

Why We Eat Fire (explanation written by Gunner, 2007)

Eating fire has been taught by various Lesbian Avengers chapters across the country over the years. LESBIAN AVENGERS was a movement specifically for "lesbian survival and visibility" that grew out of the direct-action group ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) in the early 1990s. Over the years the chapters have dwindled. I fear that the history and tradition of fire eating will not be passed on with the loss of Lesbian Avengers Chapters. As a past Boston avenger I have taught over 100 or so women and trans folks how to eat fire over the last 7 years and would like to see the ritual continued.

The original fire eating was done in response to an incident in Oregon in which bigots burned the home of Hattie Mae Cohens, a lesbian, and Brian Mock, a gay man. Cohens and Mock were fighting initiative 9 in Oregon, which would have amended the state constitution to declare homosexuality perverse. They were killed in the fire.

Today, we see hate crimes on the rise against LGBT youth, states passing DOMA's and anti-LGBT adoption laws, and transgender people still murdered at a rate of one a month and discriminated in jobs, housing, and healthcare. Ritual of fire eating is still important today. Many who have learned to eat fire and use the skill in response to anti-LGBT sentiment have found it empowering.