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# There Are No Fat People in The Netherlands: Embodied Identities, Hypervisibility, and the Contextual Relevancy of Fatness

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**There Are No Fat People in The Netherlands:**  
Embodied Identities, Hypervisibility, and the Contextual Relevancy of Fatness

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## Abstract

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This research is the product of a month long exploratory study on fatness in the Netherlands and how it intersects with other marginalized identities, including race, class, and queerness. The primary question it answers is the ways in which hypervisibility of fat bodies interplays with the silences surrounding size as an axis of identity. The research removes fatness from solely conversations in the public health field and re-situates it in a feminist, academic framework. Data was obtained through oral history interviews with seven self identified fat people currently living in the Netherlands. The results show that childhood, dieting practices, standards of beauty, Dutch national identity, health discourses surrounding an 'obesity epidemic,' and various forms of activism are critical in the participants lived experiences. Suggestions for further research include continued analysis of the ways race and ethnicity intersect with fatness in a Dutch context as well as research into the prevalence of weight based bullying in Dutch secondary schools.

Key Words: Ethnicity, Gender Studies, Sociology

## Acknowledgments

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## Introduction

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In this study, I hope to both nuance and disrupt existing narratives about fatness in the Netherlands. Currently, discourses around size take place primarily within two spheres: the “obesity as a social problem” and health framework, and patriarchal discussions of female beauty and desirability politics. This research will demonstrate the importance of bodily size as an axis of identity in a Dutch context as well as illuminate the various ways fat people experience their size in their respective communities. Bringing a specifically feminist, queer, and actively anti-racist perspective to fatness in the Netherlands is critical at this specific moment in time, as fat folks face increasing levels of marginalization and pathologization. By locating my research in the sphere of feminist academia as well as activism, I have the opportunity to continue to re-signify fat bodies outside of mainstream, normative frameworks.

My primary research question explores the ways in which the hypervisibility of fat bodies interplays with the silences and 'terra incognita' of fat folks' lived experiences. It will identify what narratives exist in the Netherlands about fatness and how these discussions happen in intersection but not conversation with fat folks' embodied existences. Then, my research will make space for new discussions to take place, centered around people of size and their own thoughts regarding their fatness. I will be studying the ways in which narratives surrounding fatness in a Dutch context intersect with other dominant discussions, both in terms of differences in dialogues in various communities (intersectional feminist spaces and larger societal discourses) and how fat people tell their own stories about their bodies. This study is deeply significant to fill gaps in “mainstream” Dutch feminist discourses as well as acknowledge the activism that people of size daily engage in by existing in a kyriarchal system. Finding the

silences in feminist discourse and literature, while simultaneously acknowledging that conversations about size are happening is important in that it challenges the assumption of “which bodies matter” in The Netherlands. Fatness is conceptualized in Dutch media and public opinion in opposition to “Dutchness,” a nuanced form of national identity that excluded numerous identities.

My research takes the form of individual interviews with self identified fat people, many of whom share other marginalized identities. They speak about their relationships with their bodies, stereotypes about fat people in the Netherlands, how they do or do not engage in activism, and the ways they daily re-signify their non-normative bodies. The expected outcome of my research is a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which fatness is conceptualized in addition to a final ISP that is primarily focused around those most marginalized by mainstream fat activism (the little that exists) in a Dutch context. My main objective is to make space for fat people to speak about their lived experiences. Too often discussions of fatness are located in two spheres: the healthcare industry/pharmaceuticals, and patriarchal discussions of beauty in opposition to fatness. I want to challenge the notion that these are the only places where conversations about size can happen as well as give voice to people who seek to problematize the various ways people of size have been marginalized. Bringing critiques into mainstream body positivity and feminist movement will increase awareness of the ways in which gender and size are deeply ingrained notions about race and ethnicity.

## Literature Review

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The following literature review seeks to summarize and contextualize both the existing literature on fatness and size in the Netherlands as well as show the broader relevance of fat studies as a field.

Why is fatness a relevant axis of identity, both in the Dutch and US context?

How has fat studies grown as a field and as a form of activism?

How is fatness a feminist issue?

What is the feminist epistemological framework behind opening up research on size?

What are some relevant theoretical conceptions of fatness?

What research has been done in the Netherlands on obesity and size?

How can my research add to *and* nuance the existing (or non-existent!) field as it stands?

Fatness is important for numerous reasons, one of the most topical being that privilege is located in having a normative body in the Netherlands. The majority of research on fatness and obesity is located within the public health field. For example, the Department of Health did a study in 2011 that showed that ethnic minority women in the Netherlands have higher rates of overweight and central obesity than their white counterparts. The article goes on to mention that this may be a result of “a lower socio-economic position, differences in culture and the level of acculturation.” (Agmeyang, 2011) My research is aimed at taking those women, primarily migrant women of color, and opening up conversations on body size to include those who it most closely relates to: fat people themselves. The problem with the medicalization of fat bodies is that the main discourses that emerge are centered around “obesity as a social problem.” This sort of pathologization of fat bodies is definitely a theme in my research, and a trope I hope to avoid falling into by consciously recognizing yet distancing myself from narratives that posit unhealthy fat bodies as undeserving of respect. For my research, this means illuminating fat women's lived

experiences in their bodies, not drawing broad conclusions about fat people's health.

Firstly, I'd like to discuss Noortje Van Amsterdam's research, "Big fat inequalities, thin privilege: An intersectional perspective on body size," and how she demonstrates the importance of recognizing size as an "axis of signification" in a Dutch context. She approaches fatness intersectionally, critically engaging with the ways in which race, class, gender, dis/ability, and age intersect with size to create and maintain specific power differentials. She begins the article by positing body size as a false binary in Dutch (and other western locations') thinking: fatness and slenderness do not operate in opposition to one another, but do operate in terms of gradations, much as the privilege one has in a slender body.

She approached this concept in two different ways: to begin with, she centered size as the dominant facet of identity and looked at how it is affected by other marginalized positionalities. Secondly, she recommended that researchers must include body size in their own work focused on other identities. She used specific examples of how size (specifically fatness) differs in relation to race. For instance, she referenced a narrative around fat black women's bodies that suggests both hypersexualization (like the Venus Hottentot) as well as non-sexuality (like the Mammy, or "faithful, obedient, domestic servant"). (Van Amsterdam, 2013) Her research explicitly identifies the ways in which size is crucial to an understanding of power dynamics in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

The strengths of her research are first that she fills a void in Dutch research- the importance of body size as a non-medicalized category of analysis. Second, she thinks intersectionally about how fatness cannot exist within a privilege/oppression free vacuum, but is instead deeply entrenched in many people's conceptions of 'which bodies matter' ( Butler, 1993).

In my own research, I seek to add to her theoretical perspective with fat Dutch people's thoughts and lived experiences.

In terms of weaknesses or gaps in her research, I found that various critical concepts in fat theory had been left out, specifically the importance of many forms of activism that daily resignify fat bodies. However, for an introductory article on fatness as an importance axis of identity, Van Amsterdam's piece is needed and beneficial in a Dutch context.

In thinking more broadly about the necessity for fat studies as an academic and activist field, I look to Charlotte Cooper and her 2010 article, "Fat Studies: Mapping the Field." This text is primarily an overview of the field of Fat Studies, with specific regard to the ways in which this field has drawn upon "language, culture and theory of civil rights, social justice and social change." (Cooper, 2010). It shows the various ways in which fat activism offer liberation for certain people of size, as well as the benefits of rethinking the production of body ideals in a US context. Contextualizing and historicizing mainstream (and alternative) fat activism since the 1960s in the US is crucial to an understanding of the ways in which "public health concerns" and fat liberation overlap. The piece relates to the "dual pathway model" description of social activism in that it demonstrates the catalysts for change by organizations and individuals (Stürmer, 2003.)

This piece is important as it shows the ways in which my research is contributing to a larger academic field, Fat Studies. It also directly pertains to my hypothesis, as it stands, that "alternative forms" of fat activism exist in the Netherlands. The article's set up allows for a multiplicity of activism to be equally valued and that is what I hope to do with my research. It also recognizes the crucial coalition building that must be done for Fat Studies as a field (and

thus, researchers within the field,) to both recognize the intersections we have with various other social justice based academic landscapes and stand in solidarity with them. I can use this in my research by noticing the ways in which specifically anti-colonialist or anti-racist activists are also helping to deconstruct moralized binaries between valuable and non-valuable bodies within a capitalist framework.

Kathleen LeBesco, the author of “Revolting Bodies: The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity” in 2004, seeks to alter the discourse around fat bodies from the medical/pathologizing field to socio-cultural spheres of research, as well as recognize the ways in which interpersonal agency (of fat people) aid/complicate strategies of social transformation. LeBesco begins with a literature review, three chapters utilizing work by Sedgwick, Butler, Grosz, Garine, Douglas, Turner, and later, medical journals/public health discourses around the “obesity epidemic/scare/panic/crisis.” She then speaks on various “aids” in dieting and caloric restriction, including self-help books, different nutrition facts on foods, and drug treatment. Her historicization of fat politics utilizes language, art, science, and public policy to expound upon the ways in which fat bodies have become associated with uncleanliness, sickness, and ugliness. LeBesco writes compellingly about the need for a re-thinking of fat activism and body politics more generally, especially around embodiment. She argues that both historically and currently, fat acceptance movements have been focused around ideas of fatness as healthy and beautiful. A more radical take on activism would be embodying a “revolting” body for political means. She draws parallels, for example, between dis/ability and queer identity politics and the benefits of claiming and naming.

Her conceptions of fatness and fat activism are directly related to the ways in which I

conduct my own research. While she recognizes the existence and validity of medical discourses surrounding body size, she rejects those in order to create a social discourse that re-imagines fat bodies as revolting- capable of overturning and radically subverting hegemonic ideas about beauty, health, and nature. This is what I seek to do in this project- bring to light the numerous ways in which fat folks daily re-signify their bodies as valuable and subversive.

## Methodology

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This study takes place in Amsterdam in the Netherlands. I choose to study people who self identify as fat (see page 13 on terminology) and as women of color. After I submitted my initial proposal and was approved to do research on fat women of color, I began to reach out to various community members that I thought might have contacts with people who would be open to being interviewed. I utilized my Community Volunteer Experience at a plus sized clothing store to gain additional contacts in the world of “fatshion,” or fat fashion. I also reached out to Redmond, an intersectional feminist collective in the Netherlands, for contacts. As time ran down, I decided to broaden my topic to look at the ways in which fatness intersects with numerous other identities, not singularly race and ethnicity. This allowed me to expand my participant group and get a variety of people to share their lived experiences as bodies of size. This means that my final group of research participants was comprised of four women of color, two white women, and a mixed race, Native American queer person.

After about two weeks of searching, I had seven people who were willing to be interviewed. I was in contact with all of them in multiple ways, including through email, telephone, and in two cases, personal visits to their shops. Each interview was conducted in a different location, chosen by the participant themselves as a place where they would feel the most comfortable. I have included information as to where the interviews took place in each person's profile, so as to be as transparent as possible in the research conditions. I sought to maintain a relaxed and conversational environment during the interviews, beginning each by stating the aim of my project and how I hoped to give space to the interviewee to say what they

wanted to say as well as to answer the questions I had prepared (see appendix.) I typically began my interviews by introducing myself, telling a little bit about my activist, academic, and personal background, and asking some general questions about bodily size in the Netherlands. Once my interviewee appeared at ease with the conversation, I would ask questions about their childhood, always making it completely clear that they had the option to withdraw or not answer a question at any point. By letting the interviewee direct the flow of conversation to what they wanted most to talk about, I believe I got much richer and nuanced results than if I had simply asked a litany of questions, many of which may not have directly impacted that specific person.

In two of my interview situations, the environment did not lend itself to being recorded—one in a busy clothing store and the other in a relaxed and intimate gathering held after hours at my CVE shop. For both of these, I got the participants verbal consent and made it clear that while this was not recorded, it was an interview and I would be keeping field notes on various things that they said. They seemed most comfortable with this method of note keeping as opposed to being recorded. I collected my data from November 16<sup>th</sup> through November 27<sup>th</sup>, holding 6 interviews, one of which included two people. The interviews lasted anywhere from one to three hours and all but one took place in person. The other was over Skype. My data collection process did not differ wildly from my initial proposal, except in terms of broadening the participant base to include folks who were not women of color.

My data analysis was done in two different ways. The first was by transcribing specific portions of the recorded interviews, coding for themes, and finally, analyzing these themes with relevant theoretical concepts from others' research. The second was by looking over the field notes from my non-recorded interviews, seeing where ideas brought up nuanced or disputed

concepts from the other interviews, and noting this in my results and discussion.

In summary, I interviewed seven people, all of whom identified as fat or some variation of the word, over the course of two weeks. Six were conducted in person and one over Skype. All but two were recorded. The limitations of this research project were as follows. Firstly, the sample size,  $n=7$ , cannot be indicative of numerous identities in a Dutch context. More research needs to be done, primarily focusing on diverse groups of women of color. Secondly, this research is by necessity a foray into a previously limited field. It is to draw out various themes about bodily size to create and inform the burgeoning field of fat studies. Finally, the data I collected from the interviewees is self-reported, meaning that it can not be independently verified. Overall, the time constraints for this project in conjunction with the small sample size may have limited the results.

## Assumptions

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This project is dedicated to breaking silences and giving voice to the daily lives of fat people in the Netherlands. It's about identifying cultural narratives that exist and talking about how people with the bodies instrumentalized in those narratives, specifically fat people of color, experience their existence. It's about showing how the pathologization of fat bodies is dehumanizing, how people of size engage in re-signifying their bodies all the time, and finally, how fatness is hypervisible, yet completely unknown in a Dutch context. The vast majority of literature about bodily size in the Netherlands comes out of a public health context. It identifies statistics, which groups are most likely to be “affected” by obesity and obesity-related diseases, and possible governmental intercessions that will help reduce the number of fat people. When the dominant discourse about fatness is intrinsically intertwined with healthcare and health categories, and when these categories are moralized, it becomes clear that fat people are not getting the space to speak from their own lived experiences in their incredibly diverse bodies. Thus, this research is radical in that it removes fatness and bodily size from that context, while acknowledging the importance it has, and allows for the critical re-signification of fatness by fat people themselves. Listening to what people have to say about their lives, their bodies, and their thoughts thereon is crucial to ending various systems of oppressions.

I recognize that going into this research with this mindset is most definitely not neutral. The myth of objectivity has been much contested by feminist academics and I hope, in my literature review, to show the ways in which radically claiming one's own standpoint is vital for rigorous research practices. The final result of this will not be a neutral piece of literature about

fatness in a Dutch context, simply because fatness, especially in intersection with race and ethnicity, is never neutral. Working from a specifically feminist researchers framework means, for me, that I acknowledge my positionality at the beginning and throughout the paper. It also means that I am accountable to my research participants and to illuminating their stories honestly, but not necessarily uncritically.

My positionality as a fat activist is of course going to be present in this research. I came here knowing that the “obesity epidemic” concept is a cultural export from the US and that fat folks rarely have a say in the narratives constructed about and around them. This research is pivotal, then, as it is giving space for fat people to talk and have their stories heard. What that means for this paper is that I am fully committed to validating and nuancing the themes that my interviewees brought forth. I am not looking to delegitimize the reality that fat women of color face in an increasingly thincentric, white supremacist section of the world. Rather, I want to locate existing narratives of belonging and identity, demonstrate how they exclude and in many cases, oppress, fat people, and allow for counter narratives to be heard.

Therefore, I have decided to structure my findings and discussion very specifically. I first want to introduce each interviewee with a small biographical profile, detailing the identities they claimed as most relevant to their size. This is aimed towards locating the reader in a specific time and place culturally, as well as letting some of the participants' personalities to come through the research. Then I will go into a more extended discussion of various themes they presented. Finally, I will draw conclusions about how fatness operates in a Dutch context, the various forms of activism fat folks engage in to re-signify their bodies, and the importance of continued research in the field of fat studies.

## Terminology

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With a topic like fatness, words have a lot of power. There are political and cultural ramifications for using specific words, which means for this research that I need to take some time to explain my methodological choices regarding naming. The word “fat” has a lot of stigma for a lot of people. Although activists have been working towards reclaiming the word as a simple (yet politically charged!) descriptor, it does not have neutral connotations for all communities. Therefore, throughout this research I specifically asked each interviewee what terms they use to describe their bodies and what they were comfortable with me using. For some, fat was fine. Others chose words like big, fluffy, curvy, and plus sized to talk about their size and shape. When I speak about each person, I am careful to use only the descriptors they have chosen for their bodies. The same goes for gender and racial/ethnic background.

In the Dutch language, most people use the word “dik,” or thick, to describe fatness. Others use the Dutch equivalent of overweight or obese, which I have actively chosen not to do in this paper. Those words are based of the BMI scale, often used in the medical and health industry, which is one of the places where fat bodies are most pathologized. Overweight, for example, implies that there is a “normal” weight that one is over. The term obesity, while in theory relating simply to bodies with specific BMIs, has been instrumentalized by pharmaceutical companies and others to contribute to an incredibly damaging narrative about an “obesity epidemic.” It also locates fatness inherently in the field of public health, which I am seeking to avoid. However, if people choose to describe their own body as such, I respect that as I do various other euphemisms or terms they employ.

## Profiles

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“Oh, you are fat, and I had something like, 'Yeah? And? So?’”

Joz is a “50- something” fat identified white woman who grew up in Holland and has lived in Amsterdam for the past 23 years. Six years ago, in 2007, she opened one of the first and only plus size clothing stores in the Netherlands. Her mission in making plus size clothes more accessible was to make the women who came to her shop happy because they could find nice clothes that they looked smashing in. Throughout the interview I noticed that her perception of herself and others was closely tied in with the clothing they wore and how they carried themselves. While she currently has a complex relationship with her own body in terms of weight loss, dieting, and self-image, she has used fashion and access to designer clothing as a means of helping other women feel beautiful. My interview with Joz took place in the shop, sitting at a small table while she bustled around making tea. I had done my Community Volunteer Experience, a requirement for SIT Study Abroad, at the store, so I had already spend over 25 hours talking to Joz about her body, her customers, and her mission for the shop. She mentioned she would feel most comfortable doing the interview there, sitting amongst the racks of high fashion clothing. We began by talking about her childhood, her relationship with food and her family, and her eventual bodily acceptance. Then, we spoke on the store and various narratives she has been exposed to about fatness. I am deeply grateful to her for opening up her store to me, as well as being available for an interview.

“I can't live small. Too many people do that.”

Bear is a 43 year old, queer, mixed race Native American. They came to the Netherlands in 1999 and have traveled around Europe since then. They are a performance artist, a cook and a lecturer. Bear identifies as a fat activist and was involved in the Fat Girl Collective in California in the 1990s. They continue their fat and queer visibility movements here in the Netherlands in their work as a performer. My interview with Bear took place at their house, sitting at their kitchen table. We had tea and slowly got into the questions I had prepared. We covered topics ranging from their childhood relationship with their family, their activism in the Netherlands and the US, and their their body as “non-normative” in a Dutch context. It is important to note that Bear is also my independent study adviser and has read and helped edit this research paper. What this means is, due to ethical concerns and power dynamics, I have elected not to include select portions of the interview, especially those that pertained to Bear's childhood and deeply personal comments they made. Yvette Kopijn, my academic adviser for SIT Study Abroad, advised that this would be the best course of action to ensure an ethical inclusion of Bear's interview. I have been in contact with Bear to ensure that what I include in this research is acceptable to them, but we have also discussed that, in the end, the power needs to be shared between researcher and researched. Thus, there may be less of Bear's interview included in the results and discussion session than other participants. I still hope to re-present Bear and their experiences in a way that fits closely with my framework on feminist forms of knowledge productions.

“What's beyond fat acceptance? Because fat acceptance..it's like, who the fuck needs to accept me?”

Hodan is a 28 year old fat identified woman of color. She grew up in the Netherlands and is a first generation migrant from Somalia. She comes from what she describes as a poor family and is university educated. Currently, she is involved with numerous projects including running a radio show, a blog, and holding events and panels. She identifies strongly as an activist, focusing on feminism from an intersectional perspective. She was not fat as a child, but gained weight in middle school and beyond, which was met with a lot of negativity from her family. Although much of her family is larger, many told her they were afraid she too would get fat and encouraged her to lose weight all throughout her teens. My interview with Hodan was the only one to take place over Skype, as she was busy at the time organizing around “Zwarte Piet is Racisme.” It lasted over three hours, the first two of which were taken up talking about both her life as a fat woman of color and the institutionalized fatphobia she has seen and experienced in the Netherlands. She was the only research participant to speak at length about systematic inequalities and how they are racialized; therefore, the thematic section I include about race and ethnicity features much of what she said. The last hour of the interview was a little unconventional, as she asked me all about my fat activism in the US and spoke about her plans for possibly starting a coherent fat acceptance movement in Amsterdam and across European borders.

“Big girls, you are beautiful.”

BeyonG is a 27 year old, mixed race (Surinamese and Dutch) woman of color who wears a big size. She purposefully doesn't use the word fat (or dik, in Dutch) to describe herself because of the negative connotations that word has for her. She works in Amsterdam for a political organization focused around visibility and activism. She has always been big and talked mainly about her adolescence and the changes that occurred therein. My interview with BeyonG took place at her workplace, in a small conference room. She seemed relaxed throughout the interview and definitely spoke on some immensely personal topics. It also happened that her and Ashily were both free to meet at the same time, so the interview included both of them. After Ashily's profile, I will discuss how this may have affected the interview and the dynamics present.

“I like my curves. I like being a bubblicious chick.”

Ashily is a 40 year old, Caribbean (Trinidad born) woman of color who identifies as fluffy and big. She hasn't always been big, but became so gradually after her twenties, when she stopped modeling. She spoke a lot during the interview about her relationships with men and her size, fashion, and the psychological aspects to fatness. She is very knowledgeable about psychology and her current career is in that field. My interview with Ashily also took place at her workplace with BeyonG. This definitely made a difference to the interview environment, as Ashily is very outgoing and has lots to say, while BeyonG is more softspoken. Multiple times during the interview, both participants would be speaking at the same time, which made it difficult to pay proper attention to both of them. Having a joint interview was fascinating because of the way they interacted with each other, but not necessarily ideal.

## Findings and Analysis I

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### Childhood and the Formation of Body Image

Many of the participants cited their childhoods as instrumental in their development of bodily and size awareness, specifically focusing on the difficulties that bigger children face. BeyonG, for example, spoke at length about the teasing she faced on the school bus and how she had a very negative body image when she was a child. She describes puberty as the most devastating age for a big kid. She has always been big, and in her youth, students used to hurl insults at her, ranging from “dikzac” or fatty and worse. With research by Statistics Netherlands stating that almost 11% of people aged 4-20 are categorized as overweight in 2009-2011, BeyonG's experiences are far from unusual (Blair, 2012). Bullying large children in the schoolyard and even at home is an ever increasing issue and one that needs to be addressed in the Netherlands.

While BeyonG's middle school experiences were critical in her understanding of her body, so was her relationship with her family at home. Her mom would constantly tell her to go on a diet, to which she would reply, “oh, are you going to join me?” She described her whole family as big-boned and talked about how the culture of food at her house was “unhealthy.” Growing up in a setting where her weight was always a topic of conversation made BeyonG feel uncomfortable in her body. Clearly, the pressure she felt at home and school to be slimmer had an adverse effect on her body image that didn't change until she grew out of her teenage years.

Joz's childhood narrative also focused on a negative body image. “My life would have been so much easier if I never had a weight problem, if I was born slim,” she started off by

saying. She spoke about her sister, who was very fat until she got gastric bypass surgery a few years ago. Joz was always afraid she would end up like her sister, which was one of the reasons she began trying to lose weight later on in life. “If I could choose, I would be a small, elfin like girl, you know?” she gently scoffs. “Yeah, sure. But then, I didn't have the choice.” Joz was not teased for her size when she was a child, but she felt a lot of internal pressure to diet and to lose a lot of weight. She constantly compared her own weight and size to that of her sister, which made her feel better because she wasn't as fat as her, but still negative, because she was afraid of becoming that fat. Much of Joz's relationship with her body centers around control, what she calls a battle. While I go into more depth about this in a later section, the theme of control is apparent in Joz's description of her body image in relationship with her sister's. She felt as if she had control over something and that her sister's body was, thus, out of control.

This information in relation to childhood experiences of bodily size is of the utmost importance in understanding the marginalization many fat folks face. What BeyonG and Joz's stories show is that it is incredibly difficult for adolescents who are teased about their size to have a positive body image. While this may seem obvious, it is a phenomenon directly tied into a culture where it is permissible and even common place for schoolmates, friends, and even family members to have access to commenting on fat bodies. BeyonG, for example, said that from a young age, people had been cruel to her about her body and it made her feel as if she couldn't love herself. Fat bodies are under intense cultural scrutiny, especially in the Netherlands, where they are something of an abnormality in terms of representation. To be surrounded by thin(ner) bodies at school and dieting larger bodies at home results in a complex view of bodily size that it can take many years to get beyond.

While extensive research has been done about fatness and bullying in the United States, I believe similar investigations need to take place in the Netherlands. A study in 2005 in the US found that obese girls and boys are significantly more likely to be victims of bullying (Griffiths, 2006). It is clear that more research must be done into weight based teasing as well as the social marginalization of overweight children in a Dutch context. While a large portion of my collected research in this project suggests that the family plays a strong role in a bigger child's body image, it is also important to remember that peers inform an adolescent's views as well. Perhaps it makes more sense in terms of national recognition to focus on body positivity and an end to bullying within school systems, rather than on a familial level, to begin with. However, research in the US shows that the home environment can also be a location for weight based teasing. In a study in 2011 in the US, results indicate that among young adults, 35.9% of females and 22.8% of males reported receiving hurtful weight-related comments by family members (Eisenberg, 2011). Further research into this phenomenon is critical in the Netherlands as well, especially with increasing policing of fat bodies in and outside the home.

## Findings and Analysis II

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### Dieting and Food Culture

Every one of the research participants had a history of dieting and a deeply complex relationship with food. While it would be irresponsible to ascribe the participants' experiences to all fat folks in the Netherlands, there are specific trends to the data I collected. For example, food (especially foods that are often categorized as unhealthy) are seen in an incredibly negative light. Each interviewee spoke at the most length about their eating habits, whether to 'prove' that they did not embody the stereotype of a fat person who eats a lot or to explain how their relationship with food is intrinsically tied up with their views on their bodies. Although I cannot include every comment they made about food, here I hope to draw out themes about size and dieting/food.

I'm first going to talk about Joz's thoughts on food and dieting, as they are indicative and representative of how external narratives about fatness influence an individual's actions. Joz has dieted since her teens, for the past 35 years at least. She has tried numerous specific diets but now prefers to simply be conscious of the foods she eats and how they make her body feel. However, she describes food as an enemy. "It is never a friend," she says, "because it makes you fat." She insisted that it is not her body that is the enemy, but the threat of becoming fatter through eating more food that worries her. Joz was very aware of what she said during the interview, pausing to explain further her meanings and make clear any points she did not want to be misconstrued. This was a point where she wanted to be absolutely clear about her meaning, which is why I'm including both quotes and context. When I mentioned that she talked a lot about her body as a battlefield in terms of dieting, she said "It is a battle. It's a battle between

good and bad. And all the good things are healthy things.” She visualizes an angel and a devil on each shoulder every time she eats something she thinks she should not.

While slender people may experience these thoughts about food as well, Dutch society encourages them in fat people, especially fat women. Through various advertisements for gyms and diet supplements, as well as governmental policies that discriminate against larger people (see the upcoming section on national discourses) fat people internalize a lot of diet culture. For woman, who face stricter body policing and expectations of dieting than many men, dieting is a way of gaining supposed control over one's body, and thus, one's weight. The illusion of control, and in fact, choice, relates to Joz's imagery of an angel and a devil on her shoulder. She says that the devil represents the part of her that would love to lose control and eat whatever she wanted, but the angel mostly keeps her “good.” This brings to light numerous moralized binaries, the most obvious being between healthy and unhealthy. This in turn correlates to an “in control” body and an “out of control” body, which then relates to a thin body and a fat body. Thus, diet culture feeds into the concept of fat bodies being out of control, out of bounds. This obviously Christian imagery is singular to Joz, but the idea of food linked to guilt and fatness is one that many participants mentioned.

One of the most concerning trends in my research on dieting and food cultures for fat people in the Netherlands is the ways in which the participants described the lengths they have gone to to lose weight. Ashily, for example, is a former model and, during her time in that industry, she had extreme dieting habits that resulted in her weight fluctuating constantly.

Trust me, I've been on the diets, I've done it all. I used to eat pills, fat burners. I would take four or five of them a day sometimes, I was just eating these fat burners. Just because I wanted to lose that weight and keep it off. And when I lost the weight, I would continue eating them. And that is because I was so obsessed with this thing that I needed to be a skinny person to be comfortable.

Ashily felt the pressure to be thin magnified, as she was a model whose body was constantly on display and critiqued. This led to what can only be described as disordered eating habits where she would eat very little and take multiple doses of fat burners per day. This gave her a feeling of control and power, one that three of the participants also mentioned. They saw dieting as a way of being in control of their bodies, and the weight loss that sometimes occurred as a small victory. One of the reasons why these sort of eating patterns are so worrisome in fat people is that they are often *encouraged* in the hopes that larger individuals will lose weight. This phenomenon occurs hand in hand with the ever increasing number of overweight/obese individuals with disordered eating and exercise patterns. A study in the International Journal of Obesity in 2007 showed that in Australia, "women with obesity had significantly higher levels of dietary restraint, eating concern, weight concern, shape concern, binge eating, misuse of diuretics, use of diet pills and fasting compared to other women in the community." (Darby, 2007) Since the theme of dieting and food restriction was prevalent in all my interviews, it is clear that this needs to be studied in much greater depth. Why do these women have guilt-ridden relationships with food? What cultural and societal factors in the Netherlands contribute to disordered eating patterns amongst fat people? Are these in fact encouraged in broader public health discourses? What affect on obese people's psychological health does constant, sometimes lifelong, dieting have? Further research must delve into these questions and more.

## Findings and Analysis III

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### Hypervisibility of Fat Bodies

Fat bodies are simultaneously hypervisible and invisible in the Netherlands. What this means for the research participants is that their bodies “stick out” and are noticeable as non-normative. Unfortunately, this also comes with a host of negative stereotypes about fatness as well as people feeling as if they have access to comment on larger people's size. It means that most public spaces are not made to accommodate fat bodies and clothing is difficult to find. In the following paragraphs, I will demonstrate how the interviewees navigate various spaces in bodies of size. It is important to remember here that while I will only include quotes from four participants, they illustrate broader societal narratives about fat people.

There is a lot of silence surrounding fatness as an identity in a Dutch context. Many people talk about bodies of size, but primarily in terms of health or obesity, and from time to time, patriarchal beauty standards and body image. While fatness does exist in intersection with those conversations, it also by necessity must exist as a non-normative body category. Multiple participants mentioned that they get strange looks in stores, while shopping, or while out for a walk. Ashily talked a little bit about her experiences being a big woman in the Netherlands and she how feels the topic is taboo.

I'm big, but I'm not fat. I'm solid, I don't have a lot of stuff hanging off. I'm just a big girl. But it still would be considered by a skinny person as fat, because I'm bigger than them. I try not to let it affect me any more, I've become comfortable with the fact that I am a big girl. I think there are spaces now opening up to accommodate and empower women of a bigger stature. It's still taboo, it's like sex in a lot of places... we need a little more education on the differences between people who are fat and unhealthily fat, and there are people who are just big.

Here it is clear that Ashily doesn't at all conceive of herself as fat, rather, she distinctly distances herself from that word. In addition, she posits a difference between unhealthy fat people and healthy ones. However, she recognizes that many slender people would still see her as fat. Bear, on the other hand, spoke at length about their body as visibly and noticeably different from many Dutch people. They said, "The body that I have is very unusual for the Netherlands, not just for my size and my shape, but also for the scars and the piercings and the tattoos. I've got ritual scarification as well." Thus, their size is not the only thing that sets them apart from other Dutch people. This clearly informs their experience of size as well.

Hodan, as a woman of color, had a unique experience with her fatness, and more specifically, her curves. She spoke primarily during the interview about exactly how her size intersects with her race. This meant two things for her: one, she never saw her body as any sort of beauty ideal in the media (this lack of positive representation is critical for her!) and two, her curvy body was sexualized in a way that perhaps a middle to upper class white woman's body would not have been.

I always thought that my body didn't fit any sort of ideal. I do have large boobs, I guess. I don't know exactly compared to what, but I do have large boobs. I definitely thought, because I'm fat, I don't fit the ideal beauty standard because I have a bigger stomach and bigger butt. And a bigger butt made me feel like a target as well. Like, something that advertised my sexuality without me wanting to. Telling the world that I'm available. My size racialized my body even more... More than a thin bodied young girl, because you have curves, you are seen as more womanly.

Hodan's body was thus both invisible and hypervisible. She didn't ever see positive representations of fat, black women in the media when she was a teenager, which resulted in her believing her body was not any sort of ideal. Simultaneously, her body was sexualized without her consent because she was seen as more "available" and womanly than her thin, white

counterparts. In an upcoming section I will further deconstruct the numerous ways in which fatness in the Netherlands is racialized.

Another thing that three participants mentioned is friends, family members, and complete strangers feeling as if they had access to commenting on their fat bodies. Bear, for instance, talked about a person they have known for awhile who recently began commenting on their size in a way Bear was uncomfortable with.

I have a hard time with [a friend] because something that I noticed in the last six months is that very often, she feels like it's okay to comment on my weight. "Oh you're losing weight!" which, maybe I am and maybe I'm not, but who fucking cares and why is it okay for this to be a topic of conversation?

Possibly because non-normative bodies (in this case bodies of size) are so open to commentary in the media, people often make comments to and about fat people that they wouldn't say otherwise. This sort of comments range from commenting on people's weight loss or gain, advising people to go to the gym, or sharing dieting plans that worked for someone the person knows. While these might seem like harmless observations, they reflect a culture-wide acceptance of fat bodies as a form of public property. BeyonG here tells a story about how she has numerous friends who comment on her body with some regularity.

I know a lot of good friends are talking to me like, 'go to the gym, it's better for you' and I was like, 'why do you not go?' I don't have a problem with myself, I feel healthy. I know you have good intentions, but let me do it when I want to do it and I think that's the problem also.

While she believes their intentions to be good, she is frustrated that they feel they can give her unwarranted advice that they would never give a thin friend. Further research into this topic could focus on the ways in which people's fatness gives others access to comment on their bodies

and give unwanted suggestions for weight loss.

## Findings and Analysis IV

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### National and Interpersonal Discourses Surrounding Health

In the Netherlands, fatness and health are inextricably linked socially. With the cultural export of a fear of an obesity epidemic from the US, Dutch rhetoric around fatness over the past 10 years has been solidly located in public health discussions. Here I am going to take some space to talk about how the concept of “obesity as a social problem” developed in the Netherlands and then I will look to the results I gathered from the interviewees on how health based discourses intersect and inform their lives. I'm not interested in proving or disproving the *existence* of what many call an “obesity epidemic,” but rather looking at how it is culturally constructed and the effects it has on fat people's lived experiences.

Friedrich Schorb wrote extensively about the development of fatness as a political problem in Europe, citing three main causes. Firstly, he posits that much of Europe has internalized an obesity epidemic narrative, which began in the United States. He then describes the ways in which healthism, discrimination on the basis of health status, has emerged as a global trend in culture and science (Schorb, 2013.) While he wrote specifically about Germany and England, similar trends are obvious in the Netherlands. For example, an online article from the Dutch Daily News in 2012 stated that:

Half of the Dutch are Too Fat! More than half of the Dutch population is overweight or obese, shocking figures have revealed. The statistics, released by Dutch Public Health, show 60 percent of men in the Netherlands are too fat, and 44 percent among women. One in seven people in the Netherlands are so fat it threatens their health, according to the research of the Dutch National Institute for Health and Environment (RIVM) among 4000 Dutch between 30 and 70 years.

While this is just one quote, it illustrates a trend across much of Europe that leads to the

stigmatization of fat people in fields such as healthcare, insurance, job hunting, and politics of desirability. One of my interviewees, Joz, explained the concept perfectly when she said that the government saying all fat people are unhealthy and a threat to the country gave everyone else an alibi to say nasty things.

If the government is just, giving you those information about how bad it is to be fat, then the tolerance for fat people is just dropping below zero. It is not a hate campaign, but it is a campaign against fat people, it really is. You know, it's like, the tone is there and it's the government who is making those noises, so everybody will follow, of course.

She linked the discourse around a fear of an obesity epidemic with the cruel comments many of her customers have been subject to. “People don't believe that I am very healthy. They see you and they have bad thoughts about you... everything you say doesn't change their picture of you.”

Assuming that all fat people are unhealthy is problematic in two regards: first, it simply isn't true. More than half of my participants say they eat healthy, exercise regularly, and their doctors assure them that they are in good physical condition. Secondly, and more importantly, the assumption that unhealthy people (whether fat or not!) should be socially stigmatized relies on moralized binaries between health and unhealth. What the research participants spoke most about, however, were the assumptions they faced from others about their health status. Bear, who is a performer in a circus troupe, spoke about their experiences with one of the trainers and how the trainer assumed that because of their size, they couldn't physically do what the others could.

I'm pretty athletic and people here don't realize that, people don't believe it. And when I started training with the circus troupe here, the first couple times, the main trainer was like, 'ok, if you can't do this, just in case you can't...'and one one level that infuriates me, but in order to prove that their assumptions are wrong, I need to put my fear aside and do the thing...it's perfectly reasonable and possible to be fit and fat, and so many people don't realize that.

Over the past decade, fat bodies have become increasingly more pathologized by a medical industrial complex. This in turn affects people of size's lived experiences as people associate fatness with ill health, and ill health with morality.

## Findings and Analysis V

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### Beauty, Clothing, and Fatness

Beauty and access to clothing is also a major theme discussed by six out of seven interviewees. Because kyriarchical beauty standards in the Netherlands typically exclude women who are not white, slender, visibly able bodied, cisgender and feminine, fat women, especially fat women of color, are excluded from normative definitions of beauty. Similarly, there are relatively few clothing options for plus sized folks in Amsterdam, and even fewer outside of major Dutch cities. Patrons often need to travel across the country to find clothes in their size, especially if they are in the larger clothing size range (European 56+.) This section of the report is going to be structured differently than the others: first, I will discuss my participant observations at Odaliske, a plus size store in Amsterdam, followed by a selection of quotes from two store owners and one patron. Then I will move into the themes the other interviewees brought up surrounding beauty, access to clothing, and the resulting effects on self image.

I worked at Odaliske for three Saturdays, over 24 hours time span. I got to know Joz, the owner, and quite a few of her customers. I also got a look into the plus size fashion market and how Joz picks which clothes to feature in her shop. Started in 2007, Odaliske is one of the only stores in the Netherlands that carries up to a size 60 in women's clothing. While the prices are certainly not attainable for everyone (the average blouse costs around 50 euro,) the high quality of the clothing makes it an important investment for some. The majority of Joz's customers are middle aged, upper-middle class, white women. They come in to the shop with their sisters and daughters and friends and quickly feel at ease with Joz's body positive decorations and set-up. During my time there, I mainly helped re-rack clothing, learned from Joz about shopkeeping, and

spoke at length with various customers about what Joz calls their “body hangups.” The emerging narratives showed just how important having fashionable, fitting clothes is for these women.

The two interviews I did not record both took place in clothing shops. The first was with a woman I'll call Nadia. Joz, the shop owner, had invited Nadia to come speak with me about her life and her body after the shop closed one Saturday. We sat and had some snacks and Nadia opened up about her history of dieting, anger at people who commented on her weight, and the acceptance she found for her body over the last two years. Nadia is a white woman in her early 60s, who has been visiting the shop since it's beginning. She talked about how she never fit in in Holland, mainly because of the idea that all Dutch people are tall and thin. I introduced her in this section because she spoke at length about how when she found clothes that fit her body and were in fashion, her self esteem improved greatly. “Looking in the mirror,” she said “was nicer than ever before.” It is important to note that it unfortunately is a privilege to be able to find clothes in ones size that one can afford. Joz describes women who could enter her shop and spend upwards of one thousand euros in one fell swoop. Women who don't have the wealth to buy quality clothes in their size (as well as larger fat women who can't find their size anywhere!) are at a huge disadvantage in comparison. However, looking at Nadia's situation alone, we can see how access to clothing can make women feel happier in their bodies.

The second unrecorded interview was with a forty-something woman of color from the Caribbean named Eunice. She owns one of the only other plus size stores in Amsterdam, located on a busy market street. My interview with her was somewhat different from the others I conducted, as she was busy operating the shop all throughout. As she re-arranged various dresses and coats on the rack, I asked her a little about her store, her customers, and what she thinks

about women of size in the Netherlands. Much of what she said was in contradiction with itself, but the subtle disagreements shed light on larger societal conversations about beauty, body shape, and capitalism. For example, she began the interview by saying she thinks that it's really a shame to be a big woman in Amsterdam because of the pressure to be thin and the mistreatment of bigger people. However, she went on to speak about how all of her customers are happy with their bodies and have accepted their curves. This discontinuity suggests that there *is* an existing conversation about fatness: that fat people (women in particular) are often mocked for their size and the general (presumably thin) public knows it. She maintains that her customers, however, have happiness with their bodies, partially as a result of shopping at her store and having clothes that fit. This demonstrates the importance of resources like the shops Joz and Eunice own to larger women: having clothes that fit on your body and are beautiful are important to many women's self image.

When women don't have access to (inexpensive) clothing that fits them, it can have serious effects on their well being. Ashily, a former model who loves fashion, went through a time where she had a lot of difficulties finding clothing.

Because I couldn't find clothes that was fitting me how I wanted them to fit, and because I had a history with fashion in the past, it was difficult for me to find clothes that was fashionable, that was the norm. I just stayed at home. Every time I was invited to go out, I would decline.

Similarly, BeyonG mentioned that to her, beauty is about the clothes you wear and how self confident you are. For many people, that self confidence is wrapped up in having well fitting, attractive clothing. When those clothes are not available, it can be quite upsetting. BeyonG mentioned, "When I get irritated with my fat is when I go shopping, then you see the problems."

The dressing room is for many a place of confrontation, possibly because the vast majority of stores simply do not carry plus sizes, but also because many larger women don't look at themselves naked. Joz, the owner of a plus size store, has this to say.

“You see it the moment they come in the door, you see it like, oh there is self hatred coming in...There is so much hate, women can be so negative about their body, and I always think, your body, that's just the thing that's carrying you all your life and maybe never lets you down, you know. Most women that come here, they have made peace with their bodies...This is what I am, so, what can we do to make it as nice as possible?”

In keeping with the concept from the earlier section, invisibility and silences in the Netherlands surrounding fatness, the plus size dressing room is one of the only places outside of a health framework that people talk about bodies of size. Even there, however, many conversations revolve around hiding or concealing certain 'unwanted' parts of the body, like larger thighs, stomachs, and upper arms. These forms of “fat talk” are not uncommon in many plus sized stores and amount to what Kjerstin Gruys calls fat talk as emotional labor. She delves into how women in plus size stores often communicate with other patrons as well as shop keepers about their own bodies, comparing and discussing what they aren't happy with, as Joz's quote above illustrates (Gruys, 2012). Recognizing this *as* emotional labor as well as noting the connections to patriarchal systems that encourage competition amongst women over bodies is critical to understanding more about fatness in the Netherlands. It shows how while plus sized stores can be bastions of body positivity, they can also reify hierarchies about which bodies matter.

## Findings and Analysis VI

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### Racialized Size and National Identity

I interviewed primarily fat identified women of color because fatness does not exist in a social vacuum, rather in intersection with numerous other identities, one of which is race/ethnicity. What emerged from my research was two fascinating themes that gesture to truths about the Netherlands as a whole. Firstly, there is a cultural narrative that it is easier to be a big woman of color than a big white woman. Whether or not this is true is certainly up for debate, however. Secondly, the discourse about a very narrow Dutch national identity involves size, as fatness is associated with the Other. In the coming few paragraphs, I'll discuss both these themes as well as relevant theoretical concepts and literature.

Three participants, Joz, Hodan, and Eunice, specifically mentioned that many people believe that it is easier to be a fat woman of color than a fat white woman. They listed various reasons ranging from a cultural acceptance of thickness for black women, to comments about how many men of color find thicker women more beautiful. Hodan talked extensively about desirability politics and how people equate being found sexually attractive with acceptance.

People do tend to think that, you know, you can be fat if you are a woman of color. There is more leeway there- you will be seen as more desirable by men of color, particularly black men. There's definitely that idea. Black men, so, Antillean and Surinamese men, men from the African continent, that they find it more desirable than white men do, or even Turkish or Moroccan. So definitely racialized, also in terms of desirability and acceptableness.

In addition, Eunice, the shop owner who's customer base is primarily women of color, talked about how there is more desire for a curvy body in "darker skinned women." She said that women who come to her store, especially those from Surinam or the Carribean, look for clothes

that are more “bling-bling” and make them stand out in a crowd. This included brighter colors, statement pieces (like an all denim jumpsuit,) and lots of sparkles. “It's all about the tits and the ass for them,” said Eunice. Hodan echoed this sentiment about having curves in the 'right places' when she talked about dominant beauty ideals outside of the white, slender model.

White women might have a lot more issues with their fat than women of color, even though we still conform to the idea that you can be fat, as long as it's the ass and the boobs. You have to have this really tiny waist, and that's definitely still a dominant idea of beauty in communities of color.

Here it is clear that while there may be more space for bigger women in communities of color, there are still norms of beauty and they typically revolve around large breasts, a big butt, and a small waist.

Another theme brought up by Bear and Hodan both was that fatness is socially conceptualized as in opposition to Dutchness, or the increasingly narrow national identity category in the Netherlands. As political leaders, institutions, and “native Dutch” folks continue to engage in discourses surrounding who is and is not Dutch, they primarily exclude migrant peoples (especially those who are of color and/or Islamic background.) What this means in terms of fatness is two things. One, rates of obesity are higher amongst ethnic minority populations in the Netherlands (Agyemang, 2011.) Two, rhetoric surrounding health and worth relates only to thin bodies, which many people from ethnic minority groups do not have. Thus, it is fairly simple for anti-migrant narratives to allude to various peoples of color as 'health risks' or 'social problems.' Hodan talked about this specifically in terms of the Turkish. She said that a lot of public health officials are talking about “saving Turkish youth from obesity” and the like. This shows that fatness is constructed as a problem, yes, but a problem that is the *fault* of the Turkish

population in the Netherlands.

I think the project of constructing this really, really exclusionary national identity, Dutch autochthone national identity, the national self, isn't just white, it is also middle class, and thin,...Any person who is seen as fat is therefore unhealthy, any person who deviated from this really really narrow white supremacist, capitalist, ableist idea of what the true Dutch person is. Ableism is a huge thing, and fat is a part of that.

Bear also gestured to this concept of Dutchness in opposition to fatness when they spoke about how representation plays into nationalistic rhetoric. They drew parallels between skin color and body size to show that diversity in both exist in the Netherlands, but often people of color and fat people are invisibilized.

As much as I love about the Dutch, I think there's a certain lack of empathy, a cultural wide lack of empathy, which is very blatantly displayed with the zwarte piet, but also, a big part of the Dutch population is not white but somehow so many people don't get this. And I think it's probably a very similar thing, a big part of the Dutch population is not thin. But that's not what we see, that's not what people see...I mean, your skin color will never change, you know, you can lose all the weight you want, you can straighten your hair, you can do whatever, your skin color is never going to change, so you're never, no matter how much you try to normalize, you're never going to be considered a part of that dominant culture, so save yourself the hassle.

What Bear brings to light here is that the dominant Dutch culture is white and thin. People who differ from this (also in terms of national origin, ability, religion, class etc.) are seen as separate from quintessential Dutchness.

## Findings and Analysis VII

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### Existence as Resistance: Personal Liberation/Acceptance Models

This final section is included to show how two of the interviewees live their lives today in their fat bodies. The way they conceptualize their size is distinct from the fatphobic narratives that surround them, which is radical. In these paragraphs, I seek to demonstrate that bodily acceptance and liberation are not necessarily the same thing, as well as challenge the idea that there are not fat folks out there practicing radical self love.

Bear does identify as a fat activist and sees their daily interactions as a form of resistance. Being visible in a fat and queer body, they said, is radical because those are not the sort of bodies that are common in the Netherlands and their existence challenges stereotypes.

I definitely feel like people need to be more comfortable [with fat bodies]...i mean, this is reality...this is not considered a normal Dutch body, this is, I think, considered a relatively normal American body once you get away from the media blah blah, but this is definitely not a typical Dutch body. I should say a typical white Dutch body.

When they perform (and during their daily interactions,) they are incredibly conscious of the audience and people's reactions to their body. Over the last six months, they have begun going completely topless on stage, which the 'skinny' members of the troupe would do all the time. However, when Bear did it, it was much different as people are not used to seeing bodies like theirs. Throughout the interview, they constantly stressed the need for Dutch people to see bodies like theirs. "Why shouldn't everyone else be as uncomfortable with my body as I am, as I have been made to feel?" they said. Their girlfriend's child, for example, often likes to play with their stomach. At first, they were not entirely comfortable with this, but they recognized the importance of seeing and touching bodies like theirs. Much of Bear's activism is focused around

visibility and challenging people's preconceived notions about fat people (that they are unhealthy, that they are not fit, that they don't have partners...)

One of the most challenging things for Bear is using the word fat comfortably to describe themselves. Because of their history with it being used in a negative way, it is difficult for them to reclaim it. "I'm still, after almost 20 years of really conscious fat activism, I'm still struggling with using the word fat. I do it with my friends and I do it when I'm feeling defiant, you know, as in, fuck them, they need to see less skinny people all the time, you know, so I'll put my fat body up there. It's been a derogatory world my whole life and it's the hardest one."

This relationship with the word fat is not uncommon and was echoed by Beyoncé in her interview. She also talked about how, for her, accepting her body means realizing that she will never have the "Naomi Campbell body." She feels beautiful in her body as it is, but also would like to have what she calls the "Beyoncé body."

Til now I have this dream, that I want to have the Beyoncé body, to say it like that, but I don't want to be the Naomi Campbell type. I'm realistic about it, that I'm not going to be that petite type of woman, but I have to be the Beyoncé type. And that's still a dream of mine, to be healthy and. It's not that I'm unhappy with myself, don't get me wrong...; I don't have problems with my weight, I go everywhere and I feel like Britney or Madonna, who you want to call it, Angelina Jolie, I feel like her.

What both these examples show is how individuals live in their bodies- some through engaging passionately in activism, others through living their life in the body they have, whether or not they are happy in it. Both of these can exist within the same person, and both can be spaces for personal acceptance. By looking at how people of size navigate spaces and find happiness, it is possible to avoid the stereotype that all fat people want to be thin. Some do and others do not, but both are as important as the other.

## Conclusions

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This research is unique in that very few others have studied fatness in the Netherlands outside of a medical sphere. The conclusions I draw here are important mainly in that they illuminate the necessity for further research in the field of fat studies. The first theme I discussed in the results and analysis portion was childhood relationships as integral in body image formation. The ways in which the research participants navigated both their home and school life had a definite effect on whether or not they had a positive body image. Similarly, during the next section I spoke on the prevalence of dieting and indeed, disordered eating patterns the interviewees mentioned. Because dieting is encouraged, both in the media and by many doctors, many fat people engage in it as a culturally acceptable way of 'controlling' their bodies. This also demonstrates a way that bodies of size are hypervisible- they often act as cultural signifiers for other phenomena, like unhealth, laziness, and non-Dutchness. Perhaps the most apparent of these is the association of fatness with unhealthiness. All the participants spoke about stereotypes about their bodies that they have to deal with on an everyday basis. Fashion, or 'fatshion,' is a cultural space located outside of discussions of health, which opens it up as a place where plus size women can feel good about their bodies in beautiful clothes (if they can afford them.) However, fashion and style is also influenced by various beauty norms, which are racialized. The theme about race and ethnicity explores the ways fat bodies of color are othered and conceptualized as in opposition to Dutchness. The final theme was a discussion of what forms of activism are typically recognized as valid and how fat people's daily lives can be re-signified through their own individual interpretations of their size.

In conclusion, recognizing fatness as an axis of identity is increasingly more important as people of size experience social marginalization and are denied access to various institutions. Further research into the field of fat studies is critical, both to de-pathologize fatness and to recognize that fat people navigate spaces in unique ways. I have included suggestions for further research throughout the findings and analysis and am sure that scholars will begin to center fatness in their discussions of health, race and ethnicity studies, and other fields.

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## Appendix: Interview Questions

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I conducted a mixture of life story/oral history questions and opinion based questions. My interviews were less structured, with more emphasis on knowledge production by the participant, not overly guided questioning by the researcher.

### *Questions:*

Can you tell me about your relationship with your body growing up?

How did your family talk about bodies?

What sorts of images did you see about fat/thick/larger people?

When was the first time you remember thinking about your size?

In the Netherlands, how do you think fat people are treated?

In what ways are fat bodies shown in the media?

Have you experienced or been a part of any body positivity movements?

How does being a woman of color influence your size/ how does being a woman of size influence your ethnic/racial identity?

Do you think it's different being a fat woman of color as opposed to a thin woc?

What unique challenges/advantages/situations do you feel you face, if any?

Can you tell me a little about feminist and fat activism in a Dutch context?

What does the fat activist movement in the Netherlands look like? Do you consider yourself an activist and why?

What's your relationship with your body now?

What sort of practices do you engage in to make yourself feel good?