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Where are all the allies, and where do we go from here?

BY GUEST WRITER | SEPTEMBER 5, 2008

During the last few months, I've either witnessed or been a part of several fatosphere discussions/arguments that involved discussion about race, racism, and the points of intersection with fat.

I've been meaning to write a piece about what good ally behavior might look like in these situations, but life got in the way. Unfortunately, the lack of (until now) a widespread critical discussion about the 1000 Paper Cranes project jolted me into the harsh reality that either folks still don't fundamentally get it, or that people aren't actually interested in thinking about more than a single-issue politic in their writing and activism.

I won't presume to know the race of Anonymous, but I have seen several white folks reply to that post and other posts about the project with some variation of, "You know, this did make me uncomfortable, but I didn't say anything." There was only one dissenter to the project on the Fat Studies list, one objecter on the fatshionista livejournal community, and zero criticism when Big Fat Blog posted about it. (I'm also curious to know if the person who accused "tara" (not me) of being an "FA troll" on FatGrrl was referring to me.)

Many many many people (POC and white) have pointed out before that racism isn't *just* the overt stuff. It is complex, nuanced, and far reaching because it is interwoven into every nook any cranny of this white supremacist culture. It can take a whole lot of time and thought and effort to recognize this if it's not something you experience firsthand, and even those of us who *do* see racism on a daily basis are taught to question ourselves and our judgment when we think something we see or hear or read is racist. This is a function of modern white supremacy: it is built into the foundation of our culture, and we are trained not to see it just like we don't "see" the air we breathe.

Which is why it was so devastating to me that I saw such little dissent over the 1000 Paper Cranes project. I had only heard about it about a week ago, but I did a search on it and could hardly find *anything* on it. And I was outraged. *Surely*, I thought, this is such a plain and simple example of inappropriately racist hyperbole and a clearcut form of the worst kind of appropriation, that it was boggling how few allies were speaking up.

This particular situation, I believe, relates to what I wrote about Beth Ditto awhile back. Maybe people don't want to speak out against their fat s/heroes (i.e. Marilyn Wann) or hesitate to hold them accountable when they fuck up. And, for the record, I believe that Marilyn fucked up in a major way, both in the execution of the project and her justification for it (citing that two of her Japanese friends said it was ok). But you know who else fucked up? White allies. And not just in this situation, but again and again. Jumping on the "yeah, that's racist!" bandwagon after someone else says it is not enough. Even when you have an unsettling feeling in your stomach about something, but don't quite know why, it is quite easy, *especially* with this medium, to do an informal scan of

WHERE AM I?



Two Whole Cakes is a blog written by Lesley Kinzel, a mouthy fat broad who deals in body politics, social justice activism, and pop-cultural criticism, usually from a feminist-flavored perspective.

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After a two year — uh — hiatus, we're happy to present almost two hours of hot new

the fatosphere to see what perspectives other folk might bring. Being an ally isn't just about supporting the voices of POC speaking out against racism; it is also about taking that risk, doing that work, and putting out your own thoughts when you see or hear or read something that you believe to be racist. White supremacy was not created by POC, we are not in positions of cultural, political, or institutional power to end it, and this means that this shit will never end unless white folks do most of the fucking work.

So this is me, holding community leaders and our allies accountable for your silence. During the original discussions about the waistline policy, and in Anonymous's recent post, several people accused "the Japanese" (as if they are a monolith!) of discouraging dissent. How ironic is this accusation when almost the entire fatosphere chose to stay silent about something they themselves knew was probably wrong?

To end this critical post on a creative note, I'd like to do my own informal poll of what *you* think constitutes good ally behavior. And further, how can we hold each other accountable in such a temporal, transient space?

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Fatcast action! (YES, featuring my charming lisp and multitudinous "y'know"s!) In this episode, Marianne and I discuss how incredibly difficult it can be to take care of yourself, and it's a little less upbeat than we planned. [...]



FATCAST

with Lesley Kinzel & Marianne Kirby

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