

# just out

The IN publication for the OUT population

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## COMMENTARY

BY MARTY DAVIS

# Choose life

Big is beautiful, but being is better

Obesity. I was 18. I had naively applied for a job with the San Diego Parks, and I was first jarred into awareness of the virulence of this word when, unfortunately for me, the application process required a brief physical examination.

A few days later the mailman brought the letter: My application for employment had been denied. The reason for denial was scrawled across the page...circled...attacking...one word...Obesity.

It was the ugliest word I had ever seen.

It's many years later now and I've since learned life is full of many such ugly words—indeed, many horrid words more hateful and brutal and dangerous than the medically approved hate word "obesity." However, this gained new knowledge does not have the power to erase entrenched and painful old memories.

Obesity. Fat acceptance. Cancer. Fatphobia. Diabetes. Size acceptance. Heart disease. Love. Hate. Tortuous pain. Pain in the knees, pain in the soul, pain in the artery-clogged heart.

Obesity. Pain. Death.

At the recent Cris Williamson and Holly Near concert I was in awe of the energy at the women-packed theater. Young, old, beautiful, powerful, each and every one.

But another truth was impossible to ignore. We are strong women, we are beautiful lesbians. We are powerful individually, and we are powerful together.

While these are wondrous things, the clearly evident fact remains that far too many of us are jeopardizing our health by being too fat. We are obese, and we are killing ourselves.

We've all heard the facts, but Portland naturopath Karen Frangos helpfully reiterates the following health risks associated with obesity. She starts by emphasizing the undeniable fact that being overweight can shorten one's life because of complications from:

- Coronary artery disease—atherosclerosis leads to increased risk of heart attack and stroke.
- Diabetes mellitus—leads to life-threatening diseases of the cardiovascular system and kidneys.
- Hypertension—high blood pressure increases risk for heart attack and stroke.
- Gall bladder disease.
- Intestinal disorders.
- Respiratory disease.
- Thrombophlebitis.
- Back and joint pains, especially lower extremities.
- Cancers—especially breast and colorectal.

Did you catch the sadness and finality of the phrase "shortens one's life"? When we speak of size acceptance and fatphobia, where is the honor for the value of the life of the obese person? Do you honor and respect yourself by choosing to shorten your life?

Does size acceptance show regard for the people who love you, your

friends, your partners, your children? Does size acceptance show respect for the person who will take care of you when you no longer can care for yourself? Does not every life deserve to be long, rich and lived to its fullest?

We look at lists like the one above and often brush them aside. After all, these are the lists that always apply to everyone else.

If you can manage to ignore the message, can you also ignore your high blood pressure? Can you ignore not being able to run, walk, romp and frolic with your children, your dogs, your friends?

On a beautiful spring day or evening can you ride your bike, can you walk the Esplanade, can you play tennis, can you hike the Wildwood Trail? Can you climb steps, can you bend over, can you be free?

Is the size-acceptance mantra merely an excuse, a facade to hide the pain of a true lack of self-acceptance? Can you honestly accept the above risks and still hide behind the debatable concept of size acceptance? These are the questions I ask myself.

Which brings me to the point of all this. For most lesbians obesity is, I believe, a question of choice.

No, not the kind of choice where a woman sits down one day and says, "I choose to be obese." That's certainly not what I have done with my life.

Yet the results of the choices and decisions, choices of diet, choices of activity levels, choices of partners and choices of lifestyle have contributed to a lifetime of weight problems. Throw in the complications of

lack of control over addiction, lack of understanding of behaviors, and you arrive at your end result. Obesity.

Why do we make choices that cause us to hurt ourselves? These are complex questions with no simple answers.

Nothing about obesity is simple. Not the reasons for it, not the excuses for it, and certainly not the means to control it. But hiding under a false—albeit comfortable—security blanket of self-acceptance and/or self-denial is not going to keep anyone hale, healthy and hearty.

And, yes, you can be big and beautiful and be healthy, and kudos to those who accomplish this. While not downplaying the problems of job discrimination and our fat-oppressive culture nor condoning societal judgments that burden the already burdened, the truth is that most of us who are weighed down by obesity are not physically healthy.

But we do have the power to make changes and improvements in our lives. We do.

Bad choices have led to a life of obesity for me. Now, new choices are going to have to be made.

The first choice is easy. I choose not to die from complications because of obesity.

Is it too late? Maybe. Maybe not. But not as late as it will be if I make no new choices at all.

Will new choices and new paths be easy? No. Will I falter and need help? Yes.

Am I going to make it? Yes, watch and see. ☐

*I choose not to die from complications because of obesity*

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