

(Un/Be)Coming Out? Rethinking Fat Politics

Samantha Murray

Eve Sedgwick suggests that it is possible to “speak” your fatness, to “come out” as fat and renegotiate the “representational contract between one’s body and one’s world.” (1994: 230). Sedgwick’s words have resonated particularly loudly with the Fat Acceptance movement, which has been embraced with feverish glee by fat women in the United States and the United Kingdom.

I was immediately attracted to the politics of this new fat pride movement, who seemed to take up this idea of intervening in the ‘contract’ one’s fatness had with the world, insisting on being seen in new ways. So, I go out into the world armed with the Fat Manifesto (Waun: 1998), wearing a sleeveless top, my dimpled arms on display. I feel strong, powerful, swollen with my fat identity, snarling at others who cast withering glances at my bulky frame.

And then, I pass a shop window.

I shudder as I catch a reflection of myself, my body appearing to me as grotesque and foreign, a bulging, jiggling vehicle of disgust and shame I want nothing to do with. I experience myself/my body in ways that shift and vary and contradict each other.

Nikki Sullivan points out the problems with the act of ‘coming out’ as part of a project to overturn public ‘knowingness’ about homosexuality.

“The call to come out presupposes that such an action is in itself transformative and that the identity that one publicly declares is unambiguous.” (Sullivan: 31)

In this paper, I take up Sullivan’s point about the problematic act of ‘coming out’ as a fat woman. I critique the problematic model of subjectivity the Fat Acceptance Movement is founded on, given the ways in which I live my fat body are always multiple, contradictory and eminently ambiguous.

This paper looks at the rise of the Fat Pride movement in the United States, and the model of subjectivity it proposes as a means of overcoming oppression of the fat woman. I critique the humanist principles on which this model of subjectivity is founded, and, moreover, the difficulties with liberationist politics.

Keywords Fatness; identity; pride politics; embodiment

After tiring of constantly telling me to pull my fat stomach in, which protruded defiantly over the waistband of my jeans, my mother finally suggested that I take a trip down to the nearest K-Mart and get myself “a nice strong pair of control top undies”. She said that they would suck me in, flatten me out, and shape me up. So, partly to silence my mother’s pleas, and partly out of morbid curiosity, I ventured into the fat people’s section of the lingerie department. After wandering up and down the aisles, I saw them. Tucked away, up against the back wall, I found the largest, cruellest pair of underpants imaginable (short of the pair hanging next to them with the knee-length legs sewn into them). They were at least three times as big as your “normal” pair of Cottontails, and were made of frighteningly strong elastane. There was a waistband on them, about a centimetre and a half wide, made from reinforced elastic, which gave way to zigzagged stitched panels of double-elastane. These panels were designed to run down over the belly and smooth it out, to pull it in. Another panel ran down the back of the pair of underpants to transform fat buttocks from something resembling two puppies fighting under a sheet to a generous, but smooth, contour.

It is not a revelatory declaration to say that, in the West, we exist in a culture of a negative collective “knowingness” about fatness. As members of Western society, we presume we know the histories of all fat bodies, particularly those of fat women; we believe we know their desires (which must be out of control) and their will (which must be weak). This constant “silent presumption” in *knowing* certain bodies reifies the culture of knowingness. We read a fat body on the street, and believe we “know” its “truth”: just some of the characteristics we have come to assume define fatness are laziness, gluttony, poor personal hygiene, and a lack of fortitude. The origin of these discourses is something I will not discuss here, however; they have become so deeply embedded in the way we read fat bodies, that even while we may cringe at the cruelty of these negative assumptions about fatness, or be reluctant to align ourselves with these discourses, when we hear such commentary about fatness we are still able to identify that these negative knowledges are certainly *operative* understandings of the fat body. Eve Sedgwick (with Michael Moon) suggests:

Our culture as a whole might be said to vibrate to the tense cord of “knowingness”. Its epistemological economy depends, not on a reserve force of labor, but on a reserve force of information always maintained in readiness to be presumed upon . . . a copia of lore that our public culture sucks sumptuously at but steadfastly refuses any responsibility to acknowledge. (Sedgwick 1993, 222)

Sedgwick posits that our culture holds up discursive constructs as “truths”, and (re)produces them as naturalised, immutable knowledges. These knowledges inform every interaction we have with others and the world, and position us along a spectrum of bodies and identities. We learn these knowledges, internalise them, and deploy them at an almost pre-conscious level: we have a learned negative response to fat bodies, and their aesthetic transgressions. The discourses around fat still reinforce a “knowingness” of what the fat subject is.

The fat subject is lazy, not willing to commit to change or to the dictates of healthy living. They are compulsive eaters, they are hyper-emotional; in short, the fat body is discursively constructed as a failed body project.

With this in mind, I grudgingly took a pair of the frightening underwear down off the rack and then casually threw a few pairs of plain Cottontails (in a size that would not *ever* fit me) over the top of the elastane torture pants to hide them from the smirking adolescent fitting room attendant. Once inside the cubicle, I hung the pants up on the hook and surveyed them with uncertainty. Finally, I unhooked the pants from their hanger, and took my clothes off. Straightening, I regarded my reflection in the full-length mirror. I examined with detached wonder the dimples of my thighs, the swell of my hips, the softness of my belly.

Sighing, I set about my task. I eased the stubborn underpants up over my corpulent thighs, inch by inch, winced in pain as I jammed my hips into the elastic, and gasped as I felt the front double-elastane panel force my belly back towards my spine. But I was in. I was flat—or at least flatter. My thighs were still dimply, and I had an unappealing tyre hanging over the reinforced waistline, but they held me in where it apparently mattered. I put my jeans back on, and noticed the ease with which the fabric slid up over my hips and buttocks: The fly and zipped up effortlessly, without having to make its way over the usual bumpy terrain. I tried to move in the pants, I tried to sit down, but I felt cut in half: I could not breathe properly, and the low-cut design of the pant legs cut into the tops of my thighs. With my face screwed up in pain, I looked again at my reflection in the mirror.

In that moment, I understood the necessary impermanence of my fat body. There is a “suspended animation”, an impermanence of living the fat body. The act of living fat is itself an act of defiance, an eschewal of discursive modes of bodily being. Seemingly, the fat body exists as a deviant, perverse form of embodiment and, in order to be accorded personhood, is expected to engage in a continual process of transformation, of becoming and, indeed, *unbecoming*. The process of transformation entails a constant disavowal of one’s own flesh. The fat body can only exist (however uncomfortably) as a body aware of its own necessary impermanence. Consequently, in experiencing my fat body there is a sense of suspension, of deferral, of hiatus. One is waiting to become “thin”, to become “sexual”, waiting to *become*. The underpants were simply a “tool” on the way to my expected transformation into a thinner, more aesthetically appealing body. Wearing those underpants and regarding my reflection in the mirror, I realised I was not expected to keep my fat body *as it was*, but *rather* to create a thin body, as body *as it could and should be*. So, on my way to *becoming* thin, I could at least try to “*pass-as-thin*”. While waiting through the apparently necessary process of creating a thinner body for myself, I was supposed to reign in my lumpy curves, flatten out my bulges, try to put some distance between the *appearance* of my body to others, and the *reality* of its fat.

And then I got angry.

I was suddenly aware of what I was doing. I was standing here in a pair of horribly uncomfortable underpants, in which I could barely breathe, and contemplating actually paying good money for the privilege of owning them. I

struggled to move freely in them, and found that the strong elastane bit painfully into my soft flesh every time I tried to sit down. Surely this was a cruel and stupid charade to subject myself to, simply because society held a general opinion that fatness is ugly.

With vicious, frustrated movements, I ripped the zipper of my jeans down and started tugging them off. I then set about peeling away the stubborn elastic from my body. I eased my thumbs into the waistband, and bit by bit, stretched the underpants painfully over my hips, pulling them down over my thighs. I heaved a sigh of relief as I kicked them away from me. I straightened up and looked at myself in the mirror. What I was left with were the imprints of my passing performance, what remained was the imprints as a reminder of the necessary impermanence of my body. Tracks of zigzags ran down over my belly where the panel had pushed me into shape. Painful red welts had formed where my legs met my hips from the tight elastic bands around the leg holes. I had a deep impression around my middle where the reinforced waistband had cut into me when I had sat down. The imprints left by the control top underpants were like a branding on my fat body. The offensiveness of my fat body was literally *etched into the flesh*. These bodily “brandings” functioned as reminders of the expected transience of my fat, its excess in need of control, containment, its attempt to “fit” uncomfortably into the clothes that pull it in and discipline it, and the society that enforces its unfixed boundaries. The marks of the “ill-fitting” body were left on my flesh. The very name of the “Control Top” underpants suggested they were indeed a disciplining device, a reminder that the fat body is only temporary, and must be strictly patrolled and policed. Reflected in the mirror, I witnessed the welts and impressions on my skin, and saw the violence of their control of the fat body, a representation of society’s disgust.

Staring at myself in the mirror, I felt choked with anger and humiliation. I did not want to be read that way. I did not want others to presume they “knew” me because of my fat bodily markers. I wanted to come out: out of the torturous underpants, out of the stifling little cubicle, out of the lingerie section with the “fat pants” hidden down the back, out of my *fat shame*.

I quickly pulled my clothes back on, threw the underpants in the corner of the cubicle, and stormed out of the store. I wanted to start looking for a way to “come out”.

Back at home, I logged on to the Net. I typed “being fat” into a Google search and among the thousands of pages of crash diets, exercise regimes and fad pills, I found something called “Size Acceptance”. The names of various fat pride organisations scrolled endlessly on my computer screen: the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, the International Size Acceptance Association, Pretty Porky and Pissed Off, Fat Feminist Caucus, S.I.Z.E, the Fat Underground.¹

It seemed other fat girls wanted out, too.

1. For an excellent explanation of the history of the Size Acceptance movement, and a list of current organizations throughout the United States and the United Kingdom, see Charlotte Cooper (1998), *Fat and Proud: The Politics of size*.

Sedgwick and Moon reflect on the fat body, and the “closet of size” in their essay “Divinity: A Dossier, A Performance Piece, A Little-Understood Emotion” (Sedgwick 1993, 229). It is possible to trace a parallel between the fat body and the gay body in that both are constructed in and through heteronormative discourses and discursive practices. In Eve Sedgwick’s (1990) influential text *Epistemology of the Closet*, her main concern lies in “denaturalising” the understandings we believe we have of homosexuality today, and its accompanying presumptions. Sedgwick argues that it is important to show how modern homo-/heterosexual definitions are structured. We believe we have a worldly understanding about homosexuality, that “we know what that means”. Sedgwick makes the point that this reinforces a “dangerous consensus of knowingness about the unknown” (1990, 45). Today, we believe we have a vast knowingness about what it is to be homosexual, but our understanding of the label itself and the correlative identity is, at the very least, problematic. The comparison between the gay body and the fat body is not one to be oversimplified: in suggesting a parallel might exist between the way both of these bodies are culturally constructed, I am simply noting that some of Sedgwick’s insights in her critique of heteronormative knowledges (focusing on the gay body) could be applied to other so-called “deviant” bodies (such as the fat body) and the knowledges that inform them.

Unlike the gay body, the fat body is always already out. The fat body is of course hypervisible in terms of its mass in relation to the thinner bodies that surround it. As Moon suggests, the fat body displays “a stigma that could never be hidden because it simply *is* the stigma of visibility”, and asks the question “What kind of secret can the body of the fat woman keep?” (Sedgwick 1993, 229). Despite this, Eve Sedgwick (a fat woman herself) tells us “that there *is* such a process as *coming out as a fat woman*” (Sedgwick 1993, 230). She suggests that this process is about declaring bravely the truth of one’s body, despite the fact that one’s fat is self-evident and, most importantly, that in speaking the truth of one’s body, you open the possibility (despite one’s fat hypervisibility) to being *seen in new ways*. As Sedgwick asserts:

It is a way of staking one’s claim to insist on, and participate actively in, a renegotiation of *the representational contract* between one’s body and one’s world. (Sedgwick 1993, 230)

In “speaking” one’s fatness, Sedgwick believes one can “come out” as fat. This notion has been taken up and morphed by the Size Acceptance movement, which fat women have embraced, particularly across the United States and the United Kingdom. In exploring this growing movement online, I came across Marilyn Wann’s brainchild: the sassy, technicolour anger and activism of *FAT!SO?*

What greeted me on Wann’s (1994) website homepage was an image of her bare bum with “FAT!SO?” emblazoned across one dimpled cheek. I liked her immediately, and read on. Marilyn Wann launched the *FAT!SO?* zine after coming to a turning point in 1993: not only was she refused health insurance because of her weight, but her then-boyfriend explained that he was too embarrassed to

introduce her to his friends because she was fat (Wann 1998, 9). This led her to become one of the key figures in the Size Acceptance movement in the United States, and has successfully lobbied for legislation against size-related discrimination in her home city of San Francisco. The *FAT!SO?* motto is “Don’t apologize for your size!”, and Wann sets out her new world order in her “Fat Manifesto”. This consists of 12 steps, perhaps writing back to 12-step programmes such as those that govern “addicts” in support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and, more portentously, Overeaters Anonymous. However, her parody of the “12 steps” attempts to subvert our systems of “knowing” about this process in relation to addiction and rehabilitation. Wann “queers” the 12 steps of addiction recovery: instead of using the programme as a tool for overcoming a dangerous “habit”, she makes it a vehicle of self-assertion and pride. At the centre of her Manifesto is the following exclamation:

... We have all at some point wasted our precious moments on the planet worrying about how we look. Stop that! Just say the magic words: “Yes, I am a fatso!” ... With these words, you create revolution. You turn fat hatred back on itself. As a fatso, you possess the ultimate weapon against weight worries, body prejudice, and size-related discrimination: fat pride. (Wann 1998, 28)

The rhetoric is both persuasive and seductive because Wann taps into the fat woman’s fears and shames about herself and her body, and argues for visibility instead of socially sanctioned concealment. Fat Pride offers a paradise to fat girls who have been told certain interactions, performances and practices in life are off-limits: size acceptance organisations hold events such as Fat Lingerie Parties, Fat Pool Parties, Fat Fashion Parades. Boxes of size-26 g-strings are ripped open with glee; lacy negligees guaranteed to slide effortlessly over ample hips are offered up, bellies hang over new bikini bottoms with impunity. In short, fat girls are offered an environment in which to conceive of themselves as sexual beings that are desirable, in ways that they had previously been forbidden to them.

Using humour and satire, Marilyn Wann has forged a funky activism that is smart, sassy, and even sexy. Her *FAT!SO?* book has a bright blue and hot pink cover with a sexy cartoon representation of a fat girl, suggestive of an animated, fleshly naughtiness. Despite this, Wann’s serious agenda is to situate herself as a necessary voice against “fat-phobia” and fat self-hatred. Her solution to the *impasse* between the fat woman and normative body image is simple: just change your mind about your body:

You *can* face your fears. You *can* dispel that cloud. And you don’t have to change the world to do it. You don’t even have to change your weight. You just have to change your attitude. It’d be my honor to act as your friendly tour guide on the trip from the old attitude (fear of fat) to the new attitude: *flabulousness!* (Wann 1998, 130)

So I just had to change my mind about my body. It sounded suspiciously simple. I read about other fat girls who had made the decision to change their minds about

their fat bodies, and had become, as Wann suggests, “flabulous”. Regina Williams, in her essay “Conquering The Fear of a Fat Body: The Journey Towards Myself”, claims:

Joining ... the size acceptance movement opened my eyes to many things. It taught that in spite of society’s sick obsession with looks, I don’t have to buy into it ... Never again will I allow anyone to put me down or mistreat me because of my weight. I love me, all of me, right now, just the way I am. (Williams, cited in Edut 1998, 184–186)

I was attracted to the politics of the fat pride movement, which seemed to take up this idea of intervening in the “contract” one’s fatness had with the world, insisting on being seen in new ways. However, there seemed to be an obstacle for me in moving towards this project. Williams said she did not have to “buy into” social discourses about beauty, but how do you turn that off? How can you completely remove yourself from the discourses that *constitute us as subjects*? She says she loves herself, all of herself, and yet I cannot identify with that. I experience myself/my body in ways that shift and vary and contradict each other. As a fat girl, I still found myself choosing the table in the restaurant facing the wall, and cutting the size tags out of my new clothes. Eschewing ingrained body knowledges about the offensiveness of the fat female body was not as easy as *changing my mind*.

I thought something must have been wrong with me, that I was not strong enough to become the subject of fat politics. But I kept reading—and something new emerged. Tucked away in Williams’ essay filled with the rhetoric of self-love and acceptance were these words: “I still have those moments of insecurity, the feelings of inadequacy, the loneliness” (Williams, cited in Edut 1998, 185). Charlotte Cooper, in her *Fat and Proud: The Politics of Size*, also notes this ambivalence:

No matter how good we feel about our bodies, we still live in environments where there is pressure to lose weight ... As fat activists we try and redirect our anger and dismay towards fat-hating cultural attitudes, but sometimes we still end up back at square one, blaming our bodies for our oppression and feeling overwhelmed by our fatness. (Cooper 1998, 157)

Fat politics talks about the fat body in terms of its possibility for resistance and the political implications of *changing one’s attitude*. But even for the activist, this moment of resistance is an ongoing internal conflict rather than a moment of discursive rupture. As Lisa Ayuso explains:

Even the most confident of FAT girls have to struggle to keep every ounce of fat intact. The truth of the matter is that many FAT activists hold a small and guilty desire to be skinny. (Ayuso, cited in Mitchell, Rundle, and Karaian 2001, 157)

In other words, even the subject of fat politics experiences a disconnection from one’s body, a need to be apart from the source of one’s angst: one’s fat flesh. What emerges from these small snippets, these quiet admissions, is that the

unified self that fat politics seems to expect, and draws its strength from, suddenly becomes an ambiguous subject. The fat activist does not want to appear to be a “traitor to the cause”, or a “sell-out”, and yet, these admissions reveal the irrevocably ambiguity a fat girl experiences: we embody the very discourses and bodily knowledges that are the cause for our anger.

In her book *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, Nikki Sullivan discusses the hallmarks of liberationist politics, and the kind of political subject it assumes. It is possible to compare the political motivations of the Gay Pride movement with Size Acceptance, whereby the key goal of the enterprise was overturning negative public attitudes towards particular bodies and identities. As Sullivan points out:

For liberationists ... the imperative was to experience homosexuality as something positive in and through the creation of alternative values, beliefs, lifestyles, institutions, communities, and so on. (Sullivan 2003, 29)

More specifically, Sullivan goes on to highlight and examine the implications of liberationist politics, particularly with reference to the act of “coming out”. While Sullivan is discussing Gay Liberation, it is possible to see the same problems emerging in Fat Pride:

Associated with “pride” ... was the belief in the transformative power of “coming out”, of publicly declaring one’s personal and political identity ... “Coming out” has its benefits and its disadvantages, but either way, the call to come out presupposes that such an action is in itself transformative and that the identity that one publicly declares is unambiguous. (Sullivan 2003, 31)

In declaring oneself to be “fat”, to “out” oneself as a fat girl, one assumes (as Sullivan points out) an *unambiguous identity*. One is “fat and proud”, with no grey areas, no contradictions, no questions, no ambivalence. Although my analysis here has been focused primarily on Wann’s fat politics, I am not suggesting that she is the leader of the *entire* size acceptance movement, or that her ideals represent every member within the movement. Size Acceptance is not a unified or singular politics, and this itself suggests the resistance, difficulties and ambiguities present in identifying simply as “FAT”. And yet, the subject of Fat Pride appears to be a Humanist subject, and fat politics seems to insist on the unitary self. For the purposes of my argument, I am focusing on what appears to be a central tenet of the philosophy of most size acceptance organisations; that is, that we should learn to love our fat bodies, and make them visible in new, enabling, and politically empowering ways.

Certainly, wearing a size-26 g-string as a fat girl and parading down a catwalk can be read as a powerful political act. In doing so, it would appear one is parodying heteronormative visual aesthetics. But is there not something that underlies that act? If you have been denied the opportunity to experience oneself as a “normative” woman, being given that chance is seductive, exciting. Even in my anger at these heteronormative presentations of feminine sexuality, as a fat girl, I would argue that I nevertheless *have to desire to experience them*. The

emphasis in Size Acceptance is still irrevocably on the *visible*, and I question whether the “new ways” it is attempting to make the fat body visible have far-reaching political implications. In “outing” the fat body, apparently we are asking others to make us visible in new, more positive ways. This in itself is an enabling political act. However, who is looking? How do we see our own fat bodies in this “liberatory” moment? Can we remove ourselves from the knowledges that have become so embedded in our sense of self, simply by changing our mind about our fat bodies? In fact, fat politics undermines its celebration of the fat body by seeming to encourage a split self in its rhetoric—a disconnection is effected in fat bodily experience in that fat pride insists that we see ourselves from exterior subject positions, and asks fat women to occupy positions outside our bodies: to look at our bodies in new ways; but what about *embodying fatness*?

The fat body of fat politics is asking to be seen within frameworks of beauty and desirability that appear to be non-normative and subversive, but are in fact *reaffirmations* of normative frameworks (through parading around in a bikini, or donning a g-string). In this way, fat politics still privileges the thin body and attempts to imitate it. *As fat girls, we still want to know what it is to be thin, even if we do not want to alter our fat.*

Fat politics does not seem to make a space for this bodily ambiguity, despite its inherent contradictions. While size acceptance notes that the fat body is simultaneously hypervisible (due to its size and the negative knowledges that are inscribed on one’s fat flesh) and invisible (in as much as the fat body is positioned outside of dominant aesthetic ideals and refused access to sexual life) in Western society, I would argue that the apparently “new ways” in which fat politics makes the fat body visible are problematic. The fat body of fat politics *still* exists in a (negative) visual regime, whereby one simply *reverses* the kind of response the fat body elicits within a dominant heteronormative framework, rather than critically engaging with this regime to dismantle it. While fat politics seems to assume that the very existence of the fat body is subversive, events such as fat pool parties and fat lingerie parties only reproduce the obsession with the visible and the power of aesthetic ideals.

I am unconvinced that fat pool parties or fashion parades function *unequivocally* as a parody or an ironic comment on heteronormativity. It seems to me that this is an attempt to access/experience normative female bodily experience and sexuality through the deployment of the g-string, the bikini—in short, by permitting a visibility of the fat body that has been shamed and hidden. And why would one not want to access the kinds of privileges and practices that have been denied the fat female lived experience for so long? I am not suggesting that these events where the fat body is made visible in ways that traditionally have been the domain of thin women should be shut down, but it is worth recognising that this “liberatory” practice still upholds a visual regime that asserts “thinness” as the preferable modality of female bodily being. Fat politics does not see itself as implicated in heteronormative aesthetic ideals, and that it is merely reproducing them by simply *reversing* the ideal, not dismantling it. The question is: how

effective is the simple reversal from a negative body to a celebrated one? It would seem to me that the system of judgement that positions the fat body as a negative body *remains intact*.

In this analysis, I have attempted to give critical attention to the way discursive regimes not only operate *despite* celebratory politics, but indeed are *reproduced and affirmed by it*. Size acceptance does not attempt to alter, nor can it attempt to alter dominant aesthetic ideals simply by changing one's mind about one's fat body. Fat politics and size acceptance are crucial in establishing communities and providing support to fat people who have suffered cruelty, shame and humiliation because of their size, but in creating communities and offering support, one does not dismantle dominant cultural ideals about the body and ideal bodily aesthetics. In moving outside these fat-friendly communities, the politics of "coming out" as fat does not formulate new modes of embodiment or being-in-the-world. If "coming out" as fat refuses an ambiguous identity, then it refuses the possibilities ambiguity presents. I am simply suggesting that if we can open a space for the ambiguity and contradictions of bodily experience, if we can accept the impossibility of a unitary self in fat politics, we can accomplish more than simply attempting to "re-hierarchise" fat over thin.

I had been searching the Internet for hours, looking for ways to "come out" as fat through fat politics, and I was becoming increasingly confused and uncertain. I glanced away from the computer screen, and noticed the mirror on the adjacent wall. I was wearing a sleeveless top, my dimpled arms on display. I set my jaw, and convinced myself I was strong, powerful, swollen with my fat identity. But I kept looking at my reflection. I felt guilty, but pleased.

Here I was, searching fat politics websites, but only a few hours ago I had crept back into the fitting room in K-Mart. Back in the cubicle, I looked down at the cruel underpants crumpled on the floor where I had kicked them away from me. I was angry, and appalled by my willingness to submit to expected aesthetic bodily ideals. I had wanted out: to get off the merry-go-round of humiliation, to "come out" as fat. But, I bent down to retrieve the underpants them, and slowly started to pull them up my legs, up over my hips, around my waist. They were just as tight the second time, just as painful, just as constricting. But standing before my reflection, I ran a hand over the soft flesh of my belly. I turned side-on, and looked at my reduced girth, the swell of my buttocks, and I closed my eyes against my reflection.

Sitting in front of my computer, surrounded by scrawled notes on size acceptance, and with the screen flashing reams of search results at me, I straightened up in my chair and looked into the mirror again, this time, at my waist. My bulges were all but gone, and even through my anger and my pain, I could not help but smile.

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