

Is Radical Lesbian Feminism the Only Radical Approach?

by Charlotte Cooper

Over the past two years I've been researching and writing about fat politics for a postgraduate degree. I've found that most material available falls into three main areas:

- a) A huge mass of medical research arguing the relative status of fat people's mental and physical health.
- b) A growing number of glossy fashion and lifestyle orientated magazines and articles in mainstream publications, and
- c) Marginalised and obscure radical (lesbian) feminist analyses.

Since my interest is in non-mainstream, feminist, political activism, and since this is *Fat Girl*, it's the last category I'm focusing on here.

When I think of Radical lesbian feminist approaches to fatness I think of journals like *Sinister Wisdom* whose sometime editor, Elana Dykewomon, has written and published articles about fat issues and has consistently pushed for a greater focus on dyke attitudes to fatness. The visibility of fat stuff in *Sinister Wisdom*, and the feeling of inclusion for fat women, has helped me immeasurably in thinking beyond accepted notions of what it is to be fat, both in fat-phobic societies and size-acceptance communities.

Yay! In Britain, *Trouble and Strife* is the only rag I can think of that has paid more than the teeniest token lipservice to fat women. The amount of articles they've published is still rather paltry when you think of how widespread is the fear of fat, but hey, at least the stuff that has appeared takes no shit in its critical inquiry.

Radical feminist approaches to fat politics reminds me of the *Fat Underground*, initiated in L.A. in the early '70s. The F.U. provided a wonderfully angry antidote to the safety of NAAFA who, during that time, would not have known political activism if it kicked them in the arse.

When the F.U. disintegrated, Judy Freespirit and Aldebaran continued working as writers and activists, and the work they did eventually turned up in the 1983 anthology *Shadow On a Tightrope*.

These perspectives have formed the basis of my understanding of fat politics. They are critical and uncompromising and I dig their politicisation, their sheer bloody hard work against all the fucking odds, and their stopy attitude. Yeah! I know all fat

politics are intrinsically disparaging of the status quo (even fashion mags!), but the Radfems take it further.

There's one problem. Well, quite a few actually. I'm bisexual and I don't always feel welcome when I read this stuff. It's a strange sensation to feel like a secret reader of lesbian journals. Okay, so I've never asked if I would be welcome but

I'm scared of rejection. Another thing: I feel distinctly unsure of and uncomfortable with some Radfem positions on things like SM, porn, new dyke movements, bisexuals, Queer, the list goes on. On issues where I don't feel like I'm on one side or another I resent being forced to accept the pro- or anti-stance. Also, call me a bitch but it's hard to adopt some of that stuff, it's hard to be a good Radical feminist if you're bisexual (strip one brownie point), and my guilt at constantly oppressing others and anger at an unfair world just grinds me down.

The point of this rant is that I want to see the things that matter to me be addressed. I

can't go on tip-toeing around and trying not to annoy other women. I want a radical analysis of fat women that includes me. You know I'm getting tired of all this mainstream, god-fearing society stuff, NAAFA bleating on about the importance of legislative change—Fuck that! I'm an anarchist! The Radical feminists have come the nearest so far but I want more. Their vision of the world seemed to stop in 1985; what's been happening since? Where is everyone? Is there a whole scene I'm missing out on? Perhaps *Fat Girl* will fill this gap. Does anyone else feel the same way I do? I feel so isolated. Heeeelp meeeeeee!!!!!!!★

