

BIGGER THAN BARBIE, STRONGER THAN KEN
Continued from Page 23

Which brings us to other things worn—or not—under our shirts: bras. Dykes most likely to ditch their not-so-wonder bras are probably, like me, survivors of the free-wheeling '60s and '70s.

Zoe of the long tresses also takes the natural route on this one.

"I would never date a woman who wore a bra," she says emphatically. "To me a bra is like a chastity belt—a male idea to keep 'em tied up and in their place."

Linda, who is 33 and plays on a softball team, echoes her sentiment: "I wear a Jogbra when I do sports, but that's it. The rest of the time it just seems stupid—and damned uncomfortable!"

Krista has bras in every color and enjoys wearing them under sheer tops; for her it's a fashion statement. "I think they're sexy," she says. "But sure, it does feel good when my sweetie lets me loose!"

At 21, Jesse has been out for six years and is happy to proclaim she's never owned a bra. She reminds us of one advantage of going without: "When I'm out dancing with my girl, I like to open my jacket so our breasts can press into each other through our T-shirts. I can feel my nipples harden as they flirt with hers, and I love the feeling of my flesh melding into hers."



Naturopath Karen Frangos suggests looking at golfers as examples of different body types: "Because golf doesn't require as much aerobic capacity, you can be a bigger woman and compete and use your power."

In the eye of the beholder

Speaking of breasts, whether we like them tamed and trussed or waving free in the breeze, we lesbians do have strong feelings about them.

Marcia is 27 years old and doesn't go there with her girlfriend. "I don't relate sex with

breasts. In fact, I ignore them. They are as erotic as my knee," she claims very seriously.

When pressed for reasons, she explains that her view is in part "a reaction to all the obsessing straight men do about them." She quickly adds that she finds breasts beautiful, but she also associates them with objects of abuse.

Marcia does seem to hold the minority opinion on this topic. Most dykes interviewed love breasts in all shapes, sizes and positions.

"My very favorite thing to do is bury my head between my lover's full breasts," confides Elaine. "I don't care if I suffocate," she adds, sounding like she means it.

The good news is that we dykes seem far more accepting of what nature gives us. The incidence of lesbians getting breast implants is a difficult statistic to pin down, but it doesn't seem to happen—at least not in the great au naturel Pacific Northwest. (Things you don't hear lesbians say: "I'd never date an A cup." Sorry guys, we just don't have the same hang-ups you fellas do concerning calibration.)

Therapist Serena Barton makes a good point about beauty: "It's nice if your partner is gorgeous in a way you like, but we all change, grow old, grow bigger and smaller."

She adds that "people you like become more attractive the more you like them."

Barton is also an accomplished artist. Sounding like the poster girl for mental health, she says, "How I look is far less important than caring about something I do, such as painting."

It is interesting, though, how candid people will be when they are promised anonymity!

Linda divulged that, shallow as it may seem, facial beauty in a lover is extremely important to her.

"I'm a sucker for a pretty face," she says. "Since that's how I spend much of my time—looking at her face—it's very important for me."

Massage therapist Mary Ann Stoddard addresses the issue of beauty standards this way: "One of my favorite parts of being a lesbian is that I don't have to look at a man and see what I look like through his eyes."

Grand opening

Another advantage is that we don't even have to ask that question to which men will never understand the answers: What do women really want?

We understand each other's plumbing and mood swings and hormonal challenges. We're also not genitally competitive. (Another thing you never hear lesbians say: "My clit is bigger than your clit.")

I've noticed that we're also less likely to succumb to shaming thoughts about our vaginas and what comes out of them. In fact, we can be downright enthusiastic.

Listen to Nora, a 35-year-old high school teacher: "I had always rather liked the taste of my own menstrual blood, and I found it an easy transition to enjoy my lover's blood," she divulges with a smile. "Maybe it's a reversion to pure animal ways, that taste for blood. After

all, I am a carnivore who loves a rare porterhouse. And female monthly blood is such a magical substance.... I love the viscosity, the sticky thickness of it."

Andrea is into olfactory delights: "I love the way my lover smells under her arms, between her legs.... I love a juicy yoni and the taste of sex."

Sure, when it comes to loving our bodies, some of us may still harbor shame from watching too many Massengill commercials. As ther-

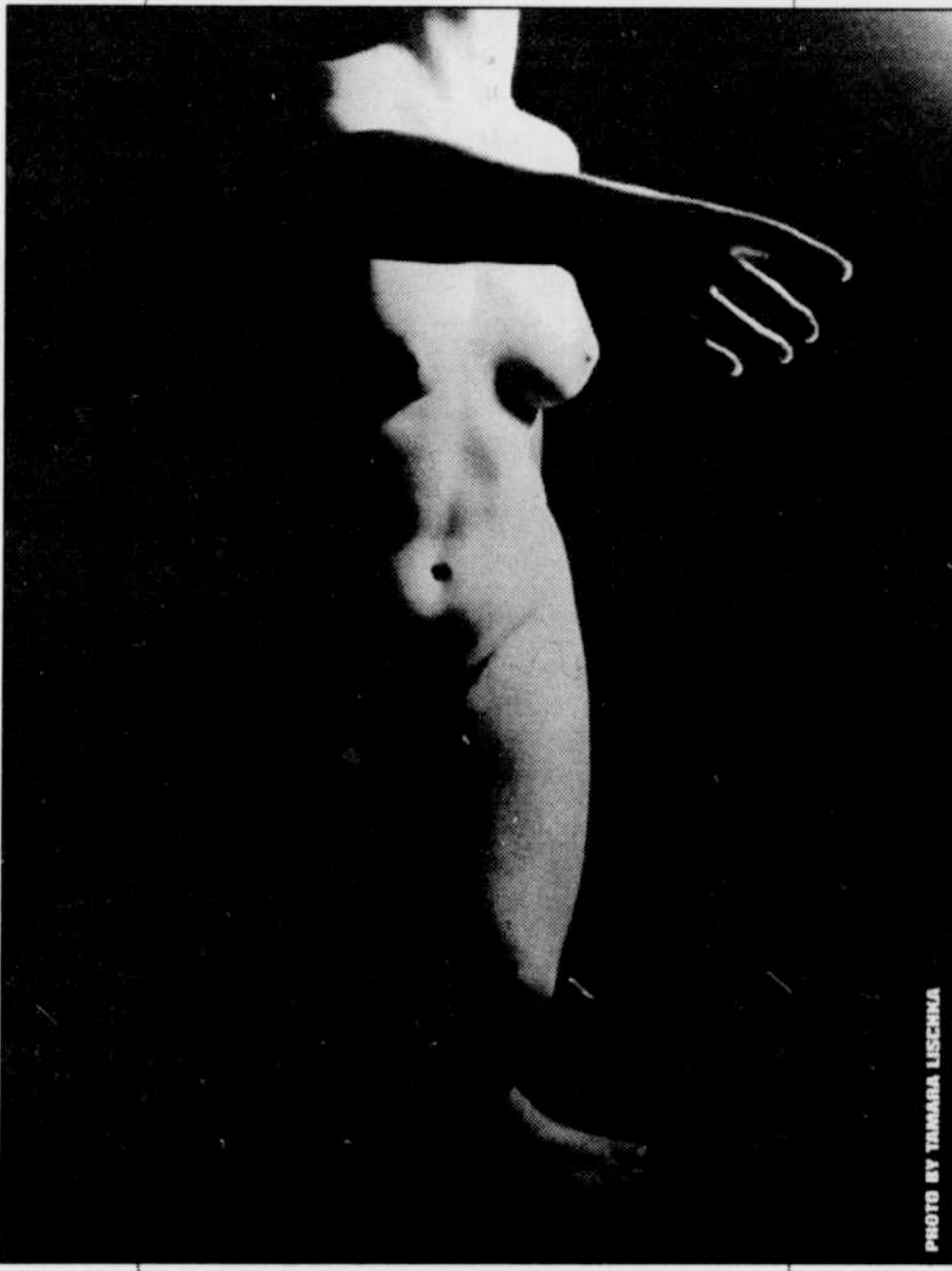


PHOTO BY TAMARA LESCHINA

we spend a staggering amount of money each year on diet books alone. A search of Amazon.com reveals that the company offers 14,915 different diet books! If any one of them actually worked, the rest would gather dust on the shelves. That's the obvious point. There are nearly 15,000 diet books because none of them work!

Musing on the subject, therapist Serena Barton asks: "If you're constantly depriving yourself and constantly dieting and stressing out, what's your quality of life?"

Erica, 27, a self-proclaimed "fearless fat chick," exclaims: "We take up room. As fat lesbians, we embody society's greatest fears because we don't need men. In the lesbian community, we don't quite fit in with lesbian chic."

Zoe, on the other hand, remembers what happened a year ago when she had gained 20 pounds and asked her lover if she minded: "To my surprise, she made it clear that I was pushing it, and if I gained 20 more pounds she would probably dump me!"

And, when asked how she'd feel if the tables were turned, Zoe confesses, "I guess I'd actually feel the same way...isn't that sad?"

When larger women come to Mary Ann Stoddard for a massage they "often feel they need to apologize in some way for their size.... They worry that I won't be able to find their muscles," she says.

As Jennifer Stock explains: "A lot of shame that women have around weight is tied to shame that began at puberty and the first emergence of curves. How you weather puberty has a lot to do with how you handle weight issues later."

She goes on to say that a woman's feelings about weight get connected to her ability to be a sexual being, to be assertive and feel empowered, and she warns that a negative body image can become pervasive in your self-identity.

"You can have a negative body image regardless of how others perceive you," Stock says. "You don't have to be different from the standard to feel that you are, and negativity can be focused on facial features, hair or skin, but the dominant concern for women is weight and shape."

Worst of all, she says, women tend to dissect themselves instead of seeing themselves as whole. Stock has also observed that "one of the hardest things to do is like yourself the way you are."

apist Jennifer Stock notes, "It's so hard to move past the wall of societal pressure."

According to gynecologist Sharon Hillier, as quoted in *Woman: An Intimate Geography*, "Women are taught that their vaginas are dirty. In fact, a normal healthy vagina is the cleanest space in the body. It's much cleaner than the mouth, and much, much cleaner than the rectum."

Who's afraid of the 'F' word?

Fat. For many women it's the enemy within, the one area of their lives they can't control.

Just look at the famous case of Oprah Winfrey, someone with the resources to tame her "weight problem" by any means known to man or woman. A few years back, when her name was called as the winner of an Emmy Award for best talk show host, Winfrey told *TV Guide*, she could only think of one thing: "237 pounds, 237 pounds is in my head as I walked up to the stage." She claimed she'd been hoping someone else would win just so she could hide in her seat.

After many years of battling her bulges, and despite a squad of personal chefs, nutritionists and trainers, Winfrey remains a full-figured gal. If her money can't buy thin, then what? In fact,

Erica, 27, a self-proclaimed "fearless fat chick," exclaims: "We take up room. As fat lesbians, we embody society's greatest fears because we don't need men. In the lesbian community, we don't quite fit in with lesbian chic."

Hip, hip, hooray!

In my experience as a woman of size, dykes are a helluva lot more accepting of all body shapes and sizes.

One way some lesbians do display sizeism is noticeable in those personal ads that request a

Continued on Page 27