

Naomi Cohen Choked on the Culture

The death of Cass Elliot has special significance for people concerned with Fat Liberation. For we are going to expose the lies and manipulations by which fat people are oppressed within this society. Why would a "successful", popular, energetic woman always be placing her body under stress by dieting? And how could the doctors ignore the nature of this body stress when searching for a cause of death?

In relation to this, the Fat Underground has been doing research and studies are being revealed showing that constant weight loss, then gain, then weight loss again, the "yo yo syndrome," is bad for the body. 99% of those who diet gain the weight back. When weight is gained back it's not usually from overeating, but rather that the body wants its natural needs met, instead of the strain of starvation. Strenuous dieting degenerates and shrivels the muscle tissue in the heart and elsewhere. And in the process of the body trying to recover or recuperate itself, the fat cells expand into those places where the muscle has degenerated. However, most doctors are biased toward slimness and haven't much concerned themselves with how harmful dieting can be. A study of Italian immigrants in Pennsylvania shows that fat people who aren't exposed to, or aware of, anti-fat attitudes live long, healthy lives, but that the emotional stresses on their culturally assimilated, fat descendents had negative effects.

When the fashion was to be heavy, and fat women were the more valued sex objects of the day, (see the painting of Renoir, Rubens . . .), thin folks were often scorned and mocked. Today, a flowing, sensual fullness of flesh is seen as evil, threatening, and too sexy. We must continue to say and to write that fat people develop health problems because of the stressful nature of being members of an oppressed group. From childhood on we must listen to the unasked for "helpful advice" of anyone who decides to tell us how we should look. It's very hard to always have been told, how pretty I'd be if I lost weight. Not healthy, happy, or more together, just "pretty." Where any fool on the street feels he/she had the privilege to insult us.

"When you go out in the street,
so many hassles with the heat,
no one there can fill your desire."

Certainly fat people don't benefit from being insulted. Once someone tried to make fun of me on the street by calling out, "Hey, Mama Cass!" The social order functions by keeping certain elements in their place, the people divided and factionalized, so that those who are in power remain there. New scapegoats are always being harnessed.

Cass Elliot had lost 80 lbs. just before starting a strenuous two-week concert schedule. After the concerts she'd been partying for days with no sleep. (When we're not accepted we



can harm ourselves by overcompensation.) We can mention once more the sado-masochism and competitive nature of our system, as exemplified in the rock and film industry. Others, including Montgomery Clift and James Morrison (The Doors), died of heart attacks that couldn't be blamed on drugs or fat. Non-conformity in looks, age, or politics is stifled unless it can make a lot of money, and even then the performers still suffer and die early.

One of the earliest reports about her death said that she choked on a ham sandwich. That's not how she died though: Naomi Cohen choked on the culture, on the stale empty air and worthless standards of our conditioning. But Fat Power/Pride and love of sensuality is being reborn and is here to stay!

"Safe in my garden, an ancient flower blooms, and the scent from its nature slowly fills the room, and its perfume means such that it's causing me to swoon..."

For more information on Fat Liberation send a self-addressed stamped envelope and 50 cents to cover costs to: The Fat Underground, [REDACTED]. Or leave a message with the Women's Switchboard, [REDACTED].

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