Shame-Soaked Selves:
Self-Policing the Hyper(in)visible Fat Female Body

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Abstract

Broadly situated in feminist theory and fat studies, this thesis puts forth a cultural analysis of autobiographical writings on fat female embodiment by making use of mixed theoretical frameworks around the regime of visibility, body- and self-policing, and a phenomenological understanding of fat embodiment, to examine the ways in which hierarchically structured ideas about femininity, desirability and size are constructed and policed on the fat female body. In order to understand in what way shame functions in fat women's embodiment and their internalization of normative ideas about gender, size, and desirability, I have analyzed fat activist Virgie Tovar's book *You Have the Right to Remain Fat: A Manifesto* (2018) as well as selected chapters from the nonfiction anthology *Scoot Over, Skinny: The Fat Nonfiction Anthology* (2005), edited by Donna Jarrell and Ira Sukrungruang. The key themes that emerge from my analysis of these works include self- and body policing, hyper(in)visibility, and the material-semiotic relation between the sign fat and the corporeality of fatness. Fat women's bodies exist in a dual state of hypervisibility and hyperinvisibility. In response to this hyper(in)visibility, fat women may increasingly police themselves and experience a split between their bodies and their selves. Through my analysis of the interconnectedness of self- and body policing, hyper(in)visibility, the affect of shame, and the corporeal experience of fat female embodiment, identifying the body as the site on which normative constructions of femininity are reproduced and policed, I locate shame as a key component in the policing of fat bodies. By laying bare the structural dimensions of the disciplinary norms around fat female embodiment, I show that the shame that is so central to their (self-)policing is neither individual nor random. As such, in this thesis I make salient how the negative body knowingness around fatness comes to dominate the corporeality of fat women's embodiment.

Key words: fat embodiment, self-policing, self-surveillance, hypervisibility, hyperinvisibility, body knowingness

Contents

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Dedications

I write this thesis for the fat woman who is made to believe her body is an obstacle to a life worth living, to love, to being seen. I write this thesis for the fat woman who, despite all that the world around her has taught her what her body can and cannot be, commits to loving her body. I write this thesis for the fat woman who struggles to uphold that commitment. I write this thesis for the fat woman who does not dare believe she can make that commitment.

Chapter 1: Embodying Shame

"I realize now that all those times I had said, 'I want to be thin,' I actually meant: I want to be loved. I want to be happy. I want to be seen. I want to be free" (Tovar 2018, 111).

"The fat woman's corporeal experience is constituted largely by the expectation of a constant disavowal of her flesh, an enforced disconnection from her body" (Murray 2004, 237).

"We women cannot begin the re-vision of our own bodies until we learn to read the cultural messages we inscribe upon them daily" (Bartky 1990, 82).

What has led me to this research is my own fat body. Strike that – it is the way I carry my own fat body that has brought me here. Strike that, too – it is the way I was taught to carry my own fat body that I cannot stop thinking about, ever since becoming aware of something I know I have done countless of times. I remember being at home one day, by myself, in my kitchen. I reached up to open a cupboard, and with that movement, my shirt rode up as I raised my arm, revealing my stomach which bulges over my jeans from whichever angle I look at it. I felt an immediate compulsion to pull my shirt down again and hide my stomach. I then noticed what I was doing, took stock of my inability to just let my stomach be revealed, even for a moment, and I wondered: why am I doing this? Who am I doing it for? Why is the idea that my naked stomach is not allowed to exist so deeply ingrained in me that it dictates the very movements I make even in the privacy of my own home? I have been thinking about this instance a lot since it happened. It is an occurrence I am sure has gone past my notice on many occasions. It is an impulse, to tug down my shirt, or yank up my jeans, or find some other way to cover my body, my belly specifically. It makes me wonder: why does the act of baring my stomach feel like a taboo? Why does the weight of that feeling propel me into action, every single time? How did I come to internalize cultural messages about fatness and gender to such an extent that it invades the way I dare to move in the privacy of my own home? How do cultural ideas come to dictate how all of us move our bodies and how we feel about ourselves, on a daily basis? The more I think about these questions, the more I consider that shame may be a pivotal factor in translating, as it were, normative ideas about bodies into how we conduct ourselves. As such, I want to research shame and how it emerges as a self-disciplining force in the lives of fat women. The impact of shame on

the lived experiences of the way fat women relate to their bodies is central to my inquiry. I will thus focus on the internalization of normative ideas about gender, size, and desirability. I do so to further examine the ways in which hierarchically structured ideas about social axes are enforced, how we enforce them ourselves, and how they dictate which movements we can and cannot make. Central to my research is the question: in what ways does shame function in fat women's embodiment and their internalization of normative ideas about gender, size, and desirability? From this flows a set of questions that will structure my thesis:

- How do self-surveillance and self-policing emerge in the ways in which fat women relate to their bodies?
- How does hyper(in)visibility affect how fat women relate to their bodies?
- How do the language surrounding fatness and the corporeality of fatness contribute to how fat women navigate through the world?

I will answer these questions by analyzing selected autobiographical writings by fat women, which I will introduce momentarily. Broadly located in fat studies and feminist theory, I present mixed theoretical frameworks to address these autobiographical works, specifically around the corporeal and the visible (the regime of visibility), body- and self-policing, and a phenomenological understanding of fat embodiment. In this thesis, I give an analysis of the interconnectedness of body policing, the affect of shame, and the experience of fat embodiment. As such, I present an analytical thesis in which I extrapolate and identify these themes which are central to embodied experiences of fatness, demonstrating how normative ideas of female embodiment are reproduced. I propose that shame is a key aspect of (self-)policing fatness, as it solidifies the policing of fat bodies.

Situating this body (of work)

A few months ago, my dearest friend and I met up and our conversation came to center on our bodies. As I blurted out – calculatedly expressed – my body cannot ever just be a body. It always already belongs to the world, already means something to it, something bad. So my body is not just a body, it is simultaneously more and less than that. A lot of people have bodies that are not ever allowed to be just that – bodies. Neutrally, that is. Which bodies are afforded 'neutrality' – or rather, the illusion thereof, as this neutrality is a normative construction – is not

random. At the same time, the same people whose bodies are not allowed to exist as just bodies, their bodies already known in specific ways, are often reduced to their bodies, solely. It is a peculiar situation we find ourselves in, in this too-much-too-little body. It took me a while to find the right words for it, but two key concepts to my understanding of fat female embodiment are hyper(in)visibility and body knowingness. Hyper(in)visibility explains this dual phenomenon of being reduced to a body, while one is invisible beyond that body. Body knowingness helps explain how we 'read' bodies based on visual difference. Then there are the rules – rules for how we must move our bodies, how we must inhabit our bodies, how we must speak about our bodies, because the body is not only a site where norms are constructed, but also the site on which they are policed. These rules are all carefully taught and laid out before us by society. Or, rather, it is hidden in plain sight. It is woven through all sorts of things – through media, through institutions such as the medical industry. Try and go against these hidden but visible rules and we will be made known how we have transgressed the rule. The exact rules differ a lot depending on the fabric of our being – our race, our gender, our class, our size, to name a few axes of signification – and on our geopolitical location.

I write this thesis from my own fat body. I must be clear: while I am a fat woman, I am on the smaller end of the fat spectrum. My fat is a more acceptable, more palatable kind of fat. It is the kind of fat that can be up for debate depending on context, due to my size, the way my body curves, and my whiteness, whereas, as I will make clear in this thesis, not every fat person is granted such privilege. I am working with the discourses around fat female embodiment emerging from a Western context. The autobiographical works I have analyzed are all American, and the scholarship I engage with, too, is specifically located in the West. A very important contributor to my understanding of the themes that emerge from my analysis is Australia-based cultural studies and critical health studies scholar Samantha Murray. Fat studies scholarship is key to my research but Murray's work is particularly relevant because she addresses the connection between discourses surrounding the fat female body and fat female embodiment (2004; 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; 2007; 2008a; 2008b). In particular, Murray has studied what the fat female body comes to signify within Western society and given a phenomenological understanding of fat female embodiment, oftentimes bringing her own lived experiences into her work. Next to Murray's work on fat female embodiment, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body* (2015) by Irish scholar Luna Dolezal, whose main area

of expertise is the philosophy of embodiment, has been vital to my discussions of self-surveillance in particular. Dolezal's work lead me to American philosopher Sandra Lee Bartky's *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (1990), which has provided me with invaluable insight into how the internalization of an outside gaze on one's body can be understood.

The relevance and urgency of my research lies in that the continual, persistent discriminatory fatphobia faced by fat women, which can shape their sense of self-worth during their formative years and affects their relationship to their bodies, has often gone under-researched and/or underestimated or even dismissed. It is important to research fat embodiment and fatphobia because the moral judgement connected to fatness, the lack of affirming discussions around size, both in society at large *and* within the field and academic spaces of gender studies. As sociologist Jeannine A. Gailey writes, "many mainstream feminist scholars have not included fat women's bodies in their attempts to theorize the female body (…) By excluding or failing to focus on fat women's bodies, feminist scholars perpetuate the hyper(in)visibility of fat women's bodies and lives" (2014, 15). It is also important to research fat embodiment because of the lack of community support amongst fat people (some wonderful exceptions aside), and the abundance of images that circulate in society which perpetuate thinness as the ideal are all so pervasive in how they influence everyday lives and people's relationship to their bodies. It almost seems irresponsible to me not to research the many ways in which the dominant cultural ideal of thinness which marks almost all cultural expressions of art, media texts, and other media (e.g. social media) that we surround ourselves with on a daily basis has left its mark on those marked fat *and* thin. The societal pedestalization of thin bodies is something that almost all of us have internalized and therefore need to deconstruct, unlearn, and grapple with. Within patriarchy, women are told their worth lies in their aesthetic appeal to men. Fat women are always inherently cast outside of the current dominant ideals of beauty in the West, but as women, they must abide to this ideal, or at the very least want to. I want to look at how these contradictions show up in fat women's lived experiences and exploring these contradictions will also shed light upon how we, as feminist scholars, can conceptualize the body.

On a more personal note, I also want to analyze stories of (body) shame and the social factors and structures that have played into the fabric of these experiences because I want to

make others feel less alone. I feel less alone reading other fat studies scholars' accounts of their embodiment and lived experiences. I conduct this research to lay bare the structural, systemic dimensions to body shame, in turn dispelling the notion that body shame is an individual problem becomes of one's own (bodily) shortcomings. Instead, I demonstrate that the systems that are in place induce body shame by design, in order to control, in this case, women's lives.

Methodological considerations

I have analyzed Virgie Tovar's 2018 book *You Have the Right to Remain Fat: A Manifesto*. Tovar is a fat activist, author, and expert on sizeism and body image. Tovar's book is an autobiographical manifesto, in which she provides the reader with Fat Politics 101 by writing of her own (bodily) experiences as a fat, heterosexual, Mexican-American cisgender woman – weaving the two together in a way that strengthens both. While the table of contents reads as informative, with chapter titles such as "What Are Fatphobia and Diet Culture?", "Dieting: Family, Assimilation, and Bootstrapping", and "Internalized Inferiority and Sexism", the actual content starts from Tovar's personal experiences, which is the writing I analyze. Mine is the first research to engage in-depth with *You Have the Right to Remain Fat* as a whole.

Next to the Tovar's work, I have made use of selected chapters of the nonfiction anthology *Scoot Over, Skinny: The Fat Nonfiction Anthology,* edited by Donna Jarrell and Ira Sukrungruang (2005). *Scoot Over, Skinny* is a collection of autobiographical writings about fatness – one of the first of its kind. Despite this, there has been little scholarly engagement with this anthology. The topics of the chapters differ, but they all centralize fat is one way or another. The anthology emerges specifically from an American context and the overwhelming majority of authors are white. Most contributors to the anthology are authors or essayists. I have selected the chapters written by fat women, as the focus of my research is fat women's embodiment, but the anthology includes a number of chapters written by men. I now will briefly introduce the authors whose works I have read and the topics covered in their chapter.

"Letting Myself Go" by American writer and essayist Sallie Tisdale mainly includes her discussions of how she feels about her body, what contributes to those feelings, such as a number on a scale, and her experiences with dieting. Her chapter first appeared in a slightly different version in *Harper's Magazine* (March 1993). American memoirist Natalie Kusz's chapter "On Being Invisible" specifically discusses feelings of hyperinvisibility and hypervisibility and the

tension between the two. Her chapter first appeared in *Allure Magazine* (July 1999). Cheryl Peck's "Queen of the Gym" is a shorter chapter about Peck's experiences of going to the gym, particularly about being amongst thin gymgoers in the women's locker room, as a fat woman. The chapter first appeared in her autobiographical work *Fat Girls and Lawn Chairs* (2002) about her experiences as a fat, gay woman in America. In "Now You See Me, Now You Don't" Sondra Solovay discusses not only the topic of hyper(in)visibility, but also gives informative insights into the myths circulating about fatness. She also shares anecdotes of her own life about encountering harmful stereotypes about fat people. Solovay is an attorney and activist and focuses both in her work as an attorney and in her activism on size discrimination and diversity. Her chapter is an edited version of an essay which first appeared in *Journeys to Self-acceptance: Fat Women Speak* (1994). "Out of Habit, I Start Apologizing" is Pam Houston's chapter, in which she gives an honest account of how she feels about her body, citing different experiences she has had in her own life that impacted how she carries herself. The chapter first appeared in her autobiographical collection of essays *A Little More About Me* (1999). The final chapter of the anthology is Jarrell's, titled "Fat Lady Nuding". Jarrell shares her experience of attending a nudist New Year's Eve party, as well as how she relates to her body. I will also consider the introduction "Fat as a Matter of Fact" written by Jarrell and Sukrungruang, the editors of the anthology.

I have conducted a cultural analysis of the aforementioned selection of autobiographical writings on fatness. Through a close reading of these works and by making used of mixed theoretical frameworks grounded in feminist theory and fat studies, in particular theories of body policing, the regime of visibility, and phenomenological understandings of embodiment, all of which I will present in chapter 2, I uncover the role of shame in fat women's embodiment. In the view of literary and cultural theorist Mieke Bal, "theory can be meaningful only when it is deployed in close interaction with the objects of study to which it pertains" (2002, 44). As such, will bring the theoretical frameworks that I map in the next chapter in conversation with the material I have studied, presenting "a close analysis, informed but not overruled by theory, in which concepts are the primary testing ground" (Bal 2002, 44). The reason I turn to autobiographical writings has been formulated best by French feminist philosopher and literary critic Hélène Cixous. Cixous notes that women have "been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them" (1976 [1975], 885). She argues that "so few women have as

yet won back their body" (Cixous 1976 [1975], 886). It is for that reason that she urges women to write "through" their bodies, asking: "why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it (…) Write yourself. Your body must be heard*"* (Cixous 1976 [1975], 876; 880). It is for that reason that I approach the question of fat women's embodiment through autobiographical writing.

I will now briefly discuss how autobiographical accounts of fat female embodiment have been taken up by other feminist scholars. As noted by historian and literary scholar Tess Cosslett, feminist theorist and sociologist Cecilia Lury and historian Penny Summerfield in *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, theories, methods*, "[a]s awareness has shifted from women's experience as a given, to the complex construction of gendered subjectivities, the field of autobiography has become a central preoccupation and testing-ground for feminism" (Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield 2000, 2). Yet there is little scholarly engagement with fat women's autobiographical writings thus far. The main findings that emerge from the scholarship that exists demonstrate that overwhelmingly, the thin ideal is something fat women grapple with. In "Fat in Contemporary Autobiographical Writing and Publishing" non-fiction writing scholar Donna Lee Brien sets out to make a preliminary taxonomy of autobiographical writings on fat. She looks at a range of works, such as autobiographical cookbooks, memoirs, and graphic works and identifies different ways of classifying them. She writes that the memoirs she has analyzed "all identify 'excess' weight, although the response to this differs" (Brien 2015, under "Memoirs of Being Fat"). She groups the memoirs as either narratives of losing weight, struggles to do so, and/or deciding not to do so, noting that the latter group is the smallest (Brien 2015). As such, all autobiographical accounts of fatness position themselves in relation to the thin norm. "Many of these confessional memoirs are moving narratives of shame and self loathing where the memoirist's sense of self, character, and identity remain somewhat confused and unresolved, whether they lose weight or not, and despite attestations to the contrary" (Brien 2015, under "Memoirs of Being Fat"). Brien's findings already allude to the relevance of the affect of shame when considering fat women's embodiment. Gender studies scholar Kathryn E. Linder argues in "The Fat Memoir as Autopathography: Self-Representations of Embodied Fatness" that the fat memoir "has the potential to be both a brave and a transgressive act (…) The fat memoir is one way in which fat women (…) can rebel against the culturally imposed silencing of their voices" (2011, 220; 228). However, most of the memoirs Linder has analyzed do not challenge the

dominant understandings of fatness. My research contributes to the small-voiced but existing conversation surrounding autobiographical accounts of fat female embodiment. It will demonstrate how fat women's autobiographical writings can be a fruitful starting point for theorization around the internalization and enactment of normative ideas around gender, size, and desirability, and are, as such, an important source of material to consider.

There are some limitations to the methodology I have employed in this research which I will bring forth now. As Canadian artist and feminist theorist Allyson Mitchell writes, "[w]hile other marginalized communities have benefited from the development of shared politics and collective organizing for decades, size has been historically under-recognized and under-theorized as an axis of identity" (2014, 66). As such, autobiographical accounts of fat embodiment are important in creating recognition and fostering connections. Autobiographical writings have been an important political tool for feminists and fat activists, however, Mitchell points out a limitation to the use of such writings in the case of fat activism, which precisely links to the lack of recognition and theorization of fatness as an axis of identity. Particularly, she points to the possibility of specific readings of autobiographical accounts of fat embodiment that are limiting.

> "While links can (and indeed are) made across individual narratives to engender a broader understanding of embodiment, these accounts are deeply vulnerable to readings that isolate fat experience as an individual phenomenon, glazing over the social, economic, and cultural structures that create and sustain fat identity. Indeed, hegemonic readings of fat subjectivity are generally organized around individual discipline – eating and exercise habits, poor self-esteem or self-control, and so on – rather than the shared cultural, structural, and interpersonal dynamics that constitute embodied life" (Mitchell 2014, 66).

It is for this reason very important to lay bare the *structural* dimensions that create fatphobia and shape fatness – which is why I focus on multiple autobiographical accounts of fat female embodiment and bring them into conversation with mixed theoretical frameworks on the regime of visibility, the workings of (self-)policing and a phenomenological understanding of the body.

Another limitation to textual analysis of fat female embodiment is the translation inherent to language. As literature and gender studies scholar Emma Rees notes in *Talking Bodies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Embodiment, Gender and Identity*, "language fails in the face of

embodiment. Writing on the body always necessitates an approximation due to the insufficiency and contingency of the raw linguistic materials" (2017, 5). In the words of American gender theorist and philosopher Judith Butler, the body "depends on language to be known [but] the body also exceeds every possible linguistic effort of capture" (1997, 4). However, I am of the belief that studying autobiographical writings is the most suitable way of approximating an understanding of fat female embodiment. "While acknowledging that language can never quite capture the complexity, surprising idiosyncrasies, and materiality of our lived experiences, it is nevertheless the primary way we have of sharing with others the confusing and uncertain realities of our embodied lives" (Trujillo 2017, 203). As sociologist Melisa Trujillo points out in "The Trouble with Body Image: The Need for a Better Corporeal Vocabulary," while language will never capture lived experiences fully, it is the foremost method to our disposal to share with others the ambiguities of our embodiment. Autobiographical writings in particular are crucial in the formulation of the social position of marginalized people. In the words of Cixious: "[w]oman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies (…) Woman must put herself into text – as into the world and into history – by her own movements" (1976 [1975], 875). I will analyze how fat women have written themselves, how they have put themselves into text, despite how they have been driven away from their bodies. Mitchell concludes by stating that the autobiographical script she analyzes, which I will bring early into my theoretical framework and introduce further,

> "is an example of the social uses of autobiography, the ways in which turning the interiority of shame outwards through performance can work to transform shame, not by eradicating it or slapping a happy face on it, but by making it public – keeping it alive in social spaces where it gets to dance in the collective light rather than festering in an individual's psyche and gut" (2014, 77).

As such my research can be understood as partaking in the dance initiated by the fat women whose autobiographical accounts of embodiment I analyze.

Defining fatness

Researching fat women's embodiment begs a seemingly simple and oftentimes overlooked question: what, exactly, is fatness? As not only fat studies scholarship but also

cultural discourses surrounding fatness in the West and the use of language around fatness show, fatness is not a simplistic category. The definition problem is something that many fat studies scholars seem to grapple with, implicitly and explicitly. Fatness is not an easily defined concept – not politically, not physically. What does being fat entail? Complicating this further is the common use of the phrase '*feeling* fat' – a troubled idea rampant with internalized fatphobia, but one that deserves unpacking. Fat is not static. Fat is ambiguous. I will bring in discussions of this ambiguity in my research, in order to not uncritically use the term fat and assume a universal understanding of it, and to avoid generalizing the experience of fatness – for it is a spectrum, and context matters and can very well be the deciding factor in determining whether one is fat or not, as I already alluded to when discussing my own body.

When does a person become fat? Where is fatness located – is it the body as a whole, is it the stomach? Is it rolls of fat? If fatness is on the other side of the spectrum of thinness, what happens in between those categories? In order to answer even one of these (connected) questions, the historical development of both fatness as a category of identity and of fatphobia as a structural system of exclusion ought to be traced. Not only that – the overlapping discourses of other hierarchically imposed meanings need to be taken into account, which is why I will now briefly discuss sociologist Sabrina Strings' book *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* (2019) and literary scholar Andrea Elizabeth Shaw's work *The Embodiment of Disobedience: Fat Black Women's Unruly Political Bodies* (2006). In *Fearing the Black Body* Strings analyzes the historical developments of fatphobia and the category of fatness and how they are directly linked to white supremacy, American nationalism and Christian morality and control of the body. Hers is "the first historical study of fat phobia and thin fetishism in the West, with an emphasis on the intertwined racial, gender, and moral issues involved in their advancement" (Strings 2019, 6). She traces how fatness came to signify immorality, how it became linked to Blackness, and how "well-to-do Americans [came] to believe that slenderness, especially among women, was both aesthetically preferable and a sign of national identity" (Strings 2019, 4). I bring in the scholarship by Strings and Shaw to situate the discourses surrounding fat women's bodies that are at the heart of my research in a broader context. Like Shaw writes, "[t]he West has required the ideological erasure of both blackness and fatness as a means of gaining aesthetic acceptability" (2006, 2). As both authors point out, the discourses on fatness are interlinked with and connected to the discourses on race. In Strings' words, "the racial

discourse of fatness as 'coarse,' 'immoral,' 'black,' and 'Other' not only denigrated black women, it also served as the driver for the creation of slenderness as the proper form of embodiment for elite white Christian women" (2019, 212). As such, Strings concludes that "the fear of the black body was integral to the creation of the slender aesthetic among fashionable white Americans" (2019, 212). Shaw points out that "fatness and blackness have come to share a remarkably similar and complex relationship with the female body: both characteristics require degrees of erasure in order to render women viable entities by Western aesthetic standards" (2006, 1). My research can be understood as furthering the understanding of the relationship between the female body and fatness, as I will look at the connection between Western aesthetic standards and the erasure, through hyper(in)visibility, of the fat female body. Absent from my theoretical framework is a discussion of the medical discourses on fatness. This is a deliberate choice, as the pathologization of fatness has been studied at length (see, for example, Murray 2007; 2008a; Strings 2019). I will quickly note that medical definitions of fatness are culturally constructed, despite their tendency to cloak themselves in a language of supposed objectivity. I do not centralize such ways of defining fatness, instead focusing in this thesis on what can be found beyond the medical gaze.

I will first present the theoretical frameworks I am working with in chapter 2, starting with a discussion of hailing, body knowingness, the regime of visibility, hyper(in)visibility and self-surveillance, and then examine how and why these phenomena exist by looking at constructions of feminine beauty and bodily norms. At the end of the chapter I will look at the strategies fat women employ to resignify fatness and the challenges to those strategies, showing how self-surveillance and body knowingness emerge and interact in fat women's embodiment.

I will then give my threefold analysis, starting with how the (self-)policing of fatness emerges in the selected autobiographical works in chapter 3, moving onto my analysis of experiences of hyper(in)visibility the authors share in chapter 4, and finally, looking at the embodied experience of fatness and the use of language in chapter 5, thus focusing on the material-semiotic relation of experience. As such, I first show how fatness is produced through norms, through policing, and through the regime of visibility, by teasing out the relation between negative body knowingness and (self-)policing in chapter 3 and by looking at the tension between hypervisibility and hyperinvisibility in chapter 4. I then demonstrate how the autobiographical works I have analyzed break the fixity of the material-semiotic relations that frame fatness as a

negative meaning and experience in chapter 5 by looking at the embodied experience of fatness and the use of language. While fatness is known in specific ways, as I will set out in chapter 2, resistant strategies of reclaiming fatness as a mode of being in the world are also put forth in the autobiographical literature, as I will explicate on in chapter 5. My analysis, as such, is not only focused on fatness through the eyes of the Other but also on the embodiment of the authors whose work I analyze.

Chapter 2: Mapping Theories on Body Policing, Body Shaming, and the Embodied Experiences of Fatness

In this thesis I make use of a mixed theoretical framework, grounded in feminist theory and fat studies. I will look at the connection between hailing as a social phenomenon and self-surveillance and body knowingness. This is also discussed in relation to the place of visibility/invisibility in policing the fat body. Then I will look at why these phenomena take place by examining how hegemonic ideas about feminine beauty and disciplinary norms of female embodiment are constructed, before looking at how a split between mind and body characterizes fat women's corporeal experiences. The fat body, the fat female body specifically, "is a site where numerous discourses intersect, including those concerning normative feminine beauty and sexuality, health and pathology, morality, anxieties about excess, and the centrality of the individual in the project of self-governance" (Murray 2008a, 213). This complicated intersection of discourses that become hurled onto the fat female body is not easy to untangle, but in this chapter I will demonstrate the importance of doing so.

Before I start, I want to briefly discuss the use of language. Next to a definition problem, fatness has a language problem. It may come as no surprise that one has to do with the other. Fatness is hard to define, but what complicates this even further is the emergence of words that still connote fatness, but avoid the actual word – perhaps in order to distance from all the negative connotations of fatness. Think of words such as plus size (stemming from a lack of inclusion), BBW (short for Big Beautiful Woman), medical terms such as obese and overweight (over whose weight?), svelte, curvy, thick/thicc, juicy, plump, Rubenesque – the list of euphemisms goes on. Perhaps it is not surprising that many fat activists heavily argue in favor of reclaiming the word fat, one example of which I will elaborately address at the end of this chapter. First, however, I will discuss how one 'becomes fat' by looking at the process of hailing, making use of Mitchell's work to do so.

Being made fat: hailing

> "*She's young and fat, we don't have to announce it to everybody*" (Huffa et al. 2004 cited in Mitchell 2014, 64).

In "Big Judy: Fatness, Shame, and the Hybrid Autobiography" Mitchell analyzes *Big Judy*, a performance piece written and performed by the Canadian fat activist collective she was a part of called Pretty Porky and Pissed Off (PPPO'd). The performance follows the coming of age of a fat girl called Judy and was created based on the personal experiences of the members of PPPO'd. Mitchell's work provides me with ample insight into how autobiographical writings on fat female embodiment can be analyzed. I want to highlight something very pivotal that *Big Judy* illustrates, something that is important to bring into my discussion of fat female embodiment early on, which is: being hailed fat. Fatness is a subject position one is hailed into. Hailing, in the words of cultural theorist and media scholar John Fiske, building on the work of philosopher Louis Althusser (1971), is a part of communication: "[i]n communicating with people, our first job is to 'hail' them, almost as if hailing a cab. To answer, they have to recognize that it is to them, and not to someone else, that we are talking. This recognition derives from signs, carried in our language, of whom we think they are" (2004 [1987], 1271). In this process, we become that which we are hailed as. In summary, "[h]ailing is the process by which language identifies and constructs a social position for the addressee" (Fiske 2004 [1987], 1271). Hailing is a power-laden enterprise: not only are we called upon, but this call is already hierarchal. We can be called upon in negative or positive terms, based on the discourse surrounding the subject position we are hailed into. The call that is made is disciplinary: we are asked to perform in accordance with the subject position we are made to take on and the discourse surrounding it. Mitchell shows how this works, clearly demonstrating that story that emerges does not come "from Judy's own observations, but from the interactions that her body precipitates; through the way others see and react to her. It soon becomes clear that this is the way that Judy learns she's fat, too" (2014, 65). It is through others that Judy learns of her own fatness – which is directly linked to hailing, as well as the regime of visibility and body knowingness, all of which I will expand on in this chapter. In the opening quote of her chapter Mitchell cites Judy's experience with her mother and a sales clerk in a dressing room at the age of eight:

> "*'We are going to weigh your food,' she says as she pats my stomach in front of the sales clerk. 'You know you can't have anything that tucks in, or has short sleeves or that has a belt or anything that comes in white or bright or pastel.'*

The sales clerk says, 'But she's young, let her wear bright clothes.'
My mom says, 'She's young and fat, we don't have to announce it to everybody.'
I'm standing there in the Sears change room doorway, looking at my mom look at me"
(Huffa et al. 2004 cited in Mitchell 2014, 64).

Judy learns there are clothes she cannot wear and food she cannot eat, because of her fat body. Her fatness is something to hide, to not draw attention to. She is looking at her mom look at her, learning how she is viewed by others. Relating to this quote, Mitchell writes that most members of PPPO'd "had had a moment like this as a child, one in which an everyday exchange marked us, hailed us into being as fat, and made clear that such a becoming was not a source of pride" (2014, 71). Being hailed as fat – being fat – is not neutral. With being hailed fat comes the knowledge that this is indeed, as Mitchell puts it, not a source of pride, but rather a source of shame. In order to understand how this is made known, I now turn to Murray, whose contributions to the field of fat studies have been essential to this research (2004; 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; 2007; 2008a; 2008b). Fatness is not known in neutral ways. Instead, it is understood in negative terms. As one is hailed as fat, one is shaped by the same 'knowledge' that informs the current understandings of fatness in the West – which is why I now focus on the way fatness is 'known'.

Who knows your fat? The fat female body, body knowingness and the regime of visibility

> "Every time society reads my fat body, it lets me know that I am defective. Society 'knows' my body, as a site of undisciplined flesh and unmanaged desires" (Murray 2005a, 265).

The fat female body cannot be known neutrally. There is a specific reading of fat bodies that shape the fat subject, one that stems from a complicated legacy of fatphobia, white supremacy, as well as a preoccupation with a mastery of the body and its lusts rooted in Christian dogmas, and control of women's bodies, as I highlighted earlier when discussing the findings of Strings and Shaw. Fat women's bodies are read in specific ways and can therefore seemingly only exist certain ways, as Murray's words I opened this section with demonstrate. She writes elsewhere that "most of the discursive constructions of the 'fat' female body in Western society are negative, and assume a failure of will and bodily ethics. The statements that our society makes every day about fatness reinforce a 'knowingness' of who the fat female subject is"

(Murray 2008a, 213). Who is the fat female subject? The assumptions that are made about fatness and by extension, the fat woman, "are that the fat person is slothful, lazy, weak-willed, unreliable, unclean, unhealthy, deviant, and defiant. These assumptions are so ingrained in the understanding society believes it has of the fat body that these characteristics have come to signify the fat woman" (Murray 2005a, 266). Western society hails the fat body in negative terms. The assumptions in turn, become internalized as knowledge, a certain kind of knowingness that is supposedly 'found' on the flesh of the fat female body. Body knowingness is a concept that is central to much of Murray's work, one that she borrows from queer theorist and gender studies scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993) and turns to often.

> "In dominant Western narratives, a fat body is marked as a site of moral decay and failure. Fat is quantified, measured, weighed, humiliated and marginalized. In Eve Sedgwick's terms, we read our collective negative 'knowingness' about fatness onto fat bodies, and believe we can glean a personal history of fat bodies; their gluttony, laziness and defiance" (Murray 2005b, 111).

A direct link is made to exist between non-normative bodies – in this case, fat bodies – and specific value-laden ideas. Murray expands: "Sedgwick suggests that our culture relies on discursive constructs as systems of knowledge that are deployed constantly as 'truths,' ideas that have become naturalized" (2005a, 266). It is only through this set of knowledge that we view and interact with the world around us. To be clear: a body's physical features themselves are neutral, but they are "marked by the social system" and then reinterpreted "through the network of relationships in which they are perceived," while believed to be direct perception as opposed to a mythic construction, as noted by feminist philosopher Monique Wittig (1997 [1980], 311). As Murray puts it, "[w]e are only able to understand our interaction with others, and with the world, through this 'lore' of knowledge that enables us to locate ourselves within a social framework and to hierarchize ourselves accordingly" (2005a, 266). We are situated within this framework; the naturalized ideas stemming from our culture make known to us which place we occupy within the hierarchy. It is through this that "we are aware of a negative discourse around fatness circulating in Western societies. The response we have to fat women, especially, is irrevocably dictated by the way this discourse has asked us to read the fat body as a site of moral and physical

decay" (Murray 2005a, 266). We are asked to read the fat female subject in a specific way – a reading thrust upon the subject when one is hailed as fat.

Related to body knowingness is the concept of tacit body knowledges. Murray writes that they "are unspoken, habitual, and are therefore difficult to analyze, and yet a discussion of this 'knowingness' about certain kinds of bodies is imperative" (2005a, 273). After all, "visible difference is still the route to classification and therefore knowledge" (Alcoff 1999, 15). Feminist philosopher and critical race theorist Linda Martín Alcoff writes in "Towards a phenomenology of racial embodiment" that "[v]isible difference, which is materially present even if its meanings are not, can be used to signify or provide purported access to a subjectivity through observable, 'natural' attributes, to provide a window on the interiority of the self" (1999, 23-24). Visible difference leads us to believe we are catching a glance of a person's interiority. According to Murray, "Alcoff suggests the ways we attribute meanings to bodily differences are ingrained in the way we read bodies. Via the regime of visibility, we believe we have access to the subjectivity of others, that we 'know' the other based on the bodily markers that have discursively come to signify certain 'truths'" (2005a, 274). Via the visual realm we assume a knowingness about other people on the basis of their bodies. In order to further examine my understanding of the workings of the regime of visibility and body knowingness in relation to fat women's embodiment, I now turn to the concept of hyper(in)visibility.

Hypervisibility, hyperinvisibility

"Privileged bodies are invisible (…) visible when the situation suits them" (Gailey 2014, 11).

As my discussion of body knowingness and the regime of visibility has demonstrated, through visibility fatness is known in particular ways. The body is the site on which a certain 'knowingness' is read. As such, the appearance of a body and the management thereof matter tremendously. As pointed out by Dolezal, appearances "are intimately linked to how one values and sees oneself, and furthermore to one's social worth and position within a social group" (2015, 107). This is specifically the case for women, because "how they look and present themselves affects how they are treated and their chances for success in various aspects of their lives. In fact,

social invisibility is a constant threat for women" (Dolezal 2015, 107). I would add that social invisibility is not only a constant threat for women, but for all people living life in the margins, with bodies that are made to be non-normative (see, for example, Johnson 2018). Therefore heightened attention to how one presents oneself because one's appearance affects how one is treated is not only a specifically 'female preoccupation'. At the same time, "[w]hile often feeling threatened with invisibility in social relations due to a diminished social status, women's bodies enjoy a hyper-visibility in the social realm; they are objectified and on constant display" (Dolezal 2015, 105). I want to expand on this tension between visibility and invisibility, as it is specifically relevant for fat women's subject positions. It is Dolezal who writes elsewhere that

> "[t]he normal body is the invisible body; it is a healthy body, untroubled by illness, discomfort, or disability, which is furthermore socialized and normalized to behave within the standards dictated by its sociocultural context and to display a neutral physical aspect through a meticulous self-regulation with regard to appearance and comportment within intersubjective encounters" (2010, 362-363).

As such, invisibility is also a trait of abiding by the social and bodily norms. Note how Dolezal refers to self-regulation as that which is required to maintain the invisibility of the 'normal' body. While I just asserted that invisibility is a threat to women, I want to explain how invisibility at times is, instead, a function of privilege. I turn to Gailey's work *The Hyper(in)visible Fat Woman: Weight and Gender Discourse in Contemporary Society* (2014). Gailey explains: "[p]rivileged bodies are invisible. Their every move is not analyzed. They are frequently given quite a bit of latitude regarding their behaviors" (2014, 11). Indeed, privileged bodies are not scrutinized the way marginalized bodies are. In fact, "privileged bodies are visible when the situation suits them" (Gailey 2014, 11). The *invisibility* of the privileged body is one that speaks of unmarkedness, supposed neutrality, and its *visibility* is in its favor. Those who do not have privilege are made to have a very different relationship to visibility and invisibility. Marginalized people are "crucial symbolic figures" and, as such, "experience, simultaneously, deprivation of recognition and surplus attention" (Gailey 2014, 11). Gailey uses the term hyper(in)visibility, arguing that the prefix hyper is appropriate because while all people are visible and invisible at times, "one's situation becomes 'hyper' when (in)visibility becomes socially oppressive" (2014, 8). In doing so, she specifically aims to examine the invisibility and visibility marginalized people suffer. Fat women's experiences demonstrate how this works. Gailey writes:

> "Contemporary Western societies relegate fat women to a hyper(in)visible space, a phenomenon that occurs explicitly within institutions (e.g., hidden from view in corporate endeavors that show off thin women) and implicitly in our interpersonal and imagined worlds (…) Fat women are hyperinvisible in that their needs, desires, and lives are grossly overlooked, yet at the same time they are hypervisible because their bodies literally take up more physical space than other bodies and they are the target of a disproportionate amount of critical judgment" (2014, 7-8).

Fat women in particular are made to suffer this dual status of increased visibility and increased invisibility. In "Living fat in a thin-centric world: Effects of spatial discrimination on fat bodies and selves" fat studies and sociology scholar Lesleigh Owen specifically addresses how spatial discrimination and fatphobic societal attitudes contribute to feelings of invisibility for fat people. She notes how much literature on fatness mentions feelings of invisibility, going as far as calling it "virtually a truism" that fat people feel invisible (Owen 2012, 298). At first, this surprised her, as her own experiences moving through the world as a fat woman left her feeling hypervisible, "even a public spectacle" (Owen 2012, 298). "How could a fat person, trying to navigate their fleshy body through a small world, feel unseen rather than highly conspicuous" (Owen 2012, 298)? Yet after hearing the stories of the people she interviewed, she came to see that the invisibility fat people speak of is more symbolic – and its consequences are harsh. Owen writes that as a consequence of the invisibility fat people face,

> "and the subsequent blaming of it on fat folks ourselves, many fat persons have a tendency to ignore or dismiss our own needs or comfort in social situations. If we feel uncomfortable and if the fault is supposedly our own, then not only should we not complain but we should minimize any discomfort our overlarge, monstrous bodies might possibly on our victims" (2012, 299).

Hyperinvisibility, as such, leads fat people to internalize the belief that their needs do not matter as much as their privileged counterparts. It is important to note that the function of hyper(in)visibility is social control, as Gailey points out: "[h]yper(in)visibility works to oppress women by bringing a tremendous amount of attention to women (and others) who transgress bodily and aesthetic norms—by being fat—while simultaneously erasing or dismissing these women in social situations" (Gailey 2014, 32). Just like hyperinvisibility impacts how fat women relate to themselves and others – by dismissing their comfort and needs – the feeling of

heightened visibility of their bodies has consequences. I will now elaborately discuss what this being on constant display means for women by looking at the internalization of an objectifying male gaze.

"I must be made to see myself as they see me": self-surveillance and the internalized spectator

> "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves" (Berger 1972, 47).

Central to women's embodiment in the internalization of a certain way of looking, one which hinders how women move. Dolezal elaborately discusses how women's identity and therefore subjectivity is one "shaped by shame", pointing not only to how women's bodies are constructed as shameful and taboo, the way women's sexuality is culturally imbued with shame, and how appearance management is a shameful affair, but also argues that shame about the body is "significantly rooted in power discrepancies between gender roles" (2015, 106; 110). Because of women's subordinated position in society they are "highly suspecticable to bodily visibility through the objectifying Look of the Other" (Dolezal 2015, 110). The key word here is *bodily* visibility, for as I explained before, marginalized people are rendered socially invisible. The bodies of those who are marginalized are heavily made visible while the opposite remains true for the dominant, normative body: masculinity is constructed as neutral, whiteness is considered default, blank, unmarked. At the same time, marginalized people do not enjoy the same *social* visibility as people in privileged positions.

Dolezal argues that "a woman's subjectivity is structured by the self-consciousness of being constantly under surveillance and, as a result, visible as a result of objectification" (2015, 110). It is this self-consciousness I will discuss now, as it dictates very much how one experiences their body and how one can and cannot move. Women cannot experience their bodies freely, they are always already made known to them by society. When your body is marked – whether it is by race, gender, size – you are not allowed to forget your body. You will be continually pushed back into it, made aware of it, defined by it. The following example from

Bartky's *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (1990) demonstrates how this works.

> "It is a fine spring day, and with an utter lack of self-consciousness, I am bouncing down the street. Suddenly I hear men's voices. Catcalls and whistles fill the air. These noises are clearly sexual in intent and they are meant for me; they come from across the street. I freeze (…) My face flushes and my motions become stiff and self-conscious. The body which only a moment before I inhabited with such ease now floods my consciousness. I have been made into an object (…) in this being-made-to-be-aware of one's own flesh" (1990, 27).

This self-consciousness, this being-made-to-be-aware of one's body, affects how one moves, which I will elaborate on in the next section. It is important to note that women going through an experience such as Bartky's, cannot return the gaze to men in a similar or significant way. As philosopher Drew Leder notes in his book *The Absent Body*, "while a woman may become self-conscious walking in front of whistling longshoremen, they do not experience similar objectification in the face of her angry look back. As she is largely powerless in the situation, her perspective need not be incorporated; it can safely be laughed away or ignored" (1990, 99). Leder, while acknowledging that gender partially determines how a person experiences their body, does not properly consider the effect or significance of this process for women, as Dolezal points out. Going back to Bartky's experience, more of this can be understood. Bartky remarks that the men catcalling her could have also objectified her in silence, but instead, "I must be made to see myself as they see me" (1990, 27). She is made to see herself through their gaze. Dolezal elaborates, noting that objectification such as that which Bartky was subjected to "encourages women and girls to treat themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated, and avoiding the concomitant shame that can arise from objectification depends on conforming to and *internalizing* the standards implicit in the gaze of the (more socially powerful) Other" (2015, 112). This results in a constant awareness of one's appearance, which in turn greatly impacts how one experiences their body. Dolezal explains:

> "[w]omen, accustomed to the visual paradigm of being 'seen,' often experience their bodies in a permanent state of visibility, where the body's appearance and comportment is self-consciously objectified and regarded as an object for a present or imagined third-

> person spectator. Femininity, as such, becomes a constant and ongoing public performance where the female subject has a continuous self-conscious regard for how the body looks to others within the framework of the restrictive standards regarding appearance and comportment" (2015, 112).

As Dolezal demonstrates, women must always appeal to the ideal, must always consider how they fail or live up to the standards set for women. Bartky dubs this internalized third-person spectator Dolezal writes of a "male coinnesseur", which I will come back to momentarily (1990, 28). Bartky continues to argue that women are under surveillance in ways men are not: "whatever else she may become, she is importantly a body designed to please or to excite" (1990, 80). Self-surveillance is thus directly linked to gender norms under patriarchy. "Knowing that she is to be subjected to the cold appraisal of the male connoisseur and that her life prospects may depend on how she is seen, a woman learns to appraise herself first" (Bartky 1990, 38). It is necessary to understand that appraising oneself is not a trivial matter but can determine a woman's life prospects, as Bartky notes. Dolezal expands on this process of internalization, self-objectification and self-policing: "[w]omen, in the patriarchal order, identify with men and learn to see themselves through their eyes. Having internalized the gaze of the (male) Other, Bartky argues, women begin to regulate themselves according to 'his' standards" (Dolezal 2015, 113). As a result of this constant male appraisal, "to varying degrees, women become used to experiencing their bodies from a distanced perspective, in terms of how they look to others, rather than in terms of non-observable attributes such as how they feel or in terms of their body's capacities or abilities" (Dolezal 2015, 113). This has consequences for one's corporeality, which I turn to now.

Throwing like a fat girl: corporeality and self-policing

> "A woman moves her body, but at the same time watches and monitors herself" (Dolezal 2015, 114).

Not all bodily movements can be made or can be made the same way by all people. There are certain physical movements that are hindered by self-consciousness, by cultural standards along the lines of gender, race, and size. In order to properly discuss fat women's corporeal experiences, I will turn to feminist scholar and political theorist Iris Marion Young's well-known article "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality" (1980). In this article Young comments on phenomenologist Erwin Straus's (1966)

discussions of the differences he observes between young boys' and girls' use of lateral space and movement when throwing a ball. Straus attributes these differences to biological differences between men and women, as to him, the early age precludes that this could be an acquired difference:

> "[t]he difference for him is biologically based, but [Straus] denies that it is specifically anatomical. Girls throw in a way different from boys because girls are 'feminine' (…) [To Straus] the early age at which the difference appears shows that it is not an acquired difference, and thus he is forced back onto a mysterious feminine essence in order to explain it" (Young 1980, 138).

Young strives to bring "intelligibility and significance to certain observable and rather ordinary ways in which women in our society typically comport themselves and move differently from the ways that men do" (1980, 139). In her article Young demonstrates that Straus's interpretation of the differences he observes is incorrect, arguing "that female bodily comportment is not essentially or biologically different to that of male bodies, as Straus suggests, but rather is characterized by self-consciousness and a hindered motor intentionality as a result of preexisting cultural expectations and conditions" (Dolezal 2015, 114). While acknowledging that differences in size, strength, and physical capacity can exist between men and women, Young argues that it is not a biological difference that determines the difference in body comportment between men and women – rather, such a difference emerges "as a result of the way one uses the body due to internalized ideas about one's social place and role" (Dolezal 2015, 114). This is directly linked to what I discussed in the previous section, the male conoisseur, the internalization of the gaze of the male Other. Within the patriarchy, "a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgement" (Bartky 1990, 72). This phenomenon shows up in such mundane, habitual ways. As Bartky writes,

> "[t]he woman who checks her make-up half a dozen times a day to see if her foundation has caked or her mascara run, who worries that the wind or rain may spoil her hairdo, who looks frequently to see if her stockings have bagged at the ankle, or who, feeling fat, monitors everything she eats, has become, just as surely as the inmate of Panopticon, a

> self-policing subject, a self committed to a relentless self-surveillance. This self-surveillance is a form of obedience to patriarchy" (1990, 80).

All of these seemingly small examples are effected by the internalized spectator, functioning, as it is designed, as an overseeing force which persistently commits to policing the woman it 'resides within', as it were. Internalizing the way men objectify women, a woman will consider how she looks with the movement she makes. As Dolezal aptly summarizes,

> "[a] woman moves her body, but at the same time watches and monitors herself, and sees her action as that which is 'looked at,' so in general, female bodily comportment does not achieve open, free and unselfconscious movement. Objectified bodily existence, or bodily visibility, leads to an obtrusive self-consciousness and resulting discontinuity with respect to the body and its actions" (2015, 114).

As such, women can not make all bodily movements freely. Dolezal and Young both clearly demonstrate that self-consciousness, brought forth by the male connoisseur, the internalized spectator, impacts the ways in which women can and cannot move their bodies. This is what Leder also writes about when discussing social dys-appearance. He describes dys-appearance as something that "results when the body is somehow away, apart, asunder, from itself" (Leder 1990, 96). Social dys-appearance, then, is such a split, but "effected by the incorporated gaze of the Other" (Leder 1990, 96). He explains that a discrepancy in power can initiate social dys-appereance, writing that "there is a tendency on the part of the powerless to a heightened self-awareness (…) It is not a matter of a reciprocal exchange of intentions, so much as one body submitting to the intentions of another" (Leder 1990, 98). In the catcalling Bartky writes of that I cited previously, her body is made to submit to the offenders' intentions, increasing her sense of awareness of herself, of her body. Leder gives the example of a student giving an oral presentation in front of a teacher, noting that said student would feel more self-conscious in this situation as opposed to presenting in front of their peers, for "[w]hat the teacher sees is what really counts, and this alien look when incorporated leads to self-consciousness" (1990, 98). In a similar vein, Dolezal writes that it is "the gaze and vantage point of (white, educated, Western) men that is cultural definitive and in which social power is situated" (2015, 111). Simply put, what men see is what really counts, and when women internalize that way of looking, a self-

consciousness emerges. It is this vantage point through which our bodies are made known to us. Leder writes:

> "women are not full cosubjectivities, free to experience from a tacit body. They must maintain a constant awareness of how they appear to men in terms of physical attractiveness and other forms of acceptability. Women are thus expected to pay meticulous attention to their surface appearance (…) This exhibits the principle of social dys-appearance; one incorporates an alien gaze, away, apart, asunder, from one's own, which provokes an explicit thematization of the body" (1990, 99).

It is this incorporation of an alien gaze that leads to self-objectification. It also leads to a thematization of the body, which in this instance can mean that a woman can look at her body and view certain body parts as good and others as bad according to how they appeal to men. As Dolezal writes, following Young (1980), the division of attention that stems from both experiencing your body as an object through the internalized (male) spectator and as a capacity "can alter comportment, disrupting flow and a smooth intentional relation to the world, making movements uncertain, unconfident and limited" (Dolezal 2015, 113). As a consequence, women's "phenomenology of self-presentation becomes dominated with conscious strategies to manage physical appearance (…) [which] is intimately linked to one's propensity to feel body shame" (Dolezal 2015, 113). Dolezal remains critical of Young however, claiming that she fails to "consider how certain activities and body practices are gendered and, furthermore, performed in particular social spaces" (2015, 115). She argues that while women may lack confidence when, for instance, throwing a ball on a football field, when participating in pratcices typically associated with 'feminine behavior' such as dancing, they may move more freely and confidently – instead, men may in such contexts be the ones making self-conscious movements (Dolezal 2015, 115). That is why she writes that "the gender coding of certain practices, along with the intersection of a multitude of other factors such as class, race, experience, circumstance, health, and so on, (…) determine this qualitative aspect of one's motor intentionality" (Dolezal 2015, 115). Indeed, it is important to consider other axes of signification. Fat women will very unlikely participate in a dance class with the same motor intentionality as thin women. Thinking back on the anecdote I shared in the introduction of this thesis, where I felt immediately compelled to tug down my shirt in order to hide my stomach, it would come as no surprise to me if fat women's

movements are hindered by a continual concern about whether or not certain body parts, especially those connoting fatness in particular such as our bellies, are covered, disrupting flow of movement.

As I have argued, fat women experience their bodies differently from thin women, due to the way fatness is constructed in cultural discourse. I have set out to show in this part of my theoretical framework, hyper(in)visibility, the workings of body knowingness and the regime of visibility, hailing, and (self-)policing of fat bodies all dictate how fat women can and cannot navigate through the world. I will now explain *why* these phenomena exist by looking at how hegemonic ideas about feminine beauty are constructed and policed and how fatness constitutes a transgression of feminine bodily norms. Then I will address a key characteristic of many fat women's corporeal experiences, namely a split between mind and body.

Aesthetic appeal, femininity, and fatness

> "[T]he body I am to be, never sufficient unto itself, stands forever in need of plucking or painting, of slimming down or fattening up, of firming or flattening" (Bartky 1990, 29).

Bartky's words demonstrate how the natural female body needs to be altered, its natural state constantly thwarted, in order to be deemed acceptable. It is not only fatness that must be eradicated – many aspects of women's bodies are perceived as flaws one must either improve or hide. Women's pronounceability, women's visibility as subjects is tied to their physical appearance and sexual desirability. Murray aptly summarizes as follows: "[t]he role of woman is then necessarily a sexualized one, and our participation in society is regulated by the attractiveness of our bodies and what they can offer" (2004, 240). So, as women's worth is determined by their aesthetic and sexual appeal, where does that leave fat women? In our current moment in time, fatness is always already cast outside of what is deemed desirable in the West. It seems as though the realm of sexuality is only for thin people. Indeed, Murray, following the work of social critic Susie Orbach (1984), shows that sex is supposedly "a realm only inhabited by the normative thin female body. Fat emerges as a barrier to a fulfilment of traditional female sexual roles that are upheld by a continuing maintenance of the body" (Murray 2004, 240). Fatness, as such, constitutes a failure of femininity – which is directly linked to the sexualization of women's bodies and the preoccupation with controlling the body. "The fat woman appears as

an uncared for, unmanaged, excessive body. Her body is seen as one of gluttonous obsessions and unchecked desires. She is a body out of control, whereas an art of existence is all about a reigning in, of giving shape and form to one's life, one's desires, one's body" (Murray 2004, 241). Our bodies come to symbolize not only a failure of femininity, but also a failure of the will. Murray explains:

> "[w]hile in dominant discourses woman is always already associated with characteristics such as excess and immoderation, the fat woman embodies the worst of them. In the popular imagination, her desires have run wild, and she stands as a symbol of moral and ethical decay. She does not fulfil feminine expectations of beauty and submission: she takes up too much space, she is uncontained and excessive" (2004, 243).

Murray's words demonstrate exactly the importance of studying size and gender in relation to one another, as it is precisely the feminine norm fatness erodes. Women's bodies are already read as immoderate, but fat women in particular are considered unruly and uncontained. Fatness is constructed as a failure of femininity, which is something that is directly linked to the standards of beauty and sexual objectification that cultural messages about femininity are littered with, which I will explicate on now.

Following Orbach (1984), Murray states that, "we are taught from a very young age that our female bodies are coveted as sexual commodities, that we must be aesthetically pleasing in order to fulfil our roles as women" (Murray 2004, 240). This lesson is taught over and over again, and from such an early age, that for many women their body becomes a primary concern. Such a concern with one's appearance, however, is considered trivial and vain in cultural discourse. Many feminist scholars who have written on female embodiment, such as Dolezal, demonstrate that such a stance fails to acknowledge the cause for such preoccupation with aesthetical appeal, and fails to recognize the systematic, structural dimensions to it. A concern for one's looks is not individual. Rather, it is "part of a systematic (and oppressive) social phenomenon" (Dolezal 2015, 107). When concerns for one's appearance are put aside as trivial and vain, and, as Dolezal points out, "seen as marginal to one's social and political identity, tackled recreationally in one's private sphere, women are isolated from each other and, as a result, body shame remains, for the most part, acutely personal, rather than a collective or political concern" (2015, 118). As I argue in this thesis, body shame is not merely a personal matter, it is indeed collective, systemic. There

are many systems in place designed to purposely induce shame in individual people, and in this current moment of neoliberalism and late-stage capitalism, the intensity of this shaming message has increased all the more. In order to understand not only body shame but also the preoccupation with the body, it is important to have an understanding of the body as a cultural medium, which is why I will elaborate on this first.

"The body – what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body – is a medium of culture" (Bordo 1997 [1993], 13). Philosopher Susan Bordo writes, following the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966; 1970), that the body is "a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body" (Bordo 1997 [1993], 13). As I explained in the introduction of this thesis (although lacking the eloquence of Bordo's phrasing), a body is never just a body. It is the site on which normative ideas stemming from the culture one is situated are acted out, reinforced through its movements. It is "a cultural medium, whose changing forms and meanings reflect historical conflict and change and on which the politics of gender are inscribed with special clarity" (Jaggar and Bordo 1992, 5). As such, like Murray writes, women's bodies "must be constantly reigned in to conform to the image that the commodification of the female form has presented" (2004, 240). It is no coincidence that women "spend more time, energy and material resources in trying to achieve a socially pleasing body that conforms to prevailing normative standards" than men (Dolezal 2015, 105). It is precisely this that Bartky's words I opened this section with allude to. "Not only must we continue to produce ourselves as beautiful bodies, but the bodies we have to work with are deficient to begin with," notes Bartky (1990, 29). Because women are taught their bodies are wrong, and that they must always appeal to the existing beauty standards, they are made to continually look upon their body as "a task, an object in need of transformation (…) Every aspect of my bodily being requires either alteration or else heroic measures merely to conserve it" (Bartky 1990, 40). Concern for what is considered beautiful is neither random nor a matter of personal taste or preference: "aesthetic is not something spontaneously produced by us, but is a learned discursive production that allows us to understand and embody the dictates of beauty" (Murray 2004, 241). I will now expand on what this learned discursive production looks like – and what it does not – and explicate on the function of such an aesthetic ideal.

The thin ideal: beauty, obedience and body shame

> "Normative femininity is coming more and more to be centered on woman's body" (Bartky 1990, 80).

I expect it should come as no surprise to any reader that the current ideal of feminine beauty in the West dictates that thinness is the epitome of beauty. The connection between the thin ideal and control of women's bodies has famously been made explicit by feminist author Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (2002 [1991]). In this well-known book Wolf analyzes the beauty myth, which goes as follows: "[t]he quality called 'beauty' objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men" (2002 [1991], 12). This 'beauty' is assumed to be inevitable, timeless, and is imbued with the naturalizing logic of biology, sexual reproduction and evolution – all of which are equally assumed to be inevitable, monolithic, umabiguous concepts like beauty. Wolf shows that contrary to this belief, beauty is in fact "a currency system (…) Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact" (2002 [1991], 12). As such, beauty is neither individual, nor trivial. "In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves" (Wolf 2002 [1991], 12). Indeed, the connection between beauty, power, control, domination and oppression is echoed by various feminist scholars, such as Bartky, who writes that

> "[t]he disciplinary techniques through which the 'docile bodies' of women are constructed aim at a regulation which is perpetual and exhaustive – a regulation of the body's size and contours, its appetite, posture, gestures, and general comportment in space and the appearance of each of its visible parts" (1990, 80).

It is not beauty that is what it is to do of – it is control, it is the production of docile bodies. Feminist theologist Lisa Isherwood echoes this sentiment in her article "The Fat Jesus: Feminist Explorations in Fleshy Christologies" when writing that "[o]nce we ask about the ideological underpinning of notions of size we begin to move the debate from one of moral weakness, abnormality and pathology on behalf of the fat woman to one of control and power and exclusion

on behalf of cultural forces and those who create them" (2010, 23). Underneath beauty standards and the thin ideal lies control. Wolf herself writes that "*[t]he beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance*" (2002 [1991], 14). Indeed, Gailey echoes when discussing *The Beauty Myth*,

> "[y]outh, thinness, and virginity are prized and deemed beautiful beause they symbolize women's lack of power. Women who are young are not yet powerful or knowledgeable, those who are thin are weak, and those who are virginal are inexperienced; in essence, these women do not threaten the social order" (2014, 53).

Therefore, beauty standards must be understood not as (solely) a question of aesthetics, but a question of power and control.

Isherwood points out the hypocrisy to the thin ideal, noting that "so many bodily behaviours that are not acceptable in women are tolerated in men, indeed at times almost seen as part of 'manly' behaviour" (2010, 24). To clarify: I do not argue that the thin ideal does not apply to men. Fatphobia does impact men. However, due to the myriad of overlapping discourses that the thin ideal is intertwined with, as I set out to show in this theoretical framework, and due to men's privileged societal position, women are scrutinized and punished much more intensely for deviating from the thin norm. This is precisely because women's role within society is tied to their bodies and their desirability. Not only does the thin ideal not apply with the same intensity to men, but as Bartky points out, "[s]ince it is women themselves who practice this discipline on and against their own bodies, men get off scot-free" (1990, 80). Self-surveillance and self-policing result into men supposedly evading responsibility. It is important to note the centrality of the body in this practice. Bartky writes: "[n]ormative femininity is coming more and more to be centered on woman's body – not its duties and obligations or even its capacity to bear children, but its sexuality, more precisely, its presumed heterosexuality and its appearance" (1990, 80). The body has become the most important site of normative femininity. Despite women's social invisibility, Dolezal echoes, physically the female body "has traditionally been subject to heightened scrutiny; women are expected to maintain their form, appearance, and comportment within strictly defined social parameters, or else face stigmatization and the loss of social capital" (2010, 357). Shame figures into this in powerful ways, becoming a powerful tool in the (self-)disciplining of women's bodies. Many women experience body shame, something which

Dolezal expands upon. She explains why body shame is such a powerful form of shame: "[n]ot only is the body the part of ourselves that is immediately observable to others, the body is also the seat of personhood, that which makes meaningful subjective experience possible" (2015, 6). Dolezal notes that "consciousness is necessarily embodied; no thoroughgoing demarcation can be made between the subject and the body. However, although *I am* my body, there is also a sense in which *I have* my body. In shame, a distance opens up between oneself and one's body" (2015, 6). This distance is something I will address in the next section when discussing Murray's criticism of the mind/body split permeating many fat activists' arguments about fat empowerment. I will also explore this in greater detail in my analysis, demonstrating how shame can open up a distance between oneself and one's fat body. I want to highlight now how this is not a random or an individual phenomenon. Dolezal clearly demonstrates that body shame not an individual problem, but a social, power-laden phenomenon, writing that "[b]ody shame links individuals to a set of normative values which make salient the parameters of acceptance, belonging and recognition" (2015, 104). Therefore, shame is a very powerful tool in the teaching, policing, and internalizing of disciplinary norms surrounding gender, race, and size. Because of this, "for women, more so than men, the body is an abiding presence in life; it is a source of anxiety in the ongoing projects of self-presentation and impression management to ensure a sense of belonging and recognition" (Dolezal 2015, 105). As such, body shame can be understood as a gendered phenomenon. Now that I have shown how the body is a key site of normative femininity, I will look at the connection between the negative body knowingness around fatness and the corporeality of fatness by expanding on one particular strategy that fat women and fat activists employ, namely "living from the neck up", which Murray lovingly calls a "time-honored fat girl thing" (2005a, 271).

"Living from the neck up": the mind/body split and fat embodiment

> "The problem with fatness is that the culture of negative 'knowingness' about fat bodies interferes with the way we can take the body up, and live it" (Murray 2005a, 273).

In her book *Fat!So?: Because You Don't Have to Apologise for your Size* (1998) fat activist Marilyn Wann asks of her fat readers to unapologetically call themselves fat. In a compelling but not unproblematic manifesto she makes her case:

> "[r]eclaiming the word fat is the miracle cure you've been looking for, the magic trick that makes all your worries about your weight disappear. Do you want to feel good about yourself? Silence your tormentors? Look better in miniskirts? Use the F-word. (…) Say it loud, say it proud: Fat! Fat! Shake your belly three times and there you are, at home in your body, free from the guilt and the shame, the stress and starvation, and the self-hatred" (Wann 1998, 18–19).

Wann's book is the object of Murray's criticism, as it represents way of thinking that Murray argues many size acceptance organizations ascribe to, one which appears to be beneficial to fat people but instead is unhelpful: the idea that fat people "should learn to love our fat bodies, and make them visible in new, enabling, and politically empowering ways" (Murray 2008b, 106). It is a seductive logic: it is tempting to re-signify your fat body as beautiful instead of worthless and the grounds on which your oppression is legitimized, but as Murray points out in her criticism of Wann,

> "[i]n simply 'choosing' a new and affirmative way of being-'fat'-in-the-world, the fat activist is mobilising a humanist logic of the primacy of the individual, and the power of *rationality* in *overcoming* one's lived reality. In this way, Wann privileges the mind over the body, and in a sense what the process of 'outing' insists on is that there is a gap between the mind and the body, whereby the 'fat' subject may alter their lived experience simply through *changing their mind*" (2008b, 108).

Not only does this reiterate the Cartesian mind/body split and its prioritization of mind over body, it does not take into account how the world interacts with and reads one's body, nor does it account for the corporeality of subjectivity. "[M]y subjectivity is always corporeal, I live my body in every gesture, every speech act, every interaction. I am my body, even as I imagine that I am not that body" (Murray 2005a, 273). The mind/body split is prevalent in much of fat activists' rhetoric such as Wann's. Wann claims that through declaring yourself fat, specifically using the 'F-word', you will be at home in your body. Murray argues that "[t]his seems somewhat oversimplified given the experience many 'fat' women have of detaching themselves from their bodies because of the shame their 'fat flesh' subjects them to" (2008b, 109). The idea of being at home in one's body or getting to that point through declaring oneself a 'fatso', as Wann does, reinforces the idea that one is separate from one's body. Murray continues:

> "the notion of 'being at home in your body' is situated in a fundamental liberal humanist logic, which relies on a necessary separation of body from self. In thinking of one's self as being a separate entity that can be *comfortably housed* in a body, while attempting to erase shame, nevertheless reinforces a logic of disconnectedness between the self and the body, despite the inevitable corporeality of our subjectivity" (2008b, 109).

The disconnection that this fosters actually is to the detriment of the fat subject. Murray explains why: "I *am* my body—the world comes to me through my fat, and yet simultaneously I experience the constant desire to *refuse* that fat flesh" (2005a, 272). She also writes about why fat women like herself 'live from the neck up'. It is a direct response to the body knowingness surrounding fatness. "In regarding my body as the means by which I am 'placed in the world,' my fat body must always necessarily be the point of reference for others, and yet I attempt to overcome the anticipated response to my fat by disavowing my body" (Murray 2005a, 272). In order to overcome how others may reaction to and interact with her fat body, Murray feels the need to disavow her body. This tension is something that Wann's well-intended advice to her fellow fat people does not address – rather, it can increase the split one feels between oneself and one's body.

Perhaps the biggest issue with Wann's logic is that she views fatness as merely an empirical fact instead of a discursive construct (Murray 2008b, 109). Wann "seems to be attempting to *resolve* the mind/ body split through this acknowledgement of one's body, and indeed *celebration* of it, and yet the space for bodily ambiguity that is by and large *elided, reproduces* this problematic split" (Murray 2008b, 109). While size acceptance and fat pride movements do afford visibility to the fat body, "the centrality of the body to identity and the concept of embodied subjectivity [are] lost" (Murray 2005a, 270). Murray describes what the problem is here:

> "[i]t was as if to accept my own body and identify as fat along the fat activist 'party line,' I had to simply *forget* the dominant discourses that shaped my understanding of my body, that I lived out corporeally in every interaction, every gesture. In fact, it seemed I had to forget my own fat body, to 'rise above it' somehow" (2005a, 270).

But one cannot forget the dominant discourses that shapes one's body. Murray continues:

> "I had to locate my 'fat identity' in my consciousness: I didn't feel I was living it out as an embodied subject. More than ever, I seemed to be doing the time-honored fat girl thing, which is 'living from the neck up.' Something in Wann's call to arms privileged the mind, reason, and the public sphere over the body, emotions, and one's private experience. A chasm opened for me between the body as it is lived and the body as it is imagined or 'known'" (2005a, 271).

This chasm works to the detriment of fat acceptance and furthers a sense of alienation from one's body. Murray demonstrates where Wann's argument halts, and it is precisely because of the body knowingness she writes of that I have discussed earlier, as well as the internalization of said knowledge.

In order to illustrate this point further, let me turn to a scenario Murray describes. Acknowledging that the ways she lives her "fat body are *always* multiple, contradictory, and eminently ambiguous", Murray writes that

> "I could go out into the world feeling armed with Wann's political arsenal, wearing a sleeveless top, my dimpled arms on display. I would feel strong, powerful, swollen with my fat identity, snarling at others who cast withering glances at my bulky frame. And then, I would pass a shop window and shudder as I catch a reflection of myself, my body appearing to me as grotesque and foreign, a bulging, jiggling vehicle of disgust and shame I want nothing to do with. I experience myself/my body in ways that shift and vary and contradict each other. The idea of a unified, unambiguous identity is untenable" (Murray 2005a, 270).

This relates directly to self-surveillance and the mind/body split, but also goes to show just how complex fat embodiment and identity is. There is no such thing as simply forgetting how the world thinks about one's body, when one inhabits a non-normative body. Imagining herself among fat women like herself, Murray notes that she

> "couldn't bring myself to envisage the reality of my *own* fat body, even in my own private daydream. Even in my own head, people were watching my body, judging its offensive wobbles and bulges. I was the guard in the Panopticon in my own head, as well as being all the inmates, backlit in their cells: under constant surveillance, the knowledge of

> constant surveillance curbing their desire to transgress the rules and the power structures that enforced them" (2005a, 269-270)

Even in a daydream, Murray's self-surveillance is at play. She brings in philosopher Michel Foucault, who famously wrote about the Panopticon, analyzing Jeremy Bentham's (1843) model of a prison. What the Panopticon effects is "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 1977, 201). "After a lifetime of internalizing the 'knowledge' of the offensiveness of my fat, I witnessed in myself the function of that very power, the internalization of discourse and the embodiment of self-surveillance" (Murray 2005a, 270). This is exactly how the internalized spectator and body knowingness about fatness emerge and interact in fat women's embodiment. As I have shown, the way fatness is known in Western society and the centrality of the body as the site of normative femininity contribute to the split between mind and body that many fat women experience.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have highlighted different phenomena relevant to how fat women can and cannot navigate through the world and how disciplinary norms of female embodiment are constructed and policed. I have shown how with being hailed as fat comes a particular way of 'knowing' the fat female body. There is a specific legacy shaping the way the fat female body is known within the West, one which reads the fat woman as immoral, excessive, and as a failure of femininity. I have shown how through body knowingness and the regime of visibility we find certain 'truths' on bodies. The discourse on fatness asks us to read the fat female body in a specific way. While fat women's bodies are rendered hypervisible, fat women are simultaneously hyperinvisible in other respects: their needs and comfort go unrecognized and dismissed. The hypervisibility of fat women's bodies must be understood in light of women's sexualized role in society. As a result of this sexualization, women internalize the perspective of a "male connoisseur", as Bartky formulates, leading to a constant awareness and consideration of how they appear to men (1990, 72). Such continual awareness, in turn, impacts how women experience their bodies and how they move. The internalized spectator will make women's movements more self-conscious, as they must always monitor how they appear. Bodily comportment and motor intentionality will differ along the lines of axes of differentiation such as

gender, race, and size. The body is a cultural medium, as Bordo argues, and the female body in particular has increasingly become the site of normative constructions of femininity. In this current moment in time, thinness is considered to be the epitome of beauty. Women's role in society is tied to the appearance of their bodies. As such, women are scrutinized more intensely than men for deviating from the bodily norms, in particular for transgressing the norm of thinness. Shame is a powerful tool in linking individual people to normative values. As such, body shame is not an individual problem; instead, many political and social structures are invested in inducing shame. As a result of the negative body knowingness about fatness, fat women may 'live from the neck up'. While fat activists may suggest reclaiming the F-word and changing one's mind about one's fat body, Murray shows that such a strategy does not account for the corporeality of subjectivity. Fat women cannot simply change their minds about their bodies, for their bodies are already known in specific ways. Now that I have made explicit a myriad of phenomena central to fat female embodiment by showing which theoretical frameworks I am working from and with, I will move onto my analysis of the selected autobiographical writings.

Chapter 3: (Self-)Policing Fatness

In this chapter, I will analyze how structural forms of policing, such as how one becomes fat through hailing, body policing and body shaming, feature in the autobiographical writings I have analyzed, and how the internalization of disciplinary norms of femininity, size, and desirability show up by focusing on self-surveillance and self-policing. I will analyze how hypervisibility and hyperinvisibility show up in the autobiographical works in the following chapter. Finally, I will move to my analysis of the language surrounding fatness, the definitions of fatness that the authors whose work I analyzed present, and the embodied experience of fatness, how one 'feels' fat, in chapter 5. Of the works I analyzed, the ones which dealt with the theme of (self-)policing the most are the works by Houston, Kusz, Solovay, Tisdale and Tovar. I begin my analysis on self-surveillance and self-policing with a focus on the social realm, on policing more broadly, because as I have cited previously, "[w]e are only able to understand our interaction with others, and with the world, through this 'lore' of knowledge that enables us to locate ourselves within a social framework and to hierarchize ourselves accordingly" (Murray 2005a, 266). I have located this lore of knowledge – body knowingness and the discourses that shape the fat female body – in the theoretical framework of this thesis. The negative body knowingness about fatness is constructed as a truth within Western society and is produced and reproduced as not only immutable but naturalized knowledge, as Murray points out. "These knowledges inform every interaction we have with others and the world, and position us along a spectrum of bodies and identities. We learn these knowledges, internalise them, and deploy them at an almost pre-conscious level: we have a learned negative response to fat bodies, and their aesthetic transgressions" (Murray 2005c, 154). In order to now uncover how fat women relate to this lore of knowledge, how they learn, internalize, and deploy them, I first pay attention to fat women's interactions with others, before I examine how they hierarchize, police, and carry themselves.

Becoming fat

"I would become that word, and I would adopt that hatred toward myself that my classmates had for me" (Tovar 2018, 16).

First, I will analyze how fatness was made known to the different authors. Thinking back on Mitchell's analysis of *Big Judy*, I want to pay attention to how fatness is made through interactions with other people. As Mitchell points out and I highlighted before, the story of *Big Judy* stems not from her own observations, but rather "from the interactions that her body precipitates; through the way others see and react to her. It soon becomes clear that this is the way that Judy learns she's fat, too" (2014, 65). I will now address how some of the authors whose work I analyzed write about how they learned they were fat.

Mitchell is not the only author to address hailing. Tovar describes the first time she was hailed as fat:

> "I remember we were both standing on the blacktop, and that's when he said it. 'You're fat.' I was confused. I didn't have any context for the word. It wasn't a word that had been in my world before then, but there was something about the way he said it. I could tell from the way he hurled it out of his mouth, like snot, that it was a hurtful word, a word meant to remind me that I had forgotten something about who I was" (2018, 16).

Two things of note happen here. One is that the statement "you're fat" is not neutral. Even without knowing the meaning of the word, Tovar could hear this was not a neutral observation. Her peer did not go around saying "you're thin" to thin kids. Next, Tovar describes how the word, understood as harmful, served as a reminder about who she was, something she was supposed to know but did not know. "It wouldn't be long before I was in kindergarten and I would hear that word all the time. I would become that word, and I would adopt that hatred toward myself that my classmates had for me" (Tovar 2018, 16). Fiske explains: "[i]n responding to our hail, the addressees recognize the social position our language has constructed, and if their response is cooperative, they adopt this same position" (2004 [1987], 1271). Of note is how it is not solely a neutral descriptive word that Tovar adopts, it is the negative meanings attached to it that she internalizes, that she 'becomes' – she becomes fat, and the connotations with it.

Not every author addresses the first time they learned of their own fatness explicitly. Tisdale is one such author: "I'm not sure when the word 'fat' first sounded pejorative to me, or when I first applied it to myself" (2005 [1993], 2). It is worthy of note that Tisdale is on the smaller end of the spectrum. It may not be a coincidence that she does to not remember when fat became an insult, one that hailed her, specifically, as fat. Those on the smaller end of the fat spectrum are

not always or conclusively viewed and treated as fat. They either do or do not become fat through interactions. Whereas there are people who are irrevocably, indisputably deemed fat. I bring this in now, because Tisdale writes that her "weight has never actually affected anything—it's never seemed to mean anything one way or the other to how [she] lived. Yet for many years, [she] felt quite bad about it" (2005 [1993], 3). To feel as though your weight has never affected anything is a function of privilege. The weight of thin people does affect them, except this affect (their privilege) remains invisible to them, because they do not know (the full extent of) how the weight of fat people affects how they live. While Tisdale does not remember when 'fat' became an insult, one she internalized, by the end of her chapter, she does mention a shift in how she felt about her body as a child compared to how she feels about it now and how she struggles with her relationship with her body now. In her discussion of how she looks at herself in the mirror – a common thread in the autobiographical accounts, one I will explicate on in the chapter focused on the embodiment of fatness – it is apparent that something *did* intervene in how she viewed her body and taught her it was wrong. It is a section that speaks of a split between mind and body, of a wish to reunite the two, and of Tisdale's grappling with the disciplinary norms of gender and size.

> "I looked in the mirror and saw a woman, with flesh, curves, muscles, a few stretch marks, the beginnings of wrinkles, with strength and softness in equal measure. My body is the one part of me that is always, undeniably, here. To like myself means to be, literally, shameless, to be wanton in the pleasures of being inside a body. I feel *loose* this way, a little abandoned, a little dangerous. That first feeling of liking my body—not being resigned to it or despairing of change, by actually *liking* it—was tentative and guilty and frightening. It was alarming, because it was the way I'd felt as a child, before the world had intervened" (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 17).

The feeling of liking her body feels dangerous to Tisdale. It goes directly against the script of how she was taught to feel in and about her body. The world had intervened in her instinctive relationship to herself and her body. Tisdale continues: "surely I was wrong; I knew, I'd known for so long, that my body wasn't all right this way. I was afraid even to act as though I were all right: I was afraid that by doing so I'd be acting a fool" (2005 [1993], 17). While Tisdale does not address the act of hailing in this chapter and rather states that she has forgotten when fat was first used against her, this section demonstrates a shift in her relationship with her body, one that still

taught her of a 'wrongness'. It is an echo of feminist scholar Cecilia Hartley's observations in "Letting Ourselves Go: Making Room for the Fat Body in Feminist Scholarship" that

> "[t]here is something wrong with the female body. Women learn early—increasingly, as early as five or six years old—that their bodies are fundamentally flawed. The restructuring process begins often as soon as a child is able to understand that there is a difference between the sexes. When that awareness reveals a female body, the realization soon follows that that body must be changed, molded, reconfigured into an ideal that will never be reached by 'letting nature take its course'" (2001, 60).

From Tisdale's words, it is clear that she, too, experiences such a restructuring process. It is important to note that this process is not just gendered, it is racialized. Tovar writes:

> "I gradually learned I was less than others because I was a fat brown girl. The lessons I learned about the inferiority of my fat body were brutal; the lessons I received about my racial and gender inferiority were subtle by comparison. But both educations were real, and in some ways, the brutality of fatphobia made it easier for me to recognize its existence later. All I wanted was for people to treat me like a person" (2018, 36-37).

From early childhood onwards, fat women of color like Tovar are made to internalize fatphobic, racist, and misogynistic ideas. The construction of ideal feminine beauty is not only remarkably thin, it is remarkably white. The restructuring process that Hartley discusses, as such, needs to be understood as not only an education in the (supposed) inferiority of the natural female body, but also as an education in the (supposed) superiority of both whiteness and thinness. Hailing is one form of being made to be fat, an important facet in the restructuring process, but is through a continual process that fat is 'made', entwined with the disciplinary norms of female embodiment teaching all women that their bodies are wrong, which is why I now turn to how fat bodies are policed and shamed beyond hailing.

Body policing and body shaming

> "'Hold your tummy in,' my mother would yell every morning from the front door as I walked across the lawn to the waiting school bus, as if the bus didn't have open windows, as if what she really meant was goodbye" (Houston 2005 [1999], 276).

If there is one stark trend in the autobiographical writings I have analyzed, it is the role close family members play in teaching the author how to carry their body. Ranging from a mother's diet to a father's pointed remarks at the dinner table, a lot of fatphobia is perpetuated by family. When you are fat, there are clothes not to wear, activities to not participate in, food to not eat. "I frequently hear people say things such as, 'Why is she wearing/doing/eating that? Doesn't she know how fat she is?'" (Gailey 2014, 31). This statement heavily implies that there are certain right ways to 'enact' and embody fatness. The collective body knowingness about fat women asks us to read them in specific ways, providing an answer to the question Gailey brings. She notes that even so much as seeing or reading about fat people can elicit feelings of anger and disgust, "presumably because of the common perception that the fat person (woman) has 'let herself go' or has 'allowed herself' to become unkempt. This stigmatized status reduces fat women to their bodies" (Gailey 2014, 31). Not abiding by the disciplinary norms of female embodiment by being fat is seen as 'letting oneself go' – something echoed in the title of Hartley's article "Letting Ourselves Go: Making Room for the Fat Body in Feminist Scholarship" that I just brought into conversation with Tisdale's autobiographical chapter titled "Letting Myself Go". However, women are not allowed to let themselves go. Rules about clothing, food, and movement, fueled by 'knowledge' read on the fat female body, that she lacks control, are taught and continually policed. As noted by literary and gender studies scholar Michael Moon and Sedgwick in "Divinity: A Dossier A Performance Piece A Little-Understood Emotion", "incredibly, in this society everyone who sees a fat woman feels they know something about her that she doesn't herself know" (1990, 27). We are to look at fat women's bodies through the supposed knowledge of their failure and excess. We are then prompted to make this known to them, to regulate and police fat women's bodies. Murray explains:

> "[i]n this current historical epoch in the West, we believe ourselves to be quite enlightened about 'correct' body maintenance. Consequently, we are skilled at reading and judging the bodies of those who do not appear to be managing their bodies properly. We do a lot of regulating and policing of certain bodies and their practices – not least the fat body" (2005b, 111).

The autobiographical works I analyzed give ample examples of such policing, such as Houston's chapter. She recalls the experience of bringing home her boyfriend from college:

> "I have been at college so long I have forgotten the rules by which my family eats dinner. I am not allowed to have bread, dessert, or seconds, ever (…) I absentmindedly reach for a second helping of peas. 'You start eating like that,' my father barks at me, 'and before too long you'll be as big as a house.' I stare at the spinach coagulating on my plate" (Houston 2005 [1999], 273).

It is at the family dinner table where in this instance, Houston is taught what her body means – and from her account, I learn that this is not an isolated incident. She writes that she has forgotten the rules, implying that these rules – no bread, no dessert, no seconds, ever – were taught and policed in the past. As the opening quote of this section demonstrates, it was her mother who reminded Houston on a daily basis how she ought to carry herself. When I return to Houston's chapter at a later stage, the emotional and physical effects of these 'lessons' will show.

Not only family members appear to participate in body policing and body shaming. Tovar recalls going on a date with a man twenty years her senior when she was eighteen years old. "He had ordered himself a rib eye and was enthusiastically chowing down. I remember trying so hard to be beautiful" (Tovar 2018, 62). She describes her pants as uncomfortably tight and wearing clothes that would please him, as such ignoring her own discomfort in favor of appealing to his tastes. According to Owen, fat people "reduce or ignore our expectations of comfort and inclusion, minimize ourselves, tuck our bodies into tiny nooks, fold ourselves inward in order to limit the insult of our bulks" (2012, 299). Tovar's descriptions of her clothing as uncomfortably tight shows that she ignores her own needs (for comfort, for space) in order to limit the insult of her fat body. Owen brings in the work of sociologist Erving Goffman (1963), who "labels this category 'covering' and discusses how stigmatized persons attempt to minimize their stigmatized attribute in order to make 'normals' feel more socially comfortable" (Owen 2012, 299). Tovar's experience on her date demonstrates how this works:

> "I had made a habit of trying to be unobtrusive by ordering a small plate or simply eating from my date's plate (…) I told him I wanted to order something. He stopped, knife and fork in hand, and sighed. 'You're not going to eat it anyway,' he said in a matter-of-fact tone verging on exasperation. And went back to eating. I felt so ashamed. It felt like there was a silent expectation that I would do whatever I had to do to remain my size—but preferably smaller" (Tovar 2018, 62-63).

In this interaction, Tovar is reminded of what expectations lie upon her as a woman – and as a fat person. What she can and cannot eat is intertwined with gendered expectations, as is her catering specifically to her date's tastes in how she dresses. The expectation that Tovar would do whatever necessary to not gain weight is connected to a view of the fat body as temporarily fat – something I address in more detail in the next chapter. Murray explains: "[f]at women try to avoid the negative response their fat body elicits, by employing behaviors that have them attempting to 'pass' as thin, or at least to mark them as being in the process of transformation to a thinner, more normative form" (2005a, 274). Tovar's habit of ordering a small plate or nothing at all can be understood in this light. In this case, her date, too, thrust this understanding onto her body, by matter-of-factly stating she would not eat what she wanted to order. Tovar is shamed into not eating what she wants to eat. Thus, in this case, shame is a feeling that emerges as a consequence of being policed, of being reminded of which expectations there are in place for Tovar, as a fat woman.

Thin friends of fat women also commonly appear in the autobiographical works I have analyzed as people who shame their own bodies using fatphobic rhetoric, shaming their fat friends in the process. Kusz describes how thin women often discuss how "bad" certain foods are when eating out together:

> "Every fat woman I know has been present at one of these ceremonies and has remarked afterward upon the quickness of the thin participants to use vocabulary like 'grossly fat,' 'massively huge,' and 'behemoth,' even with a person fitting those descriptions seated right there at the table" (2005 [1999], 26).

It is the use of such vocabulary that reveals exactly how thin companions view fat bodies and constitutes a form of body shaming. A fat friend of Kusz shared with her how at one such occasion, she lost her patience with this particular ritual. Kusz writes:

> "When one of the divorcées pinched her abdomen and said, 'No man is ever going to look at me, I've got to work harder on these abs,' my (round in the middle) friend asked, 'So would you say I don't stand a chance myself?' The abs woman looked at her like she'd just materialized from the ether (as, in a sense, she had), answering after a moment, 'I didn't realize you were interested in dating,' no doubt having made this judgement based upon the flabby nature of my friend's upper arms (and legs, torso, etc.). The assumption was that if my

friend wanted men to *see* her, then surely she would make her body *smaller*" (2005 [1999], 26).

The connection drawn between visibility, desirability, appealing to men, and being smaller comes as no surprise considering the overlapping discourses of cisheteropatriarchy and normative constructions of femininity – something I will return to in this chapter and in chapter 4 when discussing hyper(in)visibility. Kusz continues, based on her own experiences:

> "[b]ut very often I find that if I cough, in the middle of a cellulite-related discussion, and mention that I'm uncomfortable viewing my thighs as mortal enemies, the immediate look I get from the thin women is blank—not guilty, not smug, but utterly blank—and then they jolt awake somehow, turn red, and say, 'Oh, but I wasn't thinking of *you*.' Which is, in fact, just the point. How often *do* we think of that which we cannot see?" (2005 [1999], 27).

The suggestion that a thin person's comments about their own body are not related to fat people, or the fat person sitting at the very same table, is not related to invisibility alone – although that certainly plays a role. It is part of the ritual of meaning-making, of how individual people reiterate the cultural norms. Bordo's words echo once more: "[t]he body – what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body – is a medium of culture" (1997 [1993], 13). Again, the body is the site on which cultural norms are expressed. The invisibility Kusz addresses I will turn to in a later chapter, as mentioned before. I will now address the role of complete strangers in upholding a fatphobic meaning-making system.

In "Now You See Me, Now You Don't" Solovay recalls giving a lecture at the Childhood Obesity Conference, as she often does diversity and legal trainings about weight. Solovay's expertise in fat studies shows throughout the chapter, making her contribution to the anthology of great importance and of a more informative nature. As I am researching autobiographical accounts of fat female embodiment, I will not discuss her knowledgeable insights on the myths about fatness she writes about and deconstructs, namely that fat is unhealthy, mutable, and unattractive. However, I want to bring forth one incident Solovay recounts. She opened her lecture at the Childhood Obesity Conference with an anecdote about her time in law school when a vegetarians club contacted the contributors of a fat women's zine, of which Solovay was one. They wanted to host a debate between fat women and vegetarians. Solovay asks: "[w]hich side

am I supposed to sit on since I have been a vegetarian since I was eleven"(2005, 103)? Something worthy of note happened after Solovay gave her lecture:

> "A health care provider came up after my talk. She said she enjoyed it, but she just wanted to check with me and confirm that I was not actually a vegetarian—that I was merely fictionalizing to make a point about stereotypes, which she assured me she understood (…) She insisted that she understood the concept of tolerance, she promised that she would not tell anyone, but implored me to tell her 'the truth'—she really needed to know" (2005, 104).

Apparently, a vegetarian diet and a fat body were so incongruous and so contradictory to this health care provider, that she not only felt the need to comment on it to confirm the anecdote was a fiction, but that Solovay had to introduce her to her mother "to overcome this one quirky little stereotype—that fat people eat lots of meat and that thin people are vegetarians" (2005, 104). I highlight this incident to show how deeply ingrained fatphobic notions are. How strong must the conviction that fat people cannot be vegetarians be to compel a complete stranger to comment on it and question the truth of the sentiment? Not just a fat person's diet warrants such action: fat bodies in and of themselves leave thin strangers staring and commenting. I will address how in such an occurrence, the fat person whose body is gawked at and commented upon is rendered hypervisible and hyperinvisible at once, in a later chapter. Now that I have established how fat women are policed and body shamed by relatives, lovers, friends, and strangers, I will examine how they police themselves, too.

Fat women and self-surveillance

> "How dare the world do this to anyone? I thought, and then I realized I did it to myself" (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 12).

As established, fat women are taught many lessons about who they are, what their bodies signify, and what they can and cannot be. From hailing onwards, fat women internalize these messages and can start regulating themselves accordingly. In the opening quote of this section Tisdale refers to the body shaming of a well-known celebrity and her realization that she body shames herself like others shame the celebrity she writes about, showing that fat women are not

only subjected to body shaming, they also subject *themselves* to it because they have internalized the disciplinary norms surrounding gender and size. In order to understand fully how self-surveillance and self-policing work, I return once more to the Panopticon as theorized by Foucault. In *Missing Bodies: The Politics of Visibility* sociologists Monica J. Casper and Lisa Jean Moore explain:

> "The metaphor of a circular prison, which enables an inspector to be an omnipotent functionary, explains how subjects learn to self-regulate their behavior (…) Briefly applied to contemporary life, we live in a panoptic society constantly inspected by regulatory agencies (like public health departments, the police, the fashion industry) that make the human body an object of the normalizing gaze. That is, bodies are objectified. And since we don't know when we are being watched, we learn to police ourselves" (2009, 7).

Dolezal explains more about *why* we police ourselves. She describes internalization as "the process by which one accepts and makes one's own, that is *internalizes*, a set of norms, rules and mores established by an external authority" (Dolezal 2015, 60). In this case, the external authority is society as a whole and institutions such as the fashion industry and medical industry. "Once internalized, these norms are integrated as part of one's 'normal' or 'natural' viewpoint and are take to be the correct or right more of being" (Dolezal 2015, 60). It is important to note that "the internalization of external rules renders norms invisible; the individual does not even realize that he or she is self-regulating" (Dolezal 2015, 61). We often do not even notice that we regulate ourselves. Like the anecdote I shared in the introduction of this thesis, I have regulated my own body countless of times before I finally realized what I was doing. I have no doubt that there are a number of ways in which I regulate myself that I am not aware of yet. Dolezal explains why this can escape one's notice. The external rules are experienced as normal and as emanating from within oneself and as such can, with time, "become so commonplace that they come to appear natural and necessary; indeed they come to be perceived as 'reality'" (Dolezal 2015, 61). In line with Bartky's words I cited earlier, that a woman who "feeling fat, monitors everything she eats, has become, just as surely as the inmate of Panopticon, a self-policing subject, a self committed to a relentless self-surveillance," Tovar notes that women "are giving away our lives, our time,

our energy, our claim to pleasure, our desire, and our power one bite at a time" (Bartky 1990, 80; Tovar 2018, 11). She writes that women

> "are told—and we believe—that the problem is our body (…) The real problem is that women don't feel like we can eat what we want or wear what we want or live how we want, and yet we are told—and we believe—that we can fix this existential crisis through controlling portion size" (Tovar 2018, 57).

Tovar's words illustrate how women internalize the idea that our bodies are wrong, consequently not (freely) eating what we want, not (freely) wearing what we want, not freely living the life we wish to live. We are taught that the supposed wrongness of our body can be fixed through controlling how much we eat. Tisdale's account of how she has decided to *stop* dieting shows how she, for many years, policed herself to such an extent that it became habitual.

> "I have to remind myself to stop counting, to stop thinking in terms of numbers. I know, even now that I've quit dieting and eat what I want, how many calories I take in every day (…) Someone asked me not long ago how I could possibly know my calorie intake if I'm not dieting (the implication being, perhaps, that I'm dieting secretly). I know because calorie counts and grams of fat and fiber are embedded in me. I have to work to *not* think of them, and I have to learn not to think of them in order to really live without fear" (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 18-19).

Years of dieting impact how Tisdale to this day thinks about food. She has to consciously work on no longer thinking in terms of calorie intake. Interestingly, she writes that she has to do so in order to really be able to live without *fear*. As Dolezal writes, the Panopticon "manipulates the subject to use the internal discipline of self-control. The threat of punishment is key in this process" (2015, 59). Fearing the threat of punishment – fearing humiliation and shame – the fat woman will discipline *herself* and abide by the disciplinary norms and bodily rules in place. The threat of punishment may, for instance, lead her to not eat in public, as I will adress in the chapter focused on hyper(in)visibility. Or, in Tisdale's case, it lead her to diet for years, and now that she no longer does so, she still feels the echo of fear of punishment, habitually thinking of food in terms of calories. "Because the individual is constantly striving to avoid incurring punishment (of whatever form) through adhering to the rules and guidelines of an institution, norms become rooted in his or her psyche and body" (Dolezal 2015, 60). Tisdale speaks of calorie counts and

grams of fat and fiber as *embedded* in her – the norm of thinness has become rooted in her psyche and body. Tisdale continues:

> "I'm eating better, exercising more, feeling fine—and then I catch myself thinking *Maybe I'll lose some weight*. But my mood changes or my attention is caught by something else, something deeper, more lingering. Then I can catch a glimpse of myself by accident and think only: That's me. My face, my hips, my hands. Myself" (2005 [1993], 19).

The possibility of losing weight lingers in Tisdale's mind after years of striving to do just that – but now that she no longer wants to actively lose weight, she can look at herself in the mirror and simply see herself. It may seem small at first glance, but the act of looking in the mirror – or not looking, or looking only selectively – is something many authors discuss. For Tisdale to see herself, instead of looking at her body and thinking in terms of what needs fixing, or which parts are good or bad, is an immense victory over how she was taught to view herself.

Like I quoted before, "[w]omen, in the patriarchal order, identify with men and learn to see themselves through their eyes. Having internalized the gaze of the (male) Other, Bartky argues, women begin to regulate themselves according to 'his' standards" (Dolezal 2015, 113). Not only do we learn to see ourselves through the normative gaze of the male Other, we also learn to see other women this way. One way some of the authors whose work I have analyzed demonstrate doing so is through comparing bodies. "I realize with some horror that for the last fifteen blocks I have been counting how many women have better and how many women have worse figures than I do. Did I say fifteen blocks? I meant fifteen years" (Houston 2005 [1999], 272). She is not the only one. Tisdale writes: "I look at another woman passing on the street and think, At least I'm not *that* fat" (2005 [1993], 9). Remarks like these can be understood in the light of Wolf's words, that women are assigned value "in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard" (2002 [1991], 12). By comparing their bodies to the bodies of other women, Houston and Tisdale shows that they have internalized the culturally imposed standards of female embodiment. Now that I have shown how the normative ideas about female embodiment influence how fat women view and regulate themselves and how they look at other women, I will look more closely at how it is precisely the disciplinary norms around *femininity* that fat women are considered to be transgressing and how this shows up in the autobiographical works I have analyzed.

Desirability, size, and failure of femininity

> "[M]y fat body is frequently attacked on the grounds that I am not beautiful enough to exist because *apparently* that is my job as a woman" (Tovar 2018, 55).

I cannot divorce the question of femininity, desirability, and size, because they are inextricably linked. As pointed out before, "[f]at emerges as a barrier to a fulfilment of traditional female sexual roles that are upheld by a continuing maintenance of the body" (Murray 2004, 240). Fat women are considered to be transgressing the rules of femininity and feminine bodily conduct. In the words of Hartley, "[t]he fat woman demonstrates by her very presence that she has not submitted to the rules that society has established for feminine behavior" (2001, 66). Fat women must therefore overperform femininity in order to be treated with respect and to be considered women. Tovar writes that "[p]erforming femininity extra special hard feels like a particular expectation of me because I am a fat woman and my bigness always makes others call my gender into question" (2018, 54). Because her fatness already negates her femininity, Tovar must overcompensate in other ways. Tovar's "fat body is frequently attacked on the grounds that [she is] not beautiful enough to exist because *apparently* that is [her] job as a woman" (Tovar 2018, 55). Fat women like Tovar are considered to be failing at femininity because the current beauty standards in the West dictate that thinness is the epitome of beauty, and because within a patriarchal society, women's function is to appeal to men and to embody this elusive category of beauty, as I have explained in the previous chapter. Within patriarchy, women must appeal to beauty standards and to what is deemed desirable by men. Tovar's childhood experiences demonstrate further how fatness in women is also associated with masculinity:

> "I grew up being told I was a girl, and yet because of my size, the behavior I experienced from my peers felt more in line with masculinity. At home I would watch movies that showed me that girls get treated like dainty, delicate flowers and boys get treated roughly. At school, I was treated like a big tough boy, not like a flower. So, for example, during play time with other girls, we would often enact scenes from *The Baby-Sitters Club* or other books and shows we loved. When it came time to play out the romantic parts, I always played the boy, without question. We never even discussed it because it was just

> silently understood that boys are bigger than girls, and I was bigger than everyone, and therefore I was the obvious choice to play the boy" (2018, 80).

Her size rendered her more masculine than her peers. Tovar explains that "[f]atness disrupts the cultural obsession with sexual differentiation, the gender binary, and the idea that women need to be clearly and visibly distinguishable from men" (2018, 81-82). This is echoed by Hartley, who argues that

> "[a] woman is taught early to contain herself, to keep arms and legs close to her body and take up as little space as possible (…) when a woman's stature or girth approaches or exceeds that of a man's, she becomes something freakish [*sic*]. By becoming large, whether with fat tissue or muscle mass, she implicitly violates the sexual roles that place her in physical subordination to the man" (2001, 61; 62).

Fatness is a violation of the normative ideas concerning female embodiment. It constitutes a disruption to the linked systems of the gender binary and sexual differentiation, for example because "[f]at women have bigger bodies, and often more strength because of those bigger bodies" (Tovar 2018, 82). Tovar's account of her early childhood experiences shows that she was treated more like a boy because of her size. Fat women are in a specific position to femininity and masculinity, embodying an ambiguous, seemingly contradictory position. "Fat women's bodies tend to demonstrate characteristics associated with both masculinity and femininity. Their bodies are masculine because they take up a large amount of space, and their bodies are ultrafeminine because they are soft, curvy, and fleshy" (Gailey 2014, 112). Curves are 'womanly' but fatness is a failure of femininity. Tisdale's chapter shows that she, too, considers curves to be a feminine attribute. "How would it feel, I began to wonder, to cultivate my own womanliness rather than despise it? Because it was my fleshy curves I wanted to be rid of, after all. I dreamed of having a boy's body, smooth, hipless, lean" (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 14). Yet, only certain curves are considered feminine: the curve of a hip, of thighs, of breasts, and ass – never the belly, never the (double) chin, the face, the arms. Like Tovar writes, recalling a movie makeover: "her fat body is also gone. She's curvy in exactly the right way—the way that gives men boners" (2018, 40). I will return to this notion of curving in the 'right' way at a later stage, but it is important to note how Tovar links 'womanly' curves to being viewed as desirable to men.

The different autobiographical accounts of fat women's embodiment illustrate how different discourses surrounding femininity, desirability, and control emerge and interact.

Different authors seem to be grappling with the pressure to appeal to men. The desire to become thin is very much intertwined with appearing desirable to men. Tovar points to the heart of this when she writes that "men become both the stand-ins for cultural approval and the enforcers of normativity" (2018, 67). She recalls: "[i]t was disproportionally at the hands of boys my age that I was taught I was worthless. The justification was that they didn't find me desirable and this was a punishable offense to them" (Tovar 2018, 70). This language reminds me of my earlier discussion of self-policing out of fear of punishment. What Tovar recounts here is an experience of being continually policed out of punishment. Her supposed lack of desirability was punishable in the eyes of her male peers – which is why they policed her, taught her she was worthless. Tovar explains that in response to this, she was convinced she could "make it all better if [she] just tried harder to become their idea of beautiful" (2018, 71). The need to be seen as beautiful in the eyes of men shows up in her experience of visiting her doctor after she starved herself for a summer when she was eleven years old as well:

> "I went to my family's doctor to show off my new body. Dr. McCole always tried to incentivize my weight loss by telling me that when I got thin he would let me date one of his sons. I used to laugh when he said that, slightly humiliated but still wanting to earn the right to make his sons love me" (Tovar 2018, 40-41).

Tovar experiences humiliation from this particular incentive, yet still feels the desire to succeed and be granted this 'right'. Her doctor's words imply that the goal of weight loss, at least to an extent, is to appear desirable to men. Again, it becomes clear that the desire to appeal to men is directly linked to women's sexualized role in society: "our participation in society is regulated by the attractiveness of our bodies and what they can offer" (Murray 2004, 240). Therefore, the notion that fat women are failing in performing femininity is linked to women's role in patriarchical society. The compulsion to want to be seen as desirable by men, and therefore, not as fat, runs deep for many women. Tovar is not the only author who appears to grapple with this:

> "[m]y friend Phil, who is chronically and almost painfully thin, admitted that in his search for a partner he finds himself prejudiced against fat women. He seemed genuinely bewildered by this. I didn't jump to reassure him that such prejudice is hard to resist. What I did was bite my tongue at my urge to be reassured by him, to be told that I, at least, wasn't fat" (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 13).

This impulse to not be seen as fat is connected to the wish to be seen as desirable. Again, it becomes clear that the disciplinary norms around gender, size and desirability are intertwined. Fat women are excluded from the current definition of feminine beauty. Because women, within patriarchy, must be beautiful, fat women are always already failing at femininity. Not only beauty standards contribute to this: it is also because fat women's bodies blur the gender binary by virtue of their bigness and strength, which are associated with masculinity, while their curves are seen as (ultra)feminine. Distorting the (supposedly) neat distinction between masculinity and femininity and excluded from current cultural constructions of feminine beauty, fat women are seen as failing in their gender identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have given my analysis of how structural forms of policing were present in the autobiographical works I have analyzed, as well as how fat women police themselves as a result of the internalization of disciplinary norms of femininity, size, and desirability. Fatness is known in specific ways. As the fat female body is known as a site of failed femininity, fat women must overperform femininity. Fatness disrupts the gender binary: different authors share experiences of not (fully) being viewed like girls. I have shown how fatness was made known to the different authors: by being hailed as fat, like Tovar shared, resulting in her adopting the negative connotations surrounding fatness, as well as though body shaming and body policing, for example by family members telling fat women what they can and cannot eat. Internalizing these messages, fat women begin to regulate themselves in fear of punishment, which is evident from how different authors look at themselves in the mirror and how they view other women. Now that I have analyzed the (self-)policing of fatness, I will move to my analysis of the hyper(in)visibility of fatness.

Chapter 4: Hypervisible Fat, Hyperinvisible Fat

In this chapter, I will detail how feelings of hyper(in)visibility feature in the autobiographical works I have analyzed. Many authors share experiences of this in their autobiographical writings, grappling with invisibility, hypervisibility, or both at different turns. The authors who mainly discuss this theme are Solovay, Kusz, and Tovar. Tovar mostly discusses her experiences of hyper(in)visibility when she is among fellow fat women. Kusz gives different examples of hyper(in)visibility, in particular experiences of her needs going unacknowledged and unseen. Solovay focuses on how fat people respond to being treated as invisible. As discussed previously in the theoretical framework of this thesis, women suffer invisibility in terms of social relations, yet simultaneously, their bodies "enjoy a hyper-visibility in the social realm; they are objectified and on constant display" (Dolezal 2015, 105). Fat women experience this dual hypervisibility and hyperinvisibility all the more, as I will demonstrate in this chapter.

Exceptional attention, exceptional overlooking

> "Censorship! Censorship!...Look at what we don't see in magazines and on TV, except as the butts of jokes. And such Big-butt jokes…Look at what's not there already….What don't you see? Twenty-eight percent. Twenty-eight percent of Americans. And we are big. So big we can't be seen" (Solovay 2005, 108).

Beyond her first experience of being hailed as fat, Tovar's autobiographical manifesto includes many more instances of her body being made known to her in specific ways. I will now analyze Tovar's retelling of her attendance to a conference for fat queer people, hosted in a hotel large enough to host many other guests besides people attending the conference. Her experiences demonstrate how fat people are rendered socially invisible while being hypervisible at the same time, especially when together. "Over the course of the three-day conference, we were gawked at like oddities because almost all of the conference participants were fat (…) people would line up, noses pressed against the glass, to stare at us while we were swimming" (Tovar 2018, 19). The fat bodies of the conference participants were hypervisible – to be gawked at, stared at, the sight of multiple fat people in one space apparently so worthy of attention it warranted noses pressed

against the glass of a swimming pool. Yet the participants were simultaneously hyperinvisible as people:

> "At one point, I was waiting for an elevator and as the doors opened I heard a man say, 'There's one of them!' speaking to a group of two women and two children, and pointing at me. He was following conference attendees around with his family offering commentary like he was leading a tour in a zoo" (Tovar 2018, 19).

To this man, fat people were worthy of pointing out like this – the action itself showing disregard for the actual people he pointed at. As Gailey asserts, the hyper(in)visible person is "sometimes paid exceptional attention and is sometimes exceptionally overlooked, at it can happen simultaneously" (2014, 7). The example Tovar gives demonstrate how this can occur at once. She is paid exceptional attention by the man pointing her out to the group he was with, and exceptionally overlooked: the man nor his companions show any regard for her as a person. "Marginalized bodies are not just acknowledged and seen; they are made into a spectacle. They are not simply invisible; they are frequently erased or dismissed from consideration" (Gailey 2014, 167). Again, Tovar's example demonstrates both how her body is made into a spectacle, while her feelings are not even considered. As noted by critical theorist Adrienne C. Hill in "Spatial Awareness: Queer Women and the Politics of Fat Embodiment", "[f]at people may be hypervisible objects, constantly subject to a prurient, disapproving gaze, but mainstream images limit their visibility as subjects" (2009, 15). With these words Hill gets to the heart of the matter, exposing the tension between hypervisibility and hyperinvisibility Tovar and her fellow fat conference attendees faced. Hill argues that fat people "vacillate between hypervisibility and invisibility, and that this vacillation is often a function of the forms of discrimination [fat people] face" (2009, 61). Tovar's experience exemplifies this vacillation Hill speaks of.

Tovar is by no means the only one to have received such treatment. Kusz shares her experiences with hyperinvisibility in her chapter "On Being Invisible". She starts out by saying "I am a big—a very big—woman. I mention this up front because a logical person might expect wide visibility to accompany my wide body" (Kusz 2005 [1999], 20). She gives examples of how size usually increases the visibility of an object – except when it comes to people, something different happens. "Not only are [fat people] not *more* visible because of our bigness, we are in fact *in*visible because of it" (Kusz 2005 [1999], 21). She attests to this by sharing different

personal experiences, such as how many people cannot tell her and her (fat) sister apart, even though there are clear, visible differences between them (Kusz wears an eye patch and her sister wears glasses, for one). Kusz compares her being indistinguishable from her sister to "the old racist attitude that 'all black (or Asian or Latin) people look alike'", arguing that it applies to fat people as well because it has the same effect, namely "[w]e look alike to other beings because they cannot see us at all" (Kusz 2005 [1999], 22). While this effect Kusz speaks of may be what is at the heart of social invisibility – the inability, or rather, the refusal, to view marginalized people as people, to recognize and acknowledge their humanity – when making this comparison, she fails to address how size and race intersect, i.e. how fat people of color, fat women of color in particular, have *increased* social invisibility. Her lack of accounting for race also shows when she jokes that her invisibility may lend itself to being a successful criminal. While a fat white woman may be socially invisibly because of her size and rendered neutral, unmarked, by her race, because whiteness has been constructed as default, a fat person of color is unlikely to be exempt from the increased surveillance and policing people of color are subjected to, so they cannot just "walk into any bank, rifle all the cash drawers, *ask the tellers for change*, and walk out without anyone remembering later [they] had been there" as Kusz imagines she could (2005 [1999], 23). Kusz's joking about being able to get away with something like a bank robbery is informed by her experiences of being treated as though she invisible. She shares how, while she flies frequently, she has almost never worn a seatbelt, nor has she ever been reprimanded for doing so. Flight attendants skip her aisle when doing their final checkup. "To test my invisibility theory, though, I've experimented with making my seatbeltlessness [*sic*] impossible to miss (…) The attendants approach, speak to the kid in front of me ('tray table up, please'), and pass me right by. I swear it, I know it, they think my seat is empty" (Kusz 2005 [1999], 23). Along similar lines, Jarrell recalls her experiences attending a nudist party. "I can't say I don't sense any discomfort about my body size in others—one woman (…) avoids looking at me. While others smile and introduce themselves, I feel as if I am invisible to her" (Jarrell 2005, 291). Jarrell thinks it is discomfort about her fatness that leads this woman to treat her as though she is invisible.

Kusz shares another brand of invisibility she experienced, particularly in her teenage years, as she became the confidante of the thin, popular kids. While spending time with them was "an education in compassion and in the ways people are so alike at the core (…) the listening act

was so painful" (Kusz 2005 [1999], 24). While she didn't have the words for it at the time, Kusz now understands the subtexts of those moments.

> "What I observe makes me sad even today, because it exposes, finally, the overarching falsehood of those times, the comforting myth I so willfully believed: that while speaking earnestly toward my face, [they] ultimately *saw* me there inside my body, identified me as substantial, coequal, real" (Kusz 2005 [1999], 24-25).

She describes believing to be visible to her thin, popular friends, to have been seen by them. I am reminded of Gailey's words, that "[t]o be seen by another person is an indication that we exist" (2014, 167). Kusz even writes that she believed, at the time, that they loved her, which she now corrects, saying that they may very well have loved her, but not at an equal, a peer. "No, I was more a beloved pet, a sin-eater, a mother even—a spacious void into which these young women could speak; I would never be a competitor" (Kusz 2005 [1999], 25). There is a lot in this statement to unpack. What interests me is how Kusz classifies herself and was classified by her thin friends as someone who could not be seen as competition. Competition between women is one of the functions of the beauty myth, as Wolf points out (2002 [1991], 14). She writes that "[u]nder the myth, the beauty of other women's bodies gives women pain (…) This balked relationship—which gives straight women confused, anxious pleasure when looking at another female body—leaves women in a lifelong anguish of competition" (Wolf 2002 [1991], 155). This is something that also becomes clear from how both Tisdale and Houston mention walking down the street and comparing their bodies to those of other women. While I would not argue that viewing other women as competitors is a win, the *reason* for Kusz's disqualification from the competition are clear. Her fatness excludes her from the realm of desirability. Therefore, she is no competition for the attention of men.

Kusz also describes being a confidante to boys, which, unlike with the girls she thought saw her as an equal, but actually did not, she already realized at the time that this was not a matter of being seen. "I also understood the nature—not just after the fact, but even then—of the small, steady ache in my chest. Truthfully, it required no great insight to interpret statements like 'Girls are so hard to talk to, I can never say anything important' as 'I can talk to you, but then you aren't officially a girl'" (Kusz 2005 [1999], 25). This statement and Kusz's interpretation thereof show how her fatness negated her femininity. Kusz now asks "'What is WRONG with you, that you let

people look THROUGH you like this?'" (2005 [1999], 25). Yet she also admits she knows how her teen self would respond, for "her choices were to sit murmuring into the phone ('Mm-hmm, I know just what you mean'), or to have no human contact at all, for who would think to party with a person who was neither tangible nor more audible than the breath from one's own lungs" (Kusz 2005 [1999], 25)? Following Butler (2004), Owen writes that "even when our bodies are hyper-visible, our needs, individuality, and legitimacy – even our very right to humanness – remain censored, and thus invisible" (2012, 299). Kusz's quiet murmuring into the phone, offering support to her 'friends' who do not see her, speaks of such censoring. A consequence of the dual hypervisibility and hyperinvisibility is that fat women "may fail to establish boundaries, render their own needs or desires invisible, or believe they deserve mistreatment or punishment because they are fat" (Gailey 2014, 55-56). Internalizing fat hatred and believing that the microaggressions and exclusions they face are their fault, fat women may indeed, like Kusz, let people look through them and not stand up for themselves. "On an individual or experiential level, hyper(in)visibility takes place in interactions, through the internalization of fat hatred or embodiment of fat, and through the emphasis or de-emphasis of corporeal needs and desires" (Gailey 2014, 15). It is through experiences such as the ones Kusz recollects that hyperinvisibility takes place.

Kusz notes that "it's not always that a fat person's 'spaciousness' commands *more* than its share of attention (…) instead, that very trait of bigness somehow diffuses her presence until she becomes amorphous, a cipher, an indistinct aura in the room" (2005 [1999], 27). It is our very size that renders us invisible, indistinct. Yet Kusz also points out that there are exceptions to this, when our size does make us hypervisible. The example she gives highlights exactly how fat women are both hyperinvisible and hypervisible at once. "I once had a new acquaintance of mine compliment me on my personality by saying, 'The more I know you, the less I seem to notice your weight'" (Kusz 2005 [1999], 27). Arguably, this comment roughly translates to 'the more I know you, the more I am able to view you as a person, instead of defining you solely by your size'. It is an echo of what Tisdale writes about a fat acquaintance who is bigger than she is: "I would rather stand with her and not against her, see her for all she is besides fat," which implies that her fatness is all Tisdale initially sees (2005 [1993], 10). Kusz's size was her defining trait to her acquaintance – and also something to move past, perhaps. It may be a stretch, but it seems like her fatness is something to 'forgive', to 'look past', like her personality had to 'make up' for

her size. Here, Kusz is reduced solely to her size, who she is as a person invisible, while at the same time, her size is hypervisible, it is the trait that marks her, defines her. Rather, she only becomes visible to this person after getting to know her more. Indeed, Jarrell and Sukrungruang echo in the introduction of *Scoot Over, Skinny*: "[f]at becomes an identifying characteristic that makes everything else about us irrelevant" (2005a, xvi). This is how hypervisibility and hyperinvisibility can be simultaneously at play.

Kusz also demonstrates how one's visibility increases when one's body size decreases, writing about a woman she knows "who is lately becoming visible" by weight-lifting and "somewhat coincidentally, becoming smaller, harder, more 'buff'" (2005 [1999], 27; 28). It is important to ask – becoming visible to whom? The answer, unsurprisingly, has to do with both desirability and the male gaze. "Occasionally now she is having experiences (…) in which men strike up unnecessary conversations, the sort where they make actual eye contact and then talk about anything (car problems, national news items, whatever) that will prolong the moment," something Kusz then identifies, from hearsay only as she points out, as 'checking someone out' (2005 [1999], 28). The first time this happened, the woman "honestly did the look-behind-you-to-see-who-else-is-there thing, and then nearly said to the guy, 'Who are you talking to? You can't see me'" (Kusz 2005 [1999], 28). Kusz admits that her initial response to this story "is to hate her with all-consuming wrath", which, while perhaps striking as shallow, reveals the very human desire to be *seen* – something fat women like Kusz only rarely get to experience (2005 [1999], 28). Kusz's many experiences of hyperinvisibility show how hyper(in)visibility is a dominant feature of fat women's embodiment.

I have shown in what ways hyper(in)visibility figures into the autobiographical accounts of fat female embodiment, not only in a lack of distinguishing between different fat people and feelings of being unseen, but also by how fat women's needs can go unseen and how fat women, internalizing fat hatred, ignore their own bodily needs and comforts. I have demonstrated that as one woman becomes thinner, she is suddenly more visible, and that how body size can be all people see before they can see the fat person themselves. Now I will move on to a discussion of how certain contexts play into hypervisibility and hyperinvisibility.

Safety in numbers – except on a scale

> "I felt like we were not only being socially punished for being fat but for liking ourselves enough that we would be seen with others who looked like us" (Tovar 2018, 21).

Hyper(in)visibility is context dependent. The presence of multiple fat women together is very likely to heighten the hypervisibility of their fatness. Gailey gives examples of when fat women face increased visibility, depending on context. It is specifically in contexts relating to food: shopping for food in grocery stores, ordering food in restaurants, or even walking down the street with food in hand increases fat women's visibility through more stares, disapproving looks and comments from strangers to police them. The examples I have given in the section addressing body shaming and body policing demonstrate this, too: having dinner at home, having lunch with friends, and going out for dinner with a date were all situations in which fat women were exposed to increased policing. Hypervisibility then leads to increased self-surveillance: such experiences of being stared at, policed, "lead to feelings of being constantly under the microscope, which in turn perpetuates their own self-discipline and surveillance" (Gailey 2014, 59). I will elaborate on this when discussing Solovay's chapter in a moment. First, I want to address how the presence of multiple fat women can increase hyper(in)visibility.

Tovar shares how she and five of her fat friends had lunch at the hotel restaurant of the conference mentioned previously. The waitress greeted them "by saying (no joke), 'Let me guess, you people all want separate checks'" (2018, 20). Tovar writes how she felt shocked by her language, and shares how her friends responded to this. "A hush overtook the entire table. The women I was with lowered their heads, and one after the other they offered their orders quietly and apologetically" (Tovar 2018, 20). The lowering of heads, the quieting voices, the speaking with apology – as if having to apologize for existing as fat and needing sustenance – all point towards shame. The profoundly deep shame that comes from a body that has been made known again and again as inferior, as a source of shame. The shame the women experienced in this moment is palpable, and for me as a fat reader, their reaction so relatable I need to take a break every time I read this section. Sometimes, this thesis is difficult for me to work on, because it hurts to read about these experiences. I can physically feel them in my own fat body. Tovar explains why her friends responded like this – perhaps, too, why I react to this section in similar ways. "This woman had triggered them. She had reminded all of us of moments throughout our lives where fatphobes had talked to us as if they wished we didn't exist, as if we were less than others" (Tovar 2018, 20). Fortunately for these women, Tovar did not play out the script in the

same way. Instead, she refused to order and asked the waitress why she was treating everyone at the table this way. What strikes me from this encounter is the following: fat people are not safer in groups. In fact, their safety seems to be more likely to decrease, the presence of multiple fat bodies increasing the hypervisibility of their fatness. Fat people may shy away from other fat people precisely because of this. While it may be safer to be together in the sense that fat people can find support together, the risk of being scrutinized, ridiculed, gawked at increases significantly.

> "I'd never experienced fatphobia in a collective way before. When I'm alone I am easy to dismiss, but when I'm part of a group of fat people, my existence creates a sense of threat that needs to be squashed. That day I felt like we were not only being socially punished for being fat but for liking ourselves enough that we would be seen with others who looked like us" (Tovar 2018, 21).

Not unlike the experiences I highlighted about body shaming in the previous chapter, the mere existence of a fat body, in particular multiple fat bodies, can warrant commentary from thin people. Since fat women are "breaking the rules (…) culture's immediate reaction is to punish them" (Hartley 2001, 66). Multiple fat women together will elicit this reaction even more quickly. I would suggest that in context relating to food – grocery shopping, ordering food, eating in public – and to exercise – going to a gym, working out in public – and in contexts where multiple fat women are together, fat women's bodies are increasingly hyper*visible*. Yet, like Tovar suggests, in other contexts – when alone and not in association with food or exercise – fat women are more likely to be rendered hyper*invisible*, like the experience Kusz has had many times in an airplane. I suspect it is because the 'knowingness' the fat female body elicits – the idea that fat women are "slothful, lazy, weak-willed, unreliable, unclean, unhealthy, deviant, and defiant" – are heightened when in a context that people associate with this knowingness (Murray 2005a, 266). Indeed, Alcoff writes that at times, "the deployment of visible difference can be dependent on the presence of other elements to become salient or all-determining" (1999, 24). This seems to be the case for fat women. Dolezal writes that a body can become a 'seen body' "as a result of some breach in conduct, appearance or action—governed by the unspoken yet pervasive norms and rules regarding bodily comportment" (2015, 41). Fat women eating in public transgress the 'rules of conduct' that exist for fat women. The act of eating as a fat woman

reminds other people more quickly of what they suppose they know about her: that she eats too much, that she is fat because she eats 'unhealthily'. It is important to note that it does not matter what the fat woman in question eats: when it is food that is deemed unhealthy, the suspicions on behalf of the other party are confirmed; when she eats food that is considered to be healthy, the act is read as an attempt to lose weight (see also Gailey 2014, 59). Working out a gym, for instance, will primarly be understood in a similar way: as an attempt to lose weight and become thin. As a consequence of such a breach in conduct, "invisibility is ruptured and the body enters one's field of awareness in an explicit way" (Dolezal 2015, 41). Fat women are then increasingly made to be aware of their bodies. Spending time with fellow fat women in public, being seen with food, or associated with physical exercise, will heighten the chance of such made-to-be-aware of their fatness. As a consequence, fat women may specifically avoid these situations. I will now focus on how fat women respond to being made hyper(in)visible.

Responding to hyperinvisibility

"Many of us are so frightened that we do not want to be seen" (Solovay 2005, 108).

Solovay writes about how fat people oftentimes respond to being treated like we cannot be seen. "Our culture creates a fiction about what is 'normal' and what is 'desirable.' If a person is fat that individual is written out of the script, never to be seen. And it gets worse. We, the Fat, are thankful for our banishment, forsaking the spotlight for obscurity and self-loathing" (Solovay 2005, 108). Indeed, the 'spotlight' (visibility) is what exposes us to the risk of humiliation, harassment, violence. This impacts how we carry ourselves, how we dress, how we move – and shame is a key factor in this. Dolezal writes the following: "[a]voiding and circumventing shame is a powerful (and often invisible) force in daily embodied life. The subject is constantly creating strategies to avoid incurring the antagonistic, reductive or judgmental gaze of the other" (2015, 46). Indeed, Solovay notes that many fat people "are so frightened that we do not want to be seen. We even choose not to see ourselves. We walk past mirrors with downcast eyes. We avoid photographs. We avoid crowds. We hide in our large clothes. We dream of being less, of being weightless" (2005, 108). This avoidance of shame, in this case produced by a culture that constructs and identifies fatness as something shameful, "occurs on a micro-level, in the minutiae of day-to-day encounters, in skill acquisition, in action and motor intentionality, and in more

long-term strategies" (Dolezal 2015, 46). The acts Solovay lists are examples of day-to-day strategies to avoid shame. All of these acts speak of a fear of being seen, because being seen exposes us to shame. Our bodies that are made to be the source of shame, which is why fatphobia has such a profound effect on how we physically carry our bodies and how we look at our bodies – something I will elaborately address in the following chapter. It is important to note the connection between the negative body knowingness around fatness and this response to hyper(in)visibility. Murray expands on the tension between this knowingness and the hypervisible status of fat women's bodies, noting that

> "[b]ecause of this negative 'knowledge' of fatness in our culture, most people don't want to have to see fatness out on display; our initial urge wants it to be hidden, to be made invisible. And yet, it is irrevocably 'seen,' hypervisible, and the cultural meanings of its fat 'bodily markers' are always known" (2005a, 273).

It is because fatness is known in particular ways and the bodily markers of our fatness (supposedly) reveal something about us that we, fat people, feel the urge to hide, despite the irrevocability of the negative body knowingness of fatness. We do not want to be seen, for our fatness is what subjects us to shame, nor does the world around us want to see our fatness, for it 'knows' our fat as a source of disgust, shame, and failure of morality and fulfillment of bodily gender norms. The avoidance of crowds, mirrors, photographs, and the hiding of our bodies in loose clothing, as such, needs to be understood in light of this negative body knowingness. Solovay is not the only one to mention such strategies: the act of not looking in the mirror or only doing so selectively has made an appearance in the works I have analyzed numerous times, as I will show in the next chapter. As such strategies demonstrate, hyper(in)visibility can lead to shame-induced self-policing.

Temporary bodies

"In the future, I am fat" (Tovar 2018, 101).

Another strategy that the authors whose works I have analyzed employ in response to hyper(in)visibility relates to temporality. Gailey argues that the distancing oneself from one's fat, the "time-honored fat girl thing" of "living from the neck up" that Murray writes about, is what the hyper(in)visibility fat women face leads to (Murray 2005a, 271; Gailey 2014, 33). Distancing

oneself from one's fat can be done by viewing one's fat as "not the 'real me'" or as temporary (Gailey 2014, 33). The former is very clearly present in Jarrell's chapter, which I will analyze in the next chapter. The latter is something I will turn to now. Gailey writes that "[t]he cultural condemnation and denigration of fat typically leads many fat persons to view their bodies as a temporary state to be overcome" (2014, 34). Fat women "can embrace the identity (become fat), attempt to neutralize the identity (fat is temporary), or symbolically distance their selves from the identity (I'm more than fat). However, the latter two options both involve hiding an aspect of one's self" (Gailey 2014, 35). Tovar's work clearly demonstrates how this works.

> "In the dreams I have of my future, I am fat. This simple fact was hard won. For years and years, I could not accept the possibility that I would be fat forever. I had internalized fatphobia so deeply that I believed my life wasn't worth living if I wasn't going to someday transform into a thin person" (Tovar 2018, 104).

This statement reveals how heavily the thin ideal weighed on Tovar, impacting how she could imagine the future. Tovar connects her future imagined thin body to distancing herself from her body. "My obsession with my thin future was about disembodiment. It was about disassociating completely from myself, the present and my body" (2018, 105). This is linked to what I have discussed in detail in the theoretical framework of this thesis: the split between one's body and one's self that many fat women experience. It also relates to what Bartky points out is a key component to female embodiment in general, which is that women are made to look upon every aspect of their bodies as either in need of alteration or desperate attempts to conserve its current state, as addressed in chapter 2 (1990, 40). Murray explicates on the need to view one's fat body as temporary with clarity:

> "The act of living fat is itself an act of defiance, an eschewal of discursive modes of bodily being. Seemingly, the fat body exists as a deviant, perverse form of embodiment and, in order to be accorded personhood, is expected to engage in a continual process of transformation, of becoming and, indeed, unbecoming. The process of transformation entails a constant disavowal of one's own flesh. The fat body can only exist (however uncomfortably) as a body aware of its own necessary impermanence. Consequently, in experiencing my fat body there is a sense of suspension, of deferral, of hiatus. One is waiting to become 'thin,' to become 'sexual,' waiting to become" (2005c, 155).

Fat women must necessarily experience their bodies as temporarily fat. Tovar explains: "[t]he fantasy of and longing for a thin body became a way of making the oppression that was breaking my heart, breaking me, more bearable" (2018, 106). Viewing her body as temporarily fat was a strategy to cope with the oppression she is subjected to, creating a distance between herself and the fat body that is made to be the source of a shame that breaks her. The significance of the title of Tovar's book, *You Have The Right To Remain Fat,* cannot go unnoticed when considering this. You have the right not just to be fat, but to *remain* fat. The right to be fat now and the right to be fat in the future. Going back to her earlier fantasies of a thin future, Tovar writes:

> "I violently deleted my true self from the story by always focusing on an anesthetized future filled with other people who also knew how to conform successfully. I never thought of those people as good or bad. I thought of them as real, and my fat self as an in-between space I was temporarily occupying" (2018, 105).

She viewed her fat body – and therefore, herself – as temporary, an in-between state. Dieting, something different authors have done at some point in their lives, such as Tisdale, Tovar, and Solovay, is a practice that makes salient this view of the body as one of transformation. It is the epitome of viewing fatness as temporary, as a direct attempt to become smaller. Daily practices such as eating a smaller plate "reiterate to the fat woman herself and those around her that her body is in a process of transformation" (Murray 2005a, 274). Again, this is connected to the negative body knowingness that exists about fatness. Murray explains that a fat woman meeting friends for cake and coffee and then not ordering any cake "preempts the response her fat body elicits" (2005a, 274). This is a form of self-surveillance: fearing punishment in response to our fatness, fat women may police themselves by dieting. The fat woman not eating cake "is not allowing her body to speak *to* the knowledge society believes it has of fat, but is instead intervening in the way the fat body speaks about itself by speaking *for* it, which denies the reality of that fat body" (Murray 2005a, 274). Again, the way the fat female body is known in cultural discourse elicits this reaction, this intervention on behalf of one's fat body. It is important to understand that this view of fatness as temporal stems from a culture that inflates thinness with beauty, and therefore, successful fulfillment of feminine gender norms. Obtaining thinness, if not now, in an imagined future, is not so much about thinness as it is about no longer being subjected to fatphobia. "I realize now that all those times I had said, 'I want to be thin,' I actually meant: I

want to be loved. I want to be happy. I want to be seen. I want to be free" (Tovar 2018, 111). Tovar sees that it is not thinness she sought all those years: it is happiness, freedom, and to be seen – the latter increasingly unobtainable for fat women in a culture that despises fatness, rendering fat women hyper(in)visible.

Conclusion

Fat women are rendered socially invisible while their bodies are often hypervisible. Different authors detail experiences of hyperinvisibility, ranging from being mistaken for other fat women to simply being ignored. Context can determine whether fat women suffer increased visibility or invisibility. Any situation relating to food, such as eating in public or purchasing food, whether in a grocery store or in a restaurant, as well as contexts relating to physical movement like attending a work-out class or jogging in public, can increase fat women's hypervisibility. Such contexts will heighten the association between the fat female body and the supposed knowledge that is 'read' on it: that the fat woman is unhealthy because she does not eat healthily and/or exercise. Even behavior that is seen as healthy, such as eating supposedly healthy food or working out, will primarily be seen as an attempt on the fat woman's behalf to become thin. Fat women together will also suffer increased hyper(in)visibility, as Tovar's experience shows, at times even warranting stares and pointing fingers. Hyper(in)visibility can increase self-surveillance in fat women, in an attempt to avoid being policed and humiliated. In response to hyper(in)visibility many fat women choose not to look at themselves. Other ways of coping with hyper(in)visibility are thinking of one's fat as not part of oneself, as I will address in more detail in the next chapter, and viewing one's fat as temporary. Doing so will create a distance between the flesh that subjects one to humiliation and oneself. It can be understood as a way of coping with fatphobia. Now I will examine how the authors write about how they feel about their bodies and how they interact with the dominant discourses that shape how their bodies are made known to them.

Chapter 5: The F-Word

In this section of my analysis I will focus on how the different authors write about the embodied experience of fatness. I will look at how meanings are produced through the material-semiotic relation – and how they are untangled and troubled. The authors whose work mostly included a discussion of their embodied experiences of fatness and the language they use in reference to their fat bodies are Peck, who discusses her experiences as a fat woman attending a gym, Houston, who shares different stories about her body and how she physically carries herself, Jarrell, who recounts her experience of going nuding and whose hatred for her own body takes on violent forms, Tisdale, who discusses her struggles with dieting and letting go thereof, and Tovar, who shares how her relationship with her body changed over the years. I will start by looking at how the different authors write about how they feel in their body and about their body, followed by how a mind/body split emerges in some of the autobiographical writings. I will then move to the use of language to signify fatness, how they describe their bodies and parts thereof, and then examine how specific shapes of a body signify fatness according to their views, thus analyzing how the authors define fatness, where they locate fatness, and how they embody fatness.

Inhabiting your body with apology

"Out of habit, I start apologizing" (Houston 2005 [1999], 280).

Fatness is supposed to be 'acted out' in specific ways. A fat person must act appropriately, dress and move according to their size – or so does the world remind us time and again. Fat women in particular are made to inhabit their bodies in apologetic ways. To inhabit your body with apology means to carry it in specific ways: to always make it as small as possible, to tuck in, suck in a breath, to make room, something I have touched upon in the previous chapters. I write 'inhabit', a word that can suggest a split between mind and body, but as addressed in the theoretical framework of this thesis, such split does not exist. Houston's chapter in the fat non-fiction anthology is aptly titled "Out of Habit, I Start Apologizing". In this chapter Houston describes different experiences relating to her body, feeling her body. She opens with the memory of three elaborate spa days at a hotel, describing how the massages and spa treatments made her feel in her body. "It is so unlike me to have so much attention paid to my body, to pamper and indulge this fleshy mass that I have spent my whole life trying to reduce, or reshape, or disguise (…) every insecurity I have ever harbored has had to do with the shape of my

body" (Houston 2005 [1999], 270). Her body has been something to reduce, reshape, disguise, which shows throughout the chapter, as Houston struggles with internalized fatphobia at every turn. It is in Houston's account of being on the receiving end of the Rosen method, a combination of both psychotherapy and body massage, that I see how fatphobia has made Houston carry her body. Wendy, the technician treating Houston, comments on how she physically holds and supports her body:

> "'You have such strong legs,' Wendy says, 'but you are using them to hold up the rest of your body, and that's not what they are for.' (…) 'You are pulling your body up with your shoulders,' Wendy says, 'pushing and pulling, when you should only be supporting; no wonder everything is too tight' (…) I am already fantasizing about next hour's foot massage when Wendy says, 'Is there some good reason you've convinced the rest of your body your hips and stomach and pelvis don't even exist'" (Houston 2005 [1999], 270)?

Houston describes herself as someone whose every insecurity stems from her body and its shape. It is no wonder that the way she physically holds herself reflects this. The technician's remarks show how Houston supports her body in a way that masks her stomach, pelvis, and hips. It is no coincidence that these are also viewed as offending body parts. I am reminded of the question I am unable to answer definitively: where is fatness located on the body? Fatness is indeed a combination of size and shape, as I will elaborate on in this chapter. For Houston, the way she carries herself demonstrates how she tries to make herself smaller. Wendy's observations that Houston has convinced her body that certain parts of her do not even exist are telling: apparently, Houston has carried herself this way long enough for her body as a whole to adjust to this way of holding itself. It is simply habit. One which is not hard to trace: as cited before, Houston's mother told her every single day to hold her tummy in (Houston 2005 [1999], 276). So, it appears, she did. As pointed out by feminist scholar Goda Klumbyte and feminist philosopher Katrine Smiet in "Bodies Like Our Own? The Dynamics of Distance and Closeness in Online Fat Porn", other people's attitudes are "not external to lived experience, but instead societal imaginaries are literally incorporated and influence how one acts and engages in the world" (2016 [2015], 127). The attitude of Houston's mother – and most likely, other people as well – is not external to her lived experience. Instead, Wendy's remarks show that Houston has indeed literally incorporated this attitude. I am again reminded of Owen's words when she explains how fat people, despite

"quite literally taking up more physical space (…) reduce or ignore our expectations of comfort and inclusion, minimize ourselves, tuck our bodies into tiny nooks, fold ourselves inward in order to limit the insult of our bulks" (2012, 299). Such tucking and folding can lead to Houston's situation: a life lived convincing her body some parts of it do not exist.

At the end of her chapter, Houston describes an encounter that made her reconsider how she relates to her body. She made a visit to the gynecologist, writing that "the nurse makes me get on the scale. Out of habit, I start apologizing" (Houston 2005 [1999], 280). The doctor tells her there is something that troubles him about what he sees from his examination, so he leaves for the lab.

> "No diagnosis yet and already the regret is settling in. I should have loved my body better, should have loved its curves and folds and softness, should have practiced standing with my pelvis the way Wendy told me to (…) When the nurse leaves the room I pull the hospital gown to one side and look down at myself, the inch of extra flesh on each hip, the way my belly pushes out in a particularly annoying way that makes the occasional bystander ask me if I'm pregnant" (Houston 2005 [1999], 280).

The fact that Houston writes of her hips as including "extra" flesh shows she deems them unnecessary, as if her body has no use for every single part. The fact that a certain way a belly can curve warrants strangers to ask about whether someone is pregnant reflects how (most likely) thin people lack understanding of how fat bodies work, and that again, not only a body's size but also its shape matters in how the world interacts with it. Again, body knowingness relevant to consider here. "Via the regime of visibility, we believe we have access to the subjectivity of others, that we 'know' the other based on the bodily markers that have discursively come to signify certain 'truths'" (Murray 2005a, 274). The way Houston's belly curves prompts strangers to not only assume that she is pregnant but directly address this assumption, too. A certain kind of truth is thought to be found on the specific curves of her body. The doctor comes back with the news that he made a mistake, she is in fact, healthy as an ox, and leaves once more. "I let my legs go loose and try to stand using only my pelvis. I drop my shoulders as low as they will go and try to think about transferring my body weight (this takes tremendous concentration) to my hips. I take one more long look in the mirror before putting on my clothes" (Houston 2005 [1999], 281).

With these words, Houston ends her chapter – perhaps starting a next chapter in her own life where she tries to inhabit her fat body with something other than apology.

I keep thinking about the title of this chapter, "Out of Habit, I Start Apologizing". The *apologetic* way of inhabiting a body not only appears in Houston's chapter, but also, for instance, in Tovar's account of how her fellow fat friends responded to a (collective) microaggression, which I discussed in the previous chapter. As such, this can seem like the obvious focus of my interest, but it is actually the *habit* that intrigues me more. The fact that this way of being, this way fat women are taught to carry our bodies – always with apology and the supposedly appropriate sense of shame – is habitual to us, something built over time, once taught, now subconscious behavior, for the most part. How does body shame become habitual? In order to further my understanding how this way of relating to one's body comes to exist, I will now turn to Tovar, who describes her changing relationship with her body.

Wrong bodies

"My body used to belong to me" (Tovar 2018, 7).

The opening line of Tovar's work that opens this section already cuts straight to the chase of how she relates to her body, poignantly getting to the heart of the matter. Tovar describes how her body used to be just that – a body. She describes the movements she made as a young child – jiggling, wobbling – and the sheer pleasure she found in doing so. Then something shifted – she was taught shame, her body was taken. Alas, "I would lose the sense that my body was mine at all" (Tovar 2018, 8). She could no longer make the same movements in the same way. Tovar describes this process as follows:

> "All the freedom and wonder I felt became supplanted by a sharp sense that I had failed at something big. And that it was my job to fix it—to fix me. Rather than learning to trust my instincts and value myself, I learned that the size of my body was the only thing that mattered about me" (2018, 9).

In this lesson, Tovar's fatness becomes her sole defining characteristic, preceding all others. Tovar begins to describe the process of bodies – women's bodies in particular – being hijacked, bodies getting snatched, shifting (seemingly) for good one's relationship to their body in such a

profound way that very few women indeed will not recognize this idea Tovar describes, that their body is wrong.

> "Through a series of violent, culturally sanctioned events—so commonplace that women simply call them 'life'—my innate relationship to my body was taken from me and replaced with something foreign and alien and harmful. My relationship to my body was replaced with one toxic idea: your body is wrong" (Tovar 2018, 9).

Tovar is correct in asserting that the idea that her body is wrong is commonplace for women. Her words echo Tisdale's account of what starting to like her body reminds her of, as I discussed in chapter 3. "That first feeling of liking my body (…) was alarming, because it was the way I'd felt as a child, before the world had intervened. Because surely I was wrong; I knew, I'd known for so long, that my body wasn't all right this way" (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 17). Just like Tovar's body used to belong to her – but now does not – Tisdale used to like her body, before the world intervened. The repercussions of the lesson that her body is wrong are great. Tovar writes:

> "[t]he years I spent being taught fatphobia by my peers growing up, and then by media, destroyed my sense of self. By the time the boys at my school were through teaching me that my greatest accomplishment in life would be to lose enough weight to date one of them, I had no idea what I actually needed or wanted. All that was left in the wake of my dazzling and silly personality was a desire to never feel like an outsider again" (2018, 70).

The connection between Tovar's embodied experience of fatness and how she was policed by others – her male peers in particular – cannot be emphasized enough. The belief of women's internalized inferiority "is so entrenched and all-encompassing that it affects even each spoonful of food we eat" (Tovar 2018, 59). I am precisely interested in investigating how this occurs – how the beliefs women are taught about our worth and our humanity trickle down and impact the contents of our spoon and the way we do or do not look in the mirror.

Splitting mind and body

> "I am not a fat person. I am not. I am smart and funny and pretty and likeable. I am competent and hardworking" (Jarrell 2005, 286).

I want to not only consider how the authors whose works I have analyzed move their bodies, but how they look at their bodies. In the autobiographical accounts of fat female

embodiment, I recognize that multiple authors experience a need to distance oneself from one's fat body. "By fussing endlessly over my body, I've ceased to inhabit it. I'm trying to reverse this equation now, to trust my body and enter it again with a whole heart," writes Tisdale (2005 [1993], 18). By treating her body like a project to be managed, Tisdale experiences a split between mind and body. "Sometimes I'm afraid the main reason I spend half of my life outdoors is simply because there aren't any mirrors" (Houston 2005 [1999], 277). This admission shows that for Houston, her body is a problem to avoid, something she does not want to see. From her description of how she looks at her body in the mirror, I can see that Houston experiences a sense of alienation from her body and splits her body into good parts and bad parts. "The trick has always been to look *only selectively* into the mirror. To see the bright eyes, the shining hair, the whispered print of the blouse falling open to reveal soft tanned cleavage, the shapely curve of a taut muscular calf [emphasis added]" (Houston 2005 [1999], 273). Selected parts of her body may be looked upon without dread, but her body as a whole elicits no such reaction. In Houston's opinion, it is to be avoided. Therefore, the significance of the long look in the mirror Houston mentions at the end of her chapter cannot go unnoticed.

In contrast to the way Houston looks (or does not look) in the mirror, Solovay shares how she relates to her body. About her own experiences with fatphobic microaggressions, Solovay writes the following: "I face discrimination on the airplane. I get harassment on the street. I recognize it for what it is—intolerance" (2005, 109). But this does not impact the way Solovay moves the way it does for many other fat people: "I choose to look myself in the eye when I pass a mirror. I choose life. I rejoice in being seen. No matter how hostile the climate, I will not disappear" (Solovay 2005, 110). Importantly, Solovay's words demonstrate that looking herself in the eye and being seen are deliberate choices she makes. She is determined to not let a culture that hates her body and wants her to feel shame influence how she feels about her body, no matter the hostility of that culture. These are deliberate decisions on her end, which, to me, suggests that the default way of moving in, with, and looking upon her body would involve the opposite of rejoicing in being seen. "My body and mind are allies and refuse to be played against each other by internalizing that hatred. My own government has declared a war on fat, but I am at peace with my body" (Solovay 2005, 109-110). The term 'allies' does imply that body and mind are separate entities to Solovay, but her words reveal a desire to not play along with the script. Her earlier reference to looking herself in the eye when passing a mirror can, in light of the

experiences of other authors, be seen as a way of going against the disembodiment that characterizes fat women's way of moving through the world.

Unlike Solovay, Jarrell and Sukrungruang do not seem to experience a 'peace' with their fat bodies. They write in the introduction about fat people that "our bellies protrude, our chins drape, our legs rub together; our skin chafes and sweat puddles between the folds of our blubber. Yes, our bodies are fat, but so are our inner selves" (Jarrell and Sukrungruang 2005a, xii). Not only does this final statement indicate that they view the body as split from the self, apparently there is such a thing as a fat inner self. In making this assertion, the negative feelings expelled onto the fat body are internalized, made to say something about a person's sense of self. Not only the introduction to the fat non-fiction anthology includes this sentiment. One author who, as the opening quote of this section shows, has a difficult time reuniting how she feels about herself with how she feels about her body is Jarrell. In her chapter, she asks "isn't fat, after all, the fault of the fatty [*sic*] who wears it?" (Jarrell 2005, 285). While there is a lot to unpack from this statement, such as how it alludes to individual blame and failure, I want to focus on its implications that fatness is excess, something separate from the person themselves, something added onto a would-be thin person. It is deemed unnecessary. "I fear I can never ever exercise enough to *escape the fat*. Or if I could, all I could do is exercise and nothing else (…) From morning to evening I would move, shake this body, and the fat would cling to me, claw at me, laugh in my face [emphasis added]" (Jarrell 2005, 286). Again, Jarrell writes about fatness as something separate from herself, as something that can cling to her. She writes about what she feels as she observes (or, in her words, "admires") thin, "sculpted" people while they play a game:

> "as I study their definition and agility, their symmetry and mobility, I am awed. I am jealous and resentful. I am frustrated and angry. Since puberty I've worked at manipulating my body. The harder I worked to be skinny the faster I grew fatter. The deeper my longing to be beautiful the more ugly the reflection in the mirror" (Jarrell 2005, 284).

Jarrell conflates fatness with ugliness and thinness with beauty. It is obvious that she struggles very much to do anything but hate her fatness, and that she tries to distance herself from her fatness because of that. "I am a great talker to myself (…) But I am broken today. The inner

coach is silent. The fat lady is screaming. 'Shut up in there,' I yell back. 'Shut up!'" (Jarrell 2005, 286). Jarrell is not the fat lady she writes about. This fat lady resides within her. Perhaps the fat lady is who Jarrell and Sukrungruang alluded to in their introduction when they mentioned fat inner selves. Jarrell is desperate to do anything but reunite with the fat lady. "I hit myself: first against sternum. I heave. Sob. Beat my belly. Pummel it. I hate this body. I hate it. I am not a fat person. I am not. I am smart and funny and pretty and likeable. I am competent and hardworking" (Jarrell 2005, 286). It is her belly that takes the brunt of her hatred of her body. Jarrell stating that she is not a fat person because she is smart, funny, pretty, likeable, competent, and hardworking, shows exactly what the world believes fat people cannot be. In order to understand these comments, I turn to the concept of body knowingness once more.

"It is precisely because of my knowledge of the way my fat body is coded that I experience a need to *remove* myself from that flesh, a need to be *apart* from that body" (Murray 2005a, 274). Jarrell's need to distance herself from her fat body stems from her need to distance herself from the negative meanings expelled onto fat women's bodies. I am again reminded of Moon and Sedgwick's words: "incredibly, in this society everyone who sees a fat woman feels they know something about her that she doesn't herself know" (1990, 27). Yet, this feeling Moon and Sedgwick write about, directly linked to body knowingness and the regime of visibility, is, of course, an illusion, as it *is* made known to fat women. Thin people simply assume they know something fat women do not know (after all, if fat women knew what their bodies meant, surely they would do everything in their power to change their bodies – and succeed in making the appropriate changes?). Jarrell knows exactly what other people feel they know about her. Yet she knows it not to be true. Jarrell is all those things the world told her she could not be as a fat woman, which is why she writes that "[t]his body, this fat bitch of a body, betrays me. Lies about me. I hate it" (2005, 286). The reason her body lies about her is because in the fatphobic society she lives in, her fat body tells a story of failure of the will, of laziness, ugliness, of inferiority – a story Jarrell knows not to be true, because she knows she is smart, funny, pretty, likeable, competent, and hardworking. Gailey notes that by treating body and mind as though they are separate entities, one is

> "able to symbolically distance who they are from the stereotypes that many hold about fat people. However, the mind/body split contributes to self-objectification and

> hyper(in)visibility when fat women see their bodies as abject or as objects of revulsion—something separate from the *real* them" (2014, 58).

It is hard to interpret Jarrell's statement that she is not a fat woman because she is smart, funny, pretty, likeable, competent, hardworking, any other way. She views her fat body as not her real self. Jarrell's struggle with her body is rampant, reaches violent levels.

> "Without mercy, I beat. I am my own punching bag. I beat because I am fat. I beat because I won't quit: I won't quit eating; I won't quit dieting. I beat because I won't own my fat. I beat because I won't stop fighting my fat. I beat because I lie to myself and weigh myself and do what all good American girls should do: try to lose weight (…) I am not just any person. I am fat and flawed. I am undeserving and unforgiveable" (Jarrell 2005, 287; 288).

Her fatness is what renders her undeserving. Her fatness is unforgiveable. As her words demonstrate, Jarrell does have the desire to 'own' her fat and to stop fighting it – again, the formulation she uses shows she views her fat as something disconnected from her. She expresses a hope to reunite with her body, close the gap she has created:

> "I feel hope, hope that I'm not as repulsive as I've believed (…) I feel hope that maybe I can play from inside this body; move around from inside here; have fun from in here. That maybe I could love and make love from in here. I feel hope that I could live in this bulky body as is, no size contingencies attached, a hope that maybe I'm more than the big fat sum of my weight, that I am simply, but sizably, human" (Jarrell 2005, 291-292).

I think this speaks of a desire not to be rid of her fatness as much as a desire to be rid of the way she is reduced to nothing but her fatness.

Jarrell is not the only author to experience a loathing so intense it compels her to harm herself. Solovay opens her chapter "Now You See Me, Now You Don't" by writing about a fat woman who underwent weight-loss surgery and passed away as a result. She compares her relationship to her fat body to the other woman's, such as the age they both started dieting (eight years old for Solovay, seven years old for the woman she writes about), based on how she has heard this woman speak about herself, and how she imagines she must feel. "I became a performer, placing my fat body onstage under bright lights where I could be seen. She shrunk

from view. She writes, 'I wanted to hide. I wanted to die.' I bet she lowered her eyes when she walked past a mirror" (Solovay 2005, 101). As Solovay demonstrates, they both relate to their bodies in different ways – but Solovay empathizes with the woman. When contemplating having the surgery, she shares with Solovay it was not hard to come to a decision: "I was so miserable that I thought, 'Being dead would be preferable to this. This isn't living'" (2005, 101). Solovay admits she could relate to this feeling. "At the age of ten I was so miserable, I made a bargain with myself: If I was still fat in five months, then I could commit suicide. I thought I was being generous giving myself an extra shot at getting thin" (Solovay 2005, 101). I wish those words surprised me, that I could not fully understand that desperation. But this world makes for a very uninhabitable place for fat women. Jarrell's and Solovay's writings show a desperate longing to be able to exist as they are without their fatness being signified as lazy, immoral, failing, inferior, undesirable. Now that I have shown how the fat women whose autobiographical works I have analyzed can think of themselves as separate from their bodies, I want to move onto the use of language and how that contributes to how they feel about and in their bodies.

The F-word

> "'You're not *fat*! You're just—' What? Plump? Big-boned? Rubenesque? I'm just *not thin*."
> (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 8).

I will now consider how the authors define fatness, how they differentiate between fat and thin, and what language they use to connote fatness. As I alluded to in the theoretical framework, the definition problem and the language problem are connected. The language used to describe fatness can vary wildly. While some fat people have reclaimed the word fat, others very much struggle with that very same word. This struggle is evident in the autobiographical works I analyzed, which is why I will now elaborate on the language the authors used to connote fatness and how they define fatness.

Some authors do not write about size as much as about weight. Weight is not *visible*, yet the way these authors write about it would make one think it is. One such author is Tisdale, whose use of language when discussing fatness I will now analyze. Tisdale opens her chapter by stating her weight, about which she later writes that she "said it all at once, trying to forget it and

take away its power; [she] said it to be done being scared" (2005 [1993], 9). Her weight is something she feels the urge to defend: "I have to bite my tongue not to seek reassurance, not to defend myself, not to plead" she writes in relation to her weight (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 9). There is something to her weight that induces fear, that holds power over Tisdale. She writes that "the number on the scale became [her] totem, more important than [her] experience—it was layered, metaphorical, *metaphysical*, and it had bewitching power" (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 3). Her weight would determine how she felt about herself. "I would weigh myself with foreboding, and my weight would determine how went the rest of my day, my week, my life" (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 5). The act of weighing herself impacts how she feels about her body and about herself. Tisdale is not the only author who is affected greatly by what the number on the scale says: "I remove every extraneous article of clothing and all accessories and submit myself to the doctor's scale, to the mechanical contraption that has been given the power to determine the quality of relationship I have with my body" (Jarrell 2005, 287). Implied is that the higher the number, the worse the relationship Jarrell has with her body, or perhaps how much or how little the number changes over the course of time. Tisdale is aware that her weight is not the real issue. "A lot of my misery over my weight wasn't about how I looked at all. I was miserable because I believed *I* was bad, not my body" (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 6-7). Tisdale's (perceived) fatness becomes that on which all feelings of 'being bad' are expelled on. As I noted, weight is not visible. People may guess and assume someone's weight, but we do not move on this earth stuck on a scale attached to wheels. There is no number floating above our heads, indicating how many pounds we weigh at any given moment. So what is it about weight that influences how Tisdale feels in her body, about her body? It is not the weight itself, but what the number comes to signify that I would suggest is the true determining factor. Tisdale writes: "If I tell someone my weight, I change in their eyes: I become bigger or smaller, better or worse, depending on what that number, my weight, means to them" (2005 [1993], 3). The act of telling someone her weight seems to matter a lot to Tisdale. It either grants her forgiveness or becomes that which condemns her. It is interesting that according to Tisdale, her size changes in the eyes of other people based on her weight. It is the same body, yet depending on the viewer's opinions on the matter, her body is interpreted differently, takes on a new meaning. This is not only demonstrative of the ambiguity of fatness that Murray writes about, which I will come back to momentarily, but also of how much identity is shaped in

interactions, shaped by how other people interpret a person – and in that interpretation, one 'becomes', in a sense, what the Other projects onto them.

Next to authors who mostly write about weight instead of size, there are authors who talk 'around' the word fat. In "Queen of the Gym", Peck describes herself as "[a]lways having been a woman of size", as "I have never been a small woman" (2005 [2002], 52; 51). The reader is made to read between the lines that she is fat. She does use the word fat in reference to herself on occasion, including in the title of the book this chapter first appeared in, but often uses euphemisms. Peck writes about the people going to the same gym as she does as follows: "[t]here are women of all shapes and sizes—up to a point (…) There are chubby women and postpartum moms and stocky women and lumpy women…but there are very few truly fat women" (2005 [2002], 48). I wonder what kind of body Peck would define as fat. Looking at this quote, according to Peck there is chubby and lumpy, but neither of those are truly fat. Is fat then a word reserved for those who are undeniably fat? And what makes their fatness undeniable? When does one get to that point of undeniability? Who decides what is fat? Is fatness, like beauty, in the eye of the beholder? Is fatness a number on a scale? Or is it up to each individual person to either claim that label or not? Is fatness something you can self-identify as? If so, the liberty of choice seems only to be reserved for those on the smaller end of the fat spectrum, those whose fatness *is* up for debate, because there are people whose fatness will never be a matter of personal conviction. The world will irrevocably treat them as fat. Indeed, Tovar's experiences echo this when she goes back to school after a summer of starving herself when she was eleven years old. She writes: "I had lost weight, but I hadn't lost enough. To my horror and surprise, *I was still everyone's idea of fat* [emphasis added]" (Tovar 2018, 41). Tovar aptly shows how one's personal conception of fatness does not always matter, if at all. I repeat Murray's words once more: "[t]he idea of a unified, unambiguous identity is untenable" (2005a, 270). If there is one thing these questions highlight, it is just how ambiguous fatness is as a category.

Tisdale explicitly addresses the question of language, writing that: "[w]hen I say to someone 'I'm fat,' I hear, 'Oh no! You're not *fat*! You're just—' What? Plump? Big-boned? Rubenesque? I'm just *not thin*. That's crime enough" (2005 [1993], 8). In a way, Tisdale is right – not being thin is crime enough. However, just how 'not thin' someone is *does* make a difference in how severely one is punished for the 'crime'. When writing about other fat people, Tisdale mostly uses the word 'big', but sometimes fat. As discussed previously, she mainly writes

about weight instead of size. But the contrast between how Tisdale writes about her own body, which she perceives as fat, but not that fat, and the bodies of a thin and a fat acquaintance cannot go unnoticed. "Recently I was talking with a friend who is *naturally slender* about a mutual acquaintance who is *quite large* (…) When you are as fat as our acquaintance is, you are primarily, fundamentally, seen as fat. It is your essential characteristic [emphasis added]" (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 9). This statement reveals how the acquaintance Tisdale writes about is hyper(in)visible because of her fatness, for it is in Tisdale's view how she is fundamentally seen. The slenderness of Tisdale's friend is seen as natural, whereas her acquaintance is not granted such naturalness. Is it not possible she is 'naturally large'? Fatness is seen as a deviation of the norm. As though the sentiment that 'inside every fat person, there is a thin person waiting to be free' is *true* – fatness is unnatural, cannot be accepted as a neutral fact of nature. I want to highlight that through Tisdale's discussion of her fat acquaintance, I am once again reminded of how it is through social interactions one becomes fat. Tisdale notes that "the world never lets up when you are her size; she cannot walk to the bank without risking insult (…) I have no doubt she would be rid of the fat if she could be. If my left-handedness invited the criticism her weight does, I would want to cut that hand off" (2005 [1993], 10). This is a sharp contrast with Tisdale's own body. "I know that the world, even if it views me as overweight (and I'm not sure it really does), clearly makes a distinction between me and this very big woman" (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 10). The fact that Tisdale is not sure if the world views her as "overweight" already speaks of her privilege. Her account of the difference between her and the fatter woman she *speaks for*, which I hope does not go unnoticed, shows that fatness is a spectrum and there are concrete, immediate differences between how the world interacts with people based on their size. The larger one's body, the more one will be made a target of fatphobic microaggressions.

Excess flesh

> "[She] has three extra people tucked under her skin" (Peck 2005 [2002], 46-47).

I will now address the way different authors describe their body beyond that initial F-word, whether literal or through connotations. The language they use reveals how they view their body. It is important to note how often words connoting a wrongness in terms of a body's shape

appear – which does not come as a surprise, considering how many authors such as Tovar recall how they were taught that their body was wrong, as addressed before – as well as any language alluding to a body being 'too much'. Peck imagines how fellow gymgoers think about her in the opening quote of this section, assuming they view her body as excessive. She writes about one of the thin women in the gym that "she can't be carrying more than six ounces of unnecessary body fat" (Peck 2005 [2002], 48). Earlier I wrote that we do not walk this earth on scales, that weight is not directly visible, yet Peck does make her own assessment here. I find it important to point out that Peck writes about body fat in terms of necessity. Who decides what body fat is necessary and what is not? Who has claimed the authority to do so? Peck is not the only one to write in such terms:

> "I am sitting on the couch, a towel under me, a towel partially over me, or over my belly (sometimes I think she deserves an identity of her own), to hide the blubber that spills onto my upper thighs. My shoulders are naked, and they feel just as I imagined they would feel—at once powerful and vulnerable" (Jarrell 2005, 283).

This statement already carries ambiguity: feeling at once powerful and vulnerable. The words Jarrell uses in reference to her body parts show that she thinks of certain parts as excess, as too much, as not necessary: the blubber that 'spills,' like it takes up too much space. I am reminded of Murray's words, who wrote that the fat woman "does not fulfil feminine expectations of beauty and submission: she takes up too much space, she is uncontained and excessive" (2004, 243). Contrasting Jarrell's words about her own body with how she describes thin bodies as 'sculpted' – as if a sculpturer could not sculpt the curves of a fat body – and it is hard to deny her own bias. She describes how she was pushed back into her fat body, as it were, when watching thin ('sculpted') people win a game while nuding: "I am suddenly aware of the weight of myself, the sweat collecting in the skin-to-skin connection between my belly and my thighs. I shift Belly around self-consciously beneath the towel" (Jarrell 2005, 284). She was suddenly made aware of her own body, specifically, her belly, her sweating, and her weight. Murray notes that her "subjectivity is always constructed by [her] fat corporeality" (2005a, 273). "As a fat woman, I find I am engaged in a dual process of a constant refutation of my fat body, and a simultaneous hyperawareness of its soft folds and bulky borders" (Murray 2005a, 273). As much as Murray tries to overcome the hyperawareness of her flesh and her simultaneous denial of it, "it structures

[her] self-awareness, nonawareness, hyperawareness of [her] fat body" (2005a, 273). "I internalize the ways of 'knowing' my own fat body in the same way that others know my fat, through prescriptive and normalizing discourses" (Murray 2005a, 273). Jarrell seems to experience a similar hyperawareness, linked to a similar internalization of how she can 'know' her body. I recall Bartky's words on her experience of walking down the street and getting catcalled: "[t]he body which only a moment before I inhabited with such ease now floods my consciousness. I have been made into an object (…) in this being-made-to-be-aware of one's own flesh" (1990, 27). Jarrell experiences a similar being-made-to-be-aware of her own flesh, albeit in not through words, but through her own looking at thin bodies. She also recalls a moment in which she experienced the opposite: "I just happened to bring along my boas (…) The feathers are received with such admiration, for a moment I forget my fat" (Jarrell 2005, 289). One moment, a body is just a body. The next, it is so much more than just that, while simultaneously one is reduced to one's body. "One moment the fat body doesn't seem intrusive; we barely notice our size. The next moment fat weigh us down in every way" (Jarrell and Sukrungruang 2005a, xiv). This also very much relates to hypervisibility, hyperinvisibility, and the tension between the two, as addressed in the previous chapter.

It may not be a stretch to suggest that for Jarrell, fatness is (primarily) located in her belly. "I can barely balance Belly when she is tucked tidily into clothing and my feet are firmly planted on the ground," writes Jarrell (2005, 284). I adjust my high waisted jeans as I read this, painfully aware of how I tucked my own belly into my clothes. Painfully aware of how I constantly adjust and tug and tuck whenever I leave the house – and at home, as the anecdote I opened this thesis with shows. I, too, am suddenly made aware of my own fatness and 'pushed back' into my body, as it were (as if it ever left). I think back on how Jarrell and Sukrungruang opened *Scoot Over, Skinny*: "Donna is fat. Ira is fat. As a matter of fact, over half of the American population is fat. And not for a moment are we allowed to forget it" (2005a, xi). Indeed, our fatness will be brought to the forefront of our consciousness sooner rather than later. It is in how some authors describe their bodies that I observe that not only certain body parts are viewed as excessive, I also notice that some authors seem to have the idea that certain ways a body can curve and is shaped are better than others, which I will examine now.

Peculiar shapes

> "On bad days I think my body looks lumpy and misshapen. On my good days, which are more frequent lately, I think I look plush and strong" (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 1-2).

I recounted before how Tovar returned to school after losing weight and to her horror discovered she was still considered fat. The specific shape of Tovar's body is what led others to view her as such, in her view: "I was tall for my age and I had boobs. I still had my double chin and my chubby cheeks. I wasn't frail or waifish. I had misunderstood, or maybe the goalpost had moved" (2018, 41). Her body was still shaped in a way that made her peers treat her no different from before. She is not the only who writes about specific body parts being shaped wrongly or considered to be bad. Like Tisdale's statement opening this section demonstrates, she also thinks of her body as misshapen at times. Fatness is not just to do with size, it is to do with shape. Jarrell notes her surprise when, at some point during the evening when she and her fellow partygoers are nuding, "no one is staring at me in disbelief at my disproportion" (2005, 290). She believes her body to be disproportionate, a statement that reveals a body can have a wrong shape. Jarrell calls her proportions "unbearable" (2005, 291). She repeats the sentiment when writing about other people attending the party: "[w]e are overproportioned and underproportioned, unremarkably so" (Jarrell 2005, 291). Apparently, a body can be shaped incorrectly and have wrong proportions. "Fat insulates our bodies and fat infiltrates our identities. We cannot limit our loathing to our distorted size and shape: We hate ourselves" (Jarrell and Sukrungruang 2005a, xii-xiii). Who is we? In the use of 'we' Jarrell and Sukrungruang write as though all fat people view their bodies in the same way and feel about themselves in the same way because of our fatness. Of note is how again, not only size is mentioned, but also shape – the shape of a fat body matters, and apparently for fat people, our size and shape are *distorted*. Why is fatness a distortion? Such a claim reveals that thinness is seen as natural, normal, neutral – but not *that* neutral, its neutrality carries superiority of course. It may very well be that many fat people do view their bodies as distorted, as having a wrong shape, and that therefore, they cannot see their bodies as simply fat, but the way it is formulated leaves little space for any other way of signifying one's fat body. However, Jarrell and Sukrungruang do draw the connection between how the world interacts with fat bodies and how fat people can view themselves. It is perhaps because of this connection that they make such sweeping statements. They continue: "We cannot see our bodies as simply fat: We see our characters as seriously flawed" (Jarrell and Sukrungruang 2005a, xii-xiii). Their words reveal an internalization of fatphobic attitudes and claims of the supposed knowledge

about what fatness means. Jarrell and Sukrungruang write about what I alluded to in the introduction of this thesis when I wrote that my body can never just be a body. Fatness can never just be fatness, it is immediately burdened with negative connotations. “Each day we bring our flesh into a public that prizes leanness, each day we carry our heavy and cumbersome bodies through a world that idolizes speed and efficiency, we suffer shame” (Jarrell and Sukrungruang 2005a, xiii). Jarrell and Sukrungruang directly link how the world interacts with fat bodies to the feeling of shame. They note that “the fat experience [does not] exist in a vacuum. Though it is the individual who experiences fat, the culture in which we live profoundly affects that experience” (Jarrell and Sukrungruang 2005a, xv). This is echoed by Murray, who explains that “[t]he problem with fatness is that the culture of negative ‘knowingness’ about fat bodies interferes with the way we can take the body up, and live it” (2005a, 273). Thus, the cultural attitudes and discourses on fat dictate how fat people can move through the world – and how we are made to suffer shame.

Something that stands out from the autobiographical accounts is the ambiguity of fatness. As cited before, Murray writes: “I experience myself/my body in ways that shift and vary and contradict each other” (2005a, 270). The way Murray lives her “fat body are *always* multiple, contradictory, and eminently ambiguous” (2005a, 270). The authors whose work I analyzed echo this statement. The way they feel about their body is ever-shifting and can very much depend on context. “I feel myself expand and diminish from day to day, sometimes from hour to hour” (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 3). Tisdale writes that she now knows more about fatness and how diets (do not) work, but how sometimes, all that knowledge does not matter. “I look in the mirror and think: Who am I kidding? *I’ve got to do something about myself.* Only then will this vague discontent disappear. Then I’ll be loved” (Tisdale 2005 [1993], 6). Again, the body is the site on which such feelings are projected. The body must be fixed in order to rid oneself of such feelings. Again, the act of looking in the mirror inspires a specific way of thinking of one’s body, oneself, and one’s fatness. My analysis of the autobiographical writings on fat female embodiment that I have selected shows that not only the size of a body is what makes one fat; the shape of a body and the way it curves are key in how fat women look at themselves.

Conclusion

As I have set out to show in this chapter, the corporeal experience of fatness and the naming of fatness are connected. The authors demonstrate different ways of looking at and writing about their bodies, sometimes using the word fat, sometimes using euphemisms to indicate fatness, or focusing on weight instead of size. They present multiple and contradictory ways of viewing themselves, at times depending on the number on a scale. Many times fatness was viewed in terms of excess and as misshapen or distorted. Not only the way the authors look at themselves matters: as Tovar's experiences show, other people still viewed her as fat even when she thought she was no longer fat. Different authors demonstrate that they move their bodies through the world in apologetic ways, literally incorporating external attitudes about fatness, as Klumbyte and Smiet describe. A gap between the body and the self was experienced by some of the authors, often clearly in response to the negative body knowingness about fatness. Through the different experiences of looking in the mirror, a common theme in the autobiographical works, I notice that most authors have learned to look only selectively at themselves, or rather avoid the view altogether, which also seems to be a direct consequence of a split way of viewing mind and body. As such, the negative body knowingness about fatness and the overlapping discourses surrounding gender, size, and desirability directly play a role in how fat women inhabit and view their bodies on a daily basis.

Concluding remarks

I opened this thesis by recounting an experience of policing my own fat female body when I was home by myself. Why I so habitually moved to hide my stomach, why the need to do so felt so urgent and heavy, and why I felt compelled to do so despite being alone, can be understood as the functioning of an internalized spectator and the internalization of negative body knowingness around my fat flesh. It was shame that made me yank down my shirt with such immediacy, shame I had transgressed a bodily norm. In that moment, I disciplined myself out of habit, out of fear of punishment, for in public, the act of baring my fat stomach could have subjected me to increased hyper(in)visibility, body shaming, and the humiliation that comes with both. Through my analysis of the autobiographical writings by Virgie Tovar in *You Have the Right to Remain Fat: A Manifesto* and selected chapters of *Scoot Over, Skinny: The Fat Nonfiction Anthology,* edited by Donna Jarrell and Ira Sukrungruang, I come to understand that such self-policing and the shame that inspired it are neither individual nor random. Instead, I locate shame as a key component in the (self-)policing of fat women's embodiment in this current moment in the West, due to how fatness is known in cultural discourse.

As I have argued in chapter 2, within patriarchy, women's role in society is an objectified one, their function and worth deeply intertwined with their desirability and beauty. Internalizing the look of a male connoisseur, women learn to always keep in mind how they appear to others, even when they are by themselves. The internalized spectator influences how women move, their movements oftentimes more self-conscious because as they move, they monitor how they appear, always hindered by this outside perspective on their surface appearance. As such, the beauty ideal is not about beauty, it is about control. Since beauty, in the West, is currently defined as thin, fat women are already excluded from not only the category of beauty but also, to an extent, from femininity. Fat women's bodies are constantly on display, rendering them hypervisible, while at the same time fat women are overlooked and become reduced to their bodies. Through the dual hypervisibility and hyperinvisibility fat women are made to suffer, shame is induced. Because of the negative body knowingness about fatness in the West, asking us to read the fat woman as lazy, immoral, unhealthy, and excessive, stemming from a complicated history of fatphobia, white supremacy, an obsession with control over the body, courtesy of Christian dogmas, and

controlling women's bodies in particular, fat women tend to distance themselves from their bodies.

In chapter 3, I analyzed the work by Tovar along with selected chapters of Jarrell and Sukrungruang's nonfiction anthology, mainly the chapters by Houston, Kusz, Solovay and Tisdale, to look primarily at the relation between policing and negative body knowingness, showing how these phenomena are entangled in the autobiographical literature. My close analysis of the selected autobiographical works shows how policing, self-policing and body knowingness in the negative are entangled in how we perceive ourselves as fat subjects.

In chapter 4, I looked more specifically at the dialectic of the hypervisible and the hyperinvisible and at how experiences and representations of the fat body are entangled with the gaze of the Other and the act of looking, teased out from the autobiographical works I analyzed, specifically the writings by Solovay, Kusz, and Tovar.

In chapter 5, where I examined the material-semiotic relation of experience in the autobiographical writings, in particular the works of Houston, Jarrell, Peck, Tisdale and Tovar, I demonstrated how the language surrounding fatness and the embodiment of fatness are entangled with another and how this entanglement affects how we relate to our bodies – and how we can break from that. By looking at how ideas literally come to matter, I showed how the negative meanings attached to the fat body affect fat women's corporeal experiences, as a result of how society produces our bodies. As such, I first looked at the corporeal, at the flesh, and then turned to how the material-semiotic relation is addressed in the autobiographical literature, explicating on the constant effort to trouble this fixed relation and the meanings attached to the fat female body.

Fatness is a category littered with ambiguities. It is not easy to define, nor do the corporeal experiences of fatness put forth by the fat women whose autobiographical writings I have analyzed make for one coherent understanding of fatness. From all sides, fatness is multiple, contradictory, ambiguous to its very core. Shame functions powerfully in fat women's embodiment and in the process of internalization of disciplinary norms around gender, size, and desirability. It fuels self-surveillance and self-policing, increases fat women's conceptualization of their bodies into 'good' parts and 'bad' parts, leading to a view of fatness as excessive. By making use of mixed theoretical frameworks on the regime of visibility, self- and body policing,

and a phenomenological understanding of fat female embodiment and cultural analysis of fat women's autobiographical writings, I have shown how shame plays into the self-policing of bodily norms for fat women, thus focusing not only on how normative ideas about gender, size, and desirability are internalized but also how they are inhabited. Shame is a pivotal tool in the internalization and self-policing of normative ideas about gender, size, and desirability. Such self-policing can increase with experiences of hyper(in)visibility and emerges in how fat women view their bodies as temporarily fat, which is demonstrative of a mind/body split. The negative body knowingness surrounding fatness greatly contributes to such an understanding of one's body. In order to lessen the shame, humiliation, and hurt fat women are subjugated to because of their bodies, they may distance themselves from their bodies. As such, with this thesis I have contributed to a further understanding of the ways in which hierarchically structured ideas about social axes are constructed, enforced, (self-)policed, and incorporated, and, indeed, how they come to dictate the very movements we make even when we are alone.

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