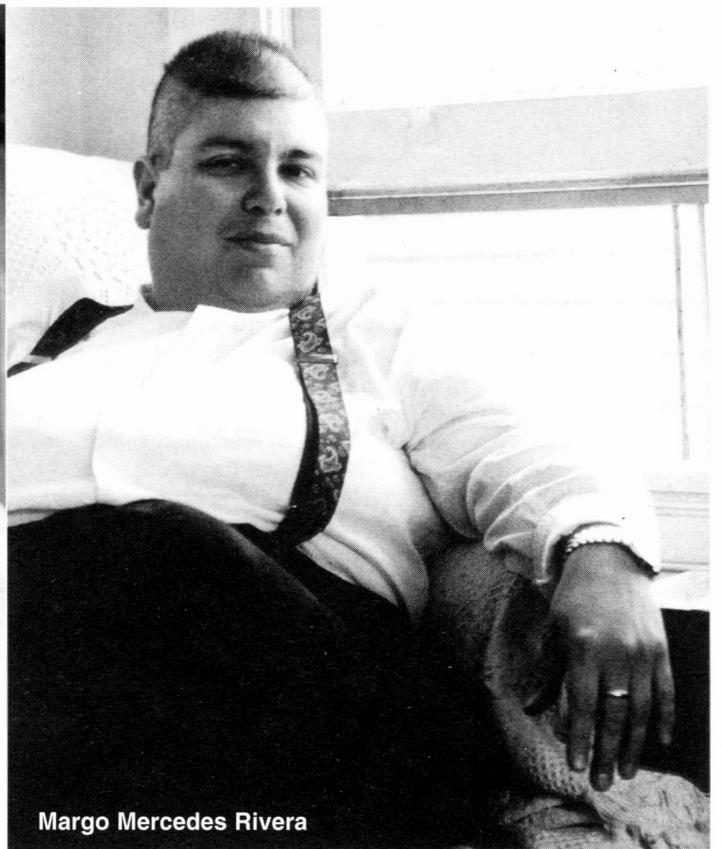




April Miller



Margo Mercedes Rivera

SEXUALITY



Susannah



Sondra Solo

Photos by Laura Johnston

It's a really intense thing to get into bed with our fat bodies that we travel around on the street with, that we get hassled with, then take off all of our clothes off and be vulnerable and say, *Here, I'm giving you my fat body,* and I trust you with it, and see what they do.

**A DISCUSSION ON
SEX, SEXUALITY,
SEXINESSES,
GENDER, POWER,
AND SHOPPING...**

April: I was interested in coming because when Margo first brought up the topic, it sounded like she had really cool positive things that she wanted to talk about, about fat and sex and how they interrelate. When I heard the topic, all I had in my mind was really negative stuff about fat and sex. So I thought, "Okay, this could be really interesting."
Margo: Yeah, it definitely could be! One of the things I'm interested in is how being fat and being lovers with fat women has impacted my sexuality. For me, this isn't limited to only when I'm in bed. It's also going on when I'm out in the world. My lover and I just visited my

ROUND TABLE

APRIL MILLER

SUSANNAH

MARGO MERCEDES RIVERA

SONDRA SOLO

PANDOURA

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Yeah, why wouldn't I?!

father in Sacramento, and we were both really uptight sitting there at their suburban table, eating with them. And that has its effect. The whole way home, we had a discussion about how it felt to be fat and lower class and lesbian. It definitely made us interact differently with each other. When we get hassled on the street as fat women, it carries over. There's also the incredible power of getting into bed with someone who you feel absolutely safe with, someone with whom you don't have to explain yourself, and who you find incredibly sexy. So, there's that whole dynamic of, as you said, April, the good and the bad.

Sondra: Do you feel comfortable because your partner's fat, or because you know your partner?

Margo: I felt instantly comfortable. There was no explaining. She didn't have to reassure me time and time again that she was really attracted to me, and that she liked me "even though" I was fat. I absolutely trusted where she was coming from. I've had that, to some extent, with women who were smaller, but, in this instance, it was instant, and it's been that way since I met her. What's your experience been?

Sondra: I just got really tired of dealing with the body-image thing, and I said, "The next person I'm with, whoever it is, has got to be a fat person." I said that to myself. I made a rule. I was just tired of it. I was tired of all the hassle. I was tired of people asking me if I knew I was beautiful. Which really insulted me. I mean, I know that it was intended to be reassuring, and maybe it would be for someone who was at a

different stage of self-acceptance, but for me, it was like, "Yeah, why wouldn't I?!" And actually, then, I broke that rule a bit, because the next person that I was with was the person I'm with now. She really wasn't fat at that time, so I was really hesitant . . .

Margo: Is she now?

Sondra: A convert, yeah! But I was just desperate not to deal with body-image issues anymore.

April: I feel the issues I have about fat and sexuality combining developed when I was really young. I got a lot of sexual attention from adults when I was younger. And I blamed it on my size – because I'm very curvy, and I always have been, and very femme. A lot of my issues about fat and sex are about abuse and control; that my sexuality isn't mine – it's theirs. I don't have ownership of it. The idea that being with another fat woman would make it easier just isn't true in my life. Sex is real scary, and real vulnerable – more vulnerable than I'm willing to be with other people. That doesn't change with the other person's size. It doesn't matter who I'm with, it always comes up.

Pandoura: I'm from the Midwest, Colorado, which is a state which abhors fat women - it's just not an acceptable thing. Being a dyke in Denver is just a nightmare come true. In Denver, my lovers were always very thin. I always wanted to hide behind them, if you can imagine or picture that. I would never even look at a fat woman. And when I moved out here and my entire life became the fat community, it was like breathing for the first time. I want a woman that I can grab hold of. I want a woman that I can touch and I can be hard with, if I want to, and not worry about

breaking bones, or worry about bruising, or all of that just like be with her the way people have always been with me. I was never willing to be with a woman who was larger than me until very recently. Up to my size was okay, but bigger was a major "no-no." And I'll never forget being down between her legs - she has this great mirror in front of her bed, at the head of her bed - and she was lying there, I was down between her legs, and I was fucking her, and I looked in the mirror, and she's very large, and was rubbing her belly and her legs, and it was the biggest turn-on and the most freeing experience that I've had. And that was less than a year ago. So it's all very new. I feel very excited about it. Now I look at fat women on the street and go, "Ooh! Lunch!"

Sondra: Is your girlfriend a large woman?

Susannah: My girlfriend is not a large woman. My girlfriend is thin. I've had relationships with both fat and thin women in the past. It was really funny, because when I met my present lover, it was one of those being-fixed-up deals, and so friends described her to me — leather vest and the occasional Mohawk, and I had formed this image

before I met her. I just imagined, in my erotic visualization, this fat woman, and when we finally met, nothing else surprised me, except my expectations about her weight.

Margo: I think it's wonderful that you assumed she was fat. I think a lot of people would assume someone wasn't.

Susannah: I think that's definitely where my attraction and erotic center was, right then. I felt very attracted to her none-the-less and I've fallen deeply in love with her. She introduced me to s/m. Even though I felt like an anxious little puppy, we took our time exploring s/m and roles together. It was this wonderful, very languid enjoyment. I found for the very first time with her that I could sustain "being present" in my body for sex. Recently she's said to me, "I know I can't give you the things a fat lover could." We both recognize this, it is true, but she continues to give me so many other amazing things!

Margo: I know that when I did personal ads this summer, the most important issue to put out was that I was fat - more so than that I was mixed race, that I was butch, what my age was, what I was into sexually, it was that I was fat, because I didn't want to date anyone who was either dieting or who expected me to be slim, fit, any of those other euphemisms for not fat. A few people wanted to know how fat I was, and the three people I ended up getting involved with were all fat. It mostly just happened that way, but pretty much none of the women who weren't fat were cool enough about fat for me.

Pand: Because I'm so new at fat politics, and it's such a new core of me, I'll say things that are

wrong . . . I'd now consider them wrong, but say things that I'm new about, that I'm not understanding, and I've been chastised a few times. I'm not trying to diet, but I've lost a lot of weight this year, from medical problems I'm having, and I've gotten a lot of crap for it. I've had women tell me that I'm not fat enough to be in this space, or that space, and it's a frustration to me because I still have this little voice in the back of my head that says, "You're supposed to diet. You're supposed to be thin. You're supposed to be getting thinner, this is a good thing, not a bad thing." I still have this little conversation going on, and then I have all of my wants, needs and my desires completely on my sleeve, because they've been unearthed and I'm wearing them very close to the surface. I literally have to say to people, "I need you to be very gentle. I need you to be very careful, because I really don't want to get this slapped away. Pay attention. Be nice and kind." I'm finding with new lovers, especially this year, that I'm being very top, very in control. When women who are new into fat politics, like my current lover, say things like, "I shouldn't eat that," or when

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I said, "Well, why don't we put chocolate all over each other's bodies and lick it off!" and she said, "Well . . ." I say, "Don't go there!" Please, don't go there! I'm not going to put sugar-free chocolate or sugar-free Jell-O in bed with us. It's just not going to happen. My most favorite erotic thing to do is to feed and be fed the most luscious foods things that just squish when they go in your mouth – in public. This is a personal favorite thing to do, and people stare. With my ex, people used to stare and click their teeth. It's really hard. Fat people have sex. We fuck. We fuck each other. We fuck all of them. Surprise!

Margo: You know, that's the other thing. When I get in bed with my fat lover, there are all these obstacles to overcome. Like, when you go to Good Vibrations and the harnesses don't fit. On top of everything else, all the images we see of sexual people are all straight, mostly white and thin. The thin thing is yet another layer of "if you're fat, you can't be sexual." It is hard to leave that behind. But I feel like when I do get in bed with my lover, the garbage usually does just vanish, because I trust her so much, and I'm so attracted to her. There's such magic between us that it does go away and our sexuality is really powerful.

Pand: My fat lover, right now, she's so new at this. All of her lovers have been skinny and fatphobic. So the only way to do it was that she would fuck them, and then she would never get anything in return, and that's been her entire experience. So she's having . . . When I'm fucking her, I'm telling her, "Your body is so beautiful," she has stopped me several times and said, "I can't take it. I can't hear it. I'm not in a space where I can hear that yet." It's hard for me, because that's so much a part of sexuality for me. How beautiful her body is, how beautiful she is, and what she's giving me is so intense, and I totally love it. It's hard for me to back off and go, "Okay, I'll fuck you without any voice, make love to you without any spoken word." It's difficult.

Margo: Well, it's a really intense thing to get into bed with our fat bodies that we travel around on the street with, that we get hassled with, then take all of our clothes off and be vulnerable and say, "Here, I'm giving you my fat body, and I trust you with it," and see what they do.

Susannah: My lover takes up so much "space" in the bedroom, in the world, and then there's all of the things that go on energy-wise in our exchange that I see her as this big, strong, powerful person during sex that when I come down from my sexual high and I catch our images together in the mirror, our difference in physical size is a bit of a shock. So, I wonder if I carry in my mind, still, an image of her that is much larger than her physical frame.

April: When I used to see pictures of my ex and I together, they always freaked me out. I think part of it

was that she took up an amazing amount space, too—she was just so much bigger than her body, but part of it also was that I have an image in my head of myself as smaller than I am, so that both of them would hit, at the same time, looking at a photo.

April: I'm wondering if other people have really specific issues that they've noticed. Recently I've been working on learning to lay on top of, sit on top of, give my weight over to other people. I started doing that with a dancer friend, and I've progressed to doing it to some extent, or occasionally, or not very long, with lovers. But it's a really big deal! And I'm sure a lot of it is from being taunted, or listening to other kids taunt friends of theirs, that if they didn't watch out, I'd sit on them.

Susannah: There was even a song for me, because of my name, "Oh, Fatsannah, don't you sit on me." But I have sat on people, and it *is* a lot of fun.

April: I like to have women of all sorts of different sizes lay on me, so I can understand it, but it freaks me out every time I have a lover who just casually asks me to get

on top of her. She assumes that's something that's in my realm of possible things to do in the world, and it's not! It's a big deal!

Margo: My last lover was probably about 130 or 140 pounds, about 5'3", and she would beg me to lie on top of her with my full body weight. And it took me I

don't even know how long to do it. And I finally did it, and she didn't explode, and she didn't break, and she actually really liked it, but I was never comfortable with it. And my lover now wants me to get on top of her. I do it more, but I still don't understand why she would want that. Maybe it's a butch thing, but I don't think I've ever...maybe just for two seconds sat on someone's face. I don't think I can do that. But I love it when my lover gets on top of me and rides me. I think it's great!

Pand: I begged my ex to sit on my face. My most favorite thing in the world is to be totally smothered. I love that! I'm not sure if it was a top thing, or a butch top thing but she wouldn't do it. And my current lover is so comfortable . . . I mean, her body has been that size forever. As she grew up, as she got older, she got fatter and fatter. She just says, "Yeah, that's my body." She's never had any trouble, never had the size trouble. And I asked her, and she just said, "Of course." Thank you!

April: It seems like there must be other things that are difficult for people.

Susannah: Well, in my family, we've always really strong bear huggers. I always feel like I'll hurt someone with that. My brother and I used to pseudo-sumo wrestle when we were kids. I love wrestling with people, testing my strength.

Margo: But I think there can also be another side of that. A good friend of mine who is a Latina butch had the beginning of a relationship with another woman, who

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happened to be a thin white woman. An interaction happened where, as I understand it, the thinner white woman accused my friend of trapping her and physically abusing her and doing things that she didn't do at all. I've known this woman for fifteen, twenty years, and this is not who she is at all. And I think it was her size that made this other woman feel intimidated, feel scared of her. It's also the intersection of other things too - race, and butch identification, but also it really had a lot to do with her size, and the woman basically feeling very unsafe with her.

Sondra: I've had experiences like that, too. I'm thinking particularly of this one woman who was one of the first women I was fooling around with. She was very thin, very white - frail. And I remember sitting next to her, and she was really intimidated. And I sort of put my hands on her, and I was like, "It's okay." And she was like, "Whoa, what are you doing?!" She was so scared, and I realized that it wasn't going to work. I did feel like it was a size thing. She was so intimidated. I felt like, if you're intimidated by me now, I don't want to be getting into this.

Pand: I have found that personality and size and sexuality are three things that just mesh, all the time. Or people on the outside looking in think they mesh. I have a big personality, therefore I must have big body. When I talk on the phone, when I was doing the personal ads thing a couple years ago, and I'd be talking on the phone, I never said anything about fat, and they automatically assumed I was, because of the size of the personality. I have a woman I traveled across country with last summer - and I hope to god she's never in my life again - she's a very thin white woman who lives in the Bay Area, she's a dyke, and she kept talking about people taking up space in the world, and I got more and more and more offended. And I kept saying to her, "If they're having big personality stuff, or they're fat, I need you to tell me, because I'm getting more and more offended, because I've also taken up very little space and been the same size. Okay? So I need you to let me know." And it became this really big issue for us.

Susannah: I think that taking up space issue is really important, especially because I feel very much that I "expand" when I'm in pleasure, and I take up a lot more room in the bedroom. So, if the person can't be there for that, and kind of hold her own in that, it's not going to work.

Pand: I've found, in s/m scenes especially, that when I'm bottoming and I'm in a really small space, I need my top to be of size. I need her to be large. That with a thin woman, when I am small, I just think it's two children in the room. It's really difficult. I need the big personality, I need her to be strong, and I automatically equate fat and strong, in a sexual situation. So when I'm bottoming,

and I'm little - I'm very, very little - I need her to bring me back that way. I need her to be strong and grab me and go, "I need you here; I need you present; I need you focused. Stay with me. Be strong." And it helps me. It helps me a lot.

Margo: Just as you said that, I just got this flash that I do associate big fat women with, as you said, strength, but also safety. I mean, that's the main way I like to give it up. But, yeah, there's something really safe.

Pand: Artemis Oakgrove wrote - and we all know she's like one of the worst writers in the community, but she does do good smut; she does decent smut - there's a piece in her book, *Nighthawk*, that I always refer to, when she's talking about being with the woman who foster-parented her, and the sexuality that hap-

pened in that relationship which is sick in its own right -but she's talking about how only a fat woman can take this from her, only a fat woman can take the total power of her sexuality, a hundred percent thin women cannot do this. I remember reading that scene and going, "Yes, that's totally it!"

April: I read that same piece and I think the book is horrible, but for me, it just keys into all the messages I've heard all my life, it's not that fat women have a sexuality - they have a sexual usefulness.

Pand: My take on that was that she uses *Nighthawk*, that she's excited when she comes, that's the only woman who can really give this to her the way she needs it.

Margo: So, April, how do you think we can have a sexuality, as opposed to having a sexual usefulness?

April: I don't know. But I think the more that fat women are explicit in the world about the fact that they have a sexuality that's *their* sexuality, and they're doing what they want, the better.

Margo: Yeah, well so often, we get sabotaged. I was in Miami, this summer, with my lover, and we were walking on this boardwalk, and there were lots of faggots out, and there was all this really cool Latin music playing. It was raining, and my wife was dressed in long shorts and a short T-shirt that showed off her belly. She looked really good. It was pouring, and the more it rained, the more her clothes stuck to her body. These guys sitting in a cafe started hassling my lover. My instinct was to reach out and put my arm around her, which of course made them hassle us for being lesbians. And they went on and on, and I don't even remember what they said. It was just nasty stuff. We kept walking and I was feeling really bad. I'm sure she was feeling even worse and I dropped her hand, because I didn't want any more shit. And she interpreted it as I didn't want to be with her, or that I was ashamed to be with her. Of course, it disintegrated from there. But that expression of herself as a fat, beautiful 350 pound woman, dressed the way that she

I've heard all my life, it's not that fat women have a sexuality - they have a sexual usefulness.

wanted to dress, turned into a wedge between us. So I think it's really hard for that to happen, because we can't just do what we want to do. We have to take in all the shit that's out in the world. It's happened, and it's really hard to transform that.

Pand: I just had a flash, from when I lived in Colorado, my lovers would never be seen with me in public as a lover. I was okay in the bedroom, and I was okay in the living room, but I was not okay to go out dancing with. I country step, two-step. And it was okay to dance with my faggot friends. It was okay to dance with my friends, but my lover would never acknowledge my existence, and this was several lovers in a row. And I totally interpreted that as being because I was fat. I mean, I never assumed it was anything else. It had to be! THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE WRONG WITH ME!

And I just flashed on that, and I really understand. I've done much better for myself since I got here. . . . Did you talk it out, you and she, later on?

Margo: Oh, eventually. . . .

Susannah: I've an experience, just from growing up and being very close with my mom, of having my mom as a companion and her being out there in the world as a smart, witty, social fat person. I have all these positive visual and kinesthetic memories of my mom getting dressed for a party, how good she looked; so elegant and sexy. She also gave me such a sex-positive and tolerant upbringing. My mom's social circle had a number of political and artsy fat dykes in it. I even went with my mom to my first lesbian bar. Having older dykes as friends while growing up has helped me enormously to live my life. But my mom has been the single most important role model for me in terms of being a fat woman in the world. Last spring, my lover and I went to a formal evening wedding. She was "best man." I had this last-minute anxiety attack about how I looked, and how we were going to be treated as a "out" dyke couple at this straight wedding. My mom just sat me down and laid all this positive stuff on me. It really helped me feel good and I really enjoyed the evening.

Sondra: We've talked a lot about fat women as being strong, and a lot of us sort of identify fat women that way, but I think that is probably sort of atypical. I'm wondering if other people think so. I mean, I think a lot of fat women out there -and maybe I'm thinking just heterosexually -but I feel like when fat women are targeted - maybe just straight women -it's more because they're easier. I don't know . . . it seems not genuinely a consensual sexual interest.

Pand: I don't know. Explain that a little more.

Sondra: I feel like there are stereotypes that fat women can be easier - easier to get fat women to do what you

want, easier to control, than a random thin woman. because I don't really feel that way, I wonder if that's part of why I'm drawn to the whole dyke community. I really wonder how much of a factor that is in my life. Because that stereotype really doesn't fit with me, it would be really hard for me to be with a man, no matter what my body was saying. Just because the culture is so different, so alienating.

Margo: Men come up to me on the street and, basically, just out and out proposition me for sex. They wouldn't say, "Would you like to go out for a drink ." They'd say, "Would you like to go home and fuck." It would just be really blatant. Sometimes I would say, "I'm a lesbian," or whatever, and they would say, "Well, I can suck pussy as good as any girl." And I'd say, "Yeah, right!" But there would be no pretense of anything else, except that I was just this fat cunt that they could stick their dick in. I mean, that's all it was. So I think that that exists.

Pand: Yeah, I've had that kind of experience, too.

Margo: And I don't know if that happens to thin women, too. I'm sure to some it does, but this exclusively happens. I mean, that's the only attention I've ever had from men.

Pand: I remember being thin and getting attention from men, and it wasn't like that. It was much more in love, like cat-calls, and nice propositions like, "Hey, wanna get married?"

April: I get both kinds. I was walking to the hairdresser once, and walked by this man who said, "Wanna fuck?" It took me ten steps to think, "He really said that! I have a hairdressing appointment! No!" But I also have men who follow me and try to give me their phone numbers, want me to go out for coffee, want to date, that kind of thing. Finally, if they're polite, I tell them I'm a lesbian,

"I don't do men."
But I think that the stereotype is definitely out there, and there is a real perception that fat women are available, because they're desperate. And hey, "all cats are gray in the dark." I don't think you can be a dyke and grow up in

America and not have that stereotype in you somewhere. I don't know how it plays out in the lesbian community, but I'm sure it's there because it's out there in the world.

Pand: That would be a really good survey to put in *FaT GiRL*, and have fat girls give to their thin friends. What happens to you on the street? Do people proposition you? Do you get this? Do you see yourself this way, and that way? Give it to both sides and see what the comparison is.

April: I find that the attention that I get is more hostile and abusive, or what I consider that way, when I'm

I have all these positive memories of my mom getting dressed for a party, how good she looked; so elegant, so sexy.

depressed. When I'm not depressed, people tend to stay further away. I still get attention, but it's more polite. So I'm curious, is it just me?

Margo: I wonder. I'm in this writing class, and the teacher told a story about walking down the street. She'd just gotten herself a roasted chicken, and she was really into this chicken. I don't think she was eating it, but she was holding it. And these guys just called her a whore, or "puta" - they said "puta" to her. And I was thinking it was probably because she was much more interested in this chicken than she was in what they had in their pants. So I think that perhaps, since you're not engaging with them, or you're really obviously not interested, in your own head, that they feel like you're rejecting them, and they can say nastier shit to you.

April: They come up and touch me, when I'm depressed, when I don't even know they're there. I think that part of it has to do with the whole *fat = lonely = available* equation.

Margo: "You'll take anything, even scum like me."

Pand: I've found myself . . . I'm riding bus and BART, now, and I'm finding that my car is going to be bigger than any therapy I've ever had, because I can't protect myself. I don't feel like I have any mental or emotional protection at all. And I have found, I'd say it's upwards of ninety percent of the time, I'll be alone at this bus stop, let's say. A man will walk by. He will say hello. I ignore him. This is an open invitation to barrage me with every disgusting thought he's ever had about a woman, a fat woman, a dyke, whatever he assumes that I am. But if I happen to say hello, just thinking I'll say hello and that'll be the end of it and he'll just keep walking - he turns around and takes it as an invitation to proposition me.

April: You just can't win.

Pand: I've given up trying.

Margo: Get a mustache.

Pand: Yeah, change my hairstyle, adjust my body, put it in appropriate clothing. It's still not going to be right.

Sondra: Get a gun.

Pand: There you go! I had cops telling me the other day that I was a moron, for walking through a neighborhood where I had no business being, dressed the way I was dressed, and looking how I looked - that I deserved, basically, I deserved what I got from the guys that harassed me.

Sondra: Did you complain to the cops?

Pand: No. These guys were harassing me and the cops pulled up, and I'm very happy they were there, because it would have extended . . . it would have gone much further than it did. And now I'm required by my supervisor to be driven to this neighborhood, because I can't protect myself, short of owning a gun or being a black belt in karate, and being able to take care of myself that way. I can't do it. There's no way to win.

Sondra: In some ways, I feel like weight is just another

one of those things, like being a woman, and being a dyke, and being whatever other things that just make you more susceptible, to people feeling that they can fuck with you.

April: I think that what I've done is learned to use the stereotypes to be my protection. Fat women are perceived as voracious, that's part of the whole "fat women are easy" thing. That they're always sex hungry, partially because they can't get it, and partially just because they eat. So a lot of my persona is about taking that reputation of voraciousness and saying, "yeah". I think that it intimidates people, that the sheer sensual wave I can put out keeps them away. Which is good and bad. I think part of the difference when I'm depressed is I'm just not doing that. I'm crying, I'm doing whatever, and then I'm vulnerable, I'm usable again. Other times they may know they can't really handle me, but at that point . . .

Sondra: Is that something that you can let go of, when you want to?

April: No.

Sondra: It's a reaction to the world at large?

April: And intimate relationships. A lot of times, I feel what I've got is a little three year old girl, running around the world in the grown-up woman's body she's always had.

Susannah: Once I was at the neighborhood diner, I had my hair all done up, and I'm in a flowered flowing dress, and I'm feeling very sexy, and my lover is in jeans and 100% butch. We passed a man and he says, raunchily, "Hey, beautiful!" to my lover. And I think I

was actually jealous of the harassment! The harassment is different for all of us. For a butch, it's a double insult, to be called "beautiful".

April: I'd be lying if I didn't say that there's a part of me that really revels in it. To be able to make people who really believe "fat people are ugly," want me and not be able to get me. I like that. Yes, I like that. I don't like them to be impolite, but I don't mind if they desire.

Pand: There's a group of men that my lover works with. She's the only woman who works in this music store, and she's not closeted, she's just very suburban, very pastel, so I walk in there. "So, this is the new girlfriend?" They don't know how to take me. I came in one day, and I was showing her *FaT GiRL*, and the men were interested. I said, "Fine. Take a look." And they were looking at it. It happened to be the first issue. Do you guys remember the centerfold? This guy opened up to it, and he threw it! He had no idea that women do this - I mean women and women together. He had no idea that fat women do this. *And* I guess she got tons of shit about being sexual, and she said, "I'm twenty-eight years old. I have a lover. We are sexual. That's who we are." And they got honest with her, and they said, "We never, ever thought of you as a sexual being. We've known you ten years." The men never thought of her as a sexual being.

"You'll take anything, even scum like me."

Is it just women, or is this fat women? Thin women are always assumed that, at the age of fifteen or sixteen, they're fucking, but fat girls -we don't start 'til later. God knows, nobody wants us and we have to wait 'til later. I didn't start being sexual 'til nineteen, but those were choices that I had made. And I'm happy about my choices. I am a sexual being. It's eighty percent, sometimes, of my persona. And I like it.- I like to put it out there. I've never interviewed for a job I haven't gotten. I'm very strong, out there, in who I am, and I want people to say, "She's sexy." I want people to tell me that I'm beautiful. I want people to tell me that they understand. So I keep taking them every issue.

Margo: Make them buy them.

April: One of the things I like about being fat is my voluptuousness. Whether it's currently fashionable or not, big tits are woman. Big hips are woman. So there's a part of me that revels in being big tits and tiny waist and big hips, and just more womanly than any woman they've ever seen before. I like that part of it. I like being able to be out in the world and throw people's assumptions back in their face, and really challenge them to look at their beliefs . . . not by saying that their standards, or the things that they value are wrong, but by saying , "Yes, the things that you value are beautiful. I think they're beautiful, too, and I have them all. You've just put a limit on the size, and that's wrong."

Sondra: I've been thinking a lot about butch identity issues, this past year. And I think what you say is really true. It's been my experience, too - this whole sort of "big breasts, big hips, more woman" thing. And I think that's really hard. I'd really like to hear more of a butch perspective on it. 'Cause I know that can be a real problem. It can be really hard to be out in the world and be butch, when your body is perceived as "ultra-woman."

Susannah: I have the flip side of that: I'm femme, but I have a butch body; broad shoulders, flat chest. . . I happen to be with a lover who totally revels in that, so we have a lot of faggot fun between the two of us.

April: I think that's interesting, too, because for me, a butch with big tits is . . . I love . . . that's what butches are supposed to be! But I totally understand it's a shopping nightmare for them. If you're the kind of butch who wants not to be that shape . . . But I don't care. I'm thinking, "Yeah, that's definitely the right way!"

Margo: It's exactly, as you say, a shopping nightmare. I was in Eddie Bauer outlet - my favorite place- and I'm in there, and I see this other butch. And of course I go up and say "hi", real friendly. She said, "Did you see these pants? Aren't they great?" I said, "I have that butch nightmare." pulling my shirt up. I moaned, "I have that

hourglass figure." She kind of laughed. "Well, they fit me just fine." When I was smaller, I used to be able to wear men's pants really easily, 501's used to fit great. But now I'm too big in the ass, with this little waist. It just doesn't work. And I do have big tits - they definitely get in the way. They feel great when I'm in bed, but when I'm strutting around, trying to be butch they don't quite fit.

Susannah: Well, try trying on dresses with huge darts! I've got nothing to fill them, and yet the dress is fitting my shoulders just fine.

Pand: I've found you just need to buy boys' clothes. I'm totally attracted to butch women. I don't have any doubts in my mind that a dark-skinned butch woman is a hundred percent for me, and I can pick them out of a crowd of a thousand, every time.

April: Are you referring to persona or physique?

Pand: Both. I like a woman with a male body. I always have. I like small-breasted women; I like women with no hips. I'm built like that, and I feel much more comfortable. I can dress femme, and I can do all that because I know how to accessorize. But I like them butch. I like to guess . . . I'm most attracted to the ones I have to look at and go, "Is that male or female?" Very attractive, I'm very attracted to transes. And it's a lot of fun. I like going out and taking them shopping, and helping them shop. They're beautiful - I think they're beautiful, and I think the struggle that they go through is beautiful.

April: I think for fat women, the commitment that we have to make to express ourselves through the way we dress, and move, and are in the world, is so big- and it doesn't matter whether you're butch or femme, or neither-the kind of struggles that we have to go through to find a way to make ourselves project what we want to project are such a ferocious project it's amazing. You're right, the struggle is beautiful. We were talking earlier about perceiving fat women as strong. I think that's part of it. You have to be incredibly strong to live in the world as a fat woman.

Margo: There is that strength of getting harassed, or getting the daily message that you don't fit, in whatever way, and then still going, still pursuing, still finding sexy outfits to wear outside, even though it may be \$60 for this really slinky sexy thing in the store - if they happen to have your size - overcoming all of that, and still being who you are and expressing it. It makes it doubly sweet.

Sondra: Yeah, but I think there are a lot of women that it doesn't happen for. There's a ton of women who just stay in their houses or in their rooms, or whatever, and I sort of feel like that could be me. Not that it could be me, who I am, but it just so happened it didn't happen to me

**"We never,
ever
thought
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that way. I think for me to be as out there as I am, just being a person walking down the street, and then being sexual on top of that, and everything else on top of that, it was real luck. I don't think it was a personal strength thing. I think it was more . . . I don't know. I just feel like, for every one fat woman who can turn it around and manage to feel good about herself consistently, there have to be tens of women who can't. You know, who are in the bedroom, who are thinking, "If only I could get down to a size 26, I could buy the thing at Lane Bryant, and then maybe I would feel sexy." I think it's sad. I guess I don't see glamour in the struggle.

Pand: It has been so long since I've been involved in that struggle, that when I hear it . . . Like, a woman the other day that I've just recently met, and hating spending time with, she's like really into losing the fifty pounds she has, and becoming the beautiful woman she wants to be to impress these men, and I have like a total visceral reaction to it. I'd forgotten that women do this struggle. I'd forgotten that office of women are on the Weight Watchers' diet, and I forgot that all they're trying to do is impress men, so they can be sexual. I'd forgotten all of this. It was a slap in the face. It was really hard. I think if we forget where we came from, we're going to be lost. And if we don't put it out there every day, we're going to be more lost.

Sondra: This is one of the things where I wonder if there's a difference - something I was trying to bring up a long time ago - a difference between s/m people, or whatever you want to call it - power people - and vanilla lesbians. Because, it seems to me the great majority of people that I experience who seem reasonable about size issues and body image issues, are all s/m people. I don't know if that's just because I don't hang out with many people who aren't. There's certainly so much shit in the lesbian community about body image stuff. I guess I get really protective of my girlfriend, 'cause when I go out with her she often gets a lot of shit, and she's quite, quite butch . . .

April: And really cute.

Sondra: Yeah. And I compare that experience to going out with other friends - especially one friend who's butch and who's very thin - just exactly what many lesbians would drool over - tightly muscled, sort of small, but big-shouldered kind of thing. And I'll tell you, she is treated better, everywhere, every time, by people queer, not queer, whatever. And it makes me so angry. It just makes me so angry.

Margo: I know this was discussed in the race roundtable thing - but there's definitely a different aesthetic of what's considered beautiful or sexy in some communities of color. I grew up similarly to you, (to Susannah) with my mother being fat, and it being a good thing, it being a

really positive thing, and my father being wildly attracted to her. I don't think it's exclusively s/m women who are into fat women. Maybe it's a higher percentage, in the survey thing, but I know plenty of vanilla women - white and of color - who are really great about fat.

Susannah: Certainly, at s/m play parties, for the first time I got to see, since I never saw my mom having sex, fat women having sex, outside of my own mirror image. There is the power of that.

April: I don't know exactly how to address this, but you were talking earlier about not all fat women being able to make a choice to be positive in the world. I know that I am kind of hostile about it, but I feel I made a choice when I was young about whether or not I was going to give in to society's pressure about how fat women could be. And I ended up the way that I am, and for the most part, I like it. And I think those women chose too - the women that I see that make me feel sorry, and make me want to rescue them, and for whom I feel an enormous amount of sympathy, but also an enormous amount of blame. I really feel like they could have chosen - or they could still choose - not to live their life like it was appropriate to tread on them. And I want them not to. I want them to decide that they have a right to be in the world, and they can be who they want, and do what they want, and stop being involved with weenie people because they're desperate, and get a life. And it sounds really harsh, but there's this part of me that *is* really harsh and aggravated. People compliment me a lot, but what they say is, "I could never wear that. I could never do that." And it's not that they don't admire, or want it somehow. They've put it as someplace that they could never go. WHY NOT? They're smaller than I am. It'd be a whole lot easier for them than it is for me, in terms of the actual physical stuff in the world. So, I don't have a lot of patience for it. I really don't. I think they chose to be limited.

Sondra: I think that's really different. What you just said is a different thing than . . . for someone to come up - and I've had things like that, too - come up and say, "Oh, I could never do that. You're so great for doing that. I could never do that." That to me is no compliment, and I don't feel like it was

intended as one. I feel like it's a "Boy, you're certainly eccentric! Good for you!" That, to me, is really a different thing. I don't have the anger that you have about . . .

I mean, I understand it. I think I really do, because I think it's probably similar, for me, to people who don't . . . like people who are just closeted, or something. And it's like, "By staying in the closet, you are affecting me. By them not knowing that you're gay and can hold that job, that does affect me." But I guess I just don't have

There's certainly so much shit in the lesbian community about body image stuff.

that feeling about weight issues. I think it probably has to do with knowledge about abusive relationships, and really understanding how they can work. People say "You should be doing something to get out of this," but you can't. Like you can't do anything. I understand it on such a guttural level that I just don't have that anger.

It's so easy to say, just leave, or whatever. Just change, just don't take it. Being able to do that is a big, scary, hard thing. But I understand what you're saying, I think.

Margo: I understand it, too. From my perspective,

I couldn't get out of it until I was ready to get out of it. Partially, I couldn't get out of it until I knew that there was something else out there. I know you were fat as a kid, too, April. I don't even know when it began. In first grade, somebody made some

comment how I wasn't in their classroom, and if I were, nobody else would have been able to fit in the classroom. It just went on and on and on. I was very active in sports, in high school, and people mooded at me from the other team, and taunted me. So

I internalized it, and then when a lover said the classic "well, you'd be so attractive if only you lost X pounds," I didn't get mad about it, and I took it. I thought, "Well, that's just how it is,

and I should be grateful that she wants to be with me, at all." It wasn't until years later that I really got a consciousness about it. I guess I don't feel like people are choosing to stay there as much as they're slammed into this place, and they don't know better yet,

or they haven't figured what other options there are yet. This particular area, we're very privileged to have a lot of really wonderful political stuff happening, and a lot of acceptance. I love places like Telegraph Avenue,

because I feel like I can walk there and melt in and I'm not a freak. But there aren't places like in most of the places across the country.

Susannah: There's such constant bombardment from society to fit the "norm", unless you have something

within you that says it can be different, somehow, and that grows, and that's always forming your perspective, so that by the time you're an adult, you can express yourself as a unique being, as a creative person, or an independent thinker in any regard.

April: I can only relate it to my life. I grew up in Minnesota, in Minneapolis, one of the probably five mixed-race kids that I knew in the state of Minnesota.

And I've been fat all my life, and it's not like people were rushing out to talk to me in Minneapolis and say,

"Oh yes, you can be different. You don't have to buy all of this." All the pressure that I got was to accept it and go with the flow, and try and turn myself into wall-paper, and diet and stuff like that. It was no easier for me there than it would be for anybody else anywhere. I think that everybody's faced with that choice, and it's not about the outside world making it easy and accessible for you.

It's about what you're prepared to think and prepared to

accept. And I guess the people I'm often the most aggravated with are people like women in NAAFA, who are in a fat activist community, or women in the Oakland fat dyke community, who have an enormous quantity of options, and still spend a lot of time saying, "I can't do this. I can't do that. This isn't available for me." If they're out in the world, they could do it, but they won't. Part of my aggravation,

clearly, is that I feel like I'm doing

all their work for them. I want to have company. But it's

hard for me to see people in that kind of pain, and the pain isn't any less when you're trying to hide. It's just the pain is just yours. You don't get to share it with anybody. It doesn't go away; it doesn't get any smaller.

It's just that there's just you.

Sondra: I guess it's so hard to leave that kind of place. I feel like people do what they can do. It's hard for me to believe - and not to belittle the effort that you've put into being you, at all - but it's hard for me to believe that people would willingly allow themselves to be oppressed. . .

People aren't stupid, you know.

If you see clearly your two options, and you can really do both of them, you choose the better one. You would choose to be less oppressed, or more vocal, or whatever, and the fact that people don't choose that, to me, means they can't - whether they can't see it or they can't do it, the fact is they can't.

April: I think people choose the more familiar route. Which isn't necessarily better, but they know how to do it.

Margo: The known misery?

April: Yeah. They know what misery looks like; they know what it feels

like; they know what to do with it.

Margo: I don't know. I feel like I need company in the things that I do. Like I didn't come out until I heard that there were other lesbians in the world, because I thought I was the only one. If I was the only one, it was a non-issue. I really did think I was the only one. I just thought I would not be sexual for the rest of my life. What a tremendous loss that would have been.

Transcribed by Cath Thompson.

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