

"we are not our enemies"

by Aldebaran

My mother always said to me, "You have such a pretty face. If only you would lose some weight..." So I got the message at an early age that I was wasting my pretty face, and didn't really deserve to have it. Reaching my teens, I felt that I didn't deserve to have any of the "good things" that supposedly reward girls who make themselves pretty--boyfriends, nice clothes, and social approval--which seemed to me then the same as life itself.

I felt guilty almost all of my life: guilty for eating, guilty for wanting nice things, guilty for taking up space, guilty just for being. Watching thin people eat the "fattening" foods which I passed up made me feel crazy: I was deprived, but they were thin. The more I thought about food, the crazier I felt.

I had dieted off and on since age nine, but in my third year of college, living in the dormitory (and fearing that I'd never get a man the way I looked), I decided to lose weight once and for all. Over that year I dieted so hard that my menstruation dried up. When it was all over, I had the proverbial size-nine body. Soon thereafter I had boyfriends, and finally a husband.

At first, to make sure that I kept all these things, I tried to pattern my eating after the women with whom I ate three meals a day in the dormitory cafeteria. They were slim, so I felt sure that they did not overeat. But as soon as I restored the bread to my sandwiches--I started gaining weight!

Now this really made me feel crazy because I could tell that I was eating no more than anyone else, and I was as active physically as they. Furthermore, I went to bed hungry every night. But overeating was the only explanation that I had to work with. The hunger, I decided, was a mental trick. And I suspected that I must be blacking out and eating huge amounts of food during periods of unconsciousness. Here was real proof that I was crazy--I didn't dare tell anyone for fear that I'd be locked up.

"I MUST HAVE EATEN 30 CANDY BARS, TERRIFIED SOMEONE MIGHT TAKE THE FOOD AWAY"

I kept this terrible secret for months. But one night, all the energy of my despair blew out in one terrific explosion. That night I must have eaten thirty candy bars, terrified that someone might discover me and take the food away.

Here at last was a good explanation for gaining weight. I continued to binge this way for several years, relieved to know that I was not crazy, only "sick." I went back to the doctors and psychologists. They told me that they could "cure" me if only I would obey them and pay for their advice. But when their "cures" all failed, they blamed me for not cooperating. There was never any question that what they were doing might be wrong.

I think that the very worst part of being fat was believing that I was my enemy, and that the people who harassed and degraded me were my friends.

Oppression is mystified when it pretends to be love. Hogie Wyckoff developed equations of radical therapy which show the consequences of mystified oppression: **Oppression plus Mystification equals Alienation.**

An up-front oppressor says, "I'm going to oppress the shit out of you." One can hate such oppressors and struggle against them clearly and cleanly. This makes such oppression hard to enforce. Mystified oppression is much easier to enforce, because it tricks oppressed people into hating themselves and makes them feel guilty for not liking their oppression. It diverts energy that could be used toward

liberation into futile struggles against one's own desires.

This is not the place to present the information demystifying oppression of fat people. For that, I hope you'll read my article, "Fat Liberation" in **Issues in Radical Therapy, vol. 1 no. 3.** Here I'd like to present some of the facts which had the greatest impact on me.

Less than 1% of those who try to lose weight succeed, and keep it off for more than a year or two. (**I'm not alone.**) The claims of reducing aids, salons, doctors, etc. are lies--see the above statistic. But these liars continue to make billions of dollars each year. (**I've been cheated.**)

The average fat person does not consume more calories than the average thin person, but fat people who have lost weight regain it eating less than the normal amount of food. (**I am not crazy and never was crazy. The eating that I saw and the hunger that I felt were real.**)

Fat people living in communities where it's ok to be fat, who actually like themselves, live vigorously, feel healthy, and are medically healthy. (**I'm not my enemy; my persecutors are.**)

Beauty is an opinion. (**I am beautiful.**)

When I came upon this information I was in a good place to hear it. Support from my sisters had freed me from needing men's approval. I'd met an extremely fat woman whose beauty and vigor proved to me beyond any doubt that fat could be okay. The recent experience of having been denied a job because of my weight and then laughed at when I tried to appeal the matter brought home to me my status as one of an oppressed minority.

Oppression plus Awareness equals Anger. Why is this information affecting millions of people not better publicized? I'm enraged at the people who kept me feeling crazy, helpless, doomed and alone so they could continue to make billions of dollars off of my misery. I'm enraged at the doctors and therapists who blame me for the failure of their theories. I'm enraged at the people who won't hire me because they think I'm an uncontrolled, unhealthy slob. I'm enraged at skinny Dr. Stillman, whose diet made millions for him but never worked for me. I'm enraged at the man on television who tells me that I'm ugly, and at the writers who perpetuate the stereotype that I'm pathetic or evil. I'm enraged, I'm enraged.

Awareness plus Contact equals Action

→ **Liberation.** This is the last equation, and I, and others like me, are in the process of bringing it about. When oppressed people make contact with each other they can act to end their oppression; but no one can be liberated in a society where others are still oppressed.

Some fat women and men in the Los Angeles area are forming a fat liberation collective. We will be writing, speaking, and acting, spreading the information that the commercial press has obscured. You will be hearing from us.

Simone Gold and I are co-leading a radical therapy problem-solving group for fat women. Believing that therapy means change, not adjustment, we support women to stop trying to adjust to demands at which they have no reasonable hope of success. It's wrong for people to have to spend all their lives failing.

The newness of this struggle makes it frightening. How can we few women support each other against all the scorn and shame that the rest of the world, in the mystified name of "love," piles on us? Facing the world without the protection of apologies or the hope of diets may feel like leaping off the top of a cliff. But the cliff is barren, and I believe in the power of sisterhood to make our landing safe. We are right-on smart and beautiful people, and we can land on our feet as winners.