

Masculinity and fatness

Is this foot too big, or is the shoe too small?

Pernille og Guro
University of Bergen

The topic of fatness, too, is a female one - "There is an astonishing lack of discussing male fatness in media discourse" (Kindinger, 2022) (Text by Olivia)



Photo by Ellie

When I am asked to reflect on masculinity and normativity I immediately think of Connell's (2020) theory of hegemonic masculinity. Connell argues that masculinity can not be understood as a monolithic category but instead organised into a hierarchy where hegemonic forms dominate while subordinated masculinities are positioned in relation to them. Distinctions are made between those that fit within the normative hegemonic framework and those that fall outside. The very existence of subordinated masculinities exposes how narrow the framework of normative masculinity is. (...) I aimed to capture this dynamic when I asked my male flat mate to fit his foot into my ballet pump. The shoe becomes a metaphor for hegemonic masculinity itself, a narrow, rigid space that results in bodies and identities, as represented by the foot, exceeding its boundaries. (...) The question is not whether or not the foot is too big, but whether the shoe, the rigid frame of normative masculinity, is too small. (Text by Ellie)

Bear subcultures create spaces where large bodies are not stigmatized but valued (McGlynn, 2020). The importance of communities and space lies in their ability to shift recognition: bodies read as failures in mainstream contexts can become desirable and legitimate within these social setting. (Text by Sara)



Photo provided by Chuqing

A photo of my ex-boyfriend who is ten years older than me standing at the seaside, taken by someone else. He is wearing shorts, he is shirtless, facing the camera with a slight smile. This photo taken on a seemingly carefree day by the seaside, actually documents a moment of deep masculine anxiety. When my ex-boyfriend saw this photo, his focus was not on the beautiful background or the happy memory – it was entirely on his belly. He told me he had gained 10 kg and was worried he had lost his attractiveness, specifically his ability to "trick young girls" anymore. His specific phrasing -- "trick young girls" -- is striking. It reveals how male desirability is often framed within a predatory economy; a man's value is measured by his ability to attract younger, thinner, and therefore more "valuable" partners. These acts were a kind of performance. The control, the dominance, the infidelity – they were all bids for reassurance, a way of asking the world: despite this body, am I still a man? He needed external validation, other woman, to confirm what my desire for him could not. In his mind, if he could still attract "young girls", then maybe the softness of his body hadn't entirely undone his masculinity. Shame is not in the body itself – it is in the gaze we learn to turn on ourselves. Reflecting on normativity through this image shows that the anxiety men feel about their bodies is never just about the body. It is about what the body supposedly says about their capacity to perform masculinity correctly. And as these readings show, the performance is always measured against standards designed to make most of us fail. (Text by Chuqing)



Is this stick figure meant to be seen as a man, or as *gender neutral*? (Text and photo by Helena)

Kindinger kommer med et godt poeng med at maskulinitet ikke bare er en kjønnsidentitet, men en maktsidentitet (Kindinger, 2022, s. 335). Så når Neumann skriver om hvordan fettete forårsaker en mer feminin tolkning av kroppen, *disgendering* (Neumann, 2025, s. 4). Vil dette også si at kroppene deres, som en følge av identitetene deres, vil bli forstått som mindre mektige og mindre verdige makt enn kva den symbolske maskuline kroppen er? (Text by Guro)



UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN

REFERANSER

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