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# Fashionable subjects and complicity resistance: power, subjectification, and bounded resistance in the context of plus-size consumers

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## ABSTRACT

The relationship between consumer governability and consumer resistance has received increasing attention in consumer research, especially with regard to consumers' physical bodies. However, a deeper understanding of how consumers juxtapose different forms and strategies of governability with respect to which discourses they embody or resist is necessary. Through an analysis of various sources of data, including interviews, fashion blogs, an online retailer's website, and a fashion magazine, we explore the nuances between processes of subjectification and resistance in the fashion field by considering the multiple powers that act on overweight female consumers' bodies. We demonstrate the complicated process by which these vulnerable consumers attempt to establish themselves as fashionable subjects as they move between adherence to expectations (biopower and subjectification) and resistance when faced with the impossibility of subjectification in a creative-agent manner. Finally, we propose the idea of complicit resistance. This resistance only partially confronts the strategies of biopower in the process of subjectification because it is limited by a threshold imposed by biopower.

## KEYWORDS

Fashion; biopower; governability; subjectification; resistance

## Introduction

This is what most girls are taught—that we should be slender and small. We should not take up space. We should be seen and not heard, and if we are seen, we should be pleasing to men, acceptable to society. And most women know this, that we are supposed to disappear, but it's something that needs to be said, loudly, over and over again, so that we can resist surrendering to what is expected of us. – Roxane Gay, *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body*

Overweight women, like the author of the quoted passage, have heard since childhood that their bodies are inadequate; they should hide them or disappear. However, Roxane Gay (2017) argues that women must resist. Women, and particularly those who are overweight, should not be subject to “what is expected” of them; they should govern their bodies as they see fit despite the pressures of social structures of knowledge and power.

Governability is a process of positioning one's body in a world of discourses, and it is an issue that has gained momentum in consumer research (Thompson and Hirschman 1995; Askegaard, Gertsen, and Langer 2002; Gurrieri, Brace-Govan, and Previte 2014; Thompson and Üstüner 2015; Yngfalk and Yngfalk 2015). The topic is of considerable relevance particularly in the fashion field because fashion – collective knowledge and a set of objects produced by the market

– profoundly affects the body. Fashion touches, molds, and transfers meaning to consumers' bodies (Entwistle 2015).

Through a Foucauldian lens, fashion can be considered a biopower (Foucault [1976] 1990), a set of policies conducted by modern institutions that act on individuals' bodies. Biopower manifests through the use of strategies that govern populations. These strategies provide patterns to which bodies should conform and determine norms to which consumers should adhere (Lilja and Vinthagen 2014). As consumers adhere to these superimposed power structures, they become subjects. This process, called subjectification, implies forms of personal governability to fulfill external expectations (Foucault 1982). In this work, we argue that fashion, in its knowledge facet and as a form of biopower, constitutes what we call fashionable subjects, or the consumers who adorn, modify, discipline, disclose, and, in uncountable ways, change their bodies according to what fashion dictates.

However, fashion as a market system also provides the possibility of another form of subjectification (Foucault 1985). As a collective set of material and symbolic objects, fashion mediates a *savoir faire* in consumers who try, by creating their own personal styles, to build themselves as fashionable subjects in the world (Thompson and Haytko 1997). In that sense, fashion as materials and symbols constitutes technologies of the self (Foucault [1988] 2003) that consumers use in their process of transforming themselves into subjects.

Therefore, fashion creates the fashionable subject in two ways. First, it provides creative-agentic technologies or tools that allow individuals to govern themselves by building their bodies and their conduct while striving for a given state of purity, wisdom, or happiness (Foucault [1988] 2003). Second, fashion governs consumers through disciplinary strategies that superimpose standards to which they must adhere to have access to technologies (Foucault [1975] 1995). When it acts as technology, fashion provides tools to individuals to help them symbolically navigate life (Thompson and Haytko 1997; Kravets and Sandikci 2014). Consumers use sartorial objects to constitute their selves. Fashion's array of choices provides guidance in social games of authenticity and conformity (Thompson and Haytko 1997), making the process of subjectification a creative-agentic exercise. However, fashion also involves disciplinary strategies regarding the size and shape of bodies. It excludes some consumers from the fashion markets and determines which bodies can use fashion as a technology: in that sense, the process of subjectification as a set of *savoir-faire* practices by means of technologies of the self requires a priori disciplinary subjectification to fashion as a biopower that builds lean bodies.

As Roxane Gay (2017) argues, bodies that are neither slender nor small are unacceptable socially and with regard to fashion. Fashion has mostly failed to include overweight consumers (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013) despite the increase in obesity rates worldwide (*Economist* 2013a). As such, overweight consumers' process of subjectification to fashion's biopower requires either a change in their bodies or a change in the fashion market to provide more suitable technologies for them. This situation has led to different outcomes regarding the process of the subjectification of consumers and also to the counterpart to this process, resistance.

Prior works have explored resistance (Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Harju and Huovinen 2015) by focusing on "fatshionistas," or fashion bloggers who advocate for the so-called plus-size target of the fashion market. These actors engage in a type of resistance to subjectification to the biopower of fashion. They embrace a lack of body discipline, acting ostensibly as fashionable subjects while being fat, and attempt to enlarge the scope of possibilities of fashion choices the market offers them in an attempt to stretch the boundaries of the body size that is acceptable to wear fashion as a creative-agentic technology. They therefore explore how consumers fight the disciplinary way that fashion acts on their bodies, while aiming to enlarge the scope of technologies of the self provided by fashion.

However, although these works examine forms of resistance, they do not address some points that we consider useful for better understanding this phenomenon. First, by treating fashion as a market system or a market field, they do not address the several types of discourses (i.e. knowledge/power

structures that sustain common behavioral practices) that make fashion such a pervasive power structure in consumers' lives.

Second, by focusing mostly on bloggers who are also considered activists, they overlook the juxtaposition of the different governability mechanisms consumers endure. Consumers may not be openly resistant to some discourses, even if they are knowledgeable of them. As such, previous works (Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Harju and Huovinen 2015) have focused on resistance strategies and have overlooked the pervasive influence of power in this context.

In this work, we examine how the process of subjectification – in terms of both usage of creative-agentic tools and disciplinary subjectification of the body – interacts with resistance to become lean or to subsume scarce or suboptimal market offers by showing the complicated way that these overweight consumers, who are vulnerable in the face of fashion's biopower, attempt to establish their fashionable selves by moving between adherence to expectations (biopower and subjectification) and resistance to them when faced with the impossibility of subjectification in a creative-agentic manner. In particular, this paper describes the findings of a study that analyzed narratives of fatshionistas' blogs, overweight women, an online retailer, and a magazine. As we identify the strategies of fashion as a biopower, the process of governability of consumers' bodies, and the modes of subjectification (the materialization of the governability process) of these overweight consumers, we propose the idea of complicit resistance. This concept refers to resistance that only partially confronts the strategies of biopower in the process of subjectification because it is limited by a threshold imposed by biopower.

As such, we contribute to the ongoing discussion of the body, the self, and power in consumer research by exploring in detail the governability process of overweight consumers who navigate spheres of both oppression and agency in their relationship with fashion power and with the technologies provided by fashion, examining how they deal with different forms of subjectification. Furthermore, we add to studies that have previously explored consumers who are involuntarily excluded from markets and thus are subject to vulnerability due to the lack of access to market offers (Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Harju and Huovinen 2015) by acknowledging that the resistance process in which these consumers engage might be limited by the pervasiveness of the biopower to which they are subjected.

## **Biopower, the self, and fashion**

In this section, we consider the constitution of the self through the means by which biopower acts on the daily lives of consumers: governability. Governability refers to a process promoted by institutional discourses, the forms through which these discourses are translated into disciplinary mechanisms (Foucault 1982), and personal conduct that aids individuals in adhering to power's requirements (Foucault 1985). Governability refers to the process of setting the field of action in which one can navigate (Foucault 1982). On an individual level, governability leads to the construction of the subject (or subjectification) by disciplining one's body (i.e. subjecting it to technologies of power; Foucault [1975] 1995), creatively conducting oneself (Foucault 1985), using technologies of the self, and negotiating aspects of power itself (Heller 1996; Lilja and Vinthagen 2014). In the next subsections, we present discourses examined in the literature that treat subjectification as an outcome of disciplinary governability, as well as the process of governability as *savoir faire*, aiming a creative agentic subjectification.

### ***Powers acting on the marketplace: the construction and subjectification of bodies***

Power in the Foucauldian sense has both a pervasive and an omniscient nature. Power is "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their organization" (Foucault [1976] 1990, 72). Power is not a single entity; it represents a set of forces and practices that reproduce themselves and maintain relatively stable societal norms and rules (Heller

1996). Power acts on both individuals and societies, guiding practices and beliefs in contextual time and spatial frames. The imposed structures and perpetrated relationships that power establishes subjectify those who live under it. Through this process, power turns human bodies into subjects (Foucault 1982).

The constitution of the subject as a process emerges in (neo)liberal societies (Lilja and Vinthagen 2014; Bokek-Cohen 2016) along with the appearance of *biopower*. Biopower is a constructive power tied to modes of life and norms that a particular population is expected to follow (Foucault [1976] 1990). Biopower develops subjects through the use of strategies that control populations connected with a disciplinary society (Foucault [1975] 1995). These strategies provide patterns to which bodies should conform and that determine the norms to which consumers should adhere (Lilja and Vinthagen 2014).

The process through which biopower constitutes subjects is governability (Foucault 1982). Governability, in this context, means the comprehension of conduct and reflects the way institutions, such as the market system, apply disciplinary mechanisms of power and the way individuals discipline themselves in subjectifying to biopower. Therefore, biopower is typical of modern societies; it is a discursive knowledge that determines what is right and what is wrong and a set of material practices that discipline consumers and provide them with tools to govern themselves. In the next subsection, we explore some of the discourses that affect the body and have been previously discussed in the literature.

### ***From normative discourses to normative strategies: healthism and leanness***

In the Foucauldian framework, discourses are systems of representation through which individuals view their reality (Foucault [1976] 1990). They refer to language used as means of a knowledge/power structure that sustains mechanisms of subjectification. In this sense, discourses produce and reproduce the knowledge that is the basis for the exercise of power.

Previous research identifies two relevant types of discourses that have had an influence on the overweight body in Western societies. The first is healthism, or the idea that productive individuals are responsible for mastering their health (Gurrieri, Previte, and Brace-Govan 2013; Gurrieri, Brace-Govan, and Previte 2014). The second is leanness (Bordo 2003; Gopaldas and DeRoy 2015), or the idea that the lean body is the ideal model not only of beauty but also of morality. Accordingly, people who are not lean – “those whose bodies carry discernible fat, including slight bellies, plump cheeks, or double chins” (Gopaldas and DeRoy 2015, 10) – do not have “mastery over bodily desires” (Bordo 2003, 9) and therefore are portrayed in media as morally flawed and unsophisticated (Bordo 2003; Gurrieri, Previte, and Brace-Govan 2013; Gopaldas and DeRoy 2015).

These discourses sustain strategies of governability performed by market institutions because they are technologies of power (Foucault [1988] 2003). These strategies are “the means put into operation to implement power actually or to maintain it” (Foucault 1982, 793). Examples of strategies for the body include disciplinary actions that classify consumers and push them to govern themselves (Yngfalk and Yngfalk 2015). A case in point is the body mass index (a height/weight ratio that indicates the degree of obesity of an individual). People who fall above the qualified interval are considered overweight, obese, or morbidly obese and are counseled by doctors to return to a “normal range weight.” Database marketing is also a potential disciplinary strategy (Zwick and Denegri Knott 2009; Coll 2013), as information collected by retailers may help drive consumers’ shopping behavior or even be sold to other disciplinary institutions, such as health companies.

Therefore, one facet of consumers’ governability refers to the strategies that market actors undertake when transforming the discourses in technologies of power that discipline individuals’ bodies. These strategies turn normative discourses into normative disciplinary actions, materializing desirable norms to consumers. As these strategies frame the field of possibilities, consumers govern their bodies by confining them to a threshold of what is acceptable. The other facet of governability is the process that leads to subjectification – that is, governability at the individual level, which involves

consumers limiting themselves to the confines of disciplinarity and using technologies of the self that foster agency and creativity in their conduct.

### ***Normative structures between discipline and creative agency***

Discourses and strategies provide the normative basis on which consumers engage in the process of their own governability to enter the process of subjectification. Several studies in consumer research have investigated consumer subjectification (Jantzen, Østergaard, and Vieira 2006; Peñalosa and Barnhart 2011; Giesler and Veresiu 2014; Mikkonen, Vicdan, and Markkula 2014; Yngfalk and Yngfalk 2015; Bokek-Cohen 2016; Ourahmoune 2017). In general, these works align with the interpretation that individuals are agents in subjectifying themselves to the structures of power through the adherence of their actions and behaviors. Subjectification encompasses the possibility of willingly disciplining one's body or applying technologies (related to grooming) to one's body that connect it with discursive norms.

From a Foucauldian perspective, discipline “regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise” (Foucault [1975] 1995, 170). To fit into the standards set by these institutions, individuals discipline their bodies and behaviors. Weight loss (Yngfalk and Yngfalk 2015), financial discipline (Peñalosa and Barnhart 2011), techniques geared to increasing longevity (Sun 2016), and plastic surgery (Ourahmoune 2017) are typical expressions of disciplinary governability. However, these studies show that, despite being impelled by normative structures to govern themselves, consumers are critically aware of the disciplinary strategies of power and consciously engage in subjectification through disciplinary self-governability.

Nevertheless, the governability of the self is not only disciplinary. As Foucault (1985, 6) explored “the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself qua subject,” he opened a branch of research that investigates how the subject, in a creative-agentic manner, constructs him- or herself by individually building his or her subjectivity. This process of subjectification is performed through what Foucault calls technologies of the self, which refer to “a certain number of operations” consumers use “to transform themselves to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault [1988] 2003, 145). The use of fashion as a tool for creating an “improved self” (Thompson and Haytko 1997; Mikkonen, Vicdan, and Markkula 2014) is a typical example of this type of subjectification through creative-agentic self-governability. However, considering that the use of these technologies serves as a way to mediate one's desires with social norms to achieve a type of equilibrium, even this type of subjectification is, in contemporary societies, confined to the possibilities of governability set by biopower. As consumers exert these two types of governability, they may engage in consumption practices that are opposed to some normative discourses or strategies, performing resistant practices of self-governability (Thompson and Üstüner 2015) to confront and expand the limits of their actions. Resistance, therefore, is a counterpart to the outcome of subjectification (Heller 1996; Moussa and Scapp 1996; Lilja and Vinthagen 2014), as both go hand in hand: resistance emerges when the consumer is conscious of the process of subjectification and tries to defy the limits imposed by it. Furthermore, both subjectifying to and resisting power structures are forms of self-governing, making resistance a manifestation of those structures in the subject (Foucault 1982). In that sense, consumers engage in resistance processes as they consciously navigate between disciplinary and creative-agentic forms of subjectification (technologies of the self), pushing the boundaries of normative powers and strategies (Thompson and Üstüner 2015). When consumers govern themselves beyond the boundaries of the governability imposed by power, they are resisting. Therefore, governability of the self involves different reactions to power: subjecting oneself to the normative structures of power through discipline, engaging in a creative-agentic process of subjectification, and consciously resisting structures deemed oppressive

We frame the discussion of governability in a gender context. As studies in consumer culture and the feminist literature show, the constitution of women as subjects has been historically coupled with

beauty and fashion (Faludi 1991; Wolf 1991; Thompson and Hirschman 1995). Fashion has become a crucial part of the female social universe in the modern age (Crane 2012; Maclaran 2012; Stevens and Maclaran 2012) and has provided discourses and enacted strategies through the market that continue to influence women's bodies and the female identity. The governability of women's bodies therefore passes through fashion in strategies that act on women as well as on their actions to discipline or adorn their bodies. Our analysis adds to these works by detailing how power and resistance enter the lives of overweight female consumers and affect their subjectivity as fashionable women who face the stigma of market powers while navigating between different possibilities of subjectification and resistance.

## Method

To comprehend the discourses and processes of governability, we relied on various sets of data that provided a rich narrative with various perspectives. The first step in data collection was to conduct phenomenological interviews with 11 overweight Brazilian women to elicit their experiences and stories (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989). We aimed to understand their embodied experiences with fashion and the effects of leanness discourses on their relationship with clothing.

In the second step, we conducted ethnographic interviews (Spradley 1979) two years later with a separate group of eight overweight Brazilian women. We chose ethnographic interviews because we wanted to examine the interactions between these consumers and the objects that surrounded them in an attempt to comprehend how the objects affected their bodies. Therefore, this set of interviews included interactions with objects in the women's wardrobes and immersion in their worlds.

The sampling criteria for both interview sets involved snowball sampling (Noy 2008), though we attempted to achieve diversity with regard to age, professional background, and ethnicity. All the consumers considered themselves "plus size," an expression that has become synonymous with being overweight in the fashion world. The interviews ranged from 30 to 90 min in length and were transcribed verbatim, generating 480 pages of text.

The third step consisted of analyzing discourses and pictorial data from four Brazilian blogs netnographically (Kozinets 2002). We selected the blogs for their popularity through search mechanisms using keywords such as "plus-size fashion," "plus-size," and "fat." We requested authorization from the bloggers responsible for the chosen blogs to use their data for our research, following the recommendation of Kozinets (2002). The digital data, which we collected between January and August 2014, accounted for 2.61 gigabytes. In the meantime, one of the authors interacted with bloggers and other readers by posting, liking, and commenting on the blogs or on the Facebook's fan pages of these blogs. Brief interviews through Skype or e-mail interactions were also held with bloggers. Finally, thoughts and reflections by the author were documented in a field diary. An important aspect of this part of the analysis was the role of bloggers in the complex realm of relations between consumers and the market. As previous research suggests, bloggers can act both as consumers (Kozinets et al. 2010) and as market actors, engaging in collaboration with brands and retailers to change the market (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). Our work positions them as both. Table 1 summarizes the profiles of the participants.

Finally, we analyzed the website content of one plus-size Brazilian fashion retailer, Flaminga, from which we copied and saved 192 pages of texts and pictures in PDF format. Then, we considered all the content (text and figures) of an issue of *Elle Magazine Brazil*, whose digital edition cover featured one of the bloggers included in this study.

For the data analysis, we read all the collected content and created a field diary containing excerpts, codes, impressions, and visual analysis of the material. Two approaches guided the interpretation of the data. For the textual material, the analysis procedure followed the tenets of hermeneutics (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Thompson 1997). For the analysis of the images, the interpretation was guided by a semiotic framework (Mick 1986) in which we treated images as texts (Scott 2009) that manifest semiotic signs.

**Table 1.** Profiles of the participants and blogs studied.

Name	Occupation	Age
<i>Profiles of the participants of the phenomenological interviews</i>		
Larissa	College professor	32
Otávia	Lawyer	27
Laura	Lawyer	26
Tarsila	Entrepreneur	60
Regina	Entrepreneur	43
Fanny	Student	17
Tamires	Manager	32
Fabiola	Student	27
Catarina	Beauty professional	43
Marília	Teacher	46
Marlene	Teacher	59
<i>Profiles of the participants of the ethnographic interviews</i>		
Astrid	Lawyer	29
Blair	Businesswoman	29
Michelle	Student	18
Fiona	Nurse	32
Tania	Engineer	60
Suzanne	Chef	39
Tamara	Student	28
Ruth	Administrative staff	52
Blog	Main bloggers responsible	Number of fans on Facebook
<i>Blogs studied</i>		
Between Tufts and Vinyl Records ( <a href="https://juromano.com/">https://juromano.com/</a> )	Juliana	90,000
Curvy Woman ( <a href="http://blogmulherao.com.br/">http://blogmulherao.com.br/</a> )	Renata/Cíntia/Isabella	60,000
Great Women ( <a href="https://grandesmulheres.com.br/">https://grandesmulheres.com.br/</a> )	Paula	710,000
Magnificent ( <a href="http://www.maggnificas.com.br/">http://www.maggnificas.com.br/</a> )	Carol/Marcella/Marina	8000

## Analysis

In this section, we analyze the narratives provided in our data to discuss aspects of the construction of the subject and the tensions endured in the process. We divide this section into three subsections. First, we analyze fashion's discourses and other related discourses that directly affect overweight women in their fashion experience. Second, we explore the disciplinary mechanisms of governability strategies enacted by institutionalized market actors and self-governability enacted by consumers. Third, we discuss how the process of subjectification intertwines with resistance practices as consumers attempt to undergo the subjectification process using creative-agentive technologies of the self.

### ***Normative discourses that frame the plus-size fashion experience***

In the narratives we collected, we found that different discourses are typical of or related to fashion (Thompson and Haytko 1997). These discourses directly affect overweight women's actions regarding their personal style and identities. The first discourse pertains to the idea that fashion, as a personal style, is a state of mind. In the texts of our data, fashion as a daily practice (Entwistle 2015) – the mediation occurring through personal style between collective discourses and one's body – refers to the possibility of finding one's place in the world and expressing oneself. Fashion is knowledge (translated into rules of conduct) and a set of materials (clothes and accessories) that consumers use to feel comfortable with their bodies and with their presence in the world. Consumers use this knowledge and material to achieve well-being and to feel comfortable, juxtaposing their personal lives and the norms they consider imposed by the fashion system. Fabiola, for whom fashion translates into personal style as a way of self-expression, illustrates this idea:

Honestly, fashion is a state of mind. It is not what people tell you looks good on you; it is about what you feel like wearing. One day you wake up and say, "That is what I want to wear today."

Fabiola adopts a critical and defensive perspective of fashion. In her words, her chosen style should be an exercise of individuality despite the rules imposed by "what people say looks good on you."

Fabiola's words represent an articulation of countervailing pressures (Thompson and Haytko 1997) that are resolved by a discourse of authenticity and fidelity to one's feelings.

Consumers' states of mind, however, are trapped in the milieu of current fashion's trends, as the market provides periodic norms of what to wear. Thus, as individuals attempt to articulate their presence in the world through fashion's knowledge and materials to form a personal style, they consider the discourse that suggests a need to remain authentic, their state of mind, and what the market imposes. As Marilia says, "Fashion for me today is what makes me feel comfortable, but I obviously consider what is trending." By comfortable, Marilia means an articulation between her authenticity and the norms of fashion, which may be opposed to her values or her sense of physical well-being.

In contrast to the discourse in which fashion exists to express one's core or state of mind is the idea of fashion as self-improvement (Thompson and Haytko 1997; Mikkonen, Vicdan, and Markkula 2014). Fashion is a tool that makes consumers' bodies look their best. An important part of the discourses of fashion is to educate consumers on the details of how bodies can be visually improved. These discourses provide both rules and ways for consumers to govern themselves, as the following excerpt suggests:

Clothes that make one look slimmer and stress one's waist area are suggested so that the women look their best. It is for the woman to value her curves . . . . It is not an attempt to simply make her skinnier or deny who she is . . . . We are women, we are feminine, and we like fashion. And if we did not care about looking pretty, we would go around wearing a sheet as a dress. (Renata, Curvy Woman blog, April 7, 2014)

Renata, like Fabiola, feels that clothes do not exist to deny who someone is and also do not exist only to follow the rules. Fashion's material use is about improving oneself or, as she says, "looking pretty." The term "value" implies that the natural body is not enough; it must be changed by objects to be better or even entirely transformed. When individuals understand and embody the idea of self-improvement, they are not only following fashion's discourses but also articulating different discourses to understand what their selves could be.

Renata's words also constitute evidence that fashion as a collective discourse is directly connected with another discourse that pervasively affects the socialized body of consumers (Thompson and Hirschman 1995): leanness. Her excerpt shows that looking prettier, in the case of an overweight women like herself, means looking slim; the clothes that make women look more slender also make them look best.

Examples of the leanness discourse are particularly (re)produced by traditional media, such as magazines, which attempt to educate consumers about which body parts they should hide and which they should display. The fat body is considered aesthetically offensive and therefore should remain hidden under the right outfit. Unlike the idea of self-improvement, leanness does not encourage consumers to "value" their curves; it teaches them how to hide what is considered ugly. In the following excerpt, for example, there are rules for wearing a particular outfit that would fit a slim but not an overweight person:

Pantyhose is the best friend forever of the "mini" skirt. Besides helping with low temperatures, it disguises possible imperfections. Generous cleavage is also part of the package, but caution: deep versions are for those who do not have generous breasts. Not your case? Give preference to squared cleavages instead of V shapes. (Elle Magazine, No. 325, 2015)

This excerpt claims that each type of body is suited for different kinds of tailoring and fabric that hide, shape, or create the illusion of leanness. In contrast with Renata's excerpt, however, *Elle's* text does not state that bodies should be "valued." Rather, it uses the term "disguise" and then advises against a certain type of clothing, as women with generous breasts are not supposed to show deep cleavage.

*Elle's* excerpt is exemplary in translating a feeling of oppression shared by consumers and bloggers: the understanding that before consumers can embody self-improvement with regard to style and beauty, they need to hide or change parts of their bodies that are seemingly inadequate. These discourses teach women that they should avoid certain aspects and materials of fashion rather

than use them to govern their bodies. The discourse of leanness therefore interferes with the other fashion discourses and prevents the recognition that consumers who are overweight can discursively form their selves as authentic, comfortable subjects for whom fashion reflects a state of mind.

Magazines and other popular media, as noted by popular critiques (Faludi 1991; Wolf 1991), are interested in (re)producing these discourses because of their relationships with the beauty industry. A consequence is that consumers will discipline their bodies with products that are advertised in magazines. These interests are recognized by consumers, who critically acknowledge them. For example, Fabiola explains that the leanness discourse compromises her experience of fashion or style and problematizes this situation:

People say that women that [have] certain types of bodies cannot wear certain clothes . . . . Depending on how your legs look, you should not be able to wear miniskirts; it is ugly. Why ugly? Who judges that? Who sets the rules? There are no rules for fashion. Do as you like.

Fabiola perceives that fashion as power imposes a boundary for consumers; fashion as a technology for building one's identity is only for the lean consumer. She understands that the discourses that set the rules of the fashion game condemn her body and tell her she should hide it.

However, the encouragement to hide that comes from the discourse of leanness accompanies the discourse of healthism (Gurrieri, Previte, and Brace-Govan 2013). Healthism argues that a body that is fat should be changed not to submit to beauty but to be healthy. For example:

I do not argue that people should get fat without limits because it is cool, because it is fashionable or because in her head, "whatever." I know this is a boring issue. But I have to ask: accept yourself the way you are, love your curves, but keep a healthy weight. And know your healthy weight; go to a nice doctor who is human and interested in you, who analyzes your habits, family history, and physical characteristics. (Renata, Curvy Woman blog, February 19, 2014)

This excerpt indicates that the body should not trespass beyond a certain limit and should not defy the rules of what a healthy body should be. The body, even in the words of a fatshionista blogger, should be subordinate to health, another instance of the social scrutiny of the female body (Gurrieri, Previte, and Brace-Govan 2013). The body thus mediates the relationship that overweight consumers have with fashion through personal style. If fashion is about expressing oneself and adorning one's body, consumers can only do so if they feel free from the constrictions their bodies impose.

### ***Creating the fashionable subject: market and individual disciplinary mechanisms***

The idea of leanness directly affects overweight consumers' relationship with fashion as discursive stances act on their bodies both through the actions of market actors (Thompson and Haytko 1997), such as retailers and brands, and through consumers' own practices of changing the self. Regarding market actors, overweight consumers tend to feel that the market system governs individuals' bodies through normative strategies such as grading size, service encounters with salespeople, and types of offers. Consumers and bloggers particularly mention the issue of grading and sizes, and the inability to find desired outfits is a primary complaint. Every overweight consumer has a story of not finding what they wanted even after several trips to shopping malls or stores and of traumatic experiences with salespeople. The case of Fanny illustrates her difficulty of finding an outfit in traditional retailers and stores:

Finding a dress for prom . . . I went to three shopping malls . . . I wanted to find something suited for the occasion, and I had to look a lot for it . . . . They don't have anything fancy. So in this kind of situation, you have to search a lot, and it displeases me. You go into stores. Sometimes, the salesperson is very friendly and offers you all kinds of things. Other times, they only decide your size for you . . . .

Once I was shopping for a bathing suit, and I asked the salesperson if she had large or extra-large sizes. She replied, saying, "But they will not fit." I said back, "I am the one who knows whether it fits or doesn't."

Fanny's statements describe how she faced a form of segregation of her body, first by not finding an outfit that she needed for a special occasion and, second, under the hostility of a salesperson who mistreated her because of her body size.

Grading size is a disciplinary strategy perpetuated by institutional actors that classifies and segregates consumers. Sorting consumers by size and excluding them from traditional retail outlets is not the only means of imposing normative constraints. We read and heard various complaints about plus-size-targeted market offers, particularly that these clothes are modest, unattractive, and gloomy. In essence, these are not outfits that would match consumers' style or correspond to their states of mind. Blair, for example, comments that she wore mostly jeans and leggings during a specific period in her life, clothes that she disliked at her most overweight times:

Several stores have big sizes. But still, they do not follow my style because they offer oversized, big clothes [and] stuff like that. So, I preferred to buy jeans and leggings for this phase of my life when I was fatter.

Fatshionistas particularly note this feeling of exclusion. Because they are very active in calling for more offers in the market (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), they vividly expose these disciplinary strategies. For example, Cíntia reveals her disappointment with a particular collection that was awaited by the plus-size fashion community. She depicts the clothes as similar to "potato bags" as they are unfashionable and unfeminine:

When the foreign brand Mango announced the launch of a new plus-size collection, everybody celebrated . . . . The campaign photo also made us excited: top model Robin Lawley, on her back, showing her curves in a black dress with lace on the back . . . I was expecting a collection full of sexy, well-tailored, and structured clothes.

What the hell were the designers and managers thinking? Is this how they think women dress? Large blouses without accentuated waists, and ill-fitting jeans? (Cíntia, Curvy Woman blog, January 2, 2014)

Cíntia believes that despite the expectations created by the brand, which announced the collection using imagery related to sexiness, beauty, and daring as well as a model who was a well-known figure in the plus-size fashion world, the products were ill-fitting and large. In her view, these clothes were made to hide the bodies of overweight consumers, not to style them.

Thus, retailers and brands produce disciplinary strategies that exclude the wrong bodies and include the right bodies for their offers, thus creating compliant bodies (Foucault [1975] 1995). As consumers feel the pressure to be fashionable subjects or individuals who will not be excluded from the market system, they feel compelled to discipline and govern themselves along these market strategies into subjects who are fashionable. Disciplinary strategies therefore create the conditions for subjectification through disciplinary self-governability (Zwick and Dene-gri Knott 2009).

When bloggers and consumers reflect on their experiences with fashion, many believe that there is a particular size that, when reached, causes suffering. This size is personal and is connected with other elements, such as age and social class, as consumers understand that they gain weight as they age, and as obesity is more prevalent in lower socio-economic classes (*Economist* 2013b). It represents the limit at which they can no longer find clothes in traditional retailing and thus can no longer engage in the market system, so they act to discipline their bodies. As Catarina says,

I had to be in a particular size range; I had to be a size 14. I pictured me wearing sizes 18 or 20 . . . . No way!

Catarina noted that she had already engaged in all types of diets, including taking amphetamine drugs to lose weight. Her need to be of a certain size – represented in the expression "I had to" – led her to attempts to lose weight.

Catarina is not alone in her experience. Interviewees consistently mentioned amphetamine-based medicines, dieting, and exercising. The most extreme forms of intervention seemed to be available to consumers who crossed their weight threshold. An example is bariatric surgery, a procedure mentioned as an option by two interviewees and endured by a fatshionista and a consumer, Blair. Although we acknowledge that bariatric surgery is a medical procedure that physicians often

recommended for dramatic overweight cases, Blair was not following health-related advice. Had she been recommended for surgery, it would have been paid for by private insurance or by the Brazilian public health system. She chose the surgery and had to pay privately because it was not for emergency or health reasons but rather an aesthetic issue.

Blair had been overweight throughout her teenage years and for a large part of her adult life. She had made several attempts to lose weight but always regained the weight in the months after dieting. At the time of the interview, Blair's family owned a boutique shop that had been in the family since her teenage years. A few months before the interview, she was not able to wear the dresses sold in the family boutique because she had gained more weight. That was when she decided to have bariatric surgery to radically change her body. Blair had reached her threshold of unacceptability. However, she had been a fashionable subject in her past and had gone through different phases of her body, including ups and downs in weight loss. During the interview, she presented several dresses that she kept in her wardrobe from the period when she was leaner. Being able to wear these dresses and other clothes represented her goal after the surgery. An excerpt from Blair's interview expresses these ideas:

It is because I am in a transition phase . . . . Now that I am skinnier, that I have lost almost 20 pounds, I am again wearing clothes that I used to wear before, such as my short shorts.

Blair was not the only respondent to compare her current self with her past self. Consumers tend to put serious expectations on their future or feel emotional about their past when they discuss their relationship with their clothes as well as that with their bodies (Beruschashvili and Moiso 2013). For example, we found that consumers viewed their fat selves as transitory. They perceived diets or surgery as elements that could lead them to change, including changing their relationship with fashion (Schouten 1991). The words of Tamara illustrate the comparisons with the past and the relationship with the future:

For me, being fat is something temporary, even if I have been a little chubby for many years now.

Finally, the last form of disciplinary self-governability occurs when consumers hide their bodies. Consumers feel restricted from wearing certain types of clothes that reveal parts of their bodies they dislike. They refrain from wearing these clothes, or they wear other types of clothes to hide parts of their bodies they dislike. They follow the "dos and don'ts" of which they are aware and change the appearance of their bodies through the use of clothes. Tamires offers a clear example of how she uses her clothes to change her body to appear differently and to hide parts of her body.

I always wear these kinds of clothes . . . . I wear black pants and jeans that are tight . . . . For example, I never bought pantaloon pants. I don't know if I would wear them because my hips are big, and I think they would look even bigger. So I just wear the straight pants and the loose blouses.

I don't like my arms, so I don't wear tank tops. I don't even think I have any anymore. Even when the weather is hot, I wear these sleeves because I don't like to show my arms.

Hiding parts of the body by wearing clothes is a form of "disguising" what is not aesthetically pleasant on one's body. Tania uses this exact expression when she says that she wears one loose blouse over more adjusted tops to *disguise* the size of her waist.

I like blouses like this, made of fabrics like voile or satin . . . . I wear them over my tops because I don't think I should be highlighting my waist area.

As these two excerpts show, when consumers cannot change their bodies, they disguise them. Their bodies, which are the carriers of fashion (Entwistle 2015), are deemed inappropriate for being fashionable and must be disciplined by being changed or hidden. However, if consumers critically acknowledge the disciplinary elements of fashion and articulate them in new discourses of practices, they engage in a resistance process against discipline.

### **Resisting: creating the non-lean fashionable subject**

Both consumers and bloggers use two primary forms of becoming fashionable subjects despite being fat and defying the discourse of leanness. The first form is the idea of democratization, which involves the use of fashion as a technology for expressing themselves without the disciplinary impediment of the fashion market system. The second form is the use of fashion as a tool for self-improvement and as an ally instead of an enemy; many consumers believe that their bodies can look more appropriate with the help of fashion. In this way, they attempt to subvert the discourses of fashion to enjoy the aspects of fashion they would not normally enjoy given the shape of their bodies. Because both forms include defiance of normative structures, they can be considered a type of resistance. However, because both are articulations of the construction of the subject under fashion discourses and practices, they are also a process of subjectification.

The word “democratization” appears in the texts of consumers and bloggers who believe that they cannot access, in larger sizes, the same clothes to which lean people have access. The following excerpt, for example, uses the term “democratization” in the sense of having the same options with the same materials that are available to the regular market.

I always have and I always will stand up for democratic fashion, and I think it is amazing to know that you can go to a store and find the same outfit a skinny girl wears. They [referring to a brand] have sizes from 2 to 20, and the clothes are made with quality materials and specially tailored. You can notice that by far. (Paula, Great Women blog, April 22, 2014)

In her excerpt, Paula emphasizes that having access to the same outfits that leaner women do is desirable, especially when these outfits seem to be tailored for and have the same quality for both groups. By articulating her satisfaction with this situation, she addresses her desire to have the same clothes in all sizes instead of a collection that is targeted only to the plus-size fashion public. However, Paula does not address the effect of these clothes on consumers’ bodies or why they would want more democratic clothes.

The interaction between the clothes and the body is a second point addressed in the narratives. The democratization of the market refers to the effects of clothes. The outfits are supposed to make consumers feel feminine, beautiful, good-looking, sexy, confident, valued, and empowered, a common word in fatshionista vocabulary. They want not only size and quality materials but also clothes that fit and value their bodies instead of hiding them.

An example of this critical acknowledgment in action is the blogger Renata, who co-created a collection with the plus-size brand Marri Gato in 2014. The clothes attempt to embody the idea that plus-size fashion clothes can be cheerful, colorful, and sexy. As [Figure 1](#) shows, the pieces co-designed and worn by Renata are colorful and adjusted to her body. The two photos show Renata in clothes that articulate the tensions lived by overweight consumers: they fit her body rather than hiding it, and they mix colors and prints rather than disguising the body in dark outfits. It is noteworthy that these clothes adapt the “dos and dont’s” of fashion for the overweight body. For example, the v-shape neckline, which *Elle Magazine* affirms should not be worn by consumers with ample breasts, appears in the picture as a means to sustain and mold the breasts. The skirt is dark instead of light colored, which visually reduces the hip size. Finally, the dress is made of a thick fabric, which creates an illusion of smoothing any apparent body folds. The difference between these outfits and the “potato bags” previously mentioned is that they fit the fat body instead of hiding it. Impediment turns into self-improvement through adaptation.

This adaptation is resistant because, symbolically, a plus-size blogger confronting the idea that fat women must hide behind dark and oversized clothes is a type of resistance (Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013; Harju and Huovinen 2015). Renata subtly defies the rules of fashion, showing that her body can also be the body of a fashionable subject. By doing so, she states that she does not need to change her body to conform to fashion and that she can use fashion to improve her body.

It was not the case that we found no discourses that completely rejected the idea that the body should be improved or modified in any way; we did. Especially among bloggers, we found posts



**Figure 1.** Clothes designed by Renata.

in which they argued for the use of fashion as a creative tool of self-expression as if it were disconnected from the body. Moreover, there were claims to use fashion as a tool to confront and defy the leanness discourse by showing what is expected to be hidden. For example:

It is just my desire today to shout: yes, I am a fat person, and I am wearing a cropped top! Just to stop the people that create rules over us and limit our creativity and happiness when we choose what to wear. I am sending you guys a kiss if you think that showing bellies is something only for the ones that have a flat – or negative – stomach. (Juliana, *Between Tufts and Vinyl Records* blog, May 28, 2014)

However, these types of militant discourses were marginal and even contradicted by the bloggers who wrote them, who also, hesitantly, recommended outfits that played the “hide-and-seek” body game.

Market actors that embrace resistant discourses tend to fluctuate between defiant resistance, such as Juliana, and a more agreeable resistance, such as that advocated by Renata. Despite endorsing fashion practices that flaunt their fat in plus-sized clothes (Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013), similar to lean fashion bloggers (Harju and Huovinen 2015), they advise consumers to improve their bodies (and to make them look lean) using fashion. For example, the website analyzed, *Flaminga*, had an entire section in which consumers could click to compare their body shape with a body-standard classification. By making such a comparison, they could choose clothes that would shape their bodies in an hourglass format: not lean, but curvilinear.

Accepting and flaunting their curves seems to be the desire of consumers as well. Their desire for fashion as overweight people involves deciding for themselves the parts of their bodies that need adjusting and adapting to create a more satisfying silhouette. Fiona, for example, chooses what parts of her body she will reveal, the parts that she feels are beautiful:

[I like these skirts] because they are short and cheerful. I don't like anything that is too long. It is not because I am a little fat that I will wear things that go under my knee, as many people do . . . I think that my legs are gorgeous, so when I wear skirts I know I am sexy . . . Also, deep cleavage . . . I feel sexy. I look at myself and say to myself: yes, it fits, I like it, let's go!

Fiona balances and measures her body, purposefully selecting the parts of her body she wants to flaunt. She uses fashion as a way to feel sexy, to feel confident, and to enhance her self-esteem despite being “a little fat.”

The intersection of “fat” and “curves,” however, seems to be a crucial point of change for consumers. Once they view themselves as fat, any attempt to be a fashionable subject who uses fashion in creative-agentive self-governability is replaced by self-disciplinary governability. Curves are accepted as a fashionable body; fatness is not. Fiona says that she stopped hiding under her clothes only after she lost weight:

Yes, I have changed. Because before I lost weight, I only wore clothes that did not show my body. I did not like small outfits or big cleavage. I used to put my long hair over the cleavage because my breasts drew a lot of attention. I would not wear anything strapped; I would always cover my arms.

The idea that fatness is fashionable up to a certain point is reinforced by many other examples from our data, such as Renata’s statement arguing that she is not a fat militant or Blair’s changes of style depending on her body size.

In summary, neither normative discourses of leanness nor resistant oppositional discourses are fully embraced in the creation of overweight consumers as fashionable selves. Rather, governability leads to the desire for fashion as a creative-agentive technology, not as a disciplinary technique of self-governability. However, some discipline is still required to turn the body from fat to curvilinear.

The discourse of leanness is embodied by consumers in such a pervasive way that even the resistance to the leanness discourse cannot erase disciplinary self-governability; resistance remains complicit to it. Therefore, resistance manifests in the use of fashion to achieve a meso-level between fatness and leanness: curves. Instead of using fashion to hide their bodies, including their curves, individuals negotiate their subjectification in becoming fashionable selves by molding and adjusting body parts. This process is complicit in the relationship between leanness and fashion and establishes a threshold for body acceptance.

This is a crucial point of this work. Bloggers are activists up to a certain point; they are caught between two forces that are both related to beauty. One force is connected with the biopower of healthy populations, state control, social marketing, and claims that body size should be controlled in the name of health (Gurrieri, Previte, and Brace-Govan 2013). The other is the intrinsic relationship between fashion and bodies (Entwistle 2015), reflected in the strategies to discipline consumers’ bodies perpetuated by retailers, brands, and the fashion industry in general. Despite bloggers’ attempts to resist the idea that the fat body is aesthetically offensive, the idea that non-leanness is inherently unhealthy, is never fully combatted. Nevertheless, facing the disciplinary technologies of power perpetrated by fashion-industry actors does not mean clashing entirely with the typical fashion rules, as fatshionistas mimic typical fashion bloggers’ practices (Harju and Huovinen 2015). As Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) note, a radical change is not always sought in the market; instead, some seek to be included and perhaps to enable change, as fashion bloggers have done in the fashion field as a whole in the past (Dolbec and Fischer 2015).

Therefore, a threshold for the acceptance of one’s body is present and reveals the subtleties and in-group privileges inherent in resistant practices and discourses. Curvier consumers with hourglass-type bodies seem to be more accepted by the evolving plus-size market than overtly overweight subjects. This issue is related to a discussion on Internet fat activist websites about consumers who are “in-betweenies” (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). In this sense, this complicit resistance does not aim to change the market radically but to stretch the boundaries of what is acceptable, creating a standard of leanness that adds another type of acceptable body that can be fashionable: the curvilinear body.

## Discussion

In this study, we presented the idea of complicit resistance to depict how overweight female consumers cope with different forces exerted by biopower in the process of governing themselves to

become fashionable subjects in a social context in which femininity is intrinsically tied to fashion and body standards. We explored the phenomenon of overweight consumers' relationship with fashion and their process of governability in subjectification/resistance in the light of a Foucauldian framework. We showed how these vulnerable consumers move in fashion discourses between adherence to expectations (biopower and disciplinary subjectification) and resistance to them, when faced with the impossibility of complete subjectification to fashion's normative structures, in a creative-agentive manner to build themselves as subjects deemed as having a personal style using fashion's knowledge and materials as technologies, even in a body that is not lean. As such, we revealed the complexities of the process of trying to establish oneself as a fashionable subject despite disciplinary acting technologies of power (Foucault [1988] 2003) on consumers' bodies.

We began by noting that leanness (Bordo 2003; Gopaldas and DeRoy 2015) is an important discourse that adds to traditional and previously studied fashion discourses of articulating one's authenticity, fashion's rules, and self-improvement governance discourses (Thompson and Haytko 1997; Murray 2002; Mikkonen, Vicdan, and Markkula 2014). The discourse of leanness is particularly relevant for influencing female consumers' experiences with fashion because it suggests that their bodies are unworthy of using fashion as technologies of the self, making them feel that their bodies are aesthetically offensive. Therefore, we have highlighted the pervasiveness of leanness in the fashion experience of consumers. Normative discourses, in that sense, are exclusionary and traditionally portray lean bodies as possible fashionable bodies.

We also described particular disciplinary normative strategies that translate the discourse of leanness into fashion market practices. Specifically, we detailed institutional strategies of the governability of the fat body within the fashion biopower. As such, we added another perspective to research that has investigated retail and market system as forms of strategies that apply populational control through disciplinary strategies (Zwick and Denegri Knott 2009; Coll 2013): we showed in detail how these strategies directly affect the shapes of female consumers' bodies through exclusion and the deleterious effects of this exclusion on consumer well-being.

In conclusion to this disciplinary stance of market governability, fashion discourses that create a fashionable subject cannot be embodied in the creative-agentive governability by consumers, as they face an impediment created by disciplinary governability strategies perpetrated by the market. Thus, overweight individuals are not able to become fashionable subjects because of their body size, which leads to market exclusion. As such, their process of subjectification to fashion's biopower – the creation of the fashionable subject – would involve either a change in their bodies or a change in the fashion market to provide better technologies for overweight consumers. A logical conclusion is that to establish themselves as fashionable subjects, consumers endure modes of subjectification based on disciplinary techniques (Foucault [1975] 1995), such as changing or hiding their bodies. Through a Foucauldian lens, consumers must make their bodies compliant to become truly fashionable selves.

However, we also explored the process of becoming a fashionable subject even when defying the discourse of leanness, similar to previous works that have examined this phenomenon (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Gurrieri, Brace-Govan, and Previte 2014; Harju and Huovinen 2015). Instead of a blind subjectification to the fashion biopower, there is a space for resistance that previous research has positioned as defying both the discourse of leanness in fashion, confronting beauty standards (Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013), and the disciplinary strategies of market powers that govern overweight consumers' bodies (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), without, however, confronting the idea of fashion as a tool for adornment and technologies of the self (Thompson and Haytko 1997). In our work, we explored this resistance in contrast with power in detail and concluded that the discursive nature of the fashion biopower leads to a resistance that can be accommodated within these same structures – what we called “complicit resistance.”

## Contextualizing consumer resistance and structures of power: complicit resistance

Our results are in line with previous studies that have examined the phenomenon in question. However, to better position the concept of complicit resistance, it is important to compare how resistance enacted by overweight consumers addresses different normative stances.

The first type of resistance consumers adopt is direct resistance to the discourse of leanness normatively imposed by the market. Previous research shows that fatshionistas act as activists by problematizing this discourse and contesting it in several ways (Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Harju and Huovinen 2015), such as making the fat body visible and using the term “fat” itself. We identified a similar scenario in our work, but with a constant tension between defying leanness and surrendering to it when it reaches a threshold. Through a Foucauldian theoretical lens, this can be interpreted as an accommodation of biopower (Lilja and Vinthagen 2014) to resistant discourses. To maintain itself, biopower must be flexible and encompass widely accepted changes that modify the rule that determines who is to be excluded rather than necessarily ending exclusion *per se*. This outcome of the fatshionista movement is a critical case that has been discussed in other fat activist spaces: that the idea of the acceptance of “fat bodies” has been appropriated by only slightly overweight women who adopt activists’ ideas of body positivity and body acceptance without *de facto* oppositionally contesting the leanness discourse (Your Fat Friend 2017). Therefore, this fight against the leanness discourse has a limited outcome, at best.

The second normative stance to which there is resistance involves the scarcity of fashion offers, critically opposing the market strategies of governability. Previous research has classified as stigmatized seekers those consumers who aim to change the array of marketing offers rather than opposing market ideologies as a whole (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). This approach is not directly opposed to the leanness discourse, as it suggests that consumers should have the right to express their individuality through fashion. They also have the right to be fashionable subjects regardless of their bodies, which leads to the question: who is the overweight fashionable subject?

Democratizing fashion means providing overweight consumers with the same set of materials and knowledge so that they can use these to articulate a portrayal of desired, palatable selves that shows *the best of them* (Kravets and Sandikci 2014; Mikkonen, Vicdan, and Markkula 2014). Nevertheless, despite efforts to deconstruct the leanness discourse, the *best of them* is articulated even by actors engaged in the democratization of fashion as a leaner version of these consumers. Thus, although these consumers are no longer invisible, they appear as visually smaller versions of themselves.

Resistance efforts translate into material solutions of self-governability that are creative-agentic and, at the same time, disciplinary for the overweight body. They no longer hide the body, but improve it; the body is still disciplined, but more loosely. Therefore, the stigmatized seekers seem to be accomplishing another accommodation of biopower: the overweight body is no longer hidden, but to be shown, it must be improved. In these resistance practices, the body ceases to be unbearable (Bordo 2003) but becomes only tolerable.

The difficulty in erasing the stigma of the fat body lies in the idea that defying the leanness discourse hypothetically implies defying health and morality discourses because the grading sizes of the market define an acceptable weight threshold. As previous research shows (Gurrieri, Previte, and Brace-Govan 2013), the idea of a productive, healthy body pervades a larger structure that constitutes a core societal value – being linked with policies of productivity (Bokek-Cohen 2016; Sun 2016). As Foucault ([1976] 1990) shows, the emergence of the idea of biopower connects with the foundation of modern societies themselves (Lilja and Vinthagen 2014). In that sense, defying a discourse of leanness and reverting to the morality attributed to the lean body by only defying local fashion discourses does not confront the main general ideal of healthism *per se* or the consequences of such discourse on consumers’ bodies, especially women’s bodies. As such, defying leanness as only an aesthetical aspect ends up being legitimate as long as the new form proposed (e.g. curvy) is still acceptable as disciplined by health-related standards.

Furthermore, defying the leanness discourse means defying the aesthetic patterns that sustain fashion itself (fashion as beauty). Fashion has historically been a form of social distinction (Crane 2012). Even in contemporary times, when consumers have access to more fashion offers, individuality is praised, and authenticity becomes a fashion goal (Thompson and Haytko 1997), fashion still mediates several social positions and conflicts. Democratic fashion remains somewhat of an oxymoron, as the field has particularities and boundaries: despite the increasing access provided by mass markets and fast fashion, haute couture is still reserved for a small part of the population that can afford it and has the *right* body to wear it. Adding to the nature of distinction that fashion embraces is the fact that obesity is more prevalent in lower socio-economic individuals in both developed countries, such as the United States and Britain (*Economist* 2013b), and emerging countries, as Brazil (Komarchesqui 2015). As such, the lean body can itself be considered a form of distinction that displays higher levels of both economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984).

In the scenarios presented previously, we showed that the resistance enacted by bloggers and also by consumers who critically acknowledge that the biopower of fashion makes them feel inadequate is still complicit with the leanness discourse. Therefore, this complicit resistance falls between complete disciplinary subjectification and complete oppositional ideological resistance. It recognizes oppression but still partially succumbs to it. It accepts some level of indiscipline and insubordination as long as these can be disguised by self-governability using technologies of the self. It proposes that disciplining can and should be superficial, setting a limit for an undisciplined body that can be adorned by disciplining technologies. The tension between a substance of the body and the appearance of it is always navigated by these consumers: as they engage in an effort to accept some part of their essence as consumers who are not lean, they use fashion to look curvy because they cannot be lean. By using fashion creatively and consciously, they accommodate their bodies among the several structures that surround them, trying to be fashionable between the tenuous boundary of acceptance and non-acceptance of their bodies.

## Conclusion

In this work, we showed how complex the process of resistance is in a context of interaction among different discourses and their disciplinary strategies reflected in the governability process in one specific consumption area and how this complexity can lead to complicit resistance. In particular, we explored the nuances between the processes of subjectification and resistance in the fashion field and considered the various powers that act on consumers' bodies through it. By doing so, we proposed that the theorization of resistance in future studies could consider the subtleties of the governability process in consumer subjectification, including to what strategies of power they choose to subjectify, under which conditions, in connection with which discourse or discourses, and how they do so. We believe that this analysis is important to understand how market power acts on consumers and the consequences of consumer resistance.

The quest to investigate the detailed processes of subjectification also led us to explore biopower's role in building the intersectional (Gopaldas 2013; Gopaldas and DeRoy 2015) exclusion. Intersectionality refers to intertextual-related discourses that doubly oppress certain populations, excluding them from market offers, job opportunities, state-sponsored services, and so on. However, it is disputable whether some discourses and exclusionary strategies are morally justifiable, such as the pressure for a lean body due to health issues (Gould and Semaan 2014). Should markets and governments promote leanness, considering that obesity is a health problem? If so, how can leanness be promoted without excluding overweight consumers and making them feel morally flawed and less than subjects who can exert their own individualities? It seems that the disciplinary strategies that promote the lean body have had pervasive consequences for consumers' health, as demonstrated by the many cases of aesthetically motivated medical intervention. Does the will to build the right fashionable body at all costs increase unhealthy interventions in the name of aesthetics? These are questions related to intersectionality that remain to be answered.

These problems also seem to connect with the socialized body of women in contemporary society (Thompson and Hirschman 1995; Gurrieri, Previte, and Brace-Govan 2013; Gurrieri, Brace-Govan, and Previte 2014). This scenario raises the question of gender. Fashion is a relevant part of the construction of femaleness in modern times (Maclaran 2012; Stevens and Maclaran 2012) and acts on the female body as a technology for feeling comfortable, with the idea of “comfort” encompassing confidence and beauty. The female fat body not only is excluded by and from fashion but also is unflattering and uncomfortable. As an undisciplined part of a self that suffers the influence of various powers to be disciplined, the overweight body is a burden to be carried in many areas of life (Bordo 2003). As such, activists and researchers interested in intersectionality could view fashion as an area to be explored because it can serve as a liberatory or oppressive tool.

This paper has two limitations. First, we conducted the study in the Brazilian context, which might differ from contexts such as North America or Scandinavia, in which previous studies on this theme have been conducted (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Harju and Huovinen 2015). Second, all the interviewees in our sample could be considered typical members of the middle class. There may be opportunities for future research with regard to other stigmatized groups whose bodies are outside the sphere of control and what is considered “right.” Additional research opportunities also exist in exploring other aspects of intersectionality in terms of intertextually related discourses. For example, how do ethnicity, disability, and class contribute to fashion exclusion and fashion choices? What other stigmatized groups and activist consumers are transformed in niche markets, including male consumers?

The idea of personal biographies is another avenue for further research. As our data show, consumers compare themselves with their past condition, when their bodies were different, and that, by itself, turns into disciplinary pressure to modify their bodies. What are the consequences of aging in the process of fashion governability for consumers? How do they cope with and transition in discourses that add another disciplinary variable to the process of establishing themselves as fashionable subjects? These questions could add to further debates on consumption well-being and on the relationship of fashion with such a state.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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