

# Fat, Lesbian and Proud

By Judith Stein with ReeRee Soers

## VOICES FROM THE LESBIAN COMMUNITY

At a lesbian rap group:

"I used to be really fat and miserable, then I came out. All that ugly fat just dropped off. I didn't diet or anything — I just got my head together and the fat disappeared!"

Messages: Fat is ugly. Fat is an indication of "unloveliness." Being fat means being miserable. The best lesbians are not fat.

At a music festival where many women take off their clothes: (spoken by two women following a fat woman with her shirt off)

"If I looked like that, I wouldn't take off my clothes!"

Messages: Fat is ugly. Fat women should be ashamed of their bodies. Fat women should have the decency to keep their clothes on and not expose all that disgusting flesh. Fat women are entitled to fewer freedoms than thin women.

At a lesbian bar:

"Look at those two fetuses dancing. They give lesbians a bad name — people will think women become dykes when they're too ugly to get by as straight."

Messages: Fat is ugly. Fat women shouldn't dance. Fat women dance with other fat women because that is all they can get. If fat women are going to be lesbians, they should be closeted to avoid making life harder for other lesbians.

Any conversation between a fat dyke and a skinny dyke:

"I really do like you as a friend... I mean you're really nurturing, caring... But I'm not attracted to fat bodies. I don't know why, but fat women just don't turn me on."

Messages: Fat is ugly. Fat lesbians make good friends, but not lovers. Fat bodies are not attractive. Fat women are nurturing. Thin women happen not to be attracted to fat women.

## VOICES FROM FAT LESBIANS

Stop dieting this shit out to us!! All those examples are real things that real women said to us. Those things hurt — and they're based on lies. We will not take it anymore!

We are real lesbians, we are "together" lesbians. We are strong, we are healthy, and we will be heard. Clear the myths about fat out of your head — they are a poison planted there by men hating big strong women. We, too, are beautiful Amazons, of great power and grace. Listen good — you have a lot to learn from us.

Fat dykes are joining together to unlearn the lies planted in our own heads, and to confront our "sisters." We will not allow thin dykes to treat us like ugly, unlovely, unhealthy shameful women. Fat dykes are saying: Stop fat oppression!! We are throwing our weight around!

## LIES THE FATHERS TOLD US

Everything you were ever taught in this culture about fat, fat people, fat people's eating habits and dieting is a lie. An enormous industry — the medical/diet/therapy industry — makes \$12 billion each year in support of these lies. This industry covers up and ignores medically documented research which would expose them — to the point where certain "facts" about fat are taken as absolute truths. These are the same people who market women as inferior, or at best, defective men; and who are convinced that gay people are perverts, or at best, only poorly-adjusted heterosexuals.

Remember, the medical research contradicts everything you were taught about fat people. Remember too, that our lives are testimonies contracting everything we were taught about the misery, maladjustment and perversion of being gay. Gay people know that the straight medical/legal/psychiatric industry lies about us. So, too, do fat people know that they lie about being fat. We, we fat people, hereby expose their lies!!

Every medical fact in this article is found in mainstream medical publications; most is also used within, and quoted from, Fat Liberation materials, especially *Why Liberated Eating?* by Vivian Mayer, Fat Liberator Publications, 1980.

Lie #1: Fat people are fat because we eat too much, too often, at the wrong times, or because something is wrong in our bodies which keeps us from knowing when we are "really" full, or "really" hungry.

The truth: Over 100 studies have attempted to "prove" that fat people eat differently, or more, or more often than thin people. Every attempt to "prove" this has failed. Even so, everyone from lovers to doctors to jerks on the street will insist that something is wrong with fat people's appetites. In the face of overwhelming pressure, many fat people believe this lie ourselves. (This is called internalizing the Oppression — when they aren't around to do it to us, we will do it to ourselves, and to each other!)

Suppression of the truth about fat people's eating habits is a conspiracy by the multi-billion dollar diet industry so they can keep offering "new and better" ways for us to lose weight. These methods, new, old, "sensible" and quick are bound to do three things: (1) Fail; (2) Keep us obsessed about our food intake and our weight; (3) Take our money and rip us off.

Lie #2: Medically supervised "sensible" weight loss diets are an effective way to achieve permanent weight loss.

The truth: Diets, of all types, have a 96-99% failure rate over a five year period. This means that over five years, any weight lost will be regained for 96-98 out of 100 people. This is true for all types of weight-loss diets and programs, including behavior modification. In fact, behavior modification programs (including the "compulsive eating" or "food issues" groups which are plentiful in the feminist therapy community) have the highest failure rate of all.

The process of dieting — restricting food/calorie intake with the goal of decreasing body weight — permanently alters the metabolism (body chemistry) by making the body more efficient (using less fuel — food — to accomplish the same work — staying alive). When food/calorie intake returns to normal, the dieter will regain not only the weight lost, but usually more. This is true 90% of the time. This pattern of increasing weight

gain after each diet failure (remember — diet failures are biochemical fact — not reflections of the dieter's lack of will-power, character, etc.) can be infinite. As a result of repeated dieting, many fat people are fatter than they would be had they never dieted.

The failure rate for diets, 96-98%, should indicate that dieting is a far from effective "treatment" for obesity — being fat. Nevertheless, doctors, therapists, families, lovers all insist that fat people should try to lose weight through dieting. The failure rate for therapeutically "curing" gay people is about the same — 96-99% fail to become heterosexual. Many therapists, doctors, and families still wish that gay people would undertake a "cure." Most gay people have the good sense — and the community support — to refuse, and even fight back — something known as "Gay Pride." Lesbians and gays recognize that being gay is no sickness, and needs no cure. Fat people are realizing that being fat is no sickness — and needs no cure!!

Lie #3: Even if they don't work for everyone (98 out of 100), diets don't do any real harm.

The truth: Bullshit! Dieting kills people, especially women who are the main targets of the diet industry. Any and all health problems attributed to fatness are actually known to be results of dieting. These health problems are compounded by the repeated dieting brought on by the failure of diets — so that fat people who do what they are "supposed to do" — diet — bring on increased health problems by the inevitable on-again, off-again diet yoyo.

Repeated dieting has been linked with higher incidences of heart attacks and strokes. They blame it on being fat... but it really is dieting. Dieting can logically be linked with a whole range of illnesses including diabetes, kidney failure, and extreme emotional distress (including depression and suicide).

Dieting and socially-produced obsession with food intake and weight loss also cause all those behaviors known as compulsive eating (binging/vomiting, anorexia, "snacking food," storing food supplies etc.) — another case where fatness is blamed for problems caused by dieting or the pressure to diet.

Lie #4: Being fat puts a big strain on your heart — look at all those fat people with heart attacks and heart conditions.

The truth: Only one researcher, in another type of study, has ever separated fat subjects into dieters and non-dieters. This means that health problems caused by dieting can (and are) wrongly attributed to being fat!! In fact, one study of a working-class, Italian-American community in Pennsylvania, found that in a setting where fat was the norm, the incidence of heart attacks was significantly lower than the national average for thin people. In other words, where pressures and oppression of fat people were not present, fat people had fewer heart attacks than the national average. When the children of this community moved out into other areas, where fat is not accepted, and they tried to assimilate by dieting, their incidence of heart attacks rapidly escalated to the national average for fat people.

Heart attacks, strokes, high blood pressure are all stress-related diseases. Fat people live under enormous stress, all the time, because of the overwhelming hatred and ridicule we face every day. We also put our bodies under enormous strain by dieting repeatedly — these things, not being fat itself, are the major cause of ill-health in fat people.

One more fact about diets: The body does not begin to "burn off its fat" when a person diets. This is yet another myth which contradicts the "truth" portrayed by the diet industry. What happens instead is that the body, when deprived of its normal calorie intake, burns lean body tissue — this includes muscle tissue such as that surrounding the heart. It takes about two weeks for the metabolism to begin living off of stored carbohydrates ("burning off the fat") — until then, the body uses any lean tissue available to provide the necessary nutrients. This process is repeated each time a person begins a new diet — the first few weeks become a time of enormous physical damage to essential muscle structures. It is no wonder that autopsies on fat people dead of heart attacks often show the muscles around the heart totally destroyed — but this is caused by repeated dieting, not by being fat. Again, the "cure" is the cause of the problem.

When diets fail: First of all, when diets fail, we blame the dieter, not the treatment. We do this repeatedly, and there are always newer and "improved" diets to try. Then, after all these things fail the dieter is seen as a weak-willed slob, and she may become desperate. Then she is offered other alternatives — such as wiring her jaws shut, or stapling her stomach smaller, or removing most of her intestines. There are many side effects of these "treatments" — such as a 10% death rate from the intestinal surgery (intestinal bypass); or months of explosive painful diarrhea after the surgery; or that with stomach stapling she will be able to eat only 8-12 ounces of food or liquid at one time or she will suffer terrible pain and risk pulling out the staples. Even if you tell her all these side effects, and you tell her that these treatments don't even work very well (usually people lose no more than 100 pounds after intestinal bypass — if they start at 450, they will still be fat by anyone's definitions), she may be so desperate that she will go ahead with surgical "cures" anyway.

## LIVING AS FAT LESBIANS

We might begin our lives as fat lesbians in the belief that other lesbians had thrown off the myths of the patriarchy, and that we would be welcomed as whole and beautiful dykes. For most of us, that dream lasts about 30 seconds. Not only is the lesbian community, as a whole, totally passive about confronting man-made notions about fat and fat women, the community has developed its own cultural norms. As in the straight world, in the lesbian community fat women are considered defects, embarrassments, or, if we are really lucky, good listeners. We are not considered gorgeous Amazons, choice lovers, or strong and healthy dykes.

The reason for this mess is simple: lesbians have taken all the patriarchal notions about appropriate bodies for women, discarded some superficial level ideas about "ideal feminine beauty" and kept the rest. On top of what remains (which is a wealth of hatred for fat women, disabled women, women with any physical differences, and women of color) the lesbian community has added its own "ideal beauty" — the tough little

Are you tired of being put-down, told to lose weight, assumed and/or felt to be inferior and/or non-sexual and/or not a 'real' Lesbian?

Come join other **FAT DYKES** in our talking, discussing, and support of each other around our oppression. We'll have some serious growing, **FUN** times together as we learn, develop and demand our rights.

This is not a food group!!

beginning  
Thurs. Nov. 8

LRC

2104 Stevens

7-9 pm



## The Politics of Fat

Amazon. By definition, this Amazon cannot be fat (how can you be strong if you are fat, they ask?), although she can look big and strong. It definitely helps that the tough little Amazon can dress appropriately in good dyke clothes. This automatically eliminates most fat women since "good dyke clothes" are not made in our sizes. If we are lucky enough (and small enough) we can find blue jeans. Otherwise, we must struggle to be an Amazon in polyester knit pants — the only clothes in our size.

If we are welcomed into lesbian circles at all, it is as friends, intellectual companions, or confidantes. Lesbian communities have shown themselves, time and time again, to be unwilling to examine their attitudes which eliminate fat women as sexual beings and potential lovers. Thin women do not "just happen" to find fat women unattractive as lovers — they are socially conditioned to view fat as ugly, and fat women as ugly, undesirable and loathsome. All of us were trained in a hierarchy of social and sexual desirability — and fat women are near the bottom of that ladder. Thin women who are really interested in supporting Fat Liberation must do some work in their own minds and hearts — looking for and uprooting those standards of attractiveness which eliminate fat women.

Fat oppression hurts all women. In addition to keeping fat women totally pre-occupied with diets, food, and coping with day-to-day life in a society that says we are worthless because we are fat, fat oppression hurts all of us. Fear of getting fat, or getting fatter, keeps women pre-occupied with how we eat. Fear of getting fat keeps women who are well within social definitions of thinness terrified about what they put into their mouths.

The idea that the body is some wild beast, only held in check by some act of will-power and grim determination, otherwise to grow and grow and grow, is a notion that keeps all women focused on our eating, our food, and the size of our bodies. This idea is not only biologically false, it reeks of that Puritan ethic which claims that the body, and most especially women's bodies — need "firm restraint" and tight control. Men have devised many ways to control women's bodies and women's sexuality — and keeping us terrified of what would happen if we "let ourselves go" is merely one more bribe around our necks. Most probably, if we "let ourselves go" some of us would be fatter than what we are now, and many of us (thin and fat) would be about the same size. It is an illusion that controls us, a deep-seated, man-made hatred and fear of fat.)

### THROWING OUR WEIGHT AROUND

The Fat Liberation movement is a political coalition of groups and individuals who see that the oppression of fat people (through ridicule, discrimination and harassment) is a part of a systematic oppression based on the belief that fat people are not as good as thin people. Since its inception in the early 1970's in California, fat lesbians have been among the movers and shakers of the movement. While there are (and always have been) individual men who support Fat Liberation goals, the heart of the Fat Liberation movement is within the feminist community, and especially within the Lesbian feminist community.

Simply put, the goal of Fat Liberation is to end fat oppression, not by the individual adjustment (dieting or weight loss surgery) but by radical social change — creating new understandings about fat and fat people. One of the most crucial tasks is getting the truth out about fat, health, and dieting — especially to fat women who are the main targets of the misinformation and resulting oppression. We want to end the cycle of dieting, failing, and self-hatred that saps the strength of women, and keeps us weak and pre-occupied from other kinds of work. We know that fat women can stop the self-hatred and self-torment produced by this fat-hating society, but we know that fat women must also fight this hatred within our own communities. We want to stop the oppression of fat lesbians by the lesbian community — we claim our large and rightful place within it.

Fat women are networking across the country, sharing resources, tactics and information. We have formed consciousness-raising groups in cities all across the U.S., and have given presentations on Fat Liberation to women's communities in many places, including Minneapolis, Berkeley, Atlanta, and Boston. Fat Liberation is fueled by energy from fat lesbians — and we are using that energy to confront the medical profession. From Berkeley to Boston, lesbian fat activists are speaking out against the lies that are killing us — working within our own lesbian communities, and fighting the medical profession as well.

Fat lesbians have held week-end workshops in Minneapolis, and enjoyed each other's strength and support so much that these are becoming regular events. In Boston, the second Fat Lesbian Liberation group met in January and February, and women involved with that group are taking the information and energy outward. Fat Liberation supports an internal communications newsletter, and a movement press (Fat Liberator Publications). We are partying together, talking together, supporting each other as we confront jobs and hostility from people on the streets, store clerks, and from our lovers and friends. More women are connecting with Fat Liberation all the time and we are making our presence known within the gay and feminist communities.

There is work to be done — by all of us. Thin women owe themselves and their fat sisters, the re-learning of lies taught by the fathers. Read Fat Liberation literature, examine your ideas, your language, your attractions. Weed out the attitudes that keep you gagged by fear of fat, and keep your fat sisters isolated and alone.

Fat women — join us — you have nothing to lose! You are not a failure, not crazy, not ugly, not worthless. Together we are Amazons — fighters worthy of the name. We have information to share, support to offer and good times together. We are beautiful women who've been shamed into self-hatred and fear, and we say — no more!!

For more information about Fat Liberation, contact:  
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