

THEY ARE TRYING TO KILL US (but it's for our own good)

by Kelly

Oppression has many ways of showing up in everyday life. When a woman is subjected to daily doses of oppression, her health suffers. She is prone to high blood pressure, heart disease, and other stress-related problems. She is prone to chemical dependency. Her self-image suffers to the point that she learns to accept the abuse, as background noise in her life. This is the way life is for fat women.

I decided to steal back a small portion of our oppression, and then list the ways that we are not loved. The standard opener to many of the incessant "fat jokes" starts this way: *How fat is she? She's so fat that . . .*

1. They lie to her. The medical establishment has been aware for years that their "cure" for being fat has a 95-99% failure rate. They capitalize on the fact that the human body can lose anywhere from five pounds to 200 pounds temporarily, but after a five-year period, 95-99% of all women gain it all back. (Eighty percent gain back more than they lost.) Confronted with these overwhelming facts, they have done the simplest possible thing: they blame HER.

2. They exploit her pain. With nearly all women re-gaining all the weight they have just lost, and 80% actually getting fatter, she provides a constantly renewable market for the ten billion dollar diet industry. Since she is never going to get thin, they can exploit her forever.

3. They make her feel crazy. Since they will not admit that diets don't work, they accuse her of "cheating" when she fails to lose weight. Knowing that she did not cheat, she begins to doubt her sanity. They send her to therapists in order to discover why she doesn't want to be thin. Since they believe that losing weight is both possible and easy, they convince her that she is fat because she hates her mother, hates herself, fears men, fears her own sexuality, etc. There are hundreds of "theories" to explain her body shape. And there are thousands of therapists willing to help her get in touch with these deep "neurotic levels" as they get in touch with her wallet. The book *Fat Is a Feminist Issue* is just more of the same foolishness, rehashed and forced

upon us as "feminist." This crazy-making is convincing to a fat woman. If they tell her that she is fat because she is repressing her anger, she will search her thoughts and discover that, indeed, she is furious, and has had no voice for that rage. If they tell her that she is fat because she is afraid of sex, she will find that this is true also. After being told that she is ugly beyond belief and that no one will ever like her as long as she looks like THAT, she is terrified to offer her body sexually. But she is angry because she is angry, and afraid of sex because no one wants her.

4. She is forced to be a willing victim. EVERYONE in her life claims the right to talk to her about her "weight problem." And each of them has the nerve to believe that they are the only ones who have talked to her about it. They will say, "Haven't you ever thought of going on a diet, dear?" Be assured, fat women have thought of going on diets fifty times a day since they were twelve years old, or since the day they passed the acceptable body size for women. She has probably dieted off as many pounds as she now weighs. Be assured that we are not fat because we lack motivation. Many of us are so motivated that we commit suicide, rather than face another day of hell. To demand of a fat woman that she lose weight and become thin is to ask the impossible, is to tell her that she must starve herself, yet again, in order to gain your approval, but all she will gain is more weight.

5. She's so fat that she is everyone's joke. Not a day goes by in a fat woman's life that she isn't subjected to one or more of the following: *You must be thin in order to be acceptable* (the media, diet sodas, diet clinics, diet sweatpants); *You are an ugly gross fat pig* (boys on the street, men in cars, angry friends and lovers); *You are a walking visual joke* (television, sit-coms where the handsome star gets stuck with the boss's fat daughter, she doesn't even have to speak); *You have no right to eat, ever, anywhere* (restaurants, supermarkets, the corner variety store, everyone stares and smirks every time she puts food in her mouth).

6. She has limited access. Sports are virtually closed to her; she is too conditioned with fear and shame to play softball, or go to the beach. Jogging would only subject her to even more street harrassment. She does not want to be a "beached whale" or a "cow on a mo-ped." She stays home an awful lot. She is told she is fat because she is lazy, so she goes out for a walk, for the exercise, and a middle-aged man goes out of his way to confront her with, "What the fuck are you? A football player?" She

goes home. She goes to women's events and finds that there are no seats that are large enough for her to be seated. So she stops paying attention to the ads. She goes to a rally for gay and lesbian rights and notices that some women are looking at her in disgust, so she stops attending. She goes to the Michigan Women's Music Festival, in order to relax. She takes off her shirt under the hot August sun and a woman strolls by her saying, "If I looked like you, I'd put my shirt back on." She goes down to take a shower and looks up to find two women smirking as they take her picture; she never goes to the showers again, and doesn't plan to attend the festival either. Her world grows smaller and smaller; her friends and lovers wonder why they can't get her out of the house. She has been condemned to solitary confinement.

7. She has been isolated, feeling as if she is the only one. And yet HALF of all women are larger than a size 16, and ONE-THIRD of all women are larger than a man's EXTRA-LARGE. At any given women's event, if these numbers are not reflected it is because the fat women are hiding all over the city. The fatter the woman, the less you see of her. Women at about 200 pounds will still go out in high percentages, women at about 300 pounds will not. There are thousands and thousands of fat women that you have never seen.

8. She is confused. They have told her that the issue is health. But it is not the issue, the issue is looks. The culture doesn't like the way fat women look; health is used as a smoke screen. And the "facts" about health are lies. They tell her that being fat causes high blood pressure. Do you know why? Because they put blood pressure cuffs, which are small, on her large arm and they get a high reading because the cuff is too tight. A male doctor on the west coast used a properly-sized cuff on a whole group of fat people who had been diagnosed as having high blood pressure and found that they did not. They tell her that being fat *causes* heart disease, but it does not. In a little community of Italian-Americans in Pennsylvania, where being fat was okay and normal, the fat people there had a *lower* rate of heart disease than the national American average. Some of these people moved away from this loving haven, and their heart disease rate shot up to the national average; they also began to diet for the first time in their lives. Why? Because having everyone hate you makes for a high level of stress in your life, and high stress is hard on a woman's heart. Left alone, loved and

accepted, we would be as healthy as thin people are allowed to be.

9. She's so fat that they are trying to kill her. There are 27,000 diet-related deaths a year in this country. And even though many doctors will refuse to perform surgery on fat women because they are supposedly "high-risk," other doctors will eagerly perform experimental weight loss surgery on fat women. There are two kinds: intestinal by-pass surgery and gastric stapling. Intestinal by-pass is when they connect a woman's stomach directly to her anus. Food passes virtually undigested through her system. The effects of this are loss of the ability to absorb needed vitamins and minerals, permanent diarrhea, loss of hair, constant weakness, and death. **TEN WOMEN OUT OF ONE HUNDRED** die on the operating table. Gastric stapling is when they place a staple into a woman's stomach in order to close off most of the stomach volume. They leave her with the capacity to hold down about ten ounces of food, the equivalent of a glass of water. Eating any more than this either will cause her to vomit or will rupture the staples, spewing the contents of her stomach all over her abdominal cavity. This, of course, leads to serious infection and other more permanent damage. However, for **ELEVEN OUT OF ONE HUNDRED** women, these effects are meaningless, for they died under the surgeon's knife. The cost of this deadly game runs between \$2,000 and \$10,000.

This list is, of course, far from complete. There are other depressing statistics, such as: Fat lesbians have half as many lovers as thin lesbians over the years. Fat women are twice as likely as thin women to drop into a lower socio-economic group than the one they came from. Fat women can be fired from jobs, or not hired at all, simply because they are fat, and there is no legal recourse. Fat women receive terrible medical care; doctors have a habit of blaming everything from hearing loss to back problems on their being fat, and put them on diets instead of treating the real problems, which worsen through neglect.

Fat Liberation is a political movement which spans the country. There are women writing, holding classes, doing workshops, and appearing on radio shows. We are reaching out to fat women everywhere; we intend to free the women who never go out; we intend to demand decent health care; we intend to abolish the diet industry; we intend to be free, to know that we are beautiful women who have managed to survive a war that has a thousand fronts.

The Women's Liberation Movement managed to free many women from countless oppressive habits. Yet I can still see that the women before me, who wear no make-up, who dress in comfortable clothes, who stand strong and proud, are still clutching their diet books in one hand. And the sneaky ones are on health food diets, pretending to care about their bodies, when they really hope to be losing weight, as a part of the process.

Women, we must eat to be healthy, not to be thin. We must stop acting as agents for the Food Police whenever we see a fat woman trying to nurture herself. A strong, well-loved fat woman is healthy. Self-starvation is not the way to control your life.

For more information about Feminist Fat Liberation, write: FAT LIBERATOR PUBLICATIONS, P.O. Box 5227, Coralville, Iowa 52241. Ask for a list of publications available. We have all the medical information, complete with hundreds of genuine footnotes, to help you turn it around. Enough is enough, it's time for self-love, it's time to demand equal treatment in all areas of our lives.

Kelly: My chosen name is Kelly, I am 29 years old, I have been fat all my life. I currently publish a newsletter which connects all the Feminist Fat Activists in the country as well as a few overseas. I have been active in the fat liberation movement for two years, although my awareness of Fat Politics goes back to 1975. I'm white, working class, and have been a lesbian for twelve years.

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