

BEARSPACE:

EXPERIENCES OF FAT GBQ MEN IN SPACES OF THE UK'S BEAR COMMUNITY

FINDINGS REPORT

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FOREWORD

Bearspace is a groundbreaking research project that has been investigating the experiences of fat gay, bi and queer (GBQ) men in spaces used and created by Bear communities in the UK. Presenting analysed data from focus groups, interviews, and my own auto/ethnographic observations from five UK Bear spaces, this report outlines the project's key findings.

As a Bear myself, I started this project in 2018 because what I was hearing and reading about Bears didn't always ring true to me. I'd always felt at ease with my body – my saggy lower belly, my skinny arms, my flabby arse – in Bear spaces. And I'd never seen so many fat guys having fun together than I had in Bear spaces. So I was surprised to encounter scholarship about Bears which described them as rejecting or excluding fat men (e.g. Brown, 2001; Whitesel, 2014). I found that there is very little research on Bears, and as a human geographer I noticed that few researchers had investigated Bears here in the UK, or the physical spaces that Bears create and socialise in (McGlynn, 2021). The Bearspace project was developed to address this gap.

This report is the project's main presentation of findings. It is divided into sections based on 4 Themes with an additional 7 Sub-themes, and at the top of each section is a list of its key points. The report was written by a Bear (myself) for Bears and for everyone who visits Bear spaces, as well as scholars interested in fat GBQ men. Though based on robust empirical data and rigorous analysis the report is written with breadth rather than depth in mind, as I have tried to strike a balance between accessibility for non-academics and Bear communities, and the development of intellectual theories. Future publications in academic journals and books will examine some of these themes and findings in greater detail, and with more substantial theoretical engagement using scholarship on GBQ men's sexualities and fatness.

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The participants, for sharing your time and experiences with me. I'm so grateful to have gotten to know you if only for a couple of hours each.

The organisers from Manbears, BritBears, BearScots, Belfast Bears and Brighton Bear Weekend, for trusting me, for promoting the project, and for letting me into your spaces. I hope to visit you all again soon once the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

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Phil Corbett, for kindly and generously designing the project flyer and then this report.

GET IN TOUCH

If you'd like to contact me (Dr Nick McGlynn) or to hear more about the Bearspace project (including future findings publications), you can email at n.mcglynn2@brighton.ac.uk.

To download free copies of this Findings Report, plus a 2-page Community Summary, visit: <https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/ctsg/2022/02/02/bearspace-report/>

FINDINGS SUMMARY




Four main Themes and seven Sub-themes detail the experiences of fat gay, bisexual and queer (GBQ) men in UK Bear spaces:

Theme 1. Being fat outside Bear spaces

Fat GBQ men at times experience direct and public anti-fat abuse. 'Mainstream' (e.g. non-Bear) LGBTQ spaces were often felt to be uncomfortable by fat GBQ men. Receiving anti-fat abuse or 'subtle' looks/comments from others was part of this. However more significant was 'standing out' amongst thinner bodies, and therefore feeling self-conscious about being fat.

Theme 2. Feeling safe and comfortable as a fat GBQ man

Bear spaces were contrasted with mainstream LGBTQ spaces, and the main way fat GBQ men described them was 'comfortable'. This meant that the men felt they 'fitted in', and were not self-conscious about being fat. The three things that made Bear spaces comfortable for fat GBQ men were:





-  Sub-theme 2.1. Being surrounded by a majority of bodies like their own;
-  Sub-theme 2.2. Believing that people in Bear spaces shared an ethos of non-judgement about bodies;
-  Sub-theme 2.3. Taking their shirts off and being celebrated for it.

Theme 3. Feeling desirable as a fat GBQ man

Fat GBQ men often felt unattractive and undesirable in both everyday life and in mainstream LGBTQ spaces. However they did get to experience feeling attractive in Bear spaces, which was felt to be a particularly positive feature of them.

Theme 4. Hierarchies of Bear bodies

Participants believed there to be a loose hierarchy of Bear bodies, particularly a top tier of muscular and masculine bodies aligned with classic Bear archetypes. This hierarchy had four key elements:

-  Sub-theme 4.1. Fat stigma and anti-fat attitudes are occasionally still expressed in Bear spaces, and most men took comfort in not being the fattest man present.
-  Sub-theme 4.2. Muscle Bears and 'Muscle Marys' were felt to have a negative 'attitude'. Fat GBQ men often felt uncomfortable when surrounded by them, and could avoid spaces where they might dominate.
-  Sub-theme 4.3. Differences between fat bodies impacted on men's experiences in Bear spaces. These included Whiteness in Bear spaces, and 'right' and 'wrong' kinds of beards and body fat.
-  Sub-theme 4.4. Representations of Bears tend to be slimmer and more muscular. These set expectations of what Bear bodies 'should' look like, and made some fat GBQ men feel they didn't fit into Bear spaces.

HOW THE PROJECT WORKED

Bearspace was funded through the University of Brighton's 'Rising Stars' programme, which supports new and groundbreaking pilot studies. The aim of this three-phase project was to investigate the role of UK Bear spaces in the marginalisation and/or empowerment of fat GBQ men.

Phase 1 – Bearspace Database (2018)




LGBTQ media (e.g. magazines, websites, social media) were reviewed, and Bear community groups and organisers were contacted, to identify 5-6 Bear spaces which would make good sites for data collection during Phase 2. Details were recorded for 64 potential Bear spaces including pubs, clubs, saunas, hotels, events, and in-person social group meetups. To identify the best data collection sites, exclusion criteria (see Box 1) were applied to the entries and they were categorised accordingly:

 RED (not suitable for Phase 2) – 27 entries

 YELLOW (potentially suitable for Phase 2) – 29 entries

 GREEN (ideal for Phase 2) – 8 entries

Box 1: Exclusion Criteria

-  No mention of Bears/sub-groups (e.g. cubs, otters etc) in official materials
-  Not active for more than 18 months
-  Not primarily based in the UK

With the kind support of their owners/organisers, 5 sites across the UK were selected for Phase 2. These were:





- Manbears Pre-HiBearnation (2018, Manchester, multiple events + club nights over 3 days)
- BritBears Sunday Social (2019, London, social meetup)
- BearScots Saturday Social (2019, Edinburgh, social meetup)
- Belfast Bears (2019, Belfast, social meetup)
- Brighton Bear Weekend (2019, Brighton, multiple events + club nights over 3 days)

Phase 2 – Data Collection (2018-2019)

This was the primary data collection phase. At each of the 5 sites, 3 types of data collection took place:

1. An on-site focus group with attendees;
2. Off-site individual interviews with attendees;
3. Observation-based auto/ethnographic writing before, during and after attendance.

Box 2: Dataset Details

-  32 unique participants across 5 sites
-  5 on-site focus groups, 24 interviews & 32 hours audio
-  120 pages auto/ethnographic writing
-  Total 868 pages of transcribed data

Phase 3 – Analysing the Data (2020-2021)

The dataset was analysed through a technique called Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This time-intensive technique uses qualitative data (e.g. writing, speech) to answer specific research questions. It involves careful reading of all of the data multiple times, extensive note-taking, and sorting chunks of data into themes relating to the research question. These themes are then organised into a Thematic Map to show their relationships (see Figure 1), and excerpts from themes are presented with some discussion to explain their meanings. The themes and discussions are presented in the rest of this community report¹.

¹ As part of my ethical obligation and promise to my participants, I've tried to ensure that no-one can be identified through the data presented in this report. This means that I have provided participants with fake names, and have adjusted some discussions to avoid mention of specific times and places. Ellipses (...) indicate that some words have been removed, and square brackets ([]) indicate that words have been slightly altered. I've also chosen not to name specific Bear spaces or groups, as it's not my intention to set these against each other or to vilify some to the benefit of others.

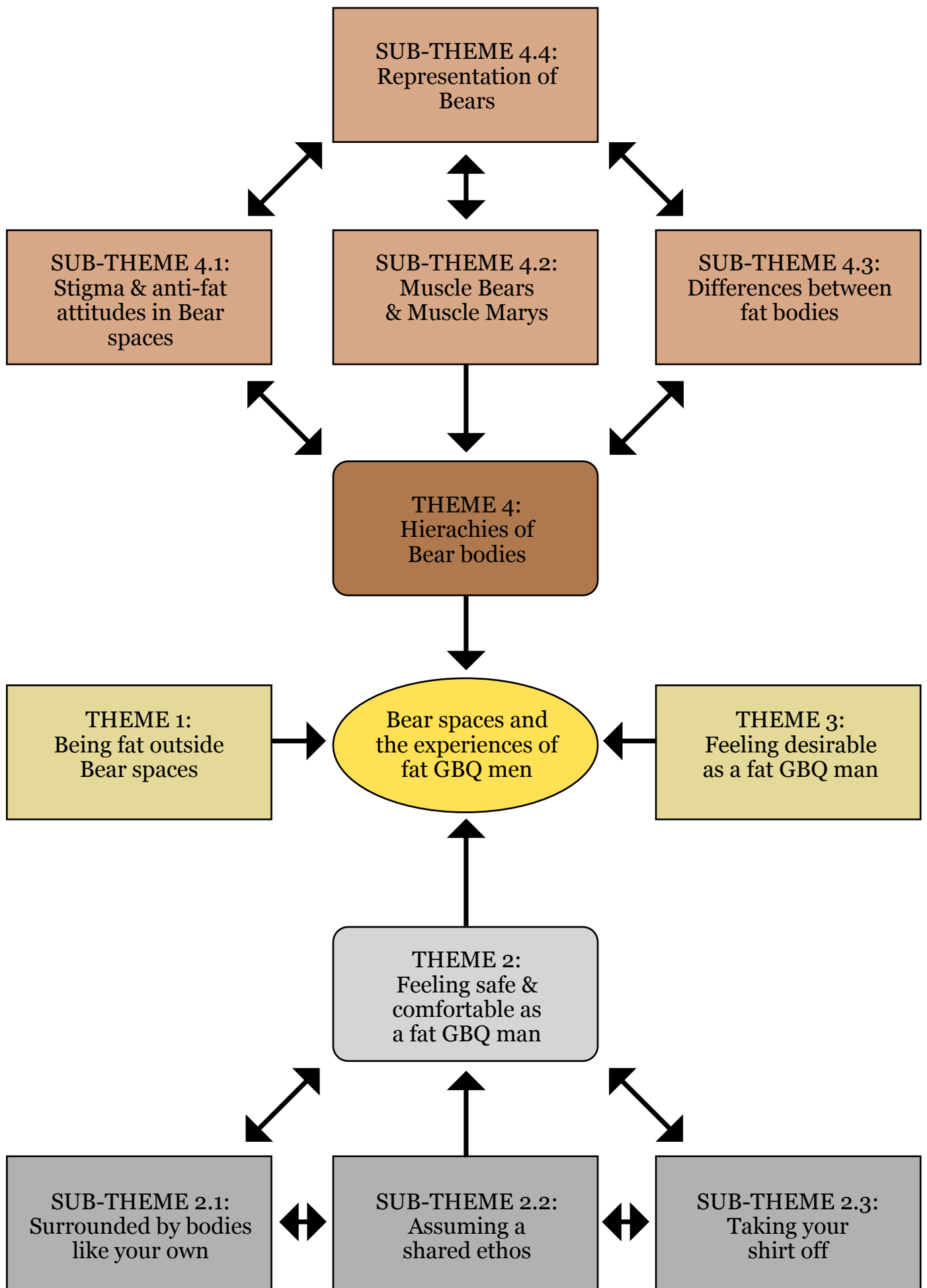


Figure 1: Reflexive Thematic Analysis map

THEME 1: BEING FAT OUTSIDE BEAR SPACES

Theme 1 key points:

- 👤 *Fat GBQ men do at times experience direct and public anti-fat abuse.*
- 👤 *LGBTQ spaces were often felt to be uncomfortable by fat GBQ men.*
- 👤 *Some discomfort was due to anti-fat abuse and subtle looks/comments in LGBTQ spaces.*
- 👤 *Other discomfort was due to being amongst a critical mass of thinner bodies in LGBTQ spaces.*

Fatness is highly stigmatised in the UK², and research indicates that fat people ourselves are often stereotyped as ugly, lazy, stupid, and targeted by abuse and exclusion (Myers & Rothblum, 2005; Sikorski et al, 2011). Participants' narratives suggest that it was rare for them to experience overt anti-fat abuse in public, but that it certainly did happen at times, with some being asked demeaning questions and others having abusive terms shouted at them in the street. One participant even experienced this after a Bear event we had attended, having stopped at a takeaway to buy food and being called 'fatty' and told 'You don't need another fucking takeaway, look at you!'.

Participants often linked anti-fat attitudes and negative experiences of being fat with everyday life, particularly shops and workplaces. But they were also particularly linked with non-Bear or 'mainstream' LGBTQ venues. Anti-fat abuse, attitudes, and discrimination are heightened amongst GBQ men (Foster-Gimbel & Engeln, 2016; Whitesel, 2014), and public abuse also still occurs in LGBTQ spaces, with some participants reporting mockery, 'disparaging comments', being openly 'laughed at' for their fatness, or being told 'You don't belong here'. In addition to such deliberate abuse, fat stigma in mainstream LGBTQ spaces also emerged through subtle signals like 'dirty looks' or 'that head-turning experience' of being noticed for the size of your body:

Interview
1

Alex: *Gay bars, not always the most comfortable places, just because you were getting the eyes on you, you're getting the odd comment.*

Group
2

Oscar: *It's all a little bit more subtle now, you'll get comments but it doesn't always overtly read as someone giving you shit for being fat.*

Both Alex and Oscar minimise how acute these experiences were – they weren't being jeered at but just registered 'the eyes' or 'the odd comment' – but also stress that even these 'subtle' experiences were experienced negatively by them. As demonstrated by Alex, when asked how they felt about being fat in mainstream LGBTQ spaces participants almost invariably used the terms 'not comfortable' or 'uncomfortable':

Interview
16

Carolus: *In some LGBT spaces, it's not comfortable. I'm not talking about mixed clientele, like lesbians or gay men, but in spaces where it's not specific for Bears or big guys... I know for sure that it's just my impression, but I feel judged if I deal with skinny boys, effeminate boys. If [my friends] ask me, "Oh, can you get me a couple of beers?", if I go to the bar and ask for beers and I am surrounded by skinny guys, effeminate guys, I don't feel comfortable in my size. It's... I don't have any particular reason, I cannot put this feeling in words. I've never had proper... I mean specific problems or episodes where I was laughed at, you know what I mean? I don't know, I feel different.*

² 'Stigma' refers to a kind of mark or feature used to classify people as deviant from the norm and as having certain negative traits (Sikorski et al, 2011; Whitesel, 2014). In this case it is fatness which is deviance from the norm of what bodies should be like.

Given that fat men GBQ don't often appear to experience open anti-fat abuse, it's understandable that Carolus expresses confusion and uncertainty here, apparently unsure as to *why* he should feel uncomfortable when he is not the recipient of anti-fat abuse, mockery, or even more subtle 'comments' or 'eyes on you'. The key feature in his account is not 'specific problems or episodes', but simply *the bodies around him* – even when they were not reacting negatively to him, or even interacting with him at all. This element emerged in other participants' stories:

Interview
8

Daniel: *[My home city], with one gay bar. If I was to put [the scene] in categories, like twinks and otters sort of size. When I was there I think I was one of the biggest people there. When I'd go on a night out I'd just feel really uncomfortable 'cause my friends were all thin and had nice clothes and I just had a plain whatever, because of my size.*

Christian: *I thought you might ask why I hang around with Bears... And I think it's to do with it makes me feel comfortable. 'Cause you think "Well why don't you go to [a popular gay bar]?" I don't feel comfortable going to those sorts of bars.*

Nick: *Why do you not feel comfortable?*

Interview
11

Christian: *Because of my weight. If you're the only one that's overweight... I would feel uncomfortable.*

Just as Carolus describes being 'surrounded by' thin men, so does Daniel report his friends being 'all thin' and Christian being the 'only one that's overweight'. Reading these accounts closely and alongside those of other participants, the key factor appears to be a majority of thinner bodies in LGBTQ spaces. Even if fat GBQ men don't experience actual abuse or anti-fat attitudes from the other men present, simply being in the *presence* of dominant numbers of 'thin', 'slimmer', 'not overweight' and 'skinny' GBQ men can make them feel uncomfortable in these spaces. This can, as Carolus suggests, be due to the fear and expectation of such abuse/attitudes from these young slim men. But it can also be due to the body comparisons which being surrounded by slimmer bodies forces fat men to make:

Interview
15

Jay: *Being fat wasn't acceptable in the gay scene in the late 80s, in a small city. Everyone was very skinny and pretty and everyone wore skintight jeans and that was just never on the cards for me. I always felt a bit self-conscious about that, and I always felt like I was the fat friend in the corner.*

Interview
22

Timothy: *I clearly stand out like a sore thumb, you know, when you're a twenty-something superchub and you're just going, "No this feels wrong".*

For fat men like Jay and Timothy, being amongst a majority of slimmer bodies in LGBTQ spaces means that you are 'self-conscious' and feel that you 'stand out'. These comparisons between your own body and the other (slimmer) bodies present in your immediate surroundings appear to be a key factor in fat GBQ men's feelings of comfort or discomfort in mainstream LGBTQ spaces.

This theme reveals that anti-fat abuse aimed at fat GBQ men does occur, including in LGBTQ spaces, but that it is usually 'subtle' – though still having negative impacts. LGBTQ spaces were often described as uncomfortable for fat GBQ men, but even deliberate anti-fat comments and abuse were not the only factor in this. Pervasive and powerful societal fat stigma means that fat GBQ men are understandably aware that their bodies are stigmatised, particularly in LGBTQ spaces (Whitesel, 2014). This means that simply being surrounded by a critical mass of valorised thinner bodies in LGBTQ spaces, even if they are not being deliberately abusive, can make fat GBQ men feel uncomfortable because they 'stick out' and don't 'fit in', and have a heightened awareness of and self-consciousness about their stigmatised fat bodies.

THEME 2: FEELING SAFE & COMFORTABLE AS A FAT GBQ MAN

Theme 2 key points:

- 🐻 *Bear spaces were contrasted with mainstream LGBTQ spaces, and the main way fat GBQ men described them was as 'comfortable'.*
- 🐻 *Comfort meant fitting in and a lack of self-consciousness about being fat.*

With regard to fatness specifically, Bear spaces were experienced more positively than mainstream LGBTQ spaces, and everyday spaces, by fat GBQ men. This matches descriptions in the bulk of writing by Bears (e.g. Suresha, 2009; Wright, 1997; Wright, 2001). It was not the case that experiences in Bear spaces were always entirely positive – some men described feeling awkward or lonely in Bear spaces, while others felt a sense of unfriendliness or cliquishness from others present. But when they discussed being fat specifically, and in direct comparison to their discussions of being fat in everyday and non-Bear LGBTQ spaces, participants spoke very positively about Bear spaces (e.g. bars, pubs, clubs, and social meetups). For example, Jay described the shift from mainstream LGBTQ venues to Bear spaces as life-changing:

Jay: *A way [the Bear scene] changed my life is it gave me a lot more confidence and the feeling that it was what I wanted out of my life, and the people I wanted to spend time with. I didn't have to hang about in the twinkie bars in [my home city] with people who were friendly enough but there was always that little frisson of consent, the fat boy in the corner... It wasn't til after I'd been to a few of the Bearier bars, got to know a few more Beary boys that that changed. I started not to care what other people thought, it gave me a confidence I didn't have before.*

Interview
15

Visiting 'Bearier bars' challenged Jay's previous expectations about the kind of LGBTQ spaces they would 'have to hang about in', spaces where they seemed only tolerated and marginalised, sat off 'in the corner'. This was a consistent comparison made by participants throughout the dataset.

Regarding what it feels like for fat GBQ men in Bear spaces, some clear patterns could be seen in the data. For fat GBQ men encountering Bear spaces for the first time the experience could be highly emotional and almost euphoric, with first-timers using terms like 'shine', 'positivity', 'amazing', 'belonged', 'happy', 'excited' and so on. Like Jay (above), first times in Bear spaces were often framed around a revelation of new possibilities for social and sexual lives for fat GBQ men. Some other participants described Bear spaces not as euphoric but as 'safe', again specifically regarding being fat in them:

Aaron: *I would say I go to Bear spaces, to be... It's very strong what I'm going to say, but to be accepted, to feel safe.*

Interview
17

Ben: *That's why we have [this Bear event], because it's still not safe for bigger guys to be out in that normative world and we need somewhere where we can actually say, "I feel okay. I can take my top off here, I can feel... I don't feel judged here."*

Interview
21

Both of these participants had described experiencing targeted and public anti-fat abuse, and by contrasting Bear spaces with other spaces they implied that 'safety' meant not experiencing (or having to fear experiencing) such abuse. But for fat GBQ men more familiar with Bear spaces, and in direct contrast to how mainstream LGBTQ spaces tended to be described (e.g. Theme 1), the term used to describe Bear spaces was 'comfortable':

Christian: *I look at myself in the mirror and I hate myself. And I hate it, and I hate myself for being weak and alcoholic and not being able to stop it. But standing in the Bears bar in [an international Bear event] or [a local Bear event] it's all fine, because I fit in with the zeitgeist as it were... I know that I feel comfortable in them.*

Nick: *What is it like to be fat or bigger in Bear spaces?*

Jonathan: *Like, using this weekend as an example, I felt really comfortable. Felt really comfortable in myself, confident in my body, and it was good 'cause this is the first time I've proper done a Bear event... I thought, "Give it a try and see what it's like" - but no, it was really comfortable...*

Nick: *How did you feel leaving the site?*

Jonathan: *On Sunday?*

Nick: *Yeah.*

Jonathan: *Devastated. 'Cause I wanted to... Well, go back to body confidence.*

As shown in these examples, feelings of comfort in Bear spaces with regard to fatness were repeatedly, directly contrasted with feelings of being fat outside of Bear spaces. Christian heavily stressed the word 'hate' in his interview, emphasising the strength of his feelings about himself and his body in his everyday life, here when at home stood in front of a mirror. In contrast his discussion of Bear spaces throughout his interview felt casual, relaxed and less intensely emotional, as 'fine' and 'comfortable' indicate. Similarly Jonathan uses 'devastated' to describe leaving the Bear space, while the Bear space is 'really comfortable' and 'good'. In neither of these examples do the men relate comfort to not experiencing anti-fat abuse or attitudes, so it is not that Bear spaces are experienced positively by fat GBQ men just because they won't experience abuse there. Instead, and again in direct contrast to being in mainstream LGBTQ spaces (Theme 1), fat GBQ men's experiences of Bear spaces as comfortable appeared to be about feelings of ease and the absence of self-consciousness about fatness:

Nick: *As somebody with your body size and shape and type, how have you felt at [this Bear space]?*

Oscar: *I have felt comfortable, yeah. I've definitely felt comfortable. I can't think of a moment in which I have felt at all self-conscious about being fat and hairy.*

As with most discussions of being comfortable, Oscar relates this to the lack of being 'self-conscious about being fat and hairy'. Therefore while non-Bear spaces are often sites where fat GBQ men feel particularly aware of and anxious about their fatness (per Theme 1), Bear spaces appear to be sites where they don't have to think about their fatness as much and thus are 'comfortable'. So with regard to both 'comfort' and 'safety', fat GBQ men in the Bearspace study appeared to use these to refer to the absence of what they might usually experience in mainstream LGBTQ spaces such as judgement, self-consciousness and sticking out.

Theme 2 demonstrates that with regard to fatness specifically, Bear spaces were overwhelmingly said to be more positive for fat GBQ men than non-Bear spaces, including mainstream LGBTQ venues. Though initial experiences could be euphoric, those more familiar with the spaces mostly experienced them as 'comfortable' or sometimes 'safe', which appeared to indicate an absence of the need to be self-conscious about one's fat body. Sub-themes 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 detail three key features of Bear spaces which appeared to make fat GBQ men more comfortable.

Sub-theme 2.1: Surrounded by bodies like your own

Sub-theme 2.1 key points:

- 😊 *Many body types attend Bear spaces, but the attendees at Bear spaces are very often fat.*
- 😊 *Fat GBQ men were comfortable in Bear spaces because they were surrounded by a majority of similar bodies, and so did not stand out.*
- 😊 *Achieving a majority of 'Beary' bodies could make other spaces feel comfortable too.*

The first element in making fat GBQ men feel comfortable in Bear spaces is that they could be surrounded by bodies like their own. There is not one single Bear look or body. The Bear spaces of the study featured men of a wide variety of body shapes, sizes and weights, and this was often noted as a positive feature by participants.

Scott: *I think especially from last night at the event, you could see the different pockets of people, but everyone was... The middle was kind of a mish mash of a lot of different types.*

Levi: *Yeah it was, that was quite good that was.*

Group
5

Timothy: *It's kind of a one size fits all, but then there's such diversity [within] it.*

However despite such positive nods to 'diversity' of bodies in Bear spaces, this first sub-theme outlines that this is not what makes Bear spaces comfortable for fat GBQ men. Instead, it is being in the physical presence of a majority of other fat bodies, within a shared space, that makes fat GBQ men feel comfortable in Bear spaces. Not all men in UK Bear spaces are fat. But, as my own auto/ethnographic notes consistently stress, a lot of them are:

Personal Notes: *I was just blown away by how fat it was! Even though we arrived early for a club night it was packed with fat bodies with bellies and arses out. There was a trio of fat guys in harnesses on the stage with fans, showing off... That made me feel good and also comfortable. At ease seeing other fat guys in centre stage and unafraid to be nearly naked.*

As indicated even in my own personal reflections, the physical presence of other fat men in Bear spaces appeared closely related to what made Bear spaces comfortable. It is important to note that the idea of 'comfort' was not part of the pre-set interview or focus group questions, but participants were prompted to discuss it if they mentioned it:

Nick: *What did you like about [this Bear space]?*

Jonathan: *I was comfortable, I think it was just inclusive and the fact that... I am attracted to Bears, so that was a nice thing, but the fact that I felt very welcome and I felt confident in my body as well because there was people there with similar shapes and sizes, bigger, bigger than me. It felt very very comfortable and I felt like I was part of it.*

Interview
9

Nick: *What is it about that kind of space that makes it feel comfortable?*

Guy: *I think because of the other people that are in the room and their body types, I think they are typically similar. Even though you will have some slimmer people for example, but I guess because there are people that are of similar stature that you feel more comfortable, I guess.*

Interview
24

In contrast to experiences in mainstream LGBTQ spaces (Theme 1), both participants explicitly link their feelings of being 'comfortable' with being in a space with 'similar' bodies to their own, specifically with regard to fatness. Guy presents 'slimmer bodies' as a challenging element to comfort ('even though'), and Jonathan focuses on those 'bigger, bigger than me'. However a deeper exploration of the data showed that participants often stressed that it was not enough to have just a few other bigger or fatter men, with bodies similar to your own, present in the space:

Nick: *What was it that made you feel particularly comfortable and included?*

Daniel: *Everyone pretty much, maybe seventy five percent, was fat - if you want to call it that - or chunky, everyone was not skinny.*

Interview
8

As with Jonathan and Guy, Daniel is very explicit in relating his feelings of comfort to the bodies around him. As a fat guy, the important point for Daniel is that 'everyone was not skinny' and perhaps 'seventy five percent was fat'. Bear spaces can mean fat men are not in the presence of just a few other fat men, but are actually surrounded by a majority of fat men. This in turn meant that participants felt their fat bodies fitted in or blended in with the other attendees:

Oscar: *I think when you come into a Bear space or just being around Bear people you're then comparing different things, so you're not then... I'm not the big fat hairy one, I fit in just like everyone else.*

Group
2

Jonathan: *I work in travel, but everyone I work with, I'd be classed as the bigger person, so it can be a bit uncomfortable when you see all the skinny gym guys walking round the office. I do feel very uncomfortable sometimes. But last night when we were out [in the Bear space], I felt very comfortable 'cause there was a lot of people round me with the same type of body, so I did feel comfortable just going from my day to day into that environment.*

Group
2

In everyday life as well as in mainstream LGBTQ spaces, fat GBQ men felt uncomfortable because they stood out as fat men amongst a majority of thinner men, and felt self-conscious about their stigmatised fat bodies (Theme 1). In Bear spaces a critical mass of fat men is often achieved, which means that fat men don't stand out as fat men. Consequently, per Oscar and Jonathan, they feel comfortable in Bear spaces as they 'fit in' and aren't 'the big fat hairy one'. This pattern was repeated throughout the dataset. The importance of this idea of achieving a critical mass of fat GBQ men is emphasised by the fact that it could even make non-Bear LGBTQ venues feel 'Beary' and thus more comfortable for fat guys:

Daniel: *We went to [a non-Bear LGBTQ bar] for drinks on the Friday. It was a very Beary crowd and I was there in just a vest which is something I wouldn't normally do, I'd normally have a vest and a t-shirt, just 'cause I don't feel comfortable. But everyone was very nice and looking at me in a good way, not like a, "He's really fat," or "He's not very nice". I felt like I was really included which was really nice.*

Interview
8

Sub-theme 2.1 shows that one of the key ways in which comfort manifests for fat GBQ men in Bear spaces is the experience of being surrounded by a majority of bodies like your own. Because in Bear spaces they are often surrounded by a critical mass of similarly fat bodies, fat guys feel that they don't stand out for being fat – as they do feel in everyday and mainstream LGBTQ spaces, and which makes them feel self-conscious about their fatness (Theme 1). Instead, they 'fit in' with the other attendees and thus feel at ease about their fatness.

Sub-theme 2.2: Assuming a shared ethos

Sub-theme 2.2 key points:

- 😊 *Participants believed people in Bear spaces would share an ethos of non-judgement about bodies.*
- 😊 *Believing that others in a space shared this ethos made fat GBQ men feel more comfortable and less self-conscious about their bodies.*

The second significant element in making Bear spaces feel safe/comfortable for fat GBQ men was that participants assumed almost everyone else in the Bear space shared an attitude of body acceptance and non-judgement. A few participants directly referred to an overarching 'Bear ethos':

Dougie: *I'm not a muscular hairy dude, I'm big, chubby, bouncy - got a bit of body hair, I've got a big beard, but apart from that I'm not particularly hairy... The Bear ethos is how to be a Bear, and there's so many different answers to it, simple as that.*

Nick: *What's your answer to it?*

Dougie: *The Bear thing is there to bring together the people... The outcasts of the gay community.*

Interview
19

Bears' historical writing (e.g. Wright, 1997; 2001) similarly indicates widespread beliefs in Bears' 'fundamental principles of inclusiveness' (Lopez, 2001:121). But there are demonstrably no 'official' Bear aims or ideals either in the UK or globally, and the creators of the Bear spaces in the study (including social and community organisers) did not strongly promote any 'official' principles of body acceptance etc – though they did emphasise this perspective in interviews and focus groups. Instead, participants' assumption of a shared ethos originated in two beliefs. First, that Bear communities are inherently more accepting and less judgemental of fat bodies than other LGBTQ communities. Some believed that this was the historical rationale for creating Bear communities:

Frank: *From what I understand about the origins of it, the term came from a magazine in San Francisco called Bear Review or something, which started because an underground scene developed in the gay scene in San Francisco as a reaction against body fascism and hyperfashion and the bitchy environment.*

Group
3

Ross: *When the Bear community started it was somewhere for those people who didn't feel accepted elsewhere amongst the twinks and whatever else, there was somewhere for them to be accepted.*

Group
2

Accounts from those involved in Bear scenes during their originary period in early 80s San Francisco belie this idea (Mauerman, 1997), and significant figures in early Bear history appear notably anti-fat (see for example Suresha, 2009:79-96). But in the contemporary UK it is clear that fat guys attending Bear spaces do strongly believe that people in Bear spaces share an ethos of body inclusion:

Joe: *We are more accepting... There's this idea of all shapes and sizes, it's a community for everybody and I think that's why we're less judgmental. I wouldn't say non-judgmental, I would just say less judgmental perhaps than other communities.*

Group
1

Ross: *I don't really go out that much at the moment, but when I am out it's with the Bear social group... I just know that for the most part, everyone else is so chill it just doesn't enter their head, I know that no one's judging anyone else. When I'm with the group, don't even for a second think of it.*

Group
2

Oscar: *It's being able to look around and see bodies that look similar to yours and then know that other people there share in that similar experience, and it's not viewed as a negative thing, it's just comfortable*

Drawing on the ideas of comfort as the absence of self-consciousness about your fatness (Theme 2), and as fitting in and not standing out (Sub-theme 2.1), we can interpret these examples as expressing similar sentiments. Ross, who suffered from serious body image issues which affected his mental health, said that he doesn't *'even for a second think of it'* because he *'know[s]'* that the others present will not be judging his body. Similarly Oscar assumes that those with similar bodies will have experienced similar things regarding their fatness, alluding to the kinds of negative experiences outlined across Theme 1. Therefore simply the fact that you are in a Bear space can produce the comfortable feeling of being less self-conscious about your body, because of the assumption that people who go to Bear spaces will not be judging you for it.

Unlike Sub-theme 2.1 however, which focused on the importance of other fat men in the space, the idea of a shared ethos outlined in this Sub-theme also attached to thinner men in the space. In this example, Oscar described leaving a Bear event to go to a party with a group of thinner men who had also been at the event:

Oscar: *Moving onto [the party], again, not an explicitly Bear space, but Bear-adjacent. Comfortable.*

Nick: *What was it that made it comfortable?*

Oscar: *It may have just been having spent time with all of those people at the [Bear event] and as a group collectively moving into a different space. I think that's what made it feel comfortable, 'cause I was already having been with all of those people... Comfortable physically with those people, just changing the location.*

Oscar presents his own assumption that because these thinner men had been attending a Bear event then, despite not being fat Bears themselves, they would be likely to share a Bear-ish ethos of body inclusion and non-judgement. Consequently Oscar felt *'comfortable physically with those people'* as a fat Bear, despite the change in location away from a Bear space. Having attended the same party myself, I noticed corroborating reflections in my auto/ethnographic notes written when I returned in the evening:

Personal Notes: *[These] felt like good spaces for me as a fat guy. Perhaps just 'cause I knew all the guys there in connection in Bear spaces, that's where I first met the majority of them, at [the Bear event] last year. And so I kinda know they're down with fat guys, they are cool with bigger guys, they're even attracted to bigger guys, and older guys... And so that kind of creates this sense like it's OK to be a fat Bear in this kinda space 'cause these guys are down with that.*

So, just as with Sub-theme 2.1, fat guys' positive feelings and experiences in Bear spaces are not always stuck in those spaces but can also move with the attendees due to the shared *'connection in Bear spaces'* and the consequent belief that *'these guys are down with'* fat men. This then makes those other spaces feel comfortable for fat guys too.

Sub-theme 2.2 therefore captures participants' popular assumption that those attending Bear spaces share an ethos of bodily inclusion and non-judgment. This assumption in turn produces a sense of comfort due to the consequent lack of self-consciousness.

Sub-theme 2.3: Taking your shirt off

Sub-theme 2.3 key points:

- 👤 *Exposing your fat belly was a source of concern for fat GBQ men, who said they would never take their shirts off in most spaces.*
- 😊 *Taking your shirt off was commonplace and celebrated in Bear spaces, which made fat GBQ men feel more comfortable.*

The third big element which related to fat GBQ men's feelings of comfort in Bear spaces was the act of taking your shirt off. This is a somewhat paradoxical finding, as the act of taking your shirt off was something that had provoked a lot of past fear and anxiety for fat GBQ men in the study, and was linked with negative experiences and anti-fat abuse. I was intensely familiar with such feelings myself, and throughout the project I recorded my thoughts about my body which were heavily focused around my belly:

Personal Notes: *I have definitely got fatter over the last year. I think my belly is kinda sagging lower... And I've kinda started to think about, I've very much started to think about it in those terms of it getting worse. Almost like it's a disease. Sometimes I kinda grab that bit of my belly, and almost kind of think of it like a kind of tumour, a cancer. I look at myself and think what would I look like if this just were cut off.*

Fat men in the study appeared to share such anxieties about their bodies focused on their bellies. Taking your shirt off and exposing a fat belly appeared throughout the dataset in men's discussions of their everyday lives:

Group
5

Timothy: *Last night I took off my shirt and I danced. I would never do that in a straight club. I'd never do that in a gay club that wasn't a Bear night.*

Interview
2

Kevin: *My ex-partner loved the beach, nearly every single holiday was based around the beach, so he'd be going off swimming and I would sit there usually near the bar under the shade with a book, top on, head down. I wouldn't have to make eye contact with anyone, I could just lose myself in a book, I wouldn't have to explain to anyone why I'm wearing a t-shirt while everyone else is jogging around in shorts and speedos... I've gone to some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, I've been all over Australia, New Zealand, I've been to Hawaii, all over the Caribbean - I never take my top off. I would never feel comfortable there, never go into a swimming pool.*

Kevin's example in particular suggests a sense of loss over not feeling able to take his shirt off, having 'gone to some of the most beautiful beaches in the world' and disconnected from other people, and his partner, due to not feeling able to expose his fat body. And, as Timothy indicates, it was something most participants said they would 'never' do in everyday spaces, or in non-Bear LGBTQ spaces. But with regard to Bear spaces, almost every participant discussed taking their shirt off - despite the fact that it was not specifically asked about in the focus groups or interviews. While Timothy, Kevin and others said they would 'never' take their shirts off in most spaces, it seemed to be such a commonplace component of a night out in a Bear space that it was usually referred to alongside dancing and drinking, e.g. 'having a lot to drink, meeting friends, having a dance and getting shirtless'. So taking your shirt off seems to be part of the default array of activities in many Bear spaces.

The first time taking your shirt off in a Bear space was always described by participants as a dramatic moment, and many had intense memories of it. Kevin, who discussed staying covered up while travelling to beautiful world beaches, compared those times to his first time taking his shirt off in a Bear space:

Kevin: *In the Bear event up here, I took my top off and it was a, I'd love to say liberating moment, it was terrifying, but I felt comfortable and that was the start of where I could actually accept who I'd become... Allie took his top off, then Joe's there rocking out in a harness and I'm like, oh my God. Couldn't believe it. Felt comfortable, felt happy. It was a weird experience, it felt like it was the first time I'd been out and I was looking around like, I really like these people, they're really friendly, open, nice, really welcoming and no one gives a flying crap what anyone else is doing in here... I started dancing, listening to the music, felt more comfortable, looked around and everyone is else is dancing, having fun, there's no one finger-pointing. No one else making remarks, pointing out the fat guy... Then just as the song was finishing off and I was going back to the table, this guy came by, rubbed the belly and said, "Great belly!". I'm like, what the fuck? I was like, "Okay, thanks!" It was good because it was the first time I felt really comfortable.*

Interview
2

Despite the intense and at times negative emotions described by Kevin here – ‘terrifying’, ‘weird’ – once the initial shock had worn off the feeling of being ‘comfortable’ and ‘happy’ seems to set in. This stems from the fact that ‘everyone else is dancing, having fun, no-one is finger-pointing’. At this Bear event Kevin does not stand out as a topless fat man, as he might have on the beaches of New Zealand and Hawaii or in mainstream LGBTQ spaces (e.g. Theme 1), but rather fits in with the other topless fat men (e.g. Theme 2 & Sub-theme 2.1). After the first time, taking your shirt off then became a frequent and even default action in Bear spaces (usually but not exclusively club nights and dancing environments), and was associated with positive feelings of inclusion, comfort and confidence in participants’ bodies:

Nick: What's it like being fat in Bear spaces?

Daniel: *Great to be honest, yeah... People enjoy your body if you're dancing and you can take your shirt off with any worry. In fact, you feel quite good taking your shirt off 'cause you get a lot of people looking at you in a good way. I was in [a Bear club night] the other day and I was nervous about taking my clothes off, because I've never done that in public... I felt really comfortable after I stripped off and was just walking about, but I would never have done that in [my home city], definitely not. I didn't think people were looking at me and thinking, "Oh, he's really fat," they were just looking like, "He's quite nice, yeah."*

Interview
8

As with Kevin, Daniel stresses the lack of self-consciousness and anxiety about receiving over or subtle anti-fat abuse or attitudes (‘you can take your shirt off without and worry’ and ‘I didn’t think people were looking at me and thinking “Oh, he’s really fat”’). Not only do Kevin and Daniel not stand out, however, but their fat bellies – so stigmatised in other spaces – are actually celebrated and appreciated as a ‘Great belly!’, with ‘people looking at you in a good way’ and ‘looking like, “He’s quite nice, yeah”’. Other participants similarly celebrated seeing others with their fat bellies out in Bear spaces:

Dougie: *People start taking their tops off, people that don't usually take their tops off because they're not as confident... Everyone just seems to be a bit huskier, everyone's doing it and it's quite nice to see. I saw some people I've never seen topless before topless yesterday, and I was like, "Oh, hot!"*

Interview
19

This twinned experience of a lack of worry about standing out as a topless fat man, and a positive appreciation of your stigmatised fat belly, demonstrate how taking your shirt off in a Bear space contributes to them being comfortable spaces for fat GBQ men, in opposition to experiences of fatness in other spaces (Theme 1).

THEME 3: FEELING DESIRABLE AS A FAT GBQ MAN

Theme 3 key points:

- 😊 *Participants often felt unattractive in everyday spaces and mainstream LGBTQ spaces.*
- 😊 *Participants distinguished between these and Bear spaces, where they did feel attractive.*
- 😊 *Experiencing feeling attractive was felt to be a particularly positive feature of Bear space for fat men.*

Theme 3 explores how and why feeling attractive and desirable was viewed extremely positively by participants. This feature of Bear spaces was at times connected to feeling comfortable but was more often seen as a positive feature for fat men in its own right. The feeling of being unattractive could understandably contribute to feeling uncomfortable in mainstream LGBTQ spaces:

Oscar: *In a setting like at the [Bear bar] or something like that, I feel like how my body is perceived isn't out of the norm, so I don't think about it. Whereas if I'm at what's usually a straight club doing a gay night or something like that and I'm not seeing other people who share similar body types to me I'm hyperaware of it at that moment. Then I don't feel attractive, I don't feel comfortable, because I know that the people who are there are not interested in what I've got going on, and I feel like in that moment I want to feel like I'm attractive and wanted in that space, and I don't feel that.*

Interview
7

Oscar explicitly links being able 'to feel like I'm attractive and wanted' in a space to the ideas of fitting in and of comfort described in Theme 2, and Sub-themes 2.1 and 2.2. So feeling undesirable and unattractive in non-Bear LGBTQ spaces can be part of why such spaces are not felt to be comfortable by many fat GBQ men (e.g. Theme 1). Building on the distinction between Bear spaces and other spaces which Oscar alludes to, most fat GBQ men in the study said they hadn't been found desirable in their everyday lives or in LGBTQ spaces, and found it difficult to view themselves as such – until they encountered Bears:

Ryan: *When I first came on the Bear scene, someone come over and said, "Oh you're really nice and big," and I'm like "What? What's wrong?" 'Cause someone was actually being complimentary about my size, and it's like... That's weird. This is strange, 'cause you have to change your entire method of thinking... These guys find me attractive because I'm big, compared to the rest of the world that finds me repulsive because I'm big... It led to an awful lot of depressive times, a lot of issues with my confidence and everything else, so that went all the way up to my mid-twenties until I started getting involved in the Bear scene.*

Interview
23

As with other participants, Ryan shares his belief that wider society outside of Bear spaces finds him completely unattractive – 'repulsive' - due to being 'big'. Fat scholarship confirms that this belief is often justified (LeBesco, 2004), and it impacted heavily on Ryan's 'confidence' and mental health. But as both Ryan and Oscar indicate, unlike in their everyday lives or in mainstream LGBTQ spaces fat GBQ men did often get to experience being attractive and sexy in Bear spaces. Bear spaces were so strongly identified as sites where fat guys were found attractive that even fat men who didn't identify as Bears would go to them. Christian was an older fat guy, but who didn't have a beard, wasn't attracted to fat men, and didn't identify as a Bear. He explained why he went to Bear spaces despite this:

Christian: *If I go to the right venue I have no trouble picking up at all. People there are 'Aww I love your belly, I really love it', and they wanna nuzzle it and touch it, and I'm thinking What the fuck? Really?*

Nick: *What is the right venue?*

Christian: *I'll go to the Bear bar in Sitges, or Benidorm, or Alicante, or anywhere where there's a Bear bar, basically. And I tend to go down very well.*

Interview
11

As with Ryan (above), Christian emphasises the distinction between experiences of attractiveness in Bear spaces versus other spaces by stressing his surprise at being found attractive for his fatness – ‘*What the fuck? Really?*’. This was mirrored in discussions across the dataset. Once in Bear spaces, being found attractive was experienced very positively by fat GBQ men:

Dougie: *Just being in the Bear scene, obviously, that's always gonna be a confidence booster... The Bear scene can only be a positive thing for me, because I get people saying I look hot!*

Interview
19

Timothy: *This weekend when I've been in the clubs or the events with larger people, I got quite a lot of attention and it was positive attention.*

Nick: *How did that manifest?*

Timothy: *In guys dancing with me, or if I started to dance with someone else, there wasn't that awkward, "Yeah, no I'm not interested in you," more people seemed to be more interested in getting to know me. I almost... There was a barrier removed... It manifested itself in a lot more positivity and the barrier being removed that I didn't have it in the back of my mind then also because... [Unlike elsewhere] if someone was looking at me, there was that feeling of, "Oh, okay, this could go somewhere," and it was very liberating, it was very freeing.*

Interview
22

Both Dougie and Timothy, as particularly fat men, stress the ‘*positive*’ impact of being found ‘*hot*’ in Bear spaces and feeling that connections made in the spaces could ‘*go somewhere*’ (such as a bedroom). Timothy’s narrative in particular makes regular comparisons between experiences in Bear spaces compared to other spaces, so that ‘*a barrier*’ which existed in the latter was removed in the former. Since fat GBQ men are so often made to feel particularly unattractive (Beattie, 2014), the experience of this contrast may be part of what makes feeling attractive in Bear spaces so ‘*positive*’ for fat GBQ men.

It was of course not the case that all fat GBQ men were found attractive by everyone in Bear spaces, and some fat participants discussed the fear of being found unattractive in Bear spaces. As Bear spaces are where participants expect to be found attractive more than anywhere else, the potential experience of being found unattractive in them may be particularly anxiety-provoking. But this theme captures that fat GBQ men described clear differences between everyday spaces and mainstream LGBTQ, and Bear spaces, with regard to being found attractive. And being found attractive and desirable was experienced as a particularly positive feature of Bear spaces for fat GBQ men.

THEME 4: HIERARCHIES OF BEAR BODIES

Theme 4 key points:

- 🐻 *Participants believed there to be a loose hierarchy of Bears, particularly a top tier.*
- 🐻 *The top tier was described in terms of physical bodies, aligning with classic Bear archetypes.*

Themes 1-3 suggest that Bear spaces can be very positive spaces for fat GBQ men. But as hinted at towards the end of Theme 3 this is not always necessarily the case, and bodily anxieties may still exist in and around Bear spaces. Theme 4 expands on these less positive elements of Bear spaces. By differentiating between the bodies in Bear spaces this theme challenges the idea that these are universally inclusive spaces for all fat GBQ men, and suggests which fat GBQ specifically might find it more difficult to experience comfort in them.

When invited to discuss their own bodies and those of other men in Bear spaces, participants often discussed 'ideal' Bears and reflected on how well they did or did not match such ideals. There were patterns in these discussions which suggested men in Bear spaces perceive the existence of a loose hierarchy of Bears. Participants did not often actively frame this as such, but at times they did so explicitly:

Jeff: *Do you think there are levels of Bears, about the A-class and B-class and C-class?*

Malcolm: *Very much so.*

Nick: *Who fits into those classes?*

Aaron: *Classes and the outside... I feel like I'm the outside...*

Malcom: *It's like a Miss World competition out there!*

Aaron: *It is like Miss World competition!*

Group
4

As indicated in this focus group discussion, the idea of 'levels' of Bears, with a competitive hierarchy, was at times openly shared. In addition to the 'A-class' referred to here, other participants talked about 'A-Bears', 'the A crowd', and 'alpha Bears'. But, as the consistent use of terms incorporating the letter 'A' suggests, these open discussions revolved almost exclusively around those bodies perceived to be at the 'top' of a hierarchy. At no point did a fat participant position themselves within the 'A-class' category, but neither did they place themselves in a 'B-class' or 'C-class'. Indeed Aaron here describes himself as falling on 'the outside' of the tiered classes entirely, suggesting a degree of alienation which was mirrored in other participants' discussions. In fact what would constitute the 'B-class' and 'C-class' etc was never actually discussed by participants – but men proposed to occupy the top tier were described repeatedly:

Daniel: *There's sometimes pockets [of Bears] that are specific and you can't really get in, they're closed off... There was a few pockets of these Bears at Pride... It was quite intimidating and I felt slightly left out...*

Interview
8

Nick: *Can you tell me about some of those pockets?*

Daniel: *I guess they're like the... When you Google the description, they fit everything. The belly, hairiness, the beard, the size. They fit all, they've got... They're quite handsome, or like... The Adidas of Bears. Like if you were to put otter, twink and bear in a line, they would be what the media or what everyone portrays, they would be like the Bear. I find it's portrayed that you have to be this certain size or a certain amount of hairy, you have to have a beard... I feel like when I first came out and identified as a Bear, I felt very much like I didn't fit in, I still occasionally don't feel like I fit in.*

Interview
8

Aaron: *At [the Bear space], it did seem like I was talking to this lot and the more we talked to this lot the more that lot moved away. It was just very odd.*

Nick: *Who was in that other lot, what kind of people?*

Aaron: *It was the Bears... all the bear-Bear Bears.*

Nick: *What's a bear-Bear Bear?*

Aaron: *A bear-Bear Bear is like, well, White. White or Middle-Eastern, Moroccan or Spanish, Latin-looking. Got a beard, probably hairy... Probably got a checked shirt on, the usual uniform of some sort. Yeah, probably muscly or slim, clone with a beard sometimes. It did seem like you were here and they were there.*

Interview
17

Aaron and Daniel's narratives can be explored in tandem to identify what kinds of men are believed to occupy the top tiers of proposed Bear hierarchies. Most notably, both suggest that it is primarily physical features which make someone fit this top tier – the 'bear-Bear Bears' and the 'Adidas of Bears'. For both Aaron and Daniel beards and body hair are crucial features, while Aaron also incorporates race/ethnicity, clothing which matches the Bear 'uniform' of plaid shirts, and muscularity. These physical features align with other participants' descriptions of the most valorised Bear bodies, and also with descriptions of 'classic' Bears who most fit a kind of historic masculine Bear archetype (Hennen, 2008). But while Bear writing often frames such archetypes around 'attitudes' as much as 'appearance' (ibid.), the Bear hierarchies described in this study appear to primarily focus on 'appearance' and specifically Bears' bodies. Together, Aaron and Daniel indicate the existence of bodily distinctions according to which GBQ men are more or less valorised in Bear spaces, and may get to feel more or less safe/comfortable.

However Aaron's comment that the 'bear-Bear Bears' would not be fat but rather 'slim' appears notably at odds with descriptions of and discussions about fat Bear bodies throughout Themes 1-3. Daniel says that ideal Bears may have a 'belly' and mentions their 'size' - but he does not say that they would be fat. He suggests that despite the very positive experiences reported by and about fat GBQ men across these themes, slimmer or less fat men may be more likely to occupy a higher position on a hierarchy of Bear bodies. Finally, regarding the implications of such perceived hierarchies, both Aaron and Daniel describe a degree of socio-spatial separation between those in the upper tier and those out of it, so that for Aaron 'that lot moved away' from him and for Daniel there are 'pockets' which are 'closed off'. Due to these bodily differences, it seems that not all fat GBQ men will experience comfort in all Bear spaces, nor equal degrees of comfort.

This theme then outlines participants' common perception that there exists a loose hierarchy of Bear bodies. The top tier of the hierarchy appeared to be based on physical features of men's bodies, and particularly those which aligned with '*classic*' Bear archetypes. The fat GBQ men who constituted the participants did not see themselves as occupying an upper tier of the hierarchy, and fatness did not appear to be one of the physical features related to it.

Potential lower tiers were only rarely mentioned and never openly described. But the following Sub-themes 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 identify implicit distinctions made between a wider variety of bodies in Bear spaces, including those who might be said to occupy lower tiers of these loose Bear hierarchies. These sub-themes will indicate some degree of hierarchical positioning beyond simply as '*A-class*' and everyone else. They also note particular implications for fat GBQ men in Bear spaces.

Sub-theme 4.1: Fat stigma & anti-fat attitudes in Bear spaces

Sub-theme 4.1 key points:

- 😊 *Openly anti-fat attitudes and abuse are very rare in Bear spaces - but they do occur.*
- 😊 *Some fat participants themselves expressed stigmatising attitudes towards very fat men.*
- 😊 *Not being the fattest man there is a key part of why fat GBQ men find Bear spaces comfortable.*

Themes 1 to 3 indicate that Bear spaces may often be safer and more comfortable for fat GBQ men than everyday spaces or mainstream LGBTQ spaces. But they are not universally free from fat stigma or anti-fat attitudes. Despite usually feeling comfortable and desirable in Bear spaces, fat GBQ men did still report some negative experiences in them relating to fatness, such as those outlined in Theme 1 - being 'blanked', perceived looks of judgement, and even outright mockery and verbal abuse:

Kevin: *The only time in any Bear event where I've actually [experienced this], I was squeezing by some guys and one of them turned round like, "Oh my God he's rubbing his fat all against me." I went, "What the fuck? You're at a Bear event!" He was like, "Oh my God, he's talking to me, make him stop!" I went, "What the fuck?" And just walked off, but there was a whole group of Muscle Marys... [saying] "Oh look how big he is," and you could hear them. They were openly criticising everyone around and it got to the point where I said, "I actually don't feel comfortable here"... So it didn't feel right, and I left.*

Interview
2

Kevin's story shows firstly that that overt anti-fat abuse can and does occur in Bear spaces. Though this experience was 'the only time' it was openly abusive - 'He's rubbing his fat all against me' - and Kevin experienced it as particularly shocking because 'You're at a Bear event!'. It consequently disrupted his experience of the space as 'comfortable', resulting in his leaving. Other participants shared a small number of similar experiences. Although very rare, such experiences demonstrate that Bear spaces are not universally guaranteed to be free from even the most active anti-fat attitudes and abuse. Even some participants in the project, most of whom were fat themselves, expressed some distaste or discomfort with particularly fat men in Bear spaces:

Gerald: *You're trying to polish a turd at times and it's... You're not a label, you're just fat. We can all be overweight, we can all be a bit cuddly at times... but some of these people are just out and out fat. But it's not for everybody, some people like it, some people don't, it's just what they like, but... I guess it's like what we mentioned last night, what is a Bear? Are the just naturally dad bods or builder's bods, muscle bods, or are they just fat?*

Interview
12

As with the small number of other participants who expressed similar distaste, Gerald did not describe being abusive to other fat men but did appear uncomfortable with men whose bodies were perceived to transgress the boundaries of an acceptably fat body. He implies that certain very fat men cross a boundary from being 'overweight' or 'cuddly', to being 'just out and out fat'. Brown (2001), Wright (2001), and other Bear writers have hinted at these unspoken boundaries of Bear bodies and communities, so that Bears can be fat but should not become too fat. This suggests that 'fat' should not be taken as a simple, singular category amongst Bears, but rather that differences between fat bodies are understood amongst men in Bear spaces - and that these differences may be valorised or stigmatised differently in Bear spaces.

These discussions about different forms of fatness in Bear spaces point towards a larger and even more significant pattern identified consistently throughout the dataset - almost every participant (myself included) actively compared their own bodies to those of other fat GBQ men in Bear spaces:

Jonathan: *I felt confident in my body as well, because there was people there with similar shapes and sizes, bigger, bigger than me. It felt very very comfortable...*

By the end of it I was really comfortable 'cause there were people walking round with their shirts off who were bigger than me.

Interview
9

Jonathan relates his positive experience of being a fat guy in Bear spaces – as ‘*confident*’ and ‘*very very comfortable*’ – to comparisons with other fat men ‘*bigger than me*’ present, against whom he isn’t ‘*the fattest person there*’. Almost every participant implicitly or explicitly linked their comfort in Bear spaces to not being the fattest man present. Upon analysis I was surprised to find this pattern throughout my own auto/ethnographic writing too:

Personal Notes: *It was a mix of guys, so you had like Rex who’s like a really big guy. You had definitely kind of fatter guys than me. Nobody who I would call a super chub. But definitely guys with like big fat bellies... I don’t think my weight crossed my mind once when I was there, my fatness didn’t cross my mind once... Quite a few other guys were fatter than me, definitely.*

This excerpt was written after returning to my hotel after a night at a Bear event. Despite my strong personal convictions about body inclusion and the need to tackle fat stigma, at the time I instinctively and repeatedly dwelt on the fact that ‘*fatter guys than me*’ were present, which I linked to how I felt as a fat guy in that space – ‘*my fatness didn’t cross my mind once*’. One discussion in a focus group explained this idea:

Frank: *One of the things I quite like about the Bear scene is that although in general I feel quite good about my body, I don’t feel a pressure to be perfect on the Bear scene and I can have a bit of a belly and miss the gym a bit.*

Rex: *Fat boys make you feel thinner!*

Group
9

<general laughter>

Though the tone here was very friendly and light-hearted, Rex’s tongue-in-cheek ‘*Fat boys make you feel thinner!*’ implies that Frank’s ability to ‘*feel quite good about [his] body*’ in Bear spaces is dependent on being surrounded by other men who don’t simply have ‘*a bit of a belly*’ but are ‘*fat*’. Compared to the other bellies around him, less fat stigma attaches to his comparatively smaller one. This idea, that comfort in Bear spaces is related to not being the fattest man present, is repeated throughout the dataset.

Collectively this theme demonstrates that fat stigma is still present in Bear spaces, even amongst fat GBQ men. It can take the form of directly expressed anti-fat attitudes, as well as the fat stigma which can still attach to particularly fat men in the spaces. Additionally, while Theme 2 and Sub-themes 2.1-2.3 identified three key factors in making Bear spaces comfortable for fat GBQ men, this sub-theme reveals that one final factor is the experience of not being the fattest man present. More uneasily, it appears that fat stigma is actually an important part of how comfort for many fat men in Bear spaces is produced, due to their getting to experience not being the fattest (and thus most stigmatised) man present. This raises important questions about how particularly fat men may experience Bear spaces, and reminds us that ‘*fat*’ is not a single homogeneous category but a variety of body types.

Sub-theme 4.2: Muscle Bears & Muscle Marys

Sub-theme 4.2 key points:

- 😊 *Muscle Bears and Muscle Marys were believed to have a negative 'attitude', but not to be uniquely abusive towards fat men.*
- 😊 *Fat GBQ men were uncomfortable and self-conscious when surrounded by Muscle Bear and Muscle Mary bodies.*
- 😊 *Fat GBQ men can avoid Bear spaces where they might be surrounded by Muscle Bear and Muscle Marys.*

As explained in Sub-theme 2.1 fat bodies are not the only men's bodies present in Bear spaces. Slimmer, muscular GBQ men in Bear spaces were at times described as '*Muscle Bears*', '*Muscle Marys*', '*Clones*' and other terms. These were loose categories, with some participants drawing distinctions while others used them interchangeably. They also often overlapped with references to '*Alpha Bears*' and '*A-Bears*' discussed in the overarching Theme 4 - yet at other times they were said to not really be Bears at all! To capture this inconsistency and ambiguity, I use the twinned term '*Muscle Bears and Muscle Marys*' in this section.

Though such muscular men were occasionally described as openly abusing or mocking fat GBQ men (e.g. Sub-theme 4.1), others were said to be perfectly friendly and welcoming. But more often they were said to have an '*attitude*' and to simply ignore fat men (unless they too were muscular):

Malcolm: *If you don't fit into a category like the Muscle Bear... And I've been up there with the Muscle Bears, I'm not just picking on Muscle Bears here, you call them the Alpha Bears don't you? And if you don't look like them, forget it, they don't wanna know. They wouldn't have a conversation like we're having.*

Scott: *Muscular dudes in harnesses, those spaces can be very... Certain people can be very haughty or very standoffish and aggressive, and you'll always get a demographic gradient in a room, there's people who either consider themselves, or by what's established in some kind of microsocial order at that time, are like the 'Alphas' or whatever.*

Group
4

Being ignored was not a pleasant experience for fat GBQ men and the perceived '*attitude*' of Muscle Bears and Muscle Marys was described negatively, as something that encouraged a degree of social ('*they don't wanna know*') and even spatial distance ('*very haughty or very standoffish and aggressive*'). But as these excerpts indicate they were not described as being uniquely abusive towards fat men. Participants did, however, share a common belief that Muscle Bears and Muscle Marys position themselves as, and are generally treated as, inherently more desirable/attractive than fat men:

Jeff: *There's a lot of attraction I think to a lot more of the muscled types, so even the twinkier types are probably attracted to that, so they go to [this popular club]. I've noticed people who I would perceive to be overweight or people I would perceive to be very heavy and fat, generally, are not as relaxed in that space anymore compared to where they would've been fifteen years ago at the very same venue.*

Interview
18

Here Jeff also suggests that Muscle Bears and Muscle Marys in Bear spaces was felt to be a relatively recent phenomenon, which may explain their lack of discussion in historical Bear writing. Many participants concurred, and some even suggested that they are not '*really*' Bears but simply '*infiltrated*' what were formerly fatter Bear spaces, and marginalised fat GBQ men:

Rex: *It's funny, all these places that use fat names as their descriptor are the places that were Beary, the two seem to be very much hand in hand. Are they still fat friendly? I suppose they are, they absolutely are compared to the rest of the [LGBTQ] scene, there's a much greater concentration of fat boys there than you'll see anywhere else. Are fat boys the top of the heap? No, they're not probably anymore, not in the more nightclubby of the spaces.*

Interview
14

Together Jeff and Rex suggest that the attendees of particular Bear spaces – especially clubs – have undergone a change in favour of Muscle Bears and Muscle Marys, and that consequently a degree of marginalisation of the fat GBQ men who used to attend has occurred. And indeed GBQ men in the study appeared to avoid Bear spaces which were perceived to be dominated by Muscle Bears and Muscle Marys:

Joe: *I don't think I would want to for instance go to [a large international Bear event]. I mean I'd love to go on one level, but I hear that it's become more of a Muscle Bear thing more than anything else and I'm clearly not going to fit into that.*

Group
1

Joe does not suggest that Muscle Bears themselves are abusive, but because his fat body is 'clearly not going to fit into that' he avoids Bear spaces where they might be. Thus as noted in Theme 1 and Sub-theme 2.1, the very physical presence and proximity of a majority - a critical mass - of slimmer and more muscular bodies in a space could encourage fat men to avoid those spaces, and could make them feel uncomfortably self-conscious when in them:

Jonathan: *Even though you're a Bear and they might all be, I was still very conscious of how I looked in there, because they're all ripped to pieces with their bodies.*

Interview
9

Jay: *In the [local Bear space], everyone's just sort of normal for want of a better word, no one's particularly different to me, not particularly prettier than me, not particularly uglier than me... Whereas I think going to some club spaces, particularly like [popular Bear clubs] and things now, I'm very conscious of the whole Muscle Bear thing, and again that harks right back to my first coming out and seeing all these sculpted Bears that I can't really identify with... They don't make me feel uncomfortable and they don't make me feel inferior, it's just I don't particularly want to be around them... So I don't really identify with that as much, so I don't feel as comfortable around that.*

Interview
15

Both Jonathan and Jay point out that it isn't that actions or attitudes but simply the bodies - 'ripped to pieces' and 'sculpted' - of Muscle Bears and Muscle Marys that make Jonathan feel 'very conscious of how [he] looked in there', and left Jay unable to 'identify' with the bodies present because the context he is comfortable with (where 'no-one's particularly different to me') has been disrupted.

This sub-theme adds further detail to Theme 4's account of hierarchies in Bear spaces. It shows that Muscle Bears and Muscle Marys were not perceived to be especially abusive towards fat GBQ men. However, building on Theme 1 it suggests that the mere presence of such bodies may disrupt those features which made Bear spaces feel safe and comfortable for fat men, e.g. Sub-themes 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3, and the experience of not being the fattest described in Sub-theme 4.1. This could make fat GBQ men avoid such spaces or feel marginalised in them.

Sub-theme 4.3: Differences between fat bodies

Sub-theme 4.3 key points:

- 😊 *Physical differences between fat men's bodies can impact on their experiences in Bear spaces.*
- 😊 *These differences include race, ethnicity and the Whiteness of bodies in Bear spaces; and having the 'right kind' of beards and body fat.*

The Bear spaces of this study were certainly not White-only but as with most Bear spaces (Gan, 2001; Lopez, 2001) they were predominantly White. This was rarely commented upon by White participants, though White Bear social group and community organisers did stress that they wanted to address this and to encourage more non-White men to come into their spaces. Bears of colour themselves were able to discuss their actual experiences when they did visit. Aaron in particular reflected heavily on his experience of being of an East Asian ethnicity:

Interview
17

Aaron: *It was [a Bear club night] or something like that, I went there and they were friendly enough but as I left, a couple of guys just said, "Mr Miyagi," and I never went back 'cause I just felt uncomfortable, unsafe there... I'd never go back there again.*

In making Bear spaces feel positive and comfortable for fat GBQ men, then, it is not enough only to think about fatness. Here Aaron's experiences demonstrate the importance of considering fat men's race/ethnicity, as well as casual racism from other attendees. However he also emphasised that his experiences were not so much about his own race/ethnicity, but about White Bears' race/ethnicity:

Aaron: *You just don't feel like you're wanted, you're not the golden kid, yeah.*

Nick: *What would be the golden kid? What is it that they want?*

Interview
17

Aaron: *I think they would want White, probably people who look like you.*

This was a jarring moment for me, and as I wrote in my auto/ethnographic notes, 'Due to my lack of muscle and the flabbiness of my belly fat... I was almost shocked to be framed as a kind of ideal Bear'. It was a telling experience to be reminded by Aaron that while fat and muscle make me feel anxious about my body, my Whiteness is heavily valorised in Bear spaces. As Gan (2001) has written, for fat GBQ men of colour Whiteness can influence their experiences of Bear spaces, not only because UK and US Bear spaces are predominantly filled with White bodies but because their Bear cultures tend to frame White bodies as 'ideal'. This will necessarily challenge the elements which can make Bear spaces comfortable for fat GBQ men of colour.

As noted in Theme 4, the possession of certain body features was strongly related with being a Bear, such as having bellies, beards, and body hair (see also Kampf, 2000; Wright, 1997; Wright, 2000). But this was not a matter of simply having these bodily features:

Group
2

Robin: *The whole Bear community was created from people that didn't feel like they fit the mould, right? So then they created their own community where they could feel accepted... And now it's, you don't have the right beard or enough body hair or the right body shape, and you're not a Bear.*

Having not just a beard but the ‘right’ beard (and belly, body hair and so on) was discussed by participants across the dataset. Fat men without beards and body hair were felt to have more difficulties fitting into Bear spaces – but so were those without the ‘right’ kind:

Aaron: *I've seen a couple big guys that have really massive beards and I look at them jealously, 'cause I'm all "You bastard! Gimme your beard!"... To feel that image of what a Bear is in terms of facial hair. You feel a bit inadequate with this. Whereas like, your beard seems fuller, whereas mine is stringy and wispy and it goes that way.*
<he points to the side>

Interview
17

Guy: *There's probably two or three things I'd say to a younger me if I could, but one of them would be, "Don't give a shit about people rejecting you because... your beard is the wrong sort, your beard is a neck beard rather than a proper beard"*

Interview
24

These participants describe the ‘wrong’ sorts of beard which they perceive as leading to feelings of inadequacy and rejection. This could be about volume and texture, such as beards that are ‘stringy and wispy’ rather than ‘massive’ and ‘fuller’. It could also be about styling, such as ‘a neck beard rather than a proper beard’. These examples demonstrate that in addition to simply having or not having a beard, there are material differences between beards which can be significant factors regarding fat GBQ men’s experiences in Bear spaces.

With regard to fat itself Sub-theme 4.1 has already shown that material differences between fat men’s bodies (e.g. how fat they are) can be very significant factors in making Bear spaces comfortable. But participants’ discussions also reveal the importance of recognising other material differences between fat on bodies:

Daniel: *I felt like at Pride it was very much there's a Bear body, you know?... I feel like I'm an outsider sometimes 'cause I've got two tummies, I haven't got the round one, I feel like I'm not a Bear. Or how it's portrayed as a Bear... I still get quite a bit of negative experience because my stomachs are split, so I've got two tummies, and most Bears that you see have just got the one rounded stomach.*

Interview
8

Here Daniel is describing not so much how fat he is (e.g. Sub-theme 4.1) but rather the shape of his fat stomach (‘my stomachs are split, so I’ve got two tummies’) which results in a ‘bit of a negative experience’. And he compares it not against a stomach that is smaller but one that is ‘rounded’ in shape. Others described similar experiences of having ‘two bellies’ or ‘three bellies’, and similarly identified a ‘round’ belly as the most ideal and desirable shape for Bears. Participants also discussed the consistency of body fat and how it felt to the touch:

Carlos: *I've met so many people up here who are like, "Oh God, he hasn't got a beard, he's too skinny, he's too fat, he's the wrong fat."*

Nick: *What's the wrong fat?*

Carlos: *Oh, the wrong fat is you're too jelly.*

Interview
2

Jeff: *There's the acceptable fat which is muscly with a belly and hairy, and there's unacceptable fat which is a white, flabby, rippling... I would look really weird with a harness with all these rippling bits.*

Interview
18

An ‘acceptable’ fat belly that is ‘rounded’ and ‘muscly’ suggests material fat which is firm to the touch. An ‘unacceptable’ or ‘wrong’ fat belly is softer to touch and with a motion of its own – ‘jelly’ or ‘flabby, rippling’. Moss E. Norman (2013) has noted ideas amongst heterosexual men of ‘hard fat’ which is associated with masculinity, and ‘soft fat’ which is associated with femininity. Similar gendered bodily ideals may be at play in Bear spaces, so that men with round, firm bellies may be more valorised than those with soft and sagging bellies.

This sub-theme demonstrates the importance of considering the material features of fat GBQ men's bodies. This can include race and ethnicity, particularly the Whiteness of ideal Bear bodies. It can also mean not only the presence or absence of bodily features like hair or fat, but also their different physical qualities. These material differences between Bear bodies can impact on fat men's experiences in Bear spaces.

Sub-theme 4.4: Representations of Bears

Sub-theme 4.4 key points:

- 🐻 *Representation of Bears tend to match slimmer and muscular idealised Bear bodies.*
- 🐻 *These representations set men's expectation of what Bear bodies should look like, and can make them feel they don't fit into Bear spaces.*
- 🐻 *Commercialised aspects of Bear spaces may encourage the circulation of idealised representations.*

Finally, Sub-theme 4.4 focuses on visual representations of Bears, such as marketing and promotional photographs and illustrations³, and Bear merchandise and commodities such as clothing and posters (often on sale in Bear spaces, particularly at multi-day events). This theme draws not just on participants' discussions about the representation of Bears but also my own written auto/ethnographic observations.

Representations of Bears are important. Participants were very conscious that Bear representations did not accurately depict the kinds of bodies actually in most Bear spaces. But they repeatedly said that their early experiences in Bear spaces had been heavily influenced by the images of Bear which they had seen:

Carlos: *A lot of those pictures were hard to come by in the early days, so you would see the quintessential lord and saviour Jack Radcliffe, who basically was the Adonis himself. Unfortunately, that obviously set your calibration, especially at formative times.*

Interview
2

Jay: *That very well-trimmed, very perfect look that Jack Radcliffe and his fellow pretty Bears or perfect Bears gave out, that wasn't what I was like and it wasn't what most of my friends looked like... Much the same as general gay magazines, you have to look like this in order to be part of the group... I just felt, reading some of the Bearier stuff, in order to be part of this I also have to conform to that look.*

Interview
15

Magazine images such as of muscled, 'very perfect' and 'Adonis' Bear porn star Jack Radcliffe (see Suresha, 2009:173-182), and other 'pretty Bears or perfect Bears' would 'set your calibration' by establishing a benchmark for what Bear bodies were expected to 'conform' to. Younger participants did not seem familiar with such early Bear media, but suggested that Bear spaces' advertising and social media had similar 'calibrating' effects. According to my auto/ethnographic observations these usually seemed to depict White men, mostly bearded, masculine-coded, and muscular – and this was indeed how participants tended to describe them:

Aaron: *There was a bloke who used to take photographs of you and make you a little icon... Basically, when they took the picture of you, they made you look good, so they slimmed you down, they made you taller, they gave the 'V' shape, again it was feeding into that image of what a Bear should be. Muscly, slim... And if you get bulge <pats stomach>, it would be a little bulge. I think maybe people wanted to look better.*

Interview
17

Bear representations appear to reproduce the hierarchies of Bear bodies discussed in Theme 4 and Sub-themes 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 – slimmer, more muscular, and with a small belly. Participants suggested that by establishing particular bodies as 'ideal' and 'the Bear image', representations like these can make fat GBQ men feel that they don't or won't 'fit into' Bear communities and spaces because they don't - or even can't - match that image:

³ I've chosen not to include images analysed as part of the project in this section. While these would certainly provide some useful examples, they would immediately identify the groups and spaces under discussion and this is not my intention.

Daniel: *It was a positive experience except from the part where I wouldn't take my top off because I didn't feel comfortable and I didn't feel like I fitted into the ideal Bear if you wanted to call it that. How the media and how online portrays it.*

Bear space organisers recognised the importance of Bear representation in their own advertising and promotion, and were also aware of tensions between the bodies represented by their advertising, the kinds of bodies who came to their Bear spaces, and their goals to create inclusive spaces:

Ryan: *In terms of advertising it's always Muscle Bears. I'm like, yeah people like that body shape, of course they do, people enjoy looking at that, but when ninety percent of people who attend your Bear event are big, why are you not putting them on the posters? [In our Bear group] we've still got muscle guys on there 'cause they're still welcome... But we're also making sure we're putting big guys back on posters. That annoys me a bit when you see like [Bear club nights]. Any one-off Bear events it's always two muscular guys... Over the last few years there almost seems to be a push of, "Hey, this is what the ideal Bear looks like." Which really annoys me, 'cause that's not what our community is at all.*

Jeff: *I don't think we're as open as we like to think we are. 'Cause we've had people showing up to [our social group], they might come up and go, "Oh well I know I don't look like the Bear type"... I suppose in some ways our logo might actually... Our logo does project a certain view. Maybe that's something we would probably revisit at some point, differently.*

Both Ryan and Jeff, as organisers of different Bear social groups, noted that their groups' own advertising has tended to stress muscular men, despite their own body-inclusive perspectives. For Ryan this is about the photos on their adverts, while for Jeff it is about his group's illustrated logo which depicts only muscular men. Both are also aware of distinctions between the kinds of men who actually visit and those on the imagery which non-organiser participants noted previously, and the alienating effect that this can have on men visiting Bear spaces, so that they come to question their own presence by stating *'I know I don't look like the Bear type'*.

Though he disagrees with the over-representation of muscular bodies as *'ideal'*, Ryan points out that *'people enjoy looking at that'*. As most Bear spaces rely on sales to some extent, it is understandable that organisers feel compelled to advertise using what *'people enjoy looking at'*. Hierarchies of Bear bodies are reproduced through advertising not simply because Bear organisers market ideal Bear bodies to Bear communities, but because such ideals are already present in Bear communities. In fact many participants actively consumed the same Bear representations they described as making them feel alienated from Bear communities. Daniel, for example, wore a T-shirt depicting a slim, hyper-muscular *'ideal Bear'* purchased at a Bear event in the same interview where he said *'I didn't feel like I fitted into the ideal Bear... How the media and how online portrays it'* (above). Bear writers have critiqued the commercialisation of Bear communities as demanding men buy their way into Bearhood (Papadopoulos, 2001; Wright, 1997). But this theme suggests that commercialisation may also impact on fat men's feelings of inclusion with regard to their bodies.

This final theme indicates that representations of Bears do not tend to match the bodies of those actually in the spaces, and are usually aligned with the kinds of hierarchies of bodies outlined across Theme 4 and Sub-themes 4.1-4.3. This could understandably make some fat GBQ men feel alienated from Bear spaces and that they did not fit into them. Organisers of Bear spaces and groups were aware of this issue, but commercialised aspects of Bear spaces such as advertising and selling merchandise could encourage the circulation of idealised representations even by those critical of them.

AFTERWARD

This report establishes some solid evidence to support what I suspect many Bears already know to be true about our spaces and our communities in the UK. It indicates that Bear spaces are valuable as they can offer fat GBQ men, as well as others, places to feel comfortable and desirable when we are so often made to feel the opposite elsewhere, including other LGBTQ spaces. It also suggests that Bear spaces are not 'naturally' comfortable for fat GBQ men. Instead it is the people - the bodies - actually present in Bear spaces which help create this sense of comfort. However it's clear that our spaces are not free from fat stigma, and that the positive aspects of UK Bear spaces are more available to some men than others (such as men with the 'wrong kinds' of fat Bear bodies).

I want to stress the importance of future research and engagement regarding the inclusion of more marginalised fat GBQ men in Bear spaces. These include fat guys of colour, and also particularly fat fat guys. There is clearly work to be done to actively make such men feel included in our spaces and part of our communities. If – as I hope I've shown - Bear spaces are important sites of comfort and even empowerment for fat GBQ guys, then it's vital that they are made welcoming to the most marginalised of us too.

I hope that this report will help Bears and others to reflect on our experiences and our relationships with our bodies; and that Bear organisers and everyone in our communities will find it helpful in producing spaces that are positive for fat GBQ men.



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