am over it. Because this entire world doesn't let you be. They keep reminding you, they keep you pulling back. The journey hasn't ended. As a 26 year old, there's still a long way too. Especially since I can't find clothes of my size, if you wanna go buy a bra; beige, white, and black options are the only ones you get. This suck! And if you really want a bra your size, you'd have to spend butloads of money, around 3 or 4 thousand. And my salary isn't that much that I buy a 5K bra and wear it. That's not how it works.

I went to Rang Ja, a clothing brand, and I asked if there was anything in my size, and they said no. Same with Outfitters. Once I asked if they have this shirt in my size, and they straight up said, no, we don't manufacture in this size. Because there isn't much demand. In Pakistan, it's a common body type, but they don't manufacture it. Because they don't care. That's not their target market. So it's like hell.

My hips and boobs are big, so I can never fit into a non-binary clothing, or something like that too. It's so hard to question your gender when your body is synonymous with being a woman, or being cisgender. So, in my mind, because of my upbringing, I have always been a cisgender woman, because there's nothing else I can be. I can't be anything else except a woman. Because I look like this. If I were skinny, it would be much easier to be androgynous, etc. Even if I wear something that is androgynous, I would still look like a woman. Unlike thin people. Because there's such a strong association.

I came across the term plus-size not that many years ago. Maybe during my university years. Because I knew about the word fat, but the concept of plus-size came later. I don't mind the word plus-size because fat has such a negative connotation. *Oh, you're fat.* They use it as it is, it has a negative connotation. But that can be used for plus-size too. Plus-size is a very vague term also, besides that, there are women who might be called thinny, but might call themselves plus-size. But plus-size can be like 100 kg or 200 kg. You can also be a short person who's 50. Right? So it's a very vague term. It doesn't define anything. But again, better than fat.

I am okay with the label. I never really thought about it. It's better than being called fat. Like if someone calls me fat, then I also have negative association with it. Of being called a fat person. Also, the word healthy. I hate the word healthy. *'You are so healthy!'* For instance, when you go to the shopkeepers and they say, *"You are so healthy."* Anytime I go shopping, somebody always mentions my weight. Even though I am the one giving them money; be nice to me! You don't need to comment on my body. But there are a lot of words. Healthy, fat, chubby, *'achay khaate peete khandaan ki'* (from a well-fed family) and so on.

Plus-size is not a local term. I don't have any experiences with it. No negative associations. Because in Karachi or Pakistan, plus-size is still not a thing. They don't use it in normal

conversations. They don't use it as anything. We have adopted it from outside, people don't use it here. Normally, if you go to shops. They'd use healthy or chubby or fat. Or they'd use *moti*. Or whatever. But plus-size in my mind, it doesn't ring any bell. It's a positive term that we have adopted from outside. So, a very small circle of people uses it, and used in a positive manner.

There's very less plus representation. It *is* getting better? Even then it's not completely accurate. They don't have variations in size. Even though it's plus-size, and plus-size have nice big hips and nice big boobs. It's like a nice pear shape, small waist, and big hips. In media, for example, in modeling, or advertisement, it's always like one fat person, then others are skinny. There's nothing in between. No variations. And even if they are there, it's really less. Even if they do select a plus-size woman it's very rare. And nothing in men. I don't think so.

But yes, representation has changed since earlier days. Back then there were *only* skinny women, in films, shows, billboards, catalogs, and everywhere I looked. People deviated towards thin people. Even in school, the tall pretty girl, and the skinny person would be in the lead or get selected. They are gonna be valued more. So it's representation at every level of society. Not just big media or whatever.

The Internet has definitely changed things. In the beginning, when we got internet, there wasn't much talk about body positivity. Recently, I started cutting out people who made me feel bad about my body. For example Kim Kardashian, or any of these big models or beauty gurus, or any of those people who have the perfect body. They would instill you to lose weight. Or take this, or that. To make your body perfect. I started cutting them out, and started following women who looked more like me. Started following pages who had people who looked like me. I made this decision consciously, and a lot of people don't consume

these things consciously. And I don't if it makes them feel bad. So, social media was good for me, but I don't know if it did the same for people in large. Some people still might feel bad about their body because of the media they consume.

My body size has definitely affected my mobility. As a fat person, for years and years, I would opt to sit in the front seat. During road trips, or whatever. Like we have to go somewhere, and all the cousins are here, so we have to fit in a single car. As a child I would never sit in the front. I didn't use to feel bad about my body. But now I want to sit in the front, because I don't want to take someone's space. So sitting in front is now a conscious decision so that I am not taking other people's spaces. I always do it.

So we were in Murree, and all the three people in the back were asleep, and I was bored in the front. And I didn't want to sit in the front, because what would I talk to the driver about?! But I would always sit in the front, because I didn't want to take someone's valuable space. That is one conscious decision I made. I stick to this. I don't want to take someone's space [an excellent point]. For instance, when in crowds, like how our markets are, Saddar, etc. While I was in university, and beyond that, one thing I did, was that my friends and I would walk in Karachi, and it was just my way of being in public spaces. Because I grew up as a sheltered kid and wasn't allowed to go out. In the university I was like I am not telling my parents, I am going.

I used to enter public spaces as a woman, where there's a lot of harassment in general. So, when you're walking on the street, you're already alert. You don't want to touch anyone or bump into someone, or when someone 'deliberately' bumps into you, etc. When I am maneuvering through crowds, even now, I would choose to go behind; put one hand in my bag, and walk behind so I could maneuver among people. Like, taking up space is a big problem for big people, so I do this. I don't want to touch anyone. As I am moving through

the world I feel I am taking up a lot of space. I am still working on it. It's a thing. When in private spaces, when I am at a *dawat* (feast), or with friends, I would put myself in a place where I wasn't bothering anyone. With my weight and size. In the classes at my university, the desks are so small. As a fat fucking person, if you're late you had to maneuver through such a small space. It was the worst.

I would never go to class late. That was my worst nightmare. This thing comes in my private space too. Even if I know I am not bothering anyone I willingly put myself in a space where I don't. Men have this weird obsession of picking women up, but a couple of my partners did pick me up once or twice. They struggled with it, I am a fat person, and I was like you don't have to pick me up. So, I don't let my husband do that - a rule that I set, you'd never pick me up. Once, we were on stairs, and he put his arm around me. He said, should I pick you up? And I said no! I don't want to put that burden on him. Even though he wants to, but I won't let him. Or when we're having sex, there's a lot of positions you can't be in because you're plus-size. If you're topping someone, you feel you're putting your whole weight on someone. Even if that person is enjoying it, you have that mindset in you. Or we have a dresser in our room, and if we're having sex, I can see myself in the mirror, I avoid that. Because as soon as that happens, I become conscious. Why do I look this way, I start thinking. He's perfectly fine with this, but I become too aware. So my body plays a role.

Even in clothing, like you can't wear tank tops. I do wear them now, but if you do that in Karachi people will look at you. Your boobs are out there; you're on display. People do look at you if you're wearing something like that, in Pakistan. As a fat person, I don't want that attention. If I know certain clothes will open me up to that kind of response, I won't. Because I am already a person who's looked at. And looked at in that way. I don't want extra attention. To be made fun of or whatever.

The city I live in, is a city that's not friendly for pedestrians. People walking down the road. Pedestrian bridges are so fucked up. They're not disability friendly. They're not friendly at all. If you're going on a bus. I used to travel by bus with my *nani's* (maternal grandmother) friends. And to climb on buses you have to climb two feet into a bus. And women section is already small and cramped. It's already too packed up, and you're like I don't want to take too much space. Walking around in Karachi isn't easy.

When I used to travel in a rickshaw, the petrol one, smaller one. I had to maneuver to climb up and sit. And when we used to sit with cousins, we had to get two rickshaws. We used to sit in each other's laps, because we couldn't afford more. And I didn't want to be the one sitting on someone's lap. I am a fat person. But if I am sitting on a seat, I am taking up space. So it was always like a conundrum. But then I got my car, I have one seat because I am driving. So you need money to have your own car. To travel in. It's easier. If you're not travelling in buses, it's easier. It's small space. It was just easier in a car. My mother had a Mehran, it used to be small too. So as a kid I didn't have that much of a size. But it's easier to fit into a bigger space.

I remember this incident, once, I was in class, I was doing work, and two friends next to me were having cake. So a teacher came in, and said in front of the class, "*Cake in class? Don't eat. And you shouldn't be eating anyway.*" Gesturing that I am fat. I was just looking at him, another time, someone asked if I have pencil, and I said no, and it came out loud. So he said that you have so much in your tummy anyway, that's why it keeps coming out. And he said that in front of the class. And that was the second time he had done it. Why are you talking about my body? You can scold me without mentioning that for being loud. Then he went on this whole lecture about how a teacher's status is different, and things shouldn't be taken like

that, and blah blah. Even in education. You can't sit in a class without your body being shamed.

Very basic things could be done to accommodate plus-size people like us. Clothes in our size. And people not saying we are fat! A fat person knows they're fat. They don't need to be reminded of it. Every second of their entire lives. So, just don't talk about them, or their body. It's basic - bare minimum thing you can do! Whether they're skinny, fat, or whatever, just don't talk. They know their body. Unless they are asking you. But don't do it yourself. That's the bare minimum.

Other than that, training doctors. For example, if you go for anything, even a fucking broken leg, they'd mention your body weight. I know a lot of women who haven't had their PCOS diagnosed because of this. Even for tumors, cysts in the uterus. Wherever they go they are told to lose weight. But this never helps. That's not how bodies work. You need to do proper testing. So access to health care is harder because you're fat. Basic things like this. Not commenting, training doctors, or even for shopkeepers. If people are coming to buy clothes from you then you comment how you're healthy and they'd have to cut off 2 ft more. If I ask how much should be cut for me, then mention *7 gaz* (252 inch) or something and cut it without commenting.

On a larger scale, media representation helps. It does help. Unconsciously you start feeling this body is normal.. If you look around in Karachi a plus-size body shape is the most normal. Like skinny people are in the minority here, especially women. Women are plus-size. We have big hips, shoulders, etc. Desi women are shaped like that. Desi people have variations like that. Some of the boobs are very diverse, or sideways, or different sizes. Even if you have a small waist you might have a big stomach. There's so many variations in size, and people need not be commenting on it. If I am getting an XL size shirt it shouldn't be reaching

my feet. Just because I am a fat person doesn't mean I am a very tall person. There are a lot of variations in the body. Baseline is acknowledging that. That's all.

Also, as I said, fat people know they are fat. They are existing in that body. They don't need a reminder. Your friendly reminders are bullying. Skinny people can be unhealthy too. Your body type or size doesn't qualify you as healthy. Or unhealthy. A fat person might be eating healthy and working out. And a skinny person might be skinny because of some disease. A lot of times, like, when I was sick I shed a few kilos. During that time I went to a wedding or something, and I was told I looked better? Prettier? But I was unhealthy at that time. Because I was sick and that was the reason of the weight loss. But people automatically connected it with being healthier. Even though I wasn't. I was very active as a child. I was the house captain. I used to beat thin girls in races. I was connected wrongly to being unhealthy. Just shut up.

Story 4: Sundus

Okay, so my name is Sundus. I am 29. About to be 30. I remember always being skinny, so skinny that my veins would show. I was always asked why don't you eat much? And was told to put on some weight. It wasn't that I was unhealthy, my BMI was always fine. Just because I was always called out for being skinny for my veins, even on my face. Things like, 'Oh what's this blue on your hand' didn't affect me. So growing up, I accepted that I was thin, and became very proud of it.

When I got sick because of an autoimmune disorder, it changed. I was put on steroids, and I got moon face. It was very hard to deal with that. I am talking about 12 years ago. This was 2010. I was in college. I was around my teenage, so you have this urge to look attractive. It was hard for me to look swollen, of a size beyond my regular growth. When the medicines would go off, I would go completely into a hunger strike. I would make sure to come back to my normal weight; my thinness. For a month or two, I would literally starve myself. I would stop eating.

I would survive on milk and bread. And it's very ironic, because people who know me, know that I can't live without food. So, they can't really imagine me being like this. I was so mentally into this. I kept on doing this every time I got sick. Every time I would lose my appetite. It wasn't that I was doing it deliberately; it was automatic. As if my body would shut off eating, and lose its appetite entirely.

Recently, when I have completely grown into an extra-large size, and I have been on medication, it's water weight, it's fat, it's not going away; all this has taken a very bad toll on me. Because I tried... my body stopped eating. A month or two back I was on vacation and I came back and stopped eating. I did lose 2 kg but in an unhealthy way. It wasn't healthy of me to stop eating completely, so I was really happy. Through Ramzan I was really happy. I

wasn't fasting but I was fasting. I'd have dinner at 10 pm and next I would eat at 7pm, Iftar time. So, I was literally hungry all day. No breakfast. No lunch. And making a lunch for myself was too much of a hassle for me. And, some days I would make ramen and that was it. Also, my doctor gave me these pills for appetite and I wouldn't take those.

I was thinking if I did take those, and they were making me hungry, and they will, and then I'd have to go and make something for myself. Get something to eat. Initially, two times a week I took peanut butter, but then I didn't even feel like eating peanut butter anymore.

My husband got to know and he got mad. He even complained to the doctor that she is not taking the pills. I got a good scolding, from the doctor and from my husband. My mom on the other hand understood that I am unwell. Even though there would be food for lunch for my father-in-law, I still wouldn't eat with him. It wasn't as if there was no food. I just didn't want to. So, it's been a struggle, and I cannot still wrap around my head that I have gained so much weight. I had never crossed 50 kg, and I now I am above 70. Yes, it's been hard, not been easy at all. I don't like seeing myself in a mirror. I recently bought contouring makeup and I have been trying to contour my face. Every now and then, you know. Few days ago, I got this fat-burning oil online, in hopes. I look at myself, I just don't see myself. I see this round woman, one I barely recognize.

When I got married, and initially at dinner parties, everyone would say try to lose weight, and it's not healthy. You have gained weight and it won't be easy. I couldn't do anything about it. I used to laugh and say I'll stop eating and I wouldn't. Initially, my mother in law would say to join a gym. Her daughter had wanted to join too, so she said I should join with her, so I'll have company too. She used to say wake up early and go for a walk. Obviously, they didn't have much idea about my condition. To see me thin, and then see me grow and grow, was

something new for them. So, I can't really blame them, or anyone around me. Eventually, they understood. Now, no one points out my weight.

But in the beginning, it was really hard. I was a newlywed, and none of my clothes fit. Two weeks before my wedding I literally altered my own dress. Of course, I couldn't go to the designer; that would take weeks! I begged my own tailor and sat till 4 AM in the morning to alter them. Also, I did go to a weight loss class, and my mother in law asked for my size, and I said no, not yet. I drank aloe vera juice, morning, in the night. I did lose weight, it made me happy. Then I decided to give my measurements. But, I got sick a month before my wedding, and started gaining weight. Unexpectedly. No one predicted it. It was difficult.

All the clothes I got, I got them designed for my size. The next day after valima I came to my mom's. And, I actually had to bring my clothes and had them altered to fit into them. The tailor said there's not much space. The way you had gained weight, they would still be tight. I remember at this wedding I wore a saari, my mom actually altered the blouse, fixed it with her own hands, and stitched it again. I really wanted to wear it.

I love saris, and I remember I used to carry them so graciously. I took two pictures in the sunlight, and later when I saw them, I hated myself. Even though my makeup was amazing. I looked beautiful, But still hated how I looked. As someone who had been so skinny, who always had this thin face-line, just like how it's shown in films? Always flaunted my saris, and I looked horrible. So, it wasn't much about people affecting me, more like me negatively shaming myself.

I think in general people think it's unhealthy to be overweight, and it could be controlled. It's not easy. My sister has kids, and she's over 40, and whatever she does she can't lose weight. I think beyond a certain age your body metabolism doesn't work that fast. So despite trying

really hard, you can't go back to a smaller size. I have come to terms with it and accepting it that I cannot go back to size 1. You know what sucks, when you go to these outlets and find out that stuff isn't available in your size. For instance, I was going to Skardu before Ramzan, and I had to buy a new pair of jeans, and in these 5 months, I bought three pairs of jeans.

They would get tight, and then I had to find another. So the last one I got was from Outfitters. In the women's section, the maximum waist size is 34 so I had to buy jeans from the men section.

In Skardu I had to wear warm stuff, and it didn't feel that bad, and I can't wear pair now because it looks manly. Even though I picked the most feminine one. But in my head I know it's from the men's section. So, it tells how as a society we are not open to women gaining weight, and despite the fact that Asian women are known to have stronger metabolism for gaining weight, as in South Asian women are busty; recognized for their hips and breasts, because, we have been uniquely shaped like that. Despite that, there are no open options for women who have gained weight or are overweight. So they know it's there, but people aren't ready to accept it or address it. They are not ready to welcome it, easily.

The first time I came across the term plus-size was when a few years ago there was this campaign in Pakistan. That was cool. That's when I came to know that there's a term for people who are overweight, and people are pointing it out and they are actually talking about it. Because you know when I was a kid, a friend of mine was overweight, and her mom was after her to lose her weight. She's unfortunately still unmarried, there's too much pressure. She gets blamed for it because she is fat and I have seen her struggle. So, when I came across this campaign, I was really happy that people were talking about it. People are openly telling other people, women are telling other women, that it's okay to be plus-size. They are getting

options of clothing. And personally, in our society I had never seen something like that before.

I first started relating to the term before I got married. I started understanding, and eventually accepted it. It wasn't as if I got into a depressive mode when I had to lose weight. But when I accepted it, I was okay with it, then I understood what plus-size women go through. What that friend of mine goes through, what she's been through. Then when I got married, I could relate more, because when you go to outlets, you see there are no options for you. You see you can look at something, but you don't really empathize till you go through it yourself. I was proud of this ignorance, but I needed this reality check. And to be able to relate.

Right now, I am okay with the label plus-size. Even though I can't recognize myself in the mirror, but still. See, there was a time after the wedding when I kept telling my husband, that I need to accept, and he asked me to keep reconsidering. Then a few weeks ago I sat him down and said that it's okay, and I that needed to address that I am sick. I need to focus on that, rather than on my weight. It's new normal for me. It's not as if I am giving up on my sickness, I am just giving in and accepting that this weight is the new me. He understood my point and accepted it.

I honestly felt I couldn't keep fighting and saying that I need revert to my earlier size.

Recently, I said that I will give my clothes away, and I don't like seeing clothes that don't fit me because it kinda triggers me, and it's a waste of space. Somebody else could use them because I won't be needing them anytime soon. I want to give them away. For instance, I know this person, someone who had to lose his weight, and he kept his small size shirt hanging, and that was his motivation, to fit into it again. He did! But me? I can't be like that. I finally need to move on, and let go of my inhibitions and clothes.

So, about the plus representation, yes, we need more of it! We see plus-size people and instantly label them as unhealthy. We do not think that being of that weight can still be healthy. General notion is, Oh, they make unhealthy choices that's why they are fat. No. I think people need to speak more about it. For instance, I like how some brands are finally coming towards catering to plus-size women. There is slow, but definite progress. Some brands are slowly progressing. For example shoes. For me at least, as my size went up. So, I have trouble finding shoes. For women, shoes are till size 38, 39 and that's it. 9 US size. Hardly 10, or 11. Not much choice exists. I think there could be more representation there.

Sharing my story like this... Honestly, being able to speak to someone who can understand. Who will not be like other people, just think I am crazy. Because I know I am not, and it's just that in the society we live in, the messed up society, it's not easy to talk about these things.

Other things where there could be more plus-size representation: undergarments! It's so hard to find them. When you go, and they say we don't have your size. I recently had this thing, that a woman measured my waist, it was all round, but the cup size wasn't okay. My breast had soared. The cup size wasn't my size. I could actually see my boobs come out of sides. So, I went to the lady again, and she said it's hard to find something in your size. I am not even kidding! These cups should be common. They are not. The max you get is 32B, 36B! There are very limited options in cup size. So, when I do go out, I just wear this baggy dress. I don't have to wear a dupatta, my in-laws aren't that conservative.

Let me share about how being in spaces is a different experience for plus-size women. See, in my personal space it's not an issue. But when you go out ... so, we are middle class family. We don't have big cars, we have a small car: Alto. So, usually my father-in-law doesn't go, but my mother-in-law sits in the front, when I sit in the back ... my younger sister-in-law has

huge hips too. So, it's very hard for us to sit in the car for a long time. Literally my thighs become sore and start aching, because I am unable to sit comfortably. Similarly, I cannot easily go in a rickshaw anymore. Because that also hurts the soreness of my thighs. Last rickshaw experience was very painful, even though I was alone. The seat was small, and suddenly I felt the seat had become too small. Later on I realized the seat wasn't small, it was I who had grown. My thighs weren't partially on the seat. So that kinda hurt the middle portion of my thighs.

Moving in public spaces is not comfortable for me. When you go to local markets, I have to loudly tell people to move. You know when I used to be thin I could easily squeeze my way through. Now I have to loudly say, that I can I please go? So, it's not comfortable at all. It's like this: when I ask people, all that attention comes to me, it gets slightly embarrassing. It's not as if I am not bold, but this sudden attention... I feel they look at you not as a woman, they see you as a plus-size woman. Something that has to pass. Maybe I am overthinking, but I do feel this sudden attention towards me. This makes me feel embarrassed.

This also reminds me of something else. People also instantly think that a woman with such size is pregnant, definitely in my case. Countless people have! So, last time I was at this market, I had to buy something, the shopkeeper got me a stool. He thought I was pregnant! I said I am not. And then this woman asked me, how far along I was? I asked what, and she repeated the question. I said no, I am not! So, she says, Oh, I am sorry we were mistaken. I said okay.

For plus-size women, it's not easy to live, and this isn't right. How terms like moti are used for us, kids do! We must tell them not to use such terms. Not even in jokes. And women should stop taking it lightly. We should tell people to stop telling us to lose weight, etc. It's not their place.

Story 5: Ayesha

My age is 28 years old. I feel my relationship with my body has been a very tumultuous one. I live in a joint family, so I have an uncle who has never felt the need to be decent towards me from a young age. So, one of the first things I remember understanding was that I was fat and ugly, that's why I have no friends. And that's why I deserved to be treated a certain way. I remember being a very shy kid, and I didn't have that many friends at that time and I associated that with the idea that because I am fat I don't deserve any friends. And then I changed schools, and went to the third grade, over there I saw a girl who was visibly very fat and she had friends. That came as a shock to me. I remember being surprised by that and understanding that maybe the way you look doesn't define how you deserve to be treated. And those were literally my first thoughts, in my life, with regards to my body!

I also really enjoyed playing in the sun. So, a bit of a background, I come from a Kashmiri Punjabi family, that values whiteness and fairness. So, my mom is fair skinned and I am more brown skinned, so from the beginning I felt... I had a harder time being accepted by my extended family as well. I feel it was grounds for bullying all the time. So, they would physically *grab* my fat. I was called all sorts of racialized names and stuff. So, obviously, I was labelled as oversensitive as a child, because I would cry after getting bullied. Then they would tell me I am too sensitive. But I didn't want to be treated that way. I remember adjusting to my life with regard to fatness. It was the *space* I was taking of everyone when I was sitting in a car. Because of me, the space in the car felt less, and people would make it very obvious. They'd say, *look at the way her stomach moves, look at the way her thigh moves, look at the way her arms move.*

This added to me never being comfortable in any clothes and I hated shopping. My friends, my best friends, are very skinny. I also remember nobody at the school said out loud that I am taller, heavier, or bigger. To the point it became ridiculous. In a way, this whole thing was absurd. It was overemphasizing or implying '*God, don't let her find out that she's heavier, bigger*' or anything like that as well. I was hyperaware of my body. Now, I see this in my little brother. He and I share the same body type in a way, from a younger age we were a little heavier. He sits with a cushion on his stomach, I realized I used to do the same thing.

I have had a very fluctuating journey with my body as well. Because when I was 14 I spent one summer crying in the swimming pool. I wanted some space from my family, so I just went there and cried, just being emo. But that involved swimming back and forth. I was also going through a breakup, so I didn't wanna eat that much I was really depressed. So, I got skinny. I got very thin. And everyone's reaction to me completely changed. In a way, I became more hyper aware after that about my body. Because *nothing* about me had changed. If anything I was a little more miserable, and less fun to be around! So, my personality was the same, but people's reactions to me changed. That made me resentful of the way people treated fat people.

I remember my *phuphos* touching my body, but it was in a different way. Like, *this is good. Look how thin your waist is, your wrist should be this much*, you know, a full analysis about my body. I remember feeling really horrified, but it wasn't acted inwards. If anything, that was the first time I felt more confident about my body, not because I was thinner, but because I could see for who I was. Like bullshit. I felt angry about it, and that's why when my weight fluctuated again I stopped being skinny because I wasn't swimming every day anymore. And my body got fatter again, I didn't feel bad about it. I didn't have that internalized self-hatred at that time.

To elaborate a bit more on my weight, when I turned 23 I think, that's when I started gaining weight, and it just expanded from there, like fluctuating back and forth, thin to fat, it was fat to fatter, and then my clothes stopped fitting me. Then people's reaction to me changed, as I mentioned earlier. And this time around the change felt more drastic to me, it was rapid weight gain, and I wasn't able to make peace with my body. I guess. In the same way when I stopped getting bigger. And I also just didn't feel comfortable about it. Because on one hand I was like I am not that fat, on the other hand, I was like I am very fat. So, I would feel that fluctuation in my own head. But I knew I was feeling really bad, really shitty because like I said my clothes weren't fitting me. I started developing these random issues which I thought were because of my weight. My knees started hurting, so I was like is it because of that and I got respiratory problems when I got congestion, somehow, I attached everything to my weight. Recently I realized I was snoring a lot. Even then someone was telling me it could be because of my weight. Everything in my life, all my problems, even beyond aesthetics, like my health, and even recently when I got diagnosed with PCOS, it's been like really focused on my weight. Weight, weight! So, I started to feel extremely negative about it. To the point that when I got my scholarship to US for master's, when I got there I didn't even meet anyone. I was so scared to leave the house, and kept fixating on what I looked like, I hated the way I looked, and felt deeply terrible. When the pandemic started, I was in a bad place with my body, so I would be working out, I would be doing a lot of exercises, walking on my roof, I would be watching those eating videos, because everything was free on YouTube.

But I didn't see myself losing weight, I don't even know if my body changed in any way, all I know is I felt continuously shitty about it. But this was also when I was exploring my relationship in a more serious way with my body. It became like a relational thing. For the past 3, 4 years, I had been feeling constantly terrible about myself, it became outward again; I started thinking more about people's reactions to me, as opposed to *my* relationship... I finally

started feeling okay, and then someone would say something shitty, and everything would fall apart. That's when I started to confront my friends, one by one, when something shitty was said. Even if that was about their own bodies. Like they look fat, and feel fat, in a negative way. Because I have been very sensitive about this from a very young age. I said, don't say this shit, because you're projecting and somebody else gets triggered. And it doesn't matter because I have been very thin, very fat, but either way you have to be very mindful of the way you say it. I would feel like I am lying to myself, but I am being quiet about it. What I mean is, I am fine with it, body positivity and all, on the outside, but on the inside, I hate myself.

But at least I was deluding myself to get by. But I didn't say out loud, like I feel disgusting, blah blah blah. Yeah, and then I think I completely reevaluated like it started with confrontation, where I started talking to people, and when they would say something that made me feel terrible, I would... I started having more upfront conversations about it, and it finally made me feel like a lot better. And a lot of it had to do with desirability too. Like do I feel desired? I felt like I have had a boyfriend for the past 6 years, and he's always made me feel super desired. But you know at one point he becomes like your mom; he's supposed to love you anyway. So, I wasn't sure if it counted the same way.

But exploring a lot about sexuality last year has made me feel better about it, like my weight hasn't changed. I just feel more comfortable dressing and wearing what I want to. And it makes me feel a lot in control. Like my own body, to say things out loud. I get to surround myself with people who value the same thing, and on the same page on this. Because... I am at a stage where I have stopped tolerating fat phobia. I feel deeply challenging it, within my own self. I can't be a hypocrite; everyone can be fat and beautiful, not me inside, I want to be

thin. I started thinking about thinness in a very different way. And understanding it in a different way as well.

Despite what people perceived my body as, I have always been active. Very fit. Like physically capable of a lot. I have started being more generous to my body, more kind to it, not in like an empty way, or strange self-help way, but in a very 'reckoning with it' way, aiming towards body neutrality. Like I don't have to love it all the time. But I am very grateful for it. So, I guess the more I focus my energy on being proud of my body, understanding it, understanding how the male gaze was working throughout, and looking at what people value beauty, came from a place of insecurity, so the beauty they valued was hollow. Because I just don't see the beauty that way at all. Genuinely I don't.

So, it was like looking at all these things. Looking at thinness more directly than fatness was making me feel better, and also, just seeing more fat friends, gaining more fat friends. Being more vocal about it myself. Being able to call myself fat too. Which I challenged too. Like, I am not *that* fat. I am not *that* thin. I almost felt like I was co-opting the word fat, if somebody was fatter than me. Because like I told you from the start, it's like an obscure thing, that I am ostensibly bigger, but it would almost be like a strange middle I have to choose. But yeah, whatever. Like I am in a place right now where I feel so much better. I recently had an experience, where I had a thin friend being valued by another new thin friend I made, and there was a man who was only paying attention to them and ignoring me. I felt angry about it, as opposed to feeling hatred for myself. So, it was more like recognizing how full of shit that mindset is. As opposed to making myself feel bad. I just understood I can't be around certain people and I am perfectly fine cutting people out of my life, if they can only value thinness. And I don't mean that in relationship, but generally. If like people who post on Instagram, and talk about someone who is just so hot, and it's just some thin person, I don't value it. I pointed

it out once or twice. Like is the standard of beauty just this? Yeah, and that just makes you feel more in control.

I came across the plus-size label maybe through clothing stores, or magazines, I am not sure. But when I did come across it, I didn't relate. I was very resistant. There's this book by Meg Abbot called *Size 12 is not Fat*. I read it when I was really young. I don't think it was a good book or anything, I just liked the name. It attracted me and stuff. I remembered when I recently had to accept that I am a size 12. It was interesting when I had to shop for my clothes, and sometimes like, you know how sizes and labels are inconsistent throughout different brands. In some places, I would be like a large, in some places I realized for the first time I was an XL, and that made me plus-size. Because it became X1? Beyond that XL. So, that was interesting.

It became like a thing where I had to just cope with it. I wasn't just comfortable with the label at all. I was like what the hell? I am plus-size? Like how rude! I didn't... I was hesitant and reluctant about the fact that I am. And, you know when you have to give your size, to somebody for something. like when I was interning, I had to give my T-shirt size. So, it was always like I don't know man, large or XL, like you have to say it out loud and that made it real. So, it felt uncomfortable? And there was a tinge of humiliation to it, like saying it out loud. But because it was at the same time I was fighting all of this in my head, about how so much of the shame I associated with my body was constant, regardless of its size. Struggling with myopic perceptions of beauty and acceptability, and I was just resisting shame, and fighting it throughout. Eventually, it didn't matter what size, even if it was L, XL, or X1, whatever, it felt easier to say. But I hate saying it because I didn't know how other people would perceive it. But now I say it with confidence it is what it is like someone dare say something. So yeah, this is how it is.

So, I don't know how I feel about the concept of plus-size representation altogether. I feel like it's used to sell me something. And, I don't know, like I want to resist the commodification of beauty, anyway, so I always don't know if it would benefit me to see more like in that way.

But, there is a truth to it, that I don't want to see, like plus-size models and them be like raised on that novelty factor, like that token, we have acceptable beauty standards of all sizes. It just feels so artificial, purposefully and intentionally meant to rope somebody in. So, it's a brand, selling me something? I am not totally onboard with that form of representation. But I do love to see more of fat women in normal situations.

Like, in a film, TV, or a book, if a protagonist, who isn't conventionally white, thin, and fair, and she isn't just put there to be a fat protagonist. She's just a protagonist. It's that neutrality in that body, that I'd love to see. It could be in a film, music video, or anywhere, I see it. This movie, for instance, *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, had a main character, who's not 'conventionally' beautiful? like you know, conventional beauty, where you have to look a certain way? She's chubby and that was not a focal part of her personality. I loved it. So, there's that. In shows like *This is Us*, where you have like a major character who is fat, like I hated her storyline for a minute because all she had was her fatness. And I think it's important to call out the elephant in the room, and call spade a spade, and acknowledge that fat *is* fat. She's fat, and it's a huge part of her identity. Her life, her dealing with fatness. But everyone else got dimensions in their lives as well. Having multiple aspect to their lives. She was *just* fat and her husband is just fat too. I was really resentful of that. So, I guess representation for me is not enough to see a fat person, but it also matters how and what the messaging is [powerful statement and critique of the messaging of identity].

I also feel sometimes the media hides fat bodies, and not just media, but generally. I think fat people are hidden sometimes. What I mean by that is, I like going to clubs and dance, and I

think sometimes, there's this stigma around fatness, that fat people feel like they are not invited. And it makes me so uncomfortable if I am the only plus-size person around. It makes me feel targeted in a way. Where I feel I have to grapple with beauty, and I have to prove my self-worth. I am in that space. But when I see fat bodies, brown bodies, and hairy bodies. When I see queer bodies around, so, that makes me feel at peace. Makes me feel fine like I feel so comfortable right now. When there's a certain space where I see fat bodies, I love it. So, I guess there is underrepresentation every now and then in certain spaces. I feel like there's some kind of systematic filtering to it because everyone's trying to go to the gym so, you know I might not find fat people at a certain space. I'll just find thin people overly. Even in gyms, like I am someone who is not afraid of going to the gym. So, you know it's interesting as a concept. But, yeah, I see more thin people or fit people there, like I know fat people will feel like doing home workouts than joining a gym before they reach a certain stage where it's not embarrassing to be in a gym as a fat person. I don't feel overexposed as a fat person. So, maybe there is like a thing to representation just generally in that way.

When I don't see fat bodies around me, I feel uncomfortable. I feel extra scrutinized then because I almost feel like I have to fight to prove that I can be... I can belong to that space. Where, I am just a person, and not a fat person specifically. Where I am a person with, you know who is beautiful, who carries worth, intelligence, blah blah blah, and I don't like have to struggle to prove it. With 80 different qualities that are good, to make up for the fact that people will not immediately recognize those qualities. Where they'd first see that I am the fat person in the room, and I feel like being the fat person isn't as bad as being the fat woman in the room. Because obviously, there's a lot of pressure on women.

I think ciswomen have to perform beauty ad infinitum. So, the pressure is 100% there. In terms of movement and mobility, it's definitely a real thing. I think from the clothes you

wear, and the way your body moves, right? Like the same clothes that a thin person wears might be perceived as 'vulgar' on my body. And that doesn't make me feel good, because I have been told that in just different words, essentially, that it's disgusting. So not only fatness and its shame are associated with my body, but oversexualized body, which is blamed for harassment and attention it receives is also then ... I have to deal with. So, going outside knowing that if my shirt is tight enough to, like when I wear, like I feel fat people are made to wear loose clothes so they can hide themselves as much as possible. Makes you feel like shit, right? Tighter clothes actually look a lot better, so whenever I wear them I feel sexy, however, I feel sexualized. The moment I leave my room, or that space where I have finally established where my body is worthy of being respected the same way. So, mobility wise it's like goddamn I have to cover the hell out of myself!

In certain areas, to feel like I am definitely saying, *promise to God not inviting harassment, look at the huge dupatta I have. Or like, loose clothes I have on today because my ass is fat, man. My ass is huge, and no matter what I wear it kind of protrudes, and this has been highlighted by women. Telling me, meaning well, but also being mean, like your ass... you have to wear loose clothes, like it doesn't look good on you. These jeans, this shalwar, they don't look good on you. Your kameez is too tight.* So, it's like an over policing of the fat body for me. Which restricts our movement in public spaces. But also in private spaces, because there I am being told that this is not allowed.

And in private places, like I don't want to be around certain places. I have had dysmorphia in which, no matter what my size, sometimes I am feeling so shit, like overly expanded. So, I have skipped going out for certain events. Because of my fatness, I have avoided family dinners and stuff, but also avoided meeting friends because I feel overly perceived. I restricted my movement and felt comfortable nowhere except in my room. Also, it's not as if

it's only in my head. Yeah, like dysmorphia is, yes it's in my head. But also sometimes it's like... I know for a fact that someone, like they don't have to say it out loud, are looking at me in a certain way. I know for a fact that I am invisible in certain places, where only the thin body is considered worthy of attention. And attention like not over attention... like recognition of a person is there? And that comes from an extracted sense of beauty, where they do objectify it. So, whenever they notice you it's not on good terms, but with regards to, when it comes to the fatness of it, you're completely invisible and dismissed, and I am too cognizant of those things. And it makes me not want to be around a lot of people and a lot of places.

Also, the term fat, it's a word I've come to terms with. Used to feel like a swear word at first, completely derogatory and something so negative and almost sinful I never wanted to be that or be accused of being that. Felt the same way when my friends would try to not say I was fat, just chubby, etc. it's a word I use very comfortably now and it's like I've reckoned with it and accepted it but not in a sad way, in a way with some small pride attached to it. I don't shy away from it.

Chapter 5: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to document and explore stories of five (N=5) cisgender plus-size women from Karachi to understand their relationship with their bodies in association with movement and mobility in private and public spaces. Seven themes that were identified and analyzed with an intersectional feminist lens are described below:

1. “*Moti*” vs The world

In the stories of the participants, a lot of harsh experiences were highlighted in association with their bodies. It was observed that society and its people have played a huge role in hindering the mobility and movement of plus-size women in private and public spaces. The participants each shared that people in both public and private spaces have had this habit of repeatedly pointing out that they are *fat* as if they don't own a mirror or don't know how their body looks or feels. “*Moti*” (which means fat in Urdu, Hindi, and Sindhi language) is the identifier because fat people are deemed the opposite of normal-bodied people as per western ideals and that somehow is everyone's business.

All the participants spoke of this kind of public shaming.

“I remember this incident, once, I was in class, I was doing work, and two friends next to me were having cake. So a teacher came in, and said in front of the class, “Cake in class? Don't eat. And you shouldn't be eating anyway.” Gesturing that I am fat. I was just looking at him, another time, someone asked if I have a pencil, and I said no, and it came out loud. So he said that you have so much in your tummy anyway, that's why it keeps coming out. And he said that in front of the class. And that was the second time he had done it. Why are you talking about my body? You can scold me without mentioning that for being loud. Then he went on this whole lecture about how a teacher's status is different, and things shouldn't be taken like that, and blah blah. Even in education. You can't sit in a class without your body being shamed.” (Khadeja)

It is observed that the teacher when questioned about his behavior tried to justify and made it all about how one shouldn't challenge a teacher because it's disrespectful.

2. Sirf *Moti* ho tum

Sirf *Moti* means ‘only fat’; the world actively reduces the existence of plus-size women to their body shape and size as per the participants. It is frequently used in a derogatory manner by people around them.

“For instance, this word moti, this uncle of mine (khalu) calls me by that. Hey, moti. I feel like smacking his head or something. It's also very internalized, you know. He himself is fat. I am fat, and so is he. So, what's the problem? Why do you call me that? A woman can't be fat? A man's fat belly isn't noticed. A woman's is. I have had whole fights over the word moti.” (Zohra)

Many young fat girls in school are nicknamed “*Moti*” right from the start besides the other nicknames like *Bhains* or they are teased with phrases like *Kis chakki ka aata khati ho?* (‘What kind of flour do you eat?’) Which is asked to confirm if the flour you eat is the reason you are so fat.

Two of the participants highlighted that we should raise kids properly to not use such terms and not enable them when they do call someone “*Moti*” in public as we are not at the stage where we can accept such a derogatory word and take its power away.

“For plus-size women, it's not easy to live, and this isn't right. How terms like moti are used for us, kids do! We must tell them not to use such terms. Not even in jokes. And women should stop taking it lightly. We should tell people to stop telling us to lose weight, etc. It's not their place.” (Sundus)

Family

All stories had moments where the participants shared that their families played an important part in them developing an unhealthy and difficult relationship with their bodies. Instead of developing a healthy relationship with their bodies and empowering them to face the world headfirst, their families reflected the normalized behaviours with the rest of society of shaming their bodies, valuing the thin bodies regardless of the health of the body, impacting their self-esteem, social interactions and, most importantly their relationship to themselves and their bodies.

“I had a harder time being accepted by my extended family as well. I feel it was grounds for bullying all the time.” (Ayesha)

Their families' behaviours made them hyper-aware of their bodies and not in a positive light, instilling the value of thinness. A lot of their parents' instructions revolved around how the girls should cover their big bodies and hide them away from the public. It was indicated that this pushed them to grow up mentally and emotionally and took away their childlike joy and playfulness.

“But I always grew up hearing that I must wear a dupatta. So, I always used to have a dupatta. Not anymore. But before my marriage, I still used to have a dupatta. Even now when I go to my mother's place, I take dupatta. That's how it has been. On the other hand, my sister doesn't wear it. She wears the shortest of the crop tops, weirdest jeans, that is torn from head to toe, and she only hears 'What have you dressed like?' from my parents. They never say that clothes are short, or something is visible. But with me it's been like, I should be aware of this because I am a big girl. So, you should know more about your body. You can see it's bulging out of places. You should be more responsible, with how you look when people are looking. And these things, they make you a grown up really quick.” (Zohra)

They all had similar sentiments that if their parents had supported healthy body relations, self-esteem, and confidence while supporting them, they would have not been so hard on themselves and would have been equipped to deal with people outside their homes who bullied and policed their bodies. It was shared that families also associated freedom of choice with marriage which is a norm in Pakistan. An unmarried girl isn't given the autonomy to dress according to her wishes but to the family's wishes, which also restricts her movement. The situation becomes worse for a fat woman as her body's worth and value depends on her marriage-worthiness. Her worthiness decreases drastically if she isn't an appealing candidate for marriage. Fat women are a heavier burden for their families and after they get married, the husband carries the parents' burden of a woman's weight. The fatness issue becomes her husband's responsibility.

“Because a lot depends on your body, and your future marriage proposals are based on it too.” (Khadeja)

Society

The participants shared their experiences of situations outside the homes that repeatedly reminded them that there was something abnormal and unacceptable about their bodies and that they should do something about it.

“For example, in my school, I was also reminded of this. In my class, I was the only plus-size kid. Yes, there were others who were chubby and all, but I was the fattest. So, even in the class, I was reminded that I wasn't normal. Even though I was at the same fitness level as them. I used to participate in everything. So, this, my family's behaviour, and then this seeped into my life when I started going out, for college and later, work. So, I used to travel by rickshaw (A local three wheeled vehicle) or on foot, and random strangers would just like come and tell me to lose weight. Because I was fat. Such incidents are countless.” (Khadeja)

The participant shared that majority of the people around her would comment on her body as if it was their responsibility to keep her weight in check. The participants experienced body discrimination even if the weight gain and loss is due to an illness, it is still pinpointed and commented upon. Sundus shared in her story that due to Lupus she recently gained a lot of weight and it was hard for everyone to understand why she could not magically lose weight. On the other hand Anza shared her experience of how people praised her weight loss without knowing the loss was triggered due to an illness.

“When I got married, and initially at dinner parties, everyone would say try to lose weight, and it's not healthy. You have gained weight and it won't be easy. I couldn't do anything about it.” (Sundus)

All these experiences have led to these plus-size women distancing themselves from people who share this mindset as they grow older and are able to call out the harsh treatment of society. Calling out usually happens if they have the opportunity to do so because it is hard to speak out when you live in a society with a collective family and communal system which directly and negatively interferes with body autonomy and mobility.

“I recently had an experience, where I had a thin friend being valued by another new thin friend I made, and there was a man who was only paying attention to them and ignoring me. I felt angry about it, as opposed to feeling hatred for myself. So, it was more like recognizing how full of shit that mindset is. As opposed to making myself feel bad. I just understood I can't be around certain people and I am perfectly fine cutting people out of my life, if they can only value thinness.” (Ayesha)

Media and Literature

The participants shared in the stories that lately various media outlets have added some representation of plus-size models, but it is not satisfactory. They grew up with the media promoting the white, blonde, and thin woman with curves in certain places as the standard of beauty, which they think does not represent these plus-size women of Karachi. These types of inaccurate plus-size women bodies continue to contribute to the negative social views and behaviours towards plus-size women.

“But when it comes to media, like TV, on all the avenues, the plus-size representation has not been that great. No. I won't say plus-size, but broader size. The sizes we used to see in Rahat Kazmi dramas. Marina Khan was someone who was okay with whatever size. The protagonists used to be thin, and feeble. Or very shy. For instance, if you saw magazines, my nana (maternal grandfather) used to bring Herald, like we used to have Reader's Digest and all, even in those I used to see fashion photos, women who weren't even 18, most of the time... they were little girls! They were thin.” (Zohra)

As per the participant's observation, in many cases, every fat woman's story becomes a sob story, while fat women do have their struggles, their whole personality doesn't *only* revolve around that, nor does their identity revolve around the size of their bodies. They are constantly fighting the battle of beauty and worthiness standards that society has forced upon them and the mass media continues to portray them as anything beyond pitiable.

The women in the study felt that the fat women were tokenized in the media and they shared that they learned via social media that some plus-size models are made up with paddings to

look plus-size so that they continue to fit the Western beauty standards, creating a false representation of plus-size models, which also takes away job opportunities from real plus-size women in the media.

“Like, in a film, TV, or a book, if a protagonist, who isn't conventionally white, thin, and fair, and she isn't just put there to be a fat protagonist. She's just a protagonist. It's that neutrality in that body, that I'd love to see. It could be in a film, music video, or anywhere, I see it. This movie, for instance, Everything Everywhere All At Once, had a main character, who's not 'conventionally' beautiful? like you know, conventional beauty, where you have to look a certain way? She's chubby and that was not a focal part of her personality. I loved it. So, there's that. In shows like This is Us, where you have like a major character who is fat, like I hated her storyline for a minute because all she had was her fatness. And I think it's important to call out the elephant in the room, and call spade a spade, and acknowledge that fat is fat. She's fat, and it's a huge part of her identity. Her life, her dealing with fatness. But everyone else got dimensions in their lives as well. Having multiple aspect to their lives. She was just fat and her husband is just fat too. I was really resentful of that. So, I guess representation for me is not enough to see a fat person, but it also matters how and what the messaging is.” (Ayesha)

Anza shared that the criticism that the representation of fatness in the media promotes obesity is pointless. She strongly stated that it has more to do with people being uncomfortable with seeing fat people on screen. She further shared:

“When it comes to plus-size representation in Pakistan, I can name like one plus-size person in media. Who always gets to be made the butt of the fat jokes. And that's Faiza Saleem. There's not much representation of fat girls, besides her. And even then it's not the best depiction. For me, there is no plus-size representation in Pakistani society. I have not met, or looked up to any plus-size person. Like oh, there is an influencer, or actress, or even politicians. The only plus-size politician is Shireen Mazari. And she gets made fun of. You know there aren't a lot of people I can look up to and be like, oh, you know, that's a fat dentist that is popular. Or, that's a doctor that's really, really respected. Or there's a social media influencer, or a fashion influencer. And the only one I can think of is Xera Hussain, and that's because of the group that she has. It's probably the only plus-size group I know.” (Anza)

All of the women in the study agreed that the internet promotes false representation of plus-size women through manipulated images and false creations of plus-size women. You cannot

rely on what media portrays as the truth, because they often photoshop images but only if you consciously follow social media pages that encourage body positivity. Generally, the internet also has too many influencers promoting diet culture, and fatphobic trolls on a mission to bully; majority of people consume such content because it mirrors their thinking patterns and the cycles of abuse, bullying and trolls target fat women.

The women in the study believe that a more inclusive truthful representation in the media definitely helps as it sensitizes people and helps them identify plus-size bodies as normal. But representation for the sake of ‘trendiness’ is not helpful, in fact it creates biasness that is quite evident when plus-size women and their narratives are excluded from social media and influencers.

“On a larger scale, media representation helps. It does help. Unconsciously you start feeling this body is normal.” (Khadeja)

Finding relatable literature which features a warrior or a romantic lead who were plus-size is rare and only the thin swan-like girl would always go on adventures and have lovers pining for her.

“I’ll talk about books. Even in books, the ones I read, they would never have the focus on the plus-size person. And when it was, it was very specific. They would mention them as being plus-size every time. If it’s a thin girl, it’s a beautiful girl for them, she would not be thin every time. Just beautiful. Her hands are like this... like a swan. Things that would make you feel more unrepresented. Okay, so like if I have to be a protagonist somewhere I have to fit in some other place.” (Zohra)

Clothing/Fashion

In Pakistan, the relationship you have with your clothes is also based on how your family dressed you or allowed you to dress and what kind of cultural protocol you had to follow while

growing up as per the participants. Zohra shares that her family wasn't quite supportive when it came to standing up against others policing her body and clothes.

“My cousin and I used to live in the same area all our lives. And she's not a plus-size person, but she had boobs. Her parents never stopped her from wearing crop tops, small shirts, and fitted jeans. She doesn't have any issues with it. She wears it everywhere. Everything that happened to me, happened to her. She still used to wear such clothes, because at home, she had people who supported her. Like no one can dare do anything, because her family supported her. My case was different, my family and all. She is one year older than me. Her family was okay with it. It's bizarre how her mother never sexualized her, but she did that to us! She used to say that my sister has an ass. She sexualized other's kids but not hers. But you did give freedom to your kid, and wearing stuff like that, and you cannot stop her. Nobody can. If you have that confidence that you can wear something like that. Not with us.”
(Zohra)

Most of the participants had to figure out how not to listen to people's opinions about their clothes. They talk about how options available in plus-size clothing are so limited and unfashionable. Often the larger sizes were designed for older women. On top of that the fashion industry lately has been trying to dress all bigger women into one colorful blob of cloth which is unattractive to younger women in my research study. What does this say to younger women? That if you are fat, you are unattractive? As Zohra shares her sentiments of many others by stating:

“During last Eid I noticed something new. That to make bigger sizes ... they realize it suddenly that most women in Pakistan are of that size. So they have made...my mother calls it jubba (gown) size. A big jubba size. There's no finesse in the arms or anything. It's just a blob of clothes. They might as well put a dupatta on you and you'd look the same. Jubba size is in, but it's also because they wanted to cater to those women. But like never clothes in which a plus-size person can look sexy. It's like why is it from chest to bottom, like a blob of cloth? It's like I am in a box or something.”(Zohra)

It can be observed in the stories that the participants feel that there is no space for them in fashion and the industry isn't making an effort to make fashionable clothes for plus-size women.

When it comes to lingerie there are only basic three colors available in a mediocre design by one single brand and that too is at unaffordable prices, as many of the participants complained, like Khadeja shared, *“As a 26-year-old, there's still a long way too. Especially since I can't find clothes of my size, if you wanna go buy a bra; beige, white, and black options are the only ones you get. This sucks! And if you really want a bra your size, you'd have to spend buttlloads of money, around 3 or 4 thousand. And my salary isn't that much that I buy a 5K bra and wear it. That's not how it works.”* The fashion industry available in Pakistan does not make lingerie appealing for younger women who want a variety of designs that are available to thinner women. Designers contribute to lack of diverse lingerie for plus-size women who also want to feel good in a variety of lingerie available to thinner women.

There was a common disgust towards shopping because the experience these women describe has usually been so uncomfortable and makes one unhappy with the lack of diversity in clothing available to plus-size women. Most fancy brands don't cater to a size above large and they don't make pretty designs for bigger people and that reiterates that big bodies aren't normal, they are not attractive, nor are they a target to plus-size female consumers.

“The problem is every time, as a kid, whenever I went there to get clothes, they never had size 12 or up. They barely have 14. Size 16 didn't even exist. Oh, we don't carry that in our stores. Then why market it? Then places like Outfitters. They told me to my face, that we don't carry jeans above 32. They said we only carry teen sizes, and I was 17-18! It's a very strange thing. They would make the mannequin look a certain way, you know? The only places you can really find plus-size stuff are overpriced like import shops. Other places I could think of are those flea markets.” (Anza)

One can of course assume that plus-size women want to feel attractive in their clothes as well. They want to pay the same price as thinner women clothing and have more choices than unattractive boring clothing for plus-size bodies.

3. “Buri Aurat”-Hypersexualization of young fat girls

The majority of the participants shared that they have experienced their bodies being hypersexualized when they were little girls and were made to feel self-aware of the changes their body was going through in a negative light, which affected their mobility and movement. It added shame and they were repeatedly instructed to hide their bodies away. One participant described that she learned at a very young age that plus-size women are considered dirty and Anza shared, “And I remember, at one point, my own mother she comes to me, not going to excuse her, and said ‘why are there marks on your chest like dirty/ bad women?’ I asked her what she meant by that, and she told me that plus-size women are almost always prostitutes”. Anza was taught by her mother that fat women were associated as a prostitute which impacted how she viewed her own body being connected to sex work.

From the stories of these participants, we learn that young girls are blamed and shamed for getting attention by older men instead of the men being called out for their disgusting behavior towards young girls. The blame is on the young girls’ normal body changes. The same style of clothes is called “Vulgar” on fat girls because their bodies have extra fat and that forces them to wear extra baggy clothes. This behavior by the society around them has restricted their mobility through unhealthy views of being associated to sex work and dirtiness which impacted their self-esteem and worth.

The way most girls are introduced to wearing bras, menstruation, and reproductive process is very secretive and with shame attached to it and Zohra shared that

“When I turned 10, I knew I was fat, but also thick. I have boobs, and I have an ass. Because my mother gave me my first bra around that age. She told me you're not at an age where you wear a slip anymore. So you wear a bra. I remember we had a store room cum changing room, my mother just gave it to me and said just go and wear it. She didn't explain anything. I remember I cried so much. Because that was the same year I got my periods too. Like, class 5 is when you're going from primary to secondary, and you're growing up. Even in school, you're told not to wear a frock,

but trousers from that point. Or wear a pajama. You have to wear a V now. I was given my first pad and first bra in the same way. In retrospect, 10 is a very young age. To know you're a woman and you have to hide things now. And you're a fat person so you have to hide more"

The participants shared that hyper-sexualization of their bodies in public and private spaces chipped away at their childhood impacting their relationship to their bodies. Some of them isolated themselves due to the traumatic experiences, which led to a complicated and unhealthy relationship with their bodies quite early on. It can be assumed that there is a toxic binary, on one side they are deemed unattractive and told that no one would marry them and on the other side they are hyper-sexualized. The blame is on the oppressed in both cases and no further inquire is done on who is the oppressor. This does limit the mobility of women and this binary can be further explored in future research work.

4. Mobility and plus-size bodies

It was shared by Anza that when you are fat and your body is constantly policed then it affects how you move in public. She also highlighted how public transport isn't friendly and accessible in Pakistan and it makes mobility hard.

"You go into public spaces, and for example, you're in public transport, and it's very hard to move around." Anza

Khadeja highlights a similar experience of riding in car with her family by stating that

"As a fat person, for years and years, I would opt to sit in the front seat. During road trips, or whatever. Like we have to go somewhere, and all the cousins are here, so we have to fit in a single car. As a child I would never sit in the front. I didn't use to feel bad about my body. But now I want to sit in the front, because I don't want to take someone's space. So sitting in front is now a conscious decision so that I am not taking other people's spaces. I always do it." Khadeja

One of the participants, Zohra, mentioned that walking on roads is her least favorite thing to do because everyone stares more at her because she is a big woman. She further shares how

her mobility on regular basis influences by the hyper sexualization and society's discrimination of fat bodies.

"But when I was growing up, I didn't want to be sexualized. I just wanted to cross the damn road! I used to hear comments about my body, boobs, or anything. So it definitely restricted a lot of my movement. Even in Karachi, I didn't walk alone. If someone was with me then fine, otherwise I took a rickshaw. And I had a whole process of getting into a rickshaw. My dupatta, I used to hang on both sides, and tuck it here, to look like a square. No one, rickshaw driver or someone, could see anything. I would always buy clothes of size bigger. Just to not show what's inside. The thought being, if I buy bigger size, no one would know my size." Zohra

The body type influences mobility in public spaces in various manners and Sundus shared how it changed for her when she gained weight due to her illness.

"Moving in public spaces is not comfortable for me. When you go to local markets, I have to loudly tell people to move. You know when I used to be thin I could easily squeeze my way through. Now I have to loudly say, that I can I please go? So it's not comfortable at all. It's like this: when I ask people, all that attention comes to me, it gets slightly embarrassing." - Sundus

All participants had similar sentiments and experiences in public spaces where the people would indicate one way or another that their body was different. Sometimes by openly commenting, harassing or ogling. Ayesha shared how her clothes are policed which restricts her movement in public spaces as well as private spaces.

"My ass is huge, and no matter what I wear it kind of protrudes, and this has been highlighted by women. Telling me, meaning well, but also being mean, like your ass... you have to wear loose clothes, like it doesn't look good on you. These jeans, this shalwar, they don't look good on you. Your kameez is too tight. So, it's like an over policing of the fat body for me. Which restricts our movement in public spaces. But also in private spaces, because there I am being told that this is not allowed." Ayesha

It can be concluded by analyzing these stories that mobility of the plus size women in this study was affected by the body type they have. The infrastructure, behavior of people and other social systems were also unfriendly to them person because of their bigger bodies.

5. No healthcare for you

Medical professionals have ignored the issues of fat women actively and would connect every condition to weight. One of the participants shared that their acne issue was misdiagnosed, and she was asked to lose weight even though the two weren't connected. Khadeja shared that once she was at a medical facility for her cousin's treatment and the doctor started commenting on her weight and telling her she has Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS). That surely was unethical, but it is a common practice. Khadeja shared, "For example, if you go for anything, even a fucking broken leg, they'd mention your body weight. I know a lot of women who haven't had their PCOS diagnosed because of this. Even for tumors, and cysts in the uterus. Wherever they go they are told to lose weight. But this never helps. That's not how bodies work. You need to do proper testing. So access to health care is harder because you're fat." Doctors discriminate on the weight of the body rather than what is happening internally, impacting the quality of care plus-size bodies are given within the medical field.

Doctors usually don't further investigate if you are fat and that emphasizes the notion that healthcare isn't for fat women. Not all fat people are inactive and ill, it is a common misconception. Some of the participants shared that regardless of the fat shaming they were active as kids and also are as grownups. The weight didn't stop them from trekking, dancing, and playing sports. Yes, for some the reactions did drive them to isolation, but it was the people and not their bodies, as Ayesha shared, "Despite what people perceived my body as, I have always been active. Very fit. Like physically capable of a lot."

Anza, who is a doctor by profession, shared that BMI is a lie and it's frustrating that doctors are still judging people's bodies with a standard that wasn't meant to be used for assessing

someone's health. She further added, health is dependent on diverse social determinants, from income, food insecurity, housing, childhood development, social inclusion, to name a few, and body type should not be the only factor that health professionals label someone as unhealthy.

6. *Main apni favorite hoon: One step at a time*

The journey of accepting your own body and being kinder after so many hard experiences is not linear. Most participants are unlearning and relearning, and at times it gets really difficult to continuously challenge society's judgements and misconceptions.

“But this time in my life, my body-related perceptions come and go. These days, or this time in my life, I am very comfortable. I am home in this body. Sometimes I want to tear it up. I just look like... I see myself. I always see myself... and sometimes I can't even recognize my face.” (Zohra)

All of the participants came across the concept of self-love through various ways. Khadeja found her way towards it via listening to BTS and she shared, “At the end of the day, the best you can do is love yourself, and be kind to yourself. Take care of yourself. I realized I can love myself. After 2-3 years I was like I can love myself. I have been fat for a decade or more, and my entire life I was told you suck, this sucks. You are fat. That's the epiphany I had!” Coming into self-love is often learned through solitude because love is not given by others. Love is a process of coming to accept, appreciate and comfortable in one's own body.

For Sundus, adjusting to her new body type has been a struggle and she still is trying to cope with the idea of being a plus-size woman and it is also part of the process, “I look at myself, I just don't see myself. I see this round woman, one I barely recognize.” The struggle to make peace with your body isn't easy, but the participants are living one day at a time, and learned to be very vocal about their body-relation, as Ayesha shares:

“Being more vocal about it myself. Being able to call myself fat too. Which I challenged too. Like, I am not that fat. I am not that thin. I almost felt like I was co-opting the word fat, if somebody was fatter than me. Because like I told you from the start, it's like an obscure thing, that I am ostensibly bigger, but it would almost be like a strange middle I have to choose.”

7. Plus-size label and Pakistan

In Pakistan the label plus-size has been recently introduced in urban spaces. It has been accepted by the public as an identifier for bigger women without adding any derogatory connotation to it.

Awareness of the label Plus-size

The participants shared the various ways they came across the label plus-size. Although it is not readily used in Pakistan, as it's an imported term and has only been introduced quite recently, this has been an important step in normalizing plus-size bodies.

“So yes, I am very comfortable with the plus-size label. But also, I don't like the way we have distributed women into these demographics. Like you are either plus-size or normal size. When the entire point of body positivity is body neutrality. Your body should not matter, size or shape. Though I understand for certain purposes, the ratio is important.” (Anza)

However, it feels more comfortable for participants to use this term. Having plus-size clothing invited women to shop for more variety of fashionable clothing but also reflects the openness for plus-size bodies in Pakistan. Although there is much more work to be done to create more inclusive shopping options. For Zohra it started with the idea of more comfortable clothes, “I started relating to the label plus-size mainly because of the clothes thing. It started that way.” Having comfortable clothing options is a start of being more inclusive and normalizing plus-size bodies.

It was pointed out by a participant that even though the term plus-size is not that common, it is devoid of any negative connotation, and people are more willing to embrace it, instead of terms like *moti*.

“Plus-size is not a local term. I don't have any experiences with it. No negative associations. Because in Karachi or Pakistan, plus-size is still not a thing. They don't use it in normal conversations. They don't use it as anything. We have adopted it from outside, people don't use it here. Normally, if you go to shops. They'd use healthy or chubby or fat. Or they'd use moti. Or whatever. But plus-size in my mind, it doesn't ring any bell. It's a positive term that we have adopted from outside. So, a very small circle of people uses it, and used in a positive manner.” (Khadeja)

One participant shared how for them the term plus-size was initially not that comfortable, but it grew on them,

“It became like a thing where I had to just cope with it. I wasn't just comfortable with the label at all. I was like what the hell? I am plus-size? Like how rude! I didn't... I was hesitant and reluctant about the fact that I am. And, you know when you have to give your size, to somebody for something. like when I was interning, I had to give my T-shirt size. So, it was always like I don't know man, large or XL, like you have to say it out loud and that made it real. So, it felt uncomfortable? And there was a tinge of humiliation to it, like saying it out loud. But because it was at the same time I was fighting all of this in my head, about how so much of the shame I associated with my body was constant, regardless of its size. Struggling with myopic perceptions of beauty and acceptability, and I was just resisting shame, and fighting it throughout. Eventually, it didn't matter what size, even if it was L, XL, or XI, whatever, it felt easier to say. But I hate saying it because I didn't know how other people would perceive it. But now I say it with confidence it is what it is like someone dare say something. So yeah, this is how it is.” (Ayesha)

The term plus-size has been recently introduced to the women in the study who are residents of urban Karachi and there are mixed feelings about it but it can be concluded that it doesn't have a heavy and negative connotation and feeling related to it yet. Though these women do envision a day where the opposite of bigger bodies isn't normal bodies.

Pakistan isn't ready for the word Fat.

“Coming back to the plus-size debate, I feel Pakistani women would still prefer plus-size over being called fat because fat still has a negative connotation”. (Anza)

Participants generally shared how the term has always been used as an insult, creating a negative association. All the women did not like how fat was the center of their identity and impacted how society treated them in public and private spaces. The term plus-size gives people a term they could accept without any inhibitions:

“ It's better than being called fat. Like if someone calls me fat, then I also have negative association with it. Of being called a fat person. Also, the word healthy. I hate the word healthy. 'You are so healthy!' For instance, when you go to the shopkeepers and they say, “You are so healthy.” Anytime I go shopping, somebody always mentions my weight. Even though I am the one giving them money; be nice to me! You don't need to comment on my body. But there are a lot of words. Healthy, fat, chubby, 'achay khaate peete khandaan ki' (from a well-fed family) and so on.” (Khadeja)

A participant added how they have been able to reclaim the word fat but the majority is still struggling:

“Also, the term fat, it's a word I've come to terms with. Used to feel like a swear word at first, completely derogatory and something so negative and almost sinful I never wanted to be that or be accused of being that. Felt the same way when my friends would try to not say I was fat, just chubby, etc. it's a word I use very comfortably now and it's like I've reckoned with it and accepted it but not in a sad way, in a way with some small pride attached to it. I don't shy away from it” (Ayesha)

Currently the participants all were of this stance that Pakistani women aren't ready because of the status quo to reclaim the words Moti or Fat and would prefer being called Plus-size.

People who are reclaiming the term fat, all those positivity movements, it's empowering for them. But for myself, I am not. (Zohra)

The above identified themes highlight the many issues faced by plus-size women in their everyday life which affects their body image, emotional and mental wellbeing, and restricts their mobility in public and private spaces. It also helped to understanding their resilient approach to these issues and their perspective on the impact of lack of plus-size representation in the society.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of this research was to document and explore stories of plus-size cisgender women in Karachi and explore their relationship with their bodies and how representation across different mediums affects their mobility. In the literature reviewed for this thesis it was found that the plus-size bodies have been heavily misrepresented and colonizers of the invaded regions have played a huge role in promoting body ideals that dismiss the bodies of people of color. It was also highlighted how certain notions have led to unhealthy relationships that women have with their bodies, which can lead to women losing control of their bodily agency.

The findings in the last chapter were coded and themed according to the intersectional lens from the five stories collected via interviews for this study and in this chapter, they will be analyzed and discussed grounded in the literature. The seven themes that will be discussed are *“Moti” vs The world, Sirf Moti ho tum, “Buri Aurat”-Hypersexualization of young fat girl, Mobility and plus-size bodies, No healthcare for you, Main apni favorite hoon: One step at a time, and Plus-size label and Pakistan.*

The identified themes indicate that the relationship plus-size women developed with their bodies to date stems from their childhood development within their families, schools and social inclusion/exclusion. It is heavily influenced by the family they are raised by, the society they live in, the media, literature, and fashion that is accessible to them and the people around them. The themes further reflect that anti-fat bias has dictated the mobility of these plus-size women in private and public spaces. To cope with these hindrances the women had no choice but to be resilient which is a non-linear journey.

“*Moti*” vs The world and Sirf *Moti* ho tum

According to the experiences shared by the participants, it was established that the world by which I mean the people and the society we live in is against fat-bodied women. They reduce their existence to their body size and their only identifier is “*Moti*”. This played a huge role in forming the relationship of these women with their bodies. It chipped away at their self-esteem, and self-love and affected their everyday experiences and mobility in private and public spaces.

We aren’t born hating our bodies and Taylor (2018) in her book aptly writes “We did not start life in a negative partnership with our bodies. I have never seen a toddler lament the size of their thighs, the squishiness of their bellies. Children do not arrive here ashamed of their race, gender, age, or disabilities. Babies love their bodies!” We are forced to dislike every inch of us if we don’t meet a colonial standard. (p. 18)

British narratives “didn’t just describe African and Asian people as fat but insisted that they revered fatness” (Gershon, 2020, para. 3). Then when they left in 1947, they left Pakistan with tons of “concern trolls” (Janardhan, 2017, para. 1) who are always distributing unsolicited advice and volunteering to share weight loss schemes and reminders that weight is the only thing holding back fat women. It is ingrained in them that the colonized body ideal, which is supposed to be thin, white, straight, and blonde-haired with a thigh gap is what everyone should be struggling to achieve. Pakistan people were colonized and assimilated to have the colonial view of what is acceptable beauty that did not include plus size brown bodies. Hence, the public actively disregard the feelings and lived experiences as shared by the participants and it is normalized social behaviour to feel no hesitation in commenting on each other's bodies and features.

The experience that Khadeja went through at her University is a good example of how people treat fat women in Karachi. Her teacher took offense when she stood up for herself because he thought that it is his right to make jokes related to her overeating as it is an unhealthy habit even though she wasn't eating the cake at that time, but it was assumed because she is fat that she must be part of an eating activity around her. In his defense, he also added that younger people should not talk back like she did regardless of the matter in question. The behavior inflicted upon fat women always has undertones of *Sirf Moti ho tum* which is meant to reduce them to their size and in most cases, it is not an adjective but an insult as per the stories.

The participants shared that they had internalized the derogatory remarks and behavior early in their childhood as their immediate families which are supposed to be loving and caring were biased against fat bodies. They could have equipped their children with the confidence to face, question, and call out society's negative ideals and behaviors towards plus-size women and not limit themselves due to the size of their bodies. But instead, the role the families, especially parents, played led to an unhealthy relationship of their children with their bodies. Many fat-bodied children were conditioned by their families to value thin bodies. They were unaware of the term fat phobia or weight bias. No such knowledge existed locally but if you analyze it now the behavioral pattern suggests that it surely has had its roots in fat phobia and discrimination towards fat bodies. These concepts could be further investigated in context of Pakistan in future researches.

If someone's body is policed all the time as shared by the participants, it would be highly likely that person would become hyper-aware of their body, which was the case with Ayesha and others. They were instructed to cover their big bodies in dupattas, wear loose clothing,

wear bras at all times even at home, take up less space and not dance or play sports. In other words, they were conditioned to socially shrink to become invisible in social spaces. It clearly affected them emotionally and mentally while growing up as it restricted their childhood experience and burdened them with being cautious of how they carry themselves so that their big bodies don't attract any attention and they keep silent, especially in the case where women were publicly shamed by authority figures. Brandheim (2017) supports this interpretation as they state "Fat individuals seem to find it impossible to respond to the deviant label and instead avoid interacting in situations where they must be reminded of them. When failing to live up to the right options, fat individuals start to disengage because they perceive that their group is falling short of a standard that is devaluing their self-worth" (p. 20)

My fellow comrade once told me that during the first feminist movement in Pakistan women burnt their dupattas. And when Zohra was sharing her relationship with dupatta, I recalled that story and reflected on how it sometimes feels like a suffocating drape for some of us who are forced to cover up. The restriction on clothing varies from class to class, area to area, and also as Zohra shared according to your marital status. This means that fat bodies do have a relationship with the class which I couldn't explore much via these stories but could be a potential area of research in the future.

It was shared that if parents and close family members weren't body shaming and policing then dealing with the society's inaccessible infrastructure and behavior would have been easier to face. Families also demand women to be thin to be eligible for marriage or else she is ugly and not worthy. They also regard fat women as a heavier burden compared to women of other sizes. The key to their freedom and choice of clothing is usually transferred from the

family to men in most cases in Pakistan as per the experiences explored. Mann (2022) highlights and further supports the stories by writing that “when our bodies develop we are taught shame, so we hide our new curves. When we get older, we are taught blame and reminded that we must not tempt men”. (para. 17)

Zohra had shared that her uncle was fat and would teasingly call her fat all the time and made her feel awful which indicates that women have had more burden to bear to be a certain size as compared to men because we live in a patriarchal society. Family, friends, schoolteachers, and everyone else always assume that if you are fat then you must be eating a lot, or not active, and the jokes then become integrated with eating habits. Sadly, not many people came to their defense when the participants grew up being harassed or bullied. They learned to be silent or fend for themselves later in their life when they got social and intellectual exposure and found community support. Taylor (2018) explains further how it all becomes part of a larger story that “Cultural and social missives about who we are supposed to be and how our bodies are supposed to look are woven into the fabric of our daily lives, and whether we want to admit it or not, they impact our sense of self, often for decades to come”. (p. 36)

The literature review and lived experiences of the participants both signify that there is not much representation in media of fat bodies which is not a surprising since for ages fat people have been categorized as clumsy, the butt of every joke, gluttonous, ugly, undesired, and lazy. Even though the times are changing, the change is quite slow and at times feels tokenistic as a fat person is added here and there and then that is called ‘representation’.

There is little to no representation of fat people in Karachi.

The stories narrated have some pitiful angles to them so that the audience at some stage feels sympathetic for the character. This contributes further to discrimination of fat bodies. Beck (2017)'s viewpoint about why representation is important resonates with me. She states:

It's important to see yourself mirrored in the media you consume — and it's important for people who don't look like you to see it too. Representation creates understanding and empathy. It allows us to see people who don't look like us as humans who deserve respect. It allows little kids to feel seen, and have a sense of worth and importance. How revolutionary would it be if it turned out Kate didn't need to lose weight to "find herself"? What if she found out she's a fat person who is deserving of good things, just the way she is? That's a role model I wish I would've had growing up. (para. 12)

Ayesha made a strong point in her story that it isn't problematic to acknowledge that a protagonist is fat and has had a difficult journey with her body, this is part of representation but if they show that is the only dimension in her life that is when it gets problematic. It was also highlighted by Anza that fat representation can never promote obesity and this notion needs to be addressed and debunked.

The relationship you share with clothes is governed by how your family dressed you or allowed you to dress and the cultural norms and protocol around you; that's how it is in Pakistan. If you are fat-bodied, even as a kid, you are dressed in loose clothes in comparison to other thinner kids of your age. The participants shared that they couldn't wear the same pretty and fashionable clothes because they were usually tighter or shorter, which according to everyone around them, didn't suit bigger kids. Fat-bodied children could not be as trendy as thinner children because of the lack of clothing options available to them. As they grew older, the same precedent was followed and bigger girls were taught and at times forced to wear loose clothing and is deemed vulgar if their clothes are "revealing" which is a way to police the bodies. The prettier and fashionable options are more readily available in smaller sizes and the manufacturers mostly do not cater to the bigger sizes which has always limited the clothing

options limiting self-expression through clothes. The easy way out the brands have recently taken is to make a gown size, which Zohra calls the 'jubba size'. One size fits all but in reality it is just an ill-fitting stitched cloth from three sides for big bodies to exist in to hide the body without making any fashion statement. Creating a one-size fits all is a convenient for businesses to make money without caring to provide more fashionable options. In many ways, not being inclusive to provide goods and services that serve big bodies is an act of discrimination against fat bodies.

The clothing options are boring and if not boring then over-priced clothing that becomes another barrier for most of the plus-size women in Pakistan to access. Most participants shared that one cannot feel comfortable and attractive at the same time with options available. These factors have led to them either hating shopping or having an uncomfortable relationship with dressing up, clothing, and fashion.

The associations and observations Pakistani plus-size women have with clothing and the related experiences have not been recorded prior to this in Pakistani academia as it is not a common issue worldwide which is why it has been a limitation to find relevant literature. Though this could be the basis of further enquiry and research. As shared through my own narrative, this research inquiry is needed to address the many barriers plus-sized bodied women in Pakistan face. It is a courageous act to speak our truths of the many negative experiences we each face. Representation is important for social change.

The modeling industry, on the other hand, has plus-size representation now but still the cellulite, body hair, and marks are airbrushed and the skin tone is made even one of the participants shared some models use padding to look plus-size a certain hip and breast size.

Anza mentioned Zehra Hussain and her group for plus-size people, interestingly that was my first exposure to a plus-size community too, and when researching for this thesis one of the first pictures I found on Google Images after I googled “Pakistani Plus Size women” was of Zehra Hussain and mine with few other plus-size women featured in a photoshoot for Zehra’s clothing brand called Xera by Zehra Hussain (@xeracurvyco). This signifies that in Pakistan there is minimal representation on media platforms of plus-size fashion and the fact that from all people, I ran into my own picture in my first Google search makes it evident.

Internationally things have progressed more comparatively. Emme, the world’s first plus-size supermodel in her recent interview was asked about her vision for the future of plus-size modeling and the fashion industry as a whole. To which Emme answered and Russo (2022) quotes:

We need to have leadership within the agencies and magazines that are more diversified so that their reflections can be reflected within the pages and campaigns that go out. And we need more young people in those roles. Young people really do understand the pulse of what's going on and can take away the exclusivity of fashion, because fashion is truly for everyone. (para. 15)

The plus-size content creators and fashion influencers have increased in number and yes the young people are driving the change for the past few years but you have to consciously filter through a lot of content to make your social media feed less negative. The internet is filled with fatphobic content and comments that force people to hate their fat bodies and it reflects the mindset of the general population. There are more fatphobic comments and images than healthy plus-size representation online.

Inclusive and empathetic representation would influence changing social perception if done responsibly as per a few of the participants. In the future, if girls grow up with literature and media content that has fat female protagonists as ones saving the day and as romantic leads, it

will definitely make fat girls represented and them to imagine a future with bright possibilities.

“Buri Aurat”-Hypersexualization of young fat girls

Another prominent theme that stood out was how young fat girls are hypersexualized and introduced to the label “Buri Aurat” (Bad woman) quite early on because of their body size. These labels created an unhealthy internalized relationship with the body, despite being an intelligent, inquisitive, kind, and good-hearted person. Their body size was central to their identity formation as reflected by the majority of participants who shared that their bodies were hypersexualized when they were little girls and that led to them being hyper-aware of all the changes their bodies went through. Tewari (2017, para. 1) writes in her article that the “figure of a young girl, thin and fair, is one that our capitalist society has made an ultimate female ambition and male fantasy, out of. Yet, the ideal body type, although remains thin, there is a fetishistic desire for "meat" in the ‘right places’,” which supports the claim that fatness is not equated with attractiveness but with hypersexualization.

It was pointed out in the stories that fat women are vulgar, dirty, and usually sex workers hence they should lose weight or the fate that awaits them. It was a way to embed shame and emphasize the instruction to stay invisible because only sex workers are supposed to be fetishized. “Toni Morrison’s 1970 debut novel, *The Bluest Eye*, poignantly touches on these cultural connections among fatness, color, and female sexuality” Farrell (2011, p. 120).

Gupta (2020) writes that “Body shaming is one of the means through which such regulation and control work in this patriarchal country (para. 1). Patriarchy is the reason why young girls are blamed and shamed when older cisgender men sexualize them and this behavior is enabled at times by the cisgender women of society. There is no accountability or responsibility taken for

this behavior and on most occasions as it still isn't identified as a social issue that impacts the lives of many. There needs to be more public platforms and leaders who name and identify these sexually violent behaviors.

The participants shared that hyper-sexualization of their bodies in public and private spaces made their families insecure and protective and their innocence was taken away. Some of them isolated themselves due to the traumatic experiences, which led to a complicated and unhealthy relationship with their bodies quite early on. This behavior makes private and public spaces unsafe for plus-size girls.

No healthcare for you

The participants shared that their health was not prioritized by medical professionals and their families because they were fat. The neglectful attitude of medical professionals has also led to misdiagnosis in some instances. This also discouraged them to reach out for medical support. The doctors aren't trained to treat diverse patients and they follow a colonized patriarchal approach to treatment. Coffey (2017) shares that in "A review of studies published in the journal *Obesity Reviews* in 2015 surveying empirical evidence across multiple disciplines showed that health care professionals' negative feelings about fat bodies can lead to misdiagnosis and late or "missed" diagnoses, negatively impacting patient outcomes". (para. 23)

BMI (body mass index), which is based on the height and weight of a person, is an inaccurate measure of body fat content and does not take into account muscle mass, bone density, overall body composition, and racial and sex differences, say researchers from the Perelman School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania (Nordqvist, 2022, para. 1). BMI is still the standard to measure someone's health even though it has been repeatedly debated over to be outdated and racist. All participants shared experiences where the doctor was more concerned

about the weight regardless of its association with the symptomatic complaint that was presented to them and wouldn't further investigate.

This indicates healthcare isn't for supporting the health of fat women even though not all fat people are inactive and ill but the stereotypes that they experience prevail. The participants gave examples of how they have been active as kids and also as grownups to justify their stories. They said that the weight didn't stop them from trekking, dancing, and playing sports but people's behavior and the discriminatory behavior they faced did cause stress as the reactions have in past forced them into isolation, but it was the people and not them who put them in such complicated position where they built an unhealthy relationship with their bodies. This pattern of stress on plus-size bodies impacts their health, well-being, and mobility.

Main apni favorite hoon: One step at a time

All participants shared that their journey towards body acceptance, love, and healing hasn't been an easy one and they are still constantly unlearning and relearning. In many ways, they have to cultivate their own critical mind and voice to question the acceptability of unacceptable discriminatory behavior and attitudes because they have not had the parent or grown-up to protect them from those. This shows that they have been quite resilient in the face of all the harshness life has thrown at them.

There are days in which they still feel like their body isn't their home and self-hatred comes again to make itself home in their bodies but they have all found ways to cope, ground, and heal. For Khadeja the music band BTS has been the inspiration to body love and Sundus acknowledges and validates her struggle of accepting her new body type which she will fully

accept at her own pace. For Ayesha being vocal and expressive about her relationship with her body has helped her in her journey.

Taylor's (2018, p. 69) following words sum up the journeys of the participants and also mine, “Unlearning is challenging. Do not expect neat, tidy resolutions, or assume that we will instantly fix the world’s ills in a single dialogue. We can, however, get closer to those goals if we are willing to be uncomfortable.” Nobody should rush these journeys as we all have had similar but not the same experiences and we are different mentally, emotionally, and metabolically and are from diverse backgrounds. The stories are documented to validate more stories like these but we should remember that “we are not all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm” (Barr, 2020, para. 1).

Mobility and plus-size bodies

Accessible mobility in public spaces is everyone’s due right but in Pakistan, if you are a big-bodied woman, it gets very restrictive to move around without unwanted attention, unsolicited advice, catcalls, etc. For women in general, autonomy rights are quite uncommon and harassment on street is a normal and acceptable social behavior. It was shared by all participants that they faced even worse kinds of treatment in transport, markets, restaurants, and other public spaces as the infrastructure are not accessible for their big bodies besides the fatphobic behavior that is constantly inflicted upon them. All participants who grew up as fat kids have faced hypersexualization too.

Culturally women in India also face the same hurdles and are restricted for similar reasons in public spaces. Khanna (2021, para. 7) talks about these hurdles in his article “The first type of hurdle is societal restrictions, imposed on women to save them from stranger violence. These restrictions on women in public spaces include covering up adequately while going

out, coming back home on time, not loitering around, and the list is unending. The rationale behind these restrictions is to protect women and confine them to safe spaces i.e. homes”.

It's worse for plus-size women in public spaces as they face sexualization and also the infrastructure isn't suitable for their bodies. These experiences have made them avoid moving around and in public and also at times in private, avoiding social gatherings, feeling a sense of shame and guilt for being big. Patriarchy plays a huge role and so does the lack of governance and leadership in creating an accessible infrastructure.

Plus-size label and Pakistan

The plus-size label has been recently introduced to Pakistan in urban cities and it has been accepted by bigger women as an identifier as it doesn't have any cultural derogatory association with it. No local clothing brand used this label until Zehra Hussian's brand did in 2015 and that changed a lot for many plus-size women like me as she also made a Facebook group for plus-size women to engage with each other and share fashion-related queries, plus-size issues, and validate each other. Some of the participants did come across the term online via social media pages of western brands and models. Social media has been an important communication tool when it comes to finding validation of their bodies, reported by the participants. Plus-size women had to be resourceful and keep searching for like-minded businesses and representation to keep themselves afloat in the fatphobic society.

Though Anza and another participant did share how the whole sizing of clothing should not become an identity in an ideal scenario because the opposite of plus-size is the normal size which again reiterates that plus-size bodies are not normal but for the need of finding representation she felt it is important to adjust with this label for now. As it is an imported term from the west, all participants shared that they would prefer it over being called Moti or

Fat at this stage because Pakistan isn't ready for this discourse and the energy to invest in it is limited in the community. Though its usage is so far restricted to urban spaces only.

Pakistan won't be ready for public discourse for at least another decade or two as per my understanding of the socio-political status quo. We still can carry out closed room conversations around this and highlight this discourse on social and mass media but with limitations similar to the research limitations described below.

The plus-size women have been stripped off their personality and body autonomy, and what remains is 'Moti'. The patriarchy mixed with capitalism and discrimination against fat people have restricted their mobility, and forced to move through a world which is designed against them since their early years. Family, which was supposed to empower and protect them as they grew up, ended up causing harm that they are still healing from. And the burden to bring about change is also expected of them, Efforts of creating space for representation are minuscule which could potentially be a great tool to counter body shaming, and policing of plus-size women.

The limitation of this research was that I couldn't address religion, sexualities, and some state institutes. This was a conscious decision taken to protect me and the participants from coming under any scrutiny because we live in a country where open discourses on the above mentioned themes are not socially acceptable and welcomed without violent repercussions. Taylor (2018, p. 11) adds this powerful quote in their book by Brené Brown who is a social researcher that "If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can't survive.". I believe that this thesis is an attempt to gather and share vulnerability as a community to provide support to other plus-size brown urban women

as well as to reach out to empathetic folk who could support in creating healing space and much-needed infrastructure which is accessible for plus-size women.

I would like to end this chapter by adding a poem by Mary Lambert (2018, 121), someone who has inspired me on my journey with my body tremendously and help inspire the message of self-love and worthiness for other plus-size brown urban girls and women.

*I want to watch the fat lady win
I want her to stop apologizing for being fat
I wish I could say: Hey, perfect angel cutie pie:
You don't owe anyone shit.
Stop apologizing for who you are.
Go eat a fucking sandwich and throw your scale away
Work out if you want to, lay on the couch if you want to
No one else lives in your body
You are enough, as you are, today*

The above discussion clearly indicated that the society we live in is patriarchal and fatphobic.

The infrastructure is inaccessible and has minuscule representation of plus-size women in various aspects and mediums of society. Constant policing and shaming of bodies has made all the participants go through ill experiences and they had to show a huge amount of resilience to face all the harshness and find a way to opt for a journey to love and accept their bodies and heal.

Scholarship of Engagement and Future Research

If I had to summarize my understanding of scholarship of engagement and experience of conducting this research it would be that it's a scholarly work being undertaken with the community and for the community.

The process of positioning myself in this research with my fellow cisgender plus-size women based in Karachi assisted me in connecting with the community and creating a process that aided my scholarship. The approach to this research, the framing of the objectives and interview questions and the intersectional analysis of the stories, all was done with an

intention to take charge of the narrative of big bodied women of Karachi and highlight them to fill out the gap in academia. Hopefully, these findings would create an in-depth understanding of the basic issues that plus-size women experience from their childhood to adulthood, how we have to navigate through public and private spaces and amplify our voices to initiate a collective movement in the future to create representation in various social mediums.

The future research could potentially be conducted by expanding the sample size and including plus-size cisgender women of multiple urban cities of Pakistan. A comparative analysis of the findings of a sample from rural cities and urban cities could also be conducted to understand how representation affects their lives, is it same or different. Additionally, a study could be undertaken to explore how representation in various social mediums can be improved in the context of Pakistan. Further investigation can also include how to make private and public spaces accessible to plus-size women.

The stories I believe are a powerful medium to create community and to reach out to other women who have never had the space to validate and understand their experience so if this knowledge is mobilized tactfully it could be utilized in creating strength based resources to assist plus size women with their healing process in association with their bodies and creation of community spaces.

Knowledge Translation

I hope that this research will help in creating visibility and representation for plus-size cisgender women with similar experiences and add our narratives to the academic literature.

The main knowledge translation project that I am planning to execute after completion of this research is to create an Instagram account sharing the experiential stories of plus-size women

in Pakistan to take charge of the narrative and create visibility and awareness about brown plus-size bodies in Karachi.

I also plan to conduct a community building activity where I gather with a small group of plus-size women, do a check in with our feelings and then talk about our bodies and then sway together to the music expanding our arms wide open and taking our rightful space and not shrink our bodies and then do a check out. I hope to work on designing this knowledge translation pilot activity soon after this research is approved so that I could built further on my work.

References

- Ali, U. (2020, March 8). Pakistani women demand bodily rights, gender equality. DW.COM.
<https://www.dw.com/en/womens-day-pakistani-women-demand-bodily-rights-gender-equality/a-52685628>
- Allies, B. (n.d.). *On public, private and communal space*. Allies and Morrison. Retrieved July 17, 2022, from <https://www.alliesandmorrison.com/research/on-public-private-and-communal-space#:~:text=Private%20space%20might%20be%20described,domain%20but%20in%20public%20ownership>
- Appreciation for fat jokes, belief in obese stereotypes linked. (2014, July 30). ScienceDaily.
<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/07/140730132441.html>
- Atewologun, D. (2018). Intersectionality Theory and Practice. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management*, 1–20.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190224851.013.48>
- Balachander, A. (2018, March 28). *Being overweight and unconventional while navigating public spaces*. Feminism In India. Retrieved July 17, 2022, from <https://feminisminindia.com/2018/03/29/overweight-navigating-public-spaces/>
- Barr, D. (2020, May 30). “*We are not all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm. Some are on super-yachts. Some have just the one oar.*” Damian Barr.
<https://www.damianbarr.com/latest/https/we-are-not-all-in-the-same-boat>
- Beck, L. (2017, March 13). *Why Television Still Doesn't Do Fat Women Justice*. Cosmopolitan.
<https://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/tv/a9127494/tv-show-fat-women-representation/>
- Being fat on public transportation*. VIRGIE TOVAR. (2015, July 28). Retrieved July 17,

- 2022, from <https://www.virgietovar.com/blog/being-fat-on-public-transportation>
- Bodily autonomy: Busting 7 myths that undermine individual rights and Freedoms*. United Nations Population Fund. (2021, April 14). Retrieved January 30, 2022, from <https://www.unfpa.org/news/bodily-autonomy-busting-7-myths-undermine-individual-rights-and-freedoms>
- Bielskytė, S. (2017, November 1). *Women's bodies in public spaces*. The Panoptic. Retrieved March 23, 2022, from <https://thepanoptic.co.uk/2017/11/01/womens-bodies-public-spaces/>
- Brandheim, S. (2017). *A systemic stigmatization of fat people* (PhD dissertation, Karlstads universitet). Retrieved from <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:kau:diva-62752>
- Brown, B. (2010, December 23). *The power of vulnerability* [Video]. TED Talks. https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability?language=en
- Brytek-Matera, A., Czepczor-Bernat, K., & Olejniczak, D. (2018). Food-related behaviours among individuals with overweight/obesity and normal body weight. *Nutrition Journal*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12937-018-0401-76>
- Carlan, H. (2020, November 24). “*Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*,” by Sabrina Strings, NYU Press, 2019. Center for the Study of Women. Retrieved September 2, 2022, from <https://csw.ucla.edu/2020/11/23/fearing-the-black-body-the-racial-origins-of-fat-phobia-by-sabrina-strings-nyu-press-2019/>
- CBC/Radio Canada. (2018, July 31). *Woman uses obituary to advocate against fat shaming in medical profession* | CBC News. CBCnews. Retrieved July 17, 2022, from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/fat-shaming-medical-1.4766676>
- Coffey, K. (2017, July 18). *Weight Bias in Health Care: The Shocking Ways Large Women Are Mistreated*. SELF. <https://www.self.com/story/weight-bias-and-health-care>
- Colls, R. (2004.). “Looking alright, feeling alright”: Emotions, sizing and the geographies of

women's experiences of clothing consumption. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 5(4), 583–596. <https://doi-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.1080/1464936042000317712>

Colls, R. (2006). Outsize/outside: bodily bignesses and the emotional experiences of British women shopping for clothes. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 13(5), 529–545.

Cooper, C. (2010). Fat studies: Mapping the field. *Sociology Compass*, 4(12), 1020–1034. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00336.x>

Crosby, E. (2019, November 17). The History of Being Fat and How It's Affected Plus Size Fashion. *emilydiscovers*. <https://emilydiscovers.com/2019/11/17/the-history-of-being-fat-and-plus-size-fashion/>

Dall'Asen, N. (2021, May 5). *Where are all the fat people in Beauty?* Allure. Retrieved July 17, 2022, from <https://www.allure.com/story/beauty-industry-fat-representation>

DeLallo, G. (2021, September 17). *Opinion: The fashion industry hates fat people and the lower class more than it loves money.* The Pitt News. Retrieved July 17, 2022, from <https://pittnews.com/article/167001/opinions/opinion-the-fashion-industry-hates-fat-people-and-the-lower-class-more-than-it-loves-money/>

Explainer: What does Mera Jism Meri Marzi mean? *Global Village Space*. (2020, January 29). <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/explainer-what-does-mera-jism-meri-marzi-mean/>.

Fanon, F. (2004). In *The Wretched of the Earth* (pp. 337–338). book, Grove Press.

Fat shaming is making people sicker and heavier. *CMAJ: Canadian Medical Association journal = journal de l'Association medicale canadienne*, 191(23), E649. <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.109-5758>

Farid, F. (2021, April 26). *Women, piety and autonomy in Pakistan*. South Asia@LSE.

Retrieved July 17, 2022, from <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2021/04/26/women-piety-and-autonomy-in-pakistan/>

Farrell, A. E. (2011). *Fat shame stigma and the fat body in American culture*. New York University Press.

“Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia,” by Sabrina Strings, NYU Press, 2019.

(2020, November 24). Center for the Study of Women.

<https://csw.ucla.edu/2020/11/23/fearing-the-black-body-the-racial-origins-of-fat-phobia-by-sabrina-strings-nyu-press-2019/>

Female mobility. Women in Mobility. (2021, February 25). Retrieved July 17, 2022, from

<https://www.womeninmobility.org/femalemobility-en>

Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. A. (1997). Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding

Women’s Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21(2), 173–206. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00108.x>

Friend, Y. F. (2019, October 18). *The bizarre and racist history of the BMI*. Medium.

Retrieved July 13, 2022, from <https://elemental.medium.com/the-bizarre-and-racist-history-of-the-bmi-7d8dc2aa33bb>

Gershon, L. (2020, March 2). *How Colonialism Shaped Body Shaming*. JSTOR Daily.

Retrieved January 17, 2022, from <https://daily.jstor.org/how-colonialism-shaped-body-shaming/>

Gupta, D. (2020, June 4). *My fight against body shaming made me aware of how patriarchy*

feeds this vicious cycle. SheThePeople TV. <https://www.shethepeople.tv/home-top-video/my-fight-against-body-shaming-made-me-aware-of-how-patriarchy-feeds-this-vicious-cycle/>

Harjunen, H. (2019). Exercising exclusions: Space, visibility, and monitoring of the

exercising fat female body. *Fat Studies*, 8(2), 173–186. <https://doi.org/login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.1080/21604851.2019.1561101>

Harvard Health. (2021, February 15). Why stress causes people to overeat.

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/why-stress-causes-people-to-overeat>

Held, M. B. E. (2019). Decolonizing Research Paradigms in the Context of Settler

Colonialism: An Unsettling, Mutual, and Collaborative Effort. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 160940691882157.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918821574>

- Hudson, M. (2022, June 22). *What is Plus Size? (& Other Need-to-Know Terminology)*. Dia & Co. Retrieved October 11, 2021, from <https://www.dia.com/blog/know/what-is-plus-size-glossary/>
- Intersectional feminism: what it means and why it matters right now. (2020, July 1). UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/explainer-intersectional-feminism-what-it-means-and-why-it-matters>
- Ironstone-Catterall, P. (n.d.). Gaze/body/looking back. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from http://www.yorku.ca/caitlin/1900/postcolonial/postcolonial_art.htm
- Janardhan, S. (2017, December 1). *Deconstructing Fatphobia and its consequences*. Feminism In India. Retrieved July 17, 2022, from <https://feminisminindia.com/2017/12/04/deconstructing-fatphobia-consequences/>
- Katja Diehl and Philipp Cerny, By, & Union, H.-B.-S. E. (2021, March 8). *Women on the move: Sustainable mobility and gender: Heinrich Böll stiftung: Brussels Office - European Union*. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. Retrieved July 17, 2022, from <https://eu.boell.org/en/women-on-the-move-sustainable-mobility-and-gender>
- Khanna, N. (2021, November 12). *Women In Public Spaces: When Gender Is Ignored While Shaping Cities*. Feminism In India. <https://feminisminindia.com/2020/11/12/women-in-public-spaces-street-safety/>
- Kovach, M., Carriere, J., Barrett, M., Montgomery, H., & Gillies, C. (2013). Stories of Diverse Identity Locations in Indigenous Research. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 6(4), 487-509. doi:10.1525/irqr.2013.6.4.487
- Kuhn, T. S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. (1st Edn). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press
- Kwan, S. (2010). *Navigating Public Spaces: Gender, Race, and Body Privilege in Everyday Life*. *Feminist Formations*, 22(2), 144–166. <https://doi-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.1353/ff.2010.0002>

Lambert, M. (2018). *Shame Is an Ocean I Swim Across: Poems by Mary Lambert* [E-book].

Feiwel & Friends.

Lather, P. (1986). Research as praxis. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(3), 257-277.

<https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.56.3.bj2h231877069482>

M. (2009, July 31). Breaking News, Analysis, Politics, Blogs, News Photos, Video, Tech

Reviews.TIME.Com.

<http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1913858,00.html>

Mann, M. (2022, February 22). *South Asian women and the sexuality we've been taught to*

ignore. 5X Fest. Retrieved July 17, 2022, from

<https://www.5xfest.com/5xpress/south-asian-women-and-the-sexuality-weve-been-taught-to-ignore>

Mavis Guydish, E. (2017). "It Gets Better:" A Short History of Feminism, Body Policing,

and Women's Suicide. *Critical Insights: Social Justice & American Literature*, 150–163.

Mayan, M. J. (2009). *Essentials of Qualitative Inquiry*. Routledge.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Plus-size*. Merriam-Webster.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/plus-size>.

Mitchell, D., & Staeheli, L. A. (2009). Public space. *International Encyclopedia of Human*

Geography, 511–516. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-008044910-4.00990-1>

Moorti, S., & Ross, K. (n.d.). Introduction: Gender and the plus-size body. *Feminist Media*

Studies, 5(2), 237–260. <https://doi->

[org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.1080/14680770500112368](https://doi-https://doi-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.1080/14680770500112368)

Naafa. naafa. (n.d.). Retrieved July 17, 2022, from <https://naafa.org/>

Nordqvist, C. (2022, January 20). *Why BMI is inaccurate and misleading*.

MedicalNewsToday. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/265215>

Parkinson, J. (2016, January 7). *The significance of Sarah Baartman*. BBC News. Retrieved

July 13, 2022, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35240987>

- Plummer, R. S., & Forestell, C. A. (2019). The effect of appearance-related media on implicit cognitive responses to food. *Appetite*, 138, 87–93. <https://doi-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.1016/j.appet.2019.03.004>
- Q., M. (2018, July 9). *The hypersexualisation of fat*. Medium. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from (Gupta, 2020)
- Rahimi, R., & Liston, D. D. (2009). What Does She Expect when She Dresses like That? Teacher Interpretation of Emerging Adolescent Female Sexuality. *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, 45(6), 512–533.
- Rashid, T. (2009). Militarized Masculinities, Female Bodies, and ‘Security Discourse’ in Post-9/11 Pakistan. *Strategic Analysis*, 33(4), 566–578. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700160902907100>
- Rodriguez, J. (2018). Intersectionality and qualitative research. In *The sage handbook of qualitative business and management research methods* (pp. 429-461). SAGE Publications Ltd, <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781526430212>
- Ross, K., & Moorti, S. (2005). Commentary and Criticism Is Fat Still a feminist Issue? *Feminist Media Studies*, 5(1), 83–104. <https://doi-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.1080/14680770500058231>
- Rotter, T. M. (2019). Gender Inequality in Pakistan - Causes and Consequences from Feminist and Anthropological Perspectives. https://doi.org/http://repositori.uji.es/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10234/183266/TFM_2019_Rotter_TheaMarlen.pdf
- Russo, G. (2022, August 17). *A Frank Conversation About Where Plus-Size Fashion Is Headed Next*. PAPER. <https://www.papermag.com/power-of-plus-gianluca-russo-2657871393.html>
- Salen, R. A. (2014). *A sense of pride over my size : A qualitative study of women of size who*

consider themselves body positive. Masters Thesis, Smith College, Northampton, MA. <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1906&context=theses>

Sangar, M., & Howe, J. (2021). How discourses of sharam (shame) and mental health

influence the help-seeking behaviours of British born girls of South Asian heritage. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 37(4), 343–361. <https://doi-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.1080/02667363.2021.1951676>

Schwartz, M. B., & Brownell, K. D. (2004). Obesity and body image. *Body Image*, 1(1),

43–56. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1740-1445\(03\)00007-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1740-1445(03)00007-x)

SexInfo Online. (n.d.). <https://sexinfoonline.com/bodily-autonomy/>.

Shaw, A. (2005). “big fat fish”: The hypersexualization of the fat female body in calypso and

dancehall. *Anthurium A Caribbean Studies Journal*, 3(2), 13. <https://doi.org/10.33596/anth.57>

Singh, S. K. (n.d.). Destigmatization of the fat female body in Size Zero and Dum Laga ke

Haisha. *Fat Studies*, 7(3), 247–263. <https://doi-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.1080/21604851.2018.1424411>

Sohail, R., Naz, R., & Malik, N. (2014). A Postcolonial Study of Barbie

Phenomena and its Implication in Pakistani Urban Context. *EUROPEAN ACADEMIC RESEARCH*, II(5), 6949–6980. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265597992_'A_Postcolonial_Study_of_Barbie_Phenomena_and_its_Implication_in_Pakistani_Urban_Context'

Stanley, A. (2008, August 22). *Plus-size sideshow*. The New York Times. Retrieved July 13,

2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/24/arts/television/24stan.html>

Stanley, A. (2012, October \). *Female stars step off the scale*. The New York Times.

Retrieved July 13, 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/14/arts/television/women-on-tv-step-off-the-scale.html>

Strings, S. (2019). *Fearing the black body: The racial origins of Fat Phobia*. New York University Press.

Taylor, S. R. (2018). *Body is not an apology: A guide to radical self-love*. Berrett-Koehler

Publishers, Incorporated.

Tewari, A. (2017, July 28). *How a woman's body is put to shame today*. Dailyo.

<https://www.dailyo.in/variety/body-shaming-fat-women-thin-girl-patriarchy-feminism-18622>

Tonic, G. (2021, March 23). *Fashion brands: Stop faking your fat-inclusivity*. Fashion Needs

To Stop Faking Its Fat-Inclusivity. Retrieved July 17, 2022, from <https://www.refinery29.com/en-ca/fat-inclusivity-plus-size-fashion-brands>

University of South Florida. (n.d.). *Community-Engaged Scholarship Toolkit*. USF.

Retrieved August 26, 2022, from

<https://www.usf.edu/engagement/faculty/community-engaged-scholarship-toolkit.aspx#:~:text=the%20public%20domain,->

[,What%20is%20%22community%2Dengaged%20scholarship%22%3F,%2C%20integration%2C%20application%20or%20engagement.](https://www.usf.edu/engagement/faculty/community-engaged-scholarship-toolkit.aspx#:~:text=the%20public%20domain,-,What%20is%20%22community%2Dengaged%20scholarship%22%3F,%2C%20integration%2C%20application%20or%20engagement.)

Vogel, L. (2019). Fat shaming is making people sicker and heavier. *CMAJ*, 191(23), E649.

<https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.109-5758>

Zimmer, B. (2015, March 27). *Women note the minuses of 'plus-size'*. The Wall Street Journal.

Retrieved January 29, 2022, from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/women-note-the-minuses-of-plus-size-1427477067>

Appendix A: Recruitment Post

Criteria

- Cisgender Women
- Currently living in Karachi
- In age bracket of 25 to 30 years
- Is at a healing stage with their body and have aided to their mental health to avoid any potential severe triggers and have energies to take part in a research

My name is Khush Bakht Memon, am currently enrolled in MA Community Engagement (Thesis-Based) graduate program of School of Public Health at University of Alberta, Canada.

I am conducting a study titled "Exploring and Documenting Stories and Experiences of Plus-Size Cisgender Women in Karachi".

For this study, I am recruiting five cisgender women who self identify as Plus-Size, living in Karachi between the age bracket of 25-30 years.

If you fit the criteria and are willing to consent to take part in the study for which I will conduct recorded interviews, please personal message me or email me at the email address mentioned below. If you choose to not take part, this won't affect our relationship (If any).

Your confidentiality will be maintained according to the agreed clauses in the consent form and will be provided with support to make the process as easy as possible.

UofA Ethics ID: Pro00119965 **Khushbak@ualberta.ca**

Appendix B: Information and Consent Form

INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM

Title of the study: Exploring and Documenting Stories and Experiences of Plus-Size Cisgender Women in Karachi

Principal Investigator: Khush Bakht Memon (Khushu Naheed)
 Graduate Student
 MA Community Engagement
 Faculty of Public Health
 University of Alberta
Khushbak@ualberta.ca
 03322348332

Supervisor: Lana Whiskeyjack,
 Assistant Professor
 Department of Women's and Gender Studies
 Faculty of Arts
 University of Alberta
lwhiskey@ualberta.ca

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in this research study titled “Exploring and Documenting Stories and Experiences of Plus-Size Cisgender Women in Karachi”. This research study is being conducted by Khush Bakht Memon studying MA Community Engagement at the Faculty of Public Health at the University of Alberta.

Participation: If you wish to participate in this study, please read this consent form thoroughly, and then your verbal consent will be recorded during the first interview. Assistance would be provided if needed to understand the form. If you choose not to participate, it won't affect our relationship (if any) and you are not obligated regardless.

Purpose of the Study: The goal of this research is to document and explore stories of cisgender plus-size women from Karachi to understand their relationship with their bodies in association with movement and mobility in private and public spaces. This research will attempt to provide representation to plus-size cisgender women in academia and validate their stories.

Study Procedures: The data collection will be done by conducting two open-ended interviews in a setting that is comfortable for the participants in a span of two weeks. The participants will be given the choice of taking part in the research in-person or digitally. They will be facilitated accordingly. Zoom will be used to conduct digital interviews. The participants will be given a choice to participate with their video or not as per their comfort; a video option would be given if they need to interact and connect with me visually to assist them in sharing. The participants are not obligated to turn their video on as the interview's audio will only be analyzed for the study. The in-person location will be picked according to the feasibility and comfort of the participants. The data would be recorded in the form of audio recordings.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits but by participating in this study, you are contributing to the academic literature which lacks representation of brown, Pakistan-born cisgender plus-size women, currently living in Karachi.

Risks: There is minimal risk of emotional fatigue and stress as sensitive questions would be asked about your journey with your body hence the recruitment criteria included that the participants should be sure that they have already been aiding their mental health.

The researcher is a trained mental health first aider from the Mental Health Commission of Canada and will provide mental health first aid if needed. Moreover, it would be ensured that the participants do not feel any kind of discomfort or stress and if such happens, then the researcher would acknowledge it, keep an open communication, and provide the needful assistance.

If the participants opt for in-person interviews, COVID-19 SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) will be followed to avoid health risks. Also, the participants will be given an incentive of PKR 2000 for self-care which they can spend as per their needs. Furthermore, after the completion of the research, the research would be shared with the participants.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

- The information that you will share will remain strictly confidential and will be used solely for the purposes of this research.

- The only person who will have access to the research data is the researcher and the data will be saved in an encrypted password-protected folder.
- Your answers to open-ended questions may be used verbatim in presentations and publications and a pseudonym will be used unless you specifically request that you be identified.
- The consent form will be shared with the participants before the interview and the verbal consent will be taken at the start of the interview.
- The transcription of all interviews will be shared back with the participants and they are free to opt out of research in the timeframe of 5 days after the final interview and notes transcription is provided to them for review.
- If the participant changes their mind and wants to withdraw their data within the timeframe of 5 days after being provided with the transcription of the interview and field notes, then no explanation would be asked and their withdrawal would be recorded in a quick zoom meeting verbally. But if they change their mind after the period has passed, unfortunately for this particular study their withdrawal won't be entertained as the deadline of the thesis requires me to finish in a fixed period and the data would have been analyzed
- The participants would not be asked to return the incentive in case of opting for withdrawal of their data.

If you consent to be identified that indicates that your name would be used while quoting your story/data. You can withdraw from being identified in the timeframe of 5 days after the transcribed data has been shared with you.

Consent to identification (Yes/ No): _____

Data Storage: The collected digital data will be stored in personal laptop and cloud storage, and both would be encrypted and password protected. The identifiers will be deleted as soon as the research is completed, but the raw study data would be completely erased after five years of acceptance of research by the University of Alberta.

Voluntary Participation: You are under no obligation to participate and if you choose to participate, you may refuse to answer questions that you do not want to answer. Should you choose to withdraw your choice will be respected. This would not affect our relationship (if any)

Incentives and support: The participant will be provided with food and drinks (non-alcoholic beverages), according to Sindhi tradition. The participant will be given a cash payment of PKR 2000 for taking part in the research which they are highly encouraged to use for self-care. The in-person participants will share a home-cooked meal with the researcher and the digital ones would be home-delivered a meal.

Information about the Study Results: Once the research is completed and approved, you would receive a copy of the final thesis to read.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or require more information about the study itself, you may contact the researcher at the email or number provided.

The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant or how the research is being conducted you may contact the Research Ethics Office at reoffice@ualberta.ca.

Consent Statement for verbal consent: I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact.

- I agree to participate in the research study described above ____ (Yes/No)