



On (not) fitting in. Fat embodiment, affect and organizational materials as differentiating agents

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	<p>organizational materials such as chairs and workwear. Yet we also illustrate how some material-discursive entanglements offered situations where shame was circumvented, instead producing our participants as acceptable within their organizational context. Our research contributes to discussions on embodied normativities in organizations by taking these issues beyond the discursive realm and highlighting the importance of materiality and affect in 'fitting in' at work. We offer new theoretical pathways to explore differentiating practices by looking at shame as part of collective and affective histories of marginalization.</p>

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3 **On (not) fitting in. Fat embodiment, affect and organizational materials as differentiating**
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5 **agents**
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10 Dr. Noortje van Amsterdam

11
12 Utrecht University, the Netherlands
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16
17 Dide van Eck, MSc

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19 KU Leuven, Belgium
20
21
22

23
24 Dr. Katrine Meldgaard Kjær

25
26 IT University of Copenhagen, Denmark
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30
31 **Abstract**
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33 This paper focuses on the experiences of self-identified fat women employees. Combining the
34 works of Karen Barad and Sara Ahmed, we offer a feminist new materialist analysis of the
35 production of difference in organizations related to size as an entanglement of bodies,
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37 discourses, organizational materials and affect. We show how our participants predominantly
38 became shameful and a ‘bad fit’ within their jobs through the intra-action of their large bodies
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42 illustrate how some material-discursive entanglements offered situations where shame was
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44 circumvented, instead producing our participants as acceptable within their organizational
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48 taking these issues beyond the discursive realm and highlighting the importance of materiality
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5 practices by looking at shame as part of collective and affective histories of marginalization.
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10 **Keywords**

11 affect, fat embodiment, gender, difference, feminist new materialism, shame, Sara Ahmed,
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13 Karen Barad
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19 **Corresponding author:** Noortje van Amsterdam, Utrecht School of Governance,
20
21 Bijhouwerstraat 6, 3511ZC Utrecht, the Netherlands, n.vanamsterdam@uu.nl
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26 **Introduction**

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29 Critical management research has shown how contemporary ideas about embodiment shape
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31 disciplinary practices categorizing certain bodies – e.g. those considered masculine, white,
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33 cisgendered, ablebodied and slender – as ‘normal’ or ‘suitable’ while brandishing others as
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35 ‘abnormal’ or ‘unsuitable’ within the workplace (e.g. Acker, 2006; Fotaki, 2013; Holvino,
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37 2010; Tyler & Cohen, 2010). In this paper, we refer to these processes as differentiating
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39 practices as we seek to understand how the politics of difference plays out in workplaces with
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41 regards to fatness¹. Our study is based on in-depth interviews with 22 Dutch working women
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43 who self-identify as fat, full-figured or obese. In order to provide a rich understanding of the
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45 differentiating practices these women are confronted with, we draw theoretical insights from the
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47 works of Karen Barad (2003, 2007, 2008) and Sara Ahmed (2004a, 2004b, 2014). Both offer
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49 new avenues of thinking about the ways in which inequalities based on bodily markers of
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51 difference are co-produced by discourses, affect and materialities.
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3 With the rise of neoliberal healthism in society and organizations alike, size as a marker
4 of difference seems to have become more prominent, as slenderness is conflated with being fit
5 and healthy (Johansson et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2007). Fat employees are therefore often
6 considered unhealthy, and by extension lazy, unproductive and unprofessional (van Amsterdam
7 & van Eck, 2019a; Johansson et al., 2017; Levay, 2014; Mik-Meyer, 2010). Research on
8 gendered embodiment within organizations shows that the norms constructed around size are
9 also gendered; although men are affected too (see Dickson, 2015), these norms seem to
10 discipline women more severely (Mavin & Grandy, 2016; Meriläinen et al., 2015; Trethewey,
11 1999). This produces particularly marginalized subject positions for fat women employees (van
12 Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019a, 2019b).

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26 Literature on normative embodiment in organizations has traditionally focused on
27 discourse and rhetoric (Fotaki et al., 2014). Yet, as some scholars have shown, bodies are not
28 only subject to discursive power, they are also a socio-material reality (Harding et al., 2021;
29 Dale & Lathem, 2015). Similarly, scholars such as Fotaki, Metcalf and Harding (2014) have
30 argued that the materiality of the human body itself is often glossed over in discursive
31 approaches to embodiment. With Levay (2014) we would add that the fat body as a particular
32 type of material embodiment is largely overlooked in current organization studies research. But
33 this is not all. Research has indicated that non-human bodies – such as organizational objects –
34 participate in organizational practices too (e.g. Nyberg, 2009; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015a,
35 2015b; Symon & Pritchard, 2015). Our research adds to scholarship on the body, health and
36 gender in organizations by addressing differentiation from a feminist new materialist
37 perspective, focussing both on the materiality of fat embodiment, organizational materials,
38 discourses and the affective flows produced by these entanglements. We show how this
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3 approach can help combat a plethora of differentiating practices, specifically also those who are
4 understudied. We will do this by adopting insights from Karen Barad (2003, 2007, 2008) and
5 Sara Ahmed (2004a, 2004b, 2014), who both, from each their perspective, extend queer
6 feminist perspectives to understand the workings of power. Together they provide tools for
7 understanding the socio-material life of differentiation in relation to (fat) embodiment,
8 something that is largely lacking in organization studies scholarship to date.
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17 Previous scholarship has argued that fat bodies are queer bodies, as they disrupt the
18 normative order and are often considered “out of bounds” (LeBesco, 2001). Yet, fat bodies are
19 not protected from discrimination under (Dutch) law, and their marginalisation therefore often
20 remains invisible or legitimized by organizational practices related to “health”. Our study asks
21 what role materialities and affect play in the differentiating practices that fat women encounter
22 in the workplace.
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31 Barad’s work offers analytical tools for understanding the entanglement of discourses
32 and human and non-human actors. This framework allows us to take both human agency and
33 the agency of materials into account when analysing differentiating practices. Barad hints at the
34 political potential of their theory when they write ‘Particular possibilities for acting exist at
35 every moment, and these changing possibilities entail a responsibility to intervene in the world’s
36 becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering’ (2003, p.
37 827). Yet at first glance, Barad’s focus on immanence seems to complicate theorizing power
38 asymmetries that result from socio-material entanglements. If analyses stay 'in the moment',
39 how are we going to understand systemic power differences? And what role does affect play
40 within entanglements that produce power asymmetries? With its focus on how emotions
41 materialize bodies, Ahmed’s work on affect is explicitly political and offers critical tools to
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3 understand how bodies become in- and excluded. On a theoretical level, our focus on the socio-
4 material will thus allow us to unpack a more expansive set of dynamics that structure
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6 differentiating practices in organizations. On a practical level, this will give us insights into
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8 concrete steps that may be taken to make organizations more size-inclusive; this aligns with the
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10 feminist tradition of taking political action. A materialist approach such as ours opens up wider
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12 possibilities for doing so by looking at the entanglement of discursive, material and affective
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14 realities.
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19 We begin by outlining existing literature on embodiment to understand the role of size
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21 within organizations. We then delineate the usefulness of Barad's analytic framework for
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23 teasing out the agentic power and co-construction of human and non-human actors in relation
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25 to differentiation. Subsequently, we discuss Ahmed's insights on how affect is wrapped up in
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27 differentiating practices, materializing the body in particular ways. We then move on to discuss
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29 our methodology and the analysis of our interview materials. Here, we show how our
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31 participants predominantly became a 'bad fit' with their jobs and organizations through the
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33 entanglement of their large bodies with everyday organizational materialities, as well as
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35 instances where entanglements provided possibilities to circumvent becoming a 'bad fit' within
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37 their workplaces. Subsequently, we provide ideas for extending the debate on normative
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39 embodiment in organizations, both theoretically and practically, by focusing on the role of both
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41 materials and affect within the differentiation practices we describe.
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49 **Fat embodiment within organizations**

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51 Organization Studies research that focuses on gendered embodiment and/or health has previously
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53 touched on the importance of employees' size (e.g. Johansson et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2007;
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3 Levay, 2014; Mavin & Grandy, 2016; Meriläinen et al., 2015; Thanem, 2009, 2013; Trethewey,
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5 1999; Waring & Waring, 2009). Johansson et al. (2017), for example, indicate that managers who
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7 are passionate about their own healthy and fit bodies and lifestyles tend to morally condemn fat
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9 people. This dovetails with the findings of Trethewey (1999), Haynes (2012) and Meriläinen et
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11 al. (2015) who show how fit bodies are conflated with non-fat bodies and become the norm for
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13 professional embodiment, also in organizations where health is not formally managed. Thanem
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15 (2013) similarly illustrates how employees who do not conform to normative fit and slender
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17 embodiment become subject to marginalization and relentless discipline. With the exception of
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19 Mik-Meyer (2008, 2010), Levay (2014) and van Amsterdam & van Eck (2018, 2019), however,
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21 little research has taken size as an entry point to analyze how differentiating practices take shape
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23 within organizations. Mik-Meyer (2008, 2010) shows how managers and health consultants in
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25 Danish organizations explicitly construct size as an important organizational concern. Bringing
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27 together research from different disciplines on embodiment, health and organization, Levay
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29 (2014) argues that size has become a way to legitimize power differences in organizations,
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31 producing fat employees as objects of organizational control, marginalization and discrimination.
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33 Our own earlier work (van Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019a, 2019b) supports these claims with
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35 empirical findings, demonstrating how fat women employees are often stigmatized and
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37 constructed as unprofessional, lazy, and unintelligent.

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Aforementioned studies thus show that a legitimate professional body needs to be slender,
a norm that is more strictly applied to women than to men (Haynes, 2012; Johansson et al., 2017;
Mavin & Grandy, 2016). Following Orbach (1987), several scholars have argued that ‘fat is a
feminist issue’ because the intersection of size with gender renders fat women more vulnerable
to stigmatization and negative appraisal than thin women and men of all sizes (e.g. Fikkan &

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3 Rothblum, 2012; Saguy, 2012). The focus on women's size can also be read as part of a more
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5 general quest to control women's bodies (e.g. Maving & Grandy, 2016; Tyler & Cohen, 2010).
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7 Although aforementioned studies do not explicitly analyse the affect or emotions that circulate
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9 around embodied normativities in the workplace, they demonstrate that the affective responses of
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11 managers and co-workers to fat workers position them unfavorably. As visibly fat employees, the
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13 women in our study thus conduct their everyday lives within the affective flow based on obesity
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15 discourse, which relies heavily on rhetorical strategies of shaming, blaming and individualization
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17 (van Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019a, 2019b; Levay, 2014). Yet through the emphasis on the
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19 discursive aspects of these differentiating practices, both the affective and material aspects herein
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21 become muted: how affect and organizational materials are implicated in processes of
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23 differentiation remains largely unknown. We now turn to Barad's work on material-discursive
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25 entanglements and Ahmed's work on affect in order to surface the material and affective aspects
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27 of differentiating practices related to fat embodiment within organizations.
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35 **Material-discursive-affective entanglements**

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37 To understand how materials, bodies and discourses interact to create social hierarchies in
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39 organisations, we adopt analytic insights from Karen Barad (2003, 2007, 2008) and Sara Ahmed
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41 (2004a, 2004b, 2014). We have chosen to combine these two theorists because they each, from a
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43 critical feminist standpoint, conceptualize exclusion as formed in a relationship between
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45 materiality and discourses. Their grounding in feminist research implies that they are both
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47 concerned with power structures and an intersectional understanding of exclusion, which make
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49 them well-suited to examine experiences of marginalization and embodiment in organisations.
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51 We have previously proposed that body size is an important category to include in intersectional
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3 analyses (van Amsterdam 2013). In this article, we build on and contribute to this argument by
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5 drawing on Barad and Ahmed's insights on materiality.
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8 Barad is fundamentally concerned with the ways in which matter 'kicks back' and how
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10 matter is part of entanglements that produce phenomena. In the article "Posthumanist
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12 Performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter" (2003), Barad argues
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14 that language and discourse have been awarded too singular prominence in representational
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16 analyses, at the expense of theoretizations of matter. Barad argues that discourse and matter –
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18 nonhuman (i.e. objects) as well as human (i.e. bodies) – do not exist as meaningful separate and
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20 separated entities, and that it does not make sense analytically to separate them. If we want to
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22 understand questions of becoming, they argue, we must look at the productive power of *intra-*
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24 actions between the material-discursive, the entanglement of matter, objects, discourses and
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26 subjects. The concept 'intra-action' highlights the ways in which the material-discursive realms
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28 are entangled, and, in turn, rejects the more common term *interaction*, which 'presumes the prior
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30 existence of independent entities' (ibid, p. 815). As Harding, Gilmore and Ford (2021, p. 13) write
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32 about intra-action 'Rather than envisioning distinctions between entities... they are blurred at the
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34 edges, bleeding into and participating in each other's performative constitution'. This also means
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36 that subjects and objects are never fixed in time or space; rather, they are continuously
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38 materializing in context specific ways; they are always 'becoming'.
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45 Importantly, Barad bases their conceptualizations on queer feminist perspectives in order
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47 to address power differentials: '... how different differences get made, what gets excluded and
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49 how these exclusions matter' (2007, p. 30), is the outcome of intra-actions between human and
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51 non-human agents. Most organization studies scholars use Barad's work to come to grips with
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53 technological advancements (e.g. Nyberg, 2009; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015a, 2015b; Symon &
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3 Pritchard, 2015). In focusing on materiality without examining the power structures involved,
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5 these studies depoliticize Barad's work, negate its queer feminist geneology, and forgo its
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7 critically feminist potential (Harris & Ashcraft, 2019). However, organization studies scholars
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9 such as Harris et al. (2020), Harding et al. (2017, 2021), Visser & Davies (2021) and Dale and
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11 Lathem (2015) provide preliminary steps to redress this deficit. The latter use Barad's framework
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13 to understand how embodiment is entangled with non-human materialities such as technology,
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15 producing the basis of discrimination for disabled people. They write: 'we need to explore how
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17 organisational processes are involved in the 'cuts' that form (both material and social) boundaries
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19 and differences, and produce inclusions and exclusions, inequalities and hierarchies, subjects and
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21 objects.' (p. 179). Barad's framework thus offers the necessary tools to analyse how material
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23 agency – the capacity of matter to actively participate in phenomena – gets enacted within
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25 differentiating practices. Yet it provides little concrete foothold to expand these political aspects
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27 of in- and exclusions related to embodiment.
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33 Combining Barad and Ahmed's work allows us to both attend to the material and affective
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35 qualities of differentiation as this relates to the fat body in organisations. Therefore, we now turn
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37 to Ahmed's work to analyse how bodies materialize in specific ways - as included or excluded -
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39 through the circulation of affect. Ahmed argues that emotions are one of the ways in which the
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41 body materializes, thus providing a bridge between the material and the discursive and offering
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43 possibilities for collective politics and social alliances (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 117). Although
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45 language and the discursive figure more prominently in Ahmed's work than in Barad's, both draw
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47 from and aim to extend Judith Butler's theorizing on performativity (Ahmed, 2014; Barad, 2008).
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49 Overall, Ahmed's work can be read as an articulation of how bodies materialize and are shaped
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51 as a part of social collectivities through the circulation of affect or emotion. With this, Ahmed's
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3 ideas about materiality allow us to analyse how bodies become part of an ‘us’ or a ‘them’ through
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5 the circulation of affect.
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8 Ahmed conceptualizes this materialization of the body as taking place within ‘affective
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10 economies’. With the term ‘economy’, a process of circulation is implied: here, she borrows from
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12 Marx to argue that emotions work ‘as a form of capital’ where ‘affect does not reside positively
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14 in the sign or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation’ (Ahmed, 2004a, p.
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16 120). Emotions and affect thus travel between people and are profoundly social. In these affective
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18 economies, Ahmed argues, emotions are not binarily ‘within’ or ‘without’ bodies, but indeed
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20 ‘create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries of bodies’ (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 10). Thus,
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22 Ahmed outlines that emotion and affect are a central part of differentiating practices that shape
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24 social collectives, as affective responses and assignments (e.g. “you should be ashamed”, “I’m
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26 afraid of him”) work to ‘give others meaning and value’ (2004a, p. 28). Feelings and emotions
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28 thus play a fundamental role in shaping differentiating practices, as they continuously create and
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30 re-create the boundaries of the collectives different bodies can legitimately be a part of. As
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32 Pouthier & Sondak (2019, p. 3) write, attending to affect is important for understanding ‘the
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34 challenges and possibilities of emancipation from oppressive and discriminatory bodily norms’.
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40 This resonates with the work of Pullen et al. (2017) and Fotaki et al. (2017) who - as
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42 part of the ‘affective turn’ in organization studies - call for an increased attention toward the
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44 work affect does within and around organizations, and specifically how it may be used to
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46 unpack how ‘real people with real bodies might experience and challenge’ organizations on an
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48 everyday basis (Pullen et al., 2017, p. 112). Affect, defined here as social emotions informed
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50 ‘by a variety of lived experiences and visceral feelings’ (ibid2) saturates organizational life.
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52 Fotaki at al. (2014, p. 13) argue that ‘affect can provide new and fruitful lenses for the critical
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3 analysis of organizational life', and Pullen et al. (2017, p. 122) call for an examination of how
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5 'lived experience' informs the circulation of affect in this context. Fraser et al. (2010, p. 204)
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7 point to Ahmed's work as being particularly helpful to understand the theme of fatness as a
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9 social category today because of its emphasis on processes of ex- and inclusion as opposed to
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11 individualization of emotional states.
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15 Using the lenses of both Barad and Ahmed, we thus add to the existing scholarship on
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17 embodiment within organizations by surfacing the role of materiality and affect in differentiating
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19 practices that fat women employees encounter.
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22 23 24 **Methodology**

25 26 **Data collection**

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28 This paper forms part of a larger research project in which we explored the experiences of self-
29
30 identified fat, obese or full-figured people living and working in the Netherlands (see also van
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32 Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019a, 2019b). We emphasize the importance of doing research *with*,
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34 rather than *on* marginalized groups. This research project evolved out of an epistemological
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36 commitment and concern for a marginalized group whose experiences are rarely included in
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38 organization studies. The first author interviewed 14 self-identified fat women and the second
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40 author interviewed 8. An important ethical consideration involved the way we approached and
41
42 selected our participants. Because identifying someone as 'fat' is often perceived as offensive,
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44 we needed an approach in which we did not categorize people ourselves, while also making
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46 clear that we did not want to reproduce the dominant negative stereotypes surrounding fatness.
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48 After reflecting on this issue, we decided to focus on people who *self-identify* as fat, large, full-
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3 figured women called *Wondervol* (Wonderfull), placed a call in the Dutch Obesity Network
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5 monthly (a foundation that offers biomedical information about being obese) and reached out to
6
7 participants via a plus size blogger.
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10 Most of the 22 women we interviewed in total reached us via the *Wondervol* Facebook
11
12 page. This is a group of 1500 members who share experiences and information about living in a
13
14 large body, for instance about fat stigma, work, romantic relationships, activism or general body
15
16 positivity. Thus, most of our participants have experience with reflecting on their body size with
17
18 others and might therefore be more able to articulate their thoughts and experiences compared
19
20 to others who do not participate in such an online community. In the announcement we
21
22 emphasized that we recognize how fatness is often negatively portrayed in the media. We
23
24 expressed an awareness of harmful effects of such stereotyping and added that we wanted to
25
26 hear from those who live in/with large bodies, because their stories rarely get told. Due to our
27
28 reliance on self-identification, we did not recruit a heterogeneous group of participants in terms
29
30 of gender and race/ethnicity: all of our participants identified as women and most were part of
31
32 the Dutch ethnic majority. Two of our participants had a minority ethnic background: Afro-
33
34 Surinamese and Antillian-Dutch. We also did not recruit a homogenous group in terms of
35
36 occupations, job sector or rank. However the diversity in occupations (see table I) allowed us to
37
38 see that fatness acts as a marker of difference both in highly visible occupations (e.g. opera
39
40 singer, comedian) as well as in more back-office roles (e.g. information analyst), and both in
41
42 high-wage occupations (e.g. accountant, head principal) as well as in low-wage occupations
43
44 (e.g. caregiver, shop assistant). We argue in line with Ford et al. (2017, p. 1557) that our
45
46 objective with this qualitative project is ‘not generalization from a sample but theorizing from
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48 “knowing subjects”’.
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3 Interviews lasted between 50-160 minutes. The general aim of the interview was to
4
5 explore how participants' size mattered in their daily work. During the interviews, the type of
6
7 questions we asked were, for instance: *When and how does your body size become an issue at*
8
9 *work? How do others in the organizational environment respond to your body? Do you have*
10
11 *examples of the physical environment that enabled or limited your body in your daily work?*
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17 Table I about here
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21 Data analysis
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24 All interviews were conducted in Dutch, fully transcribed and coded in NVivo. This enabled us
25
26 to approach the material-discursive entanglements in the 'spoken word' of our participants. As
27
28 Barad shows that discourse and material are mutually constituted, 'matter cannot register in and
29
30 for itself alone, or un-discursively' (Iedema, 2007, p. 938), but research into organizational
31
32 materialities 'can only be approached through the discursive, so studies must infer from the
33
34 spoken word how human and non-human actors intra-act' (Ford et al., 2017, p. 1557). Although
35
36 analyzing materiality through spoken word is somewhat limited by its focus on the linguistic,
37
38 neglecting other modes of meaning-making such as 'image, design, and technology' (Iedema,
39
40 2007, p. 931), we also paid attention to the bodily aspects in the interview, such as tone of
41
42 voice, rhythm of speech, silences, body postures and gesticulation. A challenge we faced
43
44 concerned the Dutch-to-English translations of our interviews, and vice versa, sharing our
45
46 results in English with our Dutch participants. For instance, the term 'fat' in English sounds
47
48 similar to the Dutch term 'vet' (meaning: greasy), which can be perceived as a highly insulting
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3 term to refer to someone's body. In order to produce a culturally sensitive account, we did a
4
5 back translation and had a bilingual speaker check our work.
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8 Our data analysis was an abductive process: we re-read Barad's and Ahmed's texts
9
10 alongside the transcripts, bringing together theory and data while together reflecting on the
11
12 'becomings' that resulted from the material-discursive entanglements. This involved two stages:
13
14 First, we selected the fragments in which materiality became particularly relevant in our
15
16 participants' accounts of being a fat woman in the workplace. This first stage revealed the
17
18 agentic role of different types of chairs, clothes, doorways, badges, food, make-up, computer-
19
20 screens and the materiality of bodies themselves (e.g. sweat, size, smell, movement) in co-
21
22 constituting the ways in which our participants could participate in their workplace. Particularly
23
24 the materiality of clothes and chairs and their intra-actions with fat bodies featured prominently
25
26 in all our participants' accounts, which is why we decided to select and zoom in on these
27
28 material agencies. The second stage involved intense exploration of the fragments by focusing
29
30 on the 'hotspots' (MacLure, 2013, pp. 172–173), that is, we approached the data through
31
32 looking at where data 'glows', where it creates disconcert or a sense of wonder. Sitting down
33
34 with our data, we discussed among the three of us which parts of the material-discursive
35
36 entanglements that we found in our data evoked particular feelings or emotions. We thus had to
37
38 go beyond the transcripts, to also include the experiences and affects that circulated during the
39
40 interviews as we recalled them through our fieldnotes (see also van Amsterdam & van Eck,
41
42 2019b). The third author in particular interrogated the first and second author about the reasons
43
44 for choosing certain fragments, and which feelings or emotions it had invoked in our
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46 participants and/or ourselves. After (re)reading the transcripts and fieldnotes, reliving the
47
48 interviews, and thoroughly discussing our experiences, we found that the fragments in our data
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3 that had a heightened affectivity were all in some way related to the way our participants
4
5 became a ‘bad fit’ with their jobs and organizations. This heightened affect points to where our
6
7 participants indicate feeling humiliated, insecure, uncomfortable and afraid. Together we
8
9 carefully considered the instances where our participants literally and symbolically became a
10
11 ‘bad fit’ in the organization through material-discursive-affective entanglements. This became
12
13 our first theme. Yet, we also recognized how entanglements sometimes offered fat employees
14
15 opportunities to fit in and become acceptable. Reflecting on this ‘disconcert’ in the data, we
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17 coined this as our second theme.
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24 **Results**

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26 In the following, we will discuss our most important insights through two themes: *becoming a*
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28 *bad fit* and *becoming acceptable*. The first theme describes how our participants often emerged
29
30 as ‘unfit’ for their jobs through intra-actions of their large bodies with everyday organizational
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32 materials and discourses. The second theme describes instances where they were able to align
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34 their bodies with legitimate others in their work environment, thus becoming acceptable.
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40 **Becoming a bad fit: intra-actions between fat bodies, clothing, seats and obesity discourse.**

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42 As we show in earlier publications (van Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019a, 2019b) our participants
43
44 were often stigmatized or excluded from workplaces because their fatness is seen as a sign of
45
46 incompetence or ill-health. Megan, for example, recounted how size normativities impacted her
47
48 chances on the job market, as she was denied an internship at a photography studio: “The
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50 manager simply told me, well you are too fat to intern here, because this is physically
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52 demanding work”. After several attempts at finding a job, Amy started mentioning her health
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3 status in job interviews: “I come straight out and say I don’t have a medical record (...) They
4 won’t ask directly but they’ll assume – this one won’t be able to do the job”. Previous research
5 (e.g. Levay, 2014; Mik-Meyer, 2008) substantiates how the conflation of fatness with ill-health
6 informs norms around embodiment in organizations and thus structures who gets acknowledged
7 as a good fit and who does not.
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15 Importantly, these differentiating practices are not merely structured by discourses about
16 health; materiality and affect play an important role in co-constructing these realities. Josie’s
17 words indicate the circulation of affect:
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22 When you are fat, people automatically think you’re unhealthy (...) The association with
23 laziness is there too. Fat people are considered dirty, they’re not motivated, and it is all
24 their own fault. (Josie)
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31 Although shame and disgust are not explicitly mentioned here, these affects ‘stick’ to the
32 normative associations of fatness with ill-health, laziness, dirt and individual responsibility. As
33 Ahmed (2004a) notes ‘emotionality involves movements or associations whereby “feelings”
34 take us across different levels of signification, not all of which can be admitted in the present...
35 “what sticks” is also bound up with the “absent presence” of historicity’ (p. 120). Historicity
36 here refers to obesity discourse through which normative associations and negative affects
37 regarding fatness - shame in particular - have been endlessly circulated over the past decades
38 (Levay, 2014). Shame circulated in the interviews mostly in non-verbal ways: participants often
39 lowered their eyes and voices when discussing the negative assumptions their fat bodies evoked
40 and we felt the atmosphere tense during these exchanges.
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3 Normative assumptions and affects related to fat embodiment cannot be disentangled from
4
5 the materiality of the fat body that makes it extra visible as nonnormative (van Amsterdam &
6
7 van Eck, 2019a). Many participants described how embodied normativities emerged through
8
9 their encounters with the material-discursive realities of everyday work life. Rifka, who had
10
11 different jobs in the service sector, talked extensively about how rare it is to see someone of a
12
13 larger size performing service-related work in shops, cafés and restaurants. The norm, according
14
15 to Rifka is ‘... around size 38, 40 [European sizes]. If you carry size 42 or up, society thinks
16
17 you are plus size, so good luck finding a job’. This resonates with the findings from Haynes
18
19 (2012), Mavin and Grandy (2016) and Trethewey (1999) that indicate the pressure on working
20
21 women to be slender. To illustrate the normative assumptions employers have about size, Rifka
22
23 referred to her experiences with job application interviews ‘they give you disapproving looks,
24
25 like they are disappointed [...] That is why I always add a picture to my CV. Then they know in
26
27 advance I am fat’. Here, it seems that the histories of experiencing disapproval and
28
29 disappointment in previous job application interviews produced the particular material reality of
30
31 the photo on the CV, which acts to disrupt the circulation of these affects during a new
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33 interview experience, illustrating that ‘the past and the future are enfolded participants in
34
35 matters iterative becoming’ (Barad, 2007, p. 181). Rifka’s narrative furthermore dovetails with
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37 Carinda’s, who noted in her interview that ‘people dress their arguments up as being about
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39 health while they are actually talking about appearance’. This aligns with Johansson et al.
40
41 (2017) who note that health is used to legitimate appearance norms in organizations.
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49 Importantly, discourses around appearance and health are entangled with the materiality of fat
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51 embodiment, producing fat employees as people who *are* not fit and *do* not fit.
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3 Clothing often came up in the interviews as an important agentive force that co-produced
4 these differentiating practices. Mostly, the entanglement of a fat body with work clothes
5 produced participants as unfit for their jobs, or a bad fit with the organization of their
6 employment. Participants described that their sizes are not only harder to find; the clothes that
7 are available in larger sizes are often more expensive or only suitable for non-professional
8 occasions. Especially those who were obliged to adorn corporate wear or who were confronted
9 with a particular dress code found their size becoming problematic. Kara, who worked a side
10 job at a hospital, and Alice, a shop assistant, offer how they emerged as a bad fit within their
11 jobs through intra-action of their fatness with ill-fitting clothes at their place of work:
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26 I used to work in a hospital and you get this outfit. I always had trouble with it. The biggest
27 pair of pants would fit me, but it was often in the wash. So I would have to wear smaller
28 pants. On me, those looked like I was wearing leggings while everyone else had normal
29 pants on. And everything feels too tight, which is uncomfortable... Or there was someone
30 else who was a bit fatter too, and they would already be wearing the bigger pants... It
31 makes you feel insecure. (Kara)
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43 I have a lot of trouble with corporate wear [*bedrijfskleding*].

44 Interviewer: So what do you need to wear at your job?

45 Well, it is compulsory. But the sweater that we have is very ugly. And then I feel
46 uncomfortable. It does look good on them [non-fat employees] but it looks pretty bad on
47 me. It makes a difference in your work. Like, here I am in my sweater. You have to look
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3 presentable but that won't happen for me because this sweater looks like a tent. That is the
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5 way it is made (Alice).
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10 Here we see how the material realities of the clothes - the tight fit of the pants, the tent-like
11 shape of the sweater - cannot be disentangled from Kara and Alice's fat embodiment and
12 obesity discourse. Materials co-constitute the flow of agency here (Barad, 2007, p. 141); the
13 material-discursive entanglements produce Kara and Alice as employees who - both literally
14 and symbolically - do not fit within their organizations, which makes them feel uncomfortable
15 and insecure about their professional capabilities. The clothes are 'too small' or 'pretty bad'
16 only in relation with their bodies, which in turn become produced as 'too large' or 'unable to be
17 presentable' in this encounter. From Barad's perspective this becoming can be considered a
18 specific 'cut': a boundary making practice that produces exclusions by performing seemingly
19 separable and fixed categories (Barad, 2008, p. 140) such as 'fat' and 'presentable'. Alice's
20 story in particular exemplifies how through the intra-action of the sweater difference emerges as
21 an issue of size ('it looks good on *them*, but it looks pretty bad on *me*').
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38 The effects of the encounter between material realities is thus inevitably tied up with
39 normative ideas about embodiment. The preferred slender embodiment within organizations can
40 be seen as part of a broader interest in controlling women's bodies in organizations and beyond
41 (e.g. Tyler & Cohen, 2010). It is furthermore entangled with constructions regarding a
42 'professional' appearance (Haynes, 2012; Johansson et al., 2017; Mavin & Grandy, 2016). Ford
43 et al. (2017, p. 1566) argue that the work attire of a given workplace may be seen as a type of
44 visualization of the larger ideals and social hierarchies that mark this space. Accordingly, '
45 ...
46 business wear forms a visual discourse encapsulating norms, histories, cultures, economics,
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3 class, gender and so on.... the norms encapsulated in the suit inform wearers how to look, how
4
5 to act and how to take the identity of ‘leader’’. This dovetails with Just et al. (2019) who show
6
7 that uniforms are markers of belonging within a particular job or sector. They conceptualize the
8
9 uniform as ‘a figure of affective attachment’ and warn that a person who does not wear the
10
11 uniform appropriately jeopardizes their belonging (p. 126). The corporate wear that Alice and
12
13 Kara describe similarly represents and enacts norms about appropriate behaviour and
14
15 appearances required within their jobs and pushes toward a homogenized ‘professional’
16
17 appearance that is inverted for these fat women; they stand out because they can’t fit. Fitting
18
19 into clothes thus becomes an integrated part of performing work-ability and belonging; the
20
21 clothes mark the extent to which their body may be considered acceptable. These norms
22
23 intersect with gender ideals too: women are pushed towards more self-governance in terms of
24
25 appearance because their bodies are historically constructed as out of place in organizations
26
27 (Haynes, 2012; Johansson et al., 2017; Mavin & Grandy, 2016). Accordingly, when Kara and
28
29 Alice’s bodies defy embodied norms about size by not fitting into the work clothes offered by
30
31 their employers, they emerge as ‘a professional liability’ (Mavin & Grandy, 2016, p. 1100).
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38 Seating arrangements were also highlighted by the participants as a challenge to their
39
40 belonging. Many participants indicated that they struggled with fitting comfortably into office
41
42 chairs and always looked carefully at the seating present at business meetings or other work
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44 gatherings. They recurrently voiced concerns about armrests that would make it painful or
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46 difficult for them to fit and spoke of the sturdiness of seats. Jane for example, mentioned this
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48 issue during her interview:
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3 All the things I have to take into account that other people never think about... When
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5 you go to dinner with clients at a restaurant with very small chairs, like those fragile
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7 folding chairs, then you sit down very carefully. You don't want the client to sit across
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9 from you while you are lying on the ground. Those moments can be really
10
11 confronting. (Jane)
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17 In the material-discursive entanglement of the fragile chairs and Jane's body in the specific
18
19 context of the client-meeting, Jane becomes cautious. She is afraid of breaking a chair and
20
21 falling on the floor in front of clients not because she is afraid of hurting herself in the fall, but
22
23 rather on account of how this would produce her as unprofessional and unfit for the workplace
24
25 (cf. Levay, 2014; Mavin & Grandy, 2016). Jane's story illustrates how this entanglement
26
27 prohibits her from aligning her body with those of her co-workers ('all the things *I* have to take
28
29 into account that *other people* never think about'). Here, shame is once again not mentioned
30
31 explicitly, but nonetheless circulated in the interview, making the interviewers' cheeks flush
32
33 while listening to Jane talk. This illustrates how affect passes 'from person to person, in a way
34
35 that is contagious but remains unspoken' (Fotaki et al., 2017, p. 4) and highlights the difficulties
36
37 in articulating the circulation of affect through interviews.
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42 The central role of objects such as seats in differentiating practices also became apparent
43
44 when our participants talked about having to take flights for their work. Tamar stated that her
45
46 size is an issue in her search for a new job, as she is aware that she does not 'fit in everything
47
48 (...) planes for example, those seats are just too small.' For this reason, she does not feel that she
49
50 can apply for a job that involves frequent traveling. Similarly, Jane explicitly outlines the
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3 economic consequences of the particular material-discursive entanglement of her larger body at
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5 work:
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10 I have to fly regularly [for my job] so that is a challenge. The more expensive airlines are
11 fine. But when I have to fly with a cheaper airline, I probably have to book two seats. These
12 seats are really small with small belts. So those moments of entering the plane are rather
13 tense. What if I need an extra chair and it is at the expense of my boss? How will they deal
14 with that? And how will it affect my possible career? Because it will cost extra. (Jane)
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24 In this example, the fat employee becomes not only different, but indeed an economic burden
25 through the intra-action of Tamar and Jane's size with small airplane seats and obesity discourse
26 that constructs fat people as unproductive and financially risky for employers (see Levay, 2014;
27 Mik-Meyer, 2008). Here, the encounters with the materiality of 'regular' seats makes it clear
28 that fat bodies take up different kinds of space than bodies that are not fat, which are assumed to
29 be the norm. Through Ahmed (2004, p. 119), we see here how bodily space becomes aligned
30 with social space through the intensity of the affective circulation of tension and anxiety that
31 Jane describes. The literal, material not 'fitting in' becomes entangled with the normative idea
32 that fat bodies do not belong at the workplace, and this entanglement produces Jane and Tamar
33 as different from their 'normal' colleagues. As illustrated above, normative assumptions
34 regarding size include the idea that fat people take sick leave more often and are less able to
35 perform strenuous physical work. According to our participants, this makes it difficult for them
36 to find new employment. This echoes research that shows how size functions as a basis for
37 various forms of discrimination in the workplace (Levay, 2014).
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3 As a part of Jane's anxiety over ill-fitting airplane seats, she describes feeling 'rather
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5 tense' when entering a plane. This signals the anticipated shame of (possibly) not fitting in the
6
7 airplane seat. The affective implications of the relationships between airplane seats, large bodies
8
9 and working life also become clear in Jill's story about one particular flight she took for her job:
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14 For work I usually flew with [airline] and I would ask if I could sit at the emergency exit
15
16 because then you have a slightly bigger space. But one time they cancelled a flight and we
17
18 all had to get into a very small airplane for like 8 people. And they had to balance the
19
20 weight carefully so then they started looking at people like, 'those look very fat'. So they
21
22 put all the skinny people on my side of the plane. Well, I felt very humiliated. I could just
23
24 die. That is really horrible, and then you are also sitting in a chair but you really don't fit.
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28 (Jill)
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33 In this example, through the material circumstances - the cancelled flight, the alternative small
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35 airplane that needs weight balancing, and the ill-fitting airplane seat - Jill becomes both
36
37 symbolically and practically Other. The difference of her body is brought into view as she is
38
39 placed among other bodies that look radically different from hers. She sticks out, she is made
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41 singular. The fact of Jill's high weight compared to other passengers might not be an issue to be
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43 humiliated by had the separation of bodies been isolated to a material, practical circumstance.
44
45 However, because the material and the discursive cannot be separated, ideas about the non-
46
47 desirability of a fat body inform the intra-action between fat and thin here, and expose Jill as
48
49 different from the other passengers. Jill's humiliation works as a form of shame aligned with
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51 negative meanings surrounding size as being too much - taking up too much space; adding too
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3 much weight; costing too much - and consolidates these. This resonates with scholarship that
4 explores space as a gendered issue. Tyler and Cohen (2010) for example show that
5
6 organizational space is gendered: dominant gender norms make it difficult for women to
7
8 legitimately take up space within organizations. Ahmed (2004) expands this theorization of
9
10 space by relating it to affective intensities produced by embodied normativities. She writes that
11
12 ‘fear works to restrict some bodies through the movement or expansion of others.’ (p. 127) We
13
14 posit that a similar argument can be made for fat subjects in organizations: our participants
15
16 emerge as a bad fit through the entanglement of their bodies with organizational materials,
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18 norms regarding both gender and size, and related affective economies.
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24 In the interviews, shame surfaced as an important theme, but was explicated almost
25
26 exclusively with reference to nonwork contexts. Wendy talked about a ‘shaming moment’ when
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28 she was told she couldn’t sit at the emergency exit and had to walk through the plane to find
29
30 another seat. Constance mentioned feeling ashamed while ordering lunch during the interview,
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32 whispering ‘people are watching’. It is significant that our participants told stories of repeatedly
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34 experiencing these feelings and this positioning of their bodies. There is a cumulative effect of
35
36 their experiences: Tamar has stopped applying for jobs involving airflight; Jane worries about
37
38 the impact of her size on her career. The narratives presented within this theme thus indicate
39
40 how our participants’ bodies gain a history of being ‘objects of shame’, through which they
41
42 emerge as a bad fit with their jobs and organizations. As Probyn (2004, p. 329) writes, shame
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44 refers to ‘the body calling out its hopes and discomfort because it feels out-of-place. This shame
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46 is the body saying that it cannot fit in although it desperately wants to’. Shame thus structures
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48 belonging and, although difficult to pinpoint and capture, is crucial for understanding
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60 differentiating practices in organizations.

Becoming acceptable: entanglements that allow fat employees to fit

Although moments of becoming shameful and ill-fitting in the context of their work were repeatedly mentioned by our participants, they also told stories about moments when expectations related to their embodiment were circumvented. In contrast to the material-discursive entanglements described in the first theme, our participants emerged here as acceptable. Interestingly, all examples involve the potential of becoming a bad fit which is then circumvented by particular intra-actions between organizational materials and our participants' large bodies.

For example, while many of our participants told stories about how clothes created difference at their workplace, Katy pointed out that dress codes can also diminish differences between fat and slender employees:

I worked at a hotel-restaurant in the UK for a while, where I had to wear a white blouse and a black skirt. I had to look really hard to find a suitable black skirt that looked neat and would fit me [...] but because of the uniformity I stood out less. With everyone wearing a white blouse and a black skirt, you sort of disappear in the bigger picture. So even though the food service industry is very much focused on appearance, my size did not bother me there. (Katy)

On the one hand, Katy's experience bears the potential of becoming a bad fit because of her size. The labour involved in 'looking hard' to find suitable black shirt echoes Hannah's points about the lack of accessibility of professional clothing for fat women, as well as Rifka's and

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3 Kara's problems with gaining access to clothes that fit them in the professional environments
4 they have been part of. On the other hand, Katy also points to the ways in which clothes -
5 especially uniforms - may work to make her body similar to her colleagues instead of different.
6
7 The identical outfits that the waiting staff all carry, regardless of shape and size, make them a
8 group. This allows them, as Ahmed argues when describing community and collectivity, to
9
10 'align' their bodies towards each other (2004a, p. 119). Clothes can thus also be considered
11
12 active agents in dissolving or erasing difference - if, that is, they are accessible and are designed
13
14 to accommodate bodies of different sizes and shapes. If, as we have argued, differentiating
15
16 practices revolve around 'fitting in', the uniformity of a uniform - developed with diversity and
17
18 comfort in mind - can signal that all bodies belong. Indeed, as Ahmed notes, there is an intimate
19
20 relationship between comfort (both one's own and other's comfort with one's body) and fitting
21
22 in: 'to be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish
23
24 where one's body ends and the world begins. One fits, and by fitting the surface of bodies
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26 disappears from view' (Ahmed, 2007, p. 159). Katy draws our attention to the ways in which
27
28 clothes can allow her to blend in and become acceptable. Sarah and Jane, on the other hand,
29
30 indicated how they used the materiality of their outfits (bright colours and cupcake print) to
31
32 resist the shaming and invisibilizing of their fat bodies (see also van Amsterdam & van Eck,
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34 2019a).

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Participants furthermore mentioned how make-up and other beauty practices and products are also entangled within the flow of agency, opening up space for fat women to become acceptable. Jane mentioned always making sure to have manicured hands, smart hair and impeccable make-up during work activities. Her narrative shows the agentic capacity of

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3 such materialities in opening up possibilities for becoming acceptable, in spite of the material-
4
5 discursive entanglement of her fat body with obesity discourse that pushes towards exclusion:
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8 After the job interview, the manager told me they wouldn't have hired me if my
9
10 appearance hadn't been so impeccable: 'Your appearance was immaculate, so we hired
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12 you. If you wouldn't have had that, you'd be unsuitable for the position because of
13
14 your size'. This made me very uncomfortable (Jane)
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20 Applying Barad's ideas around difference as produced through particular 'cuts' (2003), we see
21
22 that the materiality of Jane's immaculate appearance enacts organizational boundaries,
23
24 producing her as acceptable instead of a bad fit. The discomfort Jane experienced, can be related
25
26 to the normativities present in this encounter. As Ahmed (2014, p. 147) writes 'Normativity is
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28 comfortable for those who can inhabit it'. By extension, those who cannot inhabit the
29
30 normativities related to size in organizations can expect to feel uncomfortable: 'Discomfort is a
31
32 feeling of disorientation: one's body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled' (p. 148). Here Jane
33
34 becomes acceptable through the material-discursive entanglement of an impeccable appearance
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36 with ideas about professionalism. Yet the circulation of discomfort challenges her feelings of
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38 belonging within the organization in question.
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43 The examples presented in this theme illustrate the work materialities can do to align fat
44
45 women's bodies with legitimate others in their organizational context. Barad's new materialist
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47 perspective allows us to see that human and non-human materialities are entangled with
48
49 discourses and 'help constitute one another' (2007, p. 239). Shame seems to be at the heart of
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51 these material-discursive entanglements regarding fat embodiment; positions of becoming
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53 shameful and circumventing shame change according to the specific intra-actions, and are often
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3 folded into each other. They predominantly produce fat women employees as a bad fit with their
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5 jobs and organizations, but sometimes also provide opportunities for our participants to
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7 challenge or resist normative assumptions about size in this context.
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10 11 12 **Discussion**

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14 In this paper, we set out to explore differentiating practices in organizations related to size from
15
16 the perspective of self-identified fat women. In line with Levay (2014) we have argued that size
17
18 is an important but understudied marker of difference in modern-day organizations. Drawing
19
20 from the works of Karen Barad and Sara Ahmed we illustrate how this ‘fitting in’ is not just a
21
22 matter of symbolically or discursively fitting into the job or the culture of the organization;
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24 fitting in or belonging are thoroughly material and affective issues as well.
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30 31 **Differentiating practices beyond the discursive**

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33 Our first contribution lies in adding a material dimension to theorization on embodied
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35 normativities and related differentiating practices in organizations. Extending earlier work in
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37 MOS that focuses mostly on the discursive aspects of embodied difference (e.g. Johansson et
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39 al., 2017; Levay, 2014; Meriläinen et al., 2015; Trethewey, 1999; Waring & Waring, 2009), our
40
41 study shows how materials co-produce the basic premises of who ‘fits in’ at different
42
43 workplaces. Through the use of Barad’s (2003, 2007, 2008) analytical framework, we have
44
45 shown how everyday organizational materials such as chairs, clothing, airplane and office seats
46
47 as well as the fat body itself, can become agentic actors within material-discursive
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49 entanglements that produce our participants’ fit within their workplace. Ahmed’s (2004a,
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51 2004b, 2008, 2014) ideas about affect furthered our analysis by showing that through affects
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3 such as shame, humiliation and insecurity, fat bodies become aligned with each other as ‘a bad
4 fit’. We furthermore show how everyday objects can work to produce otherwise marginalized
5 fat bodies as acceptable. While earlier work in MOS mainly used Barad’s theory to understand
6 the role of technology in organizations (e.g. Nyberg, 2009; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015a, 2015b;
7 Symon & Pritchard, 2015), our work highlights how Barad’s concept of intra-activity can be put
8 to work to critically analyze difference in organizations. Our framework offers a rich
9 understanding of differentiating practices by incorporating an analysis of material agencies and
10 affective flows. This makes it possible to address underexplored markers of difference such as
11 body size, as well as gain a more comprehensive understanding of the production of inclusion
12 and exclusion in organizations.
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26 Gender intersects with size in the differentiating practices we showcase, not only
27 because professionalism for women is largely constructed around ideals related to their
28 appearance (cf. Haynes, 2012; Mavin & Grandy, 2016; Trethewey, 1999) but also because the
29 issues our participants highlight around ill-fitting clothes, chairs and airplane seats in essence
30 revolve around the possibilities to legitimately take up space. As Tyler and Cohen (2010) argue,
31 dominant gender norms marginalize women employees through the symbolic and performative
32 organization of space. At the intersection of size and gender it becomes clear that taking up
33 space needs to be considered beyond the discursive realm as material and affective. Fat
34 women’s bodies are considered excessive in terms of space, both literally and symbolically.
35 Their bodies are queer bodies (LeBesco, 2001) since their material presence disrupts the
36 organizational order – for example by not fitting into chairs and work wear – and this, in turn,
37 produces shame. We want to highlight this socio-materiality of bodily shame, taking Probyn
38 (2004, p. 329) literally when she writes that shame is felt ‘in the rupture when bodies cannot or
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3 will not fit the place - when seemingly there is no place to hide'. This dovetails with Ahmed's
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5 ideas around space and affectivity. She states that normative embodiment allows '...bodies to
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7 extend into spaces that have already taken their shape. Those spaces are lived as comfortable as
8
9 they allow bodies to fit in; the surfaces of social space are already impressed upon by the shape
10
11 of such bodies' (p. 148). We therefore argue, in line with Barad's onto-epistemological stance,
12
13 that space should be theorized as a material, affective *and* discursive reality that structures
14
15 belonging and as such should be considered in future research on embodied differences in
16
17 organizations. The theoretical contribution of our work lies in surfacing the critical feminist
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19 potential of material and affective analyses to gain a more refined understanding of the
20
21 workings of power in relation to embodiment in organizations. In the next section, we will
22
23 discuss the theoretical implications of the circulation of shame for the possibilities of affective
24
25 and material becoming of fat women in organizations.
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33 **Marginalized bodies and shame**

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35 Our research indicates that affect is crucial to the differentiation that our participants experience
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37 in relation to their fat embodiment. We argue that shame is a particularly pertinent affect to
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39 theorize differentiation in relation to embodiment (cf. Dolezal, 2015). Indeed, shame is at the
40
41 heart of the prevalent obesity discourse; it relies on neoliberal ideas around individual
42
43 responsibility regarding bodies that are constructed as deviant (Levay, 2014). Because shame is
44
45 often assumed to inspire weight loss, it is naturalized at both individual and structural levels.
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47 Shaming bodies of size therefore becomes socially acceptable, often even encouraged (cf.
48
49 Johansson et al., 2017; Mik-Meyer, 2008). Our research shows that the circulation of shame
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51 shapes how our participants feel and has consequences in terms of their place within the
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3 organization. As Ahmed argues, shame bridges publicness and the self: ‘shame feels like an
4 exposure - another sees what I have done is bad and hence shameful - but it also involves an
5 attempt to hide, a hiding that requires the subject to turn (...) towards the self’ (2004a, p. 103).
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7
8 This turn towards the self, we argue, makes it hard to speak about shame. This also intersects
9
10 with gender: women’s bodies are subjected to judgment and scrutiny in organizational settings
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12 (Mavin & Grandy, 2016; Trethewey, 1999), which increases the pressure to ‘hide’ (Tyler &
13
14 Cohen, 2010). Our participants often did not speak about shame explicitly in relation to their
15
16 experiences at work, a move that would involve turning outward. They talked instead about
17
18 feeling insecure, uncomfortable or humiliated, and their actions were often shaped by the
19
20 anticipation of possible shameful encounters. We argue, in line with Pullen et al. (2017) that
21
22 previously experienced histories of not fitting in were evoked, leading our participants to avoid
23
24 situations that could produce shame. Affect thus builds momentum (Pullen et al., 2017, p. 106):
25
26 when a person has a history of being marginalized because of their size, small objects, gestures
27
28 or comments can evoke that history and accumulate negative feelings. This resonates with
29
30 Ahmed’s (2004a) argument that emotional responses to discrimination and exclusion are based
31
32 on histories of marginalization: ‘those moments of interpellation get repeated over time, and can
33
34 be experienced as bodily injury; moments which position queer subjects as failed’ (Ahmed,
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36 2014, p. 147). Yet a certain history ‘may operate by concealing its own traces’ (Ahmed 2004a,
37
38 p. 119) thereby making it invisible for those who do not share this history. This also aligns with
39
40 Barad’s (2007, p. 236) ideas about temporality: ‘the past is never left behind (...) the past and
41
42 the future are enfolded participants in matter’s iterative becoming’. This leaves us with the task
43
44 to question the histories related to embodiment that are made significant in organizational
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46 contexts and how these feed into differentiating practices through their material and affective
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3 becomings. This is especially relevant in organizations, where objects are often regarded as
4
5 neutral and emotions tend to be put aside as ‘private’. Our research thus contributes to the
6
7 ongoing theorization of normative embodiment in organization studies scholarship by adding
8
9 insights on the co-production of difference through the material and affective realms.
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13 Moreover, even though we could *feel* the circulation of shame in the interviews, our
14
15 participants rarely mentioned shame explicitly when talking about their work. This could partly
16
17 be due to the difficulty of articulating affect (Fotaki et al., 2017). But perhaps speaking about
18
19 shame can be experienced as shameful in itself too. This could be amplified in organizational
20
21 contexts because expressing emotions is coded as feminine and private, and therefore regarded
22
23 as inappropriate here (Lewis, 2014). Theoretically this is interesting because, in feeding silence,
24
25 shame seems to consolidate unequal power structures. It eclipses possibilities for speaking out
26
27 and forming social collectives that can disrupt exclusion and marginalization. Yet our study
28
29 shows that there are also material-discursive entanglements that circumvent shame. Here, the
30
31 agency of workwear and other organizational materialities becomes enacted differently in intra-
32
33 action with discourses about obesity and gender, and the fat bodies of our participants; these
34
35 entanglements produce situations where shame is not the outcome, instead producing our
36
37 participants as acceptable. More research is needed to unpack the potential of different affective
38
39 economies that may indeed move people to disrupt dominant practices within organizations that
40
41 feed marginalization and exclusion. As Dolezal (2015, p. xv) writes ‘shame and overcoming
42
43 shame (which is often centered on the body), has an important role to play in terms of the
44
45 validation of subjectivity, both personally and politically’. A limitation of this study is our
46
47 reliance on linguistic data (e.g. interview transcripts), future research could further look into
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49 post-qualitative and affective methodologies to better address and represent material agencies
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3 and affective flows (e.g. Gherardi, 2019). Below we discuss practical possibilities for moving
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5 beyond body shame and size discrimination in organizations.
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10 **Moving toward inclusivity**

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12 As Pouthier and Sondak (2019) show, there is emancipatory potential in affect. Their research
13
14 provides insight into possibilities for interrupting oppressive bodily norms through affective
15
16 encounters that focus on communal laughter, compassion and the recognition of mutual
17
18 vulnerability. This begs the question what interventions are possible in organizations that enable
19
20 these ‘affective pathways to freedom’ with regards to size. We think addressing body shame
21
22 related to size in organizations is pertinent but needs to be done carefully. Similar to Pouthier
23
24 and Sodank, our previous work on poetry (van Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019b) shows how art
25
26 provides possibilities towards this end. Yet the organizational climate and safety herein are
27
28 crucial prerequisites for talking about and feeling through embodied normativities and the
29
30 differentiating practices these produce. Below, we address how organizational materials could
31
32 play a role in the political project towards creating a size inclusive climate in organizations.
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38 The narratives of our participants indicate that the costs of finding suitable clothing,
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40 having your own orthopaedic chair made and buying (multiple) airplane seats can provide
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42 obstacles to perform well in their jobs or inhibit their chances of promotion. Some feel like an
43
44 economic liability to their employer, not because they have to take sick leave more often than
45
46 their non-fat co-workers as dominant obesity discourse suggests (Mik-Meyer, 2008; van
47
48 Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019a), but because their size needs to be accommodated in special
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50 orthopaedic chairs, tailor made uniforms or corporate wear, and particular (spacier) airline seats.
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52 The economic burden of finding suitable (thus expensive) clothing that looks professional is
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3 carried on an individual basis by our participants. Following the reasoning used in disability
4 scholarship and activism (e.g. Garland-Thomson, 2005; Grue, 2011) we contend that it is not
5 the individual fat employee who is at fault here, but the material circumstances through which
6 these differentiating practices emerge. As Colls and Evans (2014, p. 733) write, we should be
7
8 ‘redefining obesogenic environments not as environments that make bodies fat, but as
9 environments that make fat bodies problematic’. Our focus on materials as differentiating
10 agents shows that fat employees do not have equitable access to fitting clothing and seating.
11
12 This puts them at a disadvantage in the context of their employment. A materialist perspective
13 provides a good starting point for making organizations more equitable: arguably objects and
14 other organizational materials are more easily changed than organizational discourses. Our
15 research offers several practical starting points for doing so. Employers could, for example,
16 critically assess their seating arrangements to secure that every employee has the opportunity to
17 use a chair that accommodates their particular bodily needs. A similar argument can be made
18 related to workwear policy. Employers should ensure everybody has equal access to suitable
19 and affordable clothing. Furthermore - akin to policy arrangements related to disability - official
20 organizational policies should specify the willingness to fund extra costs related to airplane
21 travel or other material needs employees may have based on their specific embodiment. If
22 organizations are invested in creating inclusive work environments, our suggestion is that they
23 start by cultivating practices that literally and figuratively allow more room for bodies of
24 different sizes and shapes.
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25 1. Participants identified themselves differently: e.g. ‘large’, ‘fuller-sized’, ‘big’, ‘full-
26
27 figured’, ‘obese’ and ‘fat’. In this paper we use the term fat in its’ descriptive sense in order to
28
29 disentangle it from the negative moral connotations it has in everyday use. We refrain from
30
31 using medicalized terms such as ‘obesity’ and ‘overweight’ because we want to avoid
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33 reproducing this medicalization of fatness.
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8 **Author biographies**

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10 Noortje van Amsterdam is assistant professor Organization Studies at Utrecht School of
11 Governance. Her research focuses on embodiment and health in organizations. She is
12 particularly interested in how inequalities around gender, age, size, and disability play out in the
13 workplace, and often uses arts-based methodologies to explore the affective and material
14 dimensions of these phenomena. Her work has been published in peer-reviewed journals and
15 edited books.
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26 Dide van Eck is a postdoctoral researcher in Work and Organization studies at the KU Leuven.
27 Her research focuses on diversity management and organizational inclusion, particularly in
28 service sector work contexts. She is interested in exploring how workplace diversity can be
29 accommodated by more equal and inclusive forms of organizing.
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38 Katrine Meldgaard Kjær is assistant professor at the IT University of Copenhagen. Her research
39 focuses on the relationship between health and digital culture, often with interdisciplinary as
40 well as experimental or creative methods and approaches. She has previously published on new
41 materialism and affect in relation to diet culture, and is currently working on a project about
42 medicinal cannabis in Denmark.
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Table I: Participants

Name*	Profession	Age*	Duration of the interview
Jill	Debt counselor	53	50 min
Katy	Secondary school teacher	37	60 min
Laura	Elderly caregiver	24	80 minutes
Rifka	Back and front office worker	22	55 minutes
Mell	Owner beauty salon	33	60 minutes
Sandra	Youth counselor	46	50 minutes
Alice	Shop assistant	22	90 minutes
Kara	Photographer	28	90 minutes
Jenny	Information analyst	47	60 minutes
Susan	Care-giver	39	60 minutes
Wendy	Opera singer	52	120 minutes
Claire	Service employee	25	55 minutes
Carinda	Medical researcher	34	70 minutes
Maxime	Head principal at a primary school	43	120 minutes

Monique	Project leader	26	80 minutes
Ingrid	Project manager	30	60 minutes
Nora	Actress, public speaker and comedian	50	90 minutes
Hannah	Student counselor	50	50 minutes
Constanc e	Caregiver	40	140 minutes
Nancy	Pedagogical staff member	45	150 minutes
Kathleen	Accountant	30	120 minutes
Tamar	Former IT tech and communications specialist	41	160 minutes