

"I'm Fat and Proud of It": Body Size Diversity and Fat Acceptance Activism in Spain

Lina Casadó-Marín and Mabel Gracia-Arnaiz

Medical Anthropology Research Center, University Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain

ABSTRACT

Hegemonic representations of body size and beauty often have negative and painful impacts on fat people. Fat individuals face social discrimination because of the stigma associated with fatness and because of weight-based stereotypes. In Spain, fat activism has emerged in the last decade. Social networks are used by this movement as one of the principal means of redefining fatness and disputing prescriptive standards of body health and beauty. The narratives and iconography found on these websites, managed mainly by women, contest fat phobia not only by advocating for inclusive public policies, but also by reclaiming fatness as a possible form of subversive identity. This identity is constructed by challenging the representation of fat bodies as diseased and in need of medical intervention, and emphasizes recognition of variability in and multiple experiences of body size.

KEYWORDS

Fat activism; social networks; multiple bodies; Spain

Introduction

In Western societies, an objection to fatness has been influenced by a variety of forces: Christian morality, which has historically called for moderation and restraint and scorns gluttony; scientific knowledge, which has demonstrated a close connection among diet, illness, and health; and changes in ideal body type and practices of the body (Bacon 2010; Vigarello 2010). Of the two predominant stereotypes about fatness (Fischler 1995) – the jolly, sweet-toothed fat person whose good humor ensures social acceptance, and the gluttonous fat person whose self-centeredness and laziness lead to social rejection – the latter has ultimately triumphed over the last century. In an era of increasing fatphobia (Fischler 1995; Saguy and Ward 2011) slimness is portrayed not only as attractive, but also as a sign of social distinction, moderation, and self-control, whereas fatness is equated with self-indulgence and lack of self-control (Poulain 2009; Saint Pol 2010).

Society's rejection of fatness can be traced not only to moralizing discourses on immoderate food consumption and the increasing commodification of bodies according to the dictates of a global marketplace (Scheper-Hughes and

CONTACT Lina Casadó-Marín ✉ linacristina.casado@urv.cat 🏢 Department of Nursing, University Rovira i Virgili, Avinguda Catalunya, 35. C.P 43002, Tarragona, Spain

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Wacquant 2002), but also to the current definition of "obesity" as an epidemic and as a costly and avoidable disease (Boero 2007; Moffat 2010). The medical profession simultaneously construes fat people both as sick people who are the victims of a consumer society and as guilty people who willfully transgress the norms designed to prevent weight gain (Gracia-Arnaiz 2013). The concept of disease usually absolves patients of responsibility for their condition, but in the case of "obesity," this is not usually so. Fat people are regarded as the result of behavioral choices that could be avoided simply by eating less and moving more (Guthman 2011; Yates-Doerr 2015).

These social and biomedical conceptions, far from helping to destigmatize "obesity," are becoming ways of redefining it. Stigmatization is a process that unfolds in social interaction, discrediting people as "not normal" or "deviant" (Dickins et al. 2016; Goffman 2006). If fat phobia is the systematic fear or rejection of fat and fatness because of the progressive commodification and medicalization of food and body, it manifests as the discriminatory treatment of fat people in their daily lives because of their body size (Gracia-Arnaiz 2013). Being fat is associated with social exclusion, stress on the body, and the undermining of health and wellbeing (Brewis et al. 2016). There is extensive research on fat stigma, such as children being teased on the playground by classmates, adolescents facing obstacles to participating in social activities promoted by peers, and adults having more difficulty in being recruited by employers in the labor market (Flint et al. 2016; Latner, Rosewall, and Simmonds 2007; Tibère et al. 2007).

In response to the stigma of fatness and the many forms of discrimination that follow from it, social movements have appeared that seek to subvert normative paradigms by questioning not only individual responsibility for body weight, but also canons of beauty and the definition of disease (Davenport, Solomons, and Puchalska et al. 2018; LeBesco 2004).

Arising in the United States at the end of the 1960s and replicated in various European countries, the fat activism movement reflects the heterogeneity and dynamism of its origins: the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), a civil-rights organization in the United States; the Fat Underground, a more confrontational West Coast group that split off from NAAFA in 1972, and the London Fat Women's Group, among others. While some platforms have followed NAAFA's lead in concentrating primarily on the protection of civil rights and improving the quality of life for fat persons, others, such as the Fat Underground, adopted more radical positions, demanding the right to be and to feel fat, challenging the "medicalization" of body weight, and exposing the myths and dangers of dieting and thinness (Cooper 2010). From a feminist stance, the struggle has been compared with those waged by women, immigrants, or sexual minorities against sexism or racism (Cooper 2016; Wann 1998). Digital media and, in particular, social networking sites have been strategically used by these movements to disseminate their collective claims and political actions (Boellstorff 2008; Plant 2000; Wakeford 2000). While many body/food montages

found on digital media have tended to represent idealized bodies as the lean and physically fit products of self-control, disciplined and healthy eating, and ethical food choices (Lupton 2016), these new media also include proposals from communities and bloggers which, in fighting fat phobia, call for a diversity of body sizes and shapes and other ways of understanding healthy habits from the point of view of performativity (Butler 1993; Fletcher 2016; Preciado 2011).

This article illustrates the rise of fat activism in Spain, analyzing its evolution and specific characteristics. The emergence of these groups coincides with the growing use of social networking sites. While they initially focused their attention on preventing social discrimination against fat people and achieving inclusive public policies (Dickins et al. 2016), as digital media increasingly became a space for voicing political demands (Kanh and Kellner 2004), more and more groups have focused on reclaiming rights for XXL bodies and their multiple identities through the "fatosphere" (Baker 2015; Coleman 2010; Harding and Kirby 2009). The textual content and images collected from the social media posts of Orgullo Gordo [Fat Pride], Stop Gordofobia [Stop Fat Phobia], Cuerpos Empoderados [Empowered Bodies] and WeLoversize are approached as narratives that attempt to undermine hegemonic images of bodies and health. In this article, these narratives are analyzed both as representations of the body and as subversive practices.

Materials and methods

Our interest in the study of body size diversity and food activism has spanned over ten years working in a research line on *food, gender and culture* at the Medical Anthropology Research Centre (MARC) at University Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona. During these years, we have witnessed a turning point from the Spanish health authorities: from the relevance given to certain eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia to "obesity". This work was done within the framework of a broader anthropological study entitled *The precariousness of daily life: food (in) security, gender and health* (ref. num. CSO2016-74941-P, 2016–2019). The main objective is to analyze food and body changes, particularly in women, in the contexts of increasing precariousness. One of the specific objectives is analyzing the stigma suffered by fat people and the strategies to contest fatphobic discourses, with the fatosphere being one of the main forms of response.

Approach and procedure

The research took place in two phases. First, we updated a review of the existing literature, examining primary sources such as articles, books, and book chapters on fatness and fat activism.

Second, the textual and iconographic content of four online fat activism communities with headquarters in Spain was compiled and analyzed. Material from the groups' beginnings through June 2018 was included. The groups were selected through purposive sampling. Inclusion was based on four criteria: first, the group must have been active (new posts on social media) in the two months prior to selection; second, the group must be at least one year old; third, the content posted must be related to fatness and body diversity; and last, the content must be published in Spanish. Based on these criteria, the following communities were selected: Orgullo Gordo, Stop Gordofobia, Cuerpos Empoderados, and WeLoversize (Table 1). Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were the social networks selected because they are among the top five most-used social networks in Spain.

Thirdly, once the groups were selected, we requested access to them in a private message to the groups' administrators. The administrators gave their consent for us to compile and analyze both the visual and textual materials posted by members of the written documents published in the groups.

Data collection and data analysis

Images, tweets and posts were systematically collected from four groups: orgullogordo, stop gordofobia, weloversize and cuerpos empoderados (Table 2). In our research, we combined the process of participant observation—becoming immersed in the specific language and codes of communication specific to fat activist groups – with coding (defined as the conceptual abstraction of data) before and during data collection and data analysis. The texts, videos and images posted were codified, categorized, and later analyzed using the qualitative analysis program ATLAS.ti.

Texts and images were approached as cultural texts through a thematic analysis of social media posts by members of the groups, regardless of the

Table 1. Data collected on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.

Name of Group	Instagram hashtag and number of images	Twitter account and number of tweets	Facebook page and number of posts
Orgullo Gordo	#orgullogordo 36	@OrgulloGordoFa 50	www.facebook.com/OrgulloGordo 50
Stop Gordofobia	#stop_gordofobia 4	@stopgordofobia 50	www.facebook.com/stopgordofobia 50
WeLoverSize	#weloversize 50	@weLoverSize 50	https://www.facebook.com/Loversize-519063364812554 50
Cuerpos empoderados	#cuerposempoderados 50	@cuerpoypoder 50	https://www.facebook.com/cuerposempoderados 50
Total	140	200	200

Table 2. List and information on the Selected Groups. Main Social Networks, number of followers and analysed posts of June 2018.

	Groups and year of creation			
	Gordo (2012)	Stopgordofobia (2013)	WeLoverSize (2013)	Cuerpos empoderados (2014)
MOTTO	"If love is too tight, it's not your size."	"All bodies, all beauties"	"Beauty comes in all shapes and sizes"	"For a revolution in bodies"
WEBPAGE	http://orgullogordo.webs.com/		http://weloversize.com/	http://cuerposempoderados.wix.com/gordas
FACEBOOK	https://www.facebook.com/OrgulloGordo	https://www.facebook.com/stopgordofobia	https://www.facebook.com/pages/Loversize/519063364812554	https://www.facebook.com/cuerposempoderados
	17,733 people like this 50	68,584 people like this 50	124,909 people like this 50	15,010 people like this 50
INSTAGRAM	@orgullo_gordo	@stop_gordofobia	@weloversize	#cuerposempoderados (Hashtag)
	Analysed Images 36	4	50	50
TWITTER	@OrgulloGordoFA	@stopgordofobia	@WeLoversize	@cuerpoypoder
	128 Analysed Tweets 50	12,600 50	14,700 50	419 50

social network used. The data analysis process was carried out by means of assigning codes – inductive labels linked to selected pieces of data (textual or images) – to key categories that emerged in the groups.

The groups' use of the Internet differs, as they prioritize the use of images and/or text depending on the social network they use. Their activity is defined as follows:

- Orgullo Gordo: They are mainly active on Facebook (registration date in October 2012) and their website. They define themselves as activists against fat phobia and in favor of diversity.
- Stop Gordofobia: They have used Facebook since August 2013 and have 68,779 followers. The group is very active on Twitter and Instagram. It defines its space on Facebook as, "a meeting place for people who are critical of the established canons of beauty, who are against ideal bodies, against the tyranny of appearance, in short, for people against everything that threatens body diversity ... "
- WeLoversize: Active on Facebook since March 2013, they currently have 47,329 likes on their page, 8,930 followers on Twitter and 6,730 posts on Instagram. They define their space on Facebook as, "a world in which size is the least important and self-esteem is the most important ... "
- Cuerpos Empoderados: They have a website and have been very active on Facebook since March 2014. They have Twitter and Instagram accounts. Regarding the group, they say, "we are an action-research project on bodies that have neither a physical nor a mental place in this society. We want to build it together ... "

The findings were shared with the administrators once the research was completed. The eleven codes (Figure 1) were classified into four broad categories: diverse bodies, stigma, health, and multiple beauties.

Results

#Fat acceptance activism in Spain

Fat activism in Spain emerged later than in other countries. This movement did not formally appear until 2011, when the Asociación Española para la Aceptación de la Obesidad (Spanish Association for the Acceptance of Obesity, known by its acronym ASOCEAO) was founded. This coincided with the emergence of online communities such as gordos.com, which is no longer active. Activist groups commonly turn to the Internet to promote the creation of innovative subjectivities and identities. Fat activism is no exception, and makes use of digital media in the understanding that the presence

of fatness there can contribute to transforming not only society and technology, but also conventional gender roles (Preciado 2011).

At first, these associations mainly focused on promoting inclusive policies, defining themselves as spaces from which to fight discrimination against fat people, to improve their acceptance in the work or school environment, and to boost their self-esteem. As the years passed, more and more communities emerged whose core value was taking pride in being fat and in identifying as fat.

Like groups in other industrialized countries, most of these groups are formed by women and are framed within feminist schools of thought (Cooper 1998, 2016; Gillis, Howie, and Munford 2004; Wann 1998). Take, for example, this message from Stop Gordofobia in one of its posts: "For anyone who might be confused: this is a feminist space. If anyone does not agree that the anti-fatphobia fight is feminist, you can stop following us. We believe you can't have one thing without the other, it's that simple. ♥ < 3 Kisses fatties and femmies ♥ ...". For Cuerpos Empoderados, the fight for acceptance of fat bodies also means that patriarchy must take it up as a problem: "I have spent some months surrounded by alpha males who talk to me about feminism. I joke with them and talk about the problems with masculinity. I explain what microaggressions are. I explain that the problem lies in gender categorization itself and that patriarchy goes hand-in-hand with heterosexuality and capitalism." Orgullo Gordo points to the group's links with the queer movement. "Body diversity is gaining more and more importance among queer militants under that big umbrella that feminism opened up in the sixties which hasn't stopped attracting new allies. Although discrimination on the basis of race, color or gender is looked down on by society, singling out a fat body for comment is still permissible. This is the mental framework that we seek to deactivate. The rebellion is underway against the domestication of bodies and identities, against hygienist discipline, against the assumptions of pleasure, breaking down boundaries and multiplying voices and images that demand not only rights, but pleasure."

As Haraway (1985) observes, the "cyborg" nature of these groups serves as a tool to redefine XXL bodies and their identities because it is precisely through social networks that a type of discourse is promoted that undermines hegemonic body and health standards. In this context, people who are "curvy" or "BBW [big beautiful women]" or have "dad bods" appear as counter-discourses to the aesthetic of the "fitness" body.

#Category 1. Diverse bodies

The body is present in each and every post, through the use of images as well as texts that recount experiences of fatness, body ideals, strategies of resistance and performativity.

The first issue of the fanzine *Gorda!* [Fatty!] (2012), a magazine published in Buenos Aires, defends the use of the word *fat*. As in fat activism groups in other

countries, the term has been reappropriated and redefined by these communities. For Orgullo Gordo, for example, "Fat is just another physical description like eye color, hair, height, age, etc. However, it is used as an insult. For this reason, we say that Orgullo Gordo is not merely a compound term; we have appropriated the term so that it cannot be used against us ... " Devesa and Gómez, administrators of WeLoversize and authors of the book *Gordifuckingbuena* [Big, Fucking Beautiful Woman] (2016), state that when they fully immersed themselves in the world of plus-sized bloggers, they realized the panic that the word *fat* causes. For them, *fat* is not an insult, it is a descriptive adjective like *tall*, *short*, *blonde*, or *thin*. "The problem is that throughout our lives, we have heard it used with disdain so many times that our brains automatically categorize it as something terrible [...]"

In the groups, a recurring theme is questioning the standards and indicators used to define body normality based on the height/weight ratio. Counter-discourses on how they construct body "normality" are reflected in many of the groups' posts and responses to posts by others. In one of these, *Cuerpos Empoderados* reflects critically on this process:

"What is being fat? Although at first the concept of fat appears to depend on a height/weight ratio adjusted for the quantity of fat versus muscle in the body, I believe that being fat in our society is something else. I don't exactly know what it means to be fat anymore, but I do know of multiple situations in which you think you are. You're fat when you go to the shops and the pants don't look good on you because they're designed for girls with lean thighs and no belly. You're fat when you feel ashamed to say what you weigh because it is more than what is 'normal.' You're fat when you eat with enthusiasm and people say that you are a glutton or that you eat like a man. You're fat every time you look at yourself in the mirror and think that you are. Fatness for me is not only a physical condition, it is also a mental condition, a reflection of social structures. And, above all, it is something that we experience negatively because it has gone from being a condition of the body to representing a negative value ... "

Online communities go beyond pointing to the constructed nature of fatness based on a particular aesthetic to assert that other ways of understanding corporeality are possible. For Devesa and Gómez (2016, 11–14), these understandings serve a variety of purposes: "some for pure exhibitionism, others as a way to claim rights, and a few, our favorites, because they want to show the world that fashion does not end at size 42 ... "

Cuerpos Empoderados seeks the reappropriation of bodies and the reconsideration of fatness as a comfortable condition. "We constantly seek to learn how to accept and love our bodies, these bodies that we have been made to hate and that we know that, in the end, will be our home every day of our lives ... And since we already are our bodies, we want to empower them."

The dual nature of fat activism groups as both feminist and virtual is expressed in all the online communities, emphasizing the complexity and inclusiveness of their identity. "We want to thank you all for making this space possible, where we attempt to create a fat narrative apart from prejudice. A fat, round, chubby

narrative to make ourselves visible, to give ourselves a name, to be ourselves and not a crude caricature drawn by capitalism and the heteropatriarchy. Thank you for your photos and your reflections. When you break out of this thing we call the fat closet, all of us will break out together, resisting with our dissident practices ...” (Stop Gordofobia).

#Category 2. Stigma

Group members often recount situations of weight discrimination and fat phobia that they themselves have experienced. Speaking openly about these experiences and channeling them through the network generates responses that counteract the effects of fat phobic discourse, discrimination, and prejudices against fat people.

As stated in a post on Stopgordofobia, "Being fat doesn't kill you, prejudice kills you. The doctor's prejudice when you're wrongly diagnosed. The jokes at home, in the street, and at school. The people who offer you miraculous weight-loss products and recipes that you never asked for. The comparisons, the discrimination, that is what wears you down ... ”

The jokes, the insults, and the "lack of willpower" to lose weight that is attributed to fat people are examples of explicit fat phobia. "In a show of originality, a person called a fat girl a hippopotamus. What problems do cows, pigs, hippopotamuses and all of these beautiful animals have? Were these people attacked by them at some point in their lives and that is why they detest them? Do they need some type of therapy to overcome their phobia? A hug?" (Stop Gordofobia)

This disdain is expressed in a variety of ways, some more subtle than others, as the following example demonstrates:

Girls of Madrid: Hello. I am 22 years old and weigh almost 120 kilos. No matter how many diets I've been on, I can't manage to lose weight and now this affects not only my health, but also my daily life. It's depressing that, for example, the fact that you are sitting down on the metro can make you feel bad because the person next to you gives you a mean look because you extend a bit beyond your seat and just so that you don't feel this way you end up standing. Going shopping is also the worst. At 22 years old, I can't dress like a grandmother or like a 'tomboy.' The odyssey of trying to find something to wear is draining. Because of this, I want to ask you whether you have a list or if you could give me information on some brick and mortar shop in Madrid or an online shop ... (Stop Gordofobia).

Reactions to her post gave rise to 37 comments, of which the majority were advice on plus-size shops. The post received 24 "likes." In this instance and in others like it, the online community functions as a support group in the broadest sense.

Fat phobia can be expressed more or less explicitly, "starting with the friend who calls me fat so that she feels less fat. The friend who is ashamed to go out with me. The doctor who looks at me disapprovingly. The ex who left me when my fat rolls came back. The therapist who insists that I lose weight or else. The sister who asks

me to be less public when I talk about discrimination against fatness ...” (Orgullo Gordo).

The fears and insecurities generated by social pressure on fat people are especially worrisome during adolescence. Being "the fat kid in class" can be a source of distress and frustration. In the chapter *Adolescence in First Person*, Elena Devesa of WeLoversize writes:

I never aspired to be a supermodel, I just wanted to buy things in the same shops that my friends bought things in. I wanted to walk down the street unnoticed, without getting unpleasant looks and insults from strangers. I wanted some boy to like me. Not all of them, mind you, just some boy. I dreamed of not being invisible anymore and becoming everyone's best friend, of feeling the heat of attraction in someone's gaze and the hormones coursing through my veins ... I wanted to wear a bikini, or at least a pretty bathing suit that didn't look like I had stolen it from my grandmother; I wanted to put on high heels on nights I went out and smile fearlessly at the people who passed by me; I dreamed of being just another person and not always 'the fat girl'. (Devesa and Gómez 2016, 35)

#Category 3. Health

The "health" category includes the codes "defining health," "self-control," and "dieting." Negative comments on posts from Facebook users offering advice to readers on losing weight are quite frequent. For example, responses to a video on YouTube posted by the administrator of Orgullo Gordo on her Facebook page included "scarfing down food at all hours ... instead of cookies why don't you eat some fruit and stop spreading your hang-ups to other people?" and, offensively, "Take a shower, Stinky!" On Stop Gordofobia, one user responded, "There are two types of fat people: those who are fat because of some disease or pathology, and those who are fat because they're lazy. Losing weight isn't easy but it's healthy." For members of the activist groups, these are messages from people who disguise their fat phobia by framing their preference for a certain body aesthetic in the discourse of "health."

Fat activists firmly reject these cultural beliefs and medicalizing discourses about the health of fat people, arguing that "The path to avoiding discrimination is not losing weight, it's educating based on reality. Not all fat people are sick and not all thin people are healthy," and "Being fat is not being sick (and using sickness to justify fatness legitimizes and perpetuates fat phobia)." For Orgullo Gordo, "All of this about health is just another discourse, the same as gays are going to hell or any other discourse of hate. What current research shows is that health does not depend on weight but on lifestyle. If you eat healthy (unprocessed food) and exercise, you are going to be healthy and that will be reflected in your check-ups."

In one of their many posts on health and fatness, Devesa and Gómez, as administrators of WeLoversize, criticize the reductionism of seeing "health"

only in terms of the body to the exclusion of fat people's psychological and emotional states:

It saddens us that after hundreds of messages regarding our physical health, absolutely no one has yet showed the slightest concern for the mental health of the Loversizers. All of them stare at our bellies, our boobs or our butts when we go running, but nobody considers what goes through the minds of these people who, as hard as they have tried to lose weight, have not managed to do so ...

The relation that these activists have established between physical health, mental wellbeing, and social acceptance is important because it exposes the effects of stigma on the health of fat people. To the comment quoted above, "Take a shower, Stinky," the administrator of Orgullo Gordo responded with the following message: "It seems important to me to reflect on how the idea of hygiene is used. I think that this happens not just with fat phobia, but in general with all bodies that don't fit into the socially approved body image. 'Take a shower' is a very common insult whose purpose is to make us feel 'dirty' because we are fat, because we don't shave our body hair, because we have stretch marks, for any reason. In my opinion, it is a tremendously powerful strategy of oppression ...".

Dieting is also a sign of this oppression. For Cuerpos Empoderados: "Diet is control. Diet is repression. Diet is obedience. Diet is abuse of the body. Diet is submission. Eating freely is indispensable for living freely. (...) Fat people are not the result of eating disorders. However, fat phobia is indeed the result of a disorder: a political, ethical, and aesthetic disorder. Political because it assumes that persons have absolute control over what happens to us, that our bodies are moldable, and that social context and social factors do not affect our lives. Being thin or fat does not necessarily imply either health or strength. Thin bodies also get sick ...".

#Category 4. Multiple beauties

The discourse of beauty found in fat activism groups breaks with the model of the docile body (Foucault 1995). It is a body that tries to redefine itself outside the boundaries of cultural and social representations of hegemonic beauty. "Perfection is an invention whose purpose is to make us feel unsatisfied, incomplete, and to keep us always searching for something unattainable. It is one of capitalism's and heteropatriarchy's most effective ways of dumbing us down. Because the system wants us in a daze, sad, and needy. Because this means finding salvation in the products they offer us and in a partner who 'accepts' us." (Cuerpos Empoderados).

A post on Stop Gordofobia argues that this kind of "acceptance" perpetuates oppression: "We don't want to change ourselves. We don't want others to accept us for 'who we are on the inside,' and we don't want to torture ourselves with extreme diets and exercise. We want to unlearn our desires,

and we want our bodies to be transformed into something potentially desirable for the simple fact that it is a body. We speak for the fat people who still find themselves in a space of silence, of shame, of mockery ... we invite them not to come out of the size closet, but to destroy it ... ”.

Photos of bodies and selfies play an important role in this. This "making a fat body into a visible body" is a way of opening oneself to the public sphere as part of the struggle to introduce complexity and heterogeneity into canons of beauty. This also includes sexualized and eroticized images in which the power of the body and its ability to communicate is valued (Figure 6).

We live in a reality in which power inhabits us. We are accustomed to speaking of the Western, heterosexual, property-owning, bourgeois man as the creator of worlds, worlds in which most of us suffer. Part of this suffering is the canonical standard of beauty, thinness as an instrument as well as a consequence of power. Fat people are a group that seems to be absent in this scheme. An awareness of how power oppresses reveals us to ourselves as among the oppressed, but also as reproducers of dominant and exclusionary attitudes ... (Cuerpos Empoderados).

The groups also publish posts from partners who express unconventional visions of fatness, linking it with being sexy, being pretty. "My girlfriend is fat, simple as that, fat. But she isn't just fat, she is also pretty, sexy, and terribly lovely" (WeLoversize). The aim, as indicated by Stop Gordofobia, is to be able to "celebrate stretch marks and fat rolls, to celebrate the body."

Discussion and conclusions

In response to the progressive problematization of body size (Brewis et al. 2011; Meleo-Erwin 2015) and the stigma suffered by fat people because of their weight, fat activism groups have emerged in Spain as online feminist communities. According to Butler (1993) the Western-heterosexist regime works simultaneously in two steps: one structural and another phenomenological. From this perspective, the critical analysis of fat activism takes into account not only its objective conditions of emergence but also the subjective factors that act in it as a social action, in a performative way (Preciado 2011). As we have pointed out, just as in other Western societies, they are dissident voices (Baker, 2015; Harding and Kirby 2009), mainly women's voices demanding the right to be and to identify as fat, outside of biomedical discourse and hegemonic canons of beauty (Butler 1993; Fletcher 2016; Gracia-Arnaiz 2013).

There is widespread social consensus around the belief that thinness is synonymous with self-discipline, health, and beauty (Chernin 1985; Wolf 1991). Fat identity is constructed by challenging this powerful conception of fat bodies as diseased and in need of medical intervention, as well as by emphasizing recognition of variability and diversity in body types (Saguy and Ward 2011). Fat body images and their visibility serve as a key rhetorical tool, referring how groups link the goals of fat activism with other social

justice movements. This allows fat activists to further shift discourses of body size diversity from medicalized to more politicized discourses.

With the intention of bringing these concerns to public spaces and challenge those discourses and practices that have negatively resignified fatness, virtual communities have adopted the internet in the same way that cyberfeminism has (Plant 2000): as a space for creating networks in which to denounce discrimination, fight for equality, and subvert identities. Through digital media and social networks, the *fatosphere* is used by Spanish activists as a specific way to "inhabit" the Internet (Zafra 2010) in order to break the silence, denouncing the institutions and industries, health professionals and health authorities that stigmatize and discriminate against fat people, but most of all in order to show that other ways of understanding and experiencing the body are possible. *Cuerpos Empoderados*, *Orgullo Gordo*, *Stop Gordofobia* and *WeLoversize* are examples of communities that, by sharing ideas, experiences, and reflections in favor of fatness in a public forum, transform their personal stories, photographs and videos into public acts of political rebellion. Fatness is widely regarded, perhaps especially by people who regard their body weight as "normal," as a consequence of deviant eating behavior, and this contributes to increased feelings of guilt. Fat individuals are held personally responsible for their condition, experience social exclusion, and see their identity reduced to a single, stigmatizing characteristic – fatness – while all other personal attributes become secondary. Fat activists try to break this vicious circle that undervalues personal expectations and capacities, encouraging fat persons not to accept and internalize the negative judgments of other people because doing so will cause them to lose self-respect and become even more socially isolated.

These groups espouse a notion of beauty at odds with the model of the disciplined, docile body (Foucault 1995; Turner 1984; Wooley and Wooley 1979). Fatness is beautiful, they proclaim, and being fat is something to be proud of. The fat body is agentic, seeking to redefine itself outside the conventional frame of reference in which the hegemonic canon of beauty is constructed around the slender body. In accordance with the notion of performativity (Butler 1993), the discourses that inhabit these bodies never appear completely identical or completely different. They are both text and action, conditioned by the discourse of authority, but they question dominant body ideals (Fletcher 2016; Lupton 2016; Vigarello 2010). Therefore, though fat people are always judged negatively for their physical appearance, fat activists have converted the Internet into a body-space of sociability that can give rise to new subjectivities and identities in which excess weight does not constitute a problem, but rather a legitimate option.

Unlike biomedicine, fat activists do not consider fatness to be necessarily an indicator of illness, much less an epidemic or chronic disease (Julier 2008; Petersen 2007) and demand to review the current public-health policies

around "obesity". Their concept of health is broader and more inclusive, depathologizing fatness in order to experience it as a way of life as healthy as others that may, or may not, be associated with other possible body sizes. They do not perceive their eating habits or food practices as "bad," or feel themselves to be under any obligation to diet, as indicated by nutritional guides. The dietary model is seen as rigid and inflexible because it determines whether people can eat one type of food or another, in what quantities, and where, when, with whom, and how often they may do so. For most activists, dietary and physical exercise guidelines prescribed by physicians must be radically questioned because they are constructed as a form of control and discipline over bodies as an attempt to make them uniform. From their perspective, fatness, like beauty and physical appearance, should be read in political terms, since the stigma associated with fatness has ultimately become a mechanism that supports a system of power relations that gives one group of people control over another.

While fat people are always judged by their physical appearance, the study of the discursive strategies that appear online allows us to reflect on the role that social networks play as open spaces (Haraway 1985) for the redefinition and creation of alternative discourses (Plant 2000; Wakeford 2000). Health, the struggle of diverse bodies for acceptance, and the recognition of multiple forms of beauty are some of the core ideas discussed in this article. Fat activism invites us to consider how performativity as an analytic perspective may help us to understand how hegemonic discourses may be subverted in order to reduce stigmatizing representations and practices.

Notes

1. Figure 2. Text figure translation. The first picture says "Women's freedom of expression!!". The second picture: "Fat commando presents: Kabaret (free entrance) Saturday 8th June. CSO The Quimera. Nelson Mandela Square. Metro stations: Lavapiés or Tirso de Molina. Madrid. "

Codes and categories.

2. Figure 3. Text figure translation: "Fat women ... /Fat women, like everyone else, do whatever they want".

Images from *Orgullo Gordo* and a flyer for a cabaret from *Komando Gordix* in *Cuerpos Empoderados*¹.

3. Figure 4. Text figure translation. Picture 2: "My body doesn't want your opinion".

Images from *Orgullo Gordo* on the diversity of bodies, and from *WeLoversize* on agency².

4. Figure 5. Text figures translation. Picture 1 "Which one is unhealthy? None, all of them are just drawings. You would not say anything about a person's health just by looking at their size, unless you just base your opinion on your own preconceived notions about what you are seeing". Picture 2 "We are the hypervisible invisible, the double morality and your hypocrisy, the aesthetic critique disguised as health, the discomfort in your eyes, in your space, in your uniformity. We are the breakdown of your rules,



Figure 6. Images from Stop Gordofobia and WeLoversize.

disobedience and excess, overflow and sin. Dissidence. We are the women you wish didn't exist. But we exist. And we are not going to ask for forgiveness or permission”.

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Notes on contributor

Lina Casadó-Marín is an associate professor in the Department of Nursing and researcher at the Medical Anthropology Research Center (MARC) at University Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain. Her research interests include gendered agency and theories of embodiment. She has been involved in a number of national and international projects focused on food, gender and culture.

Mabel Gracia-Arnaiz is a professor in the Department of Anthropology, Philosophy and Social Work and researcher at the Medical Anthropology Research Center (MARC) at University Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain. Her research interests are focused on the sociocultural study of food, gender and health. Spain and Mexico are her ethnographic areas of specialization.

ORCID

Lina Casadó-Marín  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8078-1673>

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