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Candy Perfume Girl: Colouring in Fat Bodies

The first coloring book is suggested to have been published in 1884 (Fitzpatrick and McPherson 2010: 127). Kate Greenaway's *A painting book* depicted regular scenes from the lives of middle class white children in Britain. Colouring books are normative parts of children's lives, serving as education and enjoyment tools (Naumann and others 2004: 490). Colouring books for adults have historically been limited to teaching tools (see, for example, Kapit / Lawrence 2014; Diamond / Scheibel / Lawrence 1985), but lately colouring books have been marketed to adults as excellent relaxation meditation tools. In early 2016, half of the top ten best sellers at Amazon were adult coloring books (Harrison 2016: para 1). Adults find coloring to be fun, relaxing, and a nostalgic way to be creative. Adult coloring book topics range from intricate patterns, drawings of animals, landscapes, to people.

The earliest fat positive adult coloring book located is Theo Nicole Lorenz's (2011) *Fat ladies in spaaaaace: A body-positive coloring book* (*FLiS*). 18 images of fat women doing things in space allow for the reader to have a wide variety in their coloring selection. Color in a fat woman in space battling a space octopus. How about a fat woman riding a space unicorn (Marianne Kirby of *Two Whole Cakes Fatcast*)? Or a fat doctor's assistant, waiting for him to figure out time and space.

Lorenz created the book after participating in a panel about the lack of fat women in science fiction at a writing convention (Kirby 2013: para 1–2). As noted on the back of the book by the author: "There's a whole universe of bod types out there, and they all deserve to be represented" (Lorenz 2011: back cover). The images include both static and dynamic poses, and many, such as the space unicorn riding fatty, are modelled after real life people involved in fat acceptance. Each image includes a caption, hinting at the story (or backstory) of the image on the page **(fig. 1)**.



// Figure 1
Theo Nicole Lorenz, *Fat ladies in spaaaaace: A body-positive coloring book*, The Zaftig Zepher, 2011

On page 14, the reader meets *The Zaftig Zepher*, who, according to her caption, "spends her nights protecting the rain-spattered streets of Metrolopolis [with her sidekick Gusty the unicorn dog]" (Lorenz 2011). The Zaftig Zepher is wearing a sleeveless bodysuit with a keyhole cutout. She has wide cateye glasses, gloves, thigh high boots, and a cape. Of course, a cape. Because, well, space. Her trusty unicorn dog, Gusty, is by her side and ready to leap to action. There are many ways that *The Zaftig Zepher* is doing fatness wrong according to mainstream. She shouldn't be wearing thigh high boots, she shouldn't be sleeveless, and she most certainly shouldn't be wearing a cape. Capes are for super heroes, and who has ever heard of a fat superhero?[1)]

FLiS is regularly included on "Best of" lists, including "7 best feminist coloring books" from Bluestockings (Sweet 2013) and Mental Floss's "10 bizarre coloring books for adults" (Cellania 2012). Lorenz has gone on to create other adult coloring books, such as *Unicorns are jerks*, *The robot's guide to love*, and the *Empire coloring book* (unfortunately not for public sale as it was a private commission from Gabourey Sidibe, but you can see images from it on Lorenz's webpage, including a not safe for work (NSFW) depiction of Sidibe's character Becky). Adult coloring books serve some of the same purposes as coloring books for children – relaxation, fine motor skill development, and pleasure. But many, like *Fat ladies in spaaaaace*, also serve another important function; to be subversive. In their exploration of gender stereotypes in children's coloring books, Fitzpatrick and McPherson found traditional gender representations reflecting patriarchal societies: Boys were more active than girls, and more often presented in adult roles (Fitzpatrick / McPherson 2010: 134). In adult coloring books, however, stories often serve to disrupt normative gender roles and traditional society. For example, *The badass feminist coloring book* by Ijeoma Oluo (2015), *The big gay alphabet coloring book* (Bunnell / Corman 2015), and *Black lives matter: The coloring book* (Hall 2015) all challenge normative roles and functions of men and women in society.

In the *Fat Bodies Coloring Book* (*FBCB*), the reader is presented with "eight illustrations of people practicing radical self-love" (Burns 2016). Images that can be read as cis and trans are unquestionably unapologetic fatties; in fact, they are antagonistic. They all wear clothes with fat positive messages, including "VBO or GTFO"[2)] and "Fuck flattering" (a nod to the Gisela Ramirez crop top from 2012). While the gender identity is blurred with these

1) There is a fat superhero; check out *Faith*, written by Houser and Portela (2015), published by Valiant Comics.

2) VBO = visible belly outline or get the fuck out.

images, the message of rebelling against gender roles is not. "I am not pretty for a fat girl" reads the outfit of one image, while others sport hairy legs, moustaches, and both butch and femme presentations. The *FBCB* was available for purchase as a Zine on Etsy in the shop of Sarah Burns in 2016; no further copies are available at this time. This scarcity of product both heightens the excitement around acquiring a product like *FBCB*, while highlighting a limitation of producing and distributing zines.

Zines are self-made, self-published, magazines that are popular in punk, DIY, and feminist spaces. Licona argues that zines represent the non-academic third space; third spaces are sites that allow for the uncovering of other ways of knowing and being "in order to make meaning of the everyday", through disrupting traditional ways of producing knowledge (2005: 106). A zine can be made by anyone, or any group of people, about any topic, for any purpose. Zines can include text, images, interactive games or activities, and more. While traditionally zines would be made by hand, many zines are now created using digital software. Within the fat acceptance community, zines have been a popular way to share information and talk back to traditional anti-fat discourse (Snider 2009: 228). *Fat-Tastic* from Sage, the *FAT femme's guide to LOVING Summer* from Aimee Fleck, and *The make it work: DIY fatshion* zine series and *Hard Femme* from Kirsty Fife, are all examples of zines from the fat acceptance community. These zines are all illustrations of the coalitional consciousness of the fat community; tools to be used by individuals and groups alike in fighting for social justice and unapologetic existence. Zines "have much to teach us about re-representations of self and community as contradictory, complicated, ambiguous, and on the move" (Licona 2005: 110).

Published in 2016, *The big fat little colouring zine* (*BFLCZ*) by Natalie Perkins is a 31 page zine that is dedicated to the "Rad Fatties of Oceania". Natalie Perkins is the proprietor of *Fancy Lady Industries*, and has produced many mainstays for fat activists, including her trademark *Fat* necklace. In this zine, Perkins presents 14 images (13 of fat people, the 14th of her trademark *Fat* script), many of whom are friends of the author. Some of the images are accompanied by text. For example, an image of a fat person holding out a tape measure is accompanied by the text, "I use a tape measure for sewing, not to measure my worth" (Perkins 2016: 4). While probably a nod to the personal and professional sewing that Natalie does, it also harkens the tape measure

included in the *Fat Rights Toolkit* which was assembled by Amanda Levitt. Included in the toolkit is a tape measure in *Yay! Scale* style; instead of numbers, words occupy the length of the tool. It encourages the user to measure their body parts with care, rather than scrutiny. Perhaps your bicep is awesome, lovely, strong?

In one image in *BFLCZ*, dedicated "For Pip" **(fig. 2)**, a fat woman is dressed in a long sleeveless gown; her hair is styled for a special occasion, and there are roses and rose petals scattered across the page. The woman has a walking aide, and the reader can image her walking down the red carpet to a premiere, or down an aisle at her wedding. Both men and women, cis and trans, are included in *BFLCZ*; *BFLCZ* also includes images of fatties with disabilities. These inclusions are notable, as much fat activism work – as well as fat studies scholarship – are spaces dominated by women, femmes, those without disabilities, and whiteness (Pausé 2014: paras 6 & 7). Another group missing from most scholarship and activism are super fat people. The *Super fat crop top girl gang* (*SFCTGG*) is a zine from Rachele Cateyes (2016), a well-known artist in the fat acceptance community. As the name implies, all of the images in the zines are outfit in crop tops; and these super fat crop top girls all have visible belly outlines (otherwise known as VBOs in the fat community). There are actually two editions of the *SFCTGG*, presenting a range of super fat bodies in a range of outfits (albeit all with crop tops). Cateyes also allows the reader to purchase individual sheets; an ambitious person could choose their favourite sheets and make their own super fat crop top girl gang book.



// Figure 2
Natalie Perkins, *The big fat little colouring zine*, For Pip, 2016

There is not much variety in the bodies presented themselves; they seem to all be the same model body. But Cateyes more than makes up for this in the variety of clothing worn, hair styles presented, and ability levels on displays. Super fats in wheelchairs, with buzzcuts, shorts, skirts, with glasses, without glasses, with tattoos, with freckles, even some cosplays are represented. Across the two editions (not counting the additional stand out print items on Etsy), are 16 images. The fat bodies are the only thing on the

page, and while their outfits might be quite detailed, the overall effect is one of simplicity and elegance.

One image that stands out is a super fat woman wearing a short skirt, cat thigh highs, and a mesh crop top over a bra. She has cat ears situated in her long dreads, and a nose ring. One hand is behind her back, with the other giving a peace sign to the reader. Like the rest of the images, she has prominent VBO and an exposed stomach. Her expression is one of nonchalance, but there's something about her stance that tells the reader she isn't sorry. She's fat. She's proud. And she isn't covering the parts of her that society may want her to.

The fat bodies in *SFCTGG* are not like the fat bodies usually seen in the printed or visual form. These bodies are proud and do not reinforce stereotypes of fat bodies. Much has been written about the presentation of fat bodies in the media, and the intention is not to review that literature here. But it is worth highlighting that fat bodies are most often presented as cautionary tales, or hyperbolic sexuality (and occasionally good for a laugh) (Wykes 2012: 62–63). It cannot be overstated how powerful it is for people to be able to see themselves represented on the screen and on the page; especially for people who belong to groups often left out of narrative (Kyrölä 2014: 1). Are these reflective images positive? Are they positioned in only one kind of story? In news media, fat bodies are often not even granted the dignity of having heads; this phenomena, coined the "headless fatty" by Charlotte Cooper (2007: para 1), is part of what dehumanises fat people to both fat and non-fat people. Fat people are seen as less than human, and so their treatment can follow along.

Many of the fat bodies across the variety of fat positive adult coloring books are showing more skin that society would like; showing more hair than society would like; showing more pride than society would like or deem appropriate. In Rachelle Bellar's (2013) *Big-bellied merbabes: A body positive coloring book (BBM)* the reader is treated to 22 images of femme merbabes that are the furthest thing from how fat bodies are usually presented in the media. On the front cover lies a big-bellied merbabe; a string of pearls around her neck draw the eyes to her round belly. Her bright blue hair seems to sparkle under the water. The images in *BBM* are largely static; small to medium size fat merbabes. In one image, a merbabe is posed next to a dolphin. The merbabe has short hair, and one arm raised like she is waving to other dolphins in the foreground. Clamshells cover her breasts, and her neck is adorned

by many strings of small pearls. While browsing through the merbabes images, readers may be struck by memories of Ariel and Ursula in Disney's animated movie, *The Little Mermaid* (1989). Ursula, who has since become a fat icon, was not a merbabe, but a huge (and unapologetic) tentacled figure of power in the film. Fat characters are rare in Disney films (or any animated films), but when they are part of the story they are always positioned in a way that makes it difficult for children to identify with them. They are magical, like the fat fairy godmother in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), villains, like Ursula in *The Little Mermaid* (1989), or non-human, like Baloo in *The Jungle Book* (1967) (or a combination of the three). Disney has never had a fat Princess, and possibly (probably) never will. But thumbing through the fat merbabes in *BBM* allows the reader to image what it might be like to be part of that world.

Grounded more in realism is Bianca Alba's *The fabulous fat femme coloring collection* (*FFF*). This collection comprises ten different fat femme personalities across 17 pages. Those featured include Queercrip sexologist Bethany Stevens, Performer Dirty Lola, and the illustrator and founder of *The Venus Emporium*, Bianca Alba. Bios of the people featured are included in this collection, which is packaged differently from the others. This isn't a bound book, or even a stapled zine; FFF is produced in an envelope, allowing the reader/artist to remove pages as desired for coloring, displaying, or sharing.

FFF is part of a collection of sex positive coloring books sold through *The Venus Emporium*, a sex positive art boutique. Other coloring books on offer from *The Venus Emporium* include *A transgender coloring book*, *Cunt coloring book* and *The fetish coloring book*. Unsurprisingly, many of the images in *FFF* are NSFW; some are nude or partially nude, others are engaged in sexually charged activities or poses.

At the front of the *FFF*, Alba notes that, "femmes of different sizes, shapes, abilities and ethnicities are featured to highlight our beautiful diversity" (2016: 1). In one image, the reader is invited to color "Bianca" **(fig. 3)** (the illustrator of the collection). Bianca is situated in a bathrub, with her legs flung over the edge, and we can see part of her naked torso, including one breast



// Figure 3
Bianca Alba, *The fabulous fat femme coloring collection*, Bianca, 2016

and nipple. There are bubbles floating around Bianca's head, and her floral patterned lace stockings invite the reader's many colors to engage. Another wonderful detail that invites splashes of color are the hexagon floor tiles in the front of the image. The images in *FFF*, like many of the images across the range of fat positive adult coloring books, present depictions of fatness that challenge the negative normative ideas and stereotypes about fatness. These fat people are not unhappy, or ashamed of their bodies. They are not limited by their size, and they even embrace activities and fashion trends supposedly off limits to those with round bellies, wobbly arms, and double chins. In this way, the fat people in these coloring books can be considered queering fatness. To queer can mean many things, but in this context, queering is a mode of inquiry and/or practice which rejects essentialism, questions long held assumptions, and disrupts supposedly fixed categories (such as gender, sexual orientation, or identity) (Wykes 2014: 4). Queering as a theoretical lens in fat studies scholarship has a long history, from Sedgwick (1993), to LeBesco (2001, 2004, 2009) to the recent edited collection, *Queering fat embodiment* (Pausé / Wykes / Murray 2014).

Longhurst (2014: 12) suggests that queering is useful in understanding fatness as it allows for unpacking the ways that social institutions and individual behaviours and practices normalise only one type of body size as acceptable: the non-fat body. As a theoretical lens, queering shines a light on essentialist arguments, and draws assumptions to the surface; in these ways, it both names and denaturalises what is considered normal ways of being, ways of knowing, and ways of doing. Wykes argues that "non-normative bodies challenge and disrupt – that is to say, queer – the disciplinary power of normative categories" (2014: 5). Fat positive coloring books can be understood as queering fatness through their rejections of mainstream notions of what it means to be fat and how fatness is supposed to be performed (Pausé 2014: 84). The images in the coloring books explored are defiant, and joyous, and sexual; they are certainly doing fatness wrong (Pausé 2015: para 5).

The FATSPO[3] *Coloring Book* (*FCB*) was created by Brian Stuart, aka Red No. 3, on *Tumblr* in 2013. As a *Tumblr* page, *FCB* is unique from the other offerings considered in this piece. It isn't a self-published zine or something to be purchased on Amazon. *FCB* is offered freely to another with access to the internet and the materials (be they drawing software or printer) to engage with the

3) ***FATSPO*** **is a direct contradiction to** ***THINSPO*****, a tag that is frequently used by those looking for thin inspiration. Often, images of fat people are tagged as** ***THINSPO*****, in a gross attempt to motivate non-fat people to stay non-fat. In this coloring book, Stuart has turned** ***THINSPO*** **on its head and has, instead, presented positive images of fat people that could, perhaps, be tagged as** ***FATSPO*****, aka fat inspiration. See it here: www.tumblr.com/dashboard/blog/fatspocoloringbook**

images. While *The FATSPO coloring book* depicts a handful of fat people involved in fat activism, like Kath Read of the *Fat Heffalump* and Amanda Levitt of *Fat Body Politics*, it mainly trades in celebrities like *Project Runway* winner Ashley Nell Tipton. Celebrity Specials, Athlete of Size Specials, and Leaders of Size Specials, are littered throughout the collection, drawing attention to actor Gabourey Sidibe, Olympian weight lifter Sarah Robles, and the Liberian activist and Nobel Peace Laureate, Leymah Gbowee. Images under these special labels are often accompanied with a brief text explanation of the individual, and often how their size was part of their public persona.

New images are still being added as of 2016, and Stuart seems to have recently turned his attention to spotlighting lesser known fat personalities, such as Kristian Nairn (who plays Hodor on HBO's *Game of Thrones*), recently deceased Australian author, Collen McCullough, and Belgian politician Maggie De Block. The frequent inclusion of fat people of colour feels especially vital, as fat activism (as well as fat studies scholarship) is dominated by white people (Cooper 2009: 328; Pausé 2014: para 6–7).

All of the images are minimalistic – simple lines and presentation. One of the more adorned images is that of Princess Ruth Luka Keanolani Kauanahoahoa Keʻelikōlani, a member of the Royal Kamehameha family of the now occupied state of Hawai'i. She is one of the few seated images, and her gown is voluminous and layered in detail. While paling to the ornateness associated with the garbs of Western royalty, Princess Keʻelikōlani's dress feels luxurious to the reader, and in direct contrast to the simplicity of the other images. At the same time, the Princess's dress is not her native garb, but instead representing colonial fashion; the reader wonders what her body would look like in her indigenous dress, and whether it it would present a different colouring experience. In contrast to the minimalistic images of the *FATSPO! Tumblr*, the frenetic images of *Body love: A fat activism colouring book* (*BLFACB*) by Allison Tunis (2016) leaves the reader wondering which detail to focus on in any given frame. At 52 pages filled with 23 images of fat people, it is the longest of the colouring books reviewed in this piece. The book opens with a dedication, "To every person who has ever looked in the mirror and hated what they saw. You do not have to feel like this" (Tunis 2016: 2).

BLFACB showcases many well-known people in the fat community, such as fat activists Jes Baker and Virgie Tovar, Substantia Jones of the Adipositivity Project, and Yogi Jessamyn Stanley.

Each image is accompanied by a brief biographical sketch of the person, including their name, their brand (if applicable), and appropriate social media information, like their webpage URL or Instagram handle. One of the many strengths of *BLFACB* is the inclusion of fat people of colour, and fat people from outside of the United States. Those captured in the book are presented in profile, face to reader, as full bodies, just faces, from behind. The variety is part of what captures the eye and keeps the reader moving through. Many images recreate well known tableaus of the people included, like Jes Baker's faux Abercrombie & Fitch campaign shoot, *Attractive & Fat*. A handful of men are present in this collection, including Bruce Sturgell, the creator of *Chubstr*, and Kelvin Davis of *Notoriously Dapper*. And even a few from outside of the United States, including Aarti Dubey, a fashion blogger in Singapore, and Meagan Kerr, a fashion blogger in New Zealand. Tunis notes in the introduction that she has used icons who have inspired her own journey; the Internet has opened up the avenues for exploration and inspiration, allowing for fat people across the world to connect with one another (Pausé 2014: 2).



// Figure 4
Allison Tunis, *Body love: A fat activism colouring book*, Kobi Jae, 2016

Presumably one of the most striking is Kobi Jae (blogger and model at *Horror Kitsch Bitch*) **(fig. 4)**. Jae is depicted as face on, full body, to the reader, with her head slightly titled and her eyes looking at something off the side. The background of this image are tiny skulls. Jae is dressed in a mesh top, jacket with fur sleeves, and a skirt that is partially unzipped. Spiders climb the shoulders of the jacket, while her chest and stomach (but not her breasts) are bared. She has on cat ears, dildo earings, and flowers in her hair. She is, in short, spectacular.

While some of the fat people are almost overshadowed by the backgrounds behind them, all of the images give us unapologetic fatness. Fierce stares, bold fashion, frenetic backgrounds, all come together to produce a collection that challenge the reader/artist and their views on fat bodies. Tunis has suggested that the collection is "part fat activism, part art therapy" (Dupere 2016: para 4). Bringing together her activism, her academic background, and her therapeutic tools, she hopes *Body love* will be empowering, fun,

and therapeutic. “It forces you to work out your own issues with bodies,” Tunis shared with Dupere in a story on Mashable: “It’s not only a soothing and relaxing meditation through the act of coloring, but also a meditation on self” (2016: para 11).

Fat bodies have long been displayed for the purposes of entertainment. But unlike their negative presentations in circuses and seaside attractions, members of the fat activist community are embracing ways to present positive representations of fatness and fat bodies, such as through colouring books. Fat positive colouring books are a growing subset of adult colouring books. And adult colouring books, themselves, are a growing part of the book market; adults enjoy the nostalgic act of colouring images, many finding it to be a form of meditation. In contrast to most children’s colouring books, adult colouring books often embrace subversive themes, dismiss traditional gender roles and presentation, and present images on the pages that are NSFW.

Presenting positive representations of fat bodies is subversive and revolutionary; these books invite the artist to engage in the nostalgic act of colouring that is also an act of rebellion. The artist is not just colouring in bodies, or images of people, but of fat bodies and fat people. Colouring in big bellies and across massive thighs; continuing to colour long after a body should have finished, but the artist is still inside the lines. These acts of colouring in what has always been white spaces, what many would argue should be white spaces, where the fat body continues to be, is rebellious. Spending time and energy to lovingly colour in fat bodies not only rejects essentialist ideas about fatness, it also reinforces positive messages about fatness. As noted by fat activist and writer, Marie Southard Ospina: “With every visible belly outline, jiggly thigh, or double chin I penciled in, I could feel the day’s anxiety becoming a distant memory. But more importantly, perhaps, I could feel myself growing more and more empowered; fueled by the reminder that my fat body was good” (2017: para 5).

But while these images are revolutionary in the way they present fat bodies, they are still limited. Most are presented as aesthetically attractive/appealing, meant to engage desire. This isn’t the same engagement as heterosexual desire (Jones 2014: 41), but still speaks to what forms of fatness are presented as acceptable and validated and what forms are not (Kyrölä 2014: 165). And across the books examined here, there is still little acknowledgment of super fat bodies and bodies with disabilities. Exceptions may be found, to be sure, like “Rolls on rolls on rolls” fatty in

The Big Fat Little Colouring Zine or the fatty with one leg in the *Superfat Crop Top Girl Gang* zine. As fat activists continue to push against the expected representations and embodiments of fatness, they need to be mindful of promoting representations and embodiments for the kinds of fatness that are often left behind.

// Image Credits

Fig. 1: Theo Nicole Lorenz, *Fat ladies in spaaaaace: A body-positive coloring book*, The Zaftig Zepher 2011
Fig. 2: Natalie Perkins, *The big fat little colouring zine,* For Pip, 2016
Fig. 3: Bianca Alba, *The fabulous fat femme coloring collection,* Bianca, 2016
Fig. 4: Allison Tunis, *Body love: A fat activism colouring book,* Kobi Jae, 2016

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Cat Pausé is the lead editor of *Queering Fat Embodiment* (Ashgate). A fat studies researcher, her research focuses on the effects of spoiled identities on the health and well-being of fat individuals. Her work in scholarly journals search as *Human Development*, *Feminist Review*, *HERDSA*, and *Narrative Inquiries in Bioethics,* as well as online at *The Huffington Post* and *The Conversation*, among others. She hosted *Fat Studies: Reflective intersections* in New Zealand in 2012, and *Fat Studies: Identity, Agency, Embodiment* in 2016. Cat is also involved in sociable scholarship. Her work is highlighted in her social media presence, Friend of Marilyn, on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, iTunes, and her blog. Her fat positive radio show, Friend of Marilyn, is travelling the world this year – make sure your city is on the tour!

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