

Cutting Out the Fat: Fatphobia and Vegan Embodiment

Tomás de las Casas

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Advisor: Stephen J. Pfohl, Ph.D.

Abstract

Using qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with vegans of diverse backgrounds and body types, this study aims to investigate how vegans understand their own bodies and the bodies of others in relation to their consumptive practices and habits. The context of fatphobia in vegan activist spaces and communities surrounds this research as a tension within veganism that helps to elucidate the ways vegans use and engage with their bodies, further helping to understand not only vegan embodiment but also how fat vegans navigate these tensions with their own bodies. Vegans often engage with veganism as a tool for better understanding their own bodies and the social identities their bodies are associated with. This reflexivity causes them to not only concern themselves with how they relate to their own bodies but also with how others view and perceive their bodies. Thus, vegans respond to anxieties and fears about these perceptions by constructing their bodies in opposition to the stereotypes others apply to them (unhealthiness, preachiness, militancy, etc.). This may result in the exclusion of some bodies which are socially understood as fitting these roles (such as fat bodies as unhealthy) and, further, the ethical nature of vegan practices also causes these bodies to be seen as immoral or especially indulgent. This research helps to understand more precisely how vegans act as bodies in promoting their veganism and how they sometimes exclude other bodies in their attempts to defend vegan bodies.

Introduction

The body is a contested social battleground where claims of truth are made and upon which certain ideologies are imprinted, oftentimes without the body's own input or consent. When some community social practice finds itself particularly concerned with what people eat, consume, or even wear, the body becomes the site where discourse takes place as people determine for themselves and others what practices are appropriate for a body to engage in. With this in mind, it may be increasingly important for people who consider themselves activists and organizers in such social spaces to be more aware of how they engage with both their own bodies and the bodies of others if attempting to encourage their practices to as many people as possible, as is often a common goal when such practices are rooted in ethical claims. One such commonly ethical practice which seems like it should be particularly concerned with the body is veganism, which defines itself explicitly in opposition to our current society's accepted norms of eating, consuming, wearing, and generally exploiting non-human animal life. For a consumptive practice so focused on how we use our bodies to harm the lives of non-human animal bodies, what do vegans actually think about their own bodies and the bodies of other vegans, specifically in relation to their vegan practices? How can we further understand this by learning what they think about the bodies of people who don't engage in a vegan lifestyle or diet?

In a survey of online vegan activist communities, one out of four fat¹ vegan activists had been told not to participate in vegan rallies and protests *explicitly* because of their bodies while 79% had never been asked *to* participate *for* the inclusion of their body, indicating that these groups have tendencies to directly discriminate against fat bodies at worst and ignore fat bodies in promoting diversity at best. These same fat vegan activists also report an impulse to be more careful than others in which spaces they participate and how they participate for fear of fat-shaming, questioning of how they can be both fat and vegan, or implications that they may be “failed representatives” (Wrenn 2017). Advertisements from the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) have drawn on troubling stereotypes of fatness to promote meatless diets, even comparing fat people to animals – specifically whales – with billboards saying “Lose the blubber: go vegetarian” which was later replaced by “GONE: Just like all the pounds lost by people who go vegetarian” (Goldstein 2009). The comparison of fat bodies to animals is not uncommon (A. Hardy 2015; Julier 2013; Russell and Semenko 2016), denoting an explicit tension in even the possible existence of a “fat vegan” in the minds of vegans and non-vegans alike. Considering campaigning like this, it shouldn’t be at all surprising when respondents’ from the previously mentioned survey also noted that the truth of their vegan status has been publicly called into question, as though a person on a vegan diet could not possibly still be maintaining a fat body (Wrenn 2017). Such de-legitimization is supported by the fact that vegan communities tend to be overrepresented by the image of

¹ The use of the term “fat” should be noted throughout this work. The use of this term is contentious within activist and academic circles and there is no clear consensus on whether this term is appropriate, however as a fat person who has been the recipient of fatphobia I will actively use this word both to resist the negative stigma associated with it and also to better understand the social connection I have with my fat body.

the white, thin, wealthy woman (Cairns and Johnston 2015; Johnston, Baumann, and Oleschuk 2021; Wrenn 2017; Wrenn and Lutz 2016).

For fat vegans themselves, these troubling dynamics cannot be easy, especially as people who are simultaneously trying to resist the stigma they face not only as fat people but also as vegans. Even further, such weight stigma can be seen as harming vegan spaces as it severely restricts the inclusion of a population which is greater today in most of the world than it ever has been in the past. It seems clear that vegans think a *lot* about the body, and as a group that centers its identity around not only the consumption of food but also what is worn on the body (leather, silk, wool, etc.) it seems like the body itself plays an important role not only in how vegans understand themselves, but in how they understand each other.

Veganism provides an interesting case of consumption practices as it ideologically “extends beyond diet, (while) everyday food choices are the primary way veganism is enacted” (Scott 2020). Studies which investigate the nuances of how fat bodies navigate these movements and communities are few in number. It’s clear in the literature that non-meat eaters (not specifically vegans) map their own ideas of what it means to be a meat eater or a non-meat eater onto bodies and, therefore, respond to bodies according to those developed meanings. What is less clear, however, is how these constructed meanings develop distinct social classes of vegan and fat embodiment that are seemingly in constant conflict with one another. Recognizing this tension, it becomes all the more important to ask how fat vegans justify their involvement in these spaces as well as how they work to center their bodies in a movement which may exclude them at worst and ignore them at best. It’s equally important to ask how vegans generally may understand

their own bodies in relation to their vegan practice and the bodies of non-vegans to their non-vegan practices, and how these understandings may alter their treatment and perceptions of people with diverse (and especially larger and non-normative) body shapes and sizes.

An understanding of “reflexive embodiment” as part of a carnal sociology of the body is central in investigating this, as Nick Crossley (1995) explains it as that which “refers to the capacity and tendency to perceive, emote about, reflect and act upon one’s own body ... Reflexivity entails that the object and subject of perception, thought, feeling, desire or action are the same”. Here I have investigated these tensions between fatness and veganism to better understand how fatness as a socially embodied identity and consciousness impacts fat vegans and their involvement in vegan communities. Furthermore, I’ve analyzed how and why non-fat vegans might use fatphobia as a tool of exclusion and erasure of fat bodies to the (supposed) benefit of a public vegan image.

In terms of their general rhetoric surrounding their embodiment, vegans seem to interpret their transition to veganism as having strong impacts on the way they see, understand, and relate to their own bodies rather than necessarily focusing on seemingly more objective or material ways veganism may influence the body, even if such objective changes occur (such as weight loss, improved gut health, etc.). These impacts on how vegans know and see their bodies tend to be tied to other social identifiers they more strongly identify with or which they consider more intrinsic to their personhood (such as race, gender, sexuality, etc.). This relationship with a vegan embodiment causes vegans to produce two major discursive themes in the way they engage with veganism and in the way they use their bodies to promote veganism and judge the bodies of other vegans:

1. Vegans, especially non-fat vegans, have many anxieties about the way non-vegans view and judge the health and bodies of vegans, impacting how they perceive and treat other vegans and how they engage in veganism themselves.
2. Vegans tend to talk about non-Vegans in terms of a lack of purity, sometimes a lack of moral character, a lack of knowledge of some deeper “truth”, and also in terms of indulgence and over-consumption. This may lead to the same prejudices of people with body types they believe (or which are generally designated socially as) typical of non-Vegans.

Literature Review

The Sociology of Embodiment and the Body that Speaks

Considering the focus here on fat bodies – and indeed, bodies generally – it’s necessary to understand exactly how we understand the body through a sociological lens. Specifically, it’s important to understand what social place the body has in existing theoretical literature on the sociology of the body. Much of the theoretical underpinning of this research comes from the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty by way of Nick Crossley as he interprets and frames Merleau-Ponty’s writings on the body in a sociological context in “Merleau-Ponty, the Elusive Body and Carnal Sociology”. Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical project is to explicitly reject a Cartesian view of the social being as a mind-body dualism, where a mind which is non-physical and thinking controls a body which is simple physical matter which the mind acts through. Rather, he understands the body as “an effective agent and, thereby, as the very basis for human subjectivity” (Crossley 1995). As such, he doesn’t see a world of minds driving bodies but rather sees a social

world of “body-subjects”; human beings who exist in a social world with their bodies, *as* bodies, *with* other bodies, and being engaged with *by* other bodies.

It’s here that embodiment comes into view as we acknowledge bodies as the basis for human subjectivity and the interactions of bodies as the basis of intersubjectivity. However, this is not to say that embodiment is something one “experiences”. To presume such would further recreate a dualism that assumes there is some mind which exists separate from the body, “experiencing” embodiment as though it could ever *not* experience it. Instead, Merleau-Ponty explicitly understands embodiment itself as the basis for experience as our body is exactly what provides us with a positionality – or a point of view – in a social world (Merleau-Ponty 1962). This isn’t to say that we can’t also experience our own bodies, but such experience usually comes either from engaging with others or a social process of separation where one begins to understand a difference between their body as an object and their body as a social being. (Crossley 1995). Neither of these, however, require a separation of the body and subject but instead serve as ways for the body-subject to turn and see itself.

Crossley similarly develops this concept, first calling it a “carnal reflexivity” (Crossley 1995) but later thinking of it as a “reflexive embodiment” which “refers to the capacity and tendency to perceive, emote about, reflect and act upon one’s own body ... Reflexivity entails that the object and subject of perception, thought, feeling, desire or action are the same” (Crossley 2006). In the context of fat bodies, we must therefore acknowledge that a person’s embodiment as a fat person to some extent defines not only the way they engage with the world but also how they *feel* about and *experience* that engagement, precisely because they are simultaneously reacting to their body *with* their

body as the rest of the world also reacts to their body with their own bodies.

The body, here, is not simply a mediator. The body is not some object through which we experience the world and through which the social world experiences the person. In a very real sense, the body *acts* as an agent in ways beyond a narrowly mechanical understanding of what a body can “do” with its hands and feet. Historical and anthropological research has found that the body “speaks” in ways which the mind cannot, and specifically speaks *for* the mind when thoughts, memories, feelings, and traumas are repressed. Anne Harrington outlines this history of the body within the world of medicine in her book on the history of mind-body medicine, *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine*, noting that “a talking body ... is one that can converse with its owner, conveying messages to her about things going on in her life that she is having difficulty consciously confronting.” This concept of a “body that speaks” has become central to therapeutic approaches to healing trauma which understand “the dangers of repression and the healing power of confession” (Harrington 2008). This “body that speaks” exists outside of the world of medicine, however, even if the developments of mind-body medicine helped to popularize this understanding of the body.

Returning to Merleau-Ponty, we see that language itself both necessitates and is necessitated by an acknowledgment of the body as being-in-the-world (Crossley 1995; Evens 2009), not simply because it is the body which speaks language but also because language finds itself expressed always in a socio-historical context that would not make sense without the presence of a body-subject in space. Here, the body speaks and is spoken to, but the body can also be spoken about as it is objectified. For Crossley, this

duality between speaking and being spoken about is important as it calls into question common debates on whether or not sociologists should treat the body as some discursive object *or* as a fleshy, active agent, as though both could not exist simultaneously.

Crossley, and Merleau-Ponty as well, state that this distinction is a false one, and that instead discourse about bodies *is* a “fleshy” process precisely because it is the body which produces discourse as “it speaks and listens, and reads and writes ... [discourse and fleshiness] belong to each other as do legs and walking” (Crossley 1995).

This, finally, brings a key understanding of how bodies – vegan, fat, both, neither, and otherwise – must be understood in the process of this study. Veganism does not seem to simply be a singular consumptive practice that people either choose to engage in or not engage in. Vegans find themselves engaged in discourse both with each other and with non-vegans alike, especially as vegans seem to have regular disagreements on what constitutes veganism and how vegans should act (which will become apparent via the findings of this study). As they engage in vegan practices, it’s the bodies of vegans which construct discourse over what it means to be a vegan and, importantly, what it means to be a *good* vegan. As such, we can expect that vegans will not only act as bodies in their engagement with veganism as a discourse and a consumptive practice, but also that they may heavily scrutinize the bodies of others as they construct and engage in the very same discourse and practice. This is not to say that such scrutiny must be negative, but it must be said that embodiment is the core of how these discourses begin and therefore bodies will find themselves directly *in conversation*, especially for a belief system which is defined by criticisms of what we put in and on our bodies. This makes it clear that it’s especially important to contend critically with which kinds of bodies are making claims

and how those bodies come to understand the bodies which surround them.

Embodied Veganism

Regardless of the ideological root that brings a person to engaging in veganism, such a lifestyle primarily is presented as a set of consumption practices. This necessarily means that consumption is a regular target of criticism both between vegans and against non-vegans. In this way, veganism comes with its own embodiment that is both defined by vegans and by the rest of society which carries certain preconceptions of the effect of vegan consumption habits (as in, a vegan diet) on the body. Such a “vegan embodiment” has been touched on in research to some extent, but such research is limited and oftentimes finds confusion in sampling as some people instead fall into categories of vegetarianism and “flexitarianism”, for example (Johnston et al. 2021; Ossipow 1995). A vegan embodiment is not unheard of, however, despite a tendency to conflate it with other lifestyles that may be similar – but not the same. Generally, veganism is compared to vegetarian lifestyles and a “natural style,” both defined by practices that seek to make eating food a refined and intellectualized experience. Such intellectualization is not only scientific, but also spiritual as greater attention is paid to the underlying ecological systems and pathways that bring certain foods to the table. The perceived objective health of foods consumed become just as important as the subjective experience such foods provide as connections to the natural world or the “Cosmos” (Giacoman et al. 2021; Jorge 2015; Ossipow 1995).

Such practices defined by a rejection of meat consumption find themselves embodied in a variety of ways. The clearest listing of these embodiments come from Laurence Ossipow’s 1995 study on vegetarian perceptions of fat bodies (and their

contrast to thin, vegetarian bodies) which finds that vegetarians tend to perceive thin bodies as associated with light, “natural” Nature², conservation, purity, and “whole” while fatness is associated with heavy, fatty, pollution, dirty, domesticated Nature, waste, and death (Ossipow 1995). These themes represent the way vegetarian embodiment (and, we can only hope to approximate, vegan embodiment) maps certain discourses unto the body which have already been identified earlier. Each of these concepts can be identified under the realms of health and environmentalism, while an ethical bent is less obvious perhaps precisely because a focus is given to vegetarians rather than vegans. These concepts are not distinct and, in fact, are deeply interrelated. In other words, thin bodies are not only perceived as healthy *and* environmentally conscious but instead are healthy *because* of a deeper ecological consciousness and vice versa. Such concepts are communicated almost entirely via the body without regard to what such bodies actually consume on a day to day basis, reinforcing the fact that embodiment acts as a foundation for producing discourses on vegetarianism/veganism (Ossipow 1995).

The limitations of this perspective must be restated and recognized as a gap in this literature (which this study may help to illuminate). What is being stated here is still not necessarily the presence of a “vegan embodiment,” but rather an approximation of what a vegan embodiment might look like when referenced to other non-meat consuming embodiments.

² “Nature” here and elsewhere is capitalized to imply that these research subjects treat “Nature” literally as we would any other being with a proper noun, that is to say as some entity worthy of respect with complex internal processes and external effects. To some extent these vegetarians may even consider “Nature” to be something that speaks, breathes, thinks, etc. and acts/exists within and through all living and non-living things.

Fatphobia and Fat Embodiment

Fat people face undue amounts of social stigma, hatred, and marginalization because of their bodies. With the socially entrenched perception of fatness as something which is itself diseased and pathologized - and often seen as the fault of fat people themselves – (Colls and Evans 2014; Fitzpatrick 2011; Julier 2013; Monaghan, Rich, and Bombak 2019; Rich 2011; Williams and Annandale 2020) fat people find themselves being paid lower wages due to the perception that their “medical risks” make it more expensive for employers to pay for their medical insurance (Julier 2013). Fat people are also perceived as lazy and ignorant, justifying state action to revoke parenthood rights for fat parents and to impose tax hikes for consumption patterns (particularly “snack taxes”) that are seen as being related to the “risky behaviors” of fat people (Julier 2013). Fatness also becomes politicized as “the obesity epidemic” is weaponized in service of reproducing hierarchical oppression and demonization of marginalized groups. Feminists become classified as “fat cows” (Julier 2013; Russell and Semenko 2016) and the supposed laziness of black and latine populations become naturalized due to the higher proportions of obesity within such communities (Julier 2013). The “obesity epidemic” is even used to distract from more institutional critiques that could lay the foundations for sustainable consumption programs as the proposal that we all should consume less transitions into a criticism of fat individuals as “overconsumers” rather than a criticism of the industrial capitalist systems that cause us all to overconsume (Julier 2013).

As outlined in the introduction, vegan spaces are no exception to these inequalities and social stigma. What we find simply by a cursory glance at how fat bodies are presented generally and within the production of body image in vegan activist circles is

not simply that fat bodies are being spoken about (i.e., objectified) but that fat bodies are rarely being listened to. Such a fat embodiment makes it so that fat bodies enter public social discourse already as highly scrutinized for what they put in their bodies (as they are encouraged or forced to focus on becoming thin) and for what they put on their bodies (as they are told that their fat bodies are aesthetically displeasing and undesirable). This puts fat bodies in a problematic position for vegan discourses, especially for fat vegans as a fat vegan body finds itself placed under stress as a fat body receiving scrutiny and criticism from other bodies while also taking on a consumptive practice that often necessitates a scrutiny for the bodies of others. This tension is precisely what drives this research as we try to find how fat vegans navigate and how non-fat vegans become aware of (or ignore) and handle this tension.

Data and Methods

This research involves a series of semi-structured interviews with any vegan who would self-identify as a vegan with the exception of one participant who considered herself “plant-based” and has rejected the label of vegan. I’ve conducted 9 interviews with 10 interviewees (one interview consisted of a vegan couple whom I spoke to at the same time). All interviews have been performed and recorded via Zoom and audio recordings automatically transcribed by Otter.ai and proofread by me for corrections and formatting fixes. These interviews have been analyzed inductively using NVivo to organize phrases and statements into identified themes. All interviewees thus far have also responded to an exit survey which asks them for basic demographic information, their height and weight, and general thoughts on the conversation. The only interviewees who did not answer the exit survey were the couple I spoke to; however, I’ve filled in any

demographic information for them that they actively shared during their interview (such as their race and genders). All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

Each interview followed a general guideline, however depending on the identity of the interviewee and what I learned about them the conversation would go in various directions. Generally, I segmented each interview into three general sections or topics: vegan self-identity (of the interviewee), perception of other vegans and how they practice diversity and inclusion, and connections between veganism and the body (both for the interviewer's own body and the bodies of others). When interviewees were fat and identified with fatness to some extent, questions tended to be a bit more explicit in asking about any experiences they may have had with fatphobia and what experiences they may have had tying their fatness with their veganism. When interviewees identified themselves as thin or average-sized, I tried to avoid explicitly asking how they feel about fat people and instead asked them about eating habits and lifestyles that are associated with fatness, a.k.a. "junk food vegans", sedentary lifestyles, vegans who don't prioritize "health" in their veganism, etc. I also asked interviewees to talk about how their veganism connects with other social groups they identify with (race, sexuality, class, religion, gender, etc.) not only to better understand how they engage with veganism but also to see how and where the body emerges in these instances as well.

Via the exit survey, which has data listed out more clearly in Table 1, almost all my interviewees have identified themselves as White with the exception of two interviewees who identify as Black and another who identifies as "White/Lebanese". Three of those who identified as White also identified as Hispanic/Latino(a/e). Five interviewees identify as cis women, three as cis men, and two as non-binary. During interviews, three

interviewees identified themselves as “fat” as opposed to thin or average-sized, and accordingly with participants’ reported height and weight the three people who identified themselves as “fat” are the only three with a BMI that can be classified as “obese”. This isn’t meant to make a judgment or confirmation on the objective weight or size of the participants or to determine any metric for fatness, but instead is meant to call into consideration what might make a person see themselves as fat and what systems (namely, BMI) might exist to legitimize a person’s belief that they are or aren’t “fat”.

Table 1 • Respondents by Race, Gender, and Size

	<i>N</i>
Total Respondents	10
Race	
White Non-Hispanic/Latino(a/e)	4
White Hispanic/Latino(a/e)	3
Black	2
Other (white/Lebanese)	1
Gender	
Cis Man	3
Cis Woman	5
Non-Binary	2
Size (according to BMI)	
Underweight	1
Average weight	3
Overweight	1
Obese	3
Size (according to self-ID)	
Average/Thin	7
Fat	3

Note: There were no respondents who identified as Asian, Native American/Indigenous/First Peoples, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. There were also no respondents who identified their gender as trans man, trans woman, or other. Two respondents did not provide their height or weight so their BMI could not be calculated.

When searching for participants, I tried to extend my sample pool to casual vegans as well as activist vegans. Vegans were found through a variety of sources, mainly from social media networks (i.e., Twitter) and real life contacts who knew vegans. Then, some participants were found via snowball sampling from interviewees. Past research tends to focus on vegan activists, limiting these studies as these are vegans who may be more conscious and wary of social biases whereas more casual vegans drawn to veganism for their own health or personal convictions may not be as cognizant of any social biases they may be

expressing. Vegan activists may also center their veganism more on environmentalism and animal ethics whereas a fuller, more complete picture of veganism in its contemporary and popularized forms must include people who define their veganism more by a connection to health. However, throughout this research I was only able to speak to vegans who currently consider themselves activists to some extent or considered themselves activists at some point during their time as vegans. This is likely because activists are more likely to discuss their vegan identity actively and openly online whereas someone who engages in veganism for personal health reasons likely won't feel too much drive to share that identity publicly. Such vegans certainly aren't impossible to find, and in the future they could be more targeted for study, but this research may suffer the same limitations as other studies for these reasons.

I also did not enact any sort of purity test on whether these vegans successfully follow a vegan diet at all times. How much these people strictly follow their vegan diet is important – especially if we expect fat vegans to be pushed away from veganism because of their experiences – but more important is the way participants embody veganism as a set of ideals, attitudes, and beliefs that go beyond their simple practices of food consumption. Therefore, a vegan is identified as anyone who identifies themselves as one and particularly identifies with underlying ideals of veganism (i.e. animal rights and ethics, sustainable consumption turning away from industrial food systems, rejection of the consumption of animal products, the health benefits of pursuing a vegan diet, etc.). The one exception to this here is the participant who rejected the label of vegan despite trying to be “plant-based”. She was included in this study because she identified her relationship to her fatness and her blackness as being explicitly important in her tensions

with veganism as a whole and with maintaining a “vegan lifestyle”.

Similarly, I have not applied any objective measure of fatness to participants when determining whether or not they may be referred to as fat people. Most, if not all, attempts to objectively measure some barrier that makes one a “fat body” is far too problematized by a history of the fat body as racialized, androgenized, and even denied citizenship status (Julier 2013; Wrenn 2017). The reality is that there are bodies that become socially perceived as fat despite any objective measure’s inability to identify it as fat while there are bodies that fall into objective measures of fatness (such as BMI, body fat content, obesity diagnoses, blood sugar content, etc.) without being socially perceived as fat. I trust that respondents understand the relationship they have with their body and that their body has with society to appropriately identify whether they operate in the world as fat bodies or not. I only ask participants to list their height and body weight in the exit survey – and I do not ask this in the interview – not to determine whether each participant can objectively be classified as a fat body but instead to understand how their bodies might be understood in a broader context of the body as a medicalized entity (in other words, whether these bodies are pathologized as obese or not).

Throughout the interview process, I framed these interviews to participants as surrounding a study on diversity and inclusion within vegan spaces. I didn’t want to lead participants with the topic of fatphobia and fat erasure as I didn’t want to prime them to temper or overcompensate their opinions on fat bodies. I expected many of these respondents to be more socially conscious than the average person and therefore to already be more careful with the way they convey their feelings on people with certain bodies. For this same reason I expected they may be less guarded and in fact more

excited to discuss what sort of diversity and inclusion practices they believe exist or should exist within their spaces. I also performed these interviews only online due to my position as a fat person performing this research. I wanted to lessen the possibility of participants tempering their responses to avoid offense in recognition of my fat body or to seem more socially accepting in spaces that already tend to be imbedded in the language of social justice, respectability, and body positivity.

I also find it important to spend some time discussing more specifically my position as a fat person in this research. I identify strongly as not only being fat, but also as a fat activist and liberationist, and some of the people I've interviewed were aware of this beforehand to varying degrees depending on their awareness of my online presence. As a fat activist, I've spoken candidly online about my experiences with fatphobia and weight stigma. To some extent, I worry that this may cause certain respondents to be more sensitive to discussing bodies and fatness with me, but as mentioned earlier I've taken steps to ameliorate this.

Further, my experiences with weight stigma and fatphobia likely have an impact on how I interpret and frame the conversations I have with my interviewees. As someone who is fat and is interested in becoming vegan (and has recently become vegetarian), I have personally faced fat stigma from vegans online and have faced challenges becoming vegan due in some part to fat stigma experienced from other vegans, among other reasons. Because of this, I approach the rhetoric vegans have on bodies with those experiences in the back of my mind. This seems to me like it can be both some help, in the sense that I may be more attuned to rhetoric that enables fat stigma, and a hindrance, in the way that I may be expecting or anticipating fat stigma when it isn't necessarily

there. Ideally, I hope that other researchers of different diverse backgrounds and body shapes and sizes can continue similar research to help contribute to a mosaic of investigations on vegans and their relationship with embodiment.

Findings

Below, I present emerging themes that are prevalent throughout each interview performed which demonstrate some of the ways vegans grapple with both their bodies and the bodies of others within vegan discourses. These themes largely appear regardless of body size but are expressed uniquely dependent on social identity. The fact that these themes are consistent across participants but uniquely expressed on an individual level will represent a broader discursive theme representing the way vegans understand the relationship between veganism and the way they understand their own bodies. In other words, the first overarching theme will deal with how vegan embodiment interacts with other forms of embodiment. Then, I will present two more themes which emerge as products of this embodied interaction between veganism and social identity. Specifically, I will show that (1) vegans – especially non-fat vegans – have many anxieties about the way non-vegans view the health and bodies of vegans, impacting the way they perceive and police their own bodies and the bodies of other vegans; and (2) vegans tend to talk about non-vegans in terms of a lack of purity, a lack of moral character, a lack of knowledge of some deeper “truth”, and most importantly in terms of indulgence and over-consumption. This may lead these vegans to attribute these negative characteristics to bodies which they consider typical of non-vegans.

Veganism as a Transformation of the Body as Subject, not Object

When talking with vegans specifically and explicitly about their relationships to their bodies, I would generally ask them something like, “Has veganism had an impact on the way you view your health and your body?” Most vegans when asked this associated veganism with a mindfulness – of the body, of what is put into the body, of how the body is viewed by others. Lola, a white cis woman who describes herself as thin, shared that “veganism has definitely changed my awareness of ... what I'm eating and the deconstruction of the products I'm eating to the absolute origins of them.” As a diet or lifestyle that requires one to literally be more mindful of what one eats and consumes, this is unsurprising. Jake, a cis man who is a fat vegan, explained how veganism changed his mindfulness around his health, telling a story about how becoming vegan encouraged him to see a doctor more regularly for blood tests to make sure he was receiving his necessary nutrients on his vegan diet. He discovered, “I was deficient in vitamin D. And I don't think that was from veganism. I think that's because I don't like the sun ... [and] I measured these things. And regularly, I think it was three months and then six months and then six months ... so, yeah, if it wasn't for veganism, I wouldn't have even known that I was vitamin D deficient.” What surprised me here was that this mindfulness had less to do with literal physical changes to the body *as a result* of a vegan diet as it did with building a relationship with the body regardless of whether a vegan diet changes the body. In this way, participants often seem to not think of veganism as “changing their body” but rather as “changing the way they exist as bodies”, treating veganism as both a cause for a more mindful embodiment and also as a tool for turning back and understanding their own bodies. This mindset is present throughout various interviews as

participants think about veganism as making them feel more “connected” to their body and “in control”, indicating that the change to veganism is more impactful in the way it situates the body as a foundation for subjectivity as it allows people to seemingly act as better agents.

It's important, however, to note that such mindfulness is not always positive for these vegans. For some, veganism might have worked to make participants *overly* concerned with what goes in their bodies in ways that they themselves may find harmful. Eve is an average sized black non-binary person who was raised by Seventh Day Adventist parents who associated religiosity with switching regularly between a vegetarian and vegan lifestyle. Eve noted that being raised with this mix of a vegetarian and vegan lifestyle caused them to be more “mindful of any bodily issues [they] have,” but at the same time caused them to have a “kind of guilt that can come with ... the way [they were] taught to eat.” Specifically, Eve told stories about how their family would encourage shame or guilt around eating certain foods that were seen as “toxic”, “full of chemicals”, or “unhealthy”, encouraging a less healthy “mindfulness” that is still less concerned with what a vegan diet physically does to the body and is more concerned with what foods a vegan mindset should treat with more hostility and negativity. Amina, a fat black cis woman who considers herself “plant-based” but an “ex-vegan”, explained that she had found herself using veganism to justify her own eating disorders. When asked why veganism appealed to her for the goal of rapid – and dangerous – weight loss as opposed to other diets, she said, “it was the idea of elimination”, and where Amina felt that other fad diets at least tried to find ways to transform foods people already enjoy veganism meant that she “really picked up on the morality of foods like this is bad. This

is good. Eat this, not that.” In both cases described above, an attachment with the morality of foods causes stress and discomfort for these vegans, not only because the food they eat is being moralized but also specifically because the foods they must *reject* have been moralized. This indicates that while in some cases veganism can be seen as empowering the body as an agent it can also produce negative stigma for bodies that fail to adhere strictly to a vegan diet, as a deviation from a vegan diet becomes associated with a moral failing. This will come up again in themes later on.

For participants with more marginalized identities, veganism seems to help them develop their relationship with their bodies specifically with respect to how they’ve been impacted by other social identifiers they identify with. To demonstrate this, I want to focus on one of the black vegans I spoke to, Eve, as well as one of the fat vegans I spoke to, Jake. As mentioned earlier, Eve was raised in a household that would regularly switch between being vegetarian and vegan, particularly because of their beliefs as Seventh Day Adventists which, according to them, involve a focus on health as a factor of spirituality and religiosity. Eve’s relationship with their religion is more complicated now and their veganism has become detached from Seventh Day Adventist beliefs, however Eve expressed a unique way that growing up vegan allowed them to engage with their identity as a black person.

“I kind of mentioned how my mom would kind of be making me feel guilty about eating certain things. And, you know, I remember it, I see why there is a value to a lot of what she says. A lot of what my mom and my dad would teach me about food, it’s being popularized right now as this ‘new knowledge,’ but I think what’s interesting is this connection to the earth and fruits and vegetables is pretty

common in black families, especially those who are coming from the slave trade. So, you know, it's also taught me a lot about like herbs and like different things that I can use to treat my sicknesses outside of regular over the counter medications.” – Eve

Eve’s feelings around the way they were raised are clearly complex and filled with traumatic ways of viewing the body, but at the same time being raised so closely to a vegan lifestyle in a black family meant that living a vegan lifestyle allowed them to engage with their black history in a tangible way that related directly with the health and wellbeing of their black body. In this way, Veganism did not *cause* any change in the way Eve viewed their body, but rather served as a tool allowing them to understand how their body relates to their family as representing a history of marginalized bodies.

Jake was an equally interesting case. Beyond being fat, Jake specifically identifies as a “gainer,” which refers to a queer fetish subculture in which participants find sexual (or sometimes non-sexual) pleasure and gratification in – and sometimes form both sexual and non-sexual relationships around – the act of intentionally gaining weight and becoming fatter. Identifying as a gainer presents unique challenges to someone with a fat body, not only because they must reject explicitly the notion that fat is something to be lost but also because it becomes almost impossible to hide the fact that someone is purposefully gaining weight and has no interest in losing it. For this identity, an *intentional* fat embodiment is a requirement to be acknowledged properly as a part of this social group. For Jake, veganism is not something that must conflict with being a gainer, but for both gainers and non-gainer vegans it does conflict.

“I remember this one time where I spoke to a vegan ... I was like to him, so yeah, the way of eating veganism, what if because being fat is simply excess calories, isn't it logical to you that if you are fat as a vegan that you can be, you know, still healthy? And he was just like, No, no way. It's impossible. And I was like, Okay, why? He's like, it just isn't. It can't be, being fat is unhealthy.

...

But I really do want to organize a gainer community and have vegan options available because when I ‘came out’ as vegan, the gainer community had a very strong, oppressive, push back towards me. As if the ideology of veganism was incompatible with gaining...” – Jake

It’s clear from this that Jake experiences an internal tension, not only as a fat vegan but as a vegan who celebrates, centers, and even glorifies fatness in his sense of self and identity. However, as mentioned earlier, when asked again how veganism impacted his relationship with his body and his health, his answer had almost nothing to do with how a vegan diet has physically changed his body; instead, he focused on how veganism impacted his mindfulness of his overall health. Further, though, Jake talked about how he tried to embody his ideal of a “vegan gainer”:

“So, I knew that I also wanted to be a gainer in the future. As an activist, I sort of felt like I need to prove a point to the gaining community, that one can be a gainer, and be vegan. And ... for scientific reasons, I don't really want people to point out the fact that oh, yeah, you might be a fat vegan but ... how much of that fat came from the animal foods from before you were vegan? You know, so like, I did this crazy thing where I was fasting and I dropped like 10 kilos and got really

light to like, I don't know 52 kilograms ... And I was pretty damn skinny ... but I want every pound of fat on me to be a vegan pound. Just a crazy thing, I had in myself. So that's also the relationship I had with my body that was related to veganism.” – Jake

Like with Eve, Jake is using veganism as a tool to navigate his identity as a fat person and a gainer in a society which demonizes and questions both, all while trying to develop a more holistic view of his own body and health which he feels would not come about if it were not for a vegan *mindset*, not just a vegan diet. His story about wanting “every pound of fat ... to be a vegan pound” is explicitly a sort of “fat vegan embodiment” as he understands his body as being both caught up in and producing discourses of what makes a body legitimate as a vegan body or as a gainer body.

Vegan Anxieties: How Bodies Police Other Bodies

Due to the ethical motivations that drive many vegans towards veganism, it makes sense that many of them explicitly state that they believe veganism is something that should – as a moral imperative – be spread to non-vegans. Vegans I spoke to were keenly aware of the perception that vegans can be seen as “preachy” or “holier-than-thou”, yet they rarely expressed a belief that Veganism is something purely personal and need not be spread. Because of this, vegans I interviewed seem to be very invested in how they “sell” Veganism to others, and, by proxy, what non-Vegans think about them. The anxiety over seeming “preachy” is one that Vegans are quick to point to as a major anxiety, and they’ll often bring it up unprompted. Kevin, a thin cis white man, said, “I tend to be a little bit more of the preacher than [my partner] is ... but it's important to me to combat the stereotype that vegans are really preachy. You know, I don't hide the fact

that I am vegan ... But I don't necessarily go out of my way to give unsolicited advice and things like that, just because I think that people are so desensitized to veganism in that way.” Kevin’s partner, Tatiana, a thin cis white woman, expressed similar concerns, saying “I don't like conflict. And I know that for me to be preachy, and to like, be serious about telling somebody that what they're doing is wrong, or I think they should change the way they do it is just not going to sit well for most of the time, unless they like actually asked me.” This anxiety shows up in more ways than just “preachiness” as vegans express concern with seeming “militant” as well, and even when not explicitly stated these vegans’ approaches to promoting veganism demonstrate a sensitivity to the fact that people may react poorly to being moralized to or yelled at or shown disturbing images. Many participants point to PETA campaign messaging as being off putting, even if they have the right goal.

Vegans rarely deny the idea that vegans might truthfully be “preachy” (although they typically reframe it as being passionate and committed to their ethical framework). Rather, they tend to treat it as something to work around and obfuscate. The vegans I interviewed often don’t want to come across as militant vegans who settle for nothing less than perfection and purity, so instead they try to find what they consider to be practical approaches to bringing others into veganism that can be effective without conflicting with their own ethical convictions. The ways in which non-fat vegans, in particular, try to encourage veganism become interesting when they are trying to strategically avoid “preachiness”. They seem to latch on to other negative stereotypes that are held about vegans and present themselves (as representatives of veganism) as proof that vegans are *not* defined by their stereotypes. Lola specifically talks about her initial

concerns with wanting to be a “fit vegan”, saying “I didn't want to make the movement look bad. I've heard this from other vegans, where they'll say ... this idea that you almost have to advertise your movement by looking really attractive or really good, or really healthy ... with regards to veganism and the stereotype that vegans have of being you know, sickly ... there was a connection definitely there of wanting to look ... less sickly, I guess I just wanted to make sure I looked like buff or like, was able to do like push-ups and stuff because like, wow, look, I can do those and I'm vegan. So, everyone become vegan.”

Jake discusses similar concerns with a different sort of negative stereotype which he himself seems to hold about other vegans, saying, “In Australia I felt slightly disconnected from the vegan communities I was involved with. Because ... I'm a man of science. And I'm also opposed to anything that isn't scientifically provable, or measurable. So, I found that so many people I was meeting were really interested in magic... And magic is fundamentally incompatible with science ... So many things were quite strange to me, anti-vaxxers! So many anti-vaxxers in the vegan community ... Yeah. A lot of anti-science people in the vegan community. And it was really annoying and weird. And a lot of, oh my god, dope or weed or whatever is illegal in Australia, but it's so readily available. The law hasn't changed the availability and so many vegans do dope. And I feel like it makes them dopey!” While these stereotypes about vegans seem to come from Jake's perspective, rather than being concerned specifically with how others see vegans, he speaks about these stereotypes as something to separate and distinguish himself from. When he says, “I feel like it makes them dopey”, there's a sense of embarrassment present and an inability to connect and align himself with these people.

Jake and Lola are both very concerned with separating themselves from what they perceive to be harmful stereotypes about vegans, regardless of how true or false they feel those stereotypes may be. In expressing this separation, they define themselves in opposition to those stereotypes, not simply as not having those stereotypes but as having some characteristic that makes them proof of the negative of these stereotypes. For Jake, it isn't enough to simply not believe in magic and not smoke dope, he instead must define himself as a man of science and as a rational and logical thinker. For Lola, it isn't enough to be a vegan who doesn't look sickly but rather she must be a vegan who is buff, can do push-ups, and look attractive and healthy. This explicitly creates tension between vegans who seek to disprove their stereotypes and those who seemingly fall into their stereotypes, and vegans tend to be careful not to cast explicit judgment on other vegans for the stereotypes they supposedly promote – but not always. In one situation, Kevin and Tatiana both cast doubt on the idea that being a “junk food vegan” could be an effective “way of being vegan” which keeps people committed to Veganism:

“... we think that [junk food vegans] are more likely to not see the results that they're hoping for or have some kind of adverse health effect as a result of eating like, tons of soy, or, you know, maybe they eat a vegan ice cream every day or something, you know. So, if those people are so focused on those prepackaged foods and things like that, it seems to us like it's more likely that they're going to kind of fall out of veganism. And then they won't be a good representative of the community. And they'll just be another person that other people can say, ‘Oh, I know somebody who tried that vegan diet, and you know, it didn't work out for them.’” – Kevin

“Yeah, because ... the biggest thing about going vegan is the improvement of health, if you do it correctly ... when your primary diet is focused around the ultra-processed foods that are vegan, then you kind of don't really reap that benefit, and then it gets a bad rap.” – Tatiana

A critical distinction between these statements and the statements of other participants is that Tatiana and Kevin are not only are seeking to transform their own health, bodies, behavior, and actions in response to a negative stereotype (these respondents also both heavily emphasize that health benefits originally brought them to veganism), but they also turn that same responsibility that they've placed upon themselves onto other vegans, or so-called “junk food vegans.” There is an explicit reflexive embodiment here as vegans, in this case, are using their own bodies – which they have acted upon and imprinted certain beliefs and ideals on – as a baseline for the bodies of others to conform to, not only physically but ideologically and perhaps even ethically. The logical conclusion of transforming the self to fit a better representational standard in opposition to perceived negative stereotypes seems to be to advocate the transformation of the other as well. This tension lays the groundwork for conflict that is mapped directly onto the body, especially with preconceived notions of “health” and the central importance of health as important above anything else.

Veganism and the Moral Body

Vegans aren't only concerned with how they and other vegans carry themselves and their bodies. As a group of people who explicitly place themselves as ideologically opposed to non-vegans, they also construct certain ideas about what a non-vegan looks like and what it says about a person to be non-vegan (in fact, I found myself having to

include more questions about non-vegans because interviewees tended to be very eager to talk about non-vegans and what they think unprompted). Because I've primarily only spoken to vegans who currently associate their veganism with ethical or environmental reasoning, even if they originally became vegan for health reasons, the language they use to describe non-vegans tends to be very morally charged. This isn't to say that their language is overwhelmingly rude or hateful or spiteful. On the contrary, a lot of vegans tend to be very sympathetic (perhaps at worst a bit condescending) toward non-vegans as they assume they simply lack knowledge or lack access to some enlightenment that veganism has produced for the vegan. For example, Jake, when asked about how vegans feel about non-vegans, took the opportunity to specifically call out and shame vegetarians specifically because he believes vegetarians "should know better," implying that non-vegans who aren't vegetarians simply *don't* know any better:

"I think firstly, I think our mortal enemies are the vegetarians ... Because it's, it's like hypocrisy. It's like, you're, you're having milk and eggs, because you feel like you know, you're not going to eat a murdered piece of meat, but that milk and the eggs is created through murder. [As for non-vegetarian non-vegans?] I don't know, I think the vegan community's kind of sympathetic towards them. I think they feel like they just haven't made the connection. And it's hard to be so critical and judgmental of them. If they don't understand what's really going on. They always say they know what's going on. I'll be like, 'Oh, watch this documentary about factory farming,' and they'll be like, oh, yeah, I know about all that. It's horrible. But you know, it's what I do to eat. And like, it's one thing to know about

it, it's another thing to see it and connect with it and understand what's really happening.” – Jake

Tatiana, similar to Jake, expresses her belief that many people simply don't know enough about what veganism is or what a vegan lifestyle or diet entails and she takes it upon herself, in these instances, to take on a role as educator:

“... a lot of people have like, surprising to me- like, to me, it's common knowledge now about certain things with veganism. But sometimes even people were like, ‘Oh, does honey count,’ or just like, ‘how do eggs count’ and like, well, that comes from an animal, then yeah, I'm not going to eat it. So, I'm just surprised by what people know and don't know about it. So, it's like, that's my opportunity to educate.” – Tatiana

Vegans acknowledge that there is a certain barrier of knowledge to being a vegan, so they can sympathize with non-vegans who don't know about what vegans understand to be harmful and abusive practices towards animals. However, this lack of knowledge is perceived as more than just a lack of functional knowledge, but almost as a lack of moral, ethical knowledge as well, as when Jake says that they may “know what's going on” but they don't “understand what's really happening.” These vegans don't see non-vegans as simply needing to know facts, they need to learn new moral truths.

This lack of a moral truth is associated with certain types of consumption practices as well, as vegans tend to talk about the way non-vegans consume in terms of indulgence, over-consumption, decadence, and a lack of purity. Anita, a thin cis white Hispanic woman, brought up such language when asked what stereotypes vegans may have about non-vegans:

“I feel like a lot of my judgment in people is when they're like, over the top meat eaters to be dicks about it. Like, I'm gonna have this burger wrapped in bacon wrapped in this and that and just like the abundance of- I just also think it's wasteful ... That, to me is like, kind of what I think about sometimes with meat eaters ... Like, let's make this 10 pound, blah, blah, blah, and of course, not all of them. That's like, that's not right. But the perfect convergence is, I think, it's when the exceptionalism of America floats into cooking and things like that ... I saw someone wrap a damn cone, like a waffle cone in foil, and then wrapped it in bacon, and then made some weird, mashed potato thing, but like deep fried all of it, and then ate it ... Yeah, like that feels so American to me. And like that, that is like sometimes what I think of a meat eater is like this excessiveness, you know?”

– Anita

This sort of language of extreme moralization of non-vegan consumption was also especially present in Eve's upbringing with their Seventh Day Adventist family, saying:

“Yeah, definitely hella stereotypes about people who are non-vegan, and coming from a household where it was steeped in the health message, like religious and, you know, that still comes with fatphobia, and diet culture a little bit, too. So there's definitely stereotypes that people who are eating meat are like, gonna get heart disease automatically, or you know, you're gonna be fat if you're not being healthy enough ... [when asked if poor health is associated with moral failure] I would say that it could be implied, but I don't think somebody would like say that, you know, out loud, but even for my sister who's kind of dealing with addiction right now, my mom took her to this holistic camp where it's fully vegan. They

walk 15 minutes after every meal, drink hot water, turmeric, hydrotherapy, all that type of stuff. And she was talking about people being at that center, it's a Seventh Day Adventist center too. And you know, somebody had like cancer there. And they were pretty terminal. So, it's kind of the idea that if you are eating and doing all these things, you can reverse these diseases or illnesses.” – Eve

As with the previous theme, it seems as though vegans find themselves in conflict and tension with the group they most explicitly place themselves in opposition to: non-vegans. Because of this, they embody certain ideals and values that they perceive as being oppositional to the type of embodiment they believe non-vegans portray. When they presume non-vegans to embody ideals of overconsumption, excess, impurity, poor health, it's likely that they draw on prevailing stereotypes to construct a “body image” of what embodying such ideals look like: a fat body. Because of this, vegans construct their own body image not necessarily explicitly as “thin,” but certainly as “healthy,” with all the cultural attachments we already tend to apply to what “health” looks like.

Discussion and Conclusions

Vegans, particularly those who are politically or ethically motivated, use their bodies explicitly to challenge and question a hegemonic norm for how we typically use our bodies in the exploitation of non-human animals. Considering the fact that the body here exists explicitly as an agent of political and social change, it seems prudent to ask what vegan embodiment looks like and what vegans think about their own bodies and the bodies of other vegans in relation to their vegan practices. However, academic discussion on vegan embodiment seems rare and complicated by confusion with other lifestyles

which are not necessarily veganism. How can we better understand the way vegans understand vegan bodies?

In this study, I've focused on the presence and manifestation of fatphobia in vegan spaces and discourses (Johnston et al. 2021; Ossipow 1995; Scott 2020; Wrenn 2017) to explore and better understand the tensions that exist in how vegans use their own bodies to represent veganism and police the bodies of other vegans to, in their mind, making veganism stronger. This focus on fatphobia is important as a form of systemic oppression (Colls and Evans 2014; Julier 2013; Morgan 2011; Rich 2011; Williams and Annandale 2020) which specifically targets bodies for the space they take up, what they mean, what they say and what they do. Analyzing the intersection of veganism and fatphobia has provided a rich and complex subject of study that is simply lacking, and my hope is that this may help to better understand vegan embodiment, fat embodiment, and even simply add theoretically to critical discourses of embodiment and consumption more broadly.

I interviewed vegans of diverse backgrounds and body types to learn about how they think about their bodies and social identities in relation to their vegan practices. Even the few participants spoken to demonstrate a heterogeneity to the experiences of vegans as each one has a rather unique story to how they arrived at veganism and as each has unique relationships between their veganism and other social and bodily identities. Despite this, where their backgrounds and experiences differ, the relationship built between their backgrounds and their veganism have many similarities. I argue here that many vegans use veganism as a tool or framework for better understanding – or perhaps better controlling and relating to – their own bodies, along with all the social tensions

their bodies are entangled within. This points toward a “vegan embodiment” by which vegans are able to engage in a carnal reflexivity, turning back to look at their own bodies (as racialized, gendered, fat/thin, etc. bodies) from their newly found perspective as vegan bodies. For many vegans, this may help produce a more nuanced and positive relationship with their own bodies as they are able to share in explicit consumption practices with people who share a similar forms of social embodiment.

However, I further argue that this vegan embodiment produces two major discourses which are conveyed and contested through and with the body. As body-subjects in an intersubjective social world, vegans are aware not only of how they view their own bodies but also of how others view their bodies. Due to a history of stigma against vegans for their perceived unhealthiness, relationship with whiteness and higher class attitudes, and overall preachiness and militancy (Goldstein 2009; Johnston et al. 2021; Wrenn 2017; Wright and Adams 2015), vegans work extra hard to position themselves in opposition to such stereotypes, oftentimes to the point of exclusion for vegans who may genuinely fit into these roles. Specifically of interest in this study was the way vegans try to combat their image of “unhealthiness”, causing many vegans to express anxieties and fears over being good representatives for veganism specifically in the appearance of their bodies and what their bodies consume. For some, this meant explicitly trying to be “fit” or lose weight while for others this meant holding negative attitudes towards those vegans which maintain an “unhealthier” diet.

Combatting these fears and anxieties also produces a desire for vegans to justify their own bodies in moralistic terms, especially as many of them understand their veganism as an ethical practice. In defining themselves as moral body-subjects, vegans

must place themselves in opposition to some less than moral other, not necessarily immoral by choice but sometimes immoral by chance or by a lack of superior knowledge or insight. This means that vegans not only understand their practices as moral but also construct their bodies as “moral bodies”, leaving the bodies of non-vegans to be, in some way, “immoral bodies” which overconsume, overindulge, cause harm, etc. In a broader societal context in which fat bodies are both associated with similarly morally charged terms (A. Hardy 2015; Colls and Evans 2014; Julier 2013; Monaghan et al. 2019; Ossipow 1995; Russell and Semenko 2016) and associated with non-vegan, meat eating consumption practices (Johnston et al. 2021; Ossipow 1995) it’s possible that vegans may be drawing upon a fatphobic language of the body when attempting to place vegan and non-vegan bodies in conversation.

This all ultimately makes it so that some bodies which construct this discourse are, in a way, lost in translation as conflicting constructions of the body question these competing dualities. Fat vegan bodies, as represented in this study as well, find themselves constructing rather unique forms of embodiment in attempts to justify their own existence within a fleshy discourse that fails to fully acknowledge their existence. When they fail to establish their own embodiment, they find themselves either trying desperately to lose weight to shed fatness or shedding the identity of veganism in an attempt to maintain the self as a fat body. This tension that fat vegans experience – and the unique embodiment they experience the world with – presents a rich source of further study that this research hopes to promote as fat vegan embodiment may help to explore how bodies find themselves both constructing and being shaped by discourses of consumption.

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