

A word to our "concerned" sisters:

This letter recently appeared in Lesbian Connection.

Dear LC,

I am concerned about the lack of attention given to obesity in the lesbian community. I work with a nonprofit health agency and know that obesity places a person at risk for a variety of health problems, including heart disease and back problems. But when I called the local lesbian and gay health project they had no information available on this topic. While I do not subscribe to the ideals of young, slim and beautiful, I do believe in good health. Is our community shying away from this issue so as not to offend big sisters? We talk about anorexia, drug abuse, alcoholism and safe sex, yet we ignore the issue of weight. It's time to talk about the health issues connected with obesity and support the dykes struggling with weight maintenance. Reconciling feminist/lesbian values with good health is a challenge that queer health-care providers need to address. Do fat dykes want services and information? What support are they looking for? What are lesbian and gay health agencies doing to tackle this issue?--Katherine. Durham. NC

Here's what one proud fat dyke had to say.

Dear LC,

I am writing in response to the letter from Katherine regarding "obesity." I am a 43 year old fat working class Chicana Dyke who is also a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. I want to take this opportunity to say to all fatphobic lesbian supremacists that you are working for the patriarchal misogynist nazis. They have taught you self-hatred and this is the fuel for your fatphobic activities. I want you to know something Ms. Katherine, the blows of daily social abuse, because I am and have always been fat, have wounded me much more than either the racism, classism or sexual abuse. This is not to deny or diminish the destructive impact on the lives of those of us who suffer because of these bigotries. I want to acknowledge that all these things work hand in hand. They are all from the same father. He is white, he is rich and he is American. I suggest you stop doing his dirty work. I don't need your supervision regarding my weight. What I do need is for you and lesbians like you to educate yourselves. Fat people are not pathologies. This is the last permissible hatred. You know racism is not OK. I want you to know fatphobia is not either. It is a civil rights issue and for your amends I suggest you read *Shadow On a Tightrope*, 1983 Aunt Lute Book Company, Iowa City, Iowa. This feels like 1939 is breathing down my brown, queer neck. It is interesting how so many people are feeling it is OK to come out of the bigotry closet while the Christian fundamentalists are controlling congress. What privilege are you protecting Katherine? Also let it be stated for the record that I am not a compulsive overeater. I am not lazy. I exercise regularly. I am not uninformed. I (as most fat women) can dance circles around most thin people's knowledge regarding nutritional information. Most of us have tried every conceivable diet and nutritional program to ward off the hate attacks against us. Diets don't work and fat is determined by genes. Take that to your self-righteous bank called I am thin, I am better. It's more like I am thin I have lots of body privilege until I get old, or disabled or, Goddess forbid, fat! There was a study done that asked

6 year old girls if they had to choose between being disabled in a wheelchair or being fat which would they rather live with? The overwhelming majority said, "I'll take the wheelchair." Six year old boys were asked to choose between being a girl, or disabled in a wheelchair for life. Every boy asked chose the wheelchair. This is not to disrespect or marginalize people who use wheelchairs, but it does make a powerful point regarding fatphobia, female hatred and ableism. Please mujeres, try for just one minute to set aside your fear and take in this information so that we can learn to love ourselves and each other in all our sizes, shapes, colors, abilities and ages. I, for one, thrive on diversity. It is more than a concept and it must be created by each one of us. Look at who you love and support. How many of those lesbians are fat? You ask about what support we are looking for? I want to be respected and valued for all my fabulous qualities including my abundant body by healthcare practitioners and all people everywhere. Don't guilt trip about food or denigrate your body in front of me. If you are attracted to a fat dyke work past your fatphobia so you can enjoy the attraction. Don't lie or deny it when it is brought to your attention. Don't assume we are not passionate, sexual beings. The best lovers I have had have been fat lesbians. Support us and yourself (this is every women's issue) by speaking up next time a fat joke is shared or some other fat-hating statement is made. When people ask why you are speaking out against fatphobia take the time to educate them as I am educating you. Don't support the diet industry. It makes billions every year on women hatred. Thousands of fat women are mutilated each year by surgeons out to make a buck by stapling our stomachs, removing lengths of our intestines and liposucking our bellies and thighs. Not to mention Weight Watchers and Jenny Craig who are major rip-off artists. They are opening up the purses of women everywhere through humiliation and guilt. Read up on the health risks of eating sugar substitutes and fat-free products that these programs sell to their apologetic clients. They are loaded with chemicals that are much more damaging to your health than sugar and unhydrogenated fat (I don't endorse white sugar as a healthy food choice). Diets don't work and they create disease. Even your mainstream western medicine doctors are now copping to the fact that diets fail 98% of the time. Exercise is the key they say. Well, if we could all afford memberships to a gym and feel like it is a relatively safe environment things might be different. This doesn't mean fat women would be thin, it only means fat women would have access and some of us might be healthier (this is not to say fat women are generally not healthy, we are as healthy as our thin sisters).

It's an abusive situation for us to encounter the constant deprecatory dialogue many thin women have to coerce themselves into exercising and also to express their fatphobia when we enter the room. The story does by no means end here. I could write a dissertation on this and maybe I will. I'll close by giving thanks to the members of The Fat Underground founded in L.A. in the late 60's mostly by radical fat lesbian feminists. You politicized me around this issue and it is because of you I am not dead from some diet or stomach stapling or in some jail hell hole for fighting back with violence instead of the written and spoken word. Thank you. And to fatphobia: ¡Ya Basta! (no more!)

Politically Relentless, Lea E. Arellano, Berkeley, CA