

**M**y sexuality and my fat body are all bundled up into a glorious tangle. As a fat bi-dyke I've been thinking about the ways my identities knot together, and what that has meant in my life. Certainly my politics as a fat woman have enabled me to generate an understanding of myself as a byke. Or was it the other way around?

Here are some of the notes I've made about the similarities between being fat and bi. I don't pretend that what follows is a definitive statement, I just want to get the ball rolling, and I hope that others will develop and debate some of these ideas.

Please note that I write as a British woman, and my comments about communities are really about the scene in the country where I live. I try not to assume that my perspective is universal.

# FAT & BI

## Prejudice

Biphobia and Fatphobia share more than just spelling, there are peculiar similarities. The prejudice against fat and bi people manifests itself within cultural beliefs that we are ugly and uncool compared to other people. This gets mixed with a kind of pity from outsiders (and sometimes ourselves) about our "difficult" sexualities and bodies. These are "difficult" only because both groups don't fit into the narrow parameters which define what sexualities or body sizes are socially appropriate. Bizarrely, it is always us that is considered deficient, not the rules which excluded us in the first place. When I first started networking with other fat and bi people I was alarmed by the extent to which I had been a sucker for the line about us being uncool. I know that just because you're fat or bi isn't necessarily going to make you a great person, but as communities we are cool, we are really cool.

I think the greed thing is interesting. Bi and fat people are often accused of "having one's cake and eating it". For bisexuals this is a metaphor that covers the disgust at our "insatiable" sexuality, whilst for fat people the insult is more literal, because we like to eat all the time, right? Especially sweets. Because our appetites are uncontrollable. That's why we're fat, isn't it?

When I had this brainwave I remembered that Jewish people are also accused of greed. This suggested to me that in twentieth century western society (ironically, the greediest colonialist culture in the world) the accusation of greed is used to control

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socially marginalised groups. I think the whole thing about being called greedy is to label us as sick and pathologised, "out of line", and intolerable compared to "normal" society, whatever that is, so that "they" don't have to deal with "us". Maybe it's our "greed" for equal rights and respect that the dominant cultures find so distasteful.

Fat people and bisexuals are a challenge to the rest of society. The very existence of bisexuality forces us to question the notion of rigid and unchangeable sexualities and binary oppositions. As fat people we are also a challenge to the belief that bodies come in sizes 10, 12, and 14. Both groups are a delightful affront to cultural values about what is correct and appropriate. I guess folks don't like being challenged.

## Prejudice feeds certain reactions

Bi and fat people have experienced an appalling amount of marginalisation both within more mainstream communities (same old same old) but also in places where we would otherwise expect support, such as amongst lesbians and gay men, and in the women's movements.

Some people don't consider fat politics or bi stuff as "real" compared to Issue X, Y, or Z. I read one hatchet piece which whined that fat women should stick to our diets and spend our energy not on attack-

ing fat hatred but on more important women's issues such as childcare and equal wages. Similarly, bisexual people are often asked to take sides, gay or straight, as though we could take ourselves apart.

It's bad enough not being considered legitimate but what really pisses me off is when we get scapegoated as parasites. As a Byke I have been accused to my face of "stealing lesbian energy" and fencesitting, and fat people are familiar with the notion that we take up too much space, or that we eat too much. Fat people are even defined in some places as a drain on government resources, ie. that fat-related ill-health (was anything ever so over-exaggerated) eats up precious healthcare budgets.

## The effects of hatred

Many fat and bi people are strong and lucky enough to have felt empowered and validated from day one. For others shame is the great leveller. Many of us try to be something we're not, because the reality of ourselves is too awful to admit. In my experience

## Differences

I know there are differences too. It's a moot point, but often sexuality is something that can be kept hidden to a certain extent, whereas there is no way of completely camouflaging a fat body. Also, fat women trying to develop political theory have had allies who have crapped on bisexuals from a great height. I'm not going to name names, you know who you are. There are fat people who are biphobic, and bisexuals who are fatphobic. It's not like we're some big happy family.

## Fat + Bi

In spite of our differences, what draws me to communities of fat and bisexual people is that both groups are in the early stages of generating autonomous social/civil rights movements. Both groups are reclaiming labels and old slurs with pride and defiance. We are creating our own theory and practices on our own terms. I love it.



the feelings of shame and embarrassment that encourage fat people to lose weight are very similar to those which pressure bisexuals to pass as lesbian/gay or straight. Might as well stir in a bucket full of guilt whilst we're at it. This is almost too obvious for me to say, but such a denial of our true selves comes at an enormous cost to our health and well-being.

If and when we come out of the downward spiral, fear and vulnerability often remain. After experiencing a giant spook, it can take a lot of courage to expose oneself again. For example, although lesbians' attitudes towards bi-dykes in has generally improved over the last 5-6 years, I still get some shit, and I still have to weigh up whether or not it is worth me speaking out. Same, after years of ridicule, with talking about fat stuff. It angers me that for bi and fat people our collusion and silence are always assumed by more dominant groups.

Bi politics often goes on about celebrating a "both/and" sexuality paradigm, instead of one which insists "either/or". For example, if your sexuality draws you towards women and men, you do not have to choose to label yourself lesbian or straight, bisexuality means you can be both these labels, and neither, and more. This reminds me of the size rights arguments about valuing the whole body size spectrum, not distilling it into a dry definition of "fat" or "thin", which in turn becomes "good body size" or "bad body size".

So there you have it. I would like to see coalitions being drawn between bi and fat people. I think we have a lot to share.