Me want food : a discourse analysis of 30 Rock

JoAnna R. Murphy

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entitled

Me Want Food: A Discourse Analysis of 30 Rock

by

JoAnna R. Murphy

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in Sociology

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An Abstract of
Me Want Food: A Discourse Analysis of 30 Rock

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JoAnna R. Murphy

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The University of Toledo
December 2011

Using a combination of fat studies, the social construction of the body, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology, this thesis examines discourses about the fat female body in 30 Rock. The body is carnal and fleshy, but it is also socially constructed; this social construction has a long and deep cultural social history, and its power is particularly apparent with regard to the devaluation of the fat female body. By combining multiple theoretical approaches, a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of discourses about the fat body emerges – suggesting that even when shows such as 30 Rock engage with counter-hegemonic discourses about the body such as fat acceptance, they may revert to hegemonic and heteronormative standards of beauty and the fat body.
For my partner and husband Levi who supported me and grew with me during this time.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In order to understand power and resistance through and within the body, it is important to conduct studies about the ways in which women – collectively, individually and culturally – engage in and resist dominant cultural and social discourses and practices of the body. By examining the ways in which this dynamic is played out on a major popular culture medium, a sociological study can explore vital issues of theoretical approaches. This chapter will provide the key research question and subsidiary research questions. The chapter describes the significance of this program in contemporary culture, and highlights the focus of the series on the issue of fatness in Season Two. Next the methodology of the thesis is described. Using a single-case study of 30 Rock, the thesis will utilize discourse analysis in order to critically examine the power dynamics involved in the social construction of the fat body. In addition, key definitions, such as “fatness”, “fat phobia”, and “size acceptance”, among others will be provided.
1.2 Research Problem

Very few shows discuss weight and the fat body within cultural and social politics. When a show does and is as popular and influential as *30 Rock*, it is important to examine how they talk about fatness and fat bodies and how the character(s) do their fat bodies. Are shows like *30 Rock* developing new discursive representations of the fat body and fatness or just perpetuating the dominant normalized body, behavior, and performativity that is typical on television? Examining the fat body and fatness through its treatment in such a significant show can help sociologists to better understand the importance of the fat body, oppression, domination, power, gender, surveillance, and governmentality. Gaps in the current research include analysis of popular culture mediums as addressing (a) social issue(s) rather than simply indicating a social issue. A partial reason for the limitations to popular culture as directly addressing social issues especially about body image and the fat female body is lacking in representations in popular shows, movies, and magazines doing just that. More specifically gaps include a lack of discourse analysis surrounding popular television shows that directly address America’s obsession with body image.

1.2.1 Key Research Question

How are and why are fat women’s bodies socially produced and reproduced in *30 Rock*?
1.2.2 Secondary Research Question

In what ways can a fat studies, social constructionism, Foucauldian approaches to the body and cultural sociology be a useful theoretical tool for analyzing the social production of the fat body in popular culture?

1.3 Significance of 30 Rock

The television show 30 Rock is an enormously popular, award-winning, pop culture phenomenon. 30 Rock has consistently won Emmy’s, the most prestigious award in television, since its debut in 2006 (primetime Emmy® award database, 2011). The show has maintained its critical and popular success in the following years. The show has been nominated for far more awards than it has actually won (primetime Emmy® award database, 2011). Since debuting, it has been nominated for 54 other Emmy’s (primetime Emmy® award database, 2011). This is just another testament to the show’s importance as a popular culture phenomenon.

1.4 Methodology

This thesis will use discourse analysis to study the way in which fatness is discursively produced in the hit television series, 30 Rock. Discourse analysis is a dominant form of methodology in cultural sociology. Discourse has been defined as “the process through which actors create propositional or evaluative accounts of the relations between themselves, other actors and situations, and larger social processes” (Steinberg, 1991, p.187). Steinberg (1991, p.187) suggests that
“… it is through discourse that we provide

a) Generalized maps of relations among actors, contexts, and activities;
b) Evaluative frames for these, and
c) Possibilities for alternative social relations and situations.”

Discourse analysis therefore involves detailed examination of the ways in which particular subjects are discussed.

This discourse analysis is applied to a single case study – it focuses on one television series, specifically the first four episodes of season two of *30 Rock*. This focus on one television series enables a degree of consistency to emerge in the data, as well as being a common methodology in cultural sociology.

However, in one sense, the thesis is not strictly a ‘single’ case study, because it does not simply study one episode – it includes four episodes (Season Two, Episodes One, Two, Three, and the first five minutes of Episode Four). These episodes all focused on the theme of fatness, so they provide a perfect point of reference for the study of fatness in popular culture. The process of coding the data for this discourse analysis is described in detail in Chapter Three. However, the main elements of this process involve identifying commonalities and differences in the data, searching for discrepant data, and developing and matching keywords, themes and labels throughout each of four individual episodes of *30 Rock* – and all of the four episodes, taken as a whole.
1.5 Definitions

Understanding definitions of certain concepts that are used throughout this thesis is important. It is also beneficial to understand that while these definitions have certain meanings, the definitions themselves remain flexible and slightly abstract within academia as there are no right/wrong dichotomies to these concepts.

“Fat studies” involves a critical approach to talking about fat, fatness, and fat bodies through theoretical frameworks such as feminism and cultural studies, thinking critically about cultural, social, and medical discourse surrounding fatness and fat bodies. According to the back cover of the Fat Studies Reader “examining the role of body weight in society, critiquing the underlying assumptions, prejudices, and ramifications of how people perceive and relate to fatness” is the aim of fat studies.

“Fat phobia” is “a pathological fear of fatness often manifested as negative attitude and stereotypes about fat people” (Robinson, Bacon, and O’Reilly, 1993, p. 468).

“Size acceptance” is a term which might nominally be assumed to involve the acceptance of all body sizes. However, it is laden with normative and judgmental standards when discussing fatness – indeed, it is commonly used in a pergorative, medicalized context and surrounded by terms such as “obesity”, “overweight”, “lack of fitness” and “unhealthy”. In contrast, when fat studies scholars use the term, they are careful to emphasize that one can be healthy or fit at any size, and that fat bodies are not necessarily evidence of ill health or immorality any more than thin bodies automatically denote health and virtue (Saguy and Riley, 2005, p. 896). For the fat acceptance
movement, it is crucial whether public discourses stress weight, diet, or physical activity, because a focus on weight is connected to normativity and implies that their members are unfit, both physically and socially.

“Power” is an abstract term that does not have a set definition, like many of the concepts used in this thesis. However, according to Foucault (1966) knowledge and power are intimately and productively related, but not the same. Foucault stressed that wherever there is power there is resistance. Power comes from everywhere; it is not a thing, an institution, and aptitude or an object. Power is not simply negative and does not just take the form of prohibition and punishment. Power can materially affect the body – there is a network of bio power within which we recognize and lose ourselves.

“Resistance” can be defined as any conscious or unconscious decision to resist cultural, social, medical, government, and other institutional standards.

“Surveillance”, according to Foucault (1975) is the truth that people are constantly being surveilled by other people, institutions, governments, organizations, and so on. People also engage in self-surveillance.

“The gaze” is a term that is used to describe a type of power (institutional, sexed, gendered, classed, and raced). “The gaze is not faithful to truth, nor subject to it, without asserting at the same time, a supreme mastery: the gaze that sees is a gaze that dominates; and although it knows how to subject itself, it dominates its masters…” (Foucault, 1963, p. 45).
“Discipline” as defined by Foucault (1975), is explained as disciplinary power that depends on hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and their combination in the examination. “These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called ‘disciplines’” (Foucault, 1975, p.137).

“Normativity” is a Foucauldian term (1961, 1963, 1966, 1969, 1975, 1976, 1984, 1984, 1986) where the individual body is subjected to a culturally formed composite picture that reflects not so much an actual average as a cultural ideal. Difference from this ideal is perceived as a failure to achieve it.

Discourse, as defined by Foucault (1969) is described as “The term discourse can be defined as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation; thus I shall be able to speak of clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse” (p. 121).

1.6 Chapter Outline

1.6.1 Chapter One Summary

Chapter One reveals the outline of the topic under study, and the specific case study of 30 Rock. It introduces the research problem including key and secondary research questions. The chapter describes the significance of 30 Rock in contemporary American culture, and highlights the focus of the series on the issue of fatness in Season
Two, Episodes One through Four. Using a single-case study of *30 Rock*, the thesis will utilize discourse analysis as the methodology in order to critically examine the power dynamics involved in the social construction of the fat body.

### 1.6.2 Chapter Two Summary

Chapter Two discusses each theoretical framework in detail that is utilized in the study including fat studies, social constructionism, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology. Each framework is supported by relevant and strong theoretical scholarly work by a number of authors from multiple interdisciplinary and sociological backgrounds.

### 1.6.3 Chapter Three Summary

Chapter Three, methodology, addresses why this thesis uses a qualitative method to closely examine the text and the relationships formed, revealed, and power struggles within and around those relationships. Chapter Three reveals the purposes of his thesis including why this study should be done, and its research questions, both key and secondary. The sources of data *30 Rock*, are also discussed as well as the qualitative method used, specifically discourse analysis. Alternative explanations, discrepant data, inter-coder reliability, consistence with previous studies of fat women’s bodies, and limitations are also revealed.
1.6.4 Chapter Four Summary

Chapter Four will provide detailed descriptions of each episode of 30 Rock from Season Two. Each episode will be broken down into what scenes overtly and covertly address and relate to the fat body, fat studies, social constructionism, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology. Each scene will include a detailed description, as well as direct quotes from the characters. This chapter will describe scenes that are directly relevant and necessary for Chapter Five’s analysis.

1.6.5 Chapter Five Summary

Chapter Five will analyze Chapter Four’s description of 30 Rock by using fat studies, social constructionism, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology frameworks to critically look at the described scenes and quotes.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the topic under consideration – the discursive (re)production of fatness within 30 Rock. It has explained the research problem along with key and secondary questions as well as the significance of the topic – both in terms of the broad scholarship around fatness and the body, and also the significance of this particular television series within contemporary popular culture. It has also discussed the methodology for data analysis, discourse analysis, which is commonly used in cultural sociology. It has provided definitions of key terms such as fatness, fat studies, fat phobia and Foucauldian terms used throughout the thesis. The next chapter will provide a
literature review of the key theoretical frameworks which guide the thesis: fat studies; social constructionism; Foucauldian approaches to the body; and cultural sociology.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the theoretical approaches which guide this thesis: fat studies, social constructionism, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology. In recent years, there has been far more scholarship about the fat female body, fat identities, fat-phobia and the size acceptance movement, also called the fat acceptance movement. Studies of the fat female body are a central part of fat studies and Foucauldian studies of the body. By incorporating fat studies, social constructionism, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology, this thesis brings a particular, postmodern and feminist intellectual energy to the topic. By combining multiple theoretical influences and a deep commitment to understanding the social construction of embodiment, the thesis seeks to gain a rich understanding of the social construction of fatness. Additionally, by using Foucault’s (1976) insight from a History of Sexuality that “where there is power, there is resistance” (p. 95), the thesis will identify both the ways in which the fat body is disciplined as well as the ways in which it resists cultural norms, such as patriarchal beauty standards. By placing these theoretical insights within a context of cultural sociology, it is possible to understand the fat body as a
subject that is continually (re)produced and disciplined in popular culture, and yet exercises agency while being physically, discursively and socially constructed.

2.2 Fat Studies

The growth of fat studies in academia has grown out of a conscious effort among sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and feminists. While academia has been focusing on other oppressed groups including the disabled, people of color, LGBT communities, and women, fat people have remained marginalized. The emerging interdisciplinary field of fat studies can be seen as one point where academia meets political activism. “In Western society, ‘fatness’ is not understood as a singular category, but rather continually constituted and reconstituted along a continuum of relativity that is governed by a series of gendered, classed, and raced imperatives for normative bodily being” (Murray, 2008, p.3). Types of fat people differ between genders, races, classes, disability, and other identity markers and these meaningful social categories often are combined with fat as a marker, i.e. fat woman, fat African-American woman, fat lesbian. Being fat in Western society is not a single category, but is often combined with other identity markers creating further oppressive environments. In addition, postmodern feminism does not seek to lump all fat women together as the same, but is committed to identifying differences surrounding fat bodies and identities.

The body diversity movement builds on traditions of antidiscrimination and rights claims that have strong political roots in the United States. Since the civil rights movement, several identity groups – including women, gays, and disabled people – have
“bridged”, or likened, claims of discrimination against their group onto more established forms of discrimination in an attempt to gain legitimacy. Thus, the term sexism was coined after racism, and the resemblance of the words was intended to assert the similarity of these forms of discrimination. Likewise, fat acceptance activists have borrowed the gay rights term coming out to speak of coming out as a fat person, in which they come to publicly affirming fatness as part of identity. Similarly, as gay rights activists use the term homophobia to speak of fear and hatred of homosexuality; fat activists speak of fat phobia to describe fear and hatred of body fat and fat people (Saguy and Riley, 2005, p. 882).

The size acceptance movement began in the US with the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance in 1969 and the Fat Underground in the 1970s (Wann, 2009, p. x). Since then it has relied on grassroots campaigns and academia to promote it. Wann (2009) located what she feels to be the beginning of fat studies at the spring 2004 conference at the Columbia University Teachers College called “Fat Attitudes: An Examination of an American Subculture and the Representation of the Female Body” (p. xi). Since then fat studies has increasingly gained acceptance within academic communities and through the work of authors such as LeBesco (2004), Rothblum, Solovay and Wann (2009) and Farrell (2011). The growth of fat studies in academia is not necessarily a new concept, but a newer discipline and is a rapidly growing field with many colleges offering courses in fat studies. Fat studies examines (often from a non-binary, postmodern point of view) discourse in communities, medicine and academia. Fat studies includes studying fat as ideology, fat people and their lives, embodiment,
laws, discrimination, images, popular culture, hegemonic norms and standards, and the fat body’s experience.

“Fat studies” is the umbrella term that encompasses studying “fat”. Through the recognition of the rights for fat people came the fat acceptance movement. On June 13, 1969, William and Joyce Fabrey signed and ratified the constitution for the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (Cooper, 2008). Fat acceptance is built around recognizing that fat people are not accepted, which is showcased in the billion dollar diet industry, and that fat people are expected to change their bodies, and to conform to hegemonic idealized beauty standards. The movement has positioned itself to not only start studying the oppression surrounding fat people, but to gain support for fat people, and fat acceptance. The NAAFA still organizes conventions and other meetings all over the nation (Cooper, 2008). Resistance to hegemonic power is part of the fat acceptance movement. The agenda is to show people that fat is not only beautiful, but also to highlight and underscore the medicalization of fat, equating fatness with being unhealthy.

Fat studies, as an emerging discipline, wants to try to remove, restructure, and reinvent some of the discourse surrounding the body, using multiple frameworks to address the body. Fat studies recognize that identity markers such as class and race also play into social categories assigned to fat people. Kuppers (2001) recognizes the “abnormal” as lacking in social value and thereby (re)creating a hierarchy of acceptable sizes, races, genders, and abilities. Fat studies aims to reverse social stereotypes about fat people, and to show there is an “in between”. Gaining weight does not reflect a person’s talent, or how healthy they are necessarily. Body size should not reflect that someone is
lazy, does not exercise, or care about their health; the social construction of the body needs to be deconstructed and a new discourse needs to be realized. Harjunen (2009) explores removing binaries surrounding the body – especially healthy/unhealthy, and that weight and body size is assigned to women, gender, and therefore (re)creates social order. Kent (2010) suggests removing the “before” and “after” surrounding the fat body; a scenario that creates an abject/healthy or abject/acceptable binary by showing people who have lost the weight as revealing their true selves now that the fat is gone. The fat was keeping them from being who they truly are, who they are meant to be which explicitly equates fat to bad, abject, not real, not part of the body, not carnal, but something that needs to be removed and is vile. Then the thin person is revealed as good, clean, and can now be accepted as a human being.

Fat studies suggest that it is essential to recognize the complexities of body politics, identity politics, the social construction of the fat female body, and other discourses surrounding it. The body and body identity, body politics, fatness, fat identity, fat acceptance, and fat phobia are all complex forms of power that should not be examined from a dualistic or binary frame such as fat/thin, man/woman, and powerful/powerless, healthy/unhealthy. Instead, fat studies urges scholars and activists to challenge, (re)construct and dismantle such binaries as well as challenge each other’s notions of body, politics, feminism, power, and resistance.

Surrounding the body, exploring “fat phobia” will be a key in the analysis of 30 Rock. Robinson, Bacon, and O’Reilly (1993) measured fat phobia in the St. Paul Minnesota area. Defining “fat phobia” as “a pathological fear of fatness often manifested as negative attitudes and stereotypes about fat people” (p. 468) Robinson et al. (1993)
found that women are more “fat phobic” than men, and the most common stereotypes of fat people are that they are undisciplined, inactive, and unappealing (p. 476). Regarding lowering fat phobia, the authors stated that fat phobic attitudes improved after a “multifaceted intervention designed to increase positive perceptions about fat people and to raise clients’ self-esteem” (p. 477). However Robinson and associates also note that very little research has been done on reducing fat phobia and changing attitudes surrounding fatness.

The body, bodily identity, sex, gender, and society all interact in very complex ways. Kuppers (2001) recognizes the complexities of studying the fat body and the binary constructs that have been created at a social level, greatly impacting how the body is viewed and analyzed. Kuppers (2001) states:

Only a small, clearly demarcated pool of images is available for representations of identity. Each is held in a rigid grid of binary oppositions: Madonna/whore, straight/gay, normal/other, and so on. Size, like sexual orientation, class, race or disability, has clean connotations of value. Size, fat, and their concomitant attributes slide toward the black hole of the abject. The fat body is the body without the rule of mind; the body let loose, animalistic, instinctive, out of control (p. 280).

Kuppers (2001) argues for a non-binary focus on size, and promoting the value of the fat body through popular culture and other media outlets. Kuppers (2001) discusses the abnormal as lacking in value thereby creating a hierarchy of “acceptable” sizes, races, genders, and other forms of embodiment.
While an embodied approach is important when discussing these complexities, it also reserves space for resistance through individual experiences, and practices. There is no simple way to talk about the social construction of bodies. There is also no single lens that the body can be discussed through. Kent (2010) produces a solution to the fat body as abject stating new discourse on fat bodies “requires radical confrontation with the representational status quo” (p. 367). Using Kristeva’s theory of the abject, Kent (2010) cites the fat body as absent from the true self referencing before and after pictures of people who have lost the fat and thus have become their true selves. Kent (2010) theorizes society struggles to remove the abject from fat people; the vile, dirty, fat, grotesque body must be diminished in order for a person to know who they really are, their true selves. Kent’s (2010) solution is to write this narrative out completely; a narrative that suggests the fat body is unhealthy, and unite the self and the body as one (p. 372).

The female body must be smaller than males, a form of the disciplined body, and patriarchal control. Harjunen (2009) discussed the social order in which not only gender but weight and body size is placed stating “In the case of women, general discrimination based on weight and body size intersects with discrimination stemming from gender organization and, hence, orders of society” (Harjunen, 2009, p. 60). Brown adds, “Most of the ways in which women feel physically ‘wrong’ e.g., having womanly hips, bellies, breasts, and thighs, are manifestations of how their body is not that of a man” (2002, p. 68). Patricia Fallon (1996) recognized underlying meanings surrounding body size and stated that the fixation on small sizes for women is not only about beauty “but an obsession about female obedience” (p. 97). To discipline one’s body to (re)produce
patriarchal, hegemonic normative standards in itself is oppressive, but it also becomes about disciplining women as the fat body is often disciplined by women. Popular magazines are constantly bombarding women with images of already thin women in clothing that will “slim”, “hide”, or “smooth” something. This is a particularly gendered phenomena – women experience scrutiny over their body size far more than men (Jagger, 2000). In western society the fat body is gendered, dichotomized, and becomes a male/female binary. Studying the fat body as gendered creates a space for discussion of power, consumption, normalization, and domination among women.

Part of not only the post-modern feminist movement but the fat studies and fat (size) acceptance movement is to educate people on difference. Beyond difference however is an individualized approach that bodies, shapes, sizes, health, and numerous other factors surrounding the body are affected by environment, socioeconomic status, gender, age, race, and to dismantle certain normative standards that seek to oppress, discipline, and idealize weight, bodies, and image. Furthermore, it is not only a dismantling but a reconfiguring of certain discourse to discuss weight, bodies, and fat(ness) from a positive angle, not a condemning one.

Shields and Heinecken (2002) discuss a type of resistance to trying to achieve and maintain an idealized beauty standard of thin by citing people who say it is what’s “inside” that matters. However, the authors remind us that by creating this dualism between mind and body, we are denying the existence, influence, and carnality of the body. Avoiding binary frames helps to show the complexities of experiences of people and how they “handle” their own social constructions. People deal with social constructions inscribed on their bodies at multiple levels. By breaking down binaries, the
analysis can then explore the implicit meanings behind creating those binaries to begin with such as fat/thin, good/bad. Regarding 30 Rock it is important to continue to implement a more postmodern framework and avoid binaries.

### 2.3 Social Constructionism

While the fat body is increasingly being studied, the socially constructed body has been recognized, debated, and utilized in the study of the body as well. As Merleau-Ponty theorizes, “…the relationship between self and other is essential to the construction of individual identities” (Murray, 2008, p. 169). Social meaning is inscribed upon the body through dominant discourses. The embodied experience is important when analyzing the body because identities, experiences, and interpretations are all experienced on an individual as well as a social level adding to the complexities of each.

In this thesis, a social constructionist approach will be used to explore “how the body is molded by various structural and cultural conditions” (Harjunen, 2009, p. 14). The fat body is socially constructed and created through a complex web of gender, class, and race. The focus on social construction is motivated by a recognition of the ways in which the body “…is a contested site, multiply interpellated; it assumes different subject positions within different discourses fluidity and sometimes simultaneously” (Huff, 2001, p. 53). The recognition that body is socially constructed, does not deny that it is also carnal. Rather, it emphasizes the social and physical nature of embodiment. It exists – and is constructed – in opposition to normalized notions of bodies, particularly gendered
bodies, and their size, behavior and performativity. And yet, in a consumption culture, food is continually marketed as a site of body pleasure and social success, as well as cultural capital. The elements of normative domination are elided in the politics of food and its marketing; simultaneously, fat bodies (in particular women’s fat bodies) are surveilled and are encouraged to engage in “self-discipline” and are otherwise subjected to various forms of governance.

It is important to explore how fat bodies do their fatness, similar to doing gender (Zimmerman and West, 1987) living in such a contradictory culture. It is equally important to examine the ways in which popular culture represents these forms of power, resistance and the body. “Unlike traditional approaches to weight, a fat studies approach offers no opposition to the simple fact of human weight diversity, but instead looks at what people and societies make of this reality” (Wann, 2009, p. x). The development of feminist fat studies has emphasized not only how fat bodies do their bodies, but their gender as fat women as well; how they engage in, and simultaneously resist, the productive discourses of bodily control which subjugate them through these forms of governance and surveillance. Resistance can include bodily normalization, modification, and transgression. Feminist fat studies reflect the recognition within third wave feminist theory that categories such as “fat women” are homogeneous; it is vital to recognize the diversity of experiences of this identity category and forms of embodiment.

Through lived experiences and individuals experiencing being fat through different identities including class, age, race, and gender among others, there is a multitude of experience to discuss and entire sets of discourse to dismantle and examine
that are all interconnected. Scott-Dixon (2008) suggests that socialization, specifically from family members, play a large role in the construction of fat, claiming that through family interaction, members learn about and gain identities surrounding “fatness, fitness, and femininity” (Scott-Dixon, 2008, p. 34). The power of fat is stigmatized and starting in the home, it moves fluidly through society. “Fat as thing and idea radiates outward from the tiny point of the adipocyte through individual body processes and experiences, through local communities and public structures, diffusing itself finally into global interconnected practices and systems of power” (Scott-Dixon, 2008, p. 29). This all represents parts of the social construction of the body, the gaze(s) up on the body, discipline, power, resistance, and surveillance – all of which pertain to 30 Rock in the following chapters.

Once a body identity has been inscribed, or even assigned, resisting that identity can be difficult. Individuals may want to embrace being fat and resist dominant discourses, but that does not mean they will or can. Murray (2008) argues that dominant discourses play a huge role in how people feel about their fat, bodies, and flesh and that it is more complicated than just “forgetting” the discourse that has influenced and shaped how we feel about our bodies. According to Murray (2008) the lived body is experienced not only through the person, but the person lives their body through others (and their meanings) as well. Because the dominant discourse is imbedded into our society, it becomes difficult for the body to exist outside those cultural norms.

Fatness, per se, is a social rather than a medical category. However, it is deeply informed by medicine – which has a parallel and overlapping discourse of ‘obesity’.
Nevertheless, it is common to see a slippage from the medical category of ‘obesity’ to the popular cultural notion of fatness, seemingly informed by medical discourse. In this context, it is important to understand how medicine actually constructs the obese body. Medical discourse suggests that the rate of obesity in the general population is significant - over 33% of the US population (Flagel et al., 2010). This medical statistic then bleeds into negative cultural responses to such embodiment: the fat body experiences attacks physically, emotionally, mentally, and financially, through state policies, medical and insurance procedures, social exclusion and through marginalization and disparagement in popular culture. Harjunen (2009) suggests that while the fat body is seen as unhealthy, out of control, animalistic, the thin body is seen as the opposite; healthy, lean, controlled, disciplined, human. Harjunen (2009) recognizes that medicalized discourse surrounding health has helped to perpetuate a healthy/unhealthy binary with thin/fat bodies. Harjunen (2009) suggests the fat body is viewed as uncontrolled and animalistic, where the thin body is viewed as disciplined and controlled. Blaming people for being fat justifies social inequalities and suggests that fat people are not ‘normal’ reproducing stereotypes about the fat body. Such issues associated with normalization and the body will be addressed later in this chapter. Harjunen (2009) reminds us that the fat body is already treated as ill, as something that needs to be cured. Often, weight loss is that “cure” even if it means resorting to dangerous and extreme methods of weight loss.

Both Saguy and Riley (2005) support that by blaming fat people for their weight it may serve to “justify and reinforce social inequalities” (Saguy and Riley, 2005, p. 871). Saguy and Riley (2005) discussed the discourse surrounding framing fat as body diversity, risky behavior, disease and epidemic. Harjunen (2009) agrees stating “…the
fat body appears and is constructed as an always already ‘ill’ or ‘pre-ill’ body that must be acted upon, rehabilitated, and ‘cured’ (p. 23). Beginning with “obesity as body diversity”, Saguy and Riley (2005) claim that fatness is a part of identity and that fat acceptance research not only celebrates body diversity, but also tries to “demonstrate the genetic and biological bases of obesity” (p. 883). They cite unsuccessful weight loss, or being able to keep off weight loss. Gimlin (2002) also explores the role of the fat acceptance movement, specifically the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA). Gimlin’s (2002) work focuses primarily on the NAAFA and she argues there are two themes attached to it with the first being an argument for fat as identity and that a fat person should not be viewed as different from any other human being. The second idealizes and sexualizes fat as a key component of identity through “fat is beautiful”. Gimlin (2002) noted contradictions throughout the NAAFA citing double standards on the part of the fat women not being involved with fat men, more than half the women were trying to lose weight and strong bodily identity discussions by members which NAAFA does not address in its literature.

Obesity as risky behavior is another competing weight frame. “A risky behavior frame emphasizes the extent to which body weight is under personal control and implies that those who are fat have unhealthy lifestyles while the thin make good food and exercise choices” (Saguy and Riley, 2005, p. 883). The authors cite numerous antiobesity activists who disagree with the fat acceptance movement citing laziness and health as reasons people are fat and then expand on why they should not be fat. Also, according to Saguy and Riley (2005) by framing obesity as a disease it “…seems to be a largely strategic attempt to make weight-loss treatments and surgery tax-deductible or
covered by Medicare, but some also argue that framing obesity as a disease would remove the blame associated with it” (p. 889). In addition to framing obesity as a disease, obesity has also been labeled an “epidemic”. Recognizing that other things such as lifestyle and poor nutrition have contributed to public health problems is also an important part of the fat acceptance movement’s agenda. The fat acceptance movement wants to promote Health At Every Size (HAES) and take the focus off the quantitative part of weight and make it more about health than weight. However, pushing an agenda that focuses on a health can potentially reinforce the “moral imperative to engage in healthy lifestyles” (Saguy and Riley, 2005, p. 896). The authors support that by engaging in this type of discourse the fat acceptance movement, in theory, can (re)create a healthy/unhealthy binary. Morality can be dichotomized into good/bad where when one is not living a healthy lifestyle it equates to living an unhealthy lifestyle, which equates to being “bad” and can ultimately continue the stigma of fat people as unhealthy and bad.

Surrounding obesity, much like Saguy and Riley (2005), Goode and Vail (2008) in Extreme Deviance suggest that obesity is deviant because people who are obese experience harassment, persecution, oppression, and cruelty. Goode and Vail (2008) agree that culturally obesity is often associated with moral failure and a weak will. They argue that while obesity is unhealthy and can lead to diabetes and heart disease, even early death that “The stigma of obesity is a moral, not a medical issue…” (p. 71) and that negative reactions to obesity do not elicit the same degree of shame or disapproval as other unhealthy conditions. It is important to recognize that both terms, obesity and fat, are often used interchangeably as there is no set cultural or social norms separating the
terms from visual discrimination; people who are fat are often labeled obese, even outside medical discourse.

The power surrounding “obesity” is imbedded in numerous cultural, social, media, and medical contexts.

…the mainstream media has gone from mentioning the term “obesity” only sixty times per year in the early 1980s to five hundred times per year in the 1990s, to one thousand mentions in 1995, three thousand mentions in 2000, and seven thousand panic-stricken mentions of “obesity” in 2003 (Wann, 2009, p. xvii).

It seems even slight divergence from idealized western beauty standards of size – which medical discourse might frame as being ‘overweight’ rather than ‘obese’ – is associated in a range of discourses and popular cultural frameworks with a fat body.

Recognizing the social construction of fatness as a non-medical discourse is also vitally important when understanding it from a sociological perspective, particularly one which explores the importance of gender within the social experience of fat embodiment. Within fat studies, “A central goal is to provide explanations for fatness that do not adhere to medicalized, Euro-American standards of “normal” and “healthy” body sizes (Gremillion, 2005, p.15). Women’ bodies experience higher rates of surveillance, governmentality, and dominance than men’s bodies, while simultaneous experiencing power and lack thereof over their bodies. It is important to understand how gendered hegemonic beauty standards and ideologies surrounding beauty and body and fat acceptance, as men are largely absent from these movements.

&Bodies out of Bounds (2001) edited by Braziel and LeBesco explores the history of fat (still a socially constructed concept), performance, abjectness, and the ways in
which fat, being fat, embodying fatness, performance, social and cultural structures (dis)function, are created, and dismantled. Braziel and LeBesco (2001) suggest the history of fat is (re)created, (dis)functions, and is dismantled through the ways in which fat, being fat, embodying fatness, performance, and abjectness is cued in social and cultural structures. Multiple authors contribute to the fat (mostly the fat female body) bodies and their experiences. While spanning centuries, Bounds (2001) explores deeper cultural meanings and constructions through the eyes of performance, theory, relationships, and socially constructed body forms. Understanding the deep roots of fat, fat phobia, and oppression on the fat body is important in deconstructing the meanings surrounding the fat body.

LeBesco (2004) discusses fat as beautiful and sexy and its potential empowerment for women. LeBesco sees the potential for empowerment through redefining beauty but also recognizes the dangers in it as well.

Simply trying to liberate fat women from ugliness to beauty, without questioning the paradigm of beauty itself, is quite dangerous; Butler warns about the appearance of a “liberated” body posing as subversive but operating in the service of…law’s self-amplification and proliferation...The problem, then, with most fat assimilations and liberationists alike within the context of beauty lies in their emphasis on tolerating or even loving themselves as beautiful the way they are, instead of recognizing the constructed nature of that very being (LeBesco, 2004, p. 50-52).
LeBesco points out the restrictions of the language surrounding health and obesity and that organizations, as well as individuals, need to fight that language. Part of the NAAFA agenda is to change the meaning of fat and health. “They [NAAFA] reappropriate fat a term of worth and value, in an attempt to rescue it from its present pejorative status” (LeBesco, 2004, p. 36). LeBesco is suggesting that language, specifically medicalized conceptions of fatness need to be examined. Recognition of the differing social responses to the body (medical, cultural, normative) is important when analyzing text.

2.4 Foucauldian Approaches to the Body

Body theory, while using numerous discourses such as normalization, power, and modification helps to encapsulate theoretical frameworks including postmodern feminism, popular culture theory, and sociology throughout numerous themes. This section of the chapter will highlight the themes developed by the French theorist Michel Foucault, whose work set the foundation for many later scholars (Foucault, 1961, 1963, 1966, 1969, 1975, 1976, 1984)

Foucault’s (1961, 1963, 1966, 1969, 1975, 1976, 1984) work is hugely influential in body theory and his influence can be seen in the development of key concepts within theories of the body, such as normalization, surveillance, power and resistance. This literature review will highlight the ways in which these concepts – normalization (including normative beauty standards), discipline, surveillance, power and resistance, the gaze, embodiment – have been utilized in many studies related to the body. These concepts are the foundations of many studies, and will provide an analytical and
theoretical framework for the applied analysis of 30 Rock in Chapter Five. Other theoretical concepts will be derived from feminist scholars such as Susan Bordo and Judith Butler, such as the concept of “abjection” and “performativity”, both of which have been used in studying the body. However, the thesis will not only rely on Foucauldian concepts – it will also utilize the sociological concepts of social constructionism and hegemony which have been applied by other theorists, including the sociologist Bryan Turner (1984). Turner (1984) and other sociologists such as Williams and Bendelow (1999) emphasize the need to include both a social constructionist approach to the body with recognition of the somatic, sensate, carnal body. The body is not simply a social construction – it is a fleshy piece of matter as well. Such recognition will underscore the analysis of 30 Rock, in particular the changed embodiment of the characters as well as the differing social responses to their bodies. There is one surprising omission in some of the literature on the body however: the failure to explicitly include sociological concepts such as race and gender. The body is always racialized; always gendered; always sexed. These are key analytical concepts which will also be utilized in the later analysis of 30 Rock.

In Discipline and Punish (1975), Foucault suggested that the body as the site of penal repression disappeared with the advent of modernity (p. 8), but in place of penal punishment comes other forms of punishment including self-discipline and surveillance. In applying this insight to postmodern culture, it may be useful to identify various forms of discipline towards non-hegemonic bodies: such disciplining occurs via the media, medicine, and the diet industry. These and other social processes encourage self-disciplining of bodies which Foucault explains as pushing people to take care of
themselves (Foucault, 1975). However, not all disciplinary processes are practiced through institutions of correction; in fact, Foucault suggests that in modernity they are far more likely to be found in a medicalized popular culture which (re)produce ideologies of the self-disciplined body including new phrases such as “eating right” and “healthy lifestyle” verses “diet” (Foucault, 1973). These new trends push a self-disciplining agenda. “As Foucault points out, this process of normalization is not restricted to institutions whose explicit aim is to “correct” behavior, such as prisons, but is a widespread feature of all institutions in modern society” (McLaren, 2002, p. 90).

Foucault suggests that with power comes authority and with authority comes the truth-power nexus. Authoritative truth is seen through law, which is another form of surveillance.

For Foucault (1975), possibly the most important feature of this normalization process is its coerciveness. The individual body is subjected to a culturally formed composite picture that reflects not so much an actual average as a cultural ideal. Difference from this ideal is perceived as a failure to achieve it. This, in part, is the birth of normalization. Bodies, through discipline and self-surveillance, needing to adhere to certain cultural ideals and standards and when resisted against those ideals the body becomes a failure; not only the body as the physical failure but the mind as a failure to discipline. In the 20th century, Stearns (cited in Huff, 2001, p. 47-48) argues “interest in weight control and elimination of fat surpassed medical concerns over corpulence and health” and the “…formation of the social body”. It is no longer about health but an unattainable ideal. Power is displayed, resisted, and decided through the body. The body is not just biological or historical. The body has taken on a relationship between biology
and history and formed a complex relationship as modern technology projects power onto the body. The body is normalized as life (biology) yet definitions of the normalized body have evolved (history). Concepts of normalization, discipline, surveillance, and resistance are now common in body studies. Nevertheless, the body and body theory remains a complex issue for most scholars. A reoccurring theme in body theory whether discussing gender, size, gestures, resistance, power, modification, normalization, surveillance, or discipline is the social construction of the body’s form and place in society. The emphasis on social construction recognizes the importance of socialization: “…visible markers on the body…are made visible through learned processes” (Alcoff, 2001, p. 279). Discourse is not only used to describe and talk about something, but also (re)produces ideologies, normative standards, normative behavior, and gestures.

Beyond Foucault, there are numerous other theorists who study the body. Bordo is a key figure in studying the body, using Foucauldian frames and terminology to support her work. Bordo (1995) uses Foucault’s discourse surrounding the “gaze” and women’s weight. Bordo focuses on power relations and bodily practices stating power relations are, “…reproducing normative feminize practices of our culture, practices which train the female body in docility and obedience to cultural demands while at the same time being experienced in terms of power and control” (Bordo, 1995, p. 27). Using a postmodern stance Bordo recognizes the fluidity of power relations, social positions, and the gaze, focusing primarily on gender, weight, and the body. Bordo (1999) puts together an array of cultural mediums including television and print ads to help explain the trend of the lean, fit body as normative. Bordo (1999) discusses models and fashion designers as partially responsible for creating thin hegemonic beauty standards for the body. Using
print ads and models as her podium for the causes of the “heroin chic” body, also noting the more complex historical, political, and social causes, Bordo (1999) also discusses bodily practices including eating disorders as socially constructed stating, “Eating disorders are also linked to the contradictions of consumer culture, which is continually encouraging us to binge on our desires at the same time as it glamorizes self-discipline and scorns fat as symbol of laziness and lack of willpower” (p. 111). Bordo (1999) concludes that people, mainly women, continually discipline their bodies based on the larger consumer culture, govern the intake (or outtake) of food, and practice cultural capital with fashion.

Butler (1990) wrote *Gender Trouble* in order to highlight the importance of including the concept of “social construction” widely – in her case, applying it to both gender and sex. Butler argues they should not be separated into a binary of an asocial body and social reactions to it, but that the “performativity” of sex is just as socially constructed as gender. “…performativity must not be understood as a singular or deliberate ‘act’, but rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler, 1990, p. 2). Butler argues that the sex/gender binary creates space only for those who fall into established sex/gender categories, making certain bodies abject. This notion of “abjection” is another key analytical concept that will be utilized in the later applied chapter on *30 Rock*.

McLaren (2002) argued that Foucault’s theories are useful in feminist analyses of the body. McLaren emphasizes the importance of a social constructionist approach which highlights the role of gender norms for women and their bodies.
...gender norms play a significant role in social organization. Moreover, the gender norms for women are not just constraining on some trivial level but encourage self-starvation (anorexia), bodily mutilation (cosmetic surgery, breast implants), and unwarranted surgical practices (caesareans, hysterectomies, genital reconstruction) (McLaren, 2002, p. 97).

Numerous other theorists have also endorsed the use of Foucauldian concepts in the study of the body, including Ball (2005) who uses Foucault’s concept of “surveillance” to analyze the relationship between the body and technology.

Gremillion (2005) also uses Foucauldian frameworks to support the sociology of the body in her work. Gremillion (2005) moves through the increased interest in the body and the sociology of the body revealing biocultural paradigms and perspectives can provide “interventions against the suggestion that conditions and processes such as poverty and urbanization are natural causes of bodily states…” (p. 16). Using Foucauldian themes such as embodiments of power, and corporeal norms, Gremillion (2005) reviews numerous theorists, examining the structures surrounding disciplined bodies and body size. She argues that the work done on body size, body politics, and the sociology of the body is pertinent for “analyzing shifting constructs of nature and culture…” (p. 26) and the researchers embrace “…complex imbrications of materiality, cultural meanings, and sociopolitical structures…” (p. 26) all of which help to assess the cultural politics surrounding why body size matters.

Barkty’s work examines the disciplinary practices specific to women, dividing them up into three groups: (1) Practices that aim to produce a body of a certain shape and
size; (2) practices that elicit a certain repertoire of gestures; and (3) practices that encourage bodily adornment (cited in McLaren, 2002, p. 93). Bartky (2002) recognizes that patriarchal structures influence bodily practices, but throughout history there have been differences in body size and shape, and currently through popular culture “thin is in”. Bartky (2002) discusses disciplinary practices on the body to remain or achieve thin, supports cultural norms and vice versa. While not all women participate in these normalized body practices and body modification (ergo resistance), the constant virginizing of women (whether through daily routines of shaving all pubic, leg, and underarm hair) or through surgery that make the hips and thighs more slender resembling that of a young boy, women, through these practices and gender “norms”, are then socially organized with other women by race, size, age, class and disability.

Emily Martin (2001), a feminist sociologist, used Foucauldian concepts, including the “gaze”, to highlight the power of gender in the social construction of the body. Following the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, she also emphasizes the need to include class and race within analyses of the body. Williams and Bendelow (1999) also explore sociological themes and embodied issues, suggesting the body operates at not only a personal level but a social level as well, and bodily conformity and transgression are impacted by social order. These themes all help to support their embodied approach and demonstrate the complexities of the body, bodily identity, and body politics. Williams (2003) argues against biological reductionism as well as a reductionist social constructionism citing, using only one or the other as dangerous and that both should be rendered useful when examining the body. This realization is important for the study of
30 Rock: both the physical body – and its changes – must be analyzed, as well as the changing social responses to it.

The body’s visibility, social inequality, forms of prejudice and violence are all interdependent, intertwined, supported, and dismantled by each other. Cofer (2003) suggests that parts of the body can become more visible in certain social contexts creating hyper-visibility; an incredibly useful insight for sociological analyses of the body. The connection between the body and its “parts” is one catalyst that can set visibility, inequality, prejudice, and violence in motion. Each visible part of the body creates hyper-visibility if it deviates from normativity and “ideal beauty” standards. Cofer’s (2003) work emphasizes the need to explore the connections between the body and forms of power, and in particular the connection between an individual’s experience of prejudice, violence, and social inequality and the visibility (or hyper-visibility) of their embodied differences. This concept of hyper-visibility is particularly useful for analyses of the fat body, and will also be utilized in the analysis of 30 Rock.

Hill-Collins (2010) discusses the dichotomy and intersection between race/gender and how it is problematic within numerous social contexts including the segregated south, African American communities, and prisons. While gender is a main factor for white women, the connection between gender and race promotes hyper-visibility as recognized in Cofer’s (2003) work, additional forms of prejudice, social inequality and violence for Black women and men. Hill-Collin’s (2010) links violence and prejudice to the construction of Blackness and the Black body. Recognition that the body is always
racialized, gendered and sexed allows for these critical analytical concepts to be applied to 30 Rock.

Disciplines and society as a whole need to start thinking about the body as more than just flesh and explore the embodied body, not only talking about bodies but also experiences from lived bodies (Kosut and Moore, 2011, p. 2). Kosut and Moore (2011) discuss the “somatic, subjective, and social components” as a part of the study that we need to be aware of. Dias (2010) examines pro-anorexia (pro-ana) sites from an embodied approach that according to members are not sites to find how to become anorexic, but sites to remain anorexic. Dias (2010) approaches pro-ana sites from a third wave feminist perspective stating “Third wave feminists address the “need for greater acceptance of complexities, ambiguities, and multiple locations, and highlight the dangers of reduction in dichotomous thinking”” (p. 401). Much like Turner (1984), Williams and Bendelow (1999), Kosut and Moore (2011), and Dias (2011) recognize the importance of avoiding a biological reductionist argument, as well as not attributing the body’s social inequalities, disciplines, normative standards, power and resistance to social construction alone.

2.5 Cultural Sociology

Cultural sociology is becoming increasingly popular within the discipline of sociology. Recognizing that sociology was leaning on the hard sciences and very specific methodologies, cultural sociology presented a new avenue for research, discussions
surrounding fields such as gender, race, class, and disability, and explored current sociological methods that were lacking in the analysis of power creating a type of hybrid discipline. Cultural sociology is a burgeoning field because it engages with so many forms of culture – celebrity culture (Elliott, 2011, Alexander, 2010), gay culture (Seidman and Meeks, 2011) popular culture (Venrooij and Schmutz, 2010, Storey, 2006), racist culture (Smith, 2011, Burdsey, 2011) capitalist culture (Silva, Warde and Wright, 2009), patriarchal culture (Sanli, 2011, Reed, 2007), cultures of resistance (Blatterer, 2010), and (particularly important for this study) fat culture (Kwan, 2009) and the culture of thinness (Kwan and Trautner, 2011).

By combining the efforts of multiple disciplines including sociology and cultural studies, the methodology, analysis, and recognition of power and political dynamics can be thoroughly explored. Cultural sociology as a discipline has something very valuable to offer, especially regarding contextual analysis. Cultural sociology offers up a unique way of framing and studying popular culture, which is key to this thesis (Crane, 2010). It is important for sociologists to recognize popular culture as real, and not only symbolic, but as a response to certain shared cultural norms and behaviors, and to recognize the politicization of popular culture especially in recent years. By studying not only culture from an analytical point of view, cultural sociology can offer a theoretical and applied approach towards studying power in popular culture. Popular culture is political now (as it has been in the past as well) and 30 Rock is no exception as it is a television show that directly addresses certain (political) issues including the body. Past political popular culture calls upon music in the 1960s and 1970s that directly addressed the war in Vietnam, racism, and sexism including musical artists such as Jimi Hendrix, and Country
Joe and the Fish, and Bob Dylan (Marshall, 2010). Popular culture is not always political or apolitical, but should not be viewed as simply leisure. Sociologists have become more aware of power struggles within American culture and can now approach cultural analysis from a postmodern frame (Haynes, 2010).

Theoretical insights that have been viewed through the lens of cultural sociology allow for the fat body to be examined as a subject that within the realm of popular culture is produced and reproduced and can simultaneously resist those productions as well. Numerous scholars have expressed the need for the social sciences to embrace and accept popular culture as a valid form of social and cultural art that needs to be studied (Hall, Grindstaff, and Lo, 2010). According to Grindstaff (2008) popular culture is a part of society that reflects, produces, and reproduces hegemonic norms, hierarchies, and simultaneously resists them, as well creating a space for sociology, which should be concerned with all of these, to study popular culture.

…to the degree that cultural sociologists are concerned with cultural hierarchy and inequality, with the characteristics of culture-producing industries, with the technological innovations and their “effects”, with issues of representation, and with the formation of individual and collective identities, they are potentially concerned with popular culture (Grindstaff, 2008, p. 219).

Hirsch (1977) concludes that the social sciences, theoretical in nature, tend to “subordinate all culture” and this “theoretical bias makes it difficult for social scientists to accept art as an institution of study” (p. 410). He states that popular culture is often diminished to an indicator about social issues rather than creating social issues, or
addressing social issues. “The study of culture – the processes of its origin and its growth, its spread and perpetuation – constitutes the study of sociology. Or, sociology is the approach to the study of human behavior that offers explanation in terms of cultural influences” (Willey, 1929, p. 208). According to Grindstaff (2008) the increase of new forms of broadcasting television and new forms of social interaction with the television medium (including YouTube, web-streams, and hand held devices such as smart phones, lap tops, tablets, and so on) has created new areas which need to be examined from a cultural sociology viewpoint.

American culture has become about shared forms of culture, including popular culture, and currently successful popular culture often resists certain cultural norms such as body image, size, race, class, and gender. Popular shows in recent years that resist normative standards include 30 Rock, The George Lopez Show, Mike and Molly, and Parks and Recreation. Upon the increase in technology, accessibility, and power to deviate from typical broadcasting, the American public has become immersed in numerous forms and types of popular culture. Within cultural sociology is a tendency to perform contextual analysis with little to no use of quantitative methods. Also, even cultural sociologists have been regarded as unsympathetic or lacking in power relation studies, fueled by Foucault (1975), Butler (1990) and Bordo (1995).

One of the essential messages of cultural sociology is that the discipline needs to not only recognize cultural influences in human behavior but also cultural responses to human behavior; it is not only about looking at the popular culture, but looking at what popular culture is doing. This is a huge part of the key concepts when examining 30
*Rock* and using appropriate methods to explore it. The increase in mediums of television, accessibility, and variety shows a growing consumer market that wants to watch television virtually anywhere they can. It prevents people from missing their favorite shows, and provides them with outlets to access them at a later time (such as a DVR).

Social norms perpetuate and (re)produce hegemonic body standards of thin, especially through media outlets including television, film, music, and other popular culture mediums. Furthermore framing popular culture into fat theories can help to support popular culture as creating or addressing social issues instead of being reduced to talking only about social issues. The discipline of cultural sociology offers new ways to approach embodiment as a social and lived experience.

### 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed major theoretical approaches to the fat body, including fat studies, social constructionism, Foucauldian approaches, and cultural sociology. Utilizing these theoretical approaches, this thesis will review the treatment of the fat body in *30 Rock*. Chapter Three will outline the methodology to be used in examining this topic.
Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe the methodology used in analyzing the application of body theory and fat studies to 30 Rock. The chapter will begin by explaining why a qualitative approach was adopted. A qualitative approach proves to be useful in the close contextual examination and application of analytical concepts and appropriate theories. Then the conceptual context will be outlined. A “conceptual context” outlines the range of theoretical and practical issues which affect the process of data analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Next, the use of discourse analysis will be explained. Discourse analysis is a particularly useful methodological tool for studies of pop culture and its characteristics will be outlined below. The coding interpretation methods will then be discussed. Issues of validity and reliability are the final topic discussed in the chapter.
3.2 Why a Qualitative Approach?

A qualitative approach is useful in the examination of popular culture, specifically through the use of discourse analysis. A qualitative approach allows for a close examination of the text and the relationships that are formed, revealed, and the power struggles within those relationships. More importantly in this study, qualitative research will reveal how the fat female body is produced and reproduced in *30 Rock*. Gaining a “holistic overview of the context” the application of the theoretical concepts through discourse analysis will prove to be valid on a number of levels, revealing the complexities of popular culture and power dynamics between men, women, and bodies (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Theoretical frameworks such as body theory, feminism, and postmodernism applied by qualitative research become an important part of the process which allows for a deeper cultural and social analysis of the text. Through the qualitative process of coding analytical themes and grouping them together, this research will reflect a more vigorous picture between power, popular culture, and the fat female body.

3.3 Conceptual Context

Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest that a conceptual context which recognizes the disparate theoretical and practical influences on a researcher’s methodology should be included in a thesis. They further suggest that the conceptual context should be represented diagrammatically, so that the iterative process of analysis, interpretation and theorizing is made clear. They also suggest that a graphic representing the development
of the research agenda should be presented alongside (and include) this conceptual context. The following diagram (3-1) illustrates the conceptual context of this research. The diagram illustrates the theoretical frameworks that were chosen for this research and then carefully considered (and potentially revised) over and over to ensure an appropriate fit with the popular culture item. The sources of data, single case studies of 30 Rock were chosen and the context was applied to the theoretical frameworks; the data influenced the theoretical frameworks, and at the same time the theoretical frameworks fluidly influenced the data and its analysis. Finally, a qualitative approach was chosen as the most appropriate method, specifically discourse analysis which includes numerous sub sections including the summary of emerging themes, coding and analysis, searching for discrepant data, and the revision(s) of theories.
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
Summary of emerging themes
Coding material
Looking for discrepant data
Revising theories

THEORETICAL APPROACHES
- Fat Studies
- Social Constructionism
- Foucauldian approaches to the body
- Cultural Sociology

CONSTANT CHECKING AND RE-CHECKING/REVISION PROCESS

SOURCES OF DATA
Single case studies
30 Rock Episodes
- Season 2, Episode 1
- Season 2, Episode 2
- Season 2, Episode 3
- Season 2, Episode 4

Figure 3-1 Conceptual Context
3.3.1 Purposes:

3.3.1.1 Why Conduct this Study?

*30 Rock* is an incredibly influential popular culture phenomenon. Discourse analysis can reveal important patterns in the social construction and reproduction of fat womens’ bodies.

Theorizing about this show can make an important contribution to fat studies, social constructionism, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology.

3.3.2 Research Questions:

3.3.2.1 Key Research Question

How and why fat women’s bodies are socially produced and reproduced in *30 Rock*?

3.3.2.2 Secondary Research Question

In what ways can a fat studies, social constructionism, Foucauldian approaches to the body and cultural sociology be a useful theoretical tool for analyzing the social production of the fat body in popular culture?

Consideration of the popularity of *30 Rock* was taken into account due to the high rate in viewership. Through the qualitative process of discourse analysis the examination of the production and reproduction of the social constructions surrounding the fat female body will be revealed at a discursive and concealed level, and the contribution to interdisciplinary studies of the body in popular culture have the potential to open up additional research in all fields concerning *30 Rock*, as well as numerous other television programs and other media outlets. These methods will prove most useful in answering the key research question as well as secondary research questions.
3.4 Sources of Data

The data for this thesis were collected over a serious of months. Season Two, episodes one through four of the popular television show *30 Rock* were examined. First, the first four episodes were viewed, and field notes were taken. In addition to the actual episodes of *30 Rock*, secondary sources such as journal articles, books, and internet websites (although very few) were also used. Literature surrounding feminism, postmodernism, sociology of the body, the body theory, popular culture and cultural sociology were examined.

3.5 Methods

3.5.1 Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach was adapted in order to be able to code the data through observation and application of theoretical concepts, by grouping coded data together by theme. Regarding coding, Seidel and Kelle (1995) express that coding has three functions: to notice relevant phenomena, collect samples of said phenomena, and to critically assess those phenomena in order to reveal similarities and differences. Regarding the analysis of power relations between the body, women, society, and culture a qualitative approach, specifically discourse analysis, was deemed most appropriate.

3.5.2 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is often affiliated with the postmodern era because it explores interpretation on an individual basis rather than providing a specific world view, “…the world is inherently fragmented and heterogeneous, and that any sense of making system
or belief is mere subjective interpretation-and an interpretation that is conditional by its social surrounding and the dominant discourse of its time” (“Discourse Analysis”, 2011). One of the founding theorists of discourse analysis, Van Dijk (1998) defines discourse analysis as “…a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (n.p.). Discourse analysis is guided by my theoretical concepts. According to Van Dijk (1998) discourse analysis needs to satisfy numerous requirements in order to be useful. These requirements include focusing on social problems and political issues, remain multidisciplinary in the analysis of those social problems, try to explain “discourse structures” (n.p.) and focus on “the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce or challenge relations of power and dominance in society” (n.p.). Discourse analysis focuses on studying abuse of power and dominance; dominance of certain social and political groups over others, groups who have their own interests at heart. Discourse analysis is meant to explore the “ontological and epistemological questions” that need to be asked in order to address issues, verses simply providing concrete answers (“Discourse Analysis”, 2011). According to Fairclough (1992), “The methodology reason is that texts constitute a major source of evidence for grounding claims about social structures, relations and processes” (p. 211). Discourse analysis is meant to be used to examine what is excluded in text, although obvious power structure and direct approaches in text are part of discourse analysis as well. This will be demonstrated in the analysis chapter.
3.5.3 Coding and Analysis of Data

By using discourse analysis, this thesis has looked for not only explicit but implicit themes, and linked them back to deeper cultural and social roots; this has produced new insights towards the social construction of the body. “By so constructing message categories, content analyses also increase the degree to which particular actions and meanings appear focused, discrete, and important” (Hirsch, 1977, p. 404). Through the recognition that the body is socially constructed and also carnal, fleshy, the coded data will relate to not only themes in the literature review such as normalization, surveillance, power and resistance, but also additional themes that arise and are pertinent to answering the research question.

Coding will be done upon a close review of each of the four episodes. Data will be gathered that is related to, and relevant, to the research question. Labels, relating to key analytical concepts will be applied to each phrase, passage, and scene that is relevant to the research question. Analytical concepts include normalization (including normative beauty standards), discipline, surveillance, power and resistance, the gaze, embodiment, the body as racialized; gendered; sexed. Additional concepts include the concept of “abjection” and “performativity”, social constructionism, hyper-visibility, normalized body practices and body modification, and socialization. From the coded data, themes will develop and will create an organized set of themes based on data that is similarly coded. A conceptual scheme will then be created from the first coded, then themed data. The key analytical terminology will be applied to the data to develop and contribute critical and original research to the sociology of the body through discourse analysis.
3.5.4 Looking for Alternative Explanations

Discourse analysis remains fluid and abstract as a methodology surrounding any text. There are very few if any theorist who would argue that a qualitative method is concrete. Qualitative methods, including discourse analysis, are used as tools to help deconstruct meanings surrounding power relations and dynamics. Alternative explanations surrounding discourses, power struggles, production and reproductions of power relations, the body, feminism, postmodernism, and other theoretical camps used in this thesis are welcomed and expected.

3.5.5 Searching for Discrepant Data

The period of time spent on this research, and the application process of a large amount of data has helped to reduce some concerns regarding discrepant data. However, the data used in this study raised certain concerns surrounding discrepancy because while scenes from each episode had obvious theoretical connections to this study and research, other scenes did not apply. This raises some discrepancies regarding the application of the data as a whole (i.e. entire episodes) and dissecting the data to apply to this research. Not all of the data collected from the 30 Rock episodes were able to be analyzed through the theoretical lenses that were chosen creating a gap in the data collected, and the data utilized. This can create inconsistencies in the validity of the study when other researchers choose to include data that was not analyzed in this study. Other researchers may choose to include and analyze all the data even if it does not directly apply to the theories that have been clarified here creating a different outcome. The data that does conflict with the theories and literature that has been proposed however remains valuable
for other scholars who use popular culture, specifically *30 Rock*, as a backdrop to their
theories and the data that was not used in this research would prove to be useful for
numerous other studies that apply different theoretical frameworks. In addition to this,
theoretical approaches that were applied can be analyzed differently at different times in
history. For example, when Dr. Spaceman tells Jenna she is in the “disgusting range” this
study applied it to the Kristeva’s abjection. However, this could also be analyzed from
Foucault’s notion of normalization. By stating Jenna falls into a “range” Dr. Spaceman
implies that while she is in the disgusting range, there are other ranges as well, some of
which would be normal, attractive, acceptable. In addition it could be analyzed from
McLaren’s (2002) work surrounding gender social construction, and norms for women
and their bodies, both of which have developed from Foucauldian theory. These issues of
discrepancy or inconsistency can alter the validity of the project. However the amount of
data collected and applied through the numerous body, sociological, feminist, and
popular culture theories helps to counter balance the reduction in validity.

**3.5.6 Inter-coder Reliability Issues**

Inter-coder agreement is needed in qualitative, and discourse analysis because it
measures “the extent to which the different judges tend to assign exactly the same rating
to each object” (Tinsley & Weiss, 2000, p. 98). Dr. Mark Sherry reviewed the same four
episodes that were examined and analyzed and we agreed on the key points of relevance
to this study in various episodes. There were a couple instances where we may have had
different interpretation of a phrase or scene; however we came to similar conclusions in
terms of the descriptions and analysis of key scenes.
3.5.7 Consistency with Previous Studies of Fat Women’s Bodies

With 30 Rock being a relatively new phenomenon the consistency with previous studies of fat women’s bodies surrounding this piece of popular culture are few. However, the conclusions surrounding how fat women’s bodies are socially produced and reproduced in popular culture, and in what ways a Foucauldian theory focuses on power, resistance, discourse, embodiment and surveillance ring true through the interdisciplinary discourse analysis used in this study. While this study does reveal some differentiating messages surrounding the reaction to fat women’s bodies, it also reveals consistent power dynamics that have been socially constructed throughout history.

3.5.8 Single Case Study: Not Searching for Representative Patterns

By using a qualitative case study method, this research will explore how (and why) social production and reproduction of women’s bodies occur 30 Rock. According to Baxter and Jack (2008) a qualitative case study methodology allows the researcher to support the “deconstruction and the subsequent reconstruction of various phenomena” (p. 544). In addition Yin (2011) describes four reasons for using a case study approach:

a) The focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions
b) You cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study
c) You want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study
d) The boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context

In this thesis the focus of the study is to answer how and why fat women’s bodies are socially produced and reproduced in 30 Rock. This thesis will examine why certain
social constructions surrounding the fat female body are in place by using theoretical material that supports the production and reproduction of the social body. The behavior of the characters cannot be manipulated and is further evidence of the appropriateness of using a case study. Contextual conditions surrounding social construction are also a key component of this research. Without examining historical theoretical content surrounding the production of the socially constructed body, there would be a major flaw in the research. Finally, there are no clear set boundaries between the phenomena, *30 Rock*, and the context as they remain fluid and open to numerous interpretations.

### 3.6 Conclusion

This thesis will use the qualitative methodological approach of discourse analysis in order to deeply and thoroughly examine season two, episodes one through four of the popular television show *30 Rock*. This study is being conducted in order to show patterns surrounding women’s bodies and the social construction of the fat female body, as well as examine how *30 Rock* as a show produces and reproduces the fat female body. Discourse analysis will allow this research to be analyzed from a contextual standpoint, allowing for the fluidity of the theories and text to become interdisciplinary through, with, and surrounding the different discourses. Through coding the data in a way that is pertinent to analyzing *30 Rock* from a fat studies, postmodern feminist frame and by grouping quotes, scenes, and phrases into body discourse themes. The reliability and validity of the methodology requires careful descriptive validity, and recognition of the
work’s discrepant data, and alternative evaluations. Chapter Five will analyze and discuss the findings.
Chapter 4

Data Description

4.1 Introduction

America has an obsession with body image. While 30 Rock is not the first television show to address body image, it does act as a popular, successful television show and deserves a detailed, multi-dimensional analysis, combining fat studies, the social construction of the body, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the data that will be analyzed in this thesis. A summary of every episode will be provided, with particular emphasis on the scenes that involve fatness. This will provide a foundation for a deep, critical engagement with the material in the following chapter, utilizing a theoretical framework which combines fat studies, the social construction of the body, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology highlights certain key components of the social construction of the fat female body: discipline, power and resistance, surveillance, the gaze, abjection, hyper-visibility, cultural capital, normalization, and the medicalization of the obesity and fatness.
4.2 Data Description

4.2.2 Summary of Season Two, Episode One

Episode One, Season Two titled “SeinfeldVision” opens with dialog between Liz Lemon (Tina Fey) and Jack Donaghy (Alec Baldwin) discussing what they have accomplished over the summer. Liz is in her glasses, and a casual outfit, and Jack is in a tailored suit. They enter Jack’s office, a huge professionally decorated office on the 52nd floor of 30 Rockefeller Center. They discuss Liz’s breakup with Floyd, and says she is over him, how she started a quilt and has been doing Yoga, upon which Jack tells her that she will never finish the quilt she started, and how she is not over Floyd. Liz says it’s “her year” and she just might get married. Jack tells her that “Women your age are more likely to be mauled at the zoo than get married”. Later, upon entering Jenna Maroney’s (Jane Krakowski) dressing room, Liz Lemon discovers that Jenna has gained a bunch of weight over the summer after performing in the off Broadway play called “Mystic Pizza” where Jenna consumed 32 slices of pizza each week over the summer. Jenna says she has “switched the eating switch and can’t switch it back”. Jack Donaghy sees the weight gain as a failure and encourages Jenna to “lose 30 or gain 60” because “anything in between has no place in television”. Jenna enters the writer’s room to laughter and mockery. Cherie, a young very thin assistant, asks Liz to be her bridesmaid, and Liz says “we” (gesturing to Jenna) would love to be bridesmaids and Cherie responds with a hug and says “Now I have my something old!”

While Jack sees Jenna a commodity to begin with, as one of the stars of TGS, Jenna also understands the importance of being a commodity as an actress. At the
wedding dress shop, Liz admits she never romanticized pretending to be a bride and the scenes cuts to a very young Liz Lemon with two teddy bears explaining (as the bride) that “This is my husband Sol Rosenbear and this is his son Richard, from a previous marriage.” Liz is then shown giving Jerry Seinfeld a tour of the studio, to stall him from getting to Jack, who is working around the clock to fix their new “SeinfeldVision” because Seinfeld did not and will not give permission to use his image in it. As a stalling tactic, Liz explains that she did break up her boyfriend over the summer, reiterating that she is totally over it. She then goes to her office and calls Floyd; another woman answers and she gives her a fake survey asking for her age, weight, and when the last time she has had intercourse. The camera cuts to Jenna on Liz’s couch eating pizza and commenting on Liz’s situation saying how embarrassing that was for Liz. Jack asks Seinfeld to give him two days to put together a presentation that will convince Seinfeld to let them use the digitally inserted images. Liz is at the dress shop to drop off the inspirational photos to which the sales lady speculated “You must the mother...” and Liz cuts in “Bridesmaid, yes”. Liz sees a woman in the dress she tried on for Cherie since they didn’t have it in Cherie’s size and she wanted to “see how it hangs”, and convinces the woman trying on the dress, by telling her she looks ugly in it, not to buy it. Liz is tempted when the sales lady points out that some women buy their dream dress when they see it and trust the husband will follow. Liz perks up and agrees saying she is moving on from Floyd, just doing it in her own order explaining, “I’m gonna get the wedding dress, and then I’m gonna have a baby, and then I’m gonna die, and then I’m gonna meet a super cute guy in heaven.” Then Liz purchases the dress, explaining she will need to spread it out over a couple different credit cards. Eventually after being up
all night Jack comes into Lemon’s office and smells a poster of food she has on her wall. Shortly after Jenna realizes that she needs to lose the weight before the show on Friday night, she attempts to dress herself in vertical stripes and walks into the writer’s room saying “I know what you’re thinking, how did I lose 25 pounds in one day. I didn’t! It’s visual trickery drawing the eye up!” The response from the writers is then laughter and mockery. By the end of show Liz Lemon, who went bridesmaid dress shopping, has purchased a $4000.00 wedding dress for her future wedding, and is now wearing it around the studio. Jack approaches Liz sitting on the stage in her wedding dress surrounded by numerous different types of carry out foods commenting on how he thought it was going to be her year and Liz points out she cannot even keep it together for one week and that she is not Jack and cannot just move on from her break up, that she is “Not you Jack, I’m just me”. Jack tells her to never say she is “just her” she is better than that and says “Now give me the ham” to which Liz responds “I like the ham” and mumbles “$4000.00 ham napkin…” while Jack helps her up and off the stage. The episodes ends with Liz asking Jack “I look pretty though right?”

4.2.3 Summary of Season Two, Episode Two

In Episode Two of Season Two, the first scene consists of Lemon walking into Jack’s office where Jack explains the steak on his coffee table is a $54.00 steak that he cannot eat due to his recent secret heart attack. He asks Liz if she would like it to which she responds “Oh, ok thanks! This would make a great sandwich tomorrow.” Jack stops her and then asks her to eat it there. Liz recognizes, and points out that Jack wants to watch her eat the steak to which he replies, “That’s what I want”. Lemon agrees to allow
to let Jack watch her eat. Within moments of sitting down to eat the steak, Jack turns back around and sees she has consumed the entire thing to which Liz replies that a dog took it.

Later, Liz sees Jenna in the hallway and says “Hey Jenna, what’s up?” to which Jenna replies “Pretty good. I’m fine Jenna, just a little lightheaded. I’m on a crash diet to go back to my old weight by Friday.” Liz asks what diet is going to do that and Jenna explains that it is a Japanese porn star diet where she can only eat paper, but it can be all the paper she wants. Liz pulls her aside and points out that her crash diet is not healthy and that maybe she is fighting her natural shape. Liz tells Jenna she should not let people make her crazy about her weight and that she is just as talented and beautiful as before, and Jack speaks up and says “No, no you are fat, now go and see Dr. Spaceman right now and get this taken care of.” Liz asks Jack after Jenna leaves “How come men can be heavy and be respected, like James Gandolfini or Fat Albert, ya know it’s a double standard and America needs to get over its body image madness!”

At Dr. Spaceman’s office he says “Jenna, medically speaking your height puts you in what we call the disgusting range”. Dr. Spaceman asks Jenna how important tooth retention is to her to which she responds that it is pretty important, and Dr. Spaceman reveals that their crystal meth program has had excellent results in weight loss but that based on her answer it is not an option. Jenna then asks about her “...crazy surgical options.” Dr. Spaceman reveals that he got into medicine to help people look their best and therefore explicitly admits to the importance of image management. Jenna brings Liz a pamphlet and Liz asks “What is this liposuction?” and Jenna adds “Plus bone shaving
and organ reduction” to which Liz makes a “gross” face and sound as if she is appalled by the options.

Meanwhile the writers are trying to figure out how to write for Jenna since she has gained weight. Frank, one of the lead writers, expresses his idea to just have Jenna say “me want food, me want food!” However, Liz points out that they are not going to treat her any differently, she will play the same characters, and the writer’s still suggest “me want food” as their most valid idea.

While Jenna tries to keep her career on track, Jack is dealing with Devon Banks who is competing with Jack over the CEO position at General Electric that is about to potentially open up. While Jack wanted to keep his heart attack a secret, Banks has found out and tells Jack that he, and Don Geiss, the current CEO are having dinner “at a restaurant.” Jack shows up to the same restaurant even though the name was never divulged by Devon Banks, much to the chagrin of Devin who reveals he never should have told Jack they were eating at “a restaurant.” Devon assures Jack he will not rat him out regarding his heart attack. However, while sitting at the table Devon offers Jack the other half of his steak and fills Jack’s glass up with red wine-two foods that have been forbidden due to Jack’s heart attack. Banks comments in a whisper to Jack, “I am going to make your heart explode”.

The same night that Jack is at dinner is the night of the show and Jenna, upon her own suggestion, puts on roller skates and rolls out on stage; the audience is panned and someone whispers “She got big”, and shortly after that comment Jenna loses her balance and Liz comments on her center of gravity being different and then Jenna falls, trying to
catch herself with a large hanging curtain, ripping it down and upon embarrassment looks up and says “ME WANT FOOD!” This gets a huge laugh from the audience and Jenna smiles in surprise.

The next day in the plaza with Liz, Jenna points out that the audience did laugh and Liz reminds her they laughed at her and Jenna says “Oh, right, the bad kind.” Liz annoyingly says “You just can’t be a real woman in this country...it’s like those Dove commercials never even happened.” Jenna then sees a display in what is assumed to be the NBC store of her face in caricature on a t-shirt that says “Me want food!”

Jenna is shown waiting at the doctor’s office flipping through a tabloid that portrays her as being “Curvy and Proud” and she says she is having second thoughts about it. Dr. Spaceman points out his colleague is the best and it will “be like none of this (making a gross face and pointing out her belly) never happened”. Jenna then looks down lovingly at the fat. She then shows up at Liz’s door exclaiming that she “is keeping it.” Liz asks her what and Jenna says the fat because people recognize her and she “gets off on it.” Liz tries to tell her that is she is going to do this she has to do it to prove a point to the world. Jenna points out that Liz needs to stop telling people how to run their lives, especially when Liz is a single woman with a wedding dress hanging over a treadmill in her living room.

4.2.4 Summary of Season Two, Episode Three

Jack is reminded in the opening scene that he is up for the GE CEO position upon Don Geiss’s retirement. Liz interrupts and asks to talk to Jack about how a lawyer called her asking her questions about Jack. Jack reveals that GE is “vetting” him. Lemon asks
Jack if they will find anything to which Jack replies “oh yes.” Jack explains he has hired a private investigator to investigate himself to stop any red flags so Jack can stay ahead of them. Liz says it’s weird to hire someone to investigate yourself, to which Jack says “You do the same thing with your therapists every week, don’t you?” Meanwhile Jenna asks Kenneth the page if she has received any fan mail from prisons, to which he responds “federal!” Jenna says that gaining the weight was the best thing that has ever happened to her, that people actually like her now. She has filmed a commercial for the number one fragrance for plus size women, Enorme. Liz asks “Can’t plus size women wear regular perfume?” Jack points out that her career is really taking off. Later on, Jenna walks in to Liz’s office and exclaims that she is losing weight. She is back to “factory made” clothing; she holds up a belt explaining “this is the notch I had to make last week; this is the notch I am using now. I’m back to the factory made notches!” Jenna explains that everything she has accomplished lately is “based on the fat” including Enorme, the offer to play Mrs. Pac Man in the live action Atari movie, and that worst of all, Jack won’t like her anymore. Jenna proceeds to explain to Lemon that they “have this secret ritual we walk by each other and slap palms together…” Because Jenna became a success on the show, she was a success in Jack’s eyes who sees money and bank-ability in Jenna.

Jack comes into Jenna’s dressing room to check up on her weight only to notice that: she is losing weight. She raises her hand for a high five, but Jack does not reciprocate. Jack points out that Jenna is not breathing heavy, her skin has cleared up, and he even finds her slightly attractive. Jenna begs Jack not to say that and says “Me want food, right?” to which Jack responds, “Do you want food Jenna!? Do you!?” Jenna
hangs her head and in shame says “I don’t know anymore. I have no appetite”. Jack tells her that if they keep her fat, they keep her funny and puts Kenneth in charge of feeding Jenna to keep her fat.

After Kenneth is put in charge of keeping Jenna fat, he tries to feed her some kind of “slop” as he explains that it will make her really fat and that it made his dad’s heart give out. Jenna just cannot bear to take another bite and her face recoils with disgust as Kenneth tries to feed her. Jenna asks Liz why she is losing the weight and Liz points out that women often overeat because they feel bad about themselves and use food and sex to deal with self-esteem issues. Liz points out to Kenneth that things have been going really well for Jenna and that maybe Kenneth should be mean to her in order for her to seek refuge in food.

Meanwhile Jack has found out through the Private Investigator he hired to investigate himself that if he wants to win the CEO chair, he has to get rid of his entire cookie jar collection; the one thing he is not fully ready to give up or get rid of. He puts them up for sale but says that certain buyers living in certain climates cannot buy them because of the weather, “They expand and contract. They are alive”, says Jack. Meanwhile, Kenneth walks into Jenna’s dressing room to insult her in order to make her eat. Kenneth walks in with a pad of paper that Liz has jotted some suggestions down on. Kenneth starts insulting Jenna about her quitting everything she starts, how she has daddy issues, and how her toes look like dried up shrimps. However, Jenna turns to Kenneth and expresses that she has never heard him talk “this way” and it turns her on. Kenneth
flees room after Jenna makes sexual advances towards him, and he explains to Liz that she is “the wrong kind of crazy”.

With Jack fretting about getting rid of his cookie jars, Kenneth walks into Jack’s office. Kenneth comments on Jack’s cookie jar and explains that when he was younger it was as if he took every problem he ever had and placed in the cookie jar at his home and that he sealed it up tight so nothing would ever get out. Jack offers up the collection to Kenneth who gleefully accepts and exits Jack’s office. Jack looks at the television monitor hanging on the wall, displaying the GE symbol and asks “Are you happy now, you son of a bitch!? You son of a bitch.”

4.2.5 Summary of Season Two, Episode Four

Only the first few minutes were used of Episode Four. The opening scene is of Liz receiving the “Followship” award for being such a good follower. Then the camera moves to the common food area in the studio and Kenneth comments on how he cannot believe how fast Ms. Maroney lost the weight. Jenna explains “If I can’t be Monique fat, I have to be Terry Hatcher thin. Either way, you’re laughing.” The show has obviously dropped the idea of Jenna remaining fat, or even losing the weight over the course of time, and in a healthy manner.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a description and summary of the Episodes of *30 Rock* which are analyzed in the next chapter. The content, obviously, relates to the issue of fatness, but it also involves far more than that. The episodes reveal numerous scenarios
that address becoming fat, the shape and look of men’s and women’s bodies, the
surveillance of women’s bodies (both by men and women), the fat body as a source of
mockery, and a symbol of a person who is a buffoon, as well as raising issues associated
with class, consumption, and lookism. These issues will be analyzed in much greater
depth in Chapter Five.
Chapter 5

Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the described data discussed in Chapter Four. Using the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Two (a combination of fat studies, the social construction of the body, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology), the chapter will highlight the key elements of its discourse on fatness, and the fat female body in particular. The conceptual and analytical framework derived from these theoretical approaches suggests that the following areas should be closely examined: the social construction of the fat female body, discipline, power and resistance, surveillance, the gaze, abjection, hyper-visibility, normalization, and the medicalization of the obesity and fatness. As discussed in Chapter Two, the body is carnal and fleshy, but it is also socially constructed; that social construction has a long and deep cultural social history, and its power is particularly apparent with regard to the devaluation of the fat female body.
5.2 Fat Studies

Fat study’s analysis of 30 Rock must deeply engage with many aspects of the show, including the initial reactions to the fat female body, and the subsequent emphasis on losing weight. The scene where Liz enters Jenna’s dressing room and discovers she has gained a considerable amount of weight over the summer is a shock to Liz – much like extreme weight loss would have been as well. Jack’s character, which is symbolic as a white, male, authority figure in a place of privilege (a famous and symbolic capitalist icon: the 30 Rock building) tells her to ‘lose 30 or gain 60” (pounds).

Then Jenna’s response is to panic because she needs to lose the weight quickly before Friday night’s show, she tries to use visual trickery to make herself look thinner. Popular culture brings a hyper-visibility to women: it (re)creates normative standards for women through fashion and the illusion of looking thin, and encourages women to discipline their bodies thin through undergarments, and slimming clothing and colors. Jenna wears a tight, slimming dress – conforming to the popular emphasis on becoming thinner, smoother and promoting looking thin rather than why women are pressured to look a certain way in the first place. By Jenna participating in cultural capital through fashion to discipline her body, she is reproducing hegemonic standards of beauty surrounding the body.

Another example of the hyper-visibility of the fat body in the show is the scene where Jenna is on Liz’s couch eating pizza. She is commenting on Liz’s situation, indicating how embarrassing that (the phone conversation with her ex’s new woman) was for Liz. In terms of analysis of the fat body, it is important to recognize that Jenna is sitting on the couch with a whole large pizza, not just a slice. This suggests gluttony and
a seeming inability to control herself – even though she is not shown eating the entire pizza. Also, Jenna says how embarrassing it was for Liz, but the scene implies that a woman, who is overweight, eating a pizza sloppily, should be the one who is embarrassed. Jenna’s demeanor is one of sloppiness and a lack of guilt for what she is doing – eating pizza – which is perfectly acceptable of course, but in a social context it would be seen as unappealing, disgusting, and overindulgence especially for a fat woman. On the other hand, Jenna’s actions could be seen as resisting those hegemonic norms and standards because she refuses to change her food preferences.

Jenna’s “Japanese porn star diet” is something a number of women have experienced, or who have known someone who experienced, experimented with, or relies on crash dieting – depriving themselves of food and nutrients in order to lose weight, and lose it very quickly. Women are constantly being coaxed through advertising and even by other women to join Weight Watchers, or Jenny Craig, or to do the Slim Fast Plan to name a few. Instead of her completing her crash diet however, Jack sends Jenna to Dr. Spaceman to have it taken care of “right now”.

According to Jack, a crash diet is not fast enough in this case. Sending Jenna to a doctor further medicalizes her “condition”. After Jenna leaves, Liz points out that men can be heavy and respected like James Gandolfini (who played Tony Soprano on the hit HBO series, The Sopranos) but James Gandolfini was also typecast as an Italian Mob Boss, so even then certain actors become molded into playing certain parts. Crash diets or other “quick fixes” have shown to be dangerous, and often unsuccessful, but are held up by mainstream media as the “answer” to the “problem” of fat (Saguy and Riely, 2005). By Jenna participating in a crash diet and then participating in an even more
extreme effort to lose the weight (seeing a doctor), she is again reproducing the normative standards of beauty that surround the body. By dieting she is challenging her ability to discipline her body to a normal size and shape, and by agreeing to see a doctor she is ignoring her own embodiment and allowing the surveillance of others to discipline her body.

While at the doctor’s office, by describing Jenna as “disgusting” Dr. Spaceman has made her into “the abject” body. They defer to hegemonic (medicalized) procedures for quick weight loss; Spaceman suggests bone shaving or organ reduction. As the literature review demonstrated, medicalized responses to size have grown exponentially in recent years, with a massive number of procedures such as bariatric surgery, gastric bypass, lap band surgeries, liposuction, and some of the other grotesque surgical options suggested by Spaceman. This is a reminder that while medicalized discourse surrounding the fat body has increased, so has the medicalized discourse surrounding diet and “health”. In this way, a normative standard of discipline surrounding one’s body and health, both for the socially constructed body as well as a carnal body, is created.

In Episode Two, Jenna discusses the success she has achieved by being fat and outlines a goal of “keeping it” – and when asked what, to reiterate, she responds “the fat”. Her commercial endorsements include a fragrance commercial called Enorme marketed towards plus-size women. Once again, her body is subjugated, objectified and commercialized. Liz asks why plus-size women can’t just wear regular perfume; this brings up an interesting point surrounding the fat body and consumerism. The term “plus size” means a lot of things to a lot of different women. However most of the time it means segregation. It is also a corporate-driven synonym for ‘fat’, aimed at increasing
the number of potential customers and increased profits. Jenna has become an embodied conduit for this capitalist market. Her role in consumer culture reflects the fact that shopping for various things, including clothing for fat women, can be challenging, demeaning, and often very frustrating. However in Episode Three, following Jenna’s exclamation regarding her success, she realizes she is now losing the weight and points out to Liz that she is back to the “factory made” notches in her belt – further evidence that fat women cannot find clothing that fits. Additionally, she is reiterates the popular patriarchal message that it is rather easy for fat women to lose weight.

Jack, the symbol of patriarchy, tells Jenna to change her body shape – again! Jack changes his mind and (in response to commercial and financial success) tells Jenna she must remain fat in order to remain funny. The symbolic importance of women’s bodies in commercial television is certainly apparent. Jack has moved from wanting Jenna to lose the weight to keep her profitable, to keeping the fat in order to keep her profitable. This makes Jenna an embodied form of cultural capital and her body a piece of economic capital. Also, he insinuates that in order for her to be (and remain) funny, she must remain fat. ‘Fat as funny’ can also mean fat as mockery. Jenna has already made into a buffoon like character with the “me want food” skit. The idea that “fat equals funny only” reinforces Kuppers’ (2001) argument that size has a connotation of value. Jenna, according to Jack was once only valuable thin, and now she is only valuable fat.

There is a discussion between Jenna and Liz about the reasons for her weight loss. Unlike her weight gain, which is attributed to a work requirement, her weight loss is explained as a reflection of her success. Now that she has commercial success and is popular, she no longer needs to eat. Liz suggests that the reason why many women
become fat is low self-esteem, and that Jenna no longer has self-esteem issues because of her success. This simplistic explanation of both self-esteem and weight issues reiterates the idea that people can change their body size easily – an assumption which fat studies would of course challenge.

5.3 The Social Construction of the Fat Female Body

Forms of social power are inscribed upon the body. The social construction of fat, as discussed in Chapter Two, has a long history. Looking more closely at the social construction of fatness in this scene, it could be inferred that simple gluttony makes a person fat (since Jenna used to be very thin). The literature review in Chapter Two indicated that society often blames fat people for their weight and disregards additional environmental, biological, or cultural factors, even though most fat studies have shown the fat experience to be more complicated than simply overeating. Liz’s initial negative reaction to Jenna’s weight gain seems to blame her for being fat – similar to a wider dynamic identified in the literature (Saguy and Riley, 2005).

The social construction of the fat body in the next scene is fascinating. Jack, the white male authority figure, states that to even be on television, Jenna must lose 30 pounds (making her appear more like the normative standard of thinness) or she must become hyper-fat (which itself would demand attention). He suggests that there is no place in between in television; being fat is not acceptable – she must be ‘super fat’ in order to be accepted. This would not be a genuine form of acceptance, however; it would position her as a source for comedic humor – a buffoon. Jack creates a binary of
acceptable/unacceptable bodies and assigns specific numbers of points to each including “lose 30” or “gain 60” for Jenna’s post-summer size. However, while losing 30 would put Jenna into an acceptable range socially, gaining 60 more pounds would put her in an unacceptable weight frame socially, but simultaneously make her hyper-visible (and a source of mockery) which would ‘work’ on television, according to Jack. Jenna’s hyper-visibility makes her vulnerable to additional surveillance. This scene reveals a lot about the social construction of the body, but concurrently reveals how carnal the body is well; it can be disciplined, and molded into normalized standards as well as resist them, often simultaneously. Turner (1984), Williams and Bendelow (1999), Dias (2010), and Kosut and Moore (2010) recognized, along with others, that it is important to not favor a reductionist standpoint regarding the carnal body, or the socially constructed body. The body operates at both a social and a personal level.

Prior to the summer, Jenna’s body reflected her position as a female actress, and she had been pressured to remain thin and youthful throughout her career. Overweight white males, such as Jack, do not face the same degree of bodily inspection. However he feels so empowered from his race/class/gendered standpoint, that he tells Jenna that bodies which do not conform to the ‘cult of thinness’ (Hesse-Biber, 2007) have “no place in television”. With Jack being the authority figure in the show, he has chosen to discipline Jenna’s body in order for her to remain in television. Initially Hollywood, through accepted societal standards of beauty, shaped Jenna’s body and now Jack is doing so in order to maintain ratings and commercial profit.

Recognition that the body is not only socially constructed but also carnal and fleshy, and has the ability to change and with change, new social biases and inequalities
can emerge or be reinforced is important. Jenna’s profession has created certain normalizations for her body – thin and young – but it goes beyond just Jenna’s body. Women’s bodies everywhere have been shaped, molded, and disciplined into a certain image that has been constructed by society as acceptable/unacceptable. Because of dominant discourses surrounding the body, it has become extremely difficult be accepted outside of those norms. While Jenna is seemingly reinforcing certain standards of beauty, she is also resisting them by keeping “the fat” later in the episodes - showing that while the body is socially constructed it also (often simultaneously) exercises agency.

People deal with their inscribed social constructions and identities in a number of different ways. In Episode Three when Jenna begins to lose weight, Liz points out that women overeat because they feel bad about themselves and use food and sex to deal with self-esteem issues. The social construction of the fat body suggests that fatness is a response to having low self-esteem, as being overindulgent, needing medical intervention, and also as sexually promiscuous in order to deal with the apparent self-esteem issues.

Each of these deeply problematic frames surrounding fatness is experienced by Jenna. Jenna is told she might be fighting her “natural shape” – a biological and medicalized frame which nevertheless hints at a place for resistance – simply accepting that her body is ‘meant’ to be this shape. However, she is simultaneously told that her weight is unacceptable, unhealthy, and will end her career – suggesting that Jenna is engaging in risky behavior and therefore is to blame for her fatness. This all is part of reproduction of dominant discourses surrounding the social construction of the fat body.
Further analysis of the scene where Jenna repeatedly states “me want food” implies that Jenna is carnal and fleshy and wants to eat, resisting dominant discourses that suggest women should limit their food intake in order to achieve a certain body size. Additionally, the lack of grammatical correctness – or even complete sentences – could be read as suggesting an almost Neanderthal, carnal desire which can barely be expressed - it is as if the fat person is not fully evolved. Also, by making fun of the idea of consuming food, the scene also implies that by wanting it or demanding it is reason for mockery and laughter. The next day, after the “me want food” show, Jenna sees all the “me want food” merchandise declaring that people like her now and has to be reminded that it is the “bad kind” of laughter.

Later, Jenna sits in the doctor’s office to have the fat removed, but she sees an article calling her “Curvy and Proud”. Recognition that fat women can have high self-esteem is important in this scene and it shows that society is starting to embrace fat women. However, Liz’s previous comments reinforced the idea that women who are fat have low self-esteem creating another dichotomy of thin/fat, high-esteem/low-esteem. These comments imply that thin women automatically have high self-esteem based on the social constructions surrounding the thin body as good, clean, appropriate, acceptable, disciplined, and normalized. On the other hand, it also implies that fat women can only be proud once it has been confirmed through social and popular outlets which help to redefine, and simultaneously (re)construct and (re)enforce, social constructions surrounding the fat body.

As noted in Chapter Two, LeBesco (2004) discusses how the discourse of ‘fat as beautiful’ is potentially empowering for women. However, engaging with the discourse
of “beauty” is potentially dangerous because of its links to objectification, commercialization and subjugation. Butler (1990) along with LeBesco (2004) suggests that by encouraging fat women to simply ‘accept themselves’ it fails to challenge the socially constructed nature of fat and assumes that individuals are malleable, but society is not. While this is a form of empowerment, and it does help to redefine social constructions about the fat body, there is a larger social context that needs to continually be examined.

5.4 Foucauldian Approaches to the Body

The “lose 30 or gain 60” scene begs to be looked at through a Foucauldian lens. Foucault (1984) suggests that ideologies of the self-discipline are central to power in modernity. This notion of self-discipline is key to the scene about the appropriate weight for Jenna as a female character on television. “Lose 30” suggests that Jenna must discipline, reduce the size of, and recognize the commercial objectification her body. Jenna is bullied by Jack Donaghy, her white, male boss, who demands that she normalizes the size and shape of her body to meet societal standards of beauty. However, “…gain 60…” involves more weight gain; it promotes becoming hyper-fat and therefore hyper-visible (as discussed in Chapter Two). If Jenna were to gain the weight she would be resisting dominant discourses surrounding the body, but at the same time disciplining her body to meet one man’s patriarchal demands. Jack’s comment that ‘there is no room for anything in between’ reveals that by being hyper-visible to millions on television Jenna cannot remain in this “abject” stage. The abject body is not acceptable because it does not fit into the socially constructed binary of thin/fat. In Jenna’s case she would
move beyond ‘fat’ into the realm of hyper-fat, therefore becoming a source of comedic humor, such as an object of mockery.

Jenna being “required” to lose the weight correlates with numerous Foucauldian bodily concepts such as discipline, normalization, the gaze, and power, but it also raises the issue of surveillance. Jack (the symbol of patriarchy) monitors her progress through intense surveillance, but so does the audience of the television show. This surveillance underlines that hyper-visibility of the fat body and the importance of the (male) gaze on women’s bodies, in both public and private spheres. Jenna is effectively told that her career depends upon her body and there will be enormous scrutiny of her weight. Jack’s surveillance is underpinned by the assumption that the gaze of the audience needs to be an approving gaze – regardless of whether Jenna succumbs to the power, or resists it, or participates in both at the same time.

In Episode One Jenna tries to “trick” everyone into believing she has lost the weight when in fact she is dressing in a manner that makes her look thinner. From a Foucauldian standpoint, Jenna could be seen as engaging in resistance, by leaving her body weight unchanged. However, at the same she is participating in hegemonic standards of beauty by dressing to look thinner, and not embracing her body, its shape, and its curves. Jenna is trying to visually achieve – through trickery – the cultural ideals set for body types and she is in a position where people view themselves as failures if they do not meet that stereotype. This scene is reminiscent of Foucault’s (1986) suggestion that the failure to cultivate a particular body is seen as a failure of the soul.
In Episode Two, Jenna goes on the “Japanese Porn Star Diet” where she can only eat paper. Crash-dieting can be analyzed through numerous Foucauldian concepts including power and resistance, surveillance, and normativity. Starting with power and resistance, Jenna has found herself dieting in order to achieve, and very quickly, a thin body but not necessarily a thin healthy body. Through crash-diets and quick weight loss, the diet industry has created a chasm of products that offer quick weight loss with no discussion surrounding the safety of rapid weight loss. As discussed in Chapter Two, Foucault (1975) recognized the influence of discourses surrounding the disciplining of the body including “eating right” and “healthy lifestyle” verses “diet”. Foucault (1973) also emphasized that discussion surrounding the body has taken on a new medicalized discourse to be more appealing. However, regardless of what discourse people (or institutions) are using, it is still ultimately about self-discipline. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Stearns (2001) argues that “…interests in weight control and elimination of fat surpassed medical concerns over corpulence and health” (p. 47).

Bordo (1999) discusses eating disorders and the social constructed body as a continuous cycle of contradiction. Living in a consumer culture that encourages people to binge also pushes an agenda where we practice will-power, and failure to meet the social standards of will power means laziness and lack of caring for one’s own self. Dias (2010) examines pro-ana websites that display a need for less dichotomous thinking and more of a focus on the larger social constructions that created the “thin is in” culture. While Jenna is disciplining her body thin, she is also resisting healthy ways of losing weight. Postmodern feminism’s focus is on removing dichotomies of good/bad even when it comes to behaviors including eating disorders and crash diets. However, as
Jenna tries to lose the weight quickly, Jack tells her it is not fast enough and she must still go see Dr. Spaceman. Dr. Spaceman, upon Jenna’s question of what her “crazy surgical options” are, offers up a number of invasive and dangerous options including bone shaving and organ reduction. As indicated in Chapter Two, gender norms play a very significant role in shaping women’s bodies through processes that include mutilation, surgical practices, and self-starvation.

The phrase “me want food” can be interpreted a number of ways. It could equate to a lack of discipline if considering the forceful way Jenna says it, as if she has to have food right then, right there. With the audience watching (i.e. the surveillance of the audience), the phrase asks for a response and in this case the response is laughter and mockery, creating a character who fits the stereotype of a buffoon. The gaze of the audience applies when they comment on her size implying she “got big” and “big” is not the “normal” size for her. However, Foucauldian analysis would also highlight resistance on Jenna’s part to not remain thin, so that she is no longer disciplining her body into a normative hegemonic state. Jenna is adorned in a shiny costume on roller skates in the “me want food” skit, and has elicited a certain response from the audience – one of mockery. However, Jenna’s resistance is not complete - she is still trying to discipline her body into a certain size and shape at this point in the episode by going on a crash diet, and seeing Dr. Spaceman.

The next day after the “me want food” episode, Liz points out that women cannot just be real (in their bodies, shape, and size) in this country and mentions how it is like those Dove commercials never happened. This makes a searing point about how even
when certain institutions try to change the discourse surrounding the female body, they often fall short. The deep cultural roots surrounding the fat body, and just disciplining the body in general by education, juridical punishment and medicine, were discussed by Foucault (1975). However, disciplinary processes are not only practiced through institutions but perhaps even more so in popular culture. The popular culture industry promotes self-disciplining into normative classed, gendered, racialized and sexed bodies wherever possible. However, as Jack’s later emphasis on Jenna keeping her weight suggests, popular culture does absorb discourses which resist heteronormative standards of beauty if they provide profits (as the commercialization of Jenna as a ‘plus-size’ model demonstrates).

Once Jenna has realized that her audience (and possibly society) still respects her as fat when she sees the “Curvy and Proud” article in the magazine, Jenna decides to “keep the fat”. This scene is a reminder of the need for sociology to adopt an embodied approach, examining the attachment to the fat, and to the carnate, fleshy (and yet socially constructed) body. Kosut and Moore (2011) elaborate about this issue in detail:

Sociologists Simon J. Williams and Gillian Bendelow have called for an “embodied sociology”, one that rejects theorizing “about bodies in a largely disembodied, typically male way” in favor of a “new mode of theorizing from lived bodies.” Approaching the body as lived, rather than as an abstract object or social construct, allows us to begin to understand the subjectivities of the flesh, and how bodies themselves hold an unspoken knowledge (p. 2).
Jenna’s changed perspective reiterates the point that the body is something that should not be reduced to only a social construction; embodiment plays an important role in how people do their fatness and experience their fat bodies. Sociology, in addition to other disciplines, should continually examine both the carnality of the body as well as the social constructions that are inscribed on it. By never reducing the body to one or the other, disciplines can find deeper, more personal meanings in how people do their bodies and apply that meaning to larger social constructions.

It is essential to recognize that Jenna is not the only character who is affected by heteronormative forms of power and body shapes. The opening scene of Episode One demonstrates a class difference between Jack and Liz, and this class difference is reflected in their clothes, mannerisms and even the positions of their offices within 30 Rockefeller Center. Liz engages in a heteronormative discourse: she feels the need to point out not only that she and Floyd have broken up, but that she is over him and how she might even get married this year. While this particular scene does not directly address the fat female body it does address other gendered and ageism issues. Liz discusses getting married and Jack explicitly tells her she is more likely to be mauled at the zoo than get married due to her age. It is as if Liz has missed out on getting married according to Jack, who is treating her as abject, disgusting, unworthy of marriage because of her age. Liz however, by not being married, is practicing resistance to normative standards of the family in this country not only by not being married, but also by not having children either.
Jack, who has been married before but is not now, is still viewed as a strong, successful man. The power relations and social positions between genders remains a strong dichotomy when discussing marriage, success, and family. As discussed in Chapter Two, it is important to incorporate class and race into the analysis of the body. Jack’s class allows him, at least socially, to date women much younger than him, where Liz is often ostracized for not being married. His whiteness is unstated and unrecognized, even if it has helped him get into his current powerful position in NBC.

5.5 Cultural Sociology

Cultural sociology creates a space where popular culture can be discussed as producing and reproducing hegemonic normative standards surrounding the body, hierarchies, and at the same time resisting those norms creating a space for sociology. It provides an excellent foundation to study 30 Rock because it highlights the importance of culture – fat culture, the culture of thinness, patriarchal culture, capitalist culture and others – in relation to wider systems of power. For example, Liz points out a gender difference between men’s sizes and women’s sizes and being respected; she wonders why men can be big and be respected and women cannot. In American culture, men’s weights are not as hyper-visible or scrutinized as women’s. Social inequality is realized through the hyper-visibility of women’s bodies. Although in recent years, men’s magazines have increased production and advertisers have recognized the consumer market of men for men’s weight-loss products, it still pales in comparison to the market aimed at females.

Cultural sociology also examines the ways in which rituals of heteronormativity (especially the feminized role of the bride) is elevated and commodified in contemporary
culture. Liz points out while shopping for a wedding dress with Cerie that as a child, she never romanticized the social ideal of being a bride, and was more realistic about it creating a space for resistance surrounding men, women, and marriage. However, later on in the episode, Liz buys a big white, very expensive, wedding dress which can point towards accepting cultural norms surrounding marriage and weddings. Liz, while trying to resist cultural norms surrounding marriage and women, finds herself reproducing those norms by the end of the episode. This issue is beyond the scope of this research, but is an interesting footnote in the wider analysis of the gendered body.

Cultural sociology also examines the ways in which food and situations that surround food and eating reflect wider forms of social power. In this show, the cultural practice of eating is highly gendered. Liz is often shown consuming numerous types of (often unhealthy) foods throughout the episodes. Jack, the VP of the Television and Microwave Division at NBC, and owned by GE, is usually placed in patriarchal positions where he expects women to conform and to obey his commands. However, even Jack as a symbol of conformist capitalist culture somewhat resists its prescriptions. He refuses to disclose his medical condition (he has suffered a heart attack) to his employer and keeps it a secret from many people. The public/private divide is a fluid dynamic which operates here: Jack makes his condition known publicly to some people, but resists disclosure to others.

Devon Banks is a tall, thin white man who has a huge steak on his plate at the restaurant with Don Geiss when Jack shows up. Cultural sociology opens this scene up for analysis. For instance, cultural sociology examines the normalization of men eating red meat, (not to mention the sexualization of meat), the links between power and cultural
capital (such as eating habits) in the business world. Yet Devon still represents the hegemonic standard of white male health and thinness. Jack on the other hand, is shorter, heavier and has just suffered a heart attack. He can no longer consume such foods. He also knows he is under a medical gaze as he will have to eventually go in for a checkup. His position fits in a medicalized discourse surrounding food and health. While socially food has been constructed as a woman’s body’s enemy, food in this instance is also Jack’s enemy.

There are numerous episodes and scenes in 30 Rock that surround food, its meanings, and explore relationships between characters and their food choices and eating habits, including the opening scene of Episode Two where Jack asks Liz to let him watch her eat (his) steak. While these episodes do focus on the female body, they also show some production of the male body as well, reversing certain social orders. Liz is able, willing, and does in fact consume the entire steak that Jack presents to her at the beginning of Episode Two. However, Jack, a man, is unable to participate in hegemonic masculine behavior such as business-like settings that contain red meat.

Cultural sociology also engages with the social expectations associated with women’s bodies. Jenna was given two options, to lose weight and go back to an “acceptable” standard of beauty, or to gain more weight, which would further resist cultural norms. Socially, and culturally, the body is supposed to be disciplined, regimented, not waiver from normative standards, and Jenna is resisting all of those things with the weight gain, but is convinced to go see a doctor about losing the weight, which she does, only to resist again losing and the weight and deciding to keep the fat. Jenna’s identity as an actress puts her in an upper class category however with her weight
gain she feared (as did others) that she would become unpopular, lose cultural capital and
become less beautiful in the eyes of her audience. Such cultural standards surrounding the
body are a reality for women. Fat women are looked down upon and thin women are
revered.

However, once Jenna realized she is just as popular (if not more) as a fat woman
and decides to “keep” the fat, Liz points out that Jenna shouldn’t do it in order to remain
popular but to prove a point to the world. Liz recognizes that Jenna’s celebrity status
would allow her to be fat, talented, and prove to the world that fat women are just as
talented and desirable as thin women. This scene demonstrates the hierarchy of social
inequality that is in place between thin and fat women. Thin women are automatically
placed at the top of the social hierarchy and described with adjectives such as talented,
pretty, and stable, strong willed, healthy, and desirable among other things. It is
important to recognize not only that thin women are deemed more socially acceptable,
but that they are culturally deemed to be “better” than fat women (whose body size is
often assumed to reflect personal failure). Thus thin women are conforming to a cultural
ideal which is reproducing hegemonic and heteronormative standards of beauty and the
body, while fat bodies transgress these boundaries.

The culture of television is an example of unacknowledged whiteness. It is a
medium that seems to be ‘color blind’, but which actually is dominated by white people.
There have been some changes in the ways in which television represents fat women in
recent years – particularly fat women of color. The presence of fat African American
women on television (such as Mo’Nique) in some ways creates a form of hyper-visibility;
their bodies are particularly noticeable given the anorexic (and raced) standards of Hollywood. But those whose body size is less extreme than others (including the racialized character Angie) nevertheless experience pressure to conform to smaller body types. While a detailed description of Angie’s experiences is outside the realm of this thesis, it is important to recognize that her racialized fat body is consistent throughout the series. This consistency in embodiment – outside the four episodes being carefully analyzed in this research – deserves fuller explanation in another study.

Reflecting on this phenomenon, Jenna Maroney commented in Episode Four of Season Two that in television one has to be either Mo’Nique fat or Terry Hatcher thin. Maroney’s comments on 30 Rock implicitly identify power dynamics associated with gender and race in the television, where larger black women are portrayed and seemingly “accepted” within the industry, while white women are pressured to remain ultra-thin. Being labeled fat is a joke in popular culture when a white woman such as Jenna experiences it. But black cultural standards about the body are undoubtedly different, and include the recognition that fat women are beautiful women. Nevertheless, black women still face objectification of their bodies: when a black woman loses weight as Maroney or Hudson or did, discourses about their attractive ‘new’ bodies circulate. What often goes unnoticed is that underlying Hollywood’s assumed connection of the thin body with beauty and attractiveness.
5.6 Conclusion

As this discussion of *30 Rock* demonstrates, the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Two (a combination of fat studies, the social construction of the body, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology), is a particularly useful way of analyzing popular culture. This chapter has highlighted key elements of hegemonic discourses about fatness, the fat female body, and the thin body in particular. By combining multiple theoretical approaches, a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of discourses about the fat body has emerged. These analyses suggest that television and popular culture have never really accepted, let alone embraced, fatness. Television shows have a long history of subjugating fat people and in particular, fat women. Fat characters have historically been portrayed as having a lack of self-control; or being over-consuming, powerless, or dominated by others. Comedies have routinely made fun of weight gain. Another common cultural discourse asserts a connection between fatness and being unhealthy – one that has been consistently challenged by fat advocates. Other cultural discourses which are commonly produced and reproduced in television include the idealization of weight loss and the assumed rewards of weight loss. The next chapter, the Conclusion, will discuss these findings and the implications of this study for a sociological analysis of the body.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This research has demonstrated the need to recognize the influence of popular
culture on the body, the discussions surrounding it, and the reinforcements and challenges
it produces and reproduces. In order to understand power and resistance through and
within the body, it is important to conduct studies about the ways in which women –
collectively, individually and culturally – engage in and resist dominant cultural and
social discourses and practices of the body. By examining the ways in which this
dynamic is played out on a major pop culture medium, a sociological study can explore
vital issues of theoretical approaches. By using four critical theoretical frameworks: fat
studies, social constructionism, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural
sociology, this research has been able to critically analyze the production and
reproduction of fat women’s bodies in a specific popular culture medium – television –
and a specific popular show – 30 Rock. Exploring the body in the television show 30
Rock was important, since the show is a pop culture phenomenon in its own right. As the
literature review demonstrated, the discourses about the body used in this show reflect
and reproduce wider social approaches towards the fat body.
6.2 Chapter Review

The chapters in this thesis explored collectively outlined the problem being studied, discussed the relevant literature, outlined a particular methodology for studying the problem, and applied four relevant theoretical approaches to the discursive production and reproduction of the fat body in 30 Rock.

Initially, the topic was outlined – the discursive production and reproduction of fatness, and the fat female body within 30 Rock. The research problem, along with key and the secondary research question, were discussed. The significance of the topic – both in terms of the broad scholarship around fatness and the body, and also the significance of this particular television series within contemporary popular culture – was introduced. Also discussed was the methodology for data analysis, discourse analysis, which is commonly used in cultural sociology. A number of definitions of key terms such as fatness, fat studies, fat phobia, discourse analysis, power and resistance, surveillance, the gaze, normativity, embodiment, hyper-visibility, abjection, and performativity were also provided.

Next, the four theoretical frameworks that were applied to the episodes of 30 Rock and the literature review included a multitude of scholars who have used such framework to examine the body. Fat studies as an emerging discipline focuses on changing the dominant discourses surrounding the fat body, specifically by breaking down socially constructed binaries of thin/fat, good/bad, acceptable/unacceptable, and so on. Fat studies aims to change medicalized discourse and the medical gaze on the body surrounding fat and fatness, creating a space of acceptance and health and every size.
Social constructionism approaches the fat body as experiencing oppression based on the social value and appropriateness assigned to the body. Fat bodies experience higher rates of oppression and marginalization due to the social constructions surrounding fatness. Part of the ‘cult of thinness’ (Hesse-Biber, 2006) is to continue to assign value to those who meet hegemonic standards of beauty, and ostracize those who do not, labeling them failures, weak-willed, and blaming them, as individuals, for their fatness. Social constructionists expose the limitations of such an individualist focus by highlighting and challenging the wider forms of power which contribute to such discourses. However, while recognition that the body is socially inscribed upon through social constructions, some theorists (Turner, 1984, Williams and Bendelow, 1999) expresses the importance reducing the body simply to “a social construction”, but also recognizing that is it biological, carnal, and fleshy as well. Social constructionism also examines how dominant discourses impact how people do their fatness, and how they feel about their bodies, putting an emphasis on the embodiment aspect and wanting to focus on the embodied process of living in a fat body.

Foucauldian approaches to the body take Foucault’s key concepts including power and resistance, the gaze, normativity, and surveillance and apply them to the power structures, social constructions, carnal, and cultural expectations of the body. One of the central insights of Foucauldian approaches is that where there is power there is resistance (Foucault, 1984). Foucauldian approaches in this research allowed for a critical analysis of how the characters (specifically Jenna) engage in power and resistance, often simultaneously, against a backdrop of oppressive, cultural standards of beauty. Through Jenna’s experiences and examining how she embodied her fatness,
Foucauldian concepts paved a way for discussion surrounding how her actions and reactions were shaped by surveillance of dominant powers and discourses, as well as the medicalized gaze, and normative standards around the body. Power is displayed, resisted, and lived through the body. *30 Rock* proved to be a valuable data source, and became a complex and unique piece of popular culture to analyze, revealing that women do engage simultaneously in power and resistance (often for very different reasons). Of course, some of the social pressures stem from certain kinds of gazes, discourses, surveillance, and the power of normativity and hegemonic standards of beauty.

The literature review also suggested that cultural sociology presented a new avenue for research, opening the way for discussions surrounding gender, race, class, and disability. With the increase in the mass media and the growth of popular culture, cultural sociology has become central to analyzing new forms of social inequality. It is particularly useful in analyzing various forms of culture – fat culture, the culture of thinness, patriarchal culture, capitalist culture and other cultures, and was able to offer unique insights in analyzing *30 Rock*. The medium of television has increased in growth and accessibility and the discipline of cultural sociology suggests that it is necessary to study cultural influences on human behavior but also cultural responses to human behavior; it is not only about looking at the popular culture, but looking at what the popular culture is doing. Hirsh (1977) recognized early on that sociology should be involved as popular culture addresses and responds to culture and also influences culture at a number of levels.
The next part of the research described the methodology used in the analysis of the application of body theory and fat studies to *30 Rock*. The chapter explained why a qualitative approach was adopted. A qualitative approach proves to be useful in the close contextual examination and application of analytical concepts and appropriate theories. A “conceptual context” outlines the range of theoretical and practical issues which affect the process of data analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1984). The use of discourse analysis was also explained. Discourse analysis is a useful methodological tool for studies of popular culture. The issue of inter-coder reliability was discussed. The use of discourse analysis was explained and its appropriateness in analyzing *30 Rock* was discussed. This study was conducted to identify patterns surrounding discourses about women’s bodies and the social construction of the fat female body, as well as examine how *30 Rock* as a show produces and reproduces the fat female body.

The purpose of the next section was to describe the data that will be analyzed in the thesis. While *30 Rock* is not the first television show to address body image, it does act as a popular, successful television show and deserves a detailed, multi-dimensional analysis, combining fat studies, the social construction of the body, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology. A summary of every episode was provided, with particular emphasis on the scenes that involve fatness. It provided a foundation for a deep, critical engagement with the material later in the research, utilizing a theoretical framework which combines fat studies, the social construction of the body, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology highlights certain key components of the social construction of the fat female body: discipline, power and resistance, surveillance, the gaze, abjection, hyper-visibility, cultural capital,
normalization, and the medicalization of the obesity and fatness. The content, obviously, relates to the issue of fatness, but it also involves far more than that. The episodes reveal numerous scenarios that address becoming fat, the shape and look of men’s and women’s bodies, the surveillance of women’s bodies (both by men and women), the fat body as a source of mockery and buffoonery, as well as raising issues associated with class, consumption.

Chapter Five provided a critical analysis of the described data discussed in Chapter Four. Using the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Two (a combination of fat studies, the social construction of the body, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology), the chapter highlighted the key elements of 30 Rock’s discourse on fatness, and the fat female body in particular. The conceptual and analytical framework derived from these theoretical approaches suggests that the following areas should be closely examined: the social construction of the fat female body, discipline, power and resistance, surveillance, the gaze, abjection, hyper-visibility, normalization, and the medicalization of the obesity and fatness. This research has emphasized the body as carnal and fleshy, but also socially constructed; that social construction has a long and deep cultural social history, and its power is particularly apparent with regard to the devaluation of the fat female body. By combining multiple theoretical approaches, a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of discourses about the fat body has emerged. These analyses suggest that television and popular culture have never really accepted, let alone embraced, fatness. Television shows have a long history of subjugating fat people and in particular, fat women. Fat characters have historically been portrayed as having a lack of self-control; or being over-consuming, powerless, or
dominated by others. Comedies have routinely made fun of weight gain. Another common cultural discourse asserts a connection between fatness and being unhealthy – one that has been consistently challenged by fat advocates. Other cultural discourses which are commonly produced and reproduced in television include the idealization of weight loss and the assumed rewards of weight loss.

6.3 Findings

30 Rock as a popular and possible influential television show built four episodes of Season Two around the fat body. Through close and careful analysis using four theoretical frameworks – fat studies, social constructionism, Foucauldian approaches to the body, cultural sociology – it was discovered that while the show may have attempted to address fat, doing fatness, and the fat body, it ultimately failed to critically address and reevaluate the dominate discourse surrounding the fat female body. While the narrative took the audience on a journey into the world of fatness, and sometimes seemed to challenge the stereotypes surrounding the fat body, the conclusion of the topic was a normalized and thin female body. Jenna had lost all her weight by the beginning of Episode Four.

Individual episodes each had examples of discourses around the fat body that challenged some dominant discourses about the fat female body. For example, when Jenna decides to keep the fat and opt out of surgical options, even after being told she needed to address her fatness, she resists engaging in surgical options. Nevertheless, she states at the beginning of Episode Four that she lost all the weight because of dominant
beauty standards. Liz constantly comments on Jenna’s new look – and even though she is supportive of Jenna’s weight gain – her comments still represent the constant surveillance of women’s bodies. Liz comments that she disagrees with American’s obsession with body image, but her stance is treated as an individual quirk, rather than a broader challenge by many women to unattainable body shapes. However, her comments are individualized through Jenna’s response – where she tells Liz that she needs to stop trying to run other people’s lives.

The fat acceptance movement may view this type of dialogue, in at least the first three episodes, as creating a space for discussing the fat body and, even if minimally, breaking down certain dominant discourses surrounding the fat body. While the show still reverts to certain binaries surrounding the fat body, fatness, and fat as an identity, it also resists other dichotomies and allows for a more complex discussion about how people (specifically Jenna) do their fatness, their reasons for becoming, or remaining fat, as well as reasons for losing weight. This expresses an important point that fat studies and the fat acceptance movement pushes for: recognition of individuals reasons for becoming fat, remaining fat, or losing weight, while at the same time recognizing the impact that social constructions have on people’s decisions as well. It is important, as stated by the movement, to not reduce fatness to an individual approach (also carnal), or only a social constructionist approach.

Foucauldian approaches recognize how influential power is on people, their lives, and their decisions. Foucault once said,
When I think of the mechanics of power, I think of its capillary form of existence, of the extent to which power seeps into the very grain of individuals, reaches right into their bodies, permeates their gestures, their posture, what they say, how they learn to live and work with other people (Diamond and Quimby, 1988, p. 6).

While Jenna, Liz, and *30 Rock* as a piece of influential popular culture may have wanted to more critically address the issue of fatness, there could be numerous reasons as to why they did not or could not. Regardless, the show made space for a discussion about power, and resistance, embodiment, surveillance, the fat female body, as well as medicalized and patriarchal gazes. The analysis of Foucauldian approaches to the body helped to prove the importance of viewing power as fluid, permeating, and something that is typically accompanied with resistance. While in the end the show may have reverted back to a hegemonic thin body, it is still very important to recognize the impact the three episodes could have on dominant discourse, power and resistance, and ways of thinking about the fat female body. Furthermore, implications are discussed in the next section of this thesis.

Culturally, especially as popular as the show is, *30 Rock* is addressing multiple issues, resisting and reproducing certain norms surrounding the body, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. The show accepts that identities are complex, and allows a space for the embodiment of certain characters to be explored. While the forth episode has resorted to Jenna losing all the weight, and citing dominant cultural standards as reasons for doing so, individually the episodes create an important dialogue about the fat female body. Even though as a whole the show fails to continue to discussion, it may just be
enough of a discussion to make an impact on the deconstruction of social constructions around fatness, the fat female body, surveillance of women’s bodies, and the medicalized gaze on bodies, as well as the medicalization of fat, being fat, and fatness.

It is important to also argue that while Jenna was initially given the option to become hyper thin (again) or become hyper fat, because there is no place in television in between, this motions to the fact that Jenna, while labeled “fat”, could actually be a body of average size. After all, Jenna is not hyper-thin or hyper-fat, pointing to an “in between”. She has a figure; she has fat rolls, but may not be labeled “obese” medically, but also does not fit into western hegemonic standards of what “thin” means either. She is not shown wolfing down obscene amounts of food, pointing towards a resistance of fat as unhealthy, which is one of the main goals of the fat acceptance movement. Jenna is not shown as gross, unclean, or disheveled throughout the three episodes, resisting yet another important social construction that fat people are dirty, and unclean. In addition to this, friends of Jenna, especially Liz are not shown as being “fat phobic”. However, the writers and even Jack could be viewed as being fat phobic due to their immediate mockery, and demands that she change her body. So while Liz accepts Jenna’s weight gain, Jenna allows others to continuously surveillance her body, and discipline it as well. This thesis finds that while a person may find acceptance from others, social and cultural norms surrounding the body often dominate one’s decisions. It is virtually impossible to forget dominant discourses surrounding the body and fully embrace difference as an individual. While Jenna comes to accept and actually like her fat (due to a social confirmation that she is “curvy and proud”), she admits she “gets off” on the attention. This helps to prove the motivations of individuals, and the importance of their embodied
experiences, while at the same time recognizing the larger social constructs at play because she still ultimately loses the weight, again citing hegemonic norms for bodies as her reasons for doing so.

While at least addressing and acknowledging the fat body, *30 Rock* does fail to address Jack Donaghy’s demands on Jenna’s body. He is never truly challenged as the patriarchal figure who is demanding Jenna discipline’s her body this way or that, and his own weight is never acknowledged, surveilled, or scrutinized. It could be argued that the show creates a dichotomy of male/female, accepted/unaccepted, power/submission due to the lack of discussion surrounding men’s bodies on the show, specifically regarding weight. Even though there is mention and discussion surrounding Jack’s heart-attack, through his own personal surveillance and bodily discipline, as well as Devon Bank’s surveillance on Jack’s body and pushing for Jack to resist medicalized discourse surrounding health post-heart-attack, the discussion is not directly about his weight.

*30 Rock* reveals on numerous levels the complexities about people, their identities, their decisions, and their embodiment. The show demonstrates that the decisions people make can be a simple carnal decision, as much as a decision can be based on social and cultural norms. The show wanted to address the surveillance of fat woman in American society, and while the show addressed, typically through sarcasm and mockery, certain bodily disciplines such as crash dieting and surgery, it ultimately reinforced hegemonic, patriarchal standards. While the first three episodes revolved around the question of fat acceptance, Jenna ultimately loses the weight and *30 Rock* it reverts to hegemonic and heteronormative standards of beauty and the fat body.
6.4 Implications

*30 Rock* may want to focus on and discuss certain issues such as fatness, and while it may, at times, be engaging in a very important dialogue with society about fatness, currently it still tends to oversimplify subjects and lacks in critical engagement with dominant discourses surrounding the fat body. This study reveals that each episode, and certain characters participates in power and resistance, but ultimately the four episodes as a whole do not imply that much is changing surrounding the fat body, social constructions, and hegemonic norms surrounding the fat body and how it is produced and reproduced.

It is important to recognize however that the fat body is *being* discussed. Even if the discussion begins to challenge certain standard of beauty that has been social constructed, but ultimately fails, it is still a discussion. Even small discussions that approach the fat body from a less socially constructed approach can have an impact on the discourse. The idea that a very popular culture phenomenon is discussing the fat body, over a period of four episodes, and allowing for multiple embodied approaches to be discussed is considered a type of resistance for the television show. The implications for the breakdown of the socially constructed fat body becomes a reality, the carnality of the body is recognized in certain episodes, power and resistance become part of the dialogue, and cultural sociology can find space to engage in the analysis of the phenomenon. While it seems as though not much has changed on television based on this study (at least referring to the episodes as a whole), this study also reveals that at least a space (even if a small one) has been created to discuss the fat body. Even though dominant discourses surrounding the body and images on television still remain
normative, and larger social forces are constantly practicing their power over certain images as well as discussion, resistance is still there. As indicated, the current research does not show if popular culture is engaging in a discussion about the fat body, verses just indicating an issue may be there, and this study indicates that 30 Rock is in fact addressing the issue of the social constructed fat body. However, overall the discussion still falls short in its critical analysis and engagement with dominant discourses by reverting back to hegemonic images and discussions surrounding the fat body.

The implications of this study show that while popular culture is still struggling with challenging (and engaging critically with) dominant discourses, it is finding a place to resist certain socially constructed standards that have been inscribed upon the fat body. These discussions are still a form of resistance that can prove to be vital and beneficial when deconstructing normative beauty standards, opening up space for fat women, and breaking down certain discourses that encourage measures (simple and extreme) of bodily discipline on the female body. It has become apparent that over time shows like 30 Rock want to dissolve certain stereotypes, gestures, and discussions surrounding the fat body and that is a type of progression. Even at the smallest level, resistance is still just that against systems of power.

As scholars began to recognize the importance of studying the body, Turner (1984) argued that sociology as a discipline had been ignoring “the most obvious fact of human existence”, the body. Turner’s work draws extensively on Foucault’s works. Turner (1984) argues that social constructionism tends to downplay the phenomenological, lived experiences of the body. Along with this, sociology must
engage more effectively with the nature/nurture question. He recommends more applied, ethnographic research on the body which utilizes a social constructionist frame. Turner (1984) used Foucault’s (1975) notions of discipline and governmentality to describe the relationship between individual bodies and the state. “Governmentality ultimately refers to the ways in which bodies are produced, cultivated, and disciplined” (Turner, 1984, 2008, p. 3). Recognizing that the social sciences needed to focus on the body, Turner encouraged incorporating lived and embodied experiences in research and methodology. This research has provided more evidence of the need for sociology to focus on the power of the body and the effect of the body on power. As Kosut and Moore (2011, p. 2) argue, the body “is the ultimate location of the division in sociology between structure and agency.” That is, the discipline of sociology must recognize the centrality of the body within its central concerns: power, inequality, social stratification, identity, and the social construction of raced, classed, gendered, disabled and fat bodies.

6.5 Limitations

No study is without limitations. The limitations of this thesis include the focus on four episodes, rather than the entire history of 30 Rock. Another limitation is that the study was limited to one popular television show- 30 Rock – and it cannot be assumed that the findings apply to other shows, or to the broader field of popular culture. Another limitation was that the thesis did not include interviews with the writers, producers or stars of the show – and such interviews may have provided additional insights into their intentions around the portrayal of the fat body. Nevertheless, the study has demonstrated
that focusing on these four episodes is a useful endeavor because of its relevance to wider discourses of fatness – both in popular culture and in the academic literature on fatness.

6.6 Conclusion

Overall, popular culture (in particular *30 Rock*) seems to be trying to engage in new discourse surrounding the fat body and challenge certain normative standards. However, it still finds itself engaging in oversimplified dialogue that reverts back to hegemonic and socially constructed beauty standards inscribed upon the body, ultimately labeling the fat abject, unwanted, and unworthy of righteous exposure within a larger social context. This study implies *30 Rock* is at the very least engaging in a dialogue that tries to challenge hegemonic standards of beauty surrounding the fat body and may be opening avenues of discussion for other popular culture mediums to start a discussion around the fat body – specifically looking at non-normative bodies. This conclusion also addresses limitations of the study. Overall, the thesis has critically reviewed literature on fat studies, social constructionism, Foucauldian approaches to the body, and cultural sociology and through discourse analysis applied those theoretical frameworks to the first four episodes of Season Two of the television show *30 Rock*. This thesis has revealed that while individual episodes of *30 Rock* may challenge dominant discourses surrounding the fat body, and begin to deconstruct certain socially constructed norms around the fat body, overall it ultimately fails as a whole to engage in critical pro-fat discourse and resist the hegemonic norms that shape images, characters, and dialogue on television.
References


