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### Transfat Representation

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Transfat Representation

by

Jessica “Fyn” Asay

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Arts in Women and Gender Studies  
Department of Women and Gender Studies  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

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## Abstract

This study defines and analyzes representation of transfats, those who are both transgender and fat, through the examination of two popular media texts, Jabba the Hutt from *The Return of the Jedi* and Pat from the Saturday Night Live tv program in the 1990's. I analyze these two texts using a queer feminist media studies lens to reveal the media construction of a transfat representation that is rooted in racism, transnormativity, and fatphobia and that positions the transfat body as non-normative and grotesque through the use of abject horror and fear. My analysis reveals how racism, transnormativity, and fatphobia shape the unique position of transfat subjects and then seeks to create more affirmative spaces for this unique and often overlooked or ignored subject position. By calling attention to the forces that have shaped transfat representation, we can work to create better, more inclusive representations that are not rooted in racism, transnormativity, and fatphobia

## Introduction

“Under the binary phallocratic founding myth by which

Western bodies and subjects are authorized, only one body

per gendered subject is ‘right.’ All other bodies are wrong.”

-Sandy Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Transsexual Manifesto”

Despite the continued growth of both fat and trans studies over the last two decades, and the increasing panic surrounding both fat bodies and transgender bodies, there has been little attention paid to trans-fat identity which is the intersection of the transgender and fat identity. In this thesis, I argue that racism, transnormativity, and fatphobia collide and result in the mistreatment and negative representation of transfat bodies. I begin with a brief review of foundational texts in fat studies and trans studies and examine the small body of work on trans-fat identity.

My thesis contributes to this dialogue through a feminist analysis of two particularly influential media representations of transfat subjects: Jabba the Hutt from *Return of the Jedi* (1983), on the one hand, and *It's Pat*, (first appearance 1990), by the creators of *Saturday Night Live*. During the time frame that both Jabba's body and Pat's body were created, the focus in U.S. culture was on athleticism and thin bodies as desirable bodies. It was the era of Jane Fonda and aerobic workout videos and being fat was not trendy or cool. Both Jabba the Hutt and Pat have

stood the test of time and remain part of the culture more than 20 years later. Jabba the Hutt in particular has such a cultural salience that people still recognize Jabba and acknowledge Jabba as a source of evil in the Star Wars Universe. I will analyze these two texts using a queer feminist media studies lens to reveal the media construction of a transfat representation that is rooted in racism, transnormativity, and fatphobia and that positions the transfat body as non-normative and grotesque through the use of abject horror and fear.

The transfat body is portrayed in a way that is intended to elicit abject horror from the viewer, resulting in a portrayal of transfat bodies that is marginalizing and damaging. I place these two texts next to each other for analysis in order to do two things. First, they are the only two mainstream visual texts that I found that represented transfat embodiment. Secondly, as I will demonstrate during my analysis, Pat is treated with just as much disgust and detestation as is Jabba, even though one is human, and the other is an alien monster. There is much overlap in the way that the characters are treated, despite their quite different transfat embodiments. This reveals a deeper connection between transfat bodies and could shed light on why there are so few transfat bodies in visual media.

I begin by analyzing the categories of fat and trans in relation to feminist and queer accounts of normativity and deviance and docile bodies. I then review literature in trans studies and fat studies, and also trans/fat studies. Next, I detail my methodology and explain why and how I analyze Jabba the Hutt from *Return of the Jedi* and Pat from *It's Pat*. The influential legacy of both Jabba the Hutt and Pat provide insight into the power of their representations. Through the use of framing, abject horror and fear, the message about how to treat transfat bodies is clear. By analyzing the way fear is used, I reveal the transphobic, fatphobic, and racist origins of this maltreatment.

I begin by analyzing the constructs of the categories of fat and trans, and concepts of normativity. The white, cisgender heteronormative beauty ideal transgresses trans identities, and is responsible in part for the erasure and marginality of transfat bodies. I use trans here to denote the vast array of trans identities and am not just speaking about binary trans identities. Jennifer McMahon (2016) cites Bordo (1991) in stating that both males and females are indoctrinated into social norms which are partially constructed, reified and upheld through media images that tell us, “what clothes, body shape, facial expression, movements and environment are required for us to be socially acceptable” (p. 176). The feminine beauty ideal has infiltrated the consciousness of all trans people, whether through the incessant conditioning of those assigned female at birth and their failure to be indoctrinated into this cult of feminine beauty, or through the discipline that is required for transwomen to pass, or for those non-binary people who may either be striving to get away from beauty ideals that are deemed feminine, or might be attempting to conform more to them depending on their starting location and desired visual outcome. The feminine beauty ideal is central to all these identities, whether as a marker that is being resisted or embraced. With the prevailing construct of male/female and subsequently masculinity/femininity, the only socially acceptable choice is one of the two binary categories and being visually recognizable as either male or female is an implicit requirement for the “correct” embodiment of both masculinity and femininity. When a body does not visually conform to the easy readability requirement, that body is automatically marked as other. Transnormativity is undergirded by all of this, forcing trans people into categories. How does fatness queer gender and how might that contribute to the abject horror with which transfat subjects are treated?

As Sandy Stone acknowledges in the quote that opens this thesis, there has been much discourse in trans studies surrounding wrong bodies. A wrong body in this context could mean that

one was assigned a gender at birth that does not align with their own sense of gender, or it could alternatively mean that their body does not align with currently dominant hegemonic heteronormative notions of attractive femaleness or maleness. When a fat body does not conform to the hegemonic idea(l)'s of femininity or masculinity and is visually illegible, that body is dually violational; that body is a threat and disruption to stable hegemonic meaning. Are fat bodies coded as improper and immoral and thus made legible only through their pathologization? The more corporeally disruptive, the more a body are disrupts the gender code, and the more space that body takes up (through fatness) the more threatening it is. This is one possible reason for the panic surrounding fat bodies and transgender bodies. I now turn my attention to bodies that are dually violational due to being both transgender and fat.



## Defining Transfat

In an attempt to queer notions of both fatness and transness, I will be using the term *transfat* to acknowledge the co-constituting components that render the experience of transfat embodiment unique. Francis Ray White (2014) engaged with the notion of queering fat embodiment and a transgender fat subject and asks what it means to inhabit that space between a malleable and non-malleable embodiment in transfat bodies to. White's contributions will be discussed at length later in this paper. The inhabiting of a liminal space in between malleable and non-malleable embodiment is significant due to embodiment being framed historically as either one or the other in fat studies and trans studies (as non-malleable in fat studies and as malleable in trans studies).. Much of the focus on the changing of the body in fat studies is a focus on why you shouldn't have to change your body or the way it looks. While I appreciate this sentiment, it seems to overlook the fact that bodies are changing all of the time. In particular, to reside at the intersection of trans and fat is to be in flux constantly, and to be exploring the in between-ness that is the border of malleable and non-malleable, changing, and static.

## Background

While scholars and activists have drawn attention to some non-normative bodies via the body positivity movement, body positivity interventions have also been shaped by hierarchies of race, class, age, and ability, and the movement has up until recently (see Taylor, 2018) been centered on white cisgender feminine embodiment. Another problematic rhetoric that has emerged within the body positivity movement that has spun off from fat studies is its insistence to “love the body you have,” “love the body you’re in,” and advocacy of “self-acceptance as you are.”

These forms of body positivity do not align with those transfat subjects whose gender identity does not fit with the body they currently have. There is an inherent friction and tension between the idea of a body that should not change and a body that needs too. This could be one reason why transfats have been excluded from both fat studies and trans studies. By calling them transfats it is not an attempt to reduce peoples identity down to their embodiment, but rather an attempt to claim space for an ignored and marginalized group. What if modifications to the body, and changes in the body were not equated, perceived, and judged as inherently in opposition to fat political and activist discourse? Body modification is global and has complex and long histories in many cultures. If we recognize gender as a performance that everyone participates to some extent, and that we are all complicit in, then the changing of gender might not seem so at odds with fat politics and activism. What if a transfat modifying their body is their way of doing body positivity, of resisting the dominant hegemonic structures and regulatory constraints (Taylor, 2019)? The insistence that the body is not changeable is problematic but is common among

outspoken fat activists and influencers such as Virgie Tovar in her book, *You Have The Right To Remain Fat* (2018). Tovar essentially reproduces another category of the ideals that must be lived up to. From a queer feminist science studies point of view, bodies are changing all the time on multiple levels regardless of their size, as Cyd Cipolla, Kristina Gupta, David A. Rubin, and Angela Willey argue in *Queer Feminist Science Studies: A Reader* (2017). While Tovar is contributing to a growing and important body of literature that focuses on helping fat individuals, particularly women, love their bodies and stop hating their bodies for being fat, she misses the mark when including transgender bodies. Tovar argues for self-love and an acceptance of fat bodies in society at large, and she uses personal narrative to relay her experiences of growing up a fat woman of color. Despite her important contributions, Tovar occludes the ways in which fat is a trans issue, just as trans embodiment is a fat issue. There are lives at this intersection that are caught in the crosshairs of the insistence of fat activism that they must love and accept their body the way it is, which implies that they must ignore their dysphoria or dysmorphia, all in the name of body positivity. Dysphoria and dysmorphia both play a huge role in the lives of some transgender people and being asked to ignore these often strong and overwhelming emotions and affective states is just simply not possible for many. Is it really body positivity if you're being asked to ignore strong feelings of discomfort that are linked to the body?

## Docile Bodies

Michel Foucault's concept of docile bodies is useful here. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995), Foucault argues that docile bodies are bodies that are regulated through discipline and constraint (McMahon, 2016). McMahon (2016) states that docile bodies are desirable in modern societies because they are more "compliant and manipulable" (p. 176). It is the production of these docile bodies that, as McMahon (2016) goes on to state, "stabilizes and promotes hegemony—that is, existing power structures, whether political or ideological" (p. 176). McMahon (2016) combines Foucault with Bordo to assert that docile bodies, having been rendered susceptible to exterior manipulation, "become so habituated in their regime of control that they *regulate themselves* after initial indoctrination" and put another way, "they are bodies that, once mastered, master themselves" (p. 176). Docile bodies are consumed with regulating themselves into hegemonic society such that they do not generally stop and question their complicity. If someone does not conform to hegemonic norms, they are policed publicly and privately by strangers, friends, and loved ones.

Drawing on this Foucauldian framework of discipline and normalization, I argue that transfat embodiment constitutes a powerful destabilization of two of the primary interrelated categories that govern social interactions, body size and gender. Transfat bodies violate dominant ideals just by existing, and when these bodies are agential and unapologetic, they hold potential to disrupt the body and gender hierarchies that render so many people oppressed and marginalized. It is only by naming and acknowledging western cultural biases against transfat bodies that we can

begin to break them down and replace them with more useful, and hopefully less oppressive ideas and social structures that aren't undergirded by body policing.

Why the intense reactions to the transfat body? Why haven't we seen any transfat bodies being held up as icons, or even investigated as a group? Why has abject horror been the lens that transfat subjects are viewed through? The interaction between transnormativity, fatphobia and racism results in a complex matrix with racialized transfat bodies at the bottom. Both trans and fat bodies are condemned yet fetishized, both cast as undesirable. There are moral panics surrounding both fat bodies and trans bodies. There are some overlaps that queering allows us to illuminate in new ways. Queering allows us to make room for those who want to change their body but not necessarily their fatness, or perhaps their fatness is not what bothers them, but other aspects of their body's configuration. Perhaps they do not desire any change at all. Queering allows for loosening and subverting the current cisgender equation of thinness with desirability and allows for examination of body modification from a fat studies lens that does not come from a place of external shame turned inward. Queering acknowledges the transfat people who are part of the fat activist community and movement without shaming them or judging them for modifying their bodies or wanting to. There must be a reconciliation with modifications and a disruption of the notion that fat activism and politics must be built upon the resistance to body modification. Transfats can provide this disruption, but first we must examine what work has been done in both trans and fat studies.

## Literature Review

### *Trans Studies*

In what is hailed as one of the foundational texts in trans studies, “*The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto*” (1992) Sandy Stone responds to trans-exclusive radical feminist (TERF) notions of transsexual women. TERF rhetoric argued that transsexual women were spies for the patriarchy, hell bent on infiltrating women’s only spaces, and many second wave feminists framed transsexual women as nothing more than sick men that were futilely self-mutilating in an attempt at appropriating womanhood (Stone, 1992). Stone traces what has become known as the transnormative script of “being born in the wrong body,” and takes the reader through an account of the history of sex change surgery, or as it is known today, gender confirmation surgery. Stone emphasizes the modifiability of the body and the potentialities that were being made manifest in trans bodies. Similar to TERF rhetoric is that of transmedicalists. Transmedicalists argue that you must not only have gender dysphoria in order to be “really trans” but that you must also undergo all possible surgical procedures in order to transition from one binary sex to another, as in female to male or male to female. Transmedicalists do not acknowledge the existence of non-binary trans people, and insist that transgender is conflated with transsexuality, rather than acknowledging the difference between sex and gender. Another highly cited and formational text was authored by Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage” which was published in *GLQ* in 1994. The text takes the reader on a journey that in no uncertain terms describes the altering of flesh, the reconfiguring,

tearing apart and being sewn back together experience of gender confirmation surgeries that Stryker renders in vivid detail. Stryker argues for reclamation of terms often leveled against trans individuals, such as “creature, monster, and unnatural” and draws attention to the empowering potential of the reclamations (Stryker, 240). With an emphasis on the modifiability of the body, and the influence of third wave feminist theorizing and queer theory that was taking shape in the early 1990’s, the arguments for bodily autonomy and the radical potential of body modification emerged as major themes that shaped the direction of trans studies (Chu & Harsin, 2019). As Gabby Benavente and Julian Gill-Peterson (2019) point out, Stryker’s performance and subsequent publishing in GLQ brought queer and trans studies into close relation, with Stryker embodying and then enacting the concept of queer gender by performing it (p. 23). Stryker’s essay is currently the second most read essay in GLQ’s history and has endured the test of time along with her other highly influential 2004 piece, “Transgender Studies: Queer Theory’s Evil Twin.” (Stryker, 2019). Contemporary scholars in trans studies return to Stryker’s work as well as Stone’s Manifesto to both credit their path breaking and early formations of trans studies, and to critique the directions in which trans studies has gone since its inception (Benavente & Gill-Peterson, 2019; Stryker, 2019; Chu & Harsin, 2019). While early trans studies focused on embodiment, there is a clear lack of intersectional work as most of those in the field were white transwomen in the academy. As Chu & Dragger point out, trans studies has largely been concerned with three binary debates, which has resulted in a narrow focus of scholarship for too long; I found no discussion of a trans-fat embodiment, experience, or literature (Chu & Dragger, 2019). I now turn to fat studies.

### *Fat Studies*

Fat studies was born of a recognition that fat is gendered, and that many fat men were able to walk through the world unpoliced about their size, while femininity became synonymous with

thinness (Bell & McNaughton, 2007). Despite the influence of queer theory and third wave feminism in the development of fat studies in the 1990's and early 2000's, a focus on white, cisgender, heteronormative female fat embodiment prevailed, resulting in fat studies failing to reflect on other important co-constituting facets of embodiment. Burgard, Dykwomon, Rothblum & Thomas's closing piece in the field defining 2009 *Fat Studies Reader* insists that fat bodies are unchangeable, that, "They are not malleable—they are fat bodies and they will stay that way" (p. 338). This insistence on non-malleability results in the assertion of a static, non-changing body and leaves no room for a shifting embodiment and forecloses the possibility of transfat embodiment. There have been calls for a more inclusive, intersectional fat politic and activist discourse, including an investigation of fat men's experiences (Bell & McNaughton, 2007.) In the *Fat Studies Reader*, S. Bear Bergman (2009) reflected on how he is treated differently depending on how his gender is interpreted by others in his piece "Part-Time Fatso." While Bergman narrated his experience of being transgender and fat, he focuses only on how he is coded as either male or female first, then treatment varies based on the prior categorization. While Bergman acknowledges his transness as the thing that allows him to variably experience his fatness as a gendered form of embodiment, he does not interrogate the role of his transness in relation to his fat body; and reduces the discussion down to fat male vs. fat female embodiment despite his unique trans-fat embodiment. While this was perhaps a missed opportunity to discuss the unique position of being a transfat, Bergman still contributed to an important concept about how individuals are coded as either male or female partially based on the fat on their bodies.

Amy Farrell's (2009) notions and reflections on Bordo's assertion that women's bodies have carried the burden of the cultural obsession with thinness, and that fat women's bodies have taken the brunt of the criticism is a useful notion. Farrell (2009) also notes that the fat body is



always inherently racialized, referencing Saartje Baartman and the association of blackness with primitiveness, out of control-ness and the overly sexualized. Farrell (2009) goes on to argue that phrenology, anthropology and eugenics all played a role in the rhetoric of the primitive other, the savage, and this was met with a fear and need for containment lest the white upper classes be contaminated with this otherness. This threat of contamination of the Other still holds true with both fatness and transness, and a transfat body represents a double threat that must be contained, lest the out of control body (fatness) or out of control mind (transness) be unleashed. Sabrina Strings (2019) traces the fear of fat to the fear of the black body in her book, *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fatphobia*, and argues that, fear of the fat body is a particular fear of the fat black female body, as black women have always served as signifiers of the Other in the West and Global North. Strings (2019) also argues that there is a link between the fear of the black and fat body by religion, and brings religion, the academy, and medicine together in their united condemning of the fat, unruly and unrepentant, and therefore mentally inferior and out of control undisciplined (and therefore ungodly) body. Cheryl Fuller (2017) also traces fatphobia to religion and morality and argues that fat bodies “wear their sins” (p.25). Through wearing the sins, transfat bodies embody the social collective “sins” of untampered impulses, greed, aggression and sexuality, and as Fuller (2017) argues, sexuality is assumed to be linked with gender to the ordinary person, they associate sex, gender, and sexuality. With this in mind, transfat bodies embody everything we are taught to hate and taught to fear in U.S. society.

### *Fat/Trans studies*

This review revealed that trans studies has ignored the fat body, and fat studies has implored the trans body only when it is used to mark a category of other. There is very little work that centers trans-fat bodies, and none that focus on how the erasure and marginality of transfat

bodies is linked to transnormativity, fatphobia, and racism. In Meredith Nash & Megan Warin's (2016) "Squeezed between identity politics and intersectionality: A critique of 'thin privilege' in Fat Studies" the authors point to the lack of scholarship, stating that, "fat activism's skeptical attitude to bodily malleability is a serious liability especially if fat trans bodies are added into the equation" (p. 12). The work of Francis Ray White offers the most insight into a conceptualization of a trans-fat scholarship and activism. White (2014) contends that fat political discourse could be critiqued for its failure to attend to the ways in which they "reinscribe binary gender, at least partially through their insistence on the non-malleability of the body" (p. 95). White (2014) argues that while the notion of being "at home" in one's body is common in both fat and trans narratives, it is "achieved by different means." White (2014) ultimately calls attention to the tension between fat and trans discourses surrounding the malleability of the body, and states that, "the desire for an alternative and surgically produced embodiment entails giving up the possibility of feeling "inside" in one's current embodiment" (p. 93). This desire for body modification in the pursuit of gender identity alignment that will result in a more desirable embodiment is directly at odds with much of fat activist rhetoric, scholarship and politics that contend that "life" is not waiting in futurity after a body transformation (White, 2014). White (2014) points to the acknowledgement of the "fundamental ambiguity of our existence" that is put forth by Murray as a potential point in which the intersection of fatness and transness can begin to be explored (p. 95). White (2014) argues for a queering of fat political discourse, and a repositioning of malleability so that it is not framed as inherently threatening or universally undesirable. White (2014) concludes by suggesting that queering fat-trans embodiment is one way to deconstruct the malleable/fixed body binary that exists within some fat and trans discourses, making room for a more nuanced embodiment that is neither entirely malleable or fixed, and perhaps even ambivalent.

### Methodology:

As a white, queer, transfat, non-binary disabled feminist scholar I use a queer feminist content analysis informed by trans politics and transfeminism as a lens for my analysis of Jabba the Hutt and Pat. I use transfeminism here as a way of denoting a third wave feminist sensibility that embraces transwomen and girls, is sex positive, espouses an affirming attitude toward stigmatized body types and which has been used to analyze and interpret pop culture texts and artifacts (Stryker & Bettcher, 2016). My aim is to analyze Jabba the Hutt from *Return of the Jedi* and Pat from *It's Pat* in ways that reveal the media construction of a transfat embodiment, and to reveal the ways that transfat embodiment is positioned as non-normative and grotesque. My analysis will center how transnormativity, fatphobia and racism work together to produce the conditions that result in the unique marginalization of the transfat subject. Rather than offering a film studies approach that centers on the diagetic and non-diagetic elements of these cinematic texts, I plan to focus on the cultural politics of media representations. To analyze these texts, I will use feminist and queer media analysis.

In this study, I chose the pieces based on some previous work I have done on Jabba the Hutt as a transfat subject on the screen, and on the popularity of both the *Star Wars* franchise, and of *Saturday Night Live*. The cultural climate at the time of their making was one that focused on thin bodies as ideal and desirable. Part of the way these ideals were homogenized and dispersed throughout society was through media, and both the *Star Wars* franchise and *Saturday Night Live* were heavily consumed media texts. Due to the broad consumption of both of these texts, these

transfat subjects become two of the only transfat subjects that have been available to audiences throughout the U.S. I also chose these two pieces due to the lack of representation of transfat subjects, these two subjects are two of the only subjects that I found that represent a transfat embodiment. Part of my work then is to shed light on the lack of transfat representation in media. One limitation of my project is that it only focuses the United States.

The way that the transfat subjects are constructed is an object of my inquiry. I will explore the camera framing of the subjects, the angles, and the way that the shots are constructed. I will also be analyzing the reactions of others to the transfat subject in question, either Jabba the Hutt or Pat from *It's Pat*. The abject horror that both subjects are treated with is important to investigate. In order to understand why transfat subjects are regarded with abject horror, we have to understand how transfat bodies are shaped by narratives and the legacies of racism, fatphobia, and transnormativity. All three of these concepts are key to understanding why the transfat subjects are treated and framed the way they are, and I will uncover the racism, fatphobia, and transnormativity in Jabba the Hutt's representation in *The Return of the Jedi* and a number of scenes from the *Saturday Night Live* skit *It's Pat*. In both cases, the gender indeterminability and fat embodiment are key components to the repulsion that they are treated with.

## Jabba the Hutt

Being called Jabba the Hutt as a middle school student in 1998 was something that needed no further explanation. Everyone knew who Jabba the Hutt was and that being called Jabba the Hutt was being called a fat, monstrous, disgusting creature. The movie *Return of the Jedi* was released in 1983 and was the third installment in the original Star Wars trilogy. It was in this movie that Jabba the Hutt featured as a prominent character and it is this Jabba the Hutt that I was being called 15 years later. The resurgence and exponential growth in the *Star Wars* fandom has only increased over time, making it one of the most widely recognized movie franchises in the world and the second total worldwide grossing movie franchise, beaten only by the *Marvel Universe*, which at the time of this writing has produced 22 movies to Star Wars' 11 (Wikimedia list article, 2019). The cultural impact of the *Star Wars* franchise has continued to endure for more than 40 years, with terms like “may the Force be with you” becoming part of the United States (and arguably global) lexicon, and helped to launch the genre of science fiction and fantasy into mainstream pop-culture where it has remained since (Star Wars, 2019). Not only have the movies been phenomenally successful, but the entire franchise has become a business model for success and profit. *Star Wars* has demonstrated the viability of the film trilogy and proved that merchandising rights could make more money than a film on its own (Star Wars, 2019). *Star Wars* apparel, comics, spin off series, books, art, jewelry, costumes (cosplay), conventions, fan art and anything *Star Wars* related can be found everywhere from grocery stores to major online retailers, from shopping malls to flea markets. *Star Wars* has made its mark in the academy as well, and numerous scholars have written about and reference the franchise, the movies, and the characters

in their work. Evidence of this can be seen with a Google scholar search of the terms, “Star Wars” which returned approximately 694,000 results on June 11, 2019. A search of the same terms conducted immediately after the first one using the USF library virtual database sorted by subject revealed that Star Wars has been referenced and is used widely across disciplines spanning psychiatry, art, film studies, writing, teaching, international policy, economics, history, advertising, gender studies, trans studies, fat studies and technology just to name a few.

In the *Star Wars* Universe colonization is a huge theme. The Empire is literally colonizing planets and people and exploiting resources and beings for their own goals. The Empire is a military force that occupies other planets and exploit planets and people for their resources. The exploitation that occurs throughout the movies that have spanned decades have always relied on the colonial narrative of a dictator, in this case Emperor Palpatine who uses his power in the Force to oppress and exploit those around him for personal gain. Emperor Palpatine commands an army of storm troopers and has powerful planet destroying weapons, such as the famed Death Star. The Empire colonizes bodies in multiple ways, through the capturing of people and other beings for slave labor, and through the ways that their colonizing practices changed the bodies in places that were occupied. In addition, the Empire was xenophobic against non-human species, attempting to eliminate whole species of aliens.

In the research conducted for this project I found that Jabba the Hutt was masculinized and treated as a binary male. While Jabba is portrayed as “male” and others use he/him/his pronouns both in the movies and when discussing and writing about Jabba, the 2001 “Essential Guide to Alien Species” which is treated as one of the most important reference guides for the *Star Wars* Universe, made it very clear that the Hutts were, “hermaphrodites with both male and female organs” (Mitchell, 2018). Additionally, the guide also contends that many Hutts consider any Hutt

who chooses to live only as one gender to be a perversion, and that choosing a single gender role in Hutt society is looked down upon (Gates, 2018). While the term “hermaphrodite” is now understood as derogatory and the word intersex is used for humans who have any combination of “male” and “female” anatomies, genes, and other markers of sex, the use of hermaphrodite in this context places the Hutts outside of the human sex and gender binaries, officially, even as the language of “hermaphroditism” was developed specifically in the context of the rise of eugenics, sexology, and scientific racism (Rubin 2017; Markowitz 2014; Malatino 2019). These projects sought to rank humankind in to a great “chain of being” that positioned cisgender, white, Anglo-European masculinity, and its heteronormative white feminine counterpart, as the apex of the hierarchy of “civilized” development. At the same time, eugenic research figures Black, brown, indigenous, and colonized populations as not only “uncivilized” and lesser developed, but also, crucially, as queer, and perverse in terms of sexuality and gender, as well as fatness (Strings 2019). Thus, in borrowing and inserting the language of eugenics and sexology into the first *Star Wars* trilogy, the *Star Wars* franchise can be read as expanding colonial, anti-trans, and anti-Black logics into one of the most widely viewed science fiction films of all time.

Jabba is portrayed as an insatiable villainous gangster who has riches and a palace, showing that they have some power and prowess. The hypersexual nature of the scene in which Leia is chained up in minimal clothing insinuates that Jabba’s sexual appetite is perhaps just as insatiable as their appetite for food. Jabba has a pet that they keep that eats people and Jabba likes to feed people to the creature for entertainment. This portrayal of Jabba as being so evil as to throw people into a pit to be devoured by their pet creature, the Rancor, encourages audience members to be repulsed by Jabba. Jabba’s status as gangster is important as well, due to the connotations of the word gangster. Gangsters are racially coded as black and brown males, so calling Jabba a gangster

is a move that paints them as not only evil but dangerous. In the opening introduction to the movie, Jabba is specifically mentioned and called, “the gangster Jabba the Hutt,” (McCallum, Kazanjian, Lucas, 1983 0:00: 35). This nomination has profound racialized implications, especially in the implicitly colonial setting of the Star Wars universe.

The 2001 “Essential Guide to Alien Species” states that in the *Star Wars* universe, the Hutts were a species that possessed both “male” and “female” reproductive organs, and were gender non-conforming, at least with regard to hegemonic gender norms of the Global North (as well as those of the Empire). Disney bought the franchise in 2012 and all the Hutts were “officially” assigned either male or female, and Jabba was given a mother and a father (Mitchell, 2018). While there have been feminist readings of Jabba the Hutt as a model of fat male sexual embodiment (Harker, 2016) and as a fat subject (McMahon, 2016), Jabba has yet to be analyzed as a transgender fat subject, and I found no discussions or analysis that addressed this while conducting research for this thesis. By insisting that Jabba be a binary male, the cisnormative heterosexual sex binary is imposed and reproduced in the *Star Wars* universe, which ironically erases that universe’s complicity with and foundation in European empire and colonization. In an effort to undo the erasure of non-binary sex and gender categories and the transgender embodiment of the Hutts by Disney, and to further normalize non-hegemonic pronouns, I will use they/them/theirs when talking about Jabba the Hutt throughout this work. While the movies use he/him pronouns for Jabba the Hutt, I argue that using they/them is an important grammatical move in order to normalize the use of they/them pronouns in the academy and beyond. As a trans feminist scholar who uses they/them pronouns I have a personal stake in the normalization of pronouns other than she/her and he/him. I could just as easily have chosen to use a neopronoun such as ze, zir, fae, or abstained from using pronouns at all and just used names. It is also important to note that when I



refer to the transgender embodiment of the Hutts, I am not attempting to erase or conflate intersex and trans experiences. According to David A. Rubin (2019) “Transgender (or trans) and intersex are umbrella terms. The former refers to a variety of gender non-conforming experiences and the latter to individuals born with sexual anatomies that various societies deem to be nonstandard” (pg. 360). It could very well be that the Hutts could be read as intersex, and that would require a different analysis and a different thesis. I am not suggesting that the trans and intersex experience are the same or interchangeable, but rather separate and distinct although related experiences. Historically, transgender individuals have faced barriers accessing medical technologies of transition while intersex individuals have been coerced or forced to undergo sometimes extensive surgeries and medical interventions (Rubin, 2019). I am also not suggesting that the Hutts being canonically intersex automatically means they are trans, since trans and intersex are two different categories of analysis. I am reading the Hutts as trans due to the ways in which both trans and some intersex people are read as gender non-conforming. I identify Jabba as trans due to the visual lack of binary gender markers that they have. This visual gender illegibility is what I am reading as Jabba’s transness. Rubin (2019) cites Stryker (2008) who argues that it is “the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place--rather than any particular destination or mode of transition--that best characterizes the concept of “transgender”” (pg. 364). Jabba is unable to visually participate in the colonial two category gender system of male and female that has spread throughout the galaxy. Additionally, I am not suggesting that you can tell if someone is trans or not based on how they look, rather I am simply suggesting that when a body is visually illegible and doesn’t easily and immediately fit into one of the two acceptable binary genders, they become trans through their illegibility. Salamon (2006) discusses transgender identity and embodiment in relation to social constructionism and contends that, “transpeople

undermine gender completely because of the material specificity of their differently gendered bodies” (pg. 580).). It is with this notion of trans that I will proceed. Although the Hutts are technically intersex, and some intersex people are thought to be or mistaken as trans (Rubin, 2019), Jabba is also trans to the extent that they disrupt strict gender binaries. The history of transness is not separate from the history of intersex, and Jabba disrupts the binary because not only as an intersex alien but also because their intersex status is linked to sexual depravity, as it has been linked to others who don’t fit into gender binaries (Foucault & McDougall, 1980). Like trans people, intersex people have been historically pathologized as sexual deviants. Jabba’s character has also been shaped by the sexist culture they were created in, and Jabba with all the power and prowess was presumed male. It is the effects and consequences of these visual cues and representations that result in the stigma and maltreatment of transfat people in society. By analyzing the way the visual transfat body is treated in pop culture, I hope to help create space for dialogue about what it means to be transfat, and to acknowledge this as a unique intersection of identity.

## It's Pat

*It's Pat* was a *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) skit that ran for four seasons and culminated in a movie, *It's Pat*, that was released in 1994. The movie was not successful but the skits that appeared on SNL have endured as popular skits and many of the skits are still readily available to watch online. Pat is an original character created by actress Julia Sweeney, whose portrayal of Pat is among the most notable highlights of her career (Thorpe, 1994). When asked about the inspiration for the character for a 1994 Rolling Stone article, Sweeney stated that, "I observed men and women who had weird qualities, and then when I put them together, I couldn't decide whether it should be a man or a woman, so I just made it someone you didn't know. To me, it was all about a real weirdo. That was where the inspiration came, it came from when you work at the office, and there's this one person who's just so fucking weird" (Thorpe, 1994, p.1). While Sweeney may not have intended to stigmatize gender non-conforming people, that is the legacy that Pat has left in their wake. The dehumanization of Pat begins immediately with the title, Pat is called an "it" literally, and as revealed in the previously quoted interview excerpt, that was the intention. Not even being afforded humanity but being labeled as an "it" implies that Pat is something else, something other, something foreign, not a who but an "it". Pat has light skin, but their race is not easily determined, and they wear their hair in a curly helmet style. Their gender and/or sex is not apparent, they have fat on their body that makes it hard to distinguish any kind of chest, and this contributes to their androgyny. They wear a western style button up shirt and khaki slacks. They have bushy thick eyebrows and wear thick rimmed black glasses with a thick white band attached to the arms of the

glasses that wraps around their head. They seem to have been styled this way to purposefully be awkward, with their shirt tucked in very tightly and their pants worn high.

Pat also makes awkward gestures and movements and they make guttural noises when they speak, often appearing to struggle to communicate. It is my assertion that they seem to be potentially on the autism spectrum. The glasses and the way Pat is dressed also convey a kind of “nerd” sensibility that Pat has. The potential of Pat to have autism is important and adds another dimension to this character that deserves further exploration by disability theorists. The way that disability is framed as something negative, something to be fearful of and avoided contributes to the way that Pat is treated. If Pat were neurotypical, they would still have other aspects that resulted in them being treated differently. Eli Claire (2017) talks about shame in regard to disability in his book, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure*. While focused on his own experiences, his insight that, “Shame has become home for many of us” rings true for many people who have been made to feel different for any reason (p. 166). Shame is being used as a tool to regulate, but it is undergirded by fear. It is this fear that gets played up and emphasized in the framing of Pat. I will not be going into the reading of Pat as autistic in depth as I have many layers already, but it is important to note this significant aspect of Pat.

In an attempt to make a character that is just “so fucking weird,” Sweeney pulled from the margins of society for inspiration, from those who might be socially awkward or have trouble expressing themselves. When Pat laughs, it seems almost forced and looking back on these skits as a historical object, I argue that the skits have not aged well, and they appear to be bullying and making fun of someone who is gender non-conforming and not neurotypical just for laughs. As time has progressed and disability activists have fought for rights for disabled people, it has become less socially acceptable to make fun of disabled people. Likewise, as trans activists have

fought hard for recognition, there is less tolerance in some circles for making fun of someone based on gender presentation. The androgyny of Pat is the main joke behind all of the skits, and Pat ends up in various situations, the gym, the drugstore, a barbershop, where the other actors in the skit attempt to ascertain Pat's gender. This is the running joke of the skit, and the actors are constantly asking Pat questions in order to try and figure out if Pat is a man or a woman. According to a 2019 *New York Times* article, Pat was one of the most popular *SNL* characters of the 1990s, and due to Pat's popularity, Pat has become what the article calls a "cultural cudgel used to mock those with unfamiliar gender expressions" (Itzkoff, 1994, p.1). Jill Soloway, the creator of the Amazon series, "*Transparent*" is quoted in the article stating that, "What we saw happen on 'S.N.L' was shame embodied and turned into an it-a thing, not a person." According to Itzkoff (1994), Soloway said that, "Pat had taught a generation of viewers to see gender nonconforming people as outsiders, rather than people who have the right to participate in art, media and comedy." Sweeney has expressed some remorse for the way that the character was portrayed, stating that she took the "criticism seriously and empathized with anyone who was insulted in this way". Sweeney goes on to state that, "As a person, of course I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings" but then added, "As an artist, I don't want to *never* hurt anyone's feelings" (Itzkoff, 1994, pg.1). Sweeney goes on to acknowledge that Pat was endorsing the idea that, "anyone who doesn't look like a man or a woman is someone we can point at and laugh at" (Itzkoff, 1994, p.1). This brings me back to what has created this climate that made it so easy for Pat to be a laughable character, an environment that made Pat popular enough that the skit ran for four seasons on *SNL*. Fatphobia, racism and transnormativity combine to create the climate that made it possible for Pat to emerge as a viable laughable character. For the purpose of this project, I will be analyzing one skit in particular that aired on November, 16<sup>th</sup>, 1991 and includes Linda Hamilton as a personal trainer. This video can

be found at <https://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/its-pat/n10133>. I turn now to the abject horror and fear that are used to frame transfat bodies, including that of Jabba the Hutt and Pat.

## Framing and Abject Horror

As Harker (2016) notes in their own use of the word abject, I use abject in the sense that it was envisaged by feminist psychoanalytic critic Julia Kristeva (1982) as “that which elicits fear and revulsion as a function of disruption (or the threat of disruption) to stable meaning” (p. 992). It is with this sense of abject horror that I turn to the scene from *Return of the Jedi* in which Leia is brought to Jabba for the first time. Leia is in shackles and is escorted by guards towards Jabba, who is speaking in a language we do not understand, with no translation. The camera angle is changed, and Leia’s face is zoomed in on and makes up a large percentage of the composition of the shot, ensuring viewers see her visceral repulsed reaction to Jabba. No doubt Jabba’s invasion of her space and treatment of her as an object are part of the revulsion, but the abject horror Leia portrays serves another function. Leia makes a guttural disgusted sound and turns away, closing her eyes, as if blinded by the horror of the sight before her as Jabba unfurls their tongue in an apparent attempt to lick Leia. By reacting so viscerally to being near Jabba, who is the opposite of Leia visually- non-white, non-English speaking, fat, and not visually distinguishable as a specific sex or gender, Jabba represents queer transfat embodiment. The framing and reaction that we see up close from Leia reinforces notions that the other, the different, the opposite, are subjects worthy of abject horror. As others (Scott, 2013; International Business Times, 2013; Harker, 2016) have noted, the racialized body, different language, and environmental portrayal of Jabba was framed as being from the East and draws on notions of Asians and Muslims as murderers, criminals, and slave owners. The Orientalism that pervades Jabba the Hutt is palpable and can be seen in other forms as well. A Lego playset was criticized for being racist in its rendering of Jabba’s palace: the

Lego set's palace uncannily resembled the Hagia Sophia, one of the "most revered mosques in the world" (International Business Times, 2013). The similarity between the dry, desert surface of Tatooine and the West's stereotypical racist ideas about how and where Muslims live, and what their morals are cannot be overlooked. C. Marie Harker (2016) writes in a footnote that the scene in which Leia is revealed to be Jabba's captive calls to mind "mid-19<sup>th</sup> century representations of the seraglio" and the scene reflects Victorian-era notions of "Islamic decadence" (p. 993). Jabba is then, the embodiment of a racialized and othered transfat body and Leia's reactions represent dominant notions about fear of the other, in this case, the racialized embodiment of a non-white transfat body. Jabba and their embodiment are a threat to white cisgender patriarchal hegemony that must be dealt with regulated and contained.

As Harker (2016) contends, fat flesh destabilizes gender due to its capability to diminish perceived masculinity, which feminizes it by association. If Jabba is feminized, and yet coded as male through the use of he/him/his pronouns throughout the movie and in the enduring legacy surrounding discussions about "him", then Jabba queers the notion of what it means to be fat. Jabba is feminized and yet masculine, and still has accumulated power and prowess throughout the universe. The trope of Jabba's grotesque fatness and lack of a visually readable sex and/or gender based on U.S. hegemonic binary gender expectations render them undesirable and abhorrent, and it could be argued that Jabba and the other Hutts turned to the Dark Side to gain power they could not obtain any other way, given their treatment as a result of their embodiment and its stigma in the *Star Wars* universe.

Returning to the notion that fat flesh destabilizes gender, I turn to Pat's destabilization of gender through their fat body. When Pat first enters the scene, they are wearing a shirt that is tight and that reveals their fat roll on their stomach. We are visually struck by the difference between



Pat's body and the scantily clad, lean and conventionally attractive bodies of the trainers and other gym members in the scene, particularly the body of the trainer who will be assisting Pat, who is played by Linda Hamilton. Hamilton became famous due to her role in the Terminator movie franchise, and much like Carrie Fischer who plays Princess Leia, her body is white, thin, and lean. Both Jabba and Pat are visually cast against bodies that represent the embodiment of the feminine beauty ideal, which detests fat bodies. This is a striking visual, with the normative thin white bodies cast against fat unknown others.

Returning to Foucault's concept of docile bodies is useful here, and for the purpose of my analysis can be distilled down into the idea that docile bodies are bodies that are improved through discipline and constraint (McMahon, 2016). McMahon (2016) states that these docile bodies are desirable because they are more "compliant and manipulable" (p. 176). It is the production of these docile bodies that as McMahon (2016) goes on to state, "stabilizes and promotes hegemony-that is, existing power structures, whether political or ideological" (p. 176). McMahon (2016) drawing on Bordo and Foucault goes on to assert that it is these docile bodies, having been rendered susceptible to outside manipulation, that "become so habituated in their regime of control that they *regulate themselves* after initial indoctrination" and said another way, "they are bodies that, once mastered, master themselves (p. 176). If we use the notion of docile bodies as a tool to view Leia's body as the docile, regulated body that is in careful control of its desire, it becomes clear that the unregulated and therefore threatening body is that of Jabba. We can also view Linda Hamilton's body as the docile, regulated body and Pat's body as the threatening and unregulated, out of bounds body. That is why they are at a gym, after all, to change their corporeal reality and embodiment and achieve a thinner body, a body that is not shrouded in flesh that makes secondary sex characteristics hard to distinguish. While Jabba is cast as so outrageously large that they are almost

beyond containment, Pat is more of a manageable size fat body, one that can be disciplined into a more conforming, more desirable body. The fatphobia is apparent from both Carrie Fischer and Linda Hamilton's characters, with Linda Hamilton's character making direct marks about Pat's fat body, and Leia's character being the visual reminder of what was desirable and acceptable. The body of the other either Jabba or Pat is framed as grotesque, which elicits overt disgust in Jabba's case and watered-down disgust for Pat's body. These bodies are framed as something to be detested, feared, because both Leia and Andrea are threatened by the body in front of them.

## Abject Horror and Fear

As the scenes with Leia and Jabba progress, we are frequently reminded of her subjugation, disgust, and contempt for Jabba, but fear keeps her compliant. In the scene in which we are first made aware of what Jabba has in mind for Leia, we are presented with a white-cloth laden Leia, appearing virginal. At one point the camera and lighting changes for a moment, highlighting Leia's slightly upturned face in ways reminiscent of Mother Mary, the ultimate virginal archetype of innocence and purity. Leia's thin small body is contrasted against Jabba's fat giant body, which is emphasized by the camera appearing to struggle to fit Jabba into the shot, and Jabba appears to be too large to be taken in all at once. Leia is held captive and subject to Jabba's will, evidenced by his yanking of a chain that is attached to a collar around her neck and which Jabba uses to control and restrict her movement. As McMahon (2016) observes, the captivity sequence treats Leia's body differently than other scenes do, and it is the focus on her "*form not her function*" that is on display (p. 173). The bikini that scantily clothes her body in this scene shows more skin than we have seen thus far on Leia, and her hegemonic body draws the audience's eye from scene to scene. The captivity sequence is purposeful for the development of the storyline but serves another purpose as well: it visually portrays the terrifying potential of queer fat embodiment. The virginal, pure embodiment of cisgender heterosexual normativity is cast against and literally chained to something framed as so grotesquely other, something so large and visually illegible, with no distinguishable sex or gender markers; this juxtaposition insights fear for Leia's survival from the audience (p. 173). A similar threat is made by Pat's body, as it disrupts the gym's activities just by virtue of its very ambiguous presentation.

The skit begins by showing people working out in a gym, with Linda Hamilton playing the role of Andrea, who was about to go to her lunch break when another trainer says that she should take this new client first, because the other trainer thinks Andrea will be better suited to evaluate the new client. Andrea says, “Why? is he a rich gorgeous hunk?” to which the other trainer replies, “well it’s a hunk of something” as Pat walks in from behind the two conversing trainers, to cheers from the audience. Pat walks in and with their shoulders shrugged up towards their neck and face they smile and say, “who’s going to evaluate me?” and the camera zooms in on Pat. The theme song then plays, which includes lyrics such as, “what’s that, it’s Pat,” and “its time for androgyny, here comes Pat” the skit proceeds and Pat and the trainer sit down to begin Pat’s “evaluation”. The evaluation includes the questioning of sex, to which Pat simply replies, “Yes please” and laughs, going on to say, “that’s my little joke” and laughing some more. With Pat stating that it is their little joke, we must make room here for queer resistance. Does Pat intentionally dodge the questions about what they are? It would seem so, and by stating that, “it’s my little joke,” Pat takes the power in the situation back from Andrea, diffusing and making Andrea uncomfortable, which does not appear to bother Pat one bit. Pat then stands up so that Andrea can measure the fat around their abdomen, and Andrea proceeds to attempt to use the calipers on Pat, but Pat can’t sit still for the measurement to be complete, and Andrea gets frustrated, stating, “look this is no fun for me either” and she concludes that “I guess we both know you need to lose a little no matter what you are...at...uh...body percentage wise” to which Pat replies, “I’m here, aren’t I?” The direct correlation to fatphobia and this scene is obvious. Pat is being told that regardless of what they are, they need to lose weight. Losing weight might even make their body more palatable and less androgynous, as Andrea points out when she states at 4:36 that the goal is to “burn through that fat and see what’s under there.” The fear that Pat might stay the way they are, androgynous, is too

much for the trainer Andrea to take and her suggestion is that no matter what Pat is they need to lose weight. This inherent and immediate fatphobia is blatant and overt with this scene. The whole skit is about Pat going to the gym, but the trainer immediately goes to losing weight as something that everyone needs to do. The cultural fear of fat is strong. Both Jabba and Pat are feared in part due to their fat embodiment, but it is the combination of fat with a trans identity that makes their embodiment unique. The fatphobia helps maintain the male/female sex binary and the literal fat on both Jabba and Pat's body disrupts popular notions about what kind of secondary sex characteristics are visible and readily apparent. This skit is unique in that it is directly addressing both Pat's unruly gender non-conformity and their unruly body. I do not believe that it was a coincidence that this particular skit is the one that Linda Hamilton was chosen to do, because what better opportunity to showcase everything that we should be desiring and upholding as beautiful then by contrasting it with something that rejects categorization.

Jabba and Pat embody the antithesis to cisnormative beauty ideals and acceptable visual embodiments of binary sex and gender in the Global North. McMahon (2016) cites Bordo in stating that both males and females are indoctrinated into social norms which are partially constructed, reified and upheld through media images that tell us, "what clothes, body shape, facial expression, movements and environment are required for us to be socially acceptable" (p. 176). With the prevailing construct of male/female and subsequently masculinity/femininity, the only socially acceptable choice is one of the binaries two categories and being visually recognizable as either male or female is an implicit requirement for the "correct" embodiment of both masculinity and femininity. When a body does not visually conform to the easy readability requirement, that body is automatically marked as other. When a fat body does not conform to the hegemonic idea(l)'s of femininity or masculinity and is visually illegible that body is dually violational, that body is a

threat and disruption to stable hegemonic meaning. Colonialism ties together transnormativity and fatphobia, as both transnormativity and fatphobia are tools of colonialism. Colonial notions of a sex and gender binary uphold transnormativity, and fatphobia results from colonial notions of beauty. At the heart of colonialism is anti-black racism, thus, anti-black racism is at the core of the threat that transfat bodies represent. This transfat threat endangers white hegemony and must be eliminated, and while *Return of the Jedi* squashes the threat for the viewer with white hegemony triumphing in no uncertain terms, Pat leaves us wanting more.

The *It's Pat* skit concludes with Andrea and the other trainer from earlier encouraging Pat to enter the locker room to get changed, with Pat physically positioned equally between the Men's and Women's locker room, the whole time being encouraged to "pick a door" by the trainers. The trainers appear to be almost holding their breath in anticipation, they just have to know what category to put Pat into. Right as it appears Pat is going to choose, the skit is cut for a Special Report; by the time the skit resumes Pat has entered into one of the two locker rooms. The viewers see the trainers laughing about Pat's ambiguity and the whole situation they were just in, appearing relieved to have finally determined Pat's gender. The audience purposely remains out of the loop, so that the joke can continue. Pat's unwieldy body has been momentarily contained, even if just a little bit, by picking one of the two doors presented to them.

Jabba the Hutt was also defeated, albeit in a much more dramatic fashion. Pat being forced to choose between two categories they might not identify with is a violence. That stems from transphobia that feeds off of transnormativity. We cannot acknowledge and understand transnormativity and its role without first looking briefly at transphobia. Transphobia is apparent in the erasure of Jabba's embodiment, and also in the constant forcing of Pat into situations and constant barrage of questions that Pat is subject too. Fear of both the visually gender non-

conforming and the fat corporeally non-conforming body gets the best of those that interact with both Jabba and Pat, and a general attitude of disgust or contempt for their existence is not hard to see. The fear of the bodies of Jabba and Pat is two-fold then, and has to do with them both physically not conforming and socially not conforming, by rejecting corporeally secondary sex characteristics that people use to categorize others into the boxes of male and female.

Jabba is forced into the male box as previously discussed, no doubt due in part to the power that Jabba wielded in the Universe. In order to deal with the threat of Jabba and their non-docile transfat embodiment, Leia is positioned as the hero that can cleverly wait until the moment presents itself to free herself. When the opportunity arises, Leia uses the chain that Jabba has been using to control her movement to strangle Jabba to death. In the scene, Leia scrambles to get behind Jabba, throwing the chain around Jabba's head so that she can choke them. The close-up views that feature Leia show her struggling, grunting, and having to repeatedly pull back with apparently as much strength as she can muster, which rocks Jabba's massive body backwards and forwards like a giant pendulum. When Jabba is featured by the camera, Jabba's tongue protrudes and writhes around in the air, their tiny arms flailing futilely as they eventually succumb to the strangulation that Leia worked so hard for. The camera is aimed in a worm's-eye-view that emphasizes Jabba's size, and Jabba closes their eyes, their tongue limp and hanging out of their mouth haphazardly, the audience presumably cheering Jabba's death, Leia has defeated the threat present in the beast. Leia has conquered the fat, the non-conforming, defiant, deviant, and perverse evil transfat embodiment. With the death of Jabba, the abject dies, and the threat and disruption along with it. The audience is once again rendered safe from the disgusting body that was deliberately fat and was the antithesis to Leia's hegemonic body in order to ensure audience disgust. The audience is supposed to rejoice in the death of the fat, genderless blob whom, despite their apparent success

as the galaxy's most infamous gangster, is portrayed as anything other than a being worthy of respect. It is important to note that the trope of the fat crime boss whose appetite extends to an insatiable appetite for sex, crime, and bad deeds is not a new one, and that Jabba is one in the long line of morally corrupt fat bodies in film and media. An examination of this is beyond the scope of this work, but a critique of how that trope has been extended into non-human and alien species in order to reinforce the notion that fatness and gender non-conforming bodies are things to be detested, regardless of species or planet of origin would be useful. For one brief examination of the fat crime boss trope, see Harker 2016. The triumph of hegemony over Jabba's transfat body has continued to be celebrated over the last three decades, and the contempt and disgust of Jabba and their embodiment has endured as part of their legacy.

Jabba the Hutt has endured both culturally and academically along with the franchise. In a 2015 article titled, "Psychopathology in a Galaxy Far, Far Away: the Use of *Star Wars*' Darkside in Teaching" Hall & Friedman argue that Jabba the Hutt is a "classic psychopath" and state that Jabba is, "intimidating to all those in his palace" (p.728-29). Hall & Friedman advocate using Jabba the Hutt to teach psychiatry students how to understand and potentially detect symptoms of psychopathy. (p. 728-29). Jabba's embodiment is now used in pop-culture and the academy, as an example of what not to be, especially if you want any chance at a financially successful future. That is, if you are a white cisgender heterosexual male who is easily visually readable as male.

The abject horror for Jabba is evident not only in writing geared towards fans of the franchise, but in more widely circulated material as well. In a 2006 article published on the New York Times website titled, "Extra Weight, Higher Costs" journalist Damon Darlin uses Jabba's embodiment as a metaphor for fat human bodies. When discussing research that claims that higher BMI's result in financial deficit over a lifetime, Darlin (2006) states, "we're not talking about



people who are merely carrying a few extra pounds, or only those that are Jabba the Hutt in their dimensions, either. People carrying 30 to 40 pounds extra can be affected” (n.p). In addition to the fear mongering intended in the previous quote, the article consistently places bodies on a hierarchy in which “normal-size” people are at the top. Darlin (2006) repeatedly makes statements such as, “heavy people do not spend more than normal-size people on food, but their life insurance premiums are two to four times as large...they can have a harder time being hired, and then a harder time winning plum assignments and promotions” (n.p.). Rather than analyzing the systemic causes that result in fat bodies being stigmatized and discriminated against as they move through the world, Darlin (2006) uses journalistic fear mongering to pour more gasoline on the moral panic surrounding fat bodies. Instead of questioning notions about what a “normal-size” body is, or what that embodiment might look like, Darlin (2006) cites research from various studies and pieces them together to argue that being in a fat body will literally cost you. Darlin (2006) cites a study published in 1966 that found that fat students had a harder time getting into top colleges and combines it with a study out of Cornell University that found that an increase of, “64 pounds above the average for white women was associated with 9 percent lower wages.” “Average” is never defined in the article. Darlin (2006) points out that there is at least a pay gap based on binary fat embodiment but does not analyze or question the gender difference. Darlin (2006) also cites research that argues that the weight bias is stronger than racial bias and adds that additional research found that while people rarely admit to racial bias, weight bias is admitted freely (n.p). Darlin (2006) leads the reader to digestible conclusions about why there are differences across race and class rather than questioning systemic racism and classism and invites the reader to join him by stating that, “a chicken-or-egg question invariably pops up. Are people fat because they are poor or poor because they are fat?” (n.p.). Darlin (2006) wraps up with the contention that, “a

drastic drop in weight corresponds to an increase of wealth” but that the financial impact of losing weight is “considerably less” for black women and that there was no change for black men (n.p.). Weight loss benefits white people then, but only if the weight loss is “significant” according to Darlin (2006). By opening the article with a comparison to Jabba the Hutt, Darlin (2006) invoked social hegemony and relied on a shared experience among readers of what a “normal” body is. In failing to define the “norm” that it upholds, the ambiguous norm is by default the unattainable white, cisgender, heteronormative beauty ideal. Jabba is used as everything *not* to be, the visual embodiment of what economic and social failure literally looks like, despite Jabba being a rich and powerful crime lord in the Star Wars universe. The fatphobia that shapes the views put forth in the previously mentioned pieces is also influenced by transnormativity, and both fatphobia and transnormativity are shaped by racism. The always already racist fatphobia and transnormativity undergirds hegemonic feminine beauty ideals and heteronormativity.

The abject horror with which transfat bodies have been regarded is rooted in racism and shaped by fatphobia and transnormativity. In her 2019 book, *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*, Sabrina Strings argues that the fear of the fat body is fear of the black body, particularly the black female body, as black women have always served as signifiers of the other in the West and Global North. Through an examination of how weight has always been tied to race and class, Strings traces the racist and eugenic roots of fatphobia. If fatphobia is always already racist, then both Jabba the Hutt and Pat are being measured against the always white normative ideal. Both Jabba and Pat are ambiguous racially visually, but they are both coded as non-white. Jabba is not human but is surrounded by things that are stereotypical of Orientalism and the building designs look much like mosques where Jabba resides. Pat is light skinned but appears

racially ambiguous with thick bushy black eyebrows and a full head of thick curly hair. One of the reasons I chose both Jabba and Pat was due to their continuing legacies, to which I will now turn.

## Legacies

The legacy of Jabba's transfat embodiment is evident in two separate online articles from the popular "fan" websites Looper and CBR. Both writers use terms and ways of describing Jabba that use their fat body as evidence of Jabba's corrupt morals, gluttony, and to mark Jabba's body as worthy of abject horror. In 2018 an online article titled, "The untold truth of Jabba the Hutt" was posted on Looper.com, a self-purported "outpost for pop culture enthusiasts of all ages." The author of the article, Christopher Gates, focuses on Jabba the Hutt, and the legacy of Jabba's embodiment is evident throughout. Gates (2018) uses many descriptors when talking about Jabba that have also been used when talking about fat people. Jabba is described as lazy, gross, and Gates (2018) states that even outside the Star Wars universe Jabba has become a symbol for, "gluttony, avarice, and corruption and it's all thanks to his iconic and thoroughly disgusting bod" (n.p.). Gates (2018) discusses the different incarnations of Jabba in the movie, comic books, and spin offs, and uses the word "obese" when discussing the "Hutt matriarch" that appeared in the cartoon series (n.p.). By choosing to use the term "obese," which is a term the medical community has used to pathologize and demonize the fat human body, Gates (2018) does not differentiate between a fat human and a fat alien species. What is implied then is that regardless of species, fat should be regarded as failed embodiment throughout the universe. When discussing Jabba's reproductive capabilities and gender, Gates states that, "Hutts were born with both male and female reproductive organs, and could mate with themselves if they wanted too" and then goes on to say that, "any perceived gender markers, like feminine makeup or sex-specific pronouns, are up to individual Hutts themselves," although *The New Essential Guide to Alien Species* says that, "many normal

Hutts consider this a perversion, and scorn those who choose gender roles” (n.p.). As Gates (2018) notes and as was previously stated, when Disney bought the franchise in 2012, they ensured that the Hutts got assigned genders-Jabba was assigned male and that, “Jabba’s hermaphroditic past” was erased from canon (n.p.).

In an article published on the comic book resource website CBR.com, Nigel Mitchell wrote a 2018 piece titled, “Hutt Stuff: 15 Weird Facts You Never Knew About Jabba The Hutt.” Mitchell (2018) states that Jabba is one of the, “most hated characters in all of the Star Wars universe” and that, “Jabba the Hutt has made a huge impact as one of the most instantly recognizable villains in movie history” (n.p.). Mitchell (2018) describes Jabba as, “putrid filth,” a “festering pile of worm-like blubber,” “loathsome,” and states that, “as if it’s not bad enough to look at Jabba, he also smells bad too” (n.p.). Such strong adjectives conjure up nothing less than abject horror. In addition to contributing to the trope of the “smelly” fat person, Mitchell (2018) points to another trait that Jabba has that is leveled against fat bodies and is a staple of Jabba’s character; an insatiable appetite. Mitchell (2018) states that according to “official sources”, “Jabba eats an average of nine meals a day, but that doesn’t count snacks” and it doesn’t include people (n.p.). Mitchell (2018) comments on Jabba’s sex and gender the same way Gates does, stating that, “only recently did Lucasfilm establish that the hermaphrodite status is no longer canon and the Hutts have male and female genders.” There is no differentiation or explanation of sex or gender in either article, no discussion of the problematic term, and both authors contribute to the conflation of sex and gender and erasure and/or negative treatment of intersex and trans embodiment.

Both pop-culture writers used strong negative adjectives, and while Gates (2018) uses the term “obese” for Jabba’s “grandmother” and equates a fat alien body with human fat bodies, Mitchell (2018) takes it a step further and argues that Jabba could have *chosen* not to be fat.

Mitchell (2018) writes in fact #4 that, “Jabba Could be Buff” and that, “Jabba has become a pejorative buzzword for those with larger body types” (n.p.). In the same paragraph Mitchell (2018) contends that, “Jabba and the other Hutts are bigger because of laziness, not biology,” and draws as evidence on the comic series, which had a Hutt character named “Grakkus” who was drawn as muscular and thin. Mitchell uses the existence of the *one* “thin” Hutt as evidence of *all* of the other Hutts’ laziness, stating that, “If Grakkus could lose weight and build muscle, then the other Hutts could probably slim down” (n.p.). Mitchell (2018) does concede that it is possible that Grakkus is the exception, but this admission reads as an afterthought. This kind of emphasis on individual responsibility is the calling card of neoliberalism, and the influence it has had on notions of personal responsibility to regulate one’s own body is evident in these pop-culture fandom articles. This neoliberal sense of personal responsibility to regulate a fat body is what landed Pat in the gym to begin with, and the skit, while centering Pat’s androgyny, also focused on how Pat’s fat body obscured sex (and therefore, gender, as many people do not recognize the difference between the two).

The fatphobia that is so apparent in the legacy of Jabba the Hutt can also be found with Pat, but on a smaller scale due to the different nature of the works. According to Itzakoff (2019) Pat was one of the most popular *SNL* characters of the 1990’s, and Pat quickly became an insult that was hurled at those that resembled Pat in their embodiment. In Itzakoff’s 2019 *NY Times* article, Abby McEnany, the co-creator and star of the Showtime comedy “Work in Progress” said that she had been called a Pat, and that she believed it was due to her being a lesbian that somewhat resembled Pat in their embodiment. (n.p.) McNany recalls being asked if she was “a Pat” in a lesbian bar bathroom, and stated, “It’s like, wow, I can’t even find a safe space in what’s supposed to be a safe space?” (n.p.) In the same (2019) Itzakoff article, Jill Soloway, the creator of the show,

“Transparent,” said that, “Pat typified a dehumanized depiction of real people” (n.p.). Soloway goes on to state that, “What we saw happen on ‘S.N.L’ was shame embodied and turned into an it-a thing, not a person” (n.p.). Soloway concluded by saying that the *It’s Pat* skits, “were a reflection of how people are expected to adhere to gender stereotypes and everybody who doesn’t do that is subject to a wide array of bullying and hatred” (Itzakoff, n.p.) In the conclusion of the 2019 article, the actress is asked about how she feels now that Pat has endured in a less than flattering way. Sweeney states that, “Pat doesn’t know that Pat comes off in an androgynous way,” and that, “Pat is actually very sexual-heterosexual. We just don’t know if Pat’s a man or a woman because of how Pat presents Patself” (Itzakoff, n.p.) Pat’s fat body is a big part of how Pat presents themselves. They wear clothing that is typically stereotypically male attire, including a button up shirt and slacks. This doesn’t seem to be enough of a signal towards male though, and skit after skit Pat is confronted with questions about their sex, which they always cleverly avoid and usually get some laughs doing so.

## Conclusion

White's (2014) assertion that, "surely, a good part of the abject horror with which fat bodies of any gender are regarded resides in the way they muddy the supposedly discrete division between male and female" is an important one (p. 96). White (2014) also contends that the narrow standards of successful trans-embodiment ought to be cracked open, and a recognition that fatness queers gender could make room for a wider recognition of trans-legibility. How can a recognition of fat as queer call into question the normalization of thinness in transnormative scripts? Based on my analysis I would argue that there is an inherent queerness in fatness, and perhaps an inherent transness. In the course of this project I noticed the discourse surrounding the "before" and the "after" talk about both weight loss and binary transition. In weight loss discourse, as in binary transnormative scripts, the "after" is a socially constructed ideal that leads people to believe that their "happy life" is obtainable if they can look like the people in the "after" weight loss photos. In trans discourse, as in weight loss culture, the "before" is often discussed as an undesirable, depressing, and often pathologized or medicalized body. The damning of futurity in fat activist discourse and reification of it in trans discourse deserves further investigation.

This project raises a number of questions about transfat bodies and where they fit into the current discourses. Both fat and trans bodies tend to be framed historically as undesirable, both condemned yet fetishized. Both have been framed by the medical establishment as bodies in need of correction (through binary transition or weight loss). In a culture obsessed with the regulation of minds and bodies, the transfat body defies regulation, serving as a visual site of resistance



(whether the individual wants that to be the case or not). In my research there was no evidence of a genealogy or investigation that linked both fatphobia and transphobia to racist eugenic practices, and this could provide valuable insight into how racist eugenic practices have influenced the narratives surrounding embodiment. If both fatphobia and transphobia are rooted in racist eugenic practices, then we may find that transfat embodiment being regarded with abject horror is a manifestation of anti-black racism. Transfat bodies are disruptive; they take up space in the world, a visual reminder of nuance that unsettles categories and notions of normativity. Within the trans communities, discussions of passing often involve discussion of weight loss/gain/redistribution. How would these notions be interpreted by current fat political discourse? Would any weight loss be framed as internalized fatphobia, or would it be viewed as acceptable to modify the body if the motivation is gender identity? These are important questions that deserve further investigation. Additionally, the transnormative script is informed by cishegemonic beauty ideals, but what about those transfats that do not desire a binary gender transition? Or those that only wish to alter parts of their body (whether or not that includes any fatness)? The current discourse has not left much room for the articulation of a fat body that is not cisgender and feminine, or for a transfat or non-binary fat body. These bodies transgress multiple boundaries and politics, and both fat studies and trans studies have failed to take up these bodies, rendering entire swaths of populations invisible and erased. As my analyses of Jabba and Pat have demonstrated, people tend to have strong visceral reactions to bodies that do not conform to hegemonic standards. This combined with the framing and portrayal of these bodies results in Jabba and Pat's bodies being cast as other, undesirable, grotesque, and worthy of disgust and something to be fearful of. Through an examination of the framing, abject horror and fear of Jabba the Hutt from *Return of the Jedi* and Pat from *It's Pat I* hope this thesis has helped to create space for transfat voices and experiences,

and to shed light on the transnormativity, fatphobia, and the racism that have shaped the ways that transfat bodies are treated and represented.

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