

## Fat Acceptance Blogging, Female Bodies and the Politics of Emotion

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*Women bloggers in the fatosphere, an interconnected network of blogs dedicated to fat acceptance, are engaged in political action. They call attention to a mainstream culture of prejudice against fat people and create a supportive community that encourages a fat-positive point-of-view. Their texts are emotion-laden, expressing feelings of unhappiness, anger, and grief directed at the individuals, popular media, and institutions that tell fat women that they cannot be happy or healthy unless they submit to the thin ideal. Female bloggers in the fatosphere can thus be conceptualized as affect aliens struggling against dominant social conceptions of happiness.*

The last time anyone made fun of me overtly, was two times in the last five years. I had this woman at the library give me this horrified look of disgust who turned giggling to her friend next to her, and this woman at a health class for the elderly and disabled say mean things to me for being fat. So it's going to happen. What do you do? Try and stand up for yourself and move to the nice people. There is always going to be someone who doesn't like someone for the way they look or even are.

—blog entry from *Five Hundred Pound Peep, The Life and Times of a 500-pound Woman* (5 February 2013)

Bloggers in the fatosphere, an interconnected network of blogs maintained by people who espouse fat acceptance (FA), are attempting to change negative societal attitudes about people who are fat. Their blogs are individual identity projects with a social justice mission to transform the mainstream culture of prejudice against people deemed “overweight” or “obese” according to medical standards. Although there are high-profile male-identified FA bloggers, such as the author behind the blog *Red No. 3*, and transgender FA bloggers such as Meyllen Djneres, who blogs about the challenges of transitioning while fat, most FA blogs are written by cisgendered women confronting the daily oppression of the thin ideal. These women share their feelings about their bodies and experiences “living while fat” and engage in somatic and emotional transgression. In this essay, I analyze how they consciously create a community of support that encourages a fat-positive point of view, where positivity means acceptance, empowering themselves and other fat women to resist the social pressure to be thin and the message that happiness exists only for slim women.

The fatosphere is not just an alternative celebratory space, though, where fat is always defined as good and thin as bad. Rather, it is a complicated terrain where fat women negotiate their embodied identities and are encouraged to locate themselves on a shifting emotional continuum. In the fatosphere, it is socially acceptable to express feelings of unhappiness one day, contentment the next, and resignation the

day after that. Like the blogger who writes *Five Hundred Pound Peep*, whose words above describe the experience of encountering negative responses and the reality that there may always be someone who turns against you on the basis of body weight, bloggers in the fatsphere respect participants' diverse, embodied experiences of the social world. Issues of intersectionality, including the ways that racial, ethnic, class, and sexual identities can mitigate or worsen one's experience as a fat person, are discussed in some FA blogs. Indeed, intersectionality is a critical aspect of an emerging feminist dialogue in a space where the most prominent FA bloggers and activists are predominantly white, middle class, and well-educated (Donaghue and Clemitshaw 2012).<sup>1</sup>

FA bloggers do not seek to silence or dismiss feelings of anger or grief among participants, although they do seek positive messages about fat identity. Instead, they recognize, as Sara Ahmed (2010a, 2010b) and Ann Cvetkovich (2012) argue, that depression and unhappiness can be productive modes for reflection and self-construction that can open up new possibilities for identity. These bloggers are willing to traverse the emotional spectrum and fully express their emotions around fatness, which often include embracing their own and others' ambivalence. They accept a wide range of feelings as a normal and expected part of a difficult and non-linear journey toward fat acceptance, an ongoing process that involves rejecting unsustainable diet and lifestyle practices, recognizing the oppressions of the thin ideal and how it damages women's lives, coming to terms with the disappointment of not being able to meet that standard, and exerting a conscious effort to disengage from the unremitting social and internalized pressure to be thin.

Like radical feminists who promoted Fat Liberation in the early 1970s and critiqued the thin ideal, women tend to participate in the fatsphere because they are experiencing emotional and practical "problems in living" (Lieberman and Bond 1976, 372). Many women who came into the second wave of American feminism in the late 1960s were suffering under the condition that Betty Friedan famously named the "feminine mystique," which told women that the unhappiness they felt was the result of personal inadequacy and maladjustment and that it could be "fixed" through greater consumption of material goods and a cheerful willingness to accept their limited female roles. Fat women might similarly be described as bombarded by the "thin mystique," a set of cultural prescriptions for thinness well-captured in such clichés as "nothing tastes as good as thin feels," words which have often been attributed to waif-like supermodel Kate Moss. The thin mystique tells women that everything in their lives will be better and they will experience true happiness once they achieve a slender body. Moreover, like the feminine mystique, this endpoint is presented as attainable through consumption—the purchase of expensive diet pills and powders, miracle supplements, exercise and yoga clothing, diet programs, and surgical procedures such as liposuction and gastric bands (Harding 2007). Fat women are motivated to participate in the fatsphere as a response to the thin mystique. They want to explore how being fat, and particularly being fat women, structures their lives in predictable and problematic ways, and they want to be in the (virtual) company of other women who know what being fat feels like, physically and emotionally. This community of

women struggles together against a gendered form of oppression that is accompanied by a shared set of emotions, including contradictions such as pride and shame, acceptance and resistance, hope and fear, and joy and anger.

In this essay, I seek to present female bloggers in the fatosphere grappling with the realities of living fat in a thin-obsessed society as examples of what Ahmed (2010b, 41) has termed “affect aliens.” Affect aliens are people who sense a “gap between the promise of happiness and how [they] are affected by objects that promise happiness” (2010b, 42) and they stand “outside the life-worlds created by passing happy objects around” (2010b, 217). In other words, fat women experience a disjuncture between something they have been told will make them happy (the pursuit of thinness) and the unpleasant reality and futility of pursuing that goal through diet regimes, vigilant weigh-ins, and the constant monitoring of one’s food intake and energy output, all of which are tools for maintaining a low body weight and remaining aligned with social expectations around the desired female body. In fact, they may experience happiness from fatness, the very opposite of the condition that society has stipulated as a prerequisite for happiness. As affect aliens, fat acceptance bloggers struggle against “the prescribed recipes of personal happiness” and locate their happiness elsewhere (Marling 2013, 5). Kath, the fat acceptance blogger who writes the *Fat Heffalump* blog, tries valiantly to explain her status as an affect alien to new readers: “So what I’m saying here on this blog is a radical concept to a lot of you. The idea that someone might refuse to believe that dominant rhetoric of fat = bad and actually be happy in their fat body is possibly confronting and confusing for many of you” (25 June 2013).

In turning to the fatosphere for solidarity with fat sisters, affect aliens may have given up wanting what is out of reach, with positive results. Blogging in the fatosphere and exposing oneself to the ideas around fat acceptance is an acknowledgment that the costs of wanting what women are consistently told over and over again that we must want—the thin body—are just too high for some. Ahmed notes, “Rather than simply becoming disappointed, or full of wretchedness, affect aliens might give up wanting what one wants to want, and want other things” (2010b, 240). Reading the blogs of the fatosphere, what many of these women want is not to be told by family, friends, and strangers that they would be so much happier if only they would lose weight. They want to be affirmed in their personal and social value regardless of body shape and size. These needs are well-expressed by the blogger who writes the FA blog, *Big Fit Deal*:

The truth is, I’m never going to be thin. I could get thinner, sure, by making weight loss my full-time job, by policing every bite that passes my lips, by reducing my caloric intake to starvation levels, and by pushing my body to extreme limits on a regular basis.... But unless I’m willing to continue that lifestyle forever, I’m going to regain that weight....It’s unbelievable to me that so many people can’t understand this. The arrogance of the thin, who love to remind us fatties that if we just try hard enough, we can be skinny too....You’ve heard me say this all before, but in dark moments like the one I had the other day, it’s important to reiterate—to society, to you, and to myself: The size of my body does not dictate my worth. (*Big Fit Deal*, 24 July 2013)

Following Ahmed's theory, the experience of being outside the life-worlds created by what we are told is our only path to happiness, actually opens up alternative paths: "We might go further with happiness," Ahmed writes, "if we don't follow its objects around" (2010b, 217).

By calling attention to FA bloggers as "affect aliens," I also hope to stimulate academic engagement with this community of women and the blogs and emotional space they have created in the fatosphere. Engaging with this group responds to mandates from scholars in both affect studies and fat studies. For example, Elizabeth Grosz has urged feminists to pay attention to the ontology of the body, "the conditions under which bodies are enculturated, psychologized, given identity, historical location, and agency" (2005, 2). In the relatively new academic field of fat studies (see Rothblum and Solovay 2009), scholars across disciplines call for increased attention to the specific lived experiences of fat women. Research and scholarship on obesity has certainly increased in recent years, but much of this work connects to a medicalized discourse that emphasizes physical health consequences and prevention models. Janna Fikkan and Esther Rothblum (2012, 575), writing from a feminist point of view, assert that "the disproportionate degree of bias experienced by fat women" has not been a focus of inquiry, whereas numerous large scale studies have investigated the psychological effects of exposure to the thin ideal (e.g. Harrison 2000, Stice and Shaw 1994, Hawkins et al. 2004). They also note that contemporary feminists have mobilized against other forms of discrimination (e.g. lesbian oppression, wage inequity, sex trafficking) but seem to "have made an exception" (592) when it comes to understanding the life-long emotional and practical consequences of weight-based bias.

Psychologist Joan Chrisler (2012) has called for "a new surge of activism in the women's movement" dedicated to understanding fat women's lived experiences, especially the diverse social identities of fat women. As it stands, she argues, we are currently leaving some of "our sisters" behind, which is an untenable position for feminist scholarship (614). Chrisler argues that more research is needed to discover how diverse groups of fat women manage stigma and cope with the stress produced by prejudice and discrimination; how fat women learn to accept their bodies; and how fat women experience positive and negative emotions (including the continuum from unhappiness to happiness) around their bodies and lives. Following this call, this essay presents women's initial motivations for blogging, the contours of the fat-acceptance blogs that comprise the fatosphere, and offers a range of examples derived from FA blogs to illustrate their richness as sites for both activism and scholarship.

### Women in the Blogosphere

By 2009, eight million American women had taken up blogging (Wright and Page 2009), with the vast majority writing personal blogs (Chen 2012). Personal blogs typically offer detailed accounts of events in the author's life and focus on defined interests, such as DIY crafts or vegan cooking, or identities, such as queer black feminist or lesbian mom. They address themes of everyday life and resemble "an

amalgam between a diary, a web site, and an online community” (Jones and Alony 2008, 433; Primo et al 2013). Blogs are also recognized as “providing emotional and informational release for a growing proportion of the population” (Jones and Alony 2008, 434).

Prior studies have examined the particular uses and motivations for blogging for diverse communities of women, such as mothers who write *mommyblogs*, detailed accounts of their parenting efforts (Friedman 2010, Lopez 2009); Asian women living in diasporic communities (Karlsson 2007); female breast cancer patients (Orgad 2005); women with disabilities (Olson Blue 2007); and women who participate in sports (Antunovic and Hardin 2013), all of which point to the importance of connection and community-building. Karlsson (2007, 148) conducted interview research that revealed that readers prefer blogs that overlap with their own daily life experiences and subject positions and faithfully read those blogs where the author’s autobiography match up with their own. For example, activist Mia Mingus describes herself at the *Leaving Evidence* blog as a transracial, transnational, queer, physically disabled, Korean woman adoptee. Indeed, blogs are most effective at stimulating reader interaction when they bring together communities of individuals who share similar identities, problems, lifestyles, passions, or ideologies, making them ideal communication and activist spaces for fat women, whose commonalities often spread across these categories. As Maratea (2008) has noted, “blogging communities tend to develop around shared interests and experiences; they consist of passionate, demographically similar individuals engaging in highly partisan debates that build in fervor as bloggers advance claims...” (146). In the fatosphere, those claims often revolve around fat women’s rights to contest the pathologizing narrative that others attach to their bodies and to assert their feelings about what it means to resist the thin ideal.

May Friedman (2010) writes that one of the blogosphere’s defining characteristics is “its focus on connection and dialogue” (198). From the perspective of women’s history, blogs open up the lives, experiences, and emotions of women, many of whom have no other means of public voice, and they “cast a light into some of the often-ignored corners of contemporary women’s history” (199). In evaluating the usefulness of blogs as historical evidence, Friedman notes that bloggers have “total authority over their stories,” which she sees as having the potential to be “extremely empowering in a number of respects for a class of people whose authority is constantly judged and critiqued by so-called ‘experts’” (200). Friedman was speaking specifically of mommybloggers, but her words also resonate for fat women, who contend with generalized social stigma as well as a powerful, oppositional public health discourse that views them as diseased, as manifestations of the obesity epidemic (Boero 2007).

### The Fatosphere

The fatosphere is an active subset of the blogosphere inhabited by a series of interconnected fat acceptance blogs and bloggers. It is an online space for fat activism comprised of a constantly changing community of vocal and active individuals who

embrace (or are trying to embrace) their size and whose writings typically encourage people to rethink their assumptions and beliefs about weight (Cooper 2008, Dickins et al. 2011). Members of the fatosphere community engage in and contribute to critical dialogue about fatness and the political aspects of weight, and they seek support from other bloggers of size. Harding and Kirby describe the fatosphere as a “smorgasbord of different takes on fat acceptance, body image, sexuality, disability and self esteem.” They place great value on the empathetic nature of the community: “By and large people are incredibly supportive of each other which really helps to mitigate all the pressure we get from family, friends and perfect strangers to feel ashamed of our bodies and try to become thinner” (2009, 83).

The fatosphere is anchored by Notes from the Fatosphere, an aggregate online daily news feed (<http://notesfromthefatosphere.blogspot.com/>) that alerts subscribers when new posts are made to fat acceptance blogs. The feed includes self-identified FA blogs that have been in existence for at least three months and focus their content on fat acceptance and fat-related commentary, but not pro-diet or weight-loss approaches. Subscribing to the feed via Feedly.com is a way for individuals to link to the major blogs of the FA community and begin finding opportunities for commenting and participation. In the two year period from January 2012 to January 2014, the number of blogs subscribed to the Notes feed varied from 40 to 66, indicating the dynamic nature of the blogosphere as a whole and the routine start-up and termination of blogs. As of July 2014, 40 blogs were subscribed to the feed.

What do fatosphere bloggers write about? Like mommybloggers who give detailed reports on bedtime routines, diapering issues, and the joys and frustrations of raising children (Lopez 2009), bloggers of size (who are predominantly female) post about their everyday experiences living as fat women in fat bodies. They describe the challenges of shopping for clothing, pursuing romantic relationships, showing up to job interviews, and finding health care providers who treat them with respect. They encourage one another to think positively about their bodies and to resist hegemonic cultural messages that demonize fat and equate female beauty only with thin, curvy shapes (Harriger et al. 2010, Donaghue and Clemitshaw 2012). They tell stories of rejection, of anger at unwanted public comment and intrusion, and of emotional burnout. Yet they also revel in moments of self-acceptance and contentment. A common theme explores creative and empowering ways of transcending limitations, such as figuring out what to do when registering for a marathon as a woman prevents the fat female runner and author of the *Big Fit Deal* blog from requesting a men’s size XXL t-shirt. Another layer is confessional, such as admitting that you slipped and binged and purged again after promising to abandon those behaviors. In sharing these kinds of experiences, they are doing more than writing personal online diaries; they are also unmasking the ways that fat bias constructs their emotional states and constricts opportunities.

Fat acceptance bloggers use their blogs for the purposes of self-expression, to challenge social and medical assumptions about fat people, to escape the oppressive mainstream environment where the thin ideal is dominant, and to build a community

of supporters who see fat as a positive aspect of identity. FA blogger Kath describes the fatosphere as including “anyone who believes in and supports the rights of fat people to live their lives with respect, dignity and without discrimination or vilification” (*Fat Heffalump*, 25 June 2013). FA activist Ragen Chastain, author of the *Dances with Fat* blog, concurs: “I want to reiterate that all fat people... have the right to exist in the world without bullying, stereotyping or stigma. The rights to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness and basic respect are not size- or habit- dependent. Fat people should not have to “earn” the right to live in the world without condescension....” (*Dances with Fat*, 10 March 2014). We should note that Chastain includes “the pursuit of happiness” in her definition. Readers of Chastain’s blog will discover that her pursuit of happiness includes not only the acceptance but also the celebration of fat and what she can do with her fat body—Chastain is a champion dancer—and a steadfast decision *not* to pursue the “wants” (the thin body) that society tells us to want in order to be happy (Ahmed 2010, 216). She consciously and vocally refuses to transform herself to accommodate other people’s happiness and by voicing *unhappiness* with the status quo, *Dances with Fat* becomes a political text.

### Fat Acceptance Blogs and Redefining Happiness

In *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed asserts that unhappiness must be reconceptualized as a valuable emotional state. She argues that we need to move away from the dominant societal norm of happiness as the desired endpoint of all human endeavors and instead be more accepting of unhappiness—or at least of different ways of being happy. At present, rushing toward a prescribed type of happiness is presumed to be the logical course of human action. Consider an unhappy child and the way adults will coax, wheedle, and implore just to restore a smile to her face because we cannot bear to see her “unhappy.” Or, consider the scores of best-selling books on happiness, such as Gretchen Rubin’s *The Happiness Project*, which offers concrete daily strategies for quantifiably increasing one’s happiness quotient. If we stop insisting on happiness, though, we are able to slow down and really *see* social problems and injustices around us. In this way, unhappiness might work as “a form of political action: the act of saying no or of pointing out injuries as an ongoing present affirms something, right from the beginning” (Ahmed 2010b, 219). Being vocal about one’s unhappiness and its causal factors can be a powerful step toward corrective action.

FA blogs are full of musings on happiness and unhappiness and taken together they offer insight into the ways that fat bias circulates and how it creates injustice in the lived experiences of fat women. They can be read politically as “narrative[s] of rage” (Ahmed 2010a, 37) in which bloggers reveal that the object that was promised to bring happiness (thinness and the thin ideal) is actually a cause of disappointment and oppression. This disjuncture is expressed in anger directed toward various entities. These include most commonly: 1) friends, family members, and others who insist that happiness is achieved through the thin body and that a fat person can only be unhappy; 2) popular media that depict the fat body as a source of shame; and 3) the medical establishment that seeks to “cure” fat people of their disease.

Jeanette, a fat exercise instructor and Hollywood producer who blogs at *The Fat Chick Sings*, explains that friends, family, and media portrayals deny the possibility that fat people can truly be happy. She finds their patronizing insistence that she suffers from “false consciousness” personally destructive:

I think one of the most difficult barriers I’ve encountered on my journey towards self acceptance is the constant barrage of input telling me that people in larger bodies can’t really be “happy.” In stark contrast to the “fat and jolly” stereotype is the notion that all fat people are unhappy deep down. And this information is everywhere. From our television and magazine advertising to barroom pop psychology to well meaning friends and relatives, it seems like a lot of people are pretty sure I would be a lot happier if I would just lose weight.

“But I am pretty happy,” I tell folks. Their reply, “Not really. If you were really happy you wouldn’t be fat.” (*The Fat Chick Sings*, 7 March 2014)

JoGeek, the blogger behind *Unapologetically Fat*, also implicates popular media and advertising for their roles in oppressing fat women, tearing down their self-esteem and creating a roller-coaster of emotions:

Through media, ads, and societal pressure we are sometimes fooled into thinking that it's possible to go through life smiling 100% every day without fail or discouragement.... I have some days when I feel like I can conquer the world, write a novel and declutter the house in the same afternoon. On those days, body acceptance is easy. I can laugh off negative body messages with scorn and engage the haters with cool confidence. I have other days when a casual fat joke in a television show or a billboard for bariatric surgery will send me into a dark, unshakable, pessimistic funk for the rest of the day.... Most days are somewhere in-between. (*Unapologetically Fat*, 9 October 2012)

Kath at *Fat Heffalump* expressed feelings of grief, shame, and unhappiness on her blog when the American Medical Association declared obesity a disease whose sufferers require medical help:

I feel so defeated today. I feel so disheartened. I feel so cheated. I feel like I’m being marked as inferior, defective, broken. Simply because my body happens to fall on the far end of a bell curve of diverse human bodies. Simply because my body doesn’t fall in the small peak of the bell curve, the median of human bodies, a tiny arbitrary band of people who are granted the “normal” status just because they’re in the middle statistically. (*Fat Heffalump*, 19 June 2013).

For Kath, this personal attack marks her body as a site of public health crisis for the seemingly arbitrary reason that she falls on the high end of the weight spectrum. It adds to her injury in a society that already rejects her body aesthetically, and now publicly labels it as unhealthy, dangerous, and in need of state intervention. In response, Kath uses her blog to resist this new shaming discourse and to refute the way that the medical establishment frames her as a problematic member of society:

But being at one end of the statistics doesn't reflect who I am. It doesn't reflect how I feel. It doesn't reflect what my body can do. It doesn't reflect my value as a human being.

Kath protests the diagnosis that society seeks to thrust upon her, and claims an oppositional stance to mainstream ideas about the need to "fix" fat bodies to make them healthy, productive, and capable of happiness. Jeanette, JoGeek, and Kath all use their blogs to contest what society tells them they should feel, that is, ashamed and remorseful about being fat. They are comfortable expressing their unhappiness with the way that they are treated in society. By refusing to capitulate to the thin ideal or to agree that thinness in practice is the only path to happiness, they also help us see how oppressive that ideal truly is.

## Conclusion

One way to understand the radicalness of the fatosphere and fat acceptance blogging is to consider just how rigid the thin-ideal is for women. FA bloggers contest a dominant western, but increasingly globalized, way of seeing and controlling women that normalizes the extremely thin body and marginalizes and stigmatizes the fat body. The pressure for women to meet thinness standards is unremitting, and as our FA bloggers indicate, it is exerted by interpersonal, mediated, and institutional sources. Thinness has come to be "the basis on which other feminine achievement rests and without which happiness and success are undermined" (Donaghue and Clemitshaw 2012, 415). FA bloggers deconstruct the thin ideal and the "religion" of body control, in which "women are socialized to view the ongoing surveillance of their bodies as a form of empowerment that arises from self-love" (Spitzack 1990, 35). They are working to reclaim the fat body from its pejorative context and to replace stigma with acceptance.

Being fat exposes women to bias across all sectors, including education, housing, employment, healthcare, and peer and family relationships (Fikkan and Rothblum 2012, Farrell 2011). The mandate to be thin is not only cosmetic, but also carries with it substantive privilege that benefits slim women at work, at school, and in every setting where negative associations with the fat body limit fat women's opportunities. Research demonstrates, for example, that parents of fat daughters do not support their college tuition costs at the same rate and frequency that they support costs for normal weight daughters and sons (Crandall 1995). They attach the stereotypes of lazy and lacking self-discipline to the fat daughters and conclude that they are less likely to complete college successfully and are less deserving of financial help (Crandall 1995). Fatosphere bloggers are leading a political movement to highlight how insidious (and how socially accepted) fat bias is, to call attention to the injustice it creates, to explain how devalued fat people feel, and to try to bring about some degree of fat acceptance in a society that stigmatizes and ridicules fat people, especially fat women.

Clare Hemmings (2012) has analyzed the politicizing potential of affect and argues that "politics can be characterized as that which *moves us*, rather than that which confirms us in what we already know" (2012, 151 emphasis mine). Most people living in western

nations recognize the existence of a thin imperative for women, that it is socially preferable to be thin. Yet far fewer understand the emotional realities of living as a fat woman. Unless one has lived in a fat body, and experienced what Five Hundred Pound Peep described on her blog as the “horrified look of disgust” and the resulting hot flush of shame to one’s cheeks that spreads like flames over the body, it is difficult to know the oppression that fat people endure in a thin-centered society. Yet this intense affective experience, what Ben Highmore (2010, 119) has described as “getting in among the murky connections between fabrics and feelings, between the glutinous and the guffaw” is precisely what is needed to understand the fat experience and be moved to corrective political action.

In this essay, I have argued that engagement with the authors and blogs who populate the fatosphere can help increase empathy and insight regarding fat women’s lived experiences and emotions. Just as heterosexual supporters of gay marriage have come to see this cause as a moral and civil rights issue, people outside the fat community could similarly be moved to stand up against fat discrimination by better understanding the issues and emotions at hand. Affect is a powerful mover; in the view of Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (2010, 25), emotions carry “intensities and resonances that impinge well beyond the printed page”—indeed, the blogs of the fatosphere are more than a collection of words and thoughts. Taken together, they are powerful political texts that have much to teach us about how fat discrimination makes people *feel*. Moving forward, it will be important for the fatosphere to represent accurately the multiplicity of voices, identities, intersectionalities, and subject positions that fat people embody. No one fat person can speak for all, nor can one speak for all fat women and/or queer fat women and/or fat women of color, etc. Multiple accounts representing diverse perspectives will open the door to a richer picture of fat culture than previously seen.

I have also argued, following Sara Ahmed and other affect theorists, that FA bloggers are “affect aliens” who are read as necessarily unhappy by friends, families, strangers, and society as a whole because they refuse to accommodate to what we are told is the prerequisite for female happiness. They interrupt the happiness of others who agree with dominant regimes and make them uncomfortable as physical reminders of the sexist ways in which women are valued foremost for their bodies. They frustrate those around them when they protest that the costs of agreement (what it requires to be thin) are unreasonably high, and when they insist on voicing their unhappiness with the discriminatory conditions that fat people face. The fat woman who stubbornly endorses her value challenges the very premise of socially sanctioned happiness for women. In this formulation, the fat acceptance activist demands freedom from that narrow vision of happiness—she demands the freedom to be affected by what is unhappy and to live a life that might make others unhappy through its nonconformity. Fat women who are public advocates for fat acceptance, and who are unrepentant, and even celebratory of their fatness, are *claiming the freedom to live lives that deviate from the expected, rigid paths that denote “happiness” for women.*

Finally, I close by noting that safe online spaces such as the fatsphere should not be regarded as utopian. Finding a supportive online community does not erase the realities of power relations in a patriarchal, capitalist, racist, heterosexist state. For fat women, the existence of FA blogs should be regarded as a significant support mechanism, but not one that will obliterate the very real structural forces of discrimination. To change the material conditions of fat people's lives, and to deliver the freedom that fat activists seek, we will need both a shift in cultural attitudes so that the ridicule of fat people is no longer tolerated, and concrete legal change through anti-weight discrimination laws that offer formal protections.

## NOTES

1. For example, the *Chicago Tribune* dubbed feminist author and fat activist Kate Harding, who is white, heterosexual, middle class, and holds B.A. and M.F.A. degrees, the "Queen of the Fat-o-Sphere" in April 2009. At that time, she was blogging on fat acceptance at *Shapely Prose*, which is currently inactive. Leading bloggers in the fatsphere, such as Marianne Kirby, coauthor with Harding of *Lessons from the Fat-o-sphere: Quit Dieting and Declare a Truce with Your Body* (2009), have argued that fat activists must do more to address intersectionality and the specific oppressions faced by fat people of color, queer fat people, trans fat people, etc. Writing on her blog, *The Rotund*, in 2012 and 2013, Kirby insisted that the fat acceptance movement would fail if it did not make a conscious effort to be more concerned with intersectionality and specifically more sensitive to issues of race. See Kirby, "Intersectional Fat Acceptance, Building Community and Not Being Part of the Mainstream," *The Rotund* (blog), 26 June 2013, <http://www.therotund.com/?p=1248>.

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