

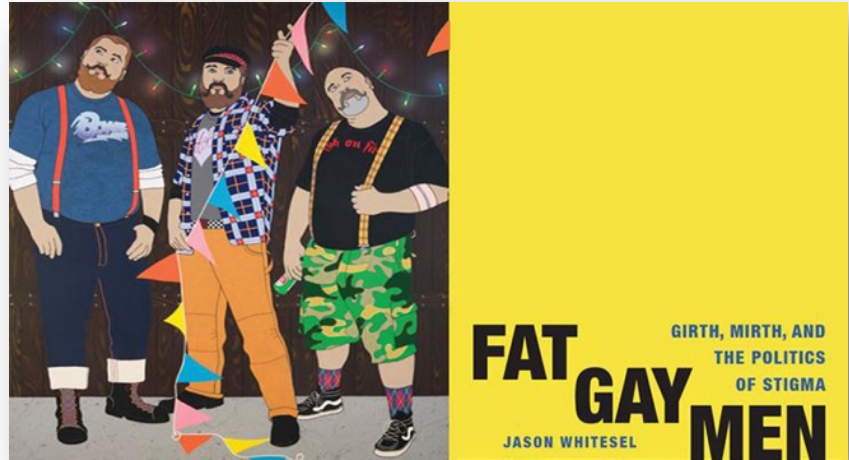
Whitesel, Jason

*Fat Gay Men: Girth, Mirth, and the Politics of Stigma*

New York: New York University Press. 2014. ISBN: 978-0814724125.

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Scholar Jason Whitesel, author of *Fat Gay Men: Girth, Mirth, and the Politics of Stigma*, is an Assistant Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Pace University. Whitesel's research focuses on the nature of suffering, healing, and human behavioral responses to size discrimination within the gay community at large and within specific subaltern gay groups. Whitesel centers his book around the Girth and Mirthers—a self-proclaimed club for big gay men to feel safe and assert themselves against the exclusion and marginalization experienced from both heteronormative mainstream and gay society. Further, Whitesel shares insight into how big gay men are deprecated in society. Crushed by desirable body images and sexual orientations that are glorified by mainstream media, Girth and Mirthers' maneuver the stigmas of weight and sexual identity by "constituting subaltern within the subaltern" of society (2). Purposefully, the book is meant to illuminate how Girth and Mirthers, as a community, "creatively and playfully reconfigure the stigma of being fat" (3). Overall, the book offers a unique insight into the world of Girth and Mirthers. I respect the author's efforts to clearly share his differences and similarities to the group and I do not think I would appreciate this book as much if it had been written by a group outsider such as a heterosexual, thin, male or female. Whitesel's



personal connection to the Girth and Mirthers as a gay man makes the book feel deeply intimate and sincere.

The introduction of the book is where Whitesel discusses his role as a sociologist and an ethnographer amongst the Girth and Mirthers. As a thin, gay male, Whitesel explains how he became identifiably "the club's little admirer". He shares that the "researcher position as both a partial insider as a gay man, and as an outsider, given [his] thin privilege, allows [him] to offer a critique of lookism in the gay world" (5). Chapter one centers around Girth and Mirthers as a legitimate social club and movement. Chapter two builds upon the history of fat and gay shaming—the intertwining injuries from which big gay men suffer.

Chapter three and four are about how big, gay men deconstruct stigmas of body, class, and sexuality. By attending and participating in Girth and Mirth vibrant weekend getaways and campy potlucks, Whitesel observed how club members come together to overcome the experience of everyday shame. For these men,

playful potluck dinners offer a safe space to dine comfortably.

Chapter five orients around shame reconfiguration in achieving sexual confidence and initiation. Whitesel took a role in these “campy-queer” activities as he witnessed the dismantlement of normative expectations through embracing and accommodating their bodies. These carnivalesque occasions took form as annual super weekends held at Cabana-style resorts. Whitesel discusses how men would splash around in pools at the cabana wearing skimpy swimsuits and enjoy themselves in “carnival, camp, and play” without giving energy to anxiety over their body shape. Whitesel explains how the Cabana renders a weekend escape from the daily stereotypes that designate big, gay men asexual and undesirable.

The language in this book is playful and erotic, while still offering readers observant insights into the lives of those skirted to the edge of the gay community. I recommend *Fat Gay Men* to anyone who is interested in reading a book about courage, stigma, pool parties, and sex—this book has the potential to liberate peoples’ assumptions of what being a big, gay man means in society.

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*Alanna Lapp just completed her undergraduate degree in criminology and social justice. While social and criminal justice peaks her interest, she is also engrossed by notions of collective behavior that are studied within sociological fields such as medical/ health and gender/ sexuality.*