

BIGGER THAN BARBIE, STRONGER THAN KEN
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"height-weight proportionate" woman, which is code for "no fatties." But hey, the good news is, no matter what your size, there's probably a woman out there who likes the cut of your jib. Or the way you look on the back of a Harley.

From the safety of anonymity, Rachel, a 22-year-old student, wonders: "Why are lesbians allowed to be overweight without doing anything about it? I don't really want to date anyone overweight, I don't like the way it feels. It's gross."

Still, Stock believes "the general feeling within the [lesbian] community may be more accepting."

Carol is a 58-year-old office worker, tired of her losing battle to be thin and now accepting of her larger reality.

"I cannot separate 'fat' and 'lesbian' from me—fat and lesbian. As much a part of me as my brown hair and brown eyes," she says. "It's even more a part of me, as it defines how I make my way in this world. It defines who my friends are, who my loves are, and who I sleep with—gay- and fat-accepting people."

Sally has always been big and got over it a long time ago. She's thrilled that her lover—who just happens to be average in size—adores her just the way she is.

"She actually likes my curvy, voluptuous body, enjoys the luxurious softness of my breasts, and loves the power in my thick, tree-trunk thighs!" Sally enthuses.

As the latest spokesmodel for fat acceptance, actress Camryn Manheim has written a great book on the subject, *Wake Up, I'm Fat*. In it she observes: "Even thin women wish they had somebody else's body. That's why it's called the beauty myth: The perfect body doesn't exist."

Which brings us to a few words about extrathin women. No matter how difficult it might be for the rest of us to feel empathy for women who are born with Olive Oyl-ish figures, the truth is that they also suffer from denigrating comments and false assumptions about their appearance.

As Janet confides with genuine pain in her voice, "People who would never think of teas-

ing a large woman about her size feel it's OK to ridicule me for being skinny...as if it's more acceptable to be underweight, and therefore that makes me fair game for jokes."

Still, there are plenty of women out there who are at peace with their bodies.

When you first meet Alice, 38, two things are obvious: She's a mighty big babe and she's not one bit unhappy about it.

"I'm a sexual outlaw... I take up space that's not supposed to be mine. When I walk down the street, you have to get out of my way!" she says with a sassy laugh.

Her longtime partner, Kathy, also a woman of size, remembers what it was like to have a thin lover: "I was always afraid I was going to



break one of her bones or something...though she really dug my supersized breasts," she says with a smile for Alice.

"Yeah, fat women are the best lovers," Alice chimes in. "They're really soft, like some giant pillow, and yet they're also incredibly powerful, too."

One thing that might help women come to grips with weight is to understand what's in it. As Natalie Angier points out in her acclaimed

book, *Woman, An Intimate Geography*: "When you gain weight because you're overeating, you put on three-quarters of that weight as fat but one-quarter as muscle. Fat people are so cowed into self-loathing that they don't realize the potential they carry. If they choose to exercise their submerged muscle on a regular basis, they'll be able to beat the sprat out of any thin ones who call them pigs."

Naturopath Karen Frangos, who has worked for many years with athletes, notes that "strength is a factor lesbians need to survive, and sports is an opportunity to excel and use their strength."

For examples of strong women who manage to have a professional career in sports while also bucking the rail-thin trend, you need only tune in to the Ladies Professional Golf Association any weekend and watch some golfers—your gaydar will definitely bleep away.

Therapist Barton has some encouraging and lighthearted words for those struggling with size acceptance: "Time takes care of a lot of it. If you're flat-chested when you're young, cleavage often comes with age."

That is exactly the case with Kathy, who now prefers her larger body.

"When I became a lesbian, women taught me to appreciate my own body. They helped me to see, and to say, 'Gee, my body is pretty wonderful.' I've always loved big women, but I really have to work at not being fat—not just big, but fat. My challenge is to accept that unless I starve, I'm going to put on weight."

—Mary Brady, Activist

"After so many years agonizing over my small breasts," she says, "I finally got to experience big, centerfold-sized breasts. They did feel good, even to me, and I could easily understand why men—and women—obsess on them."

Barton suggests that women wanting to develop more self-acceptance should surround themselves with affirming images that promote who they are and what they want to be. She

also believes women should stop trying to fit into somebody else's idea of what to wear and choose clothes that make them feel comfortable.

It happens to all of us if we live long enough

We grow old, and at some point we look it.

As recently as the 1970s, a popular expression urged us: Don't trust anyone over 30. And when today's grandmothers were young, 50 used to seem old. Now, with women like Jane Fonda, Sophia Loren, Lena Horne and Gloria Steinem reshaping our ideas of what women can look like in their 60s and beyond, it's tempting to believe we might cheat the clock altogether.

An activist and one of the founders of Older Lesbians Organizing for Change, Mary Brady has strong feelings about aging.

"I'm in a state of shock about how my body is changing as I grow older," she says.

A late bloomer, Brady came out at age 47. "When I became a lesbian, women taught me to appreciate my own body," she recalls. "They helped me to see, and to say, 'Gee, my body is pretty wonderful.'"

She still struggles with size acceptance, though.

"I've always loved big women," she says sincerely. "But I really have to work at not being fat—not just big, but fat. My challenge is to accept that unless I starve, I'm going to put on weight."

Another issue of aging is a decline in health. After a recent surgery, Brady admits, "I feel my body is letting me down, health-wise."

Brady has always loved dancing and says she is determined to regain her mobility and dance again. For inspiration she focuses on a photo.

"I saw a picture of an eighty-something woman wearing high-tops and tarring her roof by herself, and I said, 'That's gonna be me!'" she explains.

We could all use a visual touchstone like that, an image of a woman who is healthy and capable, aging with vigor and self-acceptance—and, yes, she may be bigger than Barbie and stronger than Ken.

(Please note: Some of the names of those interviewed have been changed to protect their privacy.)

■ **ORIANA GREEN** resists aging by growing a purple braid down the side of her head. She is also the Entertainment Editor for Just Out and can be reached at oriana@justout.com.

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