



Fat Gay Men: Girth, Mirth, and the Politics of Stigma (Intersections)

Jason Whitesel

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To be fat in a thin-obsessed gay culture can be difficult. Despite affectionate in-group monikers for big gay men chubs, bears, cubs the anti-fat stigma that persists in American culture at large still haunts these individuals who often exist at the margins of gay communities. In *Fat Gay Men*, Jason Whitesel delves into the world of Girth & Mirth, a nationally known social club dedicated to big gay men, illuminating the ways in which these men form identities and community in the face of adversity. In existence for over forty years, the club has long been a refuge and 'safe space' for such men. Both a partial insider as a gay man and an outsider to Girth & Mirth, Whitesel offers an insider's critique of the gay movement, questioning whether the social consequences of the failure to be height-weight proportionate should be so extreme in the gay community. This book documents performances at club events and examines how participants use allusion and campy-queer behavior to reconfigure and reclaim their sullied body images, focusing on the numerous tensions of marginalization and dignity that big gay men experience and how they negotiate these tensions via their membership to a size-positive group. Based on ethnographic interviews and in-depth field notes from more than 100 events at bar nights, cafe klatches, restaurants, potlucks, holiday bashes, pool parties, movie nights, and weekend retreats, the book explores the woundedness that comes from being relegated to an inferior position in gay hierarchies, and yet celebrates how some gay men can reposition the shame of fat stigma through carnival, camp, and play. A compelling and rich narrative, *Fat Gay Men* provides a rare glimpse into an unexplored dimension of weight and body image in American culture.

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