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*THE CURVY GIRL HANDBOOK* VS. THE INDUSTRY  
A UNIQUE BODY IMAGE IN A ONE-TRACK BUSINESS

by

JESSICA WISE

Under the Direction of Patricia Davis, PhD

ABSTRACT

Two years ago, I expanded my growing blog, *The Curvy Girl Handbook*, into a detailed, hard copy book. As I complete my education, I have yet to present my book for a publisher or consumer. It has been workshopped, revisited, and industry researched. This thesis shows the need for publishers to open their doors to more black female authors.

My study explores the impact of whitewashing in the publishing industry for fitness-related works for women. Following a literature review of the historic portrayals of the curvy figure and the black female body, I employ a quick overview of the publishing industry as well as a textual analysis of the existing works in today's fitness media through the intersectional feminist lens. The fitness industry is dominated by slender, fit white women, without much attention to other body types, races, and occasionally socioeconomic statuses. This project moves with the intent to expound on racial implications that may create obstacles for publishing my kind of work, as well as the content that is combating them.

INDEX WORDS: curvy, fitness media, racial representation, inclusion

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JESSICA WISE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2018

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2018

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A UNIQUE BODY IMAGE IN A ONE-TRACK BUSINESS

By

JESSICA WISE

Committee Chair: Patricia Davis

Committee: Carrie Freeman

Yuki Fujioka

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

*This initial review was conducted with the intention of learning about the literary world around fitness, particularly when it comes to women who deviate from the ideal body type. In order for a book to sell successfully, an author must be knowledgeable of the other works that make up its industry. The fitness world is currently booming with literature written by fitness gurus and celebrities, so I have to show that my book can measure up just as well but prove it is unique at the same time. In this literature review, I analyze the scholarship around body image that influences thematic elements in fitness and cookbooks written over the last decade. By reviewing history against work already in circulation, I learned that my book holds some similarities such as the use of visuals and promoting choice and body confidence, but it differs in the target age demographic, lack of celebrity status, and the body type it represents--curvy, but not plus-sized.*

“Just forget about the dress. We can tell everybody that Carmen's Puerto Rican. And it never occurred to you she might be built differently. Or that, unlike you and your daughter, *she has an ass* that the tailor didn't have enough bolts of material to cover, or better yet, just tell everyone there is no Carmen. Carmen doesn't exist!”

--America Ferrera as Carmen,  
*The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*  
film adaptation, 2005

The embarrassment and exclusion felt by Carmen after trying on an unforgiving bridesmaid dress in the young women's film *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* is not so fictional for curvaceous women in everyday life. Thirteen years later in 2018, the fashion and media industries are continuing to ignore curvy young women and women of color. Having an



extremely personal connection with this issue, I chose to create the exposure that was lacking, and to find out why this was an issue to begin with. About this time two years ago, I chose to use an undergrad senior project to further what I hope to be the jumpstart of my mainstream career as an author and media figure. I expanded my fitness blog, not even two years old at the time, into a manuscript with the intent for publishing. This blog and this book share the name *The Curvy Girl Handbook*. With the blog reaching over 1,300 followers and the manuscript now complete and edited, my goal in pursuing a graduate degree in Mass Communications is to gain the tools needed to push my work towards mainstream publishing. In my final project to complete my graduate education, I am beginning to see that there are extensive steps involved in preparing a manuscript for publication. First, I analyze related scholarly work as a backdrop for the mainstream fitness works and the publishers who distribute them. From there, I conduct a textual analysis to see what this means for young black women who want to publish within the fitness genre.

Like Carmen in my example above, I am coming into an industry that has not yet come full circle with the fact that different body types have different needs when it comes to getting fit. I am a curvaceous black woman, and America Ferrera (Carmen) is a short curvaceous Latina. Jillian Michaels cannot promise us the same results as a slender white woman, because we are simply not built the same. We have to target different muscles, some more than others.

I analyze the academic works that examine these politics of the female body--how body type, race, and age negotiate the way we see fitness today. This presents a viable platform for my book going forward. Following an analysis of scholarly works regarding female body politics and its relation to the fitness publishing world, I briefly discuss how *The Curvy Girl Handbook* negotiates the female body in relation to celebrity and expert-written fitness books that are

selling nationwide by examining these books themselves, along with the digital explosion of fitness for women.

I am a writer, but first, I am a black woman. The black female presence in the fitness industry is not equal to that of our white counterparts. Being that curves are most often attributed to black women, it is imperative that I first examine the history of black female body image preceding the fitness media age. This allows for a clearer perspective on the division that exists. Second, a representative of my age in this industry is vital. Of all the best-selling authors I examine I am not only the youngest, but I also do not have the responsibility of a spouse or family. I am free to focus on myself. I am “getting millennial” with my research. Providing this strong academic foundation propels my book’s efforts to teach women in the age 18-25 demographic how they can incorporate fitness into their busy, ever-changing lives. While some of these authors are curvy women, the curvy I represent is different and needs a seat at the table. The intent behind the project is to unearth concrete evidence that supports the work I have done, thus making it stronger when presenting it later.

I also examine how my work and the works of women in mainstream and academic publishing speak for black women in an industry that does not include them either. By exploring this from both sides of the industry, I identify the following:

1. The major players: Black female writers and their presence (or lack thereof) in fitness print media over the last 10 years.
2. The politics around women’s bodies and race.
3. How the historic implications around the race and body politics affect black female presence in fitness print media.

## 1.1 Curves in Publishing and Academia: Why This Matters

First, one must take a brief look at the publishing industry. Since 2017, print publishing industry has increased its sales to over 311 million units per quarter. Adult nonfiction is taking the lead with 131 million units sold (NPD Book Quarterly) and a gross of 338.9 million dollars since 2016 (Association of American Publishers). A large portion of this is due to the explosion of fitness media. Forbes eyes the consumer reports in fitness media, and calls it a pleasantly “disruptive” brand that is youthful and ever-progressing culture (Forbes.com). Overall, the health and wellness industry holds a market value of 168.04 million dollars (Statista.com). In print media, the best sellers tend to be men or white and Southeast Asian writers. Black and Hispanic women are almost non-existent on these lists. While improvement for general racial diversity is a longtime coming, there is promise for evolution as far as my focus on black women. Black female author J.J. Smith holds two spots on the *New York Times* best seller lists for health books with *Green Smoothies for Life* (#7) and *10-Day Green Smoothie Cleanse* (#9). She is the only woman on the list besides white *Whole30* cookbook writer Melissa Hartwig (NYTimes.com). *People* leaves out women of color completely in their list of top health and wellness books for 2017 (People.com). This lack of recognition begs the question: Does racial representation in fitness print media reflect in its industry presence and recognition?

This brief literature review covers the history of the curvy and black female body, and how it has been negotiated in a white world. Scholars have been examining women and body image since the Second Wave feminist movement. The works of Sarah Baird (2015), J. Robyn Goodman, and Kim Walsh-Childers (2004) prove the need for young women of all body types to gain body confidence. And this has a lot to do with body image perpetuated by the media to young women, from breast size to retail mannequin representation. Art history and sociology

scholars Enid Schildkrout (2008) and Barbara Thompson (2008) date this idealization back to the European tourist traffic through Congo in the 19th Century and the fetishization of the black female body under the white man's gaze. Schildkrout's essay "*Les Parisiens d'Afrique: Mangbetu Women as Works of Art*" considers the African female body in the face of Congo's excavation and tourist explosion by Europe. Their observations on the Mangbetu women are examined here.:

"She embodies the idealized image of African beauty, yet at the same time captures the ambivalence of the colonial attitude to African women. In description after description, the African woman is beautiful, yet 'deformed;' she comes from a wild place, yet she is not part of nature, she is a work of art and a product of civilization" (Schildkrout 71).

Barbara Thompson also notes the historic spectacling at black women in "The African Female Body in the Cultural Imagination." This essay focuses on how the European other-ing of the African female body. By using everyday women and property of Africa's many excavated communities, the African female body has historically been presented to the Western world as some kind of object of spectacle. One subject of this essay is the horror endured by Sartjie "Sarah" Baartman, also known in Europe as the "Hottentot Venus" (Thompson 27). These ghosts of colonies past show the historical treatment of black women for their body types--both consumed as seductive and aesthetically pleasing to the eye, but condemned as some kind of Jezebel in Eurocentric society. It is as if the curvaceous figure of the African woman is considered inhuman. These deeply rooted body politics predispose curvaceous black women in today's society to be unequal once again.

In a new era where the curvy figure is becoming repopularized, Kamille Gentles-Peart (2016) reconsiders this from the Caribbean perspective. Through firsthand personal accounts, Gentle-Peart delves into the conversation on body image in the English-speaking Caribbean diaspora. One account of a Jamaican immigrant woman, who began her time in America during graduate school, noted how her petite frame made her the butt of jokes from her curvaceous family members and from black Americans alike. On the other hand, her accent made her “exotic” to her white counterparts. Because of these attributes, she received less pushback than her fellow black women when pursuing her studies. “It created the perception that I was less aggressive, less confrontational, less threatening, all issues that I witness many bigger women in my community contending with when engaging with white American spaces, such as academia,” she says. “In my experience, black women with bigger bodies are not only hypervisible in academia, but they are also marginalized” (Gentles-Peart 2). How women of Caribbean descent negotiate, perpetuate, and are affected by the curvaceous beauty standard of the Caribbean against the white slender standard of United States and Europe continues to weigh on these women as they are marginalized and romanticized at the same time. Black women in America face these same issues in another arm of this diaspora.

Though a curvy derriere currently rules the trends, the female breasts have and continue to reign supreme in the making of an idealized body. In 2004, J. Robyn Goodman and Kim Walsh Childers conducted a focus group study of college women negotiating media representation when it comes to these top-heavy curves. While the writers conceded their research was “limited because [they] only used only white mass communication majors” (Goodman & Childers 669), this still offers some perspective from women who are learned in media and its techniques. Within this focus group exists an unconscious comparison between

themselves and the women in the media, desiring the coveted C-cup of the Victoria's Secret models. "Although the women said they wanted their breasts to be in proportion to their bodies, their body ideal did seem to match the media's 36-24-36 ideal" (Goodman & Childers 662). Thirty-six-inch bust, twenty-four-inch waist, and thirty-six-inch hips, are the dream measurements for the women in this study, though this is not proportionate at all. This contradiction exposes how the media indeed perpetuates young women's views on their bodies, particularly when it comes to curvy parts of the body.

The subjects then go on to negotiate these stereotypes, attempting to debunk this notion by claiming to know whose breasts are real and whose are fake. They dismiss ultra top heavy women such as Pamela Anderson and praise Cameron Diaz, yet their own argument can be disproven by Tyra Banks, at the time modeling for Victoria's Secret (Goodman & Childers 663). Banks is the exception to their judgment as a proportional and naturally top heavy woman. In spite of these contradictions, they still admit they would consider plastic surgery on their breasts if they had the funds to do so. This blurs the lines of media influence--the women claim to be aware of the media tricks when depicting women's breasts, but they also would participate in the scam in spite of "the majority of the women agree[ing] that the media influences women." This shows the problematic commodifying of the curvy figure at the hands of the media, and furthermore the problematic white gaze. Being that Tyra Banks is the only curvaceous black model in this example and happens to have natural assets, it makes me question why Goodman and Childers' subjects were so quick to assume that she too was outrageously endowed. Indeed, it is her white counterparts who are moving to gain a shape more similar to hers.

By commodifying the female breasts, women are constantly placed under the male gaze. And this affects both women who are naturally endowed and women who wish they had a little

more to work with. Goodman and Childers suggest that women may “internalize the male view into their self-concept” (Goodman & Childers 665). In other words, constantly being subjected to the male perspective both in the media’s cleavage-filled portrayals and the everyday man’s vocal appeal to larger breasts pushes women to desire these idealized hourglass figures, and they would go to great lengths to achieve it. My book’s target market experiences this firsthand. The contradictory trend excludes hippy girls from fashion but encourages artificial creation of their figures in the media, placing bottom heavy women in the same danger zone as top heavy women.

Sarah Baird (2015) seeks to combat the “36-24-36” proportion standard. And she does so in a method that follows the age of new media, a method *The Curvy Girl Handbook* works through as well. Baird has suggested that the male gaze mentioned years ago by Goodman and Childers (2004) has not only failed to improve, but worsened. “[T]he representation of the media still focuses on one particular body size” (Baird 15), that body size being the ultra thin, disproportionately curvy woman. Baird looks to online activism to see how women today are rejecting this limiting and harmful notion, showing the power of social media in an online sharing culture. In collaboration with the international activism campaign site, Change.org, the Representation Project’s #notbuyingit campaign kicked the push for more representational retail store mannequins into high gear. Though it ultimately failed to stick, the women behind this campaign prompted others to combat mannequin representation with the Expose Project, a photography exhibition gathering ninety-eight women to pose nude without photoshop. This body pride movement drew the attention of more than seventy websites and bled into retail across the pond, with plus-size mannequins appearing in a Swedish department store.

Baird (2015) recognizes the retail mannequin as a form of media, one that women see face to face everyday instead of through a screen. Though these are not models or journalists

who can physically speak, their very design implicitly mandates how women should look, where their curves should be, and how curvy they can be. Mannequins start with the ideal body type of the time, then the model is “made thinner in all manner of unexpected places” (Baird 19). This tells curvaceous women their shapes are not ideal unless they are of certain proportions. And this can only make me wonder how that makes women who look like me feel about trying on the clothes this mannequin is made to sell. Baird launched her own project to promote movements such as the Exposure Project. *The Reality of It*, released as a live installation in 2012, consists of mannequins of un-idealized body types from plus-sized to maternity-- “There is no permanent reusable model.” This kind of representation is vital for women to feel validated in their bodies. But this still is not enough. While changing the mannequin is a step in the right direction, plastic representation proves useless without attitudes toward race and body types changing as well. That is what the fitness media is missing in its push for inclusion.

Bearing this in mind, I delve deeper into how Baird, Goodman, and Childers’ above theories on selectiveness and exclusion of curvy women cannot stand independent of the same treatment black women receive in this kind of media. If the female breasts are commodified and retail mannequins are idealized, then as is the black female figure. The female breasts are fragmented from the black woman and commodified through the students' desire for plastic surgery to attain them. The retail mannequin remains primarily exclusive though, letting curvaceous black know that they are not the ideal body to have. These considerations are further developed later in the paper, as I explore how digital media has intervened.

Other scholars discuss how women in media use their bodies as a means of defiance, a common motif of Third Wave feminism. Beginning in the 1990s and placed in the media through television, singing girl groups, and magazines, this feminist climate represents women



unapologetically owning their individual bodies and beliefs. Analyzing successful women in comedy through the ages, leading with Miss Piggy and Roseanne Arnold, Karlyn shows how the unruly female character protests patriarchy in her book *The Unruly Woman* (1995). The unruly woman figure is often a curvy or plus-sized woman, rebelling against her male counterparts. She also is considered to be a loud, humorous, and sometimes sexually liberated character. Miss Piggy of the Muppets makes her case in Karlyn's study as "outrageously excessive, simpering, preening femininity and a wicked right hook" (Karlyn 27). This porky princess, Karlyn argues, uses her unruly nature as a means of agency in her relationship with Kermit the Frog and her career. Meanwhile, she remains undermined with fat jokes and fits of rage that code her a less ladylike and therefore less feminine (Karlyn 28-29). Karlyn examines the evolution of characters like Miss Piggy from Old Hollywood to today's romantic comedies and notes her contribution to feminism in film and television. Though Miss Piggy and Roseanne are white women, they too are marginalized because of their bodies. This notion that women who are vocal and curvaceous are "unruly," or less than makes me question how this may apply to black women characters, and what this means when translating to black women in real life.

Jane Arthurs and Jean Grimshaw's compilation book *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression* show how media challenges and negotiates the ideas on women's decorum, particularly in presentation and reception of the female body. Featured author Lola Young sheds light on the image of the black woman and their treatment through Eurocentric beauty standards. She notes the three primary depictions of black women: "the desexualized mammies...the 'tragic mulatta' ...and the black woman whose lasciviousness and hypersexuality were inscribed on her body in the form of excessively proportioned genitalia and buttocks" (Arthurs 68). Thus, black women and black femininity lack equal footing in a white world with white beauty standards. In

addition to the beauty marginalization of blacks and Jews, Arthurs and Grimshaw compare and contrast print media such as soft porn versus *Cosmopolitan*, as well as television characters like Patsy Stone in *Absolutely Fabulous* (Arthurs 137), who have gained a following around the subject of the female body and perceptions of decorum. Moszkowicz noted that the rise of female protagonists is moving away from or reappropriating the notion of the female body in order to further the character's super-objectives, where they are now "able to speak not only about, but *for* others" (Arthurs 209). This behavior, that in the past would have been considered improper, now works in favor of women and how they choose to represent themselves. Indeed, it is similar to moves black women have been making in the media over the last decade or two.

In addition to the image and behaviors around body politics, an important factor to note is what the notions are around achieving said image. In a qualitative, feminist social analysis, Eileen Kennedy and Pirkko Marluka consider the conversation and behaviors around women and exercise. One of the primary ways women began to receive exercise information was through fitness and lifestyle magazines, where workouts started to hold their own section in these editorial monuments (Marluka 27). This catering to the female consumerism culture, offering readers another treat within the editorial, arguably entices women to try the workouts outlined. And should they enjoy the workout, they will buy the magazine again the next month. The authors continue to explore the global fitness industry in relation to women's relationships with exercise and the fatness. Their thorough research on the subject considers the need for inclusiveness for other races and body types.

NPR's Farai Chideya hosts author Dr. Rovenia Brock, executive director of Big Brothers/Big Sisters (Sandusky, Ohio), Katrice Mines, and Cheryl Boykins, former chief executive of the Center for Black Women's Wellness (Atlanta), in a discussion on how black

women view health, obesity, and eating disorders (2005). The purpose of the discussion, titled *Roundtable: Black Women and Body Image*, is to educate on the black approach to health in white dominated society. Often young black women are left out of the conversation on body empowerment and education. Mines says to truly make a difference in how whitewashed perceptions on body image impacted her as a child, "I would need to go back to my ten-year-old self" (Chideya). The black community's high obesity rate, according to Boykins, tends to overshadow the less reported cases of eating disorders (Chideya) and the need for self love. This roundtable discussion reveals the dichotomy that lies in black women's relationship with their health--a psychological tug-of-war between media, men, and the black culture's obsession of having thicker bodies (Chideya). This discussion appeared pertinent to me because it shows the beginning of this mentality--the images impressionable little girls see on television and the ideologies that are reinforced by the adult women around them as well as young boys who are exposed to the same media. Since this 2005 discussion, not much has changed as the curvy body becomes more popularized and commodified.

There is a glaring hegemony when it comes to the politics around the female body, excluding and dehumanizing the black female. Elements of the black female body can be consumed like a pair of shoes, yet it is still not considered the "ideal" body to have. Racial identity plays into this notion, as black and white women perceive the ideal body image differently. A study by Dr. Yuki Fujioka considers how racial identity affects the way college women perceive media-perpetuated ideals on thinness and fatness, white women being more inclined to desire a thinner figure based on these images they consume (Fujioka 451). Black women tend to desire thicker bodies, as mentioned above on NPR and in *Gentles-Pearls* book, because these standards do not culturally include them. "White audiences learn the community

standards of values and norms to which they are supposed to adhere as a group member, whereas Black audiences come to know about the dominant group's expectations and world views through the mainstream media" (Fujioka 454). Both groups agree that media perpetuates the desirability of thinner women, but culturally receive and process these messages differently. While the white women in this study have a greater fear of fat, black women hold more weight in their racial identity against white-dominated media images (Fujioka 468). Young black women put less pressure on themselves to meet this standard, because they know it is biologically unattainable. However, they are still left with the notion that they are not desirable because and forced to consume these hegemonic beauty standards with little inclusion.

## 1.2 Research Questions

In light of this review, I move into my research on publishing *The Curvy Girl Handbook*. In order to examine how whitewashing fitness impacts publishing, I begin by looking into the publishing industry itself. Then, through a textual analysis, I research and answer the following questions in relation to my book and the ultimate goal--publishing in a predominantly white genre:

1. Does imagery reinforce whitewashing in fitness media? If so, how?
2. What implications about fitness print media can be made from racial representation, or lack thereof?

## 2 METHODOLOGY

In order to make a proper argument, it is imperative to explore the current works in mainstream fitness publishing that have sprung from the historical attitudes measured in the academic works. Through a textual analysis of the top works around women's fitness and body

image, I examine how black and curvy women are included in the conversation after history has set its own tone. My analysis works through the lens of intersectional feminism. From there, I consider any similarities and differences that may arise between the popular works of today and the preceding history and academic texts.

Alan McKee (2003) defines textual analysis as a method researchers use to understand how humans make sense of culture (McKee 1). While this is not the only useful method, textual analysis implies the need for interpreting the objects people consume--media, literature, etc. McKee's notion of textual analysis shows a versatility in the method that proves useful in this study.

Michelle Phillipov (2013) believes research methods are in danger of becoming hegemonic in the wake of academia becoming "more sociological" (Phillipov 209). Applied to popular media, she suggests that textual analysis can improve our understanding. "Because it seeks to find a vocabulary to describe the elusive, textual analysis can provide important and ongoing contributions to the study of popular music as well as to the study of media and culture more broadly" (Phillipov 221). In a field where much is left to interpretation, Phillipov's defense of textual analysis validates the need to keep an open mind when conducting research. Because my study surrounds media, I am encouraged to move forward with this method as well. Through my textual analysis method, my study looks through the lens of intersectional feminism to hone in on my ultimate interest in racial representation. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall (2013) note the discussion for intersectional feminism beginning in the 80s, as a "heuristic term to focus attention on the vexed dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and social movement politics" (Cho 787). This

notion demands inclusion for all women. As fitness becomes a major portion of media, it is imperative that women of all races, classes, and orientations be represented.

## 2.1 The Sample

The sample consists of the available mainstream works in fitness media over the last ten years. First, I note the audiences these women may be reaching--age, race, occupation, etc.--and how inclusive their works may be. From there, I analyze the imagery within these works and in turn analyze their racial implications. To see where works like these stand in the industry, I measure how many fitness books have been published by black women against how many have been published by white women. These works were chosen because they are well-selling, competing works in my field. I also briefly look into how some of these curvaceous authors have used visuals and digital media as imagery to intervene on the conventions of women's fitness and racial representation.

Finally, I go over my book in relation to the competing publications to see how my contemporaries are combating these historic issues, if at all. Because the ultimate goal with *The Curvy Girl Handbook* is to expand it into a series, I am examining other books by public figures who stand out the most in the fitness industry, as well as women who made their careers through their bodies, be it modeling, dance, or general likeness. While my primary focus is on black women, I am recognizing white, Asian, and Hispanic authors as well in order to gain a full scope on racial dynamics. Who are the women the public look to the most for body image and body confidence? Who is celebrated, and who is persecuted? How many of these women are black women, curvy women, or both? The current writers and public figures I will explore are Khloé Kardashian, Ashley Graham, Tyra Banks, Cameron Diaz, Cassey Ho, Misty Copeland, Ayesha

Curry, Tia Mowry, Kim Kardashian West, Chrissy Teigen, and Crystal Renn. In this section, I consider how the content of these works include young, single, curvaceous, and black women.

The writers preceding me are at least five years my senior, and lead vastly different lives with different responsibilities. At the age of twenty-three--the book written when I was twenty-one--I come from a completely different level of experience than my counterparts. Though Ayesha Curry is not far removed from me age-wise at twenty-eight, her experience is different. She comes from the perspective of a wife and mother. In *The Curvy Girl Handbook*, everything is entry level. I speak from the perspective of a young student living alone, no children or spouse or aging parents. Unlike plus-sized model Ashley Graham who can speak from her fourteen-year resume in her TED Talk (2015), my life has just begun. I am currently navigating by trial and error, be it with my finances, my maturing relationship with my family, my new location, my many jobs, or the stakes of higher education. This is the time in my life, and in my readers' lives, where there is not usually somebody else to consider. Mistakes can be made, minds can be changed, and bodies can evolve. This moment, the crucial seven years of 18-25, is not only the time that young women need to take advantage of learning and building the foundation of their careers, it is also the time to build their personal best bodies.

## **2.2 The Study**

Fitness media's failure to include this age bracket is puzzling, considering the past studies that have strongly professed the need for young women to set good habits during these years. Capt. Julian A. Reed, EdD and MPH, discusses in his nutrition study of college women that, following this phase of life, it becomes even more difficult to maintain the figure one desires because metabolism plummets and hormone levels change (2009). Now is the time to begin presetting and preserving metabolism in order to combat this problem in the future (Reed 299).

Being in the midst of this myself, I have yet to find a book covering fitness for *any* body type for this age group, let alone the curvy body type. Compound this with blackness, and the options are few. These books appear to move to “fix” a person’s health later in life, while if more fitness print media (like *The Curvy Girl Handbook*) joined the industry, some body image and weight issues can be prevented altogether. This generation of young women needs their own guide represented by more women who look like them. By conducting this textual analysis of contemporary mainstream works written in layman’s terms, I further my argument for the need for inclusion.

Generation Y women face a whole new set of problems. Thanks to some of our parents and the American public school system, we are the first generation not expected to outlive our parents due to childhood obesity (Belluck 1). Inflation rages to the point that higher education is barely within reach and puts us in debt up to our ears. Body image takes on a whole new level of strange with the rise of Instagram models, waist trainers, and other commodifications of the curvy figure. *Now*, the popular image is a girl “thick in the hips and slim in the waist,” as the saying goes. It took *GQ*’s “Women of the Year” issue nearly a decade after 2004 (Kate Winslet) to feature a curvaceous woman, let alone a black woman (Rihanna in 2012) (Mooney). Since then, more curvaceous women are receiving media accolades both for their chops and their assets. Beyoncé has been voted Most Beautiful Woman in the World for 2017 by popular public poll (Bahou). Popular lists for similar reasons also include Priyanka Chopra, Kim Kardashian (Goble), Charlotte McKinney, Emily Sears, and Iskra Lawrence (Maxim Staff). However, regular non-celebrity curvy women have been living in these bodies their whole lives, long before others began purchasing curves with buttocks injections and padding--as if they are just buying a pair of shoes. Body image and body confidence for curvy women has become



commodified in this age of society. This can wear on a person both mentally and physically, leading to stress and unhealthy weight gain that turns curves into fat. In the midst of these general issues, in addition to being a curvy woman, Generation Y needs an outlet. One way to aid the ascent from entry level to full-fledged adulthood is to take care of ourselves from within. This begins by recognizing the need for equality and considering ways to level the playing field.

This being said, young women--18-25, curvy, mostly single--have a very personal, individual journey to take. In the available works penned by curvaceous women of color, the binds of maturity and “real” adulthood do not allow these journeys to be exclusively about the individual. Often they shape themselves around who they are to others--a wife, a mother, a daughter, etc. Ayesha Curry (2016), a curvy part-time actress, chef, and NBA wife, discusses how her love for food revolves around her husband and children in her cookbook *The Seasoned Life*. Growing up in a multi-racial household and community in Toronto, Canada (Curry i), Curry recipes range from Trinidadian-rooted Island Cornmeal Porridge to a Eurocentric Smoked Salmon Scramble (Curry). Curry does not shy away from her blackness, acknowledging that she is Jamaican, African, Polish, and Chinese (Curry). She commends her heritage and community for its diversity both in its food and its people. By noting this, not only does Curry pad her expertise, but she also suggests that her environment was inclusive and open to her exploring her love of cooking.

Curry also uses subtle imagery to drive her book. She opens her family-oriented book “[i]n dedication to my two beautiful daughters, Riley and Ryan: that you may one day fall in love with food and the way it brings people together” (Curry i). The cover of her book depicts her in a white dress, with her husband NBA star Steph Curry in the background playing with their toddler at what looks like a family picnic. The cover photographer also made sure to emphasize

the white dress and Curry's wedding ring by placing a few orange apricots in the opposite hand.

These are all strategic aesthetics that create the wife and mother appeal for her audience.

Readers of *The Curvy Girl Handbook* tend to be single young women who are on the go by themselves, not concerned about getting anyone else out the door or having a ton of leftovers.

For readers who are women of color, Curry dispels any notions that she has been denied opportunities to pursue a career as a chef because of her race. In fact, in her detailed introduction about her falling in love with food, she jumps from her pursuit of acting in Los Angeles at age 17 to her reconnecting with and dating Steph Curry by the third page. A large part of her story is missing. Surely as a black actress she experienced some kind of struggle, be it based on her body type, skin color, or hair texture. She simply notes how much she missed her mother's cooking (Curry iii). Perhaps it was not considered relevant for this family cookbook, but to me it reads as a missed opportunity to explore more of the core of this woman and to shine a light on the unique experience of women of color. While Curry's recipes carve a space for foods popular within the black community and adds a voice for black women into the industry, it would be even more effective were she to focus on herself as an individual black woman.

Actress Cameron Diaz (2015) also speaks from a more seasoned perspective in her bestseller, *The Body Book*. As she writes this book in her forties, Diaz is able to look back on her teens and twenties with new knowledge. Diaz was a fast food connoisseur when she was my age, but it was not until later, when she became more learned in health, that she saw the effects of her choices, particularly when it came to her past with acne (Diaz 13). This put a damper on her self esteem in her early career, "[b]ut [she] kept eating fast food, still following habits that formed at a young age." Diaz, like many women, has had to figure things out over the years, but the difference between *The Body Book* and the need for more works like my *The Curvy Girl*

*Handbook* is the necessity to create healthy habits *before* young women reach the age of twenty-five. Diaz speaks from years of experience, meeting readers in the middle of their decades-long habits. Were there more material like this for a younger audience of readers, this journey can spare countless women from future ailments. Regardless of her age, Diaz succeeds in creating a retrospective work based solely in the individual's self-discovery of their bodies and what keeps them healthy, based on a combination of science and her years of experience as a public figure in an image-driven industry.

Diaz's image, however, is constructed under a modern version of passing. She has never denied her Cuban ethnicity, but her European features--tall, slender, light complexion--have allowed her to take on more Caucasian or nondescript roles over the years. Would she have been considered to reprise Farrah Fawcett's role in *Charlie's Angels* had her looks leaned more towards an *Afro-Latina* complexion? She rides this nondescript fence on the cover of her book, which is just about her only image throughout the entire work. She sits directly in front of the camera bathed in studio light, wearing a white strapless leotard that is barely exposed under the large title print, nude painted nails, hair and eyebrows natural. This allusion to the naked body takes out the usual glamour of Diaz's on screen characters and strips her down to the basics, a regular person just like us. A gallery at the top shows women of different body types in fun, body-loving poses. This use of imagery reinforces Diaz's desire to draw the everyday woman. However, she misses the opportunity to include women of color. Being that she is Hispanic, one would expect that she or her team would have been more inclusive. Nonetheless, Diaz uses her platform well to present a book that focuses on long-term self care.

Actress Tia Mowry's biracial ethnicity and military family background reflects in her love for soulful comfort foods like fried chicken and a systematic need to delegate and organize

in the kitchen (Mowry 3). While Mowry is a favorite of Generation Y, there are still many ways we cannot relate to her past her breakout character Tia Landry on *Sister Sister*. The thirty-nine-year-old is expecting her second child with husband Cory Hardrict after struggling with fertility for more than five years. Her latest project has been around food, with a Cooking Channel program *Tia Mowry At Home* in tandem with her bestseller *Whole New You*. The book includes Mowry's story about her journey to a healthier life, as she battled with endometriosis (Mowry 6). While this had an affect on her fertility, it also affected her weight and forced her to make changes in how she handled her nutrition, leading her to a journey of cleaner eating that is reflected in her book (Mowry 9). Her book covers over one-hundred recipes, healthy spins on comfort favorites, and recipes for kids. Mowry does well to make her book readable and accessible to everyone, offering a key to differentiate the purpose or restrictions of each recipe. She also discusses a few key concepts regarding the science of the body, body image, and self efficacy. This straddling between logos and pathos, while still placing it in plain language, accomplishes this notion of reclaiming the body both for oneself and one's family. Mowry sets readers up for success by educating what each basic ingredient (Examples: spinach) does to the body before even getting into the actual recipes. Where she misses the mark for younger women, however, is in her thematic elements surrounding kid-friendly cooking, which takes away some of the individualism younger women may need.

On another hand, Mowry's colorful imagery has a little something for everyone and embraces her pride in her black heritage. For *Sister Sister* fans--Generation Y-- she has "throwback" photos of her with twin sister and acting partner Tamera Mowry. For mothers, she has photos of her with her firstborn son Cree. Her fertility issues and pregnancy are what catalyzed her health journey, so including her child is more than fitting. Her recipes, and shots

of ingredients remain equally colorful, vivid, and inclusive, combining healthy plant-based foods with new spins on classic comfort foods within the black community. She successfully ties these elements together to create a black female narrative that still can reach a diverse audience.

The other writers also come from experience. Khloé Kardashian, in her early 30s, begins her journey at the tipping point of her marriage to Lamar Odom, writing *Strong Looks Better Naked* in the aftermath. Chrissy Teigen (2016) with *Cravings*, Kim Kardashian West (2015) with *Selfish*, Misty Copeland's (2014) memoir book and her collaborative photo book with Gregg Delman (2016), and Crystal Renn (2008) with *Hungry* also are all thirty and over. Cassey Ho (2015) cut her path in the world of pilates in college (Ho iii) the way I did, but she did not reach public acclaim until three or four years ago. Now, she is almost thirty, with her book *Hot Body Year Round* being published at the age of twenty-eight. Of these older influences, Misty Copeland is the only black woman, with a book that touches on body image but not on diet and exercise. This furthers an urgent need for inclusion of young black voices.

While I have been careful to include a diverse pool of writers, I found myself hard pressed to find non-famous women of color--particularly black women--who write about health for a mainstream audience. Though the Kardashian sisters are curvaceous women (both naturally and with some aid) and are now parents to black children, they benefit from wealthy white privilege and can arguably be considered a subtle form of passing. Half Armenian and half white, these ladies' Middle Eastern features are less apparent, and they were primarily raised in white household with Kris and Bruce Jenner. In addition, they are wealthy women who can afford to build these idealized bodies with swanky gym memberships, high end trainers and nutritionists, and personal chefs. Khloé Kardashian's wealth allows her to be able to say, "Hey, I'm here at the W, in this nice apartment, and I don't know a single person I can invite to lunch. But there's a

gym just off the lobby” (Kardashian 4), as her life with Lamar Odom takes a turn. Their wealth and lighter skin makes them more palatable as curvy women in media. Their whitewashed image allows them the privilege to break into fitness media. The sisters and these writers have a privileged distance from a large portion of potential readers--women who are neither wealthy nor concerned about much outside themselves. As far as racial representation, these writers show a push towards inclusiveness for black women, but only if they fit a certain box--lighter skin, motherhood, and fame.

This is what drove me to further research the issue. I sought out black female fitness writers over the last ten years, and measured the amount of material available against their majority white female counterparts. This search was conducted through two of the top publishing houses in the United States: HarperCollins and Random House. These are two companies I would like to submit my book to for publishing, so I specifically chose them with future reference in mind.

Going directly to the sites of these top tier publishers, I searched their full stock of health and fitness novels written by women over the last decade. From here, I counted how many female authors were published by these houses over the last ten years, by race. Again, while my focus is on the presence of black female authors, I included Hispanic and Asian authors to show the full scope of racial representation for women. To keep the focus on black female representation, authors of Southeast Asian, Turkish, and Middle Eastern descent were counted as “Asian.” Racial identity was determined by reading the bios of the authors or the introductions of their books, where they outright identified. I did not include male authored books either. I also eliminated health books that did not pertain to food/diet or physical exercise, leaving out

books on mindfulness, relationship, and general lifestyle advice. From the numbers below, the whitewashing is even more prevalent than I predicted.

**Figure 2.1 Random House Publishers Health & Wellness, Female Authors by Race (2008 - 2018)**

<b>White</b>	<b>2</b>
	<b>1</b>
<b>Black</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Asian</b>	<b>2</b>

Random House and HarperCollins categorize their fitness publishings a bit differently. Random House’s Health & Wellness section is composed of books pertaining to healthy eating, diet, exercise, and self care. HarperCollins separates in health categories, placing exercises, mindfulness, and motivational memoirs in a category called “Self Improvement.” The healthy recipes and eating are saved for the “Cookbooks” section.

**Figure 2.2 HarperCollins Self-Improvement, Female Authors by Race (2008 - 2018)**

<b>White</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>8</b>
<b>Black</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>0</b>

<b>Asian</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Native American</b>	<b>1</b>



**Figure 2.3 HarperCollins Cookbooks, Female Authors by Race (2008 - 2018)**

<b>White</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Black</b>	2
<b>Hispanic</b>	2
<b>Asian</b>	4

### 3 RESULTS

As one can see from the figures, two of America's top publishers remain dominated by white authors. Each of the mainstream writers above have contributed to these numbers, Tia Mowry (2017) being one of the only two black women published in Random House's health genre in ten years. Meanwhile another blonde, white, female author in the same publishing house, Tosca Reno, has had more publishings than any woman there in the same amount of time. The black female authors particularly did not even emerge until recently--post 2010. This lack of racial representation in fitness print media implies that black women, and therefore women of the curvaceous persuasion, are not a priority for visibility in this industry. However, the black women who are published use this as an opportunity to create their own visibility by employing imagery in their works, in both the content and the book cover. In fact, imagery seems to be more of a tool to *combat* whitewashing. This appears to be a promise for more inclusion going forward, but black women and minorities have been creating their own solutions through imagery, visuals, and digital representations.

These minority writers, celebrities and fitness gurus alike, have their own unique voice in their works. As an already established blogger, I write in the same tone in my book that I do on Tumblr--casual and fun. Cassey Ho, Chinese and Vietnamese, already has an established voice because of her online presence on her Blogilates YouTube channel, but she still speaks in the tone of an expert and a public figure. She has her “-isms,” a tone that makes her unique. She opens with the same “Hey, guys!” (Ho i) greeting in her book as she does online as well as the nickname she has give her followers, her “POPsters” (Ho i). This allows her brand to cater more to millennial women. I, too, speak in a tone that is friendly and conversational, referring to my ladies as “curvalicious divas” and letting them know that we are in the same body and on the same level, which not every mainstream writer accomplishes. In my reflections on how to intervene on the lack of racial representation, I consider with my own “isms” regarding my book, as it applies to body politics in and racial divide in fitness media.

Fitness media is growing with the digital age, providing a platform for new fitness writers from all backgrounds. Further study would beg the question: How is digital media and visual culture redefining the standard for women’s beauty and health?

## 4 DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Divas, Visuals, and Digital: The Imagery Intervention

One of my “isms” is my use of the word “curvalicious diva,” in reference to my readers. The term “diva” is especially important to me, and academia seems to be on a similar wave. Jacki Willson considers the performance of the diva persona with her book *Being Gorgeous* (2015). The visual, the spectacle of showgirls lend themselves to the body politics of feminism. Willson suggests in her book that women play into the spectacle around the female body as

means of protest in the 21st Century. By engaging the visual culture of contemporary society, Willson measures how an exaggerated display of femininity in performance such as burlesque reclaims and re-appropriates it. Her introduction discusses the evolution of burlesque motifs, “the whirligig of vibrant colour, lip gloss, carousel horses, and false eyelashes” (Willson 1) and asks that we allow ourselves to look more closely at this hyper-feminine behavior as it reemerges in pop culture icons like Lady Gaga and in the 2006 *Marie Antoinette* film. The aura that draws people to divas like Diana Ross and Mariah Carey is not just their seemingly lofty demands. It is their confidence in their body of work. Willson notes the “revealing flesh, decadent dress, and confident gestures” (Willson 1) in the work of modern day musical talents are reminiscent of preceding burlesque culture--bold, beautiful, and most of all confident. *The Curvy Girl Handbook* joins the visual culture with this in mind, along with other black female authors paving the way in this same fashion. Being that black women have historically been considered hypersexual and at the same time less feminine and less *human* because of their curvy bodies (Schildkrout 71), this is a revolution indeed.

The term “diva,” *The Curvy Girl Handbook*, and new media recognizes the importance of visuals. Digital and visual literature, in today’s increasing technology age, are etching a new genre into the media world. Curvy women need more confidence in their literal and figurative body of work with this kind of culture on the rise. Black women in pop culture have been leading the way to change this. Generation Y curvy women grew up during a time where curvy was not the body to have at first. Its celebration slowly came around in music (i.e. “Bootylicious” by Destiny’s Child in 2001) and film. Now, in the 2010s curvy women are conquering the visual culture and cutting their own paths, with black women on the front lines. Mariah Carey became the first “meme” of 2018, with a photo of her sipping from a white mug

captioned “Found my tea.” In black pop culture, tea is a euphemism for witty, snide verbiage (or “shade,” as we call it), a term often seen on Black Twitter, in adapted memes of Kermit the Frog, and in popular black television programs like *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*. Beyoncé had the right idea of digital imagery being the new frontier in creative media and has been experimenting with it for years. Her past two albums, *Beyoncé* and *Lemonade*, have been the best-selling projects of their release years with their visual components--a “visual album” she calls it. She releases these works digitally online before the hard copies reach the retail stores weeks later. The visual albums thus far have shown not only her vision behind her new sexually and politically provocative sound, but puts her curvy body on display and even includes it in the albums’ narratives. The world of fitness is beginning to run on this same track. Readers are looking for visual aid as to what their bodies need. What does the food look like? What is an example for how to do the exercises? How do we know that you as the author are in good shape to even tell us what works best for our curves? These are all concerns that require visual evidence readers can see for themselves. Cassey Ho understands this in her book *Hot Body Year Round*, which is coupled with a DVD component that offers full instruction and visual examples. For black women, this intensifies the importance of seeing themselves and their bodies in the new fitness media. Yet, this is not always the case.

Visuals also create an idea of intimacy between the reader and the author, like a pen pal sending photos and postcards of their life in another place. Readers want to know how this plays into everyday life, and the way to do that is to show them your own. Rizzoli, a New York publishing house that produces image books, captures this idea in each project. They also are inclusive of curvy women and women of color, publishing stunning imagery that hardly needs

captioning. Most recently, they have published two women who have been challenging body politics since they stepped into the spotlight--Kim Kardashian West and Misty Copeland.

In her book *Selfish*, Kim Kardashian West (2015) shows the evolution of her life in the spotlight and her curvy figure in what is essentially a photo album of the selfies she has taken over the past decade. Originally conceived as a gift for husband Kanye West, Kim K becomes more comfortable with photographing her curves as her body changes with age and childbirth, and it is a testament to how women reclaim their bodies and take pride in their curves, making her relatable and even more marketable.

Ballerina Misty Copeland (2014) makes strides to reclaim the black female body and curves through visuals in this same vein. In her self-titled collaborative book with photographer Gregg Delman, *Misty Copeland*, she puts her curves in action. Unlike West, she uses no captions for her photos. She simply lets them speak for themselves. In her leotard and pointe shoes, Copeland is captured mid-dance in various venues--studios, staircases, industrial old buildings, elegant homes. It shows how dance is an intimate experience for the body and the physical demands it places on an individual. Copeland, in her previous book *Life in Motion* discusses her adversity due to her curvy body, which is considered “wrong” for ballet. “Some people even think that I'm still just not right for it,” she says, “And I think it's shocking because they hear those words from critics saying I'm too bulky, I'm too busty” (Copeland). In her *Misty Copeland* visual book, she disproves this myth by showing how her curves merely enhance her art.

Supermodel moguls Ashley Graham and Tyra Banks also use visual platforms to promote curvy body pride via video and speech. In Graham's (2015) TEDx Talk “Plus-Size? More Like MY Size,” the supermodel and body activist opens her speech closed off to the audience. This is

because there is a mirror onstage. She looks into this mirror and gives herself a pep talk, addressing every curve and “imperfection” and telling them “I see you...and I love you” (Graham). She then shares her journey, displaying images of her early career, and how she came to accept her body even in an industry that did not. Though her career spans over fourteen years, Graham has suddenly skyrocketed in her field. Her outspoken activism makes her a high demand in the “\$18 billion industry.” Graham also expands her audience by not limiting her message to only plus-size women, who she refers to as “curvy,” by calling everyone to join in body love. “This,” she says, “is the generation of body diversity.”

Banks (2008) made an even more poignant statement long before Graham took the TED stage on her Emmy-winning talk show *The Tyra Banks Show*. This speech remains one of the top moments in talk show television.:

“To all of you who have something nasty to say to me or other women that are built like me, women that sometimes all the time look like this, women whose names you know, women whose names you don’t, women who’ve been picked on, women whose husbands put them down, women at work, or girls in school... I have one thing to say to you. Kiss my FAT ASS!” (“The Tyra Banks Show”)

This was arguably what landed Banks the Daytime Emmy. During that time, Banks had retired from heavy modeling. This, and her age, came with weight gain and tabloids disparaging it. As a curvy woman, Banks already faced body image issues when haute couture companies did not want to hire her, pushing her into *Sports Illustrated* and Victoria’s Secret. Again, this proves that black curvy women continue to be belittled no matter what. Before Ashley Graham, a truly

plus-sized woman, could be accepted, Banks--a black history-making supermodel--had been paving the way and defending her blackness and her body for more than a decade. Curvy women like these supermodel barrier breakers making public statements on televised stages demand attention. While Ashley Graham continues to carry the torch, it began with the audacity of a curvaceous black woman. Banks and Graham are now using this influence collaboratively by removing age, height, and size restrictions on Banks's hit series *America's Next Top Model*.

While curvy women on camera and in print have made a significant dent in the digital world, Kim Kardashian West has crashed into the technology industry for curvaceous imagery. Her mobile apps place curvy pop culture at consumers' finger tips. With the KKW app, one can get an intimate interactive experience behind the scenes of Kim K's brand as a glam mogul and a visual icon. The Kimoji app, takes *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* references and creates via memes, gifs, and emojis, from Kim K's curvy figure to her "ugly cry." However, it is the mobile game Kim Kardashian Hollywood where she has found most of her digital success. In this virtual pop culture world, users can create an avatar and conquer their Hollywood dreams in film, music, fashion, and more. The avatars are not limited to one body type either. Kardashian West personally oversees the options for avatar body types and fashions, making sure there is something for everyone. Other curvy celebrities have joined, including the Atlanta native, curvaceous, dance electronica singer Erika Jayne, known for being unapologetically confident with her body. Kardashian West's ability to collaborate with Silicon Valley team GLU Mobile to create a both fun and inclusively detailed game earned it over 40 million downloads and \$71.8 million as of 2016 (Robehmed). Tyra Banks takes notice of this and has expanded her digital empire with her new ANTM app, carving a new space for black women in the mobile digital world. Black women in blogging like myself also are taking advantage of the digital world.

Blogs like Black Fitness, Thick-Black-Fit, and Fit Black Gurls create the images black curvy women want to see, swarming Tumblr with both their original content and sharing images of other black women getting fit.

## **4.2 Final Remarks**

While whiteness remains the dominant presence both in publishing and in imagery, curvy and black women are using imagery and the digital age to claim a seat at the table. Further study would require exploring more publishing houses, and even taking a closer look at visual publishers like Rizzoli. In addition, while I chose to keep this work focused on print media, delving deeper into black digital presence such as bloggers and YouTubers would be an opportunity to explore another scope of racial representation.

## **4.3 Applying to the Industry: Background on the Book**

In closing, allow me to offer some background on the book itself and how it began. *The Curvy Girl Handbook* is originally a Tumblr blog ([thecurvygirlhandbook.tumblr.com](http://thecurvygirlhandbook.tumblr.com)) dedicated to sharing tips on exercise, nutrition, fashion, and lifestyle for the curvy and fit woman. What is different about *The Curvy Girl Handbook* is that it tailors its content to women who tend to be neglected by the fashion and media industries: women who are curvy but not plus-sized. The term “curvy,” with the rise of obesity in the United States, has become more of a nice non-offensive word to be used for plus-sized women (over a size 16). However, not all plus-sized women are curvy and not all curvy women are plus-sized. There are numerous women who are a size 8 (like myself) or even a size 4 with hips and thighs that are too small for the plus-sized sections--starting at size 16--, but also do not work well with the average “regular” pair of jeans. The “regular” section of the majority of retail stores have no seam allowance, stretch, or cut for



women with extra curves. They are created for a straight, slender figure. So curvy women, who are neither straight-figured nor plus-sized, have nowhere to go. They are too small for the plus-sized section, yet the regular section does not flatter them or allow for proper alterations, which not all women can afford. These women are curvy too, yet they get lost in the middle. Like Carmen in my opening example, they do not have a seat at the table according to this industry. *The Curvy Girl Handbook* blog works to claim that seat.

As a book, *The Curvy Girl Handbook* wishes to assert itself more into the mainstream world of fitness, because the same middle child issues exist there as well. The women of POPSugar, Jillian Michels, and fitness gurus of the industry for women are often depicted as slender, without extra hips, derriere, breasts, or thighs. The goal being to look like these women, these programs are tailored to someone of that body type. They are implicitly the ideal body for that particular regimen. Then again, there is a rise of plus-sized women in fitness like Jessamyn Stanley and Ashley Graham who are creating an industry for their own body type. Curvy-but-not-plus-sized women are left in the middle again without accommodations. *The Curvy Girl Handbook* provides an A-Z general guide for these women and for them alone. Addressing some of the original blog's topics, the book expounds on the particulars of nutrition, exercise, fashion and beauty, and lifestyle.

The nutrition portion is catered specifically to the curvy woman, identifying what foods are best for keeping curvy parts of the body from turning into unhealthy fat. Then the exercise chapters focus on the workouts that sculpt and tone curves, the major key to eliminate fat and enhance muscle. The fashion and beauty section finally addresses the issues of finding styles that accommodate curvy bodies. These chapters not only show what styles and cuts suit curvy women for every occasion, but also where to find them. And they make sure to accommodate the

different types of curves, separating the styles for women with lower body curves, top heavy curves, and hourglass figures. The lifestyle chapters deal with being a curvy woman in a skinny-obsessed world, exploring ways to take care of yourself mentally and emotionally and looking at curvy women in pop culture who face the same issues.

As a black female writing for a predominantly white industry, my voice in *The Curvy Girl Handbook* is both unique and essential. By grounding my pitch with a well-researched academic study, my book can be taken seriously on all fronts.

*So what? What makes my kind of curvy different?* A Google search for “curvy women” reaps a very small pool of results. The “All” tabs dehumanize this body, yielding results such as “Top Five Reasons Why Curvy Women Are the Best Partners in Bed” and “Men Often Prefer Curvy Women.” If one clicks on the “Image” tab, an estimated ninety-nine percent the photographs are of women over a size 16 decked in lingerie or these erotica women whose thighs and derrieres are ten times the size of the rest of their bodies due to plastic surgery. While plastic surgery is the business of the woman who pays for it, this affects society’s relationship with the curvy figure.

Aside from this, curvy is often associated with a woman’s relationship with food. But that only represents a small portion of how curvy women move through this world. If food were the only factor, Chrissy Teigen would be selling even more copies of her cookbook *Cravings*. While her recipes indeed look delicious, my readers cannot keep tempting recipes such as “John’s Fried Chicken Wings with Spicy Honey Butter” and still look and feel as good as Teigen in the black swimsuit she wears while eating them (Teigen 143). While I as an author love food, my kind of curvy and my readers’ kind of curvy need recipes that will not harm their regimen. And the curvy-not-plus-size regimen tends to have an extremely delicate balance.

Crystal Renn (2008) in her memoir *Hungry* also explores her relationship with food as she goes from size 12 to size 0 and back again. Renn describes how her early childhood made her a foodie in her pre-modeling days. When discussing her favorite holiday, Easter, she gleefully lists the spoils of her treats: “piles of jelly beans, marshmallow Peeps, bright foil-covered eggs and chocolate bunnies” (Renn 1). Then she takes a dip.: “you’d never have thought: When that girl is fourteen, she’s going to hate her body so much, she’ll nearly kill herself to change it.” Crystal Renn, in the nature of her novel’s title, goes on to the dark side of her relationship with food--anorexia, bulimia, low self esteem--using this as her triumphant narrative to finally accepting her curves.

*The Curvy Girl Handbook* seeks to debunk all the above. There are no crash diets, no cheat meal recipes, but there is a guide to how to have a cheat day without hurting your regimen. There is no talk of “what men like,” but there is a discussion in the fashion and beauty section about doing what *you* like as a curvy woman. *The Curvy Girl Handbook* wants our kind of curvy to be recognized as something besides our relationship with food or the commodification of our figures. And this book accomplishes the job.

This project is sure to set my book up for success. By completing this final chapter of my education, I feel more than prepared to enter my professional career and create content that is inclusive and truthful.



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