

FAAB-Mentality

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Abstract

[alert type="success"]I've been meaning to post this for a while now, as an explanation and reference for what I've been calling FAAB-mentality (described below). I originally wrote and performed this piece for the fourth annual installment of Girl Talk: A Cis and Trans Woman Dialogue in March 2012. Baby Talk I read blogs. And an unfortunate consequence of reading [...]

Article

Baby Talk

I read blogs. And an unfortunate consequence of reading blogs is that sometimes you stumble upon statements that make you upset. Lately, I've been dwelling over one single sentence from a blog post that I read a few months ago. The author was a femme-identified cis woman who described her identity this way:

"I only say I'm queer to steer clear of sex acts with cisgender men whilst simultaneously accommodating my devout lesbianism and propensity towards dating trans men when the butch pool feels too shallow."

I have become preoccupied with this quote, not because it is unusual or extraordinary - on the contrary, these are very commonplace sentiments among queer women these days. Rather, my interest in this quote stems from how perfectly it illustrates the subtle ways in which exclusion transpires in today's queer women's communities.

First, she defines "queer" in terms of her "devout lesbianism" and "steering clear of cisgender men." Given her definition, a bisexual woman (such as me), who sometimes does have sex with cis men, must automatically be **not** queer--aka, straight. Ah, the decades old lesbian tradition of erasing the B out of LGBT.

Second, she describes trans men as though they are not **really** men, but just another variety of butch woman. Indeed, trans male[pullquote align="right"]Yet somehow, over the last few years, FAAB has been appropriated by many cis queer women who wish to convey their affiliation with trans men, and to distance themselves trans women as well as cis men.[/pullquote] acceptance and desirability in queer women's spaces often hinges on this assumption, which is partly why so many FTM-spectrum folks who are on "T," prefer the pronoun "he," and move through the world as men, nevertheless disavow any male-identification.

But from my perspective, the most poignant aspect of this quote is that there is absolutely no mention

of trans women. We are absent, irrelevant, just as we are in most queer women's spaces. I suppose that this isn't surprising. If, like the author, most cis queer women believe that trans men are really butch women, then trans women must really be men. And, given this, if they believe that dating men disqualifies them from being queer, then trans women aren't even going to be on their radar.

Lately, I've begun calling this mindset the FAAB-mentality. FAAB is an acronym for female-assigned-at-birth. Both FAAB and its counterpart MAAB (male-assigned-at-birth) were originally coined by trans activists in order to challenge invalidating concepts such as "birth sex," "bio boys" and "genetic girls," and to stress that our gender identities are far more relevant than how the straight world nonconsensually categorized us when we were babies. Yet somehow, over the last few years, FAAB has been appropriated by many cis queer women who wish to convey their affiliation with trans men, and to distance themselves trans women as well as cis men.

For instance, the musician Bitch recently wrote an "open letter" explaining why her support of trans woman-excluding women's spaces is not "transphobic." She begins her letter by dismissing cis/trans terminology, then she reframes the issue in terms of FAABs versus MAABs. Again, this is not an isolated incident--one can see FAAB-mentality rear its ugly head in radical-feminist blogs, butch/femme settings, and trans events. I've even seen queer folks wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the word FAABulous.

So let me state for the record: I am not a fucking MAAB! I am a trans woman. And unlike all the so-called "FAAB FTMs" who move freely in queer women's spaces, I identify and move through the world as a woman. The whole fucking point of trans activism is to get people to respect us for who we are, not for what the straight world expected us to grow up to be when we were mere babies. As far as I'm concerned, anyone who categorizes any trans person based upon how we were coercively assigned at birth is not merely anti-trans, but they are quite literally engaging in baby talk.

But FAAB-mentality isn't only transphobic--it's also biphobic, specifically toward bi women who are sexual with cis men. It plays into baseless accusations that bisexual-identified women "reinforce the binary," yet celebrates those who embrace the supposedly more righteous label "pansexual." Now I have nothing against the term "pansexual" per se. But in queer women's circles, it is often used as a code word to communicate: "I am sexual with everyone except cis men and trans women."

Finally, despite all the cis femmes who have embraced FAAB terminology (as it allows them to partner with trans men yet still be considered lesbian), FAAB-mentality is highly femmephobic. After all, we live in a queer culture that valorizes sexual- and gender-non-conformity. So when FAAB-mentality defines womanhood in terms of being labeled "girl" as a baby, then the most queerest, coolest thing you can grow up to be is androgynous, or butch, or trans masculine. In other words, FAAB-mentality is inexorably linked to masculine-centrism in queer women's communities. As a result, femmes are viewed as suspect, unless of course they prove their queerness by pairing with someone more outwardly gender-non-conforming than them.

So I say: let's stop talking in baby talk! Let's purge the terms FAAB and MAAB from our queer vocabularies. And most importantly, let's stop viewing the world through the distorted lens of FAAB-mentality, as it inevitably causes femme, bisexual and trans women to be treated as second-class queer citizens. Instead of fetishizing birth assignments and masculine gender expression, let's create

new heterogeneous queer women's communities that celebrate difference--where a woman doesn't have to be born a particular way, or have sex a particular way, or dress or express their genders a particular way, or fulfill some kind of queer stereotype, in order to be appreciated.

Endnote: I understand the need to talk about transgender spectrums, and to develop language that accommodates trans people who don't fully identify as trans women or trans men. Rather than using MAAB and FAAB, I believe that we should refer to people who have a MTF trajectory as being on the trans female/feminine spectrum, and those with a FTM trajectory as being on the trans male/masculine spectrum. And since people seem to love acronyms when referring to trans people (a tendency I personally find rather dehumanizing), we could refer to these categories as the TF and TM spectrums, respectively (where the "F" in TF can refer to either female and/or feminine, and the "M" in TM refers can refer to either male and/or masculine). I believe that this terminology is fully inclusive, and centers our experiences on our self-identities and self-understandings, rather than non-consensual birth assignments.

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