EVERY**BODY** KNOWS ABOUT **FAT?**

EXPLORING STRATEGIES OF FAT CITIZENS

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Prologue
- Being captured by truths

> "I mean, it is okay to like food, but that much? How could she let it come this far? It is just so unhealthy to be that fat". I suddenly wake up from my own thoughts when I hear these words. In the seats in front of me in the train I see what seems to be a mother and daughter, sharing some disapproving glances while discussing the body size of a person they know. Maybe one year ago I would not have noticed anything about this conversation, the normality of it would make the conversation 'invisible' to me. However, now, I feel the power of each word they speak shivering through my body. The daughter continues: "Maybe she should consider a gastric bypass, that would be a good option wouldn't it?". "Maybe", the mother nods, "but that is quite something, that she already needs so much help at her age to take care of her body". I see them sharing an agreeable glance before moving on to another topic concerning their planned city trip and the conversation turns invisible to me again.

This book is a story about the role of *truths* such as those described above. By truths I do not mean the universal 'Truths' but I mean what is felt and understood at a given moment, but can shift to become something else. I am referring to those notions that often go with: "It is well known that … ", "That is just the way it is" and "Everybody knows" (Weedon, 1997, p. 74). As a researcher, I will therefore not show you any statistical analyses, significant results or corroborated hypotheses to convince you of the truths that I have uncovered. What I will do is an in-depth examination of personal narratives, whereby these narratives are understood to be informed or influenced by "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1979): truths that dominate in a certain time and place and produce social beliefs and norms.

These truths regulate what is seen as natural, appropriate, moral or good (Weedon, 1997). This influences the perception of bodies. Inevitably, these truths provide advantage to particular social groups and disadvantage to those who are not seen as 'normal' or 'good'. Gender, race, class and increasingly sexuality, religion, national identity, dis/ability and age have been studied by feminist scholars as criteria by which people are differentiated as either normal and privileged – such as white heterosexual men – or as unprivileged. Van Amsterdam (2013) shows how 'body size' also intersects with those criteria and could be considered as one of the main criteria by which bodies are judged.

Therefore, the truths I will focus on are those based on the look of a *fat*[1] body. Several scholars have argued that these truths only allow for a narrow understanding of fat embodiment and may lead to misperceptions, stereotypes and marginalization of fat people (e.g. Campos et al., 2006; Puhl & Heuher, 2010; Rothblum & Solovay, 2009). It is not the purpose of this story to directly argue with dominant truths surrounding fat bodies, as – fortunately - there are others who have taken up this task (e.g. Murray, 2008; Rich & Evans, 2005; Saguy, 2012; Sedgwick, 1993). Instead, the goal is to demonstrate how these 'truths' on the one hand inform and persuade fat people how to understand themselves and live their

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[1] Reading the term 'fat' might already provoke negative connotations (something that is not natural, appropriate, moral or good). However, I am using this because I want to refer to a descriptor of the human body and believe that by using the word more often, it can help to change the negative meanings often associated with it. Weight – like height – is a bodily characteristic that varies across any population and over a person's lifetime (Flegal, 2006). As fat acceptance activist Marilyn Wann stated: "there is nothing negative or rude in the word fat unless someone makes the effort to put it there" (2009, p. XII).

lives, and on the other hand, how fat people try to resist, or transform these dominant 'truths'.

Taking a critical view at the dominant truths about body size is not without social risks. It involves confronting the power/knowledge of medical professions, weight loss industries, fashion industries, government policies and the media that unanimously claim the slender body as the ideal body that everyone can and should obtain (e.g. Saguy, 2013). For instance, participants in this study indicated how doctor visits often go hand in hand with comments about their body size (p. 29), how they are blamed by others or blame themselves when pills or diets do not have the desired effect (p. 21), and how they struggle to find clothes in their size (p. 40). I also experienced myself - when explaining my research to others – how my work was trivialized or treated in a joking manner, because it is aimed at critiquing what is seen as natural and the 'truth' (p. 34 & p. 61).

Whereas the truths about fat bodies are loudly presented in health science, social media and in everyday talk, the perceptions of fat individuals themselves are rarely heard or taken into consideration. How do they use, challenge and feel about dominant truths they are confronted with daily about their bodies? How do they develop a sense of self in an environment where their bodies do not conform to society's wishes (LeBesco, 2004)? That is what I would like to investigate.

This story takes off with exploring how people's perceptions of abnormal bodies are generally interwoven with (implicit) knowledge (Alcoff, 2001; Murray, 2007). Moving further to exploring the marginalizing effects and disciplinary power of this knowledge on individuals (Goffman, 1963; Puwar, 2000) (Foucault, 1972), followed by placing it in the context of the Western norms of 'ideal citizenship' (Halse, 2009). All of these perspectives are important for understanding the role of truths about body size. However, what seems to have most relevance is the feminist poststructuralist approach, in particular the notions of subjectivity and agency (Weedon, 1997): how do self-identified fat people use acts or narratives to deal with their unprivileged position in society?

I spoke quite extensively with ten participants: Marian, Mandy, Isa, Nancy, Hanna, Ben, Riana, Kyra and Cindy[2], who will be the lead characters of this story. I spoke most of them more than one time and for several hours. Also, some of them wrote a one-week diary about their daily lives and the role of their body. With a couple of them I kept in touch to discuss the outcomes of my research. Based on these conversations, diaries and reflections, I distilled four dominant themes that seem to represent how their lives are shaped by dominant truths about fatness: *responsibility, health, professionalism and beauty/happiness.* This story builds around these four central themes. Furthermore, I collected naturally occurring data from discussions on a Facebook group to elaborate on these themes. This is a private Facebook group in which women converse about their daily lives and struggles related to their larger body size.

I hope you will gain a better understanding and critical awareness of 'truths' that inform fat people on how (not) to be and how (not) to behave. A focus on disciplinary practices and fat people's actions might offer a better understanding of the complex reality of fat embodiment to be able to create new subject positions. While I do not expect this study to instantly

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[2] For privacy reasons, I use pseudonyms to refer to my participants.

transform dominant truths around body size, I do hope to contribute to a better emphatic understanding of the complexity of fat embodiment in the lives of my participants, readers, and myself.

Who am I to tell you this?
Before moving on to the story, however, you as a reader should know about me, the author, and my subject positions with regard to bodily attributes. How can I better explain who I am than by telling you my own bodily descriptors (and/or privileges): I am a white, young, able-bodied, and slender woman. I have no experiences with marginalization or exclusion due to my body size. However, I grew up and live in a society that constructs fat as bad. I have experienced privilege based on my body size (see my own reflections on p. 60). I have experienced the fear of 'becoming fat'. And I experience the internalization of dominant truths around fat bodies within myself (see p. 63).

At the age of 11 my teacher already mentioned my 'perfectionistic' tendencies. I have always been a goody-goody, always trying to do what is socially appropriate, and being overly sensitive when someone would comment on me doing something 'wrong'. A comment about my posture, handwriting, or clothes would already evoke feelings of embarrassment and make me immediately change my 'mistake'. I was and often still am very much influenced by how I am 'supposed' to behave and what I am 'supposed' to look like according to standards in a certain setting. This entails putting in much effort to behave and look appropriate and being highly sensitive to what others might think of me. I make all these efforts to be seen as 'normal' and 'good', or even 'perfect'.

Although I cannot compare my experiences with those who are always already seen as 'abnormal', it makes me realize how much I am influenced by norms in my society. The ideas of Michel Foucault and feminist poststructuralists enable me to take a critical perspective regarding these so-called dominant societal ideals that influence the way I live my life and marginalize those who are seen as abnormal. It makes me aware how I am disciplined by others and how I discipline myself and others to adhere to appropriate norms that dominate my environment. It also makes me aware how those people - who are not able to adhere to the constructed norm – take up an unequal and unprivileged position in society. And, it makes me want to change something about that. Therefore, inspired by Foucault, I see my role as researcher "to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, evidence, some themes that have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed" (1988, p. 10).

Before I started this project, I spoke with two fuller-sized women that are close to me privately and whom I respect greatly. I believe that going into the field (instead of immersing into books) is necessary before knowing what to study. By talking to people, you get a sense of what is relevant in the field you want to study (Flyvbjerg, 2004). Although both of them ensured me they were never discriminated based on their body size, they did have their own stories in which subtle ways and expectations marginalized them as human beings and constrained them. These are two quotes to exemplify how they internalize these marginalizations:

> "Deep down, I think of myself as inferior to others because I am fat."

> "In my job, I've always had the feeling to have to compensate for my body by being very smart".

They made me realize the high societal relevance of this research, as it was by these conversations that I became aware of the persistent inequalities in Dutch society based on body size. Also, it made me aware of the taken-for-granted 'truths' that exist within myself and in society related to body size.

So I needed to know more of these stories.

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I. Seeing, knowing and disciplining

> Look at my body,
> what do you see?
> Is it the color of my skin,
> me being fat or thin,
> my femininity or masculinity,
> youthfulness or maturity,
> that makes me seen or unseen,
> defines who I have been
> what I do
> and what I don't do?
> In a world in which seeing and knowing
> are intimately interwoven,
> is what you see -
> my identity?

This chapter is meant to show how the narratives of my participants are part of power structures that produce the fat body as abnormal. Power-infused processes happen consciously and unconsciously around the body. To gain a better understanding of these processes I divide them into 'seeing' bodies, 'knowing' bodies and 'disciplining' bodies. Although I write them down in separate paragraphs, these processes often do not unfold as strictly separated but intertwine with each other. By focusing on these processes, I will illustrate how bodies are socially constructed and inscribed with meanings. More specifically, I will focus on the meanings related to body size.

Seeing
Which bodies are seen? According to sociologists Puwar (2000) and Goffman (1963), those bodies that represent the ideals of humanity are, in an embodied sense, invisible (they are *unseen*). This might sound as something undesirable but according to Puwar (2000) being invisible is actually a privileged position. Invisible bodies are perceived as 'normal'. By normal I mean people's general anticipations of what a given type of individual should be or look like (Goffman, 1963, p. 53). This position is not available to those who are marked by their body, to those who possess certain physical attributes that are perceived as abnormal. For instance, the race or color of a white person is often left unnamed and unseen (a non-issue), in comparison to a 'black person' of whom his color is often marked and highly visible (Puwar, 2004, p. 57).

Abnormal bodies are highly visible as they stand out due to their visible markers. Yet, the individual qualities of abnormals are often invisible. Let me explain what I mean by that: the high visibility of their physical markers inhibits 'seeing' the individual qualities of a person. For instance, Ralph Ellison (1995) speaks about being black in the United States, in which he considers himself as an *Invisible Man*, because due to a slew of stereotypes and prejudices, nobody recognizes what he accomplishes. This entails that 'normals' are recognized as what is typical in public and can therefore be personally unique (Berlant, 1997, p. 36), whereas being recognized as 'abnormal' allows for no personal uniqueness but produces negative stereotypes about a social group that are projected onto the individual. According to Goffman (1963, p. 12), bodily markers "reduce the person in our minds from a whole and

usual person (normals), to a tainted, discounted one (abnormals)", that is, a stigmatized person. Invisibility is thus an instrument of power, privileging the normal body to be personally unique.

The question remains: when do people generally perceive a person as 'abnormal'- as deviant from other members of our society? According to Goffman (1963, p. 4), social stigma can result from either the perception of abominations of the body, from blemishes of individual character or thirdly, from tribal stigma based on race, nation and religion. In the case of fat bodies, two types of social stigma come into play: not only are fat people stigmatized based on the perception of abominations of the body, but also, they are often seen as deviant, because fatness is seen to represent flawed character traits such as being weak-willed (Crandall, 1994).

Thus, not only is the fat body more visible related to its size compared to slender bodies, the fat body also shows a stigma that could never be hidden because "it is written on the body for all to see" (LeBesco, 2004, p. 6). I am interested in the visibility of the fat body, to understand subtle forms of exclusion and privilege based on body size categorizations.

Knowing
When people see a body, they generally do not just see the biological or material aspects; their perceptions are situated in knowledge constructions (e.g. Alcoff, 2001; Grosz, 1994; LeBesco, 2004; Murray, 2008). That is, perception of bodies is often influenced by social, cultural and historical knowledge. People experience and understand bodies through this knowledge. For instance, when seeing someone new, then, first appearances of the body enable someone to form an idea of the other person's - in the words of Goffman (1963, p. 12) - 'social identity'. When people see a 'fat' body, they might think they *know* something about that person. For instance, they might 'know' something about the person's behavior (he or she is eating too much); personality (he or she is lazy or irresponsible); or medical condition (he or she is unhealthy and/or has mental problems) (e.g. LeBesco, 2004; Murray, 2008; Sedgwick, 1993;).

According to Alcoff (2001), people try to read bodies by attaching meanings to its markers: "there is no perception of the visible that is not already imbued with value" (p. 19). As Alcoff (2001) argues, people are often unaware of these so-called 'tacit bodily logics' they use to immediately make sense of each other. The social identity theory explains that this tendency of reading bodies arises because people try to reduce the complexity of the social world and try to anticipate social behavior (Turner, 1985). As Grosz (1993, p. 199) argues: "bodies speak, without necessarily talking because they become coded with and as signs". The question is: are these bodily logics helpful or harmful by creating 'spoiled identities'? As in the case of stigmatized 'fat' bodies, one of the participants of this study described them as: "views that can sometimes be true, but most often are not" (Peter).

As these knowledge constructions are repeated over time, they become common-sense knowledge and eventually perceived as 'facts'. This puts pressure on individuals to accept them. For example, biomedical notions about fatness dominate popular perceptions about fatness in most western societies. For most people this justifies their tendency to differentiate between what are perceived as 'healthy' slender bodies and 'unhealthy' fat bodies (Van Amsterdam, 2014). That is, according to Foucault (1979), implicit knowledge deployed as 'regimes of truth': a strategic field in which what is thought to be 'true' is created and

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internalized. Every society creates its own regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980). People generally understand their interaction with others and the world through these truths.

In this study I am interested in the 'knowledge constructions' my participants have to deal with because of their body size. The main truths my participants struggled most with are related to issues of responsibility, health, professionalism and beauty/happiness. Chapter 4 till 7 will provide an in-depth examination and analysis of each of these four regimes of truth.

Disciplining

Within these regimes of truth, knowledge is constructed about what counts as normal and abnormal embodiment. Foucault (1972) argues that power and knowledge are inseparable, he therefore writes: 'power/knowledge'. Foucault thus does not conceptualize power as something someone has in his or her possession; however, he sees power as relational and interconnected with knowledge that exists between people and is internalized within people. For example, for many years it was believed that women's physiology made them inadequate of making educational and professional achievements (Weedon, 1997, p. 127). Initial feminist attempts to transform this truth were countered by religious and scientific power structures that created 'common sense' knowledge that women are best suited for motherhood, childcare and domestic labor (Weedon, 1997, p.2). These regimes of truth thus regulate what is seen as the 'truth' and how people should think about themselves and live their lives.

Consequently, perceptions of abnormal bodies are not only interwoven with knowledge, they can also have disciplinary effects. That is, the meanings people attach to someone that is perceived as 'fat' can direct a fat person to behave as he or she is expected to behave. For instance, fat people are often expected not to be good at sports, so a fat person might feel less eager to try sports. According to Goffman, "we lean on these anticipations that we have, transforming into normative expectations, into righteously presented demands" (1963, p.12). But this expectation is also productive the other way around, that is, people generally see what they expect to see. For example, when people expect that fat people often go to McDonald's (see p. 27), any fat person at McDonald's will be highly visible and immediately confirms the dominant truth. According to Puwar, a body that is perceived as abnormal "can be seen to be taking up more physical space than it actually occupies" (2004, p. 49).

Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) 'norms' as an average standard against which people are evaluated and controlled. Furthermore, those who cannot adjust to the norm are excluded and marginalized. As stated above, when a person is categorized as 'abnormal', he or she becomes highly visible (Goffman, 1963; Puwar 2000). When a person is highly visible, it compels him or her to adjust to the norm to become less visible and more 'normal'. A clear example from this study is that people who are perceived as fat (and abnormal) often try to lose weight by means of dieting to become slender (and perceived as normal). Thus, a person is not only disciplined by others, but individuals also play a major role in disciplining themselves. Discipline consist of techniques of power that construct, control and regulate an individual's body and behavior. According to Foucault (1979), people become 'docile bodies' by trying to conform to the appropriate norm in a certain context. Bodies become docile when they can be used, improved and trained (Foucault, 1979).

This study addresses several specific disciplinary practices. In short, I will focus on the following three types of disciplinary practices: 'categorization', 'normalization' and 'surveillance'. These three practices can be directed from others (techniques of dominance), or from within oneself (techniques of the self). I will now explain these practices in detail, with a particular focus on the practice of (self-)surveillance.

Techniques of dominance and the self
Foucault (1979) explains how discipline influences how human beings 'should' behave within certain contexts. He distinguishes between two types of techniques: techniques of domination and techniques of the self. Techniques of domination are disciplinary practices of pressure from the outside, that is, pressure imposed by others to adjust a person's body or behavior. Techniques of the self are disciplinary practices of pressure from the inside, beliefs about good behavior that are internalized and influenced by techniques of domination. This entails that they are not something invented by the individual himself, however, they are "models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him or her by the culture, society and their social group" (Foucault, 1979, p. 291). These techniques help one decide how to act or how not to act. According to Smith (1999, p. 83), techniques of the self could be seen as 'guides' in society that people internalize to "ensure survival, maximize success, and avoid psychological, physical and social penalties".

Categorization, normalization, surveillance
Categorization, normalization and surveillance are different forms of disciplinary practices that control individuals' bodies and behavior, either by domination of others or by techniques of the self. These disciplinary practices aim to control deviant bodies into fitting the constructed norm. According to Foucault (1979), this is how bodies are produced by knowledge/power. Categorization happens when constructed knowledge divides people into binaries of for example man/woman, healthy/unhealthy and fat/slender. This division subsequently controls subjects by defining their being and doing as limited to those of the category to which they are assigned (van Amsterdam, 2014). Through normalization, another disciplinary technique, some of these categories are seen as 'normal' or 'good'. As a consequence of this labeling, people who are not categorized as normal will feel compelled to change their bodies to fall into the category of 'normal' and 'good', because they fear being excluded (van Amsterdam, 2014). Another important discipline technique is surveillance, that entails observations of the body which inform people when bodies deviate from the norm and are therefore in need of normalization (van Amsterdam et al., 2012). According to Foucault (1979), this disciplinary practice has become a modern form of 'punishment'.

> "There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under his weight will end by interiorizing to the point he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be at minimal cost." (Foucault, 1980, p. 155).

Surveillance can be explained by means of the concepts 'Panopticon' and 'Synopticon', which together serve as a modern form of control and discipline (Mathiesen, 1997).

Panopticon
Foucault (1979) uses the metaphor of the 'Panopticon' to illustrate how people are disciplined in modern society. The Panopticon is a prison design that enables constant surveillance of the prisoners. Foucault (1979) proposed that not only prisons, but a range of institutions in today's society has come to resemble the Panopticon design. The Panopticon

metaphor helps to explain how participants experience (self-)surveillance and need to 'normalize' their body and/or behavior.

The Panopticon prison consists of a circular structure with a "watch tower" at its center. From this central point, guards of the prison can easily watch (and control) the behavior of the prisoners stationed around the watch tower. The prisoners cannot see the tower because the light is shining from the tower into the cells. As a consequence, prisoners never know for sure if they are being watched, but the feeling of constant surveillance acts as a control mechanism to discipline their own behavior, as they internalize the constant observation.

This metaphor shows that power/knowledge is practiced through observing others. This means that 'appropriate' behavior is not controlled through total surveillance, but by panoptic discipline whereby people feel as if they are constantly being watched and judged by others, and therefore control their own behavior. The more one observes, the more powerful one 'knows' what the norm is. The more visible; the more one feels observed and tries to adjust to the norm. In this study, I will investigate how participants experience Panopticon-mechanisms that subject them through disciplinary power into self-surveillance.

Synopticon
The metaphor of the 'Synopticon' is coined by Mathiesen (1997) as an addition to Foucault's Panopticon, to emphasize the importance of modern surveillance techniques in today's society. In the 'viewer society' of the Synopticon, the many see (and admire) the few, in comparison to the Panopticon in which the few see the many (Mathiesen, 1997, p. 218). The dominant construction of the ideal body is represented by mainstream media such as internet, television, advertisements etc., which entails that it is controlled by a few (the producers of mass media) and seen by many. This indicates that the ideal, desirable body is represented everywhere in mainstream media, whereas 'deviant' bodies are either concealed or represented as failed citizens, stereotypes or stigmas (Rothblum & Solovay, 2009). This dominant imagery causes a narrow understanding of ideal, desirable embodiment. For instance, American lifestyle website 'Refinery29' just[3] started a campaign called 'see the 67%' to represent the 67% of American woman who have size 14 and up – instead of the 1-2% of the images they state that media usually show of these women. As such, the media serve as a Synopticon by constructing and reproducing the ideal body size which compels viewers how to think, feel and act in relation to their body size. This study uses the Synopticon concept to analyze issues of representation that function to marginalize deviant bodies and discipline them to 'fit in'.

In this chapter, I have tried to show how power structures position the fat body as abnormal, and therefore subject it to (self-) discipline and marginalization. In the four themes (responsibility, health, professionalism, beauty/happiness), I will analyze the dominant truths that participants experience in their daily and professional lives which maintain these power structures.

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[3] See: http://thepublisized.com/refinery29-see-the-67/, accessed at 29-09-16

II. A feminist poststructuralist lens

So far, I have focused mainly on processes of domination and power, and little on the agency of the individual. However, participants of this study are not only disciplined by dominant truths, but are also agents who negotiate and navigate within these truths. This is why I need the perspective of *feminist poststructuralists* who consider the agency of marginalized individuals that can challenge technologies of domination and power (Weedon, 1997; van Amsterdam et al., 2013; LeBesco, 2004). Feminist poststructuralist theories conceive a person's identity thus not only as something imposed by power structures; rather identity is seen as a social process undergoing constant change (Weedon, 1997, p. 37). Therefore, instead of the concept 'identity' as the ready-made, stable and fixed core of an individual, feminist poststructuralists use the concept of 'subjectivity', which stresses the multiple subject positions of an individual which can be diverse, contradictory and changing in different contexts or times (Weedon, 1997, p. 32).

How to 'be': Subjectivity
Subjectivity refers to the ways – the subject positions – of being an individual (Weedon, 1997, p. 3). For example, in different social situations I can feel like a different person, which calls for different ways of behaving. I know (or feel like I know) what is expected of me in particular situations such as in class, at a birthday party, at romantic encounters or in an application interview. The social institutions that I have entered – my family, school, sport, fashion industry, social media etcetera - have taught me how to be and act, for instance how to be as a girl and later as a woman. According to Weedon (1997, p. 83), people can either embrace these ways of being – these subject positions – that are expected of us, reject them, or offer resistance by proposing an alternative subject position. She claims that everything we do signifies compliance or resistance to dominant norms of how to be a particular type of person; in the case of this study how to be a 'fat' person. Subjectivity can thus be seen as a product of regimes of truth. However, people have the ability to change the meanings of these truths. Poststructuralism theorizes subjectivity therefore as a site of conflict, that can consist of processes of change or preservation of the regimes of truth (Weedon, 1997).

Conforming, resisting and transforming
The subjectivity of the participants can thus have elements of conforming, resisting and transforming dominant truth and subject positions. Conforming entails reproducing the dominant truth; this is either because participants have internalized this truth or they feel pressured to accept this subject position. Resisting refers to discarding the dominant truth, to be able to resist the imposed subject position. Transforming is a form of resisting, however, it proposes a new truth to replace the dominant truth and to create possibilities to choose an alternative subject position. This shows that although the availability of certain truths produces particular subject positions, these subjects are not only imposed and either accepted or rejected but can also be produced and transformed (Papadopoulos, 2008).

(1) Acts
This study will take in consideration the 'acts' participants talk about to conform, resist and/or transform dominant truths/subject positions. Since I will not observe these acts myself, I refer to the acts as narrated by my participants. As I defined fat embodiment as a form of stigma, these practices can be related to the strategies for dealing with stigma that Goffman (1963) described. He suggests that stigmatized individuals develop strategies to position themselves when dealing with a spoiled identity. One of the strategies Goffman

coined, is "making a direct attempt to correct what individuals see as the objective basis of their 'failing'" (1963, p. 19) – contributing to the dominant regime of truth by trying to normalize. The second strategy is "attempting to correct their failing by devoting much private effort to the mastery of areas of activity felt to be closed due to their shortcoming" (Goffman, 1963, p. 20). This can be related to both contributing and resisting the dominant truth. Having to compensate for your body is implicitly stating that there is something 'failed' to compensate for; however, it can also be related to resisting the dominant truth by showing the incorrectness of the truth. The third strategy that Goffman (1963, p. 21) formulated entails "an attempt to break with what is called reality, and obstinately attempt to employ an unconventional interpretation of the character of his or her social identity". This can be related to trying to transform dominant regimes of truth by investing in a new truth that enables a different subject position.

(2) Talks
In addition to the focus on 'acts' this study will take in consideration the talks/narratives participants use as strategies of conforming, resisting or transforming dominant truths or subject positions. This refers not to explicit 'acts' of participants, but to 'truth-telling practices' they use to create reality. The focal point of feminist poststructuralism is language. Language does not 'reflect' social reality, but produces meaning; it creates social reality (Richardson, 1994). To identify power and strategies for change, theories of feminist poststructuralism see subjectivity as socially produced in language (Weedon, 1997, p. 40). Weedon (1997) emphasizes that subjects actively participate in the construction of their identity through language. In particular, individuals constitute themselves as subjects through techniques that Foucault (1997) labels as "ethical". Ethical is defined by Foucault (1997) as doing what is seen as right in a certain context. This approach enables me to study the ethics of an individual - the truth-telling practices that human beings apply to understand themselves. I am interested in how narratives are used to conform, resist or transform unprivileged/spoiled identity of fatness into a new subject position.

The feminist poststructuralist theories will provide the lens for analyzing the acts and talks of fat people – while taking into account how their personal histories affect their narratives and how they might change in challenging new and old truths about fatness. In the following chapters, I will concentrate on how my participants navigate and negotiate within dominant truths that position fat people with 'spoiled identities' (Goffman, 1968) such as being a moral failure, being unhealthy or inactive, unprofessional and undesirable.

III. The norm – the bio-citizen

Before moving on to the stories of my participants, I feel it is necessary to say something about the context in which my participants negotiate and manage their identity. Drawing on Turner (1996), it may be stated that Western people live in a 'somatic society', that is, a society in which "major political and personal problems are both problematized in the body and expressed through it" (Turner, 1996, p. 1). This indicates that the body plays a role in signifying good or bad citizenship. In this view, being a good citizen entails becoming a partner in governance by exercising discipline over your own practices and body, and avoid becoming an economic burden to society. Foucault (1972; 2008) describes this as neoliberal models of governance in which the autonomous, self-regulating individual is highly valued (Guthman & DuPuis, 2005).

Examples of this neoliberal discourse can be found in the Dutch context of citizenship. The Netherlands institute for social research (SCP) describes a shift in what is seen as 'good citizenship' in the Netherlands in the 1980s (Dekker & de Hart, 2005). Before 1980, a good citizen is someone for whom the government has to do good things. After 1980, the government starts to make more demands on the citizen, changing the definition of a 'good citizen' toward becoming a partner in governance. A new term, 'participation society', is introduced which expects citizens to receive and take greater responsibility (Vermeij & Gieling, 2016). According to Van de Wijdeven (2012, p. 295), the aspiration of this participation society is "improved livability, especially where demographic trends or spending cuts are putting the existing situation under pressure".

In this neoliberal society, the notion of citizenship as merely a legal status involving rights and duties is too simplistic. Rather, citizenship is based on "a set of relations between the individuals and the state that involves a conscious contribution by the citizenry to improve the life and well-being of the community by actively demonstrating the moral virtues" (Halse, 2009, p. 50). Each citizen has to be an active agent in the maintenance of these moral virtues such as 'health' (Rose 1999, p. 228). This results in an extended notion of good citizenship in the neo-liberal society; that is the 'bio-citizen'.

For the bio-citizen, failure to control one's weight makes one a 'bad' citizen because it is seen as ignoring the interests of the common good needed for a well-ordered society. According to Guthman & Dupuis (2005) and LeBesco (2010), fat people are seen as bad citizens because of the so-called 'obesity epidemic'. Media, medical professions, governments, schools, advertisers etcetera construct obesity as an epidemic by disclosing messages about the increase and dangers of being fat. Those messages not only point to increasing health care expenditures (van Amsterdam, 2012), but also to other social and economic consequences such as a decrease in worker productivity (Neovius et al., 2012) and for instance a safety problem for airlines[4].

Body Mass Index (BMI) is used as a tool to categorize people into fat and slender, whereby a BMI of over 25 is perceived as 'abnormal'. This BMI-tool links back to the disciplinary practice of categorization that divides people into binaries of normal and abnormal. According to the RIVM (National Institute for Public Health and the Environment), half of

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[4] see: https://wondervol.nl/met-maat-56-in-het-vliegtuig/, & http://radar.avrotros.nl/nieuws/detail/klm-dikke-mensen-moeten-tweede-ticket-boeken/, accessed at 08/2016

the Dutch population above age 20 is 'overweight' or 'obese'[5]. When being measured as 'obese', a person has to pay extra in The Netherlands for life insurance, disability insurance and will have more difficulty in getting a mortgage[6].

Those who benefit from the rhetoric of an 'obesity epidemic' are the weight-loss industries that offer diet products, fitness programs, and consultants to help people obtain or preserve the norm of ideal body weight. In the Netherlands, interventions such as "Jongeren op Gezond Gewicht" (JOGG, a healthy weight for youth) are being used within municipalities and schools to stimulate a 'healthy BMI' for young people. This links back to the disciplinary practice of normalization. Furthermore, surgical procedures for people with a BMI above 40 are being funded. Reality TV-programs such as 'Obese' have turned weight loss in an entertaining 'feel-good' business. And shocking statistics are shown about the increasing amount of people that become 'fat'[7], inducing the disciplinary practice of surveillance by controlling bodies in society and the need to normalize toward a 'healthy BMI'.

All these techniques are imposed on individual citizens to seek the right self-improvements for an appropriate body weight. Neoliberal governmentality thus creates a division. On the one hand the slender subjects, who are the 'ideal' citizens for being perceived as healthy, disciplined and do not need help in managing their own risks. On the other, the fat subjects, the 'failed' citizens who do require intervention in management of risks (Guthman & Dupuis, 2005). This indicates that the slender body has come to signify the 'morally worthy citizen' – as he or she is seen as capable to exercising discipline over the body, and as someone who shares the burden of governance.

To conclude, as LeBesco (2004, p. 8) describes, "the bearer of a fat body is marked as a failed citizen, inasmuch as his or her 'powers' (…) are called into question". The next four chapters will dive deeper into meanings these fat citizens construct around their powers such as being responsible, healthy, active, professional, happy and desirable. Against the backdrop of this neoliberal context, I will now take you along in the types of acts and talks fat people themselves use in negotiating their citizenship.

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[5] RIVM, see: https://www.volksgezondheidenzorg.info/onderwerp/overgewicht/cijfers-context/huidige-situatie#!node-overgewicht-volwassenen, accessed at 08/2016
[6] Verbond van Verzekeraars; see:
https://www.verzekeraars.nl/actueel/nieuwsberichten/Paginas/20120201%20-%20Overgewicht%20en%20verzekeringen,%20hoe%20zit%20het.aspx, accessed at 08/2016
[7] see: http://www.obesitaskliniek.nl/nieuws/cbs-steeds-meer-overgewicht-nederland/ & http://www.telegraaf.nl/gezondheid/actueel/22183575/__Wereldwijd_steeds_meer_dikkerds__.html accessed at 07/2016

IV. The Responsible Fat Citizen

In the following analysis, I will explore the dominant truths related to responsibility in which fat people have to navigate and negotiate their 'good citizenship'. In doing so, I seek to explore the strategies they deploy when resisting, conforming to and / or transforming the dominant truth. The narratives of my participants illustrate the power / knowlegde around fat bodies and responsibility – how a fat person ought to be or behave and how he or she acts to use different subject positions.

- Can you see me?

Without using my voice
my body reveals a choice
a choice of being bad or good
this is how I am (mis-)understood

You see me
as someone
I don't want to be

Having thick skin
and carrying my body as my sin
feeling small and vulnerable
but looking tough and untouchable

You see me
as someone
I ought to be

Hiding in the background
joking whenever around
not showing it hurts
or showing what I'm worth

You see me
as someone
I am not

Being a 'sinner'

Taking responsibility
One of the dominant subject positions that my participants struggled most with is being positioned as irresponsible. In almost every interview the Dutch phrases "elk pondje gaat door het mondje" (what you eat is what you get) and "eigen schuld dikke bult" (a fat body is your own fault) were mentioned as very painful and inaccurate. This dominant truth frames someone with a fat body as a sinful person as it is believed that fat persons are completely in control of their own weight (Finkelstein, 2007). In a religious and historical context this truth has been institutionalized in Christian thought in which 'gluttony' is described as one of the seven 'sins' (Stunkard et al., 1998).

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Furthermore, if a person is seen as failing to take responsibility of staying slender, this failure is likely to be attributed to personal weakness or (a lack of) character. This is in concert with how Evans et al. (2008, p. 19) describe that due to dominant truths related to the obesity epidemic moral virtues (such as responsibility) become intertwined with corporeal ideals (slender bodies). Being fat is thus associated with both being irresponsible and morally suspect. Riana illustrates this 'truth' in her diary.

> *Diary fragment Riana:*
> It is Friday night and I am watching a cabaret group on television with my husband and daughter. The group is playing a sketch between two spouses who are having an argument. The reason the husband gives for their bad marriage is: "You've become too fat!"
> Ouch, that's painful…
> Apparently, when the wife becomes fatter (like me) it is normal to assume that she is the one who is guilty of ruining the marriage.
> It frustrates me and makes me angry. It reminds me once again how most people think about it. But when I look at my husband and daughter I can see that they don't notice anything upsetting about the sketch.
> At the same time, my gut tells me that this is just how it is, I have to conform to this because I am guilty of something, and I have to fit in.

The diary excerpt shows how Riana struggles with wanting to resist being seen as guilty and at the same time feels pressured by the disciplinary practice that, as a fat woman, she has to conform to this categorization. Inherent in her narrative is the underlying assumption that fatness is categorized as a failure, which in turn evokes feelings of guilt and shame of not being seen as 'normal' and 'good'.

Socially acceptable stigma
As a consequence of the neoliberal focus on responsibility and (self-)control in body size, fat stigma is often seen as socially acceptable (e.g. Crandall, 1994; Puhl & Heuer, 2010; LeBesco, 2004). Being fat is seen as something you did to yourself and can therefore be justifiably blamed for. Riana also internalizes this 'truth', as she feels constrained to speak up in situations in which fat people in general or she herself is mocked, made fun of or marginalized. Even though she believes it is wrong to stigmatize fat people, she also feels she has to conform to the widely held belief that it is allowed to blame fat people, since they are perceived to have made the 'wrong' choice. Thus for her to avoid social penalties and 'survive' (Smith, 1999), she disciplines herself to conform to the subject position of being a sinner.

All my participants told me or wrote about stigmatizing experiences. Those were situations of verbal or even physical abuse, being laughed at, teasing and bullying at school, and/or discrimination within the workplace or health care settings. The participants were able to recall experiences of stigma from a long time ago, which indicates that these had (or still have) a large impact on them.

> I remember very well, about one year ago I was doing a walking tour through the meadows with a friend. When we crossed the road a man biked past us and said: 'did you have a good meal?' It made me feel so terrible, because I don't eat that much and I had even walked the entire day. Still he thought it necessary to make a comment just because we are fat.

For Ben, the most painful recollections referred to situations in which he felt excluded:

> Ben: From the age of 6/7 I already noticed being excluded due to my body size.
> Interviewer: How did you notice that?
> Ben: Picked last in gym class, those sorts of things. Also in the number of friends I had. I had good friends, but only a few. Or when we played outside, half the class was playing soccer but no one would invite me to join, so I had to do something else, mostly with two others.

This indicates the important role his visible marker of 'fat' played in the exclusionary practices that Ben encountered. All of these stigmatizing and exclusionary experiences followed after the disciplinary technique of (self-)surveillance. Apparently, surveillance of a fat body informs others that the body is deviant from the norm, and therefore in need of normalization. So, not only is fat stigma seen as allowed due to a person's own responsibility with regard to their body weight, it is also seen as socially acceptable as it might help the person to make the 'right' decisions in the future (e.g. Nolan & Eshleman, 2016). Participants often experience this disciplinary practice of surveillance when eating in public.

> Ben: I remember when I was 10 years old, I grabbed a candy from a jar and wanted to grab another one when an unknown elderly woman approached me and said: "that is why you are so fat!" (…) Those kinds of moments can be really painful, especially as a kid. It makes you aware how others notice you and think of you.

This comment shows how surveillance practices emerge. Ben's experience suggests that these practices are considered legitimate as they 'help' fat persons to lose weight, in Ben's narrative by prohibiting him to eat candy form a jar. In this sense, fat people are subjected to a form of stigmatization that is different from other 'abnormal' groups. Firstly because of the high visibility of fatness and secondly because of the tendency to 'help' the person with taking responsibility (Rich & Evans, 2005). However, recent research shows that these types of stigma harm, rather than help, healthy eating behavior (Major et al., 2014) or an active lifestyle (van Amsterdam, 2013). This is in line with what Mandy told me when she explained the help she received to lose weight at a young age:

> When your feeling of self-worth is very low, then it is really hard to find your body worthwhile enough it to take care of. (…) Because when it is already hopeless, what stops you from eating more? However, the remedy at that time was focusing on your failures, which made me feel very inferior and made me only become bigger and bigger.

The focus on her 'failed' body contributed to feelings of anxiety about her body and gave her a low self-esteem and a conflicted relation with eating. As Campos (2004) and Rich and Evans (2005) have documented, the obesity epidemic rhetoric has contradictory results: it contributes towards disordered eating, other forms of ill health and a negative body-self relationship instead of 'normalizing' fat people toward the slender norm.

Strategy: direct attempt to change 'failure'
As a consequence of the stigma and exclusion all my participants have experienced, they felt the urge to undertake "a direct attempt to change what is seen as their 'failure'" (as described by Goffman, 1963, p. 9). Already from a very young age most have tried several diets, pills and even surgery. For instance, Hanna tells about her multitude of diet attempts.

> Hanna: I have to; I have to; I have to! That keeps on nagging until you give it another try, which eventually fails, but then it starts all over again only with more misery because every time I followed a diet, and it did not work, I only gained more weight. And I also gain more feelings of guilt that it is true what is said or thought about me.

Hanna's narrative indicates how her failed attempts contributed to internalizing the dominant truth that her fat body is her fault. The main reason of my participants for trying to lose weight is to not feel excluded or marginalized. However, for most of my participants, the 'self-improvement' techniques of dieting, pills and even surgery could not help them to lose weight. Often, they even gained more weight because of those imposed techniques. However, the techniques themselves are not blamed, but the responsibility is placed with the individual fat person.

> Nina: For example, that [brand of diet product], you have to drink shakes for an entire week. The inventor was in a documentary in which he answered the question if the diet products really worked. And he said, they do, but it is entirely up to the user if they really work. So, if you are not losing weight, then it is because the user is not applying it properly.

Again, as Nina argues, the fault and responsibility is ascribed to the person who is unable to lose weight. This causes feelings of guilt and shame as Hanna describes. Most of my participants described a cycle of losing weight, and gaining that weight (and more) on again. In times of gaining weight, the subject position of 'sinner' and failed citizen is (self-)imposed on them. However, in times of losing weight, numerous compliments of friends, family and colleagues are given. For instance, Ben recently lost a lot of weight and told me in our interview how overwhelmed he was by the number of compliments he received:

> Ben: It makes you realize where you came from, that it was pretty bad. Also, one of my colleagues said to me that now that I was doing so well in losing weight, they should really keep me on board.

Losing weight is perceived as taking responsibility, and the person in question is rewarded for it by being praised for trying to be(come) a 'good citizen' - compared to what he was before he lost weight (for more on compliments, see Ch. 7). Inherent in the 'compliments' Ben received is the underlying assumption that fatness is undesirable for an employee, which in turn perpetuates job security based on body size (more on job security in chapter 6). This shows that disciplining power not only occurs from stigmatizing experiences, but also from positive reactions. This strategy of losing weight is thus often expected (or even demanded) of my participants. A couple of weeks after I interviewed Mandy I received a WhatsApp message from her:

> M: I just got bodyshamed.
> M: For the first time since our interview.
> I: What happened?
> M: I am doing a lot of cycle racing at the moment. Today I cycled from [name of city] to [name of city]. I decided to get an ice cream in [name of city].
> M: I normally never dare to go into a snack bar because I am afraid of derogatory comments, however I am trying to do more of a 'I-don't-care-what-other-people-say' kind of thing, also in this case. I bought my ice cream, but then the fifty-year old lady behind the counter said:
> M: "This way the cycling is not of any use, is it?"
> M: I was dumbfounded so I said:
> M: "What do you mean?"
> M: So she responded: "For the calories."
> M: And then I wanted to say so many things- but I just couldn't.
> M: It made me feel so terrible.

Mandy explained how she struggled with the assumption that fat people are (or should be) trying to lose weight – always trying to fit into the norm of being a responsible slender citizen. Her encounter at the snack bar illustrates the disciplinary practice of normalizing as technique of dominance by others.

Strategy: providing an excuse
Another strategy some fat individuals develop to change the subject position of being guilty is by explaining their 'failure'. They provide justifications for their body size such as an illness, trauma, genetic disorder or their social background. Scott and Lyman (1968, p. 47) describe "excuses" as "accounts in which one admits that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate but denies full responsibility". In this case, not the 'act' in question but their state of being is seen as wrong. Thus, as a strategy, excuses are used to relieve the fat person from the burden of 'responsibility' for one's fat body.

This strategy is quite ambiguous, in that it serves simultaneously to maintain the oppressive truth and to resist it. By trying to explain what is seen as a failure, some participants tried to defend themselves and resist being subjected as an irresponsible person. However, this maintains the dominant truth in the sense that fatness, in general, is still seen as something 'bad' and as something you can be blamed for. These participants thus reproduced the idea that you would need a very good *reason* to explain how you became fat in order not to be blamed for this. This oppresses other fat people who do not have a good enough 'excuse' for their body deviating from the norm. In the following Facebook discussion, this strategy of 'providing an excuse' is being questioned.

> [H]: *I am fat. I am not fat because of an illness, eating disorder, trauma, or anything else. I am just fat. Does this mean that it is my own 'fault'?*
>
> [L]: I feel like I have to explain - for myself - why I am fat. That is because I am ashamed about the way I look. And because I want to prevent people from judging me.
>
> [S]: I am also fat without reason. I don't eat too much and I am generally healthy. However, it is in my genes, I process my food slowly. And all the crash diets did not make this better. So no, I have no excuse.
>
> [R]: I always give as an explanation all the dieting at a young age, because if I would not have started with it I would be a lot slimmer now. But indeed, as you are saying, it is quite strange that I have the feeling that I have to justify myself. I am fat. Period. That should actually be enough.

A lot of different things are happening in this Facebook discussion. Firstly, the internalization of the dominant truth that fat is your own fault so you need to account for it with excuses. In that way, commenters resist being positioned as personally responsible for their body size. Secondly, they critically question this strategy that reproduces that fat is wrong. And thirdly, they engage in resistance by providing an alternative truth: "I am fat. Period". That is, one commenter tried to transform 'fat' to a neutral descriptor, instead of a failure. This last truth-telling practice can be related to Kyra's questions that came up in the interview I did with her:

> Kyra: When you are fat, is that necessarily your own fault? And what if it would be? What if someone would be fat because he ate candy and chips his entire life, so what? Is that really so bad or can we just say, 'all right it might not be the healthiest choice but it

is your choice'. Similar to people who choose to drive a motor without a helmet or go bungee jumping or smoking.

Her truth-telling practice resists the dominant truth that having a fat body is a question of responsibility. On top of that, she compares eating unhealthy food to for instance smoking, which is a behavior that is also seen as 'bad', but evokes less condemnatory responses and is not always visible. It seems that due to the high visibility of body size as embodied characteristic, a fat person has to deal with more intense surveillance practices.

Strategy: acting as a wallflower
Another strategy most of my participants adopt is 'avoiding' any possible stigmatizing situations as much as possible. This is in line with the survival mechanism described by Smith (1999); to avoid any psychological, physical and social penalties. In many public spaces where the body is highly visible – such as swimming pools, amusement parks, popular clothing shops, the gym - my participants feel unwelcome or uncomfortable and therefore are constantly pondering whether to avoid those activities or not. The memory of former stigmatizing experiences creates a constant fear of entering situations that would involve their body size and in which they would possibly be humiliated, situations such as walking past youngsters, going to the doctor or even to work at all. Cindy spoke about an internal "antenna" to signal a possible stigmatizing situation, Kyra talked about internal 'alarm bells' that would go off to warn her, so that she could avoid the situation before it would happen. Peter labeled it as a 'survival mechanism'. Hanna explains how her stigmatizing experiences even changed her character, how her body size disciplined her to behave as a 'wall flower'.

> Hanna: At school, I always tried to be invisible and dress as inconspicuously as possible, because I already stood out so much due to my body size. That meant not raising my finger in class; especially not get involved in any arguments because people might involve my weight in the argument. All in all, behaving as much as a wallflower as I could. So I adjusted my behavior. From my own personality I am not a wallflower at all, I like to be social and do fun stuff. But because of all those negative experiences I pulled back more and more.

The wallflower behavior exemplifies the disciplining power of the Panopticon, that is, as they feel highly visible and fear judgment, many participants indicated they would adjust their behavior to become less visible and less exposed to judgment. This results in a tendency to avoid any possible confrontation. Avoiding is a strategy almost all of my participants seem to be familiar with.

> Cindy: I try to avoid those [possibly stigmatizing] situations as much as possible. Because I know it works that way and I don't want to submit myself to them because I think it is very wrong. That is why I adjust as much as possible. I am not going to seek it out. I know when to expect stigma and I have too much self-respect to seek it out so I just don't do it.

Cindy justifies her behavior by applying truth-telling practices that describe this strategy as a way of self-protection. The panoptic power dynamic especially leads some participants to discipline their practices concerning eating in public in order not to be seen as a 'sinner'.

> Riana: The other day I was in the Ikea for an entire afternoon and I hadn't eaten much at home, so I started to feel quite hungry in the evening, around suppertime. But then I still think, yeah but if I eat something, they will think 'see that' [a fat person eating].

Thus, Riana disciplines herself to withhold from eating in public in order not to be seen as guilty of her fat body. Although she uses this strategy to resist being seen as irresponsible and receive possible comments on that, her self-discipline simultaneously reproduces the truth that fat is a matter of personal responsibility. For Ben, being a wallflower is something he feels he no longer has to be, now that he lost a significant amount of weight.

> I always was like a wallflower; introvert, while I now am much more outgoing. So your personality changes when your body changes. When I had a fat body, I think my EQ, my social skills, were very much behind those of others. Now that I have lost so much weight, I think my social skills are much better.

This comment shows that Ben explains his change of personality to himself. According to Ben, his change of body size allowed him to be more social, instead of being socially incapable. He reproduces the dominant truth that fat people are socially incapable or unhappy (more about happiness in chapter 7), but also, he reproduces the dominant truth that being a wallflower is someone's own responsibility, an individual matter, instead of a consequence of stigmatizing experiences.

Strategy: changing your own thoughts
To avoid or not to avoid is a recurring theme (an internal struggle) in the interviews, diaries and Facebook discussions. The paragraph above described how some participants avoid possible stigmatizing situations as much as possible and thereby became 'wallflowers'. However, other participants criticize this strategy and believe that by showing their self-confidence they will be less prone to stigma. For instance, Kyra describes her experiences in a Dutch amusement park:

> Kyra: I have made the choice to not let it [her body size] hold me back. I climbed into every Efteling [Dutch amusement park] attraction. And if it did not fit, I just climbed out. Then you will see people looking at you. Go ahead, watch me, I can't help it they did not build this in my size. At social media they might call it "the walk of shame", but for me it is not like that, it is the attraction that is not built in my size, it is not me."

Kyra resists to avoid situations in which surveillance practices are strong. She also refuses to perceive them as stigmatizing ("the walk of shame") but transforms these ideas by laying the blame on the structure of the attraction that excludes fat people. However, many (Facebook) participants express their fears of doing things and going to places because of their body size. For instance, Nancy posted a picture of her and her daughter in the Facebook group with the following message:

> Today I have conquered my fear of getting into a canoe. Taking this step was preceded by an internal battle in my head: am I not to heavy to do that? (…) On the other hand I hear: 'Mommy I really, really want to go canoeing, please!' Breath in, breathe out. With a heavy heart, I walk towards the pier. I bring my thoughts to a stop. It is now or never. Let's go! (…) After a short canoe-trip because of the hard wind, I can say that my child was happy and I felt on top of the world, I did it! My thoughts didn't win, I did.

Nancy's thought about being too fat to do things like going canoeing is something that is expressed more often in the Facebook group. It might suggest that they fear to be stigmatized in that situation. In the Facebook group, fat individuals often post stories or pictures like Nancy's in which they do something they were afraid of – these are presented as little victories and celebrated by others. The Facebook group can be seen as an "in-group alignment" (Goffman, 1963, p. 112), where 'like-situated individuals' and 'fellow sufferers' try to manage their stigmatized identity and provide a source of empowerment. Responses

such as: "you have nothing to fear but fear itself" "your own victory" "don't let your own insecurity hold you back" are common to this kind of posts. What I find interesting about this is that a new meaning of responsibility is given: that it is your own 'choice' to be a person who avoids or who does not avoid. That it is your own insecurity or anxiety that constrains you in your life. This implies that it is be your own 'fault' if you decide to avoid things in life due to stigmatization. Nina commented on this in the interview:

> Nina: Sometimes it is difficult. Is it something you do to yourself by blaming the world? For instance, when I go running, well yeah, some parts shake a little. Chances are people will see you and give comments, which you could see as offensive. However, you can also think about it in a different way: apparently they like it that I am running. I think one should control his or her negative thoughts. When you only think negatively, then that is how you will come across. I think that is what should change. That should be our mission.

Nina's narrative indicates that the nature of responsibility is reframed. However, she still reproduces the truth of responsibility of the fat person him- or herself. This remains in line with the neo-liberal climate in which the autonomous, self-regulating individual is highly valued (Guthman & Dupuis, 2006), but in which social and political aspects that contribute to fat stigma are ignored. However, this new construction of responsibility is not shared by everyone, as is illustrated in the interview with Cindy:

> Cindy: When someone posts something like she's struggling with accepting herself for who she is, others attack that immediately with responses such as 'you just have to do this or that'. 'It is all you'. 'You are responsible for your own thoughts'. 'You have to ignore the signals and images around you, those are not there'. I am sorry, but I am not that far yet and I don't know if I will ever get there. I think that just like me many others have the feeling that this is suppressed in this group.

Cindy speaks about the oppressive nature of the Facebook in-group. As LeBesco (2004, p. 4) describes, some 'fat activists' want to speak on behalf of all fat people, while others only want to speak for themselves and feel oppressed by the fat activists demands. Cindy not only struggles with the Facebook in-group, but also with the oppressive nature of contending demands about people from other in-groups:

> It is not only fighting against a large group of slender people who do not want to accept that fat bodies can exist, you also have to face a lot of resistance from fat people themselves as they claim it is only a temporary state. And then you have the group fat people who try to accept themselves, but do not want to have anything to do with those who have trouble with accepting themselves. So it is quite a mess.

Cindy constructs three different truths in different groups that she feels oppressed by. Firstly, the dominant truth that fat is bad and all fat people should be normalized. Secondly, the dominant truth that being fat is something that is in the control of the fat person him- or herself. And thirdly, it is a fat person's own responsibility to live his life as he wants to live it. This shows the role of context in forming 'truths'. As Foucault (1980) described, each society or each context creates its own truths and these truths regulate how people should think about themselves and behave within that context. Thus, which subject positions are available depends on the specific setting. For example, different subject positions are available at work, at the doctor or within a Facebook in-group. As such, subject positions shift according to the dominant truths within specific settings that fat people how to be or how to behave within that setting. But also, fat people themselves shift between resistance and reproduction depending on the context.

Creating a new truth: every-body can 'be'

Another strategy is trying to create a new 'truth' that enables fat persons to position themselves as responsible (or even irresponsible) citizens without "fat" playing any role in that. A reality that links to the current fat acceptance movements that promote that every body can 'be' – whether you are fat, slender, muscular, small and so on (see for instance the fat studies reader, 2009).

> Isa: I think there are all different kinds of currents flowing besides each other: the self-acceptance movement, the fit/strong movement, the Kim Kardashian movement and so on. And I think, but maybe that is naive, all of these currents should be able to exist next to each other.

Isa seems to allude to the idea that different body types and desires should be able to exist in society without referencing to one dominant norm. This is also in line with the ideas of feminist poststructuralist scholar Grosz (1994), who argues that people should refuse "singular models, that are based on one type of body as the norm by which all others are judged". However, Grosz proposes a body type which, "in being recognized in their specificity, cannot take on the coercive role of singular norm or ideals for all the others" (1994, p. 22). Kyra tries to transform this dominant norm by representing her fat body in bikini on social media:

> Kyra: I am the kind of person who puts a bikini photo of myself on Facebook. People respond to it saying that I am promoting obesity if I think I'm pretty. I just think fuck you. I do not promote obesity; I recommend it to nobody, if you can have a normal posture than good for you! However, if you happen to be fat, than you still have the same rights to wear a bikini to the swimming pool as a slender person.

In this sense, she is trying to show that fat people can be represented and are entitled to wear a bikini as much as slender people can. She tries to influence the Synopticon surveillance practice, by representing her own body in bikini to the public – trying to make fat bodies' representation less abnormal. However, for most of my participants, this strategy is still a very difficult thing to do.

> Cindy: That I am allowed to be, that I have as much right as any other person. That is hard for me to believe.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have tried to show how dominant truths position fat people as 'sinners', who therefore often experience - socially accepted - stigmatization. My participants developed several strategies to navigate within these dominant truth and change being seen as a 'bad' citizen. Some of these strategies reproduce the dominant truth that fat people are sinners (such as providing an 'excuse), other strategies try to redefine a fat person's responsibility (such as having to change your own thoughts, not your body size), and lastly, some strategies try to transform the dominant truth that a fat body is a person's fault (every-body can 'be'). The acts and talks of my participants illustrate the power/knowledge around fat bodies and responsibility and the ability they have to resist, negotiate and challenge this truth.

V. The Healthy/Active Fat Citizen

Appearance is one of the main strategies for 'knowing' whether a person is healthy or not (Wright, et al., 2006). Fatness itself is not something new, however, it has captured global attention as a public health problem during the last thirty years in the creation of the 'obesity epidemic' (Guthman & Dupuis, 2005; LeBesco, 2010). How do fat individuals actively develop and negotiate a sense of self in an environment in which they are framed as 'unhealthy'?

> *-LISTEN*
> Listen
> Try to listen
> Maybe if I yell,
> scream
> cry
> laugh
> or show you my position
> You would finally hear my voice
> and hear what I have to say, for real!
> Though, it makes me scared
> anxious
> frightened-
> What if you,
> might
> listen.

Being 'unhealthy'

The notion that 'fat' is caused by fat individuals simply eating too much of the wrong types of food and not being physically active enough appears to be dominant.

> Kyra: Most people have a certain idea of how I live my life. When a slender person gains weight after one week of eating bad food, they believe that I would be eating McDonalds three times a day to get this body.

The dominant subject positions that my participants indicate as available to them are both 'being unhealthy', 'being physically inactive' and 'being lazy' (see also Murray, 2005, p. 154-155). Despite substantial debate and support of the contrary (e.g. Aphramor, 2008; Campos, 2004), these dominant truths promote weight loss as an efficient (if not the only) way to achieve or maintain health (Tischner & Malson, 2011). Hanna explains how this 'mantra' affects her:

> Hanna: It is how it is always presented in the media: health care costs are much higher due to the fat people, so it is their fault. That has become a kind of mantra. And that has a different effect on fat people than on, for instance, people who smoke. Because smoking is something you can hide, whereas if you are fat, you can never hide it. Everyone notices it immediately. And then the link is already made that I am not living a healthy lifestyle, or I should really eat healthier and be more physically active.

Hanna's narrative illustrates how the media construct the message that fat people are 'bad' citizens by not only being a risk to themselves, but also an economic burden on society by

increasing health care costs (e.g. Evans et al., 2008). On top of that is the high visibility of fat, which makes fat people even more prone to surveillance and techniques of domination. The promotion of weight loss is especially noticeable in the weight loss surgeries that have become more common as self-improvement techniques. This was a recurring theme in the interviews. Most participants despise the bariatric⁸ surgery and construct it as an unhealthy way to lose weight. However, at the same time, some struggle with wanting to be seen as slender and a good citizen, something the surgery can possibly provide them.

> Riana: It astonishes me how many people have had a weight loss surgery and how easy it is to get one. People literally die because of those surgeries. I am a mother you know. What if I would be one of those? A friend of mine has no stomach anymore because of complications during the surgery. How can that be healthy? Your body can no longer take in any nutrients. But she gets to hear how great and good she is.

In addition to Riana, more participants explained how easy it is to get a gastric bypass. The social acceptance or push to get this surgery pressures Riana to think about having one. However, she tries to resist this pressure by pointing toward the health dangers of these surgeries. This can be related to the neoliberal climate that constructs fat subjects as 'failed' citizens that require intervention, imposing on them techniques of 'self-improvements' such as bariatric surgery. Implicitly, this suggests that weight loss to become slender is the desired goal, irrespective of health. Rich and Evans (2005) argue that this truth is problematic as it contributes toward ill-health via disordered relationships with the body, food and exercise.

Attempt to break with truths: not every-body can be(come) a slender body
Most of my participants have experience with a multitude of diets and dieticians in attempts to lose weight. However, as I already described in the previous chapter, these attempts often did not work out or even made them gain more weight. Hanna describes her ill health as a consequence of these attempts.

> Hanna: I have tried to lose weight for decades: I tried all sorts of diets with help of several dieticians. Every time I heard of a new diet, I tried it. Once I was on a starvation diet of only 600 calories a day, it made me so weak that I could not even get up the stairs anymore. However, my body adjusted to the diet and after a couple of weeks I stopped losing weight. I completely collapsed and cried for a week. After that I could not hold on to the diet anymore and gained all the kilos again – and even more. Which pressured me to start a new diet again. That went on until I was around forty, then I decided that diets only made me gain more weight- they only made things worse.

> Riana: The most disturbing thing is that I started dieting while I barely had any overweight, and I have ended up with extreme overweight.

As Hanna and Riana explain, trying to lose weight by means of dieting did not have the desired effect; on the contrary, it only made things 'worse'. 'Diets do not work' is a new truth they try to adopt and accept to secure their health. Simultaneously, resisting the dominant idea that it is possible for everyone to be(come) slender with a change of lifestyle. It is all a matter of 'eating healthy and exercising regularly'. Riana and Cindy both explain how hard it is to fight this dominant truth.

> Riana: Based on people's first impression of my body they immediately think: 'oh she eats too much or she could work out more'. They always presume it is my own fault.

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⁸ Bariatric refers to the 'treatment' of obesity

The insight is missing that this is most often not the case. That a lot of fat people eat healthy and try to stay fit. But only because my body is bigger than the average body, the first thing people think is: 'oh your own fault'.

Cindy: People always have the impression that everyone can be slender. But for people like me, with obesity or extreme obesity since I was a child, that is just not possible. The medicine industry opposes that by claiming it is possible with new pills or surgery. Or just open any magazine and one diet after another is suggested. For example, in this month: 'how to easily lose weight before summer'. That really counteracts the acceptance of the problem of obesity, which cannot be solved with dieting. It is so hard to fight against this idea.

This 'truth' claim Rian and Cindy try to fight is maintained through the knowledge systems and through surveillance of actors such as medical professions, dieticians, the weight loss industry, the beauty industry and governments (e.g. Saguy, 2013; Van Amsterdam, 2013). As Van Amsterdam (2013) argues, these knowledge systems are informed by dominant neoliberal health ideas and therefore leave little room for critical discussion, making it difficult for Riana and Hanna to oppose this dominant truth.

Avoiding the medical gaze
Most of my participants have experiences in which their medical practitioner mentioned their body size as cause for their various maladies, and as something that needs to be changed. As a consequence, going to see a medical practitioner presents a huge barrier for many:

Riana: I find it hard to go see a doctor because I think: but what if he says that it is because of my body size? Even though I know for sure it isn't, I still fear he will say something about my body size. I have to go over a large hurdle when I go to a doctor. (…) A doctor would never ask a slender person: do you exercise enough? Do you eat healthy? Because when it concerns a slender person, they already presume they do.

Going to a doctor is something Riana tries to postpone as much as possible, out of fear (and former experiences) of not being taken seriously for her problems. Under the medical gaze, the visible fat body is often perceived as a negative, problematic mode of embodiment and fat people are therefore often advised to lose weight as a matter of urgency (Murray, 2007). This is exemplified by Nina, who was tested in the hospital to find causes for her fatness.

Nina: At the age of 12, I was in the hospital for an entire week to check why I was so fat. I lay next to children who had a broken arm and things like that. I was not ill, but I also had to lie there and every morning they took a blood sample. I had to do all kinds of exercises, checks and my entire body was examined. They could not find anything.
Interviewer: So you were generally healthy?
Nina: And then they said I had to go to a dietician.
Interviewer: After you went through all those tests?
Nina: Yeah, they could not find a physical disorder, so I just had to go on a diet.

Despite Nina's apparently good 'health', she was recommended to lose weight. Murray (2007, p. 367-368) has similar experiences and she argues that medical practitioners are unable to leave their culturally constructed understandings of fat bodies behind when treating their patients. They therefore contribute to normalizing practices as they cast a medicalized gaze onto their patients' fat bodies.

Ambivalent subject positions related to health

How do my participants position themselves in relation to the dominant truth that fat is generally unhealthy? There is more ambivalence in the subject positions that my participants chose with regard to this truth compared to the truth related to responsibility. Some participants conform to their 'unhealthy' subject position, however, they construct it as a temporary state of being, as something they want and can change. Others construct their 'fat body' as a lifelong disease they have to find a way to deal with. Again others resist the dominant subject position and construct their body as healthy and physically active or even physically successful. For instance, Marian constructs her 'unhealthy body' as a temporary state of being, she constructs it as a 'phase' she is in.

> Marian: Well, I am not satisfied with my body right now. But I have reached a point whereby it has become unhealthy.
> (…) I just don't feel happy about it. Okay, I am no longer frustrated, but I just have to find the spirit to do something about it. It is not okay the way it is now. Because if I let go the way things are now, you will have to roll me inside.

This excerpt illustrates how Marian reproduces the truth that her fat body is unhealthy. However, her way of dealing with being seen as an unhealthy 'bad citizen' is by constructing it as a temporary subject position. Cindy on the other hand, constructs her fatness as a chronic handicap.

> Cindy: To a certain extent I will have to endure this the rest of my life. It is not like it is going to disappear one day. I see it as a physical handicap, as a disease, a chronic disease. For example, when I walk in the sand dunes, I will be out of breath after a few small hills. Then you are confronted with obesity in a painful way.

Here Cindy constructs her fat body as unchangeable, so she has to find a way to live with it. Furthermore, she constructs it as out of her control, and therefore resists the assumption she is unhealthy due to bad lifestyle choices. So, she simultaneously resists the responsibility truth but reproduces the dominant truth that fat is unhealthy.

In contrast to Marian and Cindy, Riana positions herself as a healthy and physically active citizen, despite the dominant assumptions surrounding her fat body.

> Riana: I notice that I have the tendency to inform others that I am physically active, and I do eat healthy. Because people automatically assume that fat people eat unhealthy and are physically inactive. But when I compare myself to my own friends, I live healthier than at least half of them, while they are all slender. I have a slender friend who takes the car for every 500 meters. And I always ride my bike. But I have the feeling I always have to explain: 'I do exercise enough'.

Due to the dominant assumptions about her health as a fat person, Riana feels like she constantly has to defend herself. Her strategy entails informing others about her healthy lifestyle. This strategy can be compared to the 'explaining' strategy at the responsibility subject position, in the sense that Riana simultaneously resists and reproduces the dominant truth. She resists being seen as unhealthy, however, she reproduces the idea that a fat person should explain him- or herself, whereby a slender person would automatically be seen as healthy.

Breaking with truth: health is not related to body size

A strategy some participants develop entails trying to break with the dominant truth that equates being fat with being unhealthy.

> Riana: I would really want people to know that health is not related to weight. Those things are always connected in media: if you are overweight then you are unhealthy. I think this view should be changed. It should be about one's lifestyle. I – as a fat person – *also* believe in exercising and eating healthy and I *also* strive for it. But I think most people assume I live an unhealthy lifestyle.

> Nancy: I used to have a friend who ate a large bag of chips every single day, and she was like this [with her hands she shows a slender body]. The messed up thing is that if you would put us next to each other, and ask others: who is the healthiest one? Everyone would point at her. While no one would even know our eating habits. So that is really messed up.

Some participants, like Riana and Nancy, construct a new truth in which they try to convince others (and themselves) that health cannot be equated with body size, but health should instead be equated with a healthy lifestyle. Thus they position themselves as 'healthy' and good citizens. This relates to the "Health At Every Size" (HAES) movement that argues that people of all sizes can be healthy (Bacon, 2010).

Fear of coming out (what if you might listen…)
However, Riana feels constrained to be open about these new truths as she fears she might not be taken seriously, or, that she would be seen as 'dumb' of 'ignorant'.

> Interviewer: In your diary you write about quotes related to the 'anti-diet-day', about what you feel are very powerful and 'true' quotes that you found online. However, you are reluctant to share those quotes on Facebook, can you explain why?
> Riana: I am afraid that my friends will find it a weird opinion, or that they will say something like 'but Rian, that is just not true'. I mean, I have friends who are crazy about superfoods, and I have a friend who no longer eats meat, only seeds and stuff. I have multiple friends who have a gastric bypass, and I have a former school friend who calls herself 'dietician' after she did an online course. And they all think they know how it works. And that makes me scared that they will say out loud, not think but say (because they probably already think it): 'that is why you are so fat'.

By coming out with this new constructed truth, she would also openly resist the dominant truth that fat bodies are unhealthy. 'Coming out' refers to revealing something hidden, and is seen by Goffman (1963) as another strategy for combating stigma or unwanted difference. However, 'coming out' is different in the case of fat bodies, since a fat body is always highly visible. According to Saguy and Ward (2011), fat activists use this strategy to reclaim the term fat as a neutral or even positive descriptor, instead of an insult. Riana fears to come out as 'fat' in a neutral or positive sense, as she fears others might not accept this and that she would be seen as a lesser (dumb and ignorant) person for opposing truths that people who surround her see as self-evident.

Resistance to subject position related to laziness
Physical activities are a constant struggle for my participants, either due to physical constraints or due to the gaze of others. The association of being lazy is something many participants want and try to resist. Kyra for instance tries to defend herself against commonly held assumptions that fat people are lazy by doing her best not to be contributing to this expectation, as she does not want to be seen as a lazy 'bad citizen'.

> Diary fragment of Kyra:

> During the tour [through the building she works] I walk faster than at my usual walking speed. I do not want to conform to the prejudice that fat people are slow or lazy. I walk up the stairs quite quickly. I notice that it is hot and that the lining of my blazer is also really hot. Am I sweating? Shit. Now they [the students she is giving the tour to] might think I am not fit.

Kyra internalizes the gaze of others and thereby practices self-discipline over her speed of walking. This strategy is quite contradictory. By making extra effort to avoid the subject position of being lazy, Kyra simultaneously reproduces the dominant truth that fat people in general are lazy. It would mean that when a fat person would walk slowly, he or she would 'rightfully' be associated as a lazy person. Whereas if a slender person would walk rapidly or slowly, it would have no consequences for his or her subject position as 'lazy'.

Another strategy to resist being seen as 'lazy' is adopted by Peter who proposes – like in the previous section - a different subject position, that is, being physically handicapped.

> Diary fragment of Peter:
> Moving is never really pleasant when you are fat. Going upstairs, downstairs, rising out of your chair, walking, standing: it never goes easy and you are confronted at least 30 times a day with the fact that you are too heavy. Taking a walk voluntarily is not that high on my list of pleasant activities.
> Once, when the elevator did not work and I looked horrified at the stairs, a colleague of mine said: - well intentioned - 'why don't you just take the stairs, it will be good for your physical fitness!'
> I said: 'Don't you know how heavy that is for me?' 'Come on,' he said, 'I do it too, don't I?'
> 'Oh' I said, 'so how much do you weigh?"
> 'This morning I weighed 70 kgs!', he said with pride.
> 'Good. Well, I will arrange a bag of 110 kgs sand for you. Will you be able to take that upstairs?'
> '110 kgs? That would be quite a challenge… Why then?'
> 'For you? With your physical fitness? A challenge? No way! But why do you expect me to just carry 180 kg upstairs?'

In this fragment, Peter attributes his physical inabilities as 'normal' due to physical constraints instead of the dominant assumption of a weak-willed character. He thus actively resists the dominant subject position of being a lazy 'bad citizen'.

Physical activities: surprising with physical skills
Related to the assumption that fat people are physically inactive, being successful at any physical activity is not something expected of them.

> Nancy: When I performed at school, a lot of people were surprised about my dancing skills. I remember a teacher who said to me: "beforehand I was quite scared about what would become of that, however, you moved like a little feather on stage". Those kind of things, I can use it to my advantage to surprise people with my skills. Because these assumptions exist. So I better use them.
> (…) I did things people did not expect. I think I was able to survive because of that. For instance, people thought I would not be able to do all kinds of sport related things, but I often could. So that was always above expectations. So yes, I surprised people, and I still do.

Nancy claims to be using this assumption to her advantage, as she is able to surprise her audience in her work as comedian and actor. Marian and Riana struggle with the gaze of others and the expectation of not being good at physical activities.

Diary Marian:
They [colleagues at school] are utterly surprised I can give gym classes. I assume that they think that fat one can't do it, or something like that.

Diary fragment Riana:
During the rehearsal I always doubt whether I can show off what I can do in dancing. I am the only fat one. Showing off will only make me more visible and that is something I find difficult. What will people think of the fact that I stand there and how I perform? I am never put in front during the choreography. For me that feels like a confirmation. I feel I should be happy that I am allowed to join at all. That is how it feels for me. While I have the longest dance experience and belong to the category of better dancers, rationally I know that, but intuitively I feel I am not supposed to stand there, because dancers should be thin. That is something I have been taught during my dancing existence.

During those physical activities, Riana feels highly visible and therefore the disciplinary mechanism of the Panopticon becomes more powerful. Also, the assumption that fat people cannot be good at physical activities, is something many participants have internalized, which makes it hard for them to oppose – even though they possess the skills they are not expected to possess. Riana internalizes the surveillance of others and disciplines herself not to become more visible but to conceal her dancing skills.

Concluding remarks
The notion that fat individuals have an unhealthy lifestyle appears to be dominant. I noticed that in the narratives about health style issues, my participants are often active agents that try to resist this dominant truth in their everyday lives. Strategies aimed at trying to break with this dominant truth that relates health to body size. However, I also noticed that the power/knowledge of this truth is so oppressive that it causes 'fear' to publicly resist and challenge this truth. Another notion that appeared to be dominant is that fat people are physically inactive and unskilled at physical activities. The participants seem to be less fearful to actively resist being positioned as lazy. However, the power/knowledge that positions fat people as unskilled at physical activities is something some experience as too oppressive to oppose.

VI. The Professional Fat Citizen

Surprisingly, organizational research on the body is rare (Levay, 2014; Mik-Meyer, 2008). According to Levay (2014, p. 571), discussing the influence of bodies is considered less serious and worthy of attention in organizations and organizational research. I experienced this myself when I contacted a headhunter (my initial plan as data-collection for this thesis) – who became quite upset when I explained I wanted to study the role of bodies in organizations and recruitment. The social reality she constructed was that 'the appearance of bodies plays absolutely no role in organizations or recruitment', after which she added that I had chosen a really naive thesis subject. Fortunately, there are studies to be found conducting research on the role of bodies in organizations and recruitment. For instance, Guthman and Dupuis (2006) found that body weight serves as a basis for structural inequality and implicit discrimination in recruitment and promotion. What are the experiences of my participants related to their profession and the role of their body? And what kind of strategies did they use to position themselves as a (good) professional fat citizen?

-Belonging
As we create the normals
abnormals come into existence
No matter how kind
no matter how bright
no matter how humorous
abnormals are held at a certain distance
Even though *they* are numerous
one can only –truly– belong
by succeeding to conform
to our created norm

Being 'unprofessional'

When asked if they thought bodies, and more specifically fat bodies, played a role in organizational context, most participants focused on the role of bodies in application procedures:

> Ben: It is something everyone considers in an application interview. Oh, that one is fat, so he will probably be lazy, or take sick leave more often, however, maybe that is just not true. I have the feeling that it [body size] is of influence in a lot of organizations.

Despite similar answers, in their interviews most participants focused more on the role of their bodies in their daily lives than in their professions. The dominant truths around responsibility, health and happiness were more often questioned, resisted and transformed by the participants compared to dominant truths around professionalism. As Rian explains, her job brought her self-confidence that her body could not give her.

> Rian: I notice that when other certainties such as a job are missing, then I get immediately way down on my body and myself. So, in the time when I was out of a job I was continually thinking that I am too fat and not good enough.

This could either mean that the role of the body is of less influence in a work context; or it is a taboo to talk about the role of bodies at work; or perhaps some participants were more hesitant to talk about those situations as work is an area of life they can gain confidence from, as Rian argues, and they do not want their body to play a role at work as well. Levay (2004) and Trethewey (1999) claim it cannot be expected that people will directly account for how they perceive and act on matters of body weight in their work. They argue that the connection between professionalism and fitness – in which fitness equals slenderness – is often internalized and taken for granted. Rian and Mandy explain how they 'always' see themselves as less successful in their work compared to more slender people.

> Rian: I always compare myself to more slender women and I always think: yeah but they are much better than me. I can't get those thoughts out of my head.

> Mandy: Deep down, I think of myself as inferior to others because I am fat. I try to refute it by my smartness and funniness. (…) But I notice that I see myself as deviant from others. So, I would place myself outside the group successful, beautiful people.

Rian and Mandy are constantly measuring themselves and others against the ideal image of what a successful body looks like. It suggests that they associate the fat body with being less successful and competent compared to slender bodies. As the findings of Trethewey (1999) indicate, a professional body is often perceived as a fit body, meaning a non-fat body that is able to work hard and is presentable in a professional context. One of the Facebook discussions also touches on this issue when discussing the news that in Egypt seven female TV-hosts would be suspended in order to lose weight[9].

> Facebook discussion:
> Anna: Typical case, a woman has to be 'pretty' - slender is pretty? - and what else she can does not matter. A month suspension to lose weight for a more 'representative look' and in that month no pay check.

This example shows how Anna questions the importance of 'beauty' for women at their work, which is especially prevalent in jobs with extensive public contact (Tyler and Abbott, 1998). Some scholars therefore argue that the demands made on women's bodies are much stricter than for men (Van Amsterdam et al., 2012). For instance, Peter described that his body enabled him to position himself as big and powerful in his job as a manager:

> In my job as a manager my body has not been in the way so much. I have, of course, also quite an imposing appearance. That matters. It is not that I need that, but still, it saves me a discussion because I do not have to emphasize that I am the boss, my body does that already for me. You can compare it to not having to scream because my voice is already loud enough. So in that sense it helps.

This indicates how body size categorizations intersect with gender categorizations. For men, body size might not always have a negative impact in their work, while for women there seems to be no positive fat subject position available since this is incongruent with 'femininity' (Van Amsterdam, 2013). This is in line with the findings of Monaghan (2007) who shows how fat men can find ways to construct a positive fat identity, in which their body size is equated with power. Mandy and Kyra explain how it is different for a woman to be fat at their work than for a man:

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[9] See: http://nos.nl/artikel/2126598-egyptische-tv-zender-schorst-dikke-nieuwslezers-om-af-te-vallen.html, accessed at 18/08/2016

> Mandy: My (male) director is too fat and the (male) financial manager as well. They are both men, grey, and I have the feeling that it is different for a woman. Because when you are too fat as a woman, then you become less worthy as a woman, while if you are a man and grey, it is different. I think it is more important for women to be slender than for men.

> Kyra: I believe it is more difficult for fat women than for fat men. I think fat men receive fewer comments for not complying with the ideal image. I noticed that at my office. The one other fat guy also receives comments about how he has gained weight again, but beyond that they leave him alone. There is no value judgment such as there would be for women.

Kyra and Mandy claim it is of less negative impact at work for a man to be fat than for a woman. Their narratives can be related to the dominant norm that equates slenderness with femininity. However, Ben also described how he was deemed unprofessional before his weight loss:

> Ben: One colleague said to me that he thought I looked unprofessional before my weight loss. He dared to say that after my weight loss: 'It just didn't look right, it was indecent, it was not normal'. Well, I think what he was trying to say was that you represent the organization when you are with clients, so you have to be able to function normally, so that your body does not hinder that and that you're not the ugly one.

As the narrative of Ben (and of Kyra about her male fat colleague) indicates, fat men are also subjected to fat prejudice on the work floor. However, the difference between fat men and fat women is that for fat men there also seem to be positive fat subject positions available, while for women a fat body seems to instantly denounce her worthiness as a woman and/or employee. Therefore, as I will explain later on, the women feel pressured to put in extra effort for their appearance.

The fat applicant/employee

A couple of my participants shared the belief that when entering application procedures, their body size matters. That is, the perception of their body immediately evokes (negative) expectations. These participants, therefore, have the feeling that an employer would favor a more slender candidate over a fat candidate with the same skills and work-experience. Kyra explains her rejections as a result of not fitting into the 'mental image' some employers have of new employees:

> Kyra: I have seen multiple companies from the inside, so I know a) how hard it is to even get as far as an application interview due to the profile picture, and b) when you are as far as an application interview, how quickly you get rejected. With some people you just notice that during the conversation, there is no connection. Some people just have a kind of mental image, and I do not fit in. When they see me they think: 'no, you do not fit in'.

Kyra explains how her 'abnormal' body hinders her in finding a job. It suggests that her bodily markers evoke negative expectations in terms of being a good employee, these are mostly stereotypical thoughts such as taking sick leave more often, being less competent and having an unkempt appearance (Halse, 2009; Puhl & Heuer, 2009). The association of being ill more often is something Riana notices:

> Riana: Others told me how they get to hear from their employer that fat people are ill more often. Which is proven not to be true, however it is some kind of myth that can't be

eradicated. I am for instance never ill so I already bring down the average. (…) I have been unemployed for two years, many times I have wondered to what extent my weight played a role in that, like they would opt for the more slender candidate because they thought I would be ill more often. And I am never ill!

Riana practices resistance to this regime of truth by reconstructing the potential absenteeism assumption as a 'myth' instead of the real truth. Also, she practices resistance by positioning herself as 'proof' that this assumption is wrong, as she claims never to be ill. Kyra and Ben (see quote on p. 36) experience the association that fat people look less neat or proper for the job, or that they are not 'representative' enough.

> Kyra: After my interview she [her current boss] literally said she wouldn't have hired me if I didn't looked as neat as I did. She said that full-figured people often look unkempt.

Ben reproduces the truth that his former fat body is unrepresentative for a company, as he now (after his weight loss) no longer has to absorb this attribute into his own identity. Kyra however, did not want to conform to this 'prejudice' and tries to resist this anticipated spoiled fat identity:

> Kyra: I told her [boss] 'Well, that is not my experience, I also see a lot of unkempt slender people but maybe they are less visible'. That is what I have said. That it was a prejudice. It was anyhow an attempt to defend a position. I know fat men and women, I know slender people, a lot of people with either an unkempt or a decent appearance, but that does not depend on how fat someone is.

In doing so, she tries to resist the dominant truth of having an unkempt appearance not only for herself, but for all fat people. That is, she undermines the link between body size and the decency of appearance. She does seem to take a fat activist standpoint.

Nina explains how media representations contribute to the dominant truth that fat people are less competent:

> Fat women and men are often the comedians, the funny one, or the bad one. When you look at role models in the media, how many fat people do you see as role model? As professional successful businesswoman or man? Maybe a few.

According to Nina, the Synopticon of the media produces the dominant standards for the appearance of a competent person and an incompetent person. Fat persons are often not represented as successful and competent, which enforces the dominant truth that fat people are less competent or successful.

Some of the organizations my participants worked at offered health programs. Hanna, for instance, explains a program being offered to her.

> Our organization always advertises the program 'in balance', in which all kinds of physical activities are offered under the guise that a fit employee is a happy employee. And then I have the feeling that it is directed at me, to get me to exercise, you know. Because fat people should become healthier so that they go on sick leave less frequently as 'statistics' show. That is the association I always feel underneath those programs.

Hanna feels that these kinds of health programs are imposed on her to seek the right self-improvements, as her body is now perceived as a health risk that could be a financial cost to

the company. These programs illustrate the neoliberal ideas that encourage companies to see body weight as a rightful corporate concern (Mik-Meyer, 2008).

How do my participants negotiate these dominant truths in relation to their profession? I will now address the strategies within the context of their profession by describing the fearful, funny, super smart and impeccable fat employee.

The fearful fat employee

The interviews revealed that the fear of size discrimination translates for some of my participants into being less confident in their profession. Some say they are less confident to go into an argument because their body would always be dragged into it, or less confident of doing what they are good at in front of an audience.

> Cindy: I notice that I miss confidence on the work floor. I have built a wall around myself because I believe that at any moment I could get a comment about my body.

It seems that because of her experiences with fat stigma Cindy – who is a professional pianist - constantly fears the recurrence of stigmatizing or discriminatory practices.

> Cindy: It is like 30% of my concentration is focused on what I have to do (playing piano on stage), and 70% is focused on what they might be thinking of me. One time when the piano was faced in front of the audience, I was playing with shaky fingers thinking I wouldn't survive. The audience must be thinking 'what a fat body'. So if I make one mistake they will not only think 'what a fat body', but this mistake would also confirm that a fat person cannot be good at anything.

Cindy internalizes the gaze of others on her fat body, which makes it hard for her to only focus on her 'job'. This translates into devoting much of her energy into self-surveillance.

The funny fat one

Humor is a strategy that is often used by my participants in their work context. Some of my participants mention that there are two ways of using humor: either as malicious pleasure or as self-mockery. Marian often uses 'humor' related to her body size to make everyone at ease or to solve situations: "you can better make the jokes yourself." For instance, in the application interview of Marian, questions came up if she had the papers to give a gym class.

> Marian: One of the questions was [in the application interview]: can you give gym classes? [teachers need a separate gym license]. Well, yes I can, but eh. Then I just anticipate what is expected because I see them looking at me like 'yeah but'. While I can give good gym classes, that is not the point.
> Interviewer: But you don't say that?
> Marian: No, I say what is expected from me, by making a joke of my sport skills. Being sportive, I have no confidence that I can do that.

Marian anticipated that others think she will not be able to teach gym class because she is fat, and she uses humor to conform to that expectation. She internalizes the gaze of the other, and therefore feels that her fat body makes her inadequate as a gym teacher. Nina also uses humor in her profession as an actress and comedian, however, she claims to be using humor about her body as self-mockery, while simultaneously denouncing dominant assumptions about fat bodies.

> Nina: I tell people: I understand you are jealous; you all want to be like me. And I ask people the direct question: do you think I am fat? Then people are shocked. That kind of self-mockery. To criticize those things out in the open.

Kyra uses humor to deal with situations in which she receives comments about her body.

> Kyra: When there is cake at work, and colleagues ask if I want to have some, I respond like: of course, I have to think about my figure. And then they laugh and we are able to have a conversation about it.

For Nina and Kyra, using humor about their body helps to open up a discussion with others about their body size and thereby enables them to criticize dominant truths. Nevertheless, they feel the need to use 'humor' to be able to criticize dominant truths. Hole (2013) tries to explain the relationship between the fat body and comedy by analyzing television series. According to her, the fat female body is seen as a 'threat', therefore "media relocates the fat female body from "to-be-looked at" to "to-be-laughed-at", trying to release the fear as laughter" (Hole, 2013, p. 23). This points towards the representation of fat people in the media, in which their dominant subject position is represented as 'the funny one'.

The super smart employee
Feeling the need to compensate for a fat body is something that often came up in the interviews, especially in relation to work. This strategy can be linked to the strategy as described by Goffman (1963, p.20) "an indirect attempt to correct their failing by devoting much private effort to the mastery of areas of activity felt to be closed due to their shortcoming". I came across two types of compensation strategies: mind-oriented and bodily-oriented compensating. Mind-oriented compensation involved my participants showing their intelligence or having a strong work ethic.

> Nina: I once wrote a paper on 'it is allowed to be fat, however, you have to prove yourself before you will be accepted.' As examples I described Oprah Winfrey and Karin Bloemen, who both really achieved something. So that has been my drive, I have to be really good at something and then it does not matter that I am fat.

Nina describes how she feels that, as a fat person, she has to be really good at something to be accepted and included in society. A common compensation strategy for most of my participants is being super smart to oppose the dominant assumption that fat people are less competent or plain stupid. For instance, Cindy explains how being perfectionistic has become part of her identity:

> Cindy: I have always been perfectionistic. That is partly due to being obese, because I have always had signals that I am not good enough with this body, so I have to be good at other areas.
> (…)
> When I send a small message via WhatsApp and it contains a typing error, then I will have trouble sleeping at night because I think: I am already fat and now they will also think I am dumb because I am fat. That compensation behavior can be really annoying, because I know everyone makes mistakes, but when I do it myself in a document or conversation, then it is aaaah.

Cindy refers to the discursive constraints as 'signals' she experiences that compel that, as a fat woman, she is not good enough so she has to be 'perfect' in other areas of life. She fears that her mistakes will be immediately related to being dumb because of her fat body. The need my participants feel to compensate can be considered both a way of conforming to the notion that their fat body is making them a 'failed' citizen, and as a way to counter that truth by showing they excel in other areas. For instance, when Ben applied for a position in a commission, he felt he had to emphasize his unique financial knowledge to be accepted.

Ben: I noticed in that commission, that when I lost weight I became more included and accepted in the group. Of course, I only entered the commission because of my financial knowledge. I think I was hired because of that, not because of who I was.
Interviewer: So you felt that your financial knowledge was of importance?
Ben: Yeah, I emphasized my financial knowledge [to get selected for the commission]. I had the idea that I had to be of added value to able to become part of them.

Kyra: I feel like I have to prove myself even more. That my weight compels how people see me, and that is often negative. So because of that I have to prove myself that I am really good at my job and that my weight is unimportant.

For Ben and Kyra and many others to feel secure in their job, they feel they have to compensate for their body in terms of work qualities.

The impeccable employee
Bodily oriented compensation can entail different kinds of strategies related to visibility. Most often, participants feel they have to put in extra effort to look well-groomed at work and thereby decrease the visibility of their body.

Mandy: I am really harsh on myself when it concerns clothing. I make sure I look great every day in terms of clothing, so no casual Friday for me. I think when you are already too fat you shouldn't also appear unkempt.

Rian: As a manager, I had the feeling to put in extra effort to look well-groomed. Because, when you are overweight you already have so much against you.

The narratives of Mandy and Rian suggest that for a fat employee to look well-groomed, he or she has to make a bigger effort than a slender person. By being fat, they apparently violate society's anticipations of what an individual should appear like. And therefore, most of my participants express self-discipline directed at putting (extra) effort into their looks and style.

Marian: I noticed that clothes play an important role. I am very much focused on being neat, without any blemishes, no jeans and not something tight.
Interview: Why is the way of dressing so important to you?
Marian: That is your 'tool' to do something about it. The few fat people I know are all very much focused on their appearance. They go to the beautician, have neat hands, their make-up is spotless. They do what you can do about it for that moment. You cannot lose that 20 kgs, so you do what can do. And someone else can easily pull off a loose t-shirt, however for me it looks like I am painting. Or this jeans I am wearing now, that is just not neat enough. However, my colleagues wear this all the time.

Marian describes the role of clothes, make-up and hair as a 'tool', that can help to minimize the effect of her body. By making everything else around her body as 'perfect' as possible, she feels she can look good enough. This relates to the compensation strategy in which no mistakes are allowed since her body size already signifies failure. It is also a clear example of the production of the "docile body" as Foucault articulated it. Marian is self-disciplined in controlling and maintaining her physical appearance in the sense of clothes, hair and make-up. According to Bordo (2003, p. 63), the result is that the demands on the body are so internalized that women become their own guard.

The pressure to manage their body and mitigate impact on others translates into putting effort to dress properly so that their "failing" would be hidden as much as possible. Cindy explains why she thinks this strategy is justifiable.

> Cindy: I realize that my body influences the way people see me, and that is not how I want to present myself. I want to be judged for what I have to say and do, not for what my body says. I often wear black, because I know in a white dress everyone would concentrate on that white dress and my big body instead of what I have to say and want to do. In that sense, it is compensation behavior, however I think it is justifiable.

Cindy tries to conceal her bodily marker, because she 'knows' people would only see her fat body and not what she has to say or wants to do. She feels it is justifiable to conceal her fatness, as she would otherwise be reduced to a 'tainted, discounted person' (Goffman, 1963, p. 12).

Some participants use the opposite strategy, that is, they make themselves even more visible by choosing extravagant looks.

> Kyra: I try not to hide myself in clothes but stand out by painting my hair red and wearing cupcake dresses. It is a little rebellious. I just think you want to look at my fiery red hair or dress with cupcakes on it? And then what, what do you want to say, hey? A fat woman in a cupcake dress? Bye!

This strategy can be seen as resisting the disciplinary mechanisms that compel fat people to make themselves less visible. By standing out, Kyra tries to claim space that she normally is not entitled to have (Puwar, 2004).

And lastly, Marian's strategy involves wearing a 'bow tie' to distract the attention from her fat body:

> Marian: When I was young – and still slender - I once had to give a presentation for a large audience and I was a bit nervous about it but then I received a really good tip from a corporate person: to wear something that distracts the attention, like a big bow tie. That tip really helped me and I am still using it, then I know they are watching that bow tie and not my fat rolls.

Marian consciously uses this strategy to distract the attention of her audience away from her fat body. This bow tie can be seen as a strategy that reproduces dominant truths about the fat body, as she has to distract the attention from what she sees as her 'failing'. These types of compensating in terms of appearance show different ways of dealing with the dominant truth that the body of fat women signifies failure.

In our second interview, Kyra reflects on her contradictory strategies at her work.

> On the one hand I try to compensate in terms of my performance at work. On the other hand I try to pose a statement in terms of my clothes. So that is bit a double. A little contradiction within myself.

Kyra feels confused about this as she wants to resist dominant truths and stereotype thoughts related to fat bodies and is not afraid to express or show this in her clothes, yet she still feels the need to compensate in terms of her work performance. So she uses strategies that both resist and reproduce dominant truths about fat bodies. This shows the fluidity of subject positions, in which many of my participants use strategies of resisting and reproducing dominant truths, sometimes even simultaneously.

Concluding remarks

In line with Levay (2004) and Trethewey (1999), the connection between professionalism and a slender, fit body is more often reproduced by my participants compared to the other dominant truths. However, the narratives of my participants also indicate that body size intersects with gender, as for fat men there seems to be a less negative impact on their work than for women. Self-surveillance is, therefore, a dominant technique in the work context of most of my (female) participants. Strategies they use often involve 'compensating' in areas felt to be closed due to their 'shortcoming', which implies that their body marks them as a bad professional/citizen.

VII. The Happy/Beautiful/Sexy Fat Citizen

- Representation
Oh mirror
so painfully reflects
my self-destructing reflection

In this world
where my body is concealed
forcing me to uphold my shield

My deviant looks
produce self-defensive behavior
keeping myself locked and everyone away

As everywhere around me
I am bombarded
with reminders of my inappropriateness

Composing me as a freak
compelling me
to be miserable

Oh the damage it has done
I have lost myself
in my own reflection

Being 'unattractive'

Current heteronormative ideals equate beauty with slenderness (Beale et al., 2016; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). These coercive ideals of slenderness have long been a feminine issue (Bordo, 2003), however, male bodies are also increasingly being subjected to disciplinary practices with regard to the ideal body size (Monaghan, 2005). Fatness has not always been seen as abnormal or considered unattractive. However, since the twentieth century those who are fat have to "dwell in the shadows of citizen life" (LeBesco, 2004, p. 56). According to LeBesco (2004, p. 57), for a fat person, his or her only shot at full citizenship is if he or she loses weight. This would assume that to be seen as 'slender' entails to be accepted as a worthy, good citizen. It shows the importance of slenderness for social acceptance and worthiness. How do fat people experience these normative ideals in their daily lives? And how do they develop and negotiate a sense of self within this status quo?

You look good, have you lost weight?
Participants have differing feelings about receiving compliments from others.

> Conny [Facebook discussion]: It is quite funny actually; when I am feeling good I more often receive compliments about my appearance. It makes sense though. And indeed, people immediately assume I have lost weight. Those two things are so connected to each other in our current culture: you look good so you probably have lost weight. I even have been asked if I lost weight in moments that I was very sure I even gained weight – but I was just feeling good.

Marian: I have worked here for a long time. And my colleagues know I would want to be more slender, so they compliment me when I lose weight. However, not at the moment, they know that I am currently in a 'larger' phase.

Conny and Marian both have been 'complimented' by asking if they have lost weight. These compliments construct losing weight as a good thing. This suggests that those who succesfully engage in weightloss strategies are appreciated as a good citizens. As Conny describes, it also seems that losing weight and looking good are related to each other. In other words, when you are fat, you cannot look good. Or in the case of Marian, the compliments can be seen as a normalizing tactic compelling her to lose weight and move closer to the norm. Furthermore, Riana explains about the 'rewards' former fat people receive when they have lost weight by means of bariatric surgeries.

Riana: Because they get to hear how great, handsome, good, and beautiful they are. And I am like, yeah, here I am still being fat.

Later on in the interview:
When my friend got a gastric bypass, I told her I would find it really difficult because (a) I understand very well why you are doing this, but (b) I am very much against it, and (c) I will probably be extremely jealous when you will remain slender. So, that is really contradictory. On the one hand I am really much against the fact that people opt for that kind of surgery, on the other hand I think, yeah, but they are slender and look at all the compliments they receive. Now that there are so many people around me who choose that surgery, what if I will be the last one? (…) I really, really don't want to do it, but it is my only shot at becoming slender. I don't want to, I try really hard to choose the other way, but as long the thought is in my head that slender is better…

Riana feels conflicted about her friend's surgery. On the one hand, it suggests that she has internalized the norm to be slender and she wants to be seen as a good person. On the other hand, she strongly opposes – what she sees as – an unhealthy way of becoming slender (see also Ch. 5 'the healthy/active citizen'). The possibility of bariatric surgery poses a constant internal struggle for her between opting for being seen to have a good, handsome and 'healthy' appearance, or for her to feel healthy. Here, Riana prefers being healthy over being seen as good, beautiful and 'healthy'. However, she is afraid that she might also 'surrender' to choosing the only option of becoming slender, as she fears being the only one left who is excluded from being seen as a good. This shows the disciplinary technique of categorization, through which Riana feels compelled to become 'normal' out of fear of being excluded from participating equally in her social context based on her deviation from the norm.

Riana emphasizes the number of compliments people receive who have lost weight. She and Sara also talked about the different types of compliments fat and slender people receive:

Riana: When you are slender you more often hear how beautiful you are or how well you look, and when you are fat you don't get to hear that. The most you might hear is what nice pants you are wearing. Or what a nice haircut. But not about your total appearance. Let alone hear that you are beautiful.

Facebook post by Sara: What do you think about the following? I posted a picture of myself in a new bikini, the responses I got were like: 'woh so brave' but no one says 'nice bikini' (the reason for uploading the picture). Thankfully no negative responses, they should try ha-ha, but why is it brave or strong for me to post something like this?

> When my sister (with size 6/8) posts something like this she'll receive comments such as sexy or nice bikini, but when I post it with ten sizes bigger it is brave.

Both narratives indicate that fat embodiment is seen to preclude one from being labeled beautiful. In Riana's example this becomes apparent as compliments are focused on attributes such as her hair or clothes, but nobody refers to her body. In Sara's example compliments are focused on her courage for showing herself in spite of her body. The story of Sara can be linked to the bodily markers that become visible according to Puwar (2000) and Goffman (1963). The first thing that appears to viewers is her bodily marker of being fat. So, she receives comments about that bodily marker – that she is 'brave' to show her bodily marker instead of hiding it. In contrast, Sara mentions her sister, whose body is not marked by visible fat, this unmarked position makes it possible for viewers to 'see' and compliment her bikini. These kinds of compliments implicitly reproduce the dominant truth that their bodies are not good enough, compared to a slender body that conforms to the mainstream Western ideal of attractiveness.

Nina and Mandy also mention 'compliments' or well-intended comments they received that actually felt as painful insults:

> Nina: I had a date once, I was still very young, it was in Amsterdam. I was quite in love and we were kissing and stuff. We were in a bar when he said: 'Gosh, it is such a shame, isn't it? You have such a beautiful head, it is too bad that you have such a fat body'. (…) This happened to me once. I can imagine that if you hear that more often you will start believing it.

> Mandy: Later, that guy sends me a Whatsapp message: 'you should know that I do not find you less worthy because of your appearance'. Well, call me oversensitive, but *because* of my appearance? There are people who find me attractive you know.

Both these comments implicitly reproduce the dominant idea that Nina's and Mandy's bodies make them a lesser or unattractive person. Although both ensured me they did not let themselves be daunted by these kinds of comments, the comments did have a large impact on them. Nina and Mandy indicate these are incidents they could not easily forget. A strategy some of my participants subsequently developed to deal with these kinds of stigmatizing experiences is 'rationalizing' the situation.

> Hanna: You know, those kinds of things people will say to you. And I used to find that really difficult. But now I just think that person is not in his right mind, because when you say those kinds of things, you must be not completely together in your head.

This truth-telling practice helped them to stop laying the blame for comments at themselves, but instead on the offenders who they construct as apparently not very developed or intellectual. This helps them to be at ease and 'survive' those kinds of situations.

When I am slender I will be happy
One of the dominant power/knowledge constructions that was mentioned or resisted in the interviews is that to become happy, one has to be slender.

> Riana: Since I stopped dieting my body weight is more stable; I stopped gaining more weight. However, I still find it hard to let go of the thought that when you are slender you are happy. Rationally, I know it does not make sense, rationally I know that I live a healthy lifestyle, but still, if they invent a wonder-pill tomorrow to become slender, what would I do?

Riana explains how she, emotionally, internalizes this dominant truth and deep down still wants to conform to the norm. This is in line with how LeBesco (2004, p. 41) describes that media culture poses that, for fat people, the "greatest ambition is to lose fifty pounds and thereby solve all of their problems". The media serve as a Synopticon in which diet and exercise programs are accordingly presented as techniques of improvement of the self, with happiness as result. This can be seen in the multitude of Facebook pages and advertisements such as "Voortaan slank en gelukkig" (from now on slender and happy)[10] that show before-and-after pictures of people losing weight, diets, and work-out movies as means of self-improvement. Most of my participants gave examples of how images and films in mass media contribute to upholding the ideal of a slender body and constructing the fat body as abnormal.

>Riana: How can I impart my 16-year-old daughter that her body is beautiful when she only sees size 6 in the media and learns that slender is beautiful?

>Cindy: How many fat people are there in the Netherlands? Quite a lot. However, when you look around you, and you see how bodies are advertised, then you are a freak. That is the ideal image you constantly get injected into your head. Ideally, your body has to look like this. That has become everyone's goal, to achieve that. Also when you're fat that is your ideal image, so you have to try to get as close as you can.

Riana and Cindy criticize the dominant, narrow construction of beauty in mass media. Cindy explains how the underrepresentation of fat people in media causes her to see herself as deviant and compels her to not be happy with the way she looks. As such, the media tap daily into my participant's sense of self. Cindy continues to criticize the role of the powerful 'few' in the Synopticon; that is the industries that benefit from keeping fat people unhappy.

>Cindy: You cannot make money off people who are happy, but off people who are unhappy you make a lot. The obesity group is a very vulnerable group, from whom a lot of money can and has been earned in the past few decades. That is the biggest problem, the advertising world, the pharmaceutical industry, the clothing industry, they have so much power, and as long as that power stays, as long as I do not see a woman of my size in an TV commercial or movie, I will continue to see myself as deviant. In other words, they [fat people] are unhappier. And people who are unhappy will try everything to achieve the portrayed ideal. And that is why those industries as the big pharmaceuticals with their diet-products are so powerful.

She emphasizes that this status quo is imposed by media culture and industries – such as the pharmaceutical and clothing industries - on people trying to secure what is constructed as the ideal of a normative body size. As such, she resists not only the dominant truth but also criticizes those who benefit from this truth. Her strategy is to collect information that helps her resist the dominant power/knowledge constructions that produce her body as deviant and compel her to be unhappy. This information helped her to figure out how certain industries are in the position to control and disseminate ideas and representations and therefore reinforce the status quo. Yet, she is aware that these industries are so powerful that it is very difficult for her alone to break with their truths. Her narrative shows the systemic oppression of knowledge/power of large industries.

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[10] https://www.facebook.com/Voortaan-Slank-Gelukkig-1634838806755184/?fref=ts

Being someone you're not
Cindy, Hanna and Peter reflected on how being fat became part of their personality.

> Cindy: Most people don't realize what kind of impact obesity has on a person's daily life and way of thinking. Especially when you have been obese since your childhood, it becomes so much integrated into your personality that it is hard to take out. It is a little piece of freedom that you hand in, which is a shame I think, because it constrains you at so many levels.

> Peter: I found out that the biggest damage I have suffered due to my body is the way it has changed my personality, and my way of dealing with other people. I was not a very kind person; I was sharp, often too sharp, and too much in the defense. It is self-reinforcing you know, when you don't look like the norm, you're also going to behave aloof and defensive.

> Riana: I realize now that when you get to hear already from a young age how stupid, ugly and dumb you are, that it becomes part of you. That, in the end, you will think, yeah that's what I am.

Due to the marginalizing and exclusionary practices they experienced at a young age, some participants felt they had become a less happy, sociable, likable or, in the words of Goffman (1963) 'whole' person than they would have been without those experiences. Cindy explains that her body size has become - in a negative way - integrated into her personality. From her perspective, she has lost the 'freedom' to be who she wants to be as the perceptions about her body constrained her way of thinking and doing. The same goes for Peter. He describes this as the 'damage' his body size has caused to his personality, as he feels he became a less likable person than he would want to be, due to the need to always be on the defense about his body. Riana reflected that the comments on her body made her position herself as a less worthy subject. All three construct these implications not as a direct consequence of their body size, but as a consequence of the stigmatization they have experienced.

Riana felt she was not allowed to do the things she wanted to do as long as she was fat:

> My life was on hold. I would only do things again when I would be slender, I postponed everything: I will go back on stage when I am slender, I will go dancing when I am slender, I will wear certain clothes when I am slender, I will have a short haircut when I am slender. I used to always have short hair, but I started to believe that this is not okay when you are fat. Until one-and-a-half years ago, I finally thought this is ridiculous; I can have a short haircut because it suits me as a person. But I placidly delayed that for 5 years.

Riana's narrative illustrates how through self-discipline she put her life on hold for years. Her internalized beliefs, influenced by dominant truths related to her body size, informed her especially on how *not* to act. Riana felt that the things she wanted to do are only allowed for slender people. She felt she first had to become slender, before being able to do those things.

Self-acceptance movement
Still, a new truth is emerging that could transform dominant truths that equates slenderness with beauty happiness. This alternative truth emerges from the 'self-acceptance' movement which Riana and Isa described:

> Riana: I am working on self-acceptance, to accept that this body is okay the way it is. And that not all fat people are to blame for their body size. That is what I want to accomplish someday, I notice that I find that really hard. Because it is something that struck me deeply, that I think, yeah what if just one person makes a wrong comment, then I may already be completely back to where I started [with regard to self-acceptance].

> Isa: More than 60% of the women in The Netherlands have size 44. So when you look at it in that way, the average woman is no Gisele Bündchen or Doutzen Kroes. But they are the ones whom we constantly try to resemble. Although Doutzen Kroes is beautiful, it is not realistic for every woman to look like that. Every person and every woman is beautiful in his or her own way; they should find strength from that and use it to be happy. However, for most people that is a very difficult thing to do.

Self-acceptance is something Riana is trying to work on herself, to resist the dominant truth of fat is bad and to be able to be happy with the body she has. Isa resists the slender norm not only for herself but as something each fat (wo)men should try to achieve, by describing it as 'unrealistic'. Also, she resists the dominant truth by promoting a new truth that every person (fat and slender) can be beautiful. A couple of my participants also explained how they were able to become more self-confident when they started trying to accept their body, instead of trying to keep changing it (by means of dieting) toward the slender norm. However, as Isa describes, not everyone is able to let go of the thoughts that they are not good enough in the body they have.

> Riana: the thought you are fat and not good enough, I wonder if that will ever go out of my head, because I have that thought regularly, even though I am making progress by stopping with diets and by working on self-acceptance. I still compare myself with slender women. I always think, yeah, but they are better than me. While rationally I know that is not true.

Riana's words illustrate that she cannot as easily as Isa use the new self-acceptance discourse to be happy. The truth of 'slender is better' is still more dominant in her own truth-telling practices. This also applies to Ben, who, after his weight loss, has become quite resentful of the 'self-acceptance' mantra.

> Especially now that I have succeeded, I can be very hard in my judgment, I think that attitude is unacceptable. If I had accepted who I was, I would not have achieved who I am now. Then my life would have been much less, yeah... [*silence*] I think I would have been less happy in the end. It still has to be proven in the future if I will really become happier than I was before. But I think my future perspective is much better than before.

Later in the interview Ben addresses self-acceptance again:

> There may be some truth in it, but if you would really accept who you are, then you would take it as a given fact and nothing would happen. If you would be happy, then that is fine, but, I believe most people will not be happy.

Thus Ben reinforces the dominant truth that slender is better, although he is still hesitating if he is really happier than before. Yet, he is clear about the apparent 'fact' that his future perspectives in terms of work and friends are better now that he is perceived as slender, as a good citizen. His truth-telling practices enable him to position himself as 'good', in contrast to what he was before, when he was told to accept his body.

Being sexy

One of the Facebook discussions revolved around the question "*what kind of things do you do that society does not expect of fat(ter) people?*". Many responses were given related to eating healthy, being physically active, showing self-confidence, never dieting. Until Kirsten entered the discussion with another 'thing' that society does not expect of fat(ter) people:

> (…) something that is never expected of the fatter person. That they can flirt, be sexy or even be an utterly scandalous vamp. I could have post the goody-goody answer: that I am very limber (I am), that my favorite comfort food is a bowl of salad, and that I love to go out and go crazy on house music (burning a lot of calories). However, I choose to post the unsafe but true answer, because that is something people do not expect from me, that is that I can easily be very sexy and flirtatious.

Kirsten's comment about being sexy was received as both inspiring and as a shock in the Facebook group. Being sexy is felt as something fat people cannot be. This truth seems even more internalized within fat people compared to other areas of life that seem closed off to fat people such as having a healthy lifestyle. Most of my participants and the participants in the Facebook group feel - in the words of Kirsten - 'safe' enough to resist the truths of having an unhealthy lifestyle or having to diet. However, that fatness is unattractive and not sexy is something most of my participants reproduced. For instance, Riana explains about having to 'play' sexy:

> Last year I had to play a role in which I had to be sexy. Well, I did not like that at all, it was really confronting. I do not like it, let alone on a stage. Even though I thought the show went pretty well, and that was also noticeable from the positive comments. Until I saw myself on video and I thought: gee, so fat! And that immediately wipes out all the compliments.

When Riana sees her own performance on video, it confirms for her the already internalized truth that she cannot be sexy. This had nothing to do with her performance, only with what she thought her body size represented. Seeing her fat body in relation to a sexy performance came as a shock to her. This shock is not surprising considering the underrepresentation of fat bodies in general in media (Sender & Sullivan, 2008), let alone as attractive or sexy. When fat women and men are represented in the media, they are mainly portrayed as "ugly, disgusting or even laughable objects of derision" (LeBesco, 2004, p. 41). Seeing oneself reflected in the mirror, pictures or a movie is therefore something many of my participants experience as shocking and distressing. Peter for example, talked about places that confronted him with his body, such as seeing himself in the mirror at public places:

> Peter: Those things that confront you with it. The mirror. Glances of others. It causes a kind of numbness. I do not want to see it, know it. I turn myself away from the world.
> (Later on in the interview)
> One of the things that helped me decide to do the surgery [gastric bypass] was when I was in the hallway of a theatre, and there was a mirror from top to bottom. And I saw myself, and I thought argh! That is the biggest problem, that you can only see yourself so negatively, as less worthy. It is something you cannot cope with, so you just pretend it is not there.

Mandy and Peter share the feeling of not conforming to what is seen as attractive in society, and therefore feel this hinders them in finding a relationship:

> Mandy: Deep inside, I think of myself as a lesser person. I always have the feeling that there can never be a guy who is truly in love with me unless something is wrong with him. I know that is a heavy thing to say; I hear that too, that he should settle with me, so

to say. That there would be no one who thinks I am great for who I am, but that he has to accept that part. Even though, I know, I have had enough guys who really found me attractive.

Peter: I had no choice. I had to break through something, because, I have an ex-partner you see, so she is no longer with me. And I would really want a relationship again, but that is difficult. Because when we got to know each other I was less fat. That has grown along; it is not what people want. For men and for women. It is not something people dream about.

Although Mandy has experiences in which guys find her attractive, she still internalizes the 'truth' that there can be no one who would really want her because of her body size. For Peter, this even led to taking a gastric bypass as he felt this was the only way to 'break through' his loneliness and find a partner by getting closer to the ideal slender norm.

Kyra resists the framing of fat women as 'unattractive':
I especially notice that men cannot be open about finding fuller sized women attractive. For instance, within a group of friends jokes are being made about 'chubby chasers'. While there are also men, like my boyfriend, who date slender as well as fat women. They do not care. It is about the person and not about body size. (…) I also know that there are men, I receive random messages on Facebook from men who say: 'I think you are a beautiful woman, you are my ideal image but I do not dare to say that to anyone else.' I think that is such a waste. That you are not allowed to find fat women pretty, and if you do, you have to do it secretly. Because it would be weird. It is allowed to say you like blond or red hair, long or tinted skin, but not this. That is wrong.

Kyra alluded to the idea that it is the patriarchal, masculine culture that prescribes that it is wrong to find fat women attractive. Men cannot be open because they fear facing judgment that they do not conform to "mainstream" ideals of sexual attraction. Her narrative indicates the gendered and heteronormative ways in which women's bodies are being perceived.
Ben: I like slender girls more than fat girls. I just don't think it is beautiful. I can be quite judgmental about it. Especially after my process [of losing weight].

Peter: And then, that is really bizarre, when you see another fat person you also think 'bleh'. That is really strange. I correct myself, but still it happens.

Peter and Ben illustrate this norm of finding fat women unattractive. Ben is quite straightforward about this, Peter, however, explains that his initial response is to think of fat as unattractive, but that he tries to correct his own thoughts. It shows how much this norm is internalized in fat people themselves and how they also discipline other fat people.

New truth: Big Girls, We are Beautiful
A new movement is trying to transform the dominant truth and position fat as beautiful and sexy. This can be seen as a postmodern perspective on the body that applauds the representation of fat bodies, in which "beautiful images pull beauty down from its pedestal, making it accessible and omnipresent" (LeBesco, 2004 p. 50). This movement is also noticeable in the Facebook group in which fat women increasingly upload pictures of themselves. As fat people are often concealed in social media, by making themselves visible, and even positioning themselves as beautiful, it can be seen as a point of resistance and strategy of empowerment for fat people. From this perspective, fat itself is not the problem,

but the problem is that people have a narrow understanding of beauty that excludes fat people (Saguy, 2013, p. 54).

Cindy describes how other fat people are claiming a subject position as beautiful and sexy:
> Cindy: It is a kind of affirming; I am pretty, I am pretty, I am pretty. But do you really believe it yourself? Because when you look around, all the signals point into the direction that you are not allowed to be. When you see a poster alongside the road of a woman in a nice bikini, it gives you that signal. You are bombarded with it, on television and in media; you are infiltrated with these images.

Cindy agrees that the narrow understanding of beauty is a problem, however, she explains that this narrow understanding is so powerful that it makes it impossible for her and for many other fat people to really think of themselves as beautiful. What is more, as Saguy (2013) describes, by affirming that fat is beautiful, it reinforces the importance of beauty for women's social acceptance and worthiness. It does not resist the truth that women are only seen as valuable if they are beautiful. This indicates the gendering of the importance of beauty. As Weedon (1997) argues, dominant feminine norms oppress women in the subject position of being attractive and desirable to men. Already from a young age, little girls learn to look 'pretty'. Feminist scholars have criticized this beauty ideal for women and pointed to the harmful effects on the body image and eating habits of girls and women (Bordo, 2003).

Concluding remarks
My participants' narratives indicate the dominance of the slender beauty ideal and the gendering of this phenomenon. This truth seems even more internalized within fat people compared to other areas of life as what seems to be closed off to fat people. Those who lose weight are rewarded for it; those who are slender are represented as the ideal in mass media; and the availability of an abundance of diet products, fitness programs and bariatric surgeries that promote a happy and slender life, all contribute to normalizing practices directed at fat people. Although the dominant truths of beauty, happiness and sexiness are strong and oppressive, points of resistance can be found in the self-acceptance movements and individual attempts of positioning fat as beautiful- but most importantly, position fat people as worthy citizens.

Epilogue

I realize

This is not *the* truth
This is not right
This is unjust

You know what *is* bad?

It is bad to treat me differently
It is bad to exclude me
It is bad to hurt me

It is not me it is *you*

I am as normal as any other person
I am fat and I am a person
I am a fighter

My body deviates from the norm

Should that constrain me to enjoy the beach
to eat at a restaurant
to apply for that job-

out of fear of being *judged*?

It is *a* body
It does not define me as bad
It cannot compel me how to be

because hey

I'd rather be <u>me</u>

This final poem is created by assembling fragments of the interviews, diaries and Facebook discussions that communicated agency and resistance in relation to being positioned as 'bad'. I tried to express the voices of my participants that were directed toward resisting disciplinary practices related to their responsibility, health, professionalism, and happiness. These four themes were most influential in the participants' lives, in terms of dominant truths that they felt oppressed by and tried to resist. However, they are agents "who must swim in rivers that have strong currents" (Erickson, p. 52, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Strong currents compel the bearer of a fat body to be regarded as a failed citizen, as is often experienced and internalized by my participants. My participants often feel constrained in being and doing. The idea of being a failed citizen often contributed to a feeling of low self-worth. That this current, or disciplinary power, is quite strong, is noticeable in the 'fear' many expressed with regard to resisting dominant truths and choosing alternative subject positions. Most participants have experiences of – what is often seen as 'justified' – stigma, which had such a big impact on them that they became 'paralyzed', unable to resist dominant subject positions.

How to 'be' a fat citizen? The acts and talks of my participants represent several possibilities that can differ per person, situation and setting. Sometimes participants internalize the Panoptic-mechanism and see themselves through the eyes of others as a 'bad' citizen. Self-surveillance compels them to be and act according to the dominant norms and become less 'visible' - for instance, by avoiding places such as a swimming pool or avoiding situations such as getting into a discussion with others. Common strategies are trying to correct their 'failure' directly by attempting to change their body size towards the norm, or indirectly by compensating for their 'failed body' in other areas. In other moments, participants notice the disciplinary practices of the Panoptic-mechanism, yet do not internalize the dominant truths and norms that position them as 'bad'. This often causes an internal conflict whether to obey the disciplinary practices to protect themselves from stigmatizing situations, or to openly resist and try to transform these truths but be subjected to possible fat shaming. This indicates the multiple, fluid and contradictory subject positions that my participants took on by reproducing and resisting dominant truths.

The ways in which fat people, who are perceived as deviating from the slender norm, make sense of themselves and live their lives, is a necessary starting point for understanding how power relations structure society and produce inequality around body size issues. A first stage of possible change of these power relations is recognizing how these dominant truths subordinate fat people to slender people. That is what I hope this study can contribute to. However, I emphasize that not only recognition of harmful truths but also 'representation' of fat people and the intersectionality of body size with other categorizations such as gender, class and ethnicity / race are important issues that should be addressed to be able to envisage new possibilities for fat people on how to 'be'. I hope this thesis opens up possibilities to think about and discuss taken-for-granted truths and to broaden the narrow representations of body size to make the world a better place, a place in which a person's body size becomes irrelevant to whether he or she can be responsible, healthy, successful and happy.

Appendix I Methodological Reflections

1. **Poststructuralist paradigm**
2. **Sampling**
3. **Data-collection: in-depth qualitative interviews, diaries, naturally occurring data**
4. **Data-analysis**
5. **Presentation of data**
6. **Validity**
7. **Reflexivity of the researcher**

In this chapter I reflect on methodological choices I have made in this research project. Some of my choices might be different from the dominant way of conducting research; therefore, I feel it is necessary to unpack why I think these choices are appropriate for this specific research project. It is important to note that the goal of this research is not to represent 'facts', however, the goal is to evoke change and transform dominant meanings in society (Ellis, 2004). Also, I conducted research on a sensitive topic (Lee, 1993) in the sense that I study members of a marginalized group in society, who experience stigmatization and stereotypical expectations of social audiences (e.g. Puhl & Heuer, 2010). These two notions encouraged me to search for methodological innovation.

1. Poststructuralist paradigm

What kind of criteria can be applied to judge the value of this study? According to Guba & Lincoln (2005), the research standards should be appropriate to the specific type of study. The feminist poststructuralist paradigm guided my research so this is where I should find the appropriate criteria. As argued by leading qualitative researchers, the standards by which 'quantitative research' are judged are fruitless for my type of study (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). However, there is general consensus that researchers should demonstrate that their studies are credible (Cresswel, 1998). I therefore searched for new standards that are appropriate for qualitative, feminist poststructuralist research. Cresswell (1998) argues that researchers within this paradigm need to be reflexive and disclose what they bring themselves to the narrative. And secondly, he argues for collaboration with participants in the study to minimize inequality. In addition, Ellis (2004, p. 252) argues that the most important criterion is "whether the work has the possibility to change the world and make it a better place". Although I have no expectation of changing the world, I hope to contribute toward change, which I already succeeded in with respect to myself (more on this, see p. 62).

2. Sampling

After finalizing my research proposal, I was thrilled to finally go into the field and hear the stories of participants. However, I immediately stumbled upon the first hurdle: how to gather participants for my study without categorizing or offending anyone? As Butler (1996, p. 307) explains in her writings about 'lesbian identity', identifying someone as a lesbian or in this case as 'fat', can serve not only to affirm but also to constrain, determine or specify one's identity in ways that support fat phobia and slender ideal thought. So I wanted to refrain from categorizing potential participants myself.

As a solution, I posted invitations to participate in my study in social media groups of self-identified fat people. I posted an invitation in the newsletter of the obesity association, in a Facebook group of fuller-sized women, and on the website of a plus-size blogger. For the

purpose of this thesis, I was not interested in the categorization of fat from a medical perspective (see chapter 3 on BMI), but rather in general perceptions of whether possible participants considered themselves a member of a group that experiences fat stigma. I contend that categorizations based on body size (fat/slender) are socially constructed and reproduce relations of power between those on either side of the category. In this project I left the categorization and decision to participate in my research project entirely up to the potential participants themselves. I also used the snowball method: I asked at the end of each interview if the participant knew anyone else who might be interested in participating in the research and if so to give them my contact details. On the whole, all the participants in this research have contacted me, so they decided themselves if they felt safe enough to talk to me.

The diversity of my sample however can be criticized. According to Tracy (2010), an important criterion for qualitative research is that samples are marked by a rich rigor which is generated through a 'requisite variety' (p. 841). As my intention is to employ a feminist perspective, it is important to include dimensions of inequality. Due to the sensitive topic, however, I relied on volunteer participants, so I could not use active strategies to recruit more diverse participants. Non-white and lower class people who experience inequalities with regard to their larger body size are underrepresented in this study. I can thus by no means generalize my findings for all fat people; I can only speak for the similarities and differences in experiences of my specific group of participants. This group consists of mainly female, white, and middle class people (see p. 62-63 for the types of participants). I would advise for future research to try to incorporate intersections of body size with other categorizations such as gender, class and race/ethnicity.

3. Data collection
I used different methods to gather my data: qualitative in-depth interviews, diary method and naturally occurring data of online discussion on Facebook. These ways of collecting data enabled participants to express themselves in different ways. That is, expressing themselves in conversation with me as a researcher (reflexive dyadic interviews), in writings of their own (diaries), and in online conversations with others who face similar situations (Facebook discussions).

In-depth qualitative interviews
> Cindy: I have to say, in this same café I have been interviewed before about my life as obese, in which a student just like you sat at the other end of the table. Only that time she had her laptop in front of her, typing along as I provided answers to her list of questions. We also had to stop quite abruptly after exactly an hour had passed. This time it was completely different, it did not really feel like an interview, more like a conversation.

This is a response I received after meeting with one of my participants in a coffee bar in Amsterdam. As we lost track of time, we sat there for over two hours talking continually about her experiences in daily and organizational life related to being fat. In a more classic interview, I would ask a list of structured questions and the interviewee would provide answers to these questions. However, as this study focuses on a subject that can make the participant feel vulnerable, I did not feel comfortable in approaching the participants as subjects of data. Rather, I wanted the participants to feel safe by creating a more equal relationship between me - as a researcher - and them as participants. I dealt with the following issues, which surround the exploration of sensitive topics by means of qualitative interviewing (Lee, 1993).

Firstly, the location of the research was decided upon by the participants themselves; this could either be a local coffee house, the participants' home or their place of work - wherever they felt most comfortable to talk. The participants thus selected where but also when interviews would take place.

Secondly, instead of a classic structured interview I used a reflexive dyadic way of interviewing (Ellis, 2004, p. 61). This allows for a more intimate connection between the researcher and participant. The focus remains on the story of the participant, however, by also sharing my own reflections related to their stories, it helped to build trust and gain information of the participants at a deeper level and to lessen the hierarchy in the interview (Ellis, 2004). Also, it helped to remain the flow to let it be a conversation. I created a topic list before the interviews, however, the interview often took a life on its own as I tried to also let the participant take control in the conversation (Lee, 1993). I memorized the topics I wanted to ask but tried to let the participant control the direction of our conversation. As a consequence, the duration of each interview was often longer than a typical one-hour interview.

And thirdly, privacy, confidentiality and a non-condemnatory attitude are important because they provide a basis of trust (Lee, 1997, p. 28). To touch upon this issue of trust, I ensured anonymity but also, by having a second interview with most of my participants. This second interview enabled a more intense relationship between me as a researcher and the participant. As the participant and researcher already 'knew' each other (such as my non-condemnatory attitude) in the second interview, it often offered the opportunity to move into a deeper level and touch upon sensitive topics.

My own body size was also of influence in creating a safe environment in the interviews. Some participants questioned my interest in the subject as a slender person. Also, one of the participants 'googled' me before the interview, and found a lot of sports pictures of myself. His experience with sports people is that he often was marginalized by them, telling him what to do and emphasizing his 'failure'. He was therefore not sure what to expect from the interview – would I also tell him the importance of being active and eating healthy? Therefore, I first had to convince my participants of my non-condemnatory attitude towards their body. This attitude is also not something most of my participants were used to, as their closest friends and relatives often expressed dominant truths and immediately 'judged' their body. Fortunately, by explaining my research interest and emphasizing my focus on changing dominant 'truths', I was able to create a safe enough climate for them to tell their stories.

Diary methods
I chose to use creative research methods to capture first hand experiences. The participants were asked if they would be willing to write in a diary for one week to capture experiences in that specific week related to their body. Not only were the participants 'in control' over the data, it also enabled detailed information about recent events (Symon, 1998). Furthermore, creative methods can contribute to capturing experiences about sensitive topics. They allow the participants to express themselves in their own way. However, the method can be burdensome to the respondent so I let the participants decide for themselves 'how' they wanted to write a diary, for instance on paper or online (or even Whatsapp), the length of the diary and so on. All to let the participant feel safe and in control over his or her diary.

The diary method also allowed for my participants to engage in writing as inquiry (Richardson, 2000). This enabled some of my participants to reach new understandings of their personal and professional lives. Sometimes writing about their experiences was also confronting or painful. However, it also enabled some participants to give new meanings to their experiences. It sometimes brought to light things that have been silenced before. For example, one participant wrote about the painful experiences of going to public bathrooms and the struggles he underwent, something he had never been able to talk about before. Others became aware, by writing every day, how often they felt their body played a role in their daily lives.

Naturally occurring data
I have studied naturally occurring posts and discussions of an online community, this method is named 'netnography' (online ethnography) (Kozinets, 2010). The online community I have studied is a Facebook group that comprises fuller-sized women who share stories about their lives. Their shared characteristics create recognition of similar feelings and experiences, which offer a strong forum for members of the online community to learn from one another and together to try make an impact on the society or culture around them. I used their posts to 'check' my findings based on the interviews and diaries and to further support my initial findings. This method enabled to observe and analyze written texts that exist independently of the researcher (Silverman, 2011, p. 274).

By using this method, I had to deal with some ethical issues. First, I had to disclose my own presence to the online community and my intentions with the research. Also, I had to ensure anonymity of the online community members. And, most importantly, I needed the permission of the group members to use their posts and discussions as data in my research. Therefore, I posted a comment in the Facebook group in which I introduced myself and my research project and asked permission for using their forum as data for my research. No one opposed as long as I would anonymize the data, on the contrary, I received only positive comments and encouragements for my research.

Three criteria guided the selection of Facebook discussions that I included. Firstly, the post and comments had to be considered a 'discussion'. That is, I included only posts that evoked at least five or more comments. Secondly, I used the material from the Facebook group to refine the themes that I had found in the interviews and diaries. Thus I focused on posts that fit into one of these four themes (responsibility, health, professionalism and beauty/happiness). And thirdly, I wanted the data to be reasonably recent. So I only included discussions that weren't older than five years.

4. Data analysis
All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, all the diaries were digitalized and the extracts of Facebook discussions were saved on my computer. I used several qualitative research tools to analyze the collected data. Firstly, qualitative data analysis software NVivo enabled me to arrange all the data into codes and categories, which I later on divided under the four themes (see table 1).

Secondly, I experimented with writing as method of knowing (Richardson, 1994). I kept my own short journal in which I wrote messages to myself about things I observed, initial hunches, critiques of my own experiences, and personal feelings or beginnings for a poem. Also, I experimented with writing by just starting to write things down to discover new

things about my topic. These writings and rewritings were not meant as a final presentation of the data, but helped me to get to "know" the data (Richardson, 1994).

Thirdly, I used a critical discourse analysis informed by feminist poststructuralism (Weedon, 1997) to analyze the codes and themes. This analysis allowed me to identify underlying subject positions and strategies that participants used in their narratives regarding the role of body size in their daily and professional lives. I paid attention to both how my participants reproduced dominant truths about body size as how their actions resisted and transformed these. I have thus tried to investigate similarities and differences in experiences of my participants, but I acknowledge that the truths and strategies presented in this paper are by no means exhaustive.

Quotes	Codes	Category	Theme
How many fat people are there in the Netherlands? Quite a lot. However, when you look around you, and you see how bodies are advertised, then you are a freak. That is the ideal image you constantly get injected into your head. Ideally it has to look like this. That has become everyone's goal, to achieve that. Also when you're fat that is your ideal image, so you have to try to get as close as you can.	Slender ideal Being abnormal	Representation Normalization	Subjectivity: beautiful fat citizen
The other day I was in the Ikea for an entire afternoon, and I hadn't eaten much at home so I started to feel quite hungry in the evening, around suppertime. But then I still think, yeah but if I eat something, they will think 'see that' [a fat person eating].	Eating in public	Self-surveillance	Subjectivity: responsible fat citizen
I have always been perfectionistic. That is partly due to being obese, because I have always had signals that I am not good enough with this body, so I have to be good at other areas.	Compensating	Stigma strategies	Subjectivity: professional fat citizen

Table 1: Codes, categories and themes

5. Presentation of results: use of poems

How to do justice to the intense, vulnerable and intimate stories of my participants? This was a main struggle I underwent during my writing phase. I wanted to capture in my writing the intensity of the affective experiences of the people I interviewed. However, in a traditional way of presenting research data, a researcher has to 'cool down' data rather than present 'feelings' (Furman et al., 2007). How could I do justice to the intimate stories of the participants, while having to write in a tightly structured academic language?

I discovered new ways to present my data in arts-based research (ABR) (Leavy, 2015). More specifically, I have turned to poetic forms of presenting results. Poetry enabled me to present the personal and intimate topics more vividly and evocatively. As a researcher, it enabled me to use both body and mind – to blend the practices of social science and expressive form of art - in conveying my results.

My intention with these poems is firstly to evoke emotional responses in readers and enable them to put themselves in the place of others, enlarging their social awareness and empathy. But also, I wanted to represent the speaker in a way that Richardson (1994, p. 522) argues might even "better represent the speaker than the practice of quoting snippets in prose". This is also in line with Ellis (2004) who argues that "an artful, poetic and emphatic social science can let readers feel in their bodies the complexities of concrete moments of lived experience" (p. 30). What is more, writing and rewriting these poems, served as a process of discovery and inquiry. It enabled me to better understand, or gain a new understanding of the data I collected. According to Richardson (1997, p. 91), "there is no such thing as 'getting it right', only 'getting it' differently contoured and nuanced". This relates to the postmodernist perspective that poetry helps to recognize that all texts are constructed. This perspective emphasizes that language cannot expose social reality, rather, it produces meaning and in that sense is creating social reality.

6. Validity

I am concerned about issues of validity. However, this criteria takes on different meanings in critical, narrative research (Ellis, 2004). In this research paradigm, validity can be judged by "whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers" – or my own (Ellis, 2004, p. 124). One way to improve lives would be to help the participants understand their worlds better, and the ways those in power shape them. In this research project, my interaction with others is an important and influential element of the data that I gathered. According to Cresswell (2000), collaboration with the participants of the study is an important validity procedure to minimize the hierarchy between researcher and participants, and not to further marginalize them. For instance, some participants helped me to decide upon the direction of my study and with assembling more participants. Also, I have used a reflexive dyadic style of interviewing to further strengthen the role of the participants in my research. And, I tried to give back some of my results to those I have studied and give them a chance to contribute or assess my analysis. Responses I received were, for instance, that the four themes were highly recognizable, however, the theme 'professionalism' was still something some said 'did not play a role' in their lives. I have tried to incorporate this in the 'professional fat citizen' chapter. Thus, I checked the validity of this study in the sense that the results reflect the participants concerns and experiences.

7. Reflexivity

Another important element within the feminist poststructural paradigm is the reflective practices of the researcher. I have to make clear how my own experiences, values, and positions of privilege in various hierarchies have influenced my research interests, my choices in the research process and the presentation of my research findings (Ellis, 2004; Ortlipp, 2008). I will do so by showing parts of the diary I kept during my thesis-project. These reflect experiences during the research process and memories of experiences before I started with this research. This is also intended as a validity procedure, to show the reader my social, cultural and historical positionings and personal beliefs and values that shaped my interpretation (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127).

> *"If you participate in the field of fat studies, you must be willing to examine not just the broader social forces related to weight but also your own involvement with these structures. Every person who lives in a fat-hating culture inevitably absorbs anti-fat beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes, and also inevitably comes to occupy a position in relation to power arrangements that are based on weight"*
> - Fat studies reader, Wann, 2009, p. xi

The following excerpts from my diary illustrate how I am interpellated into these power dynamics and show how I have learned about these through reflecting on my experiences.

Skinny jeans

I am 14 years old and shopping with a friend from school. We go to the jeans store to buy a new pair of jeans, which is for the first time on our own. Luckily, I find a jeans that fits me and I really like. It is a skinny, low waist model. Exactly in the trend of the moment. After buying the jeans, my friend and I go satisfied back to her house and show her mother our new clothes. Her mother compliments me with the way the jeans looks on me. Then she sees the jeans is a size 4, and adds how good I am to have that size, and expresses how jealous she is. It makes me feel very proud of my body.

Now I reflect on this episode from another position. This experience taught me that my body was something I, as a 14 year old, was responsible for, and made me 'good' and admirable. I realize now how I as a 14-year-old was influenced to buy tight-fitting and revealing clothes that emphasized my slender body size – making me believe that to dress what is seen as 'sexy' is normal and even necessary for a girl. But not only that, the admiring gaze of others on my body size is something that feels strange for me now. That I was seen as 'good'- was only based on my body size, not on my way of living. Also, it increased my fear of becoming fat, and being seen as bad.

Fat jokes

Representation appeared to be an important issue for my participants. It made me think about how I am influenced by TV and social media. Two popular TV-series that I have watched in the past are 'Friends' and 'New Girl'. In both these series, lead characters play flashbacks- scenes in which they are fat. These scenes are used to make an abundance of fat jokes.

Before this research project, I would not have noticed anything stigmatizing about this. Now, it makes me realize that these shows contribute to dominant truths that a slender person can star as a lead character, however, fat persons are minimized as a side role and stereotype. In both series, the slender lead characters are positioned as the better, happier and more successful variant as opposed to who they were when they were fat. These TV series not only contribute to positioning fat people as laughable objects, but they also reproduce the idea that it is simply possible (and necessary) to change your body size to become 'normal'.

Visibility of fat bodies on sports field

Ping! I receive a Whatsapp message from one of my teammates of korfball. It is a picture with the following text: "This is really not O.K.". When I open the picture, I see it is a close-up of a girl in her sports outfit on the field. Due to her movements on the field, her skirt went up so her 'fat' legs visibly show.

By engaging in this research I have become more acutely aware of the high visibility of fat people on the sports field. I notice how this visibility urges some people to say something about it. For some reason, a fat person on a sports field stands out, as someone who does not belong, and that urges most people to comment on it. This can vary from jokes and derogatory comments such as 'look at that fat person', to well-intended but marginalizing comments such as 'at least she is trying to do something about it', and comments that question their position in the field: 'she must have a really good shot otherwise she would not be there'.

Personal risks & stereotypical expectations
I am trying to make up my mind about what I want to study as research topic for my master thesis. I have two options, either the organizational subject which is in line with my public administration and organizational background, or choose the subject of 'fat bodies' which is completely something new for me. I explain my options to some co-students to hear their opinion. One of them strongly advises me not to choose the topic of 'fat bodies' as she believes it would not be a real 'challenging' subject. Another related experience happened in an informal reception of the research master. One of my teachers asks me what I was working on. I choose my words carefully to convince him of my highly interesting and urgent research topic. However, he is not quite convinced by my critical perspective on dominant truths about fat bodies. On the contrary, he reproduces the dominant truth that for people who are fat the main thing is that they should be more physically active and eat healthier. Also, he questions how I could undermine that 'truth' in my research.

As Lee (1993, p. 9) argued, when conducting sensitive research, "researchers may find their work being trivialized or treated in a jokingly manner". These experiences showed me how - in the environment of my study 'public administration and organizational research' - some consider questions relating to the body as less 'serious' and less worthy of attention (Levay, 2013). It even made them question my position as researcher. After several experiences like these, I notice a reluctance boiling up in me to explain my thesis subject to others. Often I have interesting discussions, yet sometimes it can be wearisome to constantly try to oppose or transform dominant truths of others. Such experiences arise, according to Lee (1993), because of the stereotypical expectations social audiences have of those who research deviant groups.

You look good, have you lost weight?
I hear my aunt say with much satisfaction she lost some weight. I am standing behind her, surrounded by other family members, trying to fetch some birthday-cake. The thought that I should tell her she looks good immediately crosses my mind. I hesitate; I never have said something like that before. Not because I do not think she looks good, but because it is not really something I normally tell to any of my family members. Still, I feel like it is something she might want to hear and maybe it would be the 'proper' thing to say at the moment. Despite the feeling that this would be the socially desirable response, I decide not to mention anything to her about the way she looked, as I have never done so before.

I am now caught up in a reflection that questions this experience. Why should I tell her she looks good? Would I have said that if I had not known she lost weight? I feel it is, apparently, socially desirable to compliment people when they are trying to lose weight. However, now it feels more like technique of dominance to normalize others to become slender.

Coming out as fat activist
I come across the Facebook page 'What's wrong with fat' that challenges fat attitudes. I see some interesting posts that might help me in my research process. I move toward the 'like button' with my mouse, but then I suddenly hesitate, I realize that by clicking 'like', all my Facebook friends will see I have liked this page. What will that say about me? That I approve 'fatness'? Will that be accepted?

Although I am interested in the posts of fat activists and fully agree with most of them, to come out as fat activist on social media is something I am not completely at ease with yet. I constrain myself not to be open about this on social media for fear I might be misunderstood

by others. But perhaps being misunderstood is not my only fear. Maybe I am also afraid to lose my own privilege.

What to wear to an interview

What to wear, what to wear… I am standing in front of my closet, picking out an outfit for the day. I have to pick out something that is proper for the interview. It is my first official interview, and I feel a bit nervous. What will she think of me when she sees me? Will my own body size be an issue? I want to create a safe environment in the interview, so I try to pick out clothes that do not emphasize my slenderness.

For my first interviews, I notice I am pondering about what to wear for an interview, more than I usually do before an appointment. I have become acutely aware of my own privileged position in relation to those categorized as fat. Therefore, I want to try to 'conceal' this privileged position to not let it influence the interview. However, this also indicates that, apparently, I normally discipline myself to wear clothes that emphasize my slenderness and afford me a privileged position.

How my internalized truths became subverted

I am walking back to the train station and feel all kinds of emotions running through my body, I just had an intense and valuable interview with Hanna. She told me about how she has been fat since she was a young child, how she was beaten up as a kid for her body size and bullied ever since. How she tried the most extreme diets to change her body size but each attempt did not have the desired result. How she behaved as a 'wallflower' almost her entire life to become less visible and avoid stigmatizing situations. How she has been positioned as 'bad', marginalized and constrained as a human being. I am angry with her bullies, I am angry with the current society that upheld truths that tell her she is less worthy because of her body size, but foremost, I am angry with myself for having internalized some of these same truths.

Through the conversations I had with my participants and by reflecting on these, I have noticed how my own internalized truths have become subverted. The narratives of my participants have taught me that bodies are not inherently good or bad, and their narratives made me eager to want to change something about the dominant notions that have such a large impact on them and others.

8. Participants*

I will shortly describe each of my participants in terms of gender, age, and profession and the way(s) they have helped in this research project. All the participants are of white middle class Dutch descent.

Marian

Marian is a 43-year old woman, she works at a primary school as the head principal. I interviewed her twice at her home. In between the two interviews she wrote in a diary about how her body size mattered in her experiences at work and in her daily life.

Mandy

Mandy is a 26-year old woman, she just completed her master and found a job as associate in a philantropical organization. I interviewed her twice, once in a café combined with a lunch, and once at her home. We remain in contact by using WhatsApp as her form of diary through which she tells me about experiences concerning her body size. Also, she provided feedback on the first draft of this thesis.

Isa
Isa is a woman of approximately 30 years old who – besides her job at a bank - is a plus-size blogger. I interviewed her once. She also helped me to acquire new participants by posting a call to participate in this research project on her website and Facebook as plus-size blogger.

Nancy
Nancy is around 50 years old and works as an actress, public speaker and comedian. We had an extensive conversation at her home. She is also a member of the Facebook group of fuller-sized women.

Hanna
Hanna is a woman of around 60 years old. She works as a student counselor. With her I had one extensive interview and I was able to use the slides of a lecture she has given at a health seminar about living as obese.

Cindy
Cindy is woman in her forties; she works as caregiver and used to perform as a pianist. We came together twice in a local coffee bar where we had two extensive interviews. In between she wrote in a diary for me. We also kept contact via e-mail and she provided feedback on the first draft of this thesis.

Riana
Riana is a 45-year-old woman, she worked as a manager at a children's day care, and at the moment she works as a pedagogical staff member. I interviewed her twice, the first time at my university department and the second time at her home. In between the two appointments she kept a diary for me, and she added another one-week diary she had written a year before that. She is also a member of the Facebook group.

Kyra
Kyra is around 30 years old and works as an accountant and in customer service. I interviewed her twice at a coffee bar. In between the two interviews she kept a diary. Also, she send me scientific articles and other types of information that had helped her. She is a member of the Facebook group.

Peter
Peter is a man around 65 years old who has just retired; he used to work as a manager at multiple IT related places. Since a few years he has a gastric bypass. I interviewed him twice at two different cafés. In between he wrote in a diary. He also provided feedback on the first draft of this thesis.

Ben
Ben is around 28 years old, he works as a junior accountant and is also finishing his studies. I interviewed him once as he no longer – since one year - self-identifies as fat. We talked about his former experiences and compared them with his current experiences related to his body size.

*All the names are fictitious.

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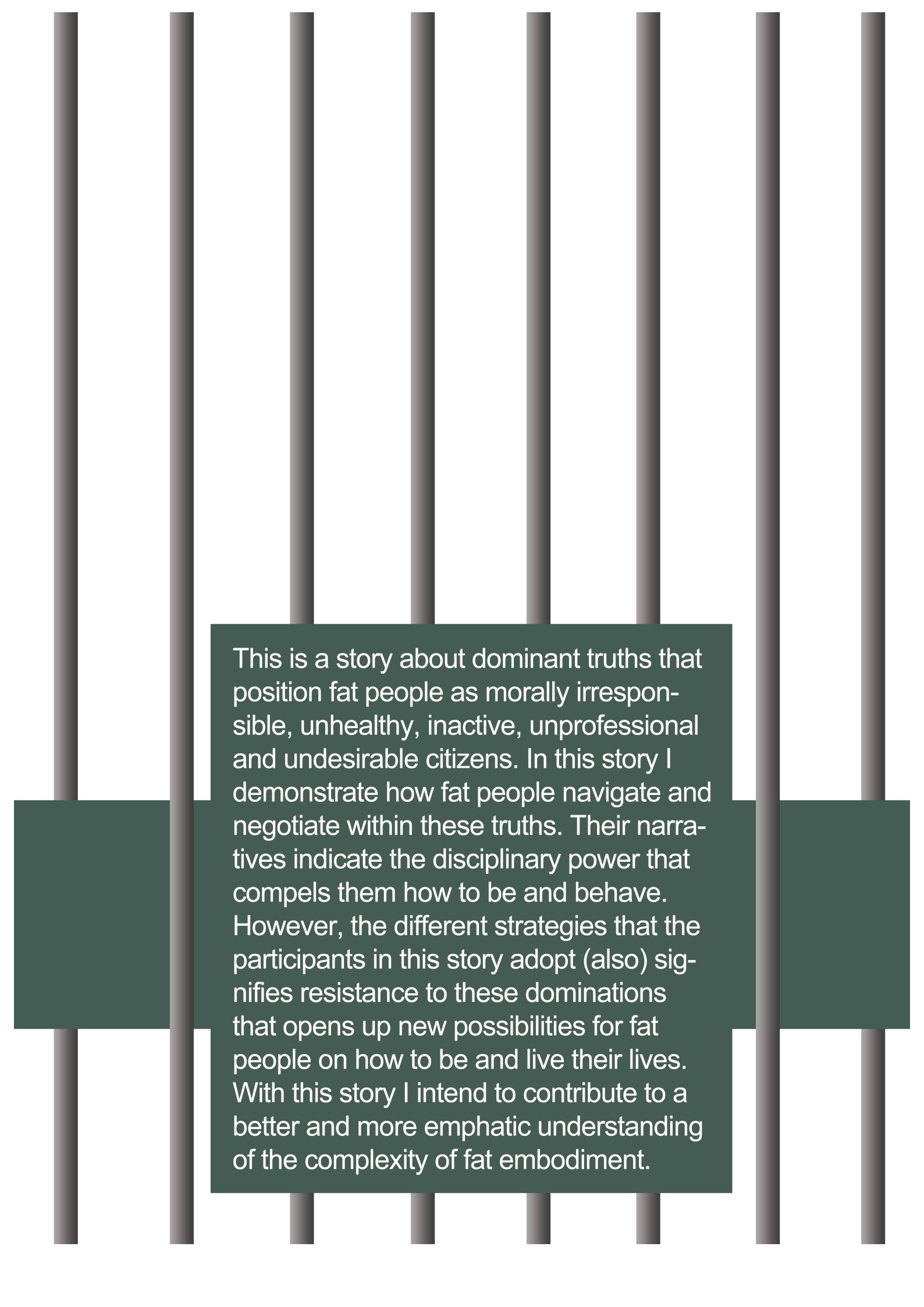
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This is a story about dominant truths that position fat people as morally irresponsible, unhealthy, inactive, unprofessional and undesirable citizens. In this story I demonstrate how fat people navigate and negotiate within these truths. Their narratives indicate the disciplinary power that compels them how to be and behave. However, the different strategies that the participants in this story adopt (also) signifies resistance to these dominations that opens up new possibilities for fat people on how to be and live their lives. With this story I intend to contribute to a better and more emphatic understanding of the complexity of fat embodiment.