

Trans & Fatness

How does transness and fatness intersect? Does fatness make gender more or less intelligible? Can we say that fatness creates or destroys gender? What does a fat non-binary person look like?

Helena Asen-Farsund
Pauline König
University of Bergen

FAT AND GENDER

"I look the same every day. I'm five feet nine inches tall, broad shouldered and white skinned, green eyed with short brown hair, roughly 275 pounds. I dress my self plainly-blue jeans and button-downs, boots or sandals. I wear glasses. All these things are true all the time, and yet even so I am only Fat in the normative, cultural, "Ew, gross, look at it jiggle" sense about a third of the time. Whether I'm fat depends on whether the person or people looking at me believe me to be a man or a woman." (Quote from Bergman 2009, p. 139)



Photo by Helena

Not all bodies are recognized as gendered in the same way, and some struggle to be recognized at all. I had always thought of gender mostly in terms of identity and expression, but reflecting on fatness made me realize how much it is also about the body itself and how it looks. In this sense, bodies are gendered through appearance, and recognition depends on how closely they align with normative expectations. Being recognized is therefore conditional. Certain bodies are immediately read as "normal", whereas others are questioned or seen as out of place. This is particularly evident in relation to trans bodies. Fatness makes this even more complex, as it further disrupts what is considered proper. It reveals that gender recognition is not only about identification, but about conformity to specific bodily forms. What is considered a proper masculine or feminine body is thus not natural but produced through expectations that exclude those who do not fit. (Text by Sara)

FAT AS A BARRIER AND A RESOURCE



Photo by Emma

The image that stuck with me the most from this week's reading is the seemingly opposed ways of being at home in your body as a fat and trans person. If being fat and not trying to change that is on the one side, then transitioning and or changing certain parts of your appearance to pass are on the other side. [...] The resistance to societies standards of beauty by staying fat meets the surrendering to the broad idea of what our conditioned brains categorize as female, male and other. It feels like posing the age-old question should I stay or should I go but the answer is both. I thought the picture from my easter hiking trip fit very well here. The middle of a cloud no one knows left from right and you still have to pick a path and hope for the best." (Text by Emma)

Fatness is not merely an "addition" to a body; it actively shapes and materializes gender. As noted in the literature, fat has agential properties: it can masculinize a body by increasing the space it occupies, or ultra-feminize it through the softness and curves of breast and hip tissue. In the postcard, the bikini highlights these fleshy markers of femininity. However, for many individuals, especially those in the trans and non-binary communities, fat can be either a hindrance or a resource. While thinness often acts as a gatekeeper for passing or accessing gender-affirming care, fatness can also be used to signify masculine strength or feminine softness. The women in the postcard reclaim this fleshy femininity, suggesting that their fatness does not negate her womanhood but rather constitutes its unique, excessive form. (Text by Chuqing)



Photo by Chuqing



Photo by Sara

The picture I chose contrasts a controlled, moderately filled trash can with one that is overflowing, illustrating how norms distinguish between what is considered acceptable and what is marked as excessive. In this way, it reflects how bodies are evaluated through these same distinctions. (Text by Sara)



REFERENCES

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