



Lesbian Ethics

Volume 2 No. 3

Lesbian Ethics

Editor: Jeanette Silveira

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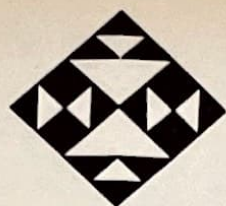
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Editor's Introduction

Once again *LE* is slower getting to you than I would like. Mainly this seems due to the lack of a co-editor who can begin the next issue as I'm finishing the current one. However, there are new dykes helping out; and *LE* herself is financially healthy and continues to find new subscribers.

With this issue *LE* completes her second volume. While the covers of the first three issues were NOT color coordinated, you'll note the covers of the second three ARE. What will I do next?

The focus of this issue is sex. The articles speak for themselves, covering, I believe, the full range of the topic. I do want to point out that the authors of two articles and four forum contributions are anonymous or use pseudonyms. This is many more than in prior issues of *LE*. What does this say about lesbians and sex?

The forum topic for the next issue of *LE* (3:1) is Radical Lesbian Spirituality. There may still be time to submit material for this issue, contact me about deadlines. The forum topic for *LE* 3:2 is Separatism: After the Debate. That is, I'm suggesting that readers go beyond the debate over the validity of separatism to explore the questions and opportunities which separatism presents to you, as a means of revolution and as a way of living. What successes, problems, contradictions does one encounter living as a separatist? What issues do you think we do/will encounter in a lesbian society? How do you think we'll get there from here? Or any other aspect of the topic that intrigues you. Be creative. Tentative deadline for this forum is May 31, 1988.

Of relevance to potential authors for *LE* is the fact that through the experience with past issues, *LE's* editorial policy has been developing. I am now setting a limit of 1000 words for letters to the editor. These will remain unedited, except for space-saving purposes (include your phone number for this). Longer responses to material which has appeared in *LE* should be submitted as articles, which will be edited. Guidelines for articles include: 1) As much as possible, base your analysis in your own experience and that of other lesbians. 2) Commentary (positive or negative) on the work of other lesbians (*LE* authors and others) should be substantiated with quotations and adequate references. 3) Find a lesbian who said it or say it yourself. Male authors should be cited only when they are critiqued (and that should not be frequent) or when information they provide is crucial and not available elsewhere. 4) Use the words *dyke/lesbian* and *womon/woman/wimmin/womyn/women* rather than *human* and *humanity* when implying something of great value. (I am not adamant about alternate spellings of *woman*, because I don't think they solve the problem.)

Jeanette Silveira

Mystical Unioning

Dacey Yates

This narrative acknowledges that womons sometimes consciously experience mystical or transcendent states of union with various forms of life, including with each other. Particularly addressed is mutual transcendency which can occur during Lesbian sexlove. Personal-account information from individual Lesbians is included to illustrate the hidden high significance of the presence/absence of these mystical experiences in our lives. It is proposed that such experiences are natural, valid, and important to womons, and that were it not for men's oppression they might be a typical component of most womons' lives. Profound empowerments result to womons from mystical love experiences; since these empowerments are a threat to patriarchy men have forced their erasure to such extent that we ourselves now tend to discredit love mysticism and resist engaging in it. This erasure is presented as the breaking of the fundamental or essence level of womon/womon and womon/earth connectedness.

Men's colonization of mysticism, i.e., their appropriation and perversion of the real thing, is discussed in a beginning way, with special attention to the sado-masochistic content of christian mysticism. Certain phenomena of u.s. pop culture are viewed as examples of mass propaganda aimed expressly against the existence of womons' mystical love experiences.

Specifically regarding Lesbian ethics and lifestyles, it is suggested that we will continue to meet with frustration so long as there is lack of direct-experience conscious knowledge of the essence of self-and-other. The 'issue' of 'monogamy vs. nonmonogamy' is examined in this light, as are some painful group behaviors common in Lesbian communities.

Although all womons are included as potential experiencers of womon/womon love transcendencies, it is self-acknowledged Lesbians who are viewed as the likeliest, now, to retain sufficient moral realism and motivation to win back these experiences which men have deprived us of. The purpose of this narrative is to contribute assistive information to Lesbians who are – or would like to become – engaged in that effort.

Introduction

I once sat down and wondered why my mystic states of unioning with other womans had been so few.

Sprinkled through my life were occasions when I had been the same person as another woman, she being simultaneously me. Our bodies retained their separateness while all else of us – our minds, emotions, awarenesses, inclinations, and more – became the constituents of one being, not two. Analogous to two drops of water touching and blending as one, so it was with the activating forces which enliven our bodies. Our two indwelling spirits became one. Our two consciousnesses became one. It was intimacy beyond imagination.

Sex was a context in which this transpersonal event could and did happen. I knew that, from the few times it had: As I attended my incomparable lover with all of my senses, so she attended me, and when our awarenesses merged so that I was inside her, being her, I perceived myself through her loving, multi-sensed comprehension of me. Her perceptions became mine, and I knew I am beautiful and good. And yet my focus was not on myself. I was fixed on the glory of her. Her body was in my arms, my eyes, my ears, my tastebuds; her skin was my own which was pressing against it, and yet it was her. Her flesh, her movements, her sensations were mine, known thoroughly to me as my own. And yet all of these things were distinctly HER. I loved the essence of HER, as if nothing of me existed but my thousands-flooding awarenesses of her, and my love for her. She knew it. She was knowing all of it, knew herself, realized herself in all her incredible beauty and goodness, via me. With me. In love with me. In lovesex with me. And that was not all. During two of these occasions of mystical sexlove, when our two consciousnesses merged we also unioned with what has been called – inadequately if you ask me – cosmic consciousness. I prefer to express this the best way I can: We two-as-one became also the same as the self-knowing heart/soul/mind/life of She Who Is All Things And Non-Things.

I can attest these experiences are okay to have. Why hadn't I had them more often?

Spiritual Loneliness (and Frustration)

My self-inquiries were no mere intellectual curiosity; they were a problem-solving effort to escape from devastating spiritual loneliness. I was suffering on of those times Lesbians know, when it surfaces and prolongs that one is essentially – but intangibly – isolated even though interacting with plenty of people: unperceived, aliened, and starved for communion.

I had a lover. Our live-together monogamous relationship had become that arid landscape of superficial conversation, passing pats, and – rarely – sex of the considerate and shallow kind. She seemed to want this existence, but I had never tested whether she actually preferred it. I decided to try and reinstate our passion (as so many Lesbians have done). We did love each other deeply (as so many have).

Although it felt a contradiction in terms to be intellectually directing my passions, I attempted to do that. My thoughts were strategic and simplistic: Sexlove had been a major context for both the expression and the nourishment of our previous profound intimacy; we had not made real sexlove in a long time; I was probably co-responsible for that; I would therefore rouse my passions from sleep, open again my physical senses to her attractions, tune in, fire up, and seduce my lover back into what had once and so briefly been authentic closeness.

It didn't work. At first she appeared oblivious to my messages, but I knew she wasn't; as I escalated the power and specificity of my invitations of eye contact, innuendo, and body language (which were by then fueled with absolute desire for specifically her) she sweetly declined, using the subtle but effective non-verbal ways. At my instigation we talked about it then, several times over the course of a few months, with the result that I knew I remained ignorant of the bottom line of her relevant thoughts and feelings. However, one new fact emerged clearly in my mind. This woman was deliberately resisting an attraction to me.

I could perceive it. She was actively blocking her urges to respond and engage with me at more passionately intimate levels. One does not barricade something which isn't there anymore, has faded away; one barricades what is still present, alive, and pushing. For the first time in my life, in the face of a significant rejection I tried not to take it personally and largely succeeded.

Previously I had lived sequentially in monogamy with other womons who had in turn grown distant-but-pleasant within our first calendar year. Their declinings of real intimacy with me, I had assumed, were due to something wrong with me; something unpalatable, or deficient, or both. That assumption I had never allowed to become a definite conscious thought; I had let it remain a haunt. In lieu of confronting it I turned to the fact that my troublesome relationship pattern seemed universal among Lesbian couples I knew. I vaguely subscribed to the common resignation that that was just the way it went – although it might be different if ever you met the right woman . . .

In other words, because of implanted half-conscious doubts and fears that my inner self was distasteful or inadequate, I had adopted and retained for years a mindless passive stance regarding the mysterious disappearance of intimacy. I might have retained that stance forever, except that during the mystical state of sexlove union I then thoroughly realized my own goodness, wholeness, and

beauty, via another woman's shared perception of me. That revelation has power and permanence, and in my case it eventually displaced the core of men's sabotage against my esteem for the essence of my self.

I now informed my lover of my knowledge that she actually desired the passion and intimacy she rejected. She verified that was true. When I asked if she would share her reasons, she said she herself did not understand them. Much later she told me why: In her mind existed the implanted belief that if one fully loves someone other than god, then god will take that being away. Since we two had been consciously aware of loving each other fully (oh, much more than fully) during our sexlove transcendency, and since that state had occurred suddenly before she realized what was happening, she was afraid to risk the levels of intimacy which might lead to it again. She feared that if she let herself love me (read: let herself be conscious of loving me) fully, god would kill me if necessary, to deprive her of me. And if she let me love her fully, then god might kill her. She was agnostic by chosen orientation, and was puzzled and frustrated at being the unwilling host for the incongruent belief-and-fear, but could not get rid of it. As a further turn of the screw, she had once allowed herself to consciously fully love a person who then died abruptly in early adulthood.

But long before she finally self-identified these things and then explained them to me, we had mutually agreed to cancel our monogamous commitment at all its levels. I explored a few relationships with other women I knew and met, but each time the magnetism was lacking. The strong authentic urge to merge at deep levels was absent between those women and me, we were insufficiently attracted to desire deeper intimacy. My former lover and I had continued to live together for a while, and then separated.

Enforced Isolation ≠ Chosen Solitude

Solitude I cherish as much as communion. I make that point toward the accurate portrayal of my circumstance and, I speculate, that of many other Lesbians. Solitude is nutritive, restorative, and delightful to me, and I have experienced sublime states in that mode. When men/patriarchy deprive me of adequate aloneness, I suffer. I need both: profound self-intimacy, and profound self-with-other intimacy.

Back to Nature, by Default

Another tendency which I think many Lesbians would recognize was that I increasingly turned to nature's non-human species and classes of beings for solace and a next-best communion, in the face of isolation from my lover and others of my own kind. A journal excerpt reflects this, and my internal desolation at the time.

. . . I fit nowhere, among humons. I fit only among leaves and rocks on the ground. Stones, big as mountainsides or pebbles, fit my hands' shapes and my skin's textures. And trees. Leaves, bark, root shapes half in and half out of the earth. Green against blue sky; that fits my eyes' needings, if I must say so, and not my absent-minded lover's face or eyes – which mostly serve to remind me of those few, so few, moments when she and I were One, when that One was present in her face and eyes . . .

Am I Anomalous?

Because the level of womon/womon communion I lacked was ineffable, I had difficulty clearly defining my painful situation, even to myself. Also there was no cultural validation for the existence, let alone the prime significance, of what I lacked and wanted to know how to increase. Patriarchy of course pretends there is no such thing as transcendent or mystic womon/womon unioning in sex or any other context. And no Lesbian had ever mentioned the subject to me. I wondered whether the Lesbian silence was caused solely by the fact that the subject is hard to express in words, ineffable; another possible reason for the non-mention would be that the experience – and its experiencers – might be deviantly rare. I doubted that was the case. My guess (a trust as much as a guess) was that the frequency of womon/womon mystic union was occasional, not rare or anomalous, among Lesbians in general. I wanted to talk with other Lesbians in the hope that something among their experiences would help me to get out of my prison. Also I was concerned to know whether I was or wasn't an anomaly among my peers; the implications of that, either way, were weighty. Further, I had grown plain burning curious about the Lesbian world in this regard.

A Collection of "Facts" About Mysticism

Prior to querying any Lesbians, I gathered and organized my store of actual and supposed information about the broad subject/s of transcendency/mysticism. Most of it was patri-information: I summarize that here, hoping to clarify it with my accompanying comments.

In patriarchy's esoteric definition, the transcendent and the mystic are two different subjects: It is supposed to be that ordinary people can experience transcendent states, whereas the experiencers of mystic states are extremely rare personages. This is an artificial division and it is usually tacit, implied rather than said outright; one must dig hard to find where men have expressed it, and even those expressions are oblique, not straightforward. Because it is a tacit division of an ineffable arena, it is easy to miss, and awkward to discuss. That

built-in difficulty serves men; patriarchy does not want this obscure splittance pointed out, brought to light, and analyzed. Men's division of the transcendent from the mystic is a corollary to their insistence that the flesh and the spirit be separated and hierarchized (and that insistence is, of course, the original and fundamental plank in patriarchy's structure). The so-called mystic experience is hierarchized as holier and higher than the so-called transcendent. I speculate that the purpose of that maneuver is to defend and exalt, in comparison to womons' experience, an incomplete kind of supramundane experience which men have.

Patriarchy's Transcendencies

What patriarchy allows to be transcendent states of consciousness have been described by numerous ordinary folk (men and womons, I presume, although interestingly I find no comparative statistics) who experienced them, in diverse situations, as valued highlight events in their lives. Examples are such as born-again raptures, Maslow's peak experiences, ecstatic encounters with aspects of nature such as the sunset or the ocean, etc.

Despite their diversity of context and content, transcendencies have some common characteristics. Often, during the experience, the subject person comprehends the presence of – and the self's unity with and sameness as – an all-encompassing Mind or Life or Spirit which is perceived to be the cause of all which exists; this comprehension entails vast feelings of belovedness and existential assurance. Apparent opposites are reconciled; for instance, the finite and the infinite are perceived as two aspects of one dimension. The subject and the object/s become identical, i.e., the perceiver becomes identical with whatever is perceived. The experience is alogical, it is not explainable within the constraints of logic. Enlightenment of the mind occurs. The experience alters and may even transform the subject's philosophy of living. Some or all of the consequences are permanent. Timelessness, bliss, exultation, ecstasy, peace, and awe, are experienced simultaneously and distinctly. The physical senses, the sensory perceptions, are heightened.

The above list of characteristics can be found, substantively speaking, in many of patriarchy's books and articles: I have no argument with the specific content of the items, I agree with them intellectually and experientially. My argument concerns a significant omission, an erasure. Where is mention or indication of **two-person** (or more than two) **mutual** states of transcendence? Nowhere. The mention is invariably absent, and the implication is that two-person transcendencies are nonexistent. Western patriarchy presents transcendency as, by unspoken definition, always the solitary experience of one person.

Patriarchy's Mystic States

This category of experience is supposed to be reserved for extraordinary personages of patri-religions. Usually but not always they are men: saints, gurus,

and masters of christianity, sufism, hinduism, taoism, buddhism, etc.

Prerequisite to becoming a mystic, they are supposed to have accomplished three things: 1) Total detachment from all creatures and materiality, so as to orient the self entirely toward a god ideal; 2) Arrangement of the physical lifestyle completely around union with god as the major project of personal existence; 3) Prolonged adherence to a program of regular spiritual exercises, including austerities and asceticism.

Mystics are supposed to have experienced transcendency and then advanced to a higher class of experience – proclaimed by men to be the highest possible. Their ability to have this ultimate, this mystic, experience is said to derive from three factors, all concurrently necessary: 1) Mystics are supposed to have met the triple criteria, above, for external and internal behaviors; 2) Their innate psychospiritual constitution is supposedly special, they are born with a rare talent for mysticism; and 3) God is supposed to have chosen to favor specifically them, from among the total population, with the gift of the experience itself – the reason for which choice god never tells.

Patriarchy's mystical experience entails a complete cessation of all the physical senses. That one characteristic, as best I ascertain, is the sole one distinguishing all approved mystical experience from the mere transcendent. In transcendent states sensory awareness is heightened; in mystical states it is absent. (The sensory oblivion is intentional on the part of the mystic; it is the desired result of years of self-inflicted insults to the body.) As to what makes an experience which lacks a component higher than one which has it, the answer is said to be that the flesh, i.e., sensory awareness of materiality, no longer contaminates and drags down the spirit.

Obviously there are abundant patriarchal reasons why one Lesbian in bed with another could not be having a mystical experience.

Terminology

So much for what men say, and their unfortunate hierarchies, distortions, and erasures. I will now go on with actual Lesbian experience, using interchangeably such terms as *mystical*, *supramundane*, *transcendent*, etc.

Lesbians' Actual Experiences

I individually interviewed the first five Lesbian friends with whom I happened to cross paths at a workable time. I asked them to tell me about any personal experience of mystical union they had had, regardless of type or context. Each was informed I might sometime utilize what was said, in writing for publication. None declined or even hesitated, and all approached the subject with initial pleasant interest. My introductory question was individualized each time, so as to communicate personally and clearly to each of these quite-different womans

what I was, out of the wild blue yonder, asking. But the gist of my query each time was, "Have you ever had an experience when you felt merged in a strange and wonderful kind of union with something or someone; perhaps something in nature, or someone you loved?"

Example Interview

What one Lesbian had to say is substantively presented below. Alterations of our conversation, such as paraphrasing, deletions of my words, etc., have been made only to remove irrelevancies, brevitize, and to protect her identity.

Yes, I used to have transcendent experiences; especially in my twenties, when I listened to classical music. I would union with the music. In ecstasy. But it stirred or loosened an overwhelming reservoir of sadness, despondency. So much, I would collapse in tears, unable to do anything else, or stop. These feelings had to do with knowing that great numbers of people in the world must struggle in the dirt for their very survival. They must live under such oppressive conditions that in order to survive they have to forego – they don't have the opportunity to engage in – delight and ecstasy. During that period of my life I had been reading Maslow's concepts on actualizing, and I would feel, "There is no way those people could actualize!"

[When asked how long the span of time was, in her twenties when she had these experiences:] Not long. I was living with my first lover then, and she put a stop to it. Just put her foot down and said, "No more Sunday music in this house." It upset her, she was concerned for me, that I would get that way. (Laughing.) Poor thing, she had a lot to put up with. I used to get raptures during thunderstorms, too. Lightning triggered it, with me. Especially fierce, close lightning. I would go out and stand in the yard with my arms stretched to the sky in exultation, because it was me, the lightning! She would yell, "Come in! You'll get killed!" I would say, "You come out!" Once she joined me, but not for long. When it would be over enough that I'd go back in, she'd roll her eyes and say, "Oh my gawd, people will think you're crazy," in a way she had that was comic and tolerant at the same time. And if we took a vacation and went to the ocean, she would worry about me there, too, because she knew I might get this compelled feeling of wanting to physically get in the sea and go out and out, way over my head, way far out. I would get mystical at the seaside. For one thing, I

would have the experience of perceiving all of how immensely vast it was and yet perceiving that all of it was near enough to be right there as if I could hold it in my hand! My seaside raptures and the lightning ones weren't followed by grief and despondency, they were totally exultant. In the middle of them I would have a wonderful, wonderful contrasting feeling of being overawed and fear – you have the body fear, but the mind is not in tune with that – contrasting with a huge feeling of my own power. It is a sense of confrontation and power.

[When asked if she had ever mystically unioned with another person:] No, I've striven for it and approached near-states, but never experienced any state of the same class of quality as with the sea, and lightning, and music.

[When asked if she knew why she had not mystically unioned with another person:] I think the biggest element is trust. You'd have to have trust that the other person would value that, and not use it against you. I've had it happen that a lover took my confidential information about myself, and later used it against me. The question was, why was I sharing things like that with her, when she didn't share things about herself with me? Also I concluded, probably in my late twenties, that that *total oneness* with another person was too good to be allowed. It was contingent on verbal communication about it, and I couldn't communicate about it verbally. Also I decided it was contingent on understanding in all kinds of more peripheral areas. At that time in my life I had sorrow for the whole world. I'd slowed down enough to take into account what was around me. I was alone with all this, all these perceptions of misery, and no one else seemed to understand the condition the world was in – and I mean the immediate world, not five blocks from my house. I began to develop callouses to my compassion by deliberately de-escalating my efforts to help.

What blows the unioning in any relationship is the inability to be *understood* by the other person. I have never felt that anybody else perceived what I perceive, and so I've never felt that they understood me, knew me, perceived me, what I really am. This is frustrating and lonely, and it can be painful when you deeply love someone who probably will never really know who you are. That pain – and the other one, too, the despondency and grief brought on for me by unioning with music – people avoid and resist the pain

associated with thoughts of unioning. They resist by semi-consciously callousing themselves so they won't experience the unionings. And this increases with age, the callous layers grow thicker. People attend more and more to the mundane details of material existence and popular values, in part so as to avoid unioning; at the same time, they abstain from circumstances which would or might lead to it. I think I learned not to union, and how not to.

[As it turned out, this Lesbian had in fact, previous to the interview, experienced a mystic state involving another woman. She remembered it later, and told me. Her grandmother had died in her arms, and during that death episode a rapturous set of perceptions had occurred between the two of them. The Lesbian said this experience was, and remained, of inestimable value in her overall life. Her description of it was vivid and accompanied by tears of joy.]

Information from the Interviews, Compiled

Only one of the Lesbians reported experiencing mutual sexlove transcendency; however, each of them reported having at least one transcendency of some kind. When all five interviews had been completed and transcribed so that I could overview them together, I made a working classification of the mystical and quasi-mystical states which had been described, as follows.

I. The first category included mystic states which primarily involved another woman as "the other." That is, the experiencer was an interviewed Lesbian, and a second woman was the precipitating focus of her experience, regardless of the context in which it took place. There were three distinguishable types of states in this category:

I-A. In this type the two womons mutually experienced mystic union with each other and also with cosmic consciousness during sexlove. One Lesbian reported this. It had occurred twice with her. Both times, the transcendence was immediately followed by feelings of tremendous sadness. (When I experienced this type, I did not feel any sadness in connection with it, only ecstasy.)

I-B. This type was the same as I-A above, except that cosmic consciousness was not involved. The same Lesbian reported also experiencing this state, also twice, and again both times it was followed by sadness. (I have also experienced this state, with no sadness.)

I-C. The context for this type was death; in it, the subject Lesbian became engaged in a mystical sharing of another woman's experiences at the time that other woman's body was dying, and for a while after. One Lesbian reported

this, with her maternal grandmother. From her description, this state was relatively less mutual and was more like a transfer of her own persona into the persona of the dying woman, in the sense that the death-passage was the focus of the experience for both of them; however, there was mutuality, a knowingness-of-each-other, two-way, involved. The Lesbian described concomitant feelings of overwhelming rapture, joy, peace, certainty of life after death, and a vivid sense of a dissolving or evaporating of chronic interpersonal difficulties, with a freeing of mutual love which had always existed but was previously imprisoned by those difficulties. (It happens that I too have had this experience, and with a grandmother. In my case it was my paternal grandmother. The description above coincides closely with my experience.)

II. The second category included mystic states of union in which "the other" was non-human, and was some aspect of earth's nature perceivable by one or more of the ordinary physical senses. In this category two different types of states were described, both of which were relatively less mutual, relatively more like transferring into the being of "the other," yet still with some mutuality entailed:

II-A. Three Lesbians reported transcendent unioning with some aspect of nature, and their respective "others" were: a sunset vista, a sunrise vista, and a mountaintop vista overlooking lower mountains; in each case there was also a unioning with cosmic consciousness. One Lesbian seemed fairly sure she had had only one such experience; one was sure of twice; the last was sure of once, and thought she might have had several.

II-B. This type was the same as II-A above, except that cosmic consciousness was not involved, and the predominant emotional tone was a feeling comprised of rapturous confrontation with "the other," and resultant self-power. One Lesbian described experiencing this, with lightning (more than once was implied) and with the ocean (again apparently more than once).

III. Category III was the state of mystic unioning in which music was "the other." I classified it separately from Category II because "the other" was not a direct aspect of earth's nature. One Lesbian reported this enrapturement with music (classical), indicating it occurred several times. She said afterward the experiences loosened or stirred in her an overwhelming reservoir of sadness and despondency. (I have, one time, experienced ecstatic unioning with music; for me there was no subsequent sadness; the experience remained entirely one of unspeakable beauty and joy.)

IV. Quasi-Mystic or Psychic Woman/Woman Experiences was my working title for the fourth category. Here there were descriptions of two types of supramundane experiences of one Lesbian with another, but these did not match the profile of transcendancy, i.e., were not ecstatic, etc.:

IV-A. One Lesbian described what was apparently a one-way transfer of her consciousness into the body-and-persona of another woman with whom she was in love. She said she could feel exactly the other woman's mental and emotional activities, and was at first reluctant to admit to herself that this was happening. She described it as an exciting experience which she would have enjoyed very much except for the frustration of being unable to communicate to her lover what was happening. She indicated this inability to communicate was due to her lover's resistance; she seemed to think her lover was semi-aware of what was going on but refused to acknowledge it. The frustration turned to pain because, once she began to verbalize about the lover's experiences, the lover felt spied on and became extremely angry and rejecting. This transfer experience was described as a prolonged one occurring over six to eight weeks, both in and out of bed.

IV-B. One Lesbian described what she thought was probably a mutual experience, an erotic phenomenon which occurred with her and another Lesbian during sex. She said this was ". . . probably more physical than spiritual. It was like two auras, blended – this energy field which I guess is an aura – when that blends with the other in a certain way . . . very erotic. Like an orgasm dispersed over the entire body."

V. Childbirth Transcendancy was the final category. One Lesbian reported an experience of mystical unioning with cosmic consciousness in the context of giving birth to a baby, in a hospital setting. She was reluctant to talk about it and said, ". . . drugs and stuff screwed it up so bad I couldn't define it." Then, speaking of typical hospitalized childbirths, she said, ". . . these birth experiences are connected with bad feelings about all kinds of things."

Grahn's Experiences

Judy Grahn, in her book *Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) lucidly describes and discusses some supramundane Lesbian sexlove experiences. I will quote and paraphrase her here, with my cautionary comments that our two approaches to categorization are different, and our meanings for such terms as psychic, transformative, ecstatic, etc., may or may not coincide. Her remarkable work in the Chapter entitled "Friction Among Women" should be read directly and entirely, if the reader wishes to gain a holistic and undistorted perception of what she has to say.

By way of categorization Grahn discusses a graduated set of levels or spheres of Lesbian sex experience. At one of these levels, a partner in the Lesbian sex dyad makes a solo journey to a source of power. As examples of these sources Grahn lists: metaphors, scenes, personages speaking and moving, ancestors, mentors, spirit guides, etc. She says, about this type of experience:

... the feeling or experience is prolonged, ecstatic, emotional, journeylike, and with intensity barely short of orgasm over a long period of time; and though the orgasm when it finally and brilliantly happens may culminate in an image or a sequence of images, its purpose seems to be more to bring the dreamer back, to return the beloved to the material plane . . .

During this experience the non-journeying sex partner is described as being in a different altered state characterized in part by intense heightened perception of, and focus on, the journeyer; the non-journeyer's role is in part to be co-agent of what allows the journey to occur, and also to be what brings the journeyer back.

Another level she describes also involves a solo journey, but in this type of experience the journeyer transfers a gift to the non-journeyer so that both share it. Grahn reports that at this level there is

... an exchange between at least two mind/bodies, who share an image between or among them, greatly intensified by their close sexual and emotional connection.

As an example of such an image shared, she describes a yellow light which her sex partner, who was at the time in a sex trance journey encounter with a goddess being, concentrated on and sent to her so that she received it, a golden glow spreading in a warm ball over her eyes and face. She also reports that during one of her experiences in this level or sphere, she journeyed and had an ordinary-seeming conversation with a Lesbian who was dead. That woman had been her lover earlier in her life. She says that after this experience a great rift in her felt filled in, and that she was reunited with the dead Lesbian in some way.

Grahn's personal-account descriptions of these sublime states are to me invaluable information.

But they are not descriptions of the kind of communion I lacked and needed. What I wanted was ecstatic total unioning with my lover, and the two of us unioning with The All Who Is Beyond Images And Beings. I did not want one of us journeying off to focus with a third-party being or image, etc. I did not want to be in an altered state different from my lover's. I wanted us to be the One being in the One state.

My Quasi-Mystic Encounters Out-Of-Bed

By the time of reading Grahn I had had, out of bed and by myself, some solo encounters with supramundane images and beings. These encounters began to occur distinctly and memorably when I was about forty. Their frequency had increased in a pattern which correlates better with my developing Lesbian/feminist conscious awareness than with the linear advance of my age. By way of example I will report two of them below, as I described them in my

journal. I select these specific two because they contain elements which Grahn also specifically mentions: a disembodied yellowgold light, and a female being associated with rainbow light.

The Yellow Light. I'd been sitting at the kitchen table, studying a friend's letter. My chair faces a window above the sink across the room. Dishes in the dishrack there. I sat back from the letter, to ponder it. When I let my eyes up, there at the dishrack was this gorgeous blazing star of amber gold light. It made a five-pointed star but the points were the barest of rays — mostly it was a round ball star. It was made by the sunlight coming through the heavy bottom of an amber-colored tea glass; behind it for background was a big black skillet, so that the blazing golden star was set against a matte black heaven. It was so sudden and gorgeous to see right there, and it had this kind of *intimacy* to it — as if some personal Visitor had been standing there waiting for my attention — that I said out loud in surprise, "Well Hello!" I knew immediately to fix on its beauty and let all else fade out of existence. Which I did until it disappeared (maybe 2, 3 minutes) as the sun moved. It told me things. None of them new to me, nor is it new what they all mean put together — what is new is my profounder level of understanding of what I already knew. And also there was a Message that what I knew, respective to this, was more significant than I had been aware. A set of principles I should hold up more into my consciousness, to make good evaluations of what happens — and perhaps of what is to happen, when it might be good to make predictions . . . [Here in my journal I went on to specify the content of the Message. Characteristic of such events, even the briefer ones take pages to tell, and so I will skip to the last sentence.] . . . And it also said to me, "And you should get a gold star, so here I am." Which I loved equally as much as all the rest of it.

Regarding the female image-being associated with rainbow (sometimes "diamond") light, I have many times picked up hints from other womons' talk and writings, that they had either encountered this image-being or come very close.

Rainbow Woman . . . a female being whose substance is that of the rainbow. She has more-or-less the shape of a woman, yet she shifts and shimmers in luminous colors as if she might

at any moment assume some other shape, She is mature, not girlish, but young. Or rather, there is a freshness to her which gives an aura or feel of youngness, young maturity. I first met her [while I was physically in the house] visioning myself beneath an (actual) oak tree This tree is a special friend to me . . . [I decided to meet whatever is my spirit guide and] released all but that desire and intent. Immediately I found myself beneath the Tree in the company of Rainbow Woman. I knew her to be myself, my own profoundest guide to my own profoundest paths of knowing. Immediately! It was as if she had been kept away from me; and that added impetus to the immediacy and vividness of her image; now that nothing stood between us, finally, she was emphatically present. Although composed of beautifully colored energies, she has a very *still* persona. She speaks, so far, only to say "Yes" when I ask a question which can be correctly answered Yes – and even that one word she gives slowly and as if with effort. My impression is, she has to transfer out of one realm into another before talking (i.e., before responding with verbal/auditory imagery). I have the feeling she is like the fairy queen of English legends – that she is the Lady of the Nature-Elemental Realms: the combined earth/plants spirit/s: THE FAERIE. I think she is the place in me where I meet and merge with the plants – perhaps the minerals and animals also, but with emphasis on the plants. I think my meeting with her is the introduction to my own ability to cross the "boundary" between the human/animal class and the plant class: to transfer my life-force back and forth.

With this understanding, a great well of tears for the long-lost-now-found-again is present. The repository of this was in my chest, on the left side, beneath the place where my heart is, at the breast's lower inside periphery. And the great feeling rises or wells up from there, wanting to travel – the tears – up the left side of my throat. As I relax and breathe deeply so that this repository can release itself into acknowledgment, it rises and travels up through the left inside of my throat to the left rear brain. From there it spreads to the left frontal brain. Also, in my back, the left of my back, a bit above the kidney region and midway toward the spine, there is a point of awareness like a knot of constriction or a small ball of something releasing itself. There are a couple of traveling pains moving around in my left torso, in back, and a tingling of my left arm and hand. (All of this time – 3 or 4 minutes,

probably – I have my face cupped/covered by both hands; I am breathing deeply and evenly on purpose because this is a tremendous and somewhat scary experience. The breaths seem to go of their own accord to these places I have described.) At about 3 to 4 minutes, the process seems to conclude and no more activity happens, although I do not feel it is done. Instead, I feel a stage of it is done, and that I am not supposed to elicit or encourage more at this time. I feel it might be dangerous if more happened, all at once; feel, it would be too much for my system.

I sit back and alter into a more ordinary state of consciousness. Suddenly I am struck with the urge to go outside and walk barefoot on the wet street. (Outside it has been a tumultuous night of changing weather: storms, hail, racing clouds, brilliant near-full moon, etc.) I happen to be barefoot already. It is after 1:00 a.m. I go outside, but instead of walking in the street, I want to (and do) stand barefoot in the thick wet grass. The sky is clear just now, and the moon is directly overhead; I stand looking up at her, feeling shaken, very shaken, from my previous experience. Then I squat and place the palms of both hands into the grass, feeling that I need something to help me recover, but not knowing what. I begin to breathe deeply again, and the energy from myself and from the Earth begin to circulate, exchange. I find that I am grounding and settling myself, and it feels as if I am breathing in the Earth's vast calm strength – and that she is absorbing from me some kind of natural waste elimination or discharge that is the result of the process I experienced. With hands and feet in the grass, I can feel the movement of a couple of bugs that live underneath. This tickles, and they are disturbed, stirring, trying to work their way away. I stand up and walk back toward the door. In doing this I become acutely aware of the cold wetness of the grass – a bracing, invigorating feel, a vivid contrast of temperatures between the rained-on grass and my feet. The grass feels extremely alive, thick and heavy-wet with life. I go back in the house and shortly go to bed . . . When I cease anything purposeful, I go to sleep instantly.

The next day when I go again to the state of visitation she (Rainbow Woman) is there. I communicate to her that I am wary of the potency of our encounters, and ask if she can be relied on not to take me to Big Power that is too big for me. In response – although she does not verbalize it – I get that

she does not have the ability to promise that; she lets me know she cannot be responsible for this by herself . . . I get that she hasn't much – if any – judgment or ability to discern my danger zones; she wants me to know that; but if I will do the discerning and give her the feedback, she can let up or alter an activity we are doing. Rainbow Woman seems agreeable and willing to watch out *with* me, for the hazard of going too far too fast; and with my feedback given to her, she seems to feel capable of heeding me.

I get that she is at least as much plant as animal/human; and although she has profound wisdoms, these are not of the quick, situational type; also that her timing is either different or absent. What happened next, today, is that . . . I invited her to come to me, merge back inside my body and "fill it up," every cell, with herself and me conscious of her. I had, then, the image of myself glowing and shimmering from every cell with the energy of this spirit force/guide of me. Then we put it back into separated twosome; then, repeated the merging again as if practicing something nice that we liked . . . then we just left it merged, and I told her to "take the controls" and do whatever came next. We went straight up the trunk of the Tree, zip, as a squirrel. This was a surprise to me, and it happened with no pre-thought of a squirrel at all, or any preparation. And I had the definite instantaneous feel/motion of *being* a squirrel zipping up a tree trunk so fast you could hardly see it. I *felt* the bark of the tree going under and past my little feet – although that doesn't indicate how it really felt, because the squirrel doesn't quite experience it that way.

And the squirrel doesn't experience being a squirrel the way I would have thought it does. For one thing, a squirrel doesn't see very much of itself when it is traveling along; it isn't much aware of itself, its body – at least not when it is moving forward. It is visually aware of what is in front of and around the forward part of its body; and tactile-wise it is aware of how the surface feels that is under its feet – very aware of this – which is a *different* underfoot awareness from the way human feet feel. This difference [exists] for at least two reasons that I experienced: 1) Squirrels' feet are much smaller and function differently, and 2) When the squirrel was moving, the sequence of tactile stimuli was so much greater in number and speed. Proportionately, squirrel's feet just cover a lot more, and a lot faster, than do human feet. (All of

this takes a long time to describe, but these perceptions happened, quite distinctly, in a split second.) Next, we-as-squirrel went across a high-wire telephone line. Without transition, next we weren't squirrel, we were a reddish leaf (sweet gum, I think, or maple) falling down. That was nice, and so we were another leaf . . . I had the feeling we were not down to serious business. Rainbow Womon seemed in aimless activity, and I was being very judgmental . . . I decided to structure the process, and then we quieted down and got a merge-image of the shimmering-energy me expanding to a size that encompasses the solar system. We brought that down to a size to encompass the Earth-Moon system and let that (the Earth and the orbiting Moon) rest inside my left lower chest, about the same place as the "deep well" spot was, where Rainbow Womon first made her physical presence known yesterday. I chose not to alter this image before coming back to "ordinary" consciousness — just left it that way.

[On the third day] . . . I went physically to visit with the Tree. For the first time I put the palms and fingers of my hands on her trunk. I had a brief, vivid memory/experience of the squirrel's feet. Then immediately I was suffused with a strong sense of being loved — so strong I felt like crying, but the tears did not come up. I was reminded of the "well of tears" experience of Rainbow Womon's first presentation, i.e., this love-crying feeling of long-lost-now-found-again had the same flavor, but with a milder sadness and with also the conscious awareness more of distinct belovedness. I moved to stand with my spine leaning against the tree, and the back of my head. Some of her limbs are low-growing . . . it was as if I were in a special shelter or hideaway just for me, a place out of the ordinary which was itself beautiful and from which I could look out and see nothing but the beautiful. I felt *held*, loved, sanctuaried. I did not want to leave there. There was no work or care or struggle in that place. It was the place of FAERIE.

[Addendum: I left because I feared for my humon body to stay too long; the time-flow was too different in the plant realm I had entered, compared to the humon/mammal realm. The plant realm felt langorous, timeless, gravitously delightful, so lovingly seductive I was afraid if I stayed longer I might not come out with my body still alive, even though I was experiencing no physical ill effect — nor did I afterward.]

Shared Images (&/or Metamemories?)

Grahn (in the work described above) discusses her knowledge that powerful images, e.g., the yellow light, and the rainbow/diamond light of the female being, can be mystically accessed and then psychically transferred between or among lovers, during sex. She says that shared images, if their holders choose to pour mutual energies into them, become greatly enhanced in strength, and that the powers released can influence in a transformative way not only the participants but also the world around them and its future. I agree, and add that I believe there are contexts in addition to sexlove, wherein this transferring, mutual sharing, and power-enhancing takes place among womons.

And Mary Daly in her book *Pure Lust* (Boston: Beacon, 1984) says that womons bear what she calls Metamemories, and that we are now doing a bonding which takes place in a world of nature's vibrations and rhythms: ". . . rivers, sands, trees, winds, flames, seas . . ." She says that for each of us who is, solitarily, doing this, the processing we enact alone ". . . augments our capacity and Lust for participation . . . [our] longing to live in connectedness that already is, but is not yet Realized." (She also says, in a marvelous one-line analysis of men/patriarchy: "The warfare is against the deep power of women.")

I have a question. Why is it that 1) *in bed*, in a mystical state, making love, we Lesbians would bypass the opportunity to directly access and focus on the essence of each other, and instead mystically access third parties, while 2) *out of bed* we would try to assuage our Lust to bond, to Realize our connectedness with each other, indirectly, by means of using aspects of earth's nature as a third-party channel or transformer? This seems to me inefficient if not backwards – and that leads me to suspect the hidden presence of men. Just how deeply have we internalized their prohibitions?

While reading *Pure Lust* I wrote some reactions in my journal:

Well, I am pressure-cooker impatient for some Realizing between me and the womons I love . . . Yes, it is magnificent, having the Power to Union and communicate cross-species and cross-class, and cross-form, even, in Ways that exceed logic and previously-described "possibility," but not if in lieu of what I most starve for, the more natural-to-me unioning with my own kind . . . To the Race of Womons this may be the greatest price of all, so far, for what we have let men do to us: being not-Realized. Being unreal-ized because we are not unioning, not perceiving the ultimates of one another, the essences of one another. We have let them make us stop doing it with one another . . . [next they will] make us stop doing it with other kinds of beings . . . unreal-ize the essence

of all Life's forms, beginning and ending with our own kind. The lack of unioning is the spirit's great drought, great famine; with our spirits arid and malnourished we succumb easier to men's novocaine and brainwash. We are less and less inclined to act against them as they go on extinguishing the forms of Earth's life . . .

Why Lesbians Don't Do It

As a result of my explorations I believe that womons subconsciously prohibit ourselves from the experience of sexlove mystical unionings with each other because men have coerced us to hold internalized fears pertaining to the experience. The deepest-buried of these fears, I think, are realistic; those are not about the experience per se, but are about what men could do to us for having it. Considering all the things men have punished the Race of Womons for, the bulk and the cruelest of penalties can be traced to times when we have evidenced the use of our own Mind Power, which is a holistic combination of logic, exploratory reasoning, intuition, personal perception, transferred perception, spiritual vision, etc. Men have driven us to abdicate the vaster areas of our real Minds; so long as we stay out of our Minds we will be incompetent to stop them from finalizing what they are obviously doing to us all and the earth. They have driven us out of our Minds, using fear. We now exercise the kind of self-control which frees men from having to control us; we passivize our selves so as to be less troubling/visible to men, and thereby in the short run less seemingly-troubled ourselves, more seemingly-safe in our goal of trying to maintain an (illusory) status quo in patriarchy. All of that has been said before. I am applying it here specifically to our self-passivization of our powers of spiritual intimacy.

Five Lesbians' Specific Reasons

The transcriptions of the five Lesbian interviews yielded more than 40 reasons for self-prohibiting mystical sexlove unioning. Few of these were clearly stated; most were allusions trailing off into vagueness, such as, "I concluded that that total oneness with another person was too good to be allowed." *Too good to be allowed. Allowed by whom?* Of these 40-odd reasons, there are ten examples below, fleshed out by me so as to convey, here out-of-context, what was communicated to me, both specifically and by implication. I have also converted these examples into a uniform first-person format, for clarity.

1. *To have this experience would mean encountering Something more powerful than me, Something intrinsically unknowable, probably inimical, and dangerous. (There were several reasons similar to this one, including some which allude to the dangerous unknown Something as existing intrinsically within the other woman – the other woman, generically!)*

2. *If I were to have this experience, that would mean I am an anomalous freak. (It is in fact quite dangerous for a woman to be perceived as anomalous in patriarchy.)*

3. *The experience is not possible to have; certain things in life are too good to be true (or allowed) and this is one of them, I believe.*

4. *If I have this experience god will punish me. (There were many variations of this one; often the specific designation of god was omitted or expressed as "Something"; the alluded-to punisher was, however, always god-like instead of man-like, in the sense of being disembodied, i.e., men have taught us to substitute the image of god-as-punisher for the image of man-as-punisher.)*

5. *If I have this experience it would mean I am crazy. (It is – and who doesn't know it? – dangerous to be crazy, or to be thought crazy, in patriarchy.)*

6. *I fear that I, my self-ness, would fragment if I have this experience. (There were also several variations of this one; one can substitute for fragment: be destroyed, be lost, be annihilated, be permanently disoriented, etc.)*

7. *I am afraid to have this experience with another woman because she might later betray me, and that would be terribly painful; I already know the pain of woman-betrayal at lesser levels, and I certainly don't want to know it at the higher levels. (Betrayed to whom? Betrayal involves a third party. Who was it, or whose regime, that profited by those past betrayals?)*

8. *I have had the experience before and I don't want to have it again because it loosened vast feelings of grief buried inside me. (Who, or whose regime, caused the loss of what? How?)*

9. *If I have this experience it would cause changes deep within me; those changes would in turn result in situational changes in my outer life: changes in relationships, disturbances, painful trouble for me and others I care about. (How patriarchal is the present set-up?)*

10. *If I have this experience I would discover things about myself which I suspect but do not want to know. (If bad things: Who, whose regime, has caused us to so suspicion our selves? Who invented "original sin" and said Eve caused it? If good things: How patriarchal is the present self-concept?)*

Our fears range from soup to nuts. I have some of the ones above. Behind them all are hidden men.

Trending Away From Intimate Sex

Lesbians are not immune to having our attitudes and approaches to sex and love manipulated by men/patriarchy. Among In-ish Lesbians I know (and some whom I read) the trendy for-display attitude seems essentially the same as that of the averaged-out Yuppy at large: a separation of sex from love. Here in Hometown, Lesbian-trendy feedback lets me know the In thing is to project an air of intellectualized distance, sophisticated objectivity, if the subject is sex.

One is not supposed to say, for instance, "Well, what I mean by 'desire' is that I'm so much in love with her my very cells feel starved to be with specifically her; just be with her; close as possible; in every way, in-bed and out-of-bed; and I can tell she is starved for me the same, you know, so that it seems we both are starving to *blend* with each other in some ultimate way – that's what 'desire' is to me. What is it to you?" (Not that I would introduce that question these days, for dread of hearing some Lesbian respond, "What I mean by 'desire' is that I want access to her genitals.")

From about the mid-1940s to mid-50s u.s. pop culture presented sex and love as associated together within a third-factor context of Magnetic Attraction. I am very interested in the phenomenon of M.A. because when it is mutual it is what I mean by "desire." I hypothesize that men fear and hate M.A. because although they can feel it and perhaps sometimes even reflect some of it (I never felt it, even reflected, coming from a man or boy, but I know womons who talk as if they have), they can't generate it; whereas they know womons do both generate and feel it. Which is to say, I think men fear/hate M.A. because they fear/hate womons and womons' powers. Three example pop song hits from the '40s/'50s era illustrate some attitudes we were supposed to get, back then, about Magnetic Attraction, its consequences, its relationship to god/good and witch/evil, etc.

That old black magic has me in its spell
 That old black magic that you weave so well
 Those icy fingers up and down my spine
 That same old witchcraft when your eyes meet mine . . .

and

Oh it's witchcraft! Wicked witchcraft!
 And although I know it's strictly taboo,
 When you arouse the need in me
 My heart says Yes Indeed in me
 Proceed with what you're leading me to . . .

and

What is this thing called love?
 This funny thing called love?
 Oh, who can solve this mystery?
 How could it make a fool of me?
 I saw you there one wonderful day.
 You took my heart and threw it away.
 That's why I ask the lord in heaven above:
 What is this thing called love?

In that era, regular ado was made about Magnetic Attraction in songs, movies, books, etc., emphasizing its paranormal power, its supposed unknowableness, the supposed condition of one's helplessness when experiencing it, the supposed inevitable pattern of coming to distress from having experienced it, and an insistence that the other person in the dyad is the sole source of the Magnetism and thus to blame for said distress. *Profound Magnetic Attraction Is Bad*: that is what we were supposed to get, and that is what we – including we Lesbians – got.

In the mid - '50s to mid - '60s era, u.s. pop still associated love and sex together, but now in a context of froth. Love and sex were sillified. What typifies this in my memory are the movies: the doris days and the rock hudsons in the pillow talks, the gidgets and the like bubble-headed gadgets of pop. The image of sultry siren-woman was made to fade; ensconced instead was the fashionably dolled token career girl, or the bikini-unclad nymphet playing beach blanket bingo. Love and sex were not so serious after all; ridiculous in fact. Magnetic Attraction was trivialized, virtually erased from pop imagery.

From the mid- '60s to mid- '70s we were taken through a bewaringly innocent-looking asex spell wherein lots of us got to be flower-childy and couch-broke under guru-psychologists, often in groups where we learned to encounter strangers in the way of exchanging lukewarm fuzzies and other such strokes, verbally admitting to having some emotions, and we had it pronounced for us that That Was Intimacy. Also we learned how to be cool and mellow-out our frustrations and our passions with pot and zen; if desperate for delight, we could try hallucinating with available substances.

After that, pop began in earnest to sever sex from love, then dropped love, and is now milieu-enforcing increasingly bizarre violence as the In context for sex.

But nothing is new under the sun, if you live under the sun on an earth infested with men. Sadism and sado-masochism as the patri-context for both sex and spirituality are of course as old as men's regime.

Sadism, Sex and Spirituality

I am certainly not the first to point out that there is a connection between SM sex and patri-religion. I have come to think that this connection exists implanted so deeply in us as individual womons that we often remain unaware of it even after years of analytical living as radical Lesbians. To make war against womons' spiritual powers is the prime *raison d'être* for all patri-religions, and the same motive is behind the pop-enhanced institutionalized practice of SM sex. The devotee of any patri-religion and the devotee of SM sex are operating under one identical false premise. It is called Inversion by esoterists. It is a pseudo-principle which can be simply expressed this way: Whatever behavior is carried

to extreme will transform to its opposite. Or as a man put it (and he apparently was not aware of writing about SM sex also, for his context pertained to religious mysticism "only"):

. . . the continuity of life is assured by the mutual sacrifice which is consummated on the peak of the mystic mountain: death permits birth; all opposites are for an instant fused together and then inverted. What is constructive turns to destruction; love turns to hate; *evil to good; unhappiness to happiness; martyrdom to ecstasy . . . insults, after passing through the focal point, are inverted – like the rays of light – and changed into praise . . .* [Emphasis mine.] (From, Cirlot, J.E. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. [New York: Philosophical Library, 1962].)

I have previously said that a characteristic of transcendency is that apparent opposites are resolved, and I used for example the finite and the infinite. The finite and the infinite are not behaviors of womons and men. *Finite and infinite* are always used as either nouns or adjectives; they are not used as verbs, active or passive. Cirlot's examples above, though they seem to be nouns and adjectives, are actually nominalized passives: verbs put into the passive voice. His examples are not about universal apparent opposites, they are about behaviors and feelings of womons and men – and his specific choices "just happen" to be words which are commonly associated with SM sex. This quote from Cirlot is a classic example of what Mary Daly has named Spooking By Use Of The Passive Voice, which linguistic device men use to hide the fact that they are the doers of atrocities, and that they perpetrate their acts on specific victims. (See *Gyn-Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* [Boston: Beacon, 1978] pp. 324-27.) Once Cirlot's grammar has been unsnarled, the verbs put back into the active voice, and the missing doer and victim reinstated, his claim of Inversion can be perceived for what it is: a non-sensical attempt to sanctify sado-masochism. His material falls apart in the light of simple analysis of his use of language.

All that I have read of SM-sex theorists' arguments in support of their practice are likewise examples of spooking in the passive voice.

Christianity and Spiritual Sado-Masochism

It is debatable which brand of patri-religion men have constructed most deviously, to hide their real sadist/dominance purpose for its existence. The socio-religious horrors men perpetrate on womons in non-christian countries – the sutees, the for-dowry murders, the clitoridectomies, the foot bindings, etc., are dramatic and visible tips of the icebergs of the day-to-day tortured situation of womons in patri-cultures which are hindu, or taoist, moslem, buddhist, etc.; most radical Lesbians know this by now, deeper than we can stand to hold in mind. But here I will narrow the focus to the particular politics of christianity.

Christianity is one of the cults whose members worship a dead man; they dwell on the details of his torture-to-death, and on the (asserted) fact that he willingly acquiesced to it. The major ritual of christians is the symbolic cannibalism of this man's body. Their name for this ritual is *communion*. They say this practice brings them into a *mystical union* with one another and with the dead man.

Within this cult are several sub-cults, one of which is called the catholic church. This is the one best known to designate a certain few of its members as approved mystics; usually those personages are referred to by catholics as "the christian mystics." All sanctioned christian mystics meet the requirements I presented earlier, under the heading "Patriarchy's Mystic States." Most if not all of them are long dead. Among them are a few token womons, one of whom was a 16th century nun, Teresa de Cepeda, the catholics' saint Teresa of Avila.

Teresa of Avila: A Token Patri-Mystic

In 1970 pope paul vi proclaimed her a doctor of his church, during which ceremony he said she was a teacher of "marvelous profundity." In connection with that event the second vatican council proclaimed that christian mystics, "by penetrating [sic] the revealed message . . . enrich our comprehension of it and thereby contribute to the Church's living [sic] tradition."

There are english translations of what are alleged to be Teresa's own descriptions and commentaries regarding her mystic experiences. One of these is *Teresa of Avila: The Interior Castle*, R. J. Payne, ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1979). Her accounts are similar to the writings of other christian mystics in that their theme is the combination of, 1) self-humiliation/loathing, and 2) pain, as the sole avenue by which *homo sapiens* can achieve (what is said to be) a mystical union with the divine, the ultimate possible experience. (Why it should be that the cannibalism ritual of communion does not entail this experience I have never found explained; nevertheless, that sacrament is apparently not supposed to equate to this non-sacrament solo-mystic experience.)

Teresa was familiar with transcendencies having the characteristics I have earlier described. She eschewed those states, believing them to be not only inferior but also deceptions of the devil. To her, the ultimate state – and the only one free from danger of the devil – was the state of total oblivion. Below are some excerpts from her *The Interior Castle*.

. . . Authentic preparation is the desire to suffer and imitate the Lord . . . During them [her ultimate altered states] it seems my soul is as though asleep. All the faculties are asleep in this state – and truly asleep – to the things of the world and to myself. During the time the union lasts my soul is left as though without its senses, for it has no power to think. In loving, if it does love, it doesn't understand how or what it is it loves. In sum, it is like one who in every respect has died to the world. The death is a delightful one, an

uprooting from the soul of all the operations the latter can have while being in the body. There is neither imagination, nor memory, nor intellect that can impede this good. His Majesty is so joined and united with the essence of the soul that the devil will not dare approach . . . O, what a great good, a state in which this accursed one does us no harm! . . . [After the state] I feel more estranged from earthly things. But O Lord, what new trials begin for my soul! Those who arrive at union with God do not have peace . . . [the soul] conforms with many tears . . . perhaps the sorrow proceeds from the deep pain it feels at seeing that God is offended . . . The grief that is felt here is not like that of this world. [The grief is in] the intimate depths . . . the pain breaks and grinds my soul into pieces . . . [But] what must have been the feeling of our Lord Jesus Christ? . . . what kind of life must He have suffered [?] . . . [and] His death, the happiness of showing the love He had for His Father in suffering so much for Him. What must it have been for Him to find so excellent an occasion for showing His Father how completely obedient He was to Him? O great delight, to suffer in doing the will of God!

[Referring to the transcendent not-oblivious states, she says:] There are other unions. How true it is there are! These unions regard vain things and the devil will use such things to transport us . . . women. Since we are weaker there is more occasion for the devil. Some, since they receive some consolation interiorly, think they are experiencing a spiritual event and let themselves become absorbed . . . The devil can deceive one with respect to the spiritual delights . . . These miseries will not afflict or assail everyone as much as me because of my wretchedness. It seems that I myself want to take vengeance on myself. This is something so painful for me . . . When the spiritual life is mixed with our own passions, they are the occasion of loud sobbing. The force of these passions can cause nosebleeds and other things just as painful . . . I am very dull. When God wants to grant the favor of union with Him, He does so to the persons who despise the things of the world . . . In the work of the spirit the one who thinks less has less desire and does more. What we must do is beg like the needy poor before a rich and great emperor, and then lower our eyes and wait with humility . . . My soul, which is so wretched, vile, filthy . . .

The whole of Teresa's book is comprised of such expressions of masochism; and this is not to blame the victim. Where there is a masochist there is the sadist; his name is legion. Whether men/sadists are present in their physical bodies, or whether present as fear-forced internalized images or fantasies in the mind of the masochist victim, they are present. Teresa's words evidence the presence and the form of the sadist/s in her case. Her descriptions of absolute submission to dominance are, indeed, "the revealed message of the christian tradition." No Lesbian of any christianized country is free from that tradition, nor is any of us free from enforced masochistic behavior in our everyday lives.

The God/Devil/Sadist Image in 1987: Alive and Kicking

My search for the cause of the dearth of womon/womon mystical sexlove unioning in the lives of myself and other Lesbians has resulted in my speculation that the sadist/dominator in fear-image form has been implanted more deeply and more deviously in our minds than many of us are aware.

I am a pagan or panthea-ist Lesbian separatist feminist and have been all of those for a good while; I would prefer to think of myself as healed and immunized against being prey to the sadist in the form of the patri-god or devil image implant. I now believe that kind of thinking on my part would be a crucial underestimation of the enemy.

Men invented the image of the patri-god (and devil) so that they could attribute their perpetrations to "Him." And so also do they hide "Him," when expedient, behind other images which are even less direct; for example, that unknown dangerous "Something" which might get you if you were to have a mystical sexlove experience, is such an image, semi-conscious. In the transcripts of the Lesbian interviews I found many evidences of the presence of images of the punisher/enforcer, along with deep fears associated with those images, when the subject was womon/womon sex-spiritual unioning. Four of those five Lesbians are not christian; two are pagan, one is agnostic, and the other apparently feels no inclination to call herself anything. Yet all five alluded to prohibitive fears associated with spooky image concepts.

In the interviews I asked evoking questions such as, "What bad thing, exactly, are you afraid might happen?" and, "Specifically who would do that harm to you?" The bulk of the fears pertained to 1) physical harm and pain, and 2) emotional harm and pain. The fears of physical harm extended to and beyond being killed; they extended all the way to dread of complete annihilation of the self. The fears of emotional harm and pain included such as dread of rejection, betrayal, loss of self esteem, loss of the beloved, existential grief, personal isolation, being misunderstood and maligned, etc. (I repeat, I discovered I also harbored some of these fears.)

Never was a man or group of men identified as the feared harmer. The internalized image was never directly that of man. Sometimes the interviewee identified or alluded vaguely to "society" as the source of the dreaded danger; sometimes it was a vengeful omnipotent being; sometimes the other womon of the unallowable intimacy, or something imagined to exist within her persona; sometimes an imagined element of the potential experience *per se*, etc. But man, the actual sadist/enforcer, was never mentioned.

If the situation of the six of us Lesbians in this ersatz sample is comparable to Lesbians in the broader population, then the following, I think, is true: Large numbers of us have been unknowingly resisting and avoiding the behaviors which would result in *essential* intimacy, intimacy which is union at the essence-level or spiritual level, in the context of sexlove; and the reason why we have so resisted/avoided is that men have succeeded in instilling in us a fear that if we do this thing they would deal us pain and punishment – unto death, if that were necessary to stop our doing it. (Read: Stop us *again* from doing it *again* – for I believe we did it, once; and I believe we bear the Metamemories and shared true-images of the witchburnings and earlier and later horrors men/sadists did to us as punishment for exercising our powers.

We Certainly Do Some Peculiar Things . . .

There is of course correspondence between what is in one's mind and one's behaviors; and this is true whether or not one is aware of what is in the mind. Any fear-image which men have driven into a woman's mind to serve themselves will, if she remains unaware of it, result in her behaving in men-servicing ways, unable to understand what she is doing or why.

I think it probable that all womons innately possess the capability and also the strong drive to experience transcendent intimacies, especially within our own kind, and sub-especially during sexlove with each other. I further think that because self-known Lesbians are most "at risk" of doing that unioning, then in order to obey men and stop ourselves we must perform some extreme and peculiar behaviors. And those behaviors, emotional and physical, are themselves painful to ourselves and each other — painful in ways particular to Lesbians. We are so often much more aware of our loves. I have wondered if what we mostly have left in common as Lesbians-at-large is our understanding of each others' puzzled pain; we resonate to that in each other, respond to it. We at least validate it. Including in print, we do a lot of that.

"Celibacy" in Monogamy

The phenomenon of intimacy-fading within monogamous relationships is far from new to us; and recently in Lesbian publications there has been an increase in the number and specificity of our complaints about it, along with an inclination to share ideas about causation and what to do. Perhaps as Lesbians-at-large we are about to get our craw full and our jaw set, determined to discover some real answers *why* it keeps happening that our used-to-be passionate lover now resists and avoids sex-context intimacy. Hooray — unless we again fall into the trap of stopping our search upon finding one or two likely-looking "answers" which shed no light on how to solve the problem. For example, it has been pointed out that both substance abuse and a herstory of childhood rape can be causes. I agree they can, and I think we must explore the extent and the results of these traumas if we are to heal ourselves. But I do not think they are universally the causes, nor the radical cause, of our self-controls against unioning.

Preoccupation With "Monogamy vs. Non-Monogamy"

Monogamy can be used as a set-up to barrier against essential intimacy with everyone, including the present lover; with or without the exacerbating presence of substance abuse &/or background of early molestation &/or Lesbian battering, etc., it can be so used. As can non-monogamy. As can solitary celibacy. Any life-style choice can be so used.

The so-called "issue" of "monogamy vs. non-monogamy," examined from that perspective, looks suspiciously like a red herring.

From any perspective it is a crudely reductionistic either/or, a juxtaposition of false opposites with "versus" wedged between; these are characteristics of a men's construction. Where are *all* of the *actual* alternatives, or even some of them, and what are their names? Is the woman who practices self-sex and also sex with one lover monogamous? Is she non-monogamous? Is there such a thing as the monogamous triad? And so on. Why is it that we haven't begun to name the realities pertinent to *us*? And if we did, is there any single category which could name even one of us over the span of most of her life? As Lesbians, our essential nature individually and collectively defies categorization; that's one thing Lesbians are all about. We know that, really, so why have we bought it that our natures are so static they should fit into one or the other of two pigeonholes?

One of the few things we haven't analyzed and discussed about "monogamy vs. non-monogamy" is that we can and do use both modes to self-prevent the kind of intimacy which leads to conscious awareness of our spiritual oneness.

Lesbian Community/Group Cruelties

I am not the first to note and decry the interpersonal cruelties which Lesbians sometimes conduct via some of our own supposedly supportive, supposedly feminist, supposedly social, and supposedly community, groups and gatherings. I have witnessed shunnings, slanderings, silencings, steamrollerings, sabotagings – accompanied by their necessary base of sycophantings – all of which resulted in devastating pain to the victims. Too often the overt agenda is little more than a coverup for clique- or charisma-dominated politics, in the so-called Lesbian Community. When I was the scapegoat in such an episode, it hurt beyond words. I am now separatist not only from men but also from patri-Lesbian goings-on; part of the reason is, I don't know that I'm strong enough to stand more.

This phenomenon used to be additionally disturbing to me because it seemed inexplicable. I could identify the individual and group dynamics; but I couldn't understand *why* Lesbian feminists would be doing these cruelties, or *how* their analytically-experienced minds could remain unconscious of what they were doing. And doing with peculiar intensity. When this stuff is perpetrated by Lesbians in Lesbian-only groups, the psychic atmosphere becomes charged, saturated, with a keen toxicity. Compared to it, nasty stuff generated in mixed het/Lesbian feminist groups is a breath of fresh air. Feminist analysis of horizontal hostility does not, for me, fully account for the existence of dedicated horizontal *malice* among Lesbians. Why are we doing it?

To the extent that power imbalance is present among womons, intimacy is not. Are our group cruelties – so strangely mindless and so peculiarly intense – motivated by an implanted self-control which is deeper than we've realized? It fits.

Lesbian Battering

Once upon a time there was a Lesbian feminist activist who so fiercely wanted equality for womons that she took leave of absence from employment and went on the road at her own expense to campaign for the ERA. When she came home, as a matter of relationship routine she battered her lover. She detected no incongruity in her behavior. Don't we all know one such? If we loosen the definition of *batter*, take it out of the dramatic level, how many do we know? Is something going on here that is rooted even deeper than battering patterns in the family of origin?

The Ultimate Strategy Against Us?

Intimacy is political. Profound intimacy is profoundly political. Ultimate intimacy among womons is the antithesis of patriarchy; it is the condition among womons which must not be allowed if men are to continue to dominate/annihilate the earth. I believe our instinct, our drive, to real-ize our oneness-of-essence is so powerful that men cannot control it; but I think they have coerced us into controlling it, ourselves. Along with all else we need to examine about our various Lesbian issues and relationship problems, I suggest we consider that self-prohibition of total intimacy could be a factor in all of them.

Concluding Comments

In this narrative I have presented personally-gathered information about Lesbian sexlove as a context for consciously experiencing womon-and-womon spiritual oneness during the mystical or transcendent state. My main purpose has been simply to share that information, along with my speculative thinking, in print to other Lesbians. My aim in this sharing is to acknowledge the Lesbian sexlove mystical experience in regard to its reality and its crucial significance, and to help validate those truths. As one interviewed Lesbian put it, "Wow! Just talking about this thing makes it more real, doesn't it?" From my explorations of this subject I have concluded a terribly obvious fact: If we are to regain the experience and use of this, our womons' power-to-union, then our first *de facto* task must be to re-member that it is real.

Women, Lesbians and Prostitution: A Workingclass Dyke Speaks Out Against Buying Women for Sex*

Toby Summer**

Dedication

To the woman in my life who knows most
what this has cost the both of us.

Introduction

Shining bright red, a miniature box of wooden matches sits next to my flat blue cigarette package. I bought the cigarettes, but some man forgot the matches when he left. The matchbox is embossed with gold, two circles. Inside the smaller circle, an owl sits on the stump of a redwood tree. On the left of the owl, there is a stick-figure drawing of a whole living redwood. On the right, child-like squiggles represent flying birds. Between the two circles, bold capital letters name the institution issuing the matchbox: BOHEMIAN CLUB. It is world famous; infamous, more accurately. War lords of this outlaw nation belong to this exclusive club, this men-only club.

While week-ending with a friend on the Russian River, I once penetrated the Bohemian Club's summer encampment's security. We strolled right through the center of camp. Structurally it looked like Girl Scout camp, but felt different. Bohemians don't allow girls.

*I am thankful that *Lesbian Ethics* exists; without it, no one could hear my written voice over the roar of the Man's lies. I am also deeply grateful to those women who make my life possible in an impossible world. I thank you for your guidance, insight, truth-saying, assistance, criticism, patience, love and support. Without you, my courage would have failed me here.

**Toby Summer is not my real name. I do not use my real name because I don't want to be exposed to the sexual humiliation that goes with having been abused as a prostitute. It never ends. No one who knows who I am is authorized to "come out" for me; if, when, where, how, to whom, and for what purpose I do choose to identify myself, it is my choice. It is the only control that I have that leaves me any human dignity.

This club may soon have to hire women as workers because they lost a case in court for sex discrimination in employment. If and when they do, it won't be the first time they've paid money to women, just the first time for non-sexual work.

I draw the above frame around the subject that I want to address to my community through *Lesbian Ethics*. This frame of men with absolute power and women with so little starkly shows that men make the rules and women do what we're told to do. This is a system that uses class and race to divide women from each other, but it is based on sex discrimination. Prostitution and pornography are graphic practices of female sexual slavery within this system; the major difference between the two practices is that in pornography there is a permanent record of the woman's abuse that can be sold again and again.

I do not deny that women are hungry for freedom and equality; I am such a woman. I do not deny that women make hard "choices," nor do I deny that women find many ways to resist male supremacy. I have made such choices and continue to devise ways to resist, too. I simply underline the obvious: women do not rule. We have not consented to this system; our consent is not necessary or required. Men set the standards and women either go along and get along or try to think of ways to resist without getting killed. We get killed either way.

I.

Connections

In *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry*, a newly released book by Cleis Press edited by Frederique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander,¹ the

¹*Sex Work* is a collection of stories written by women who have been or still are inside the sex industry. I considered submitting an article to *Sex Work*, but decided it was not a context for my viewpoint. At least one contributor, Sarah Wynter, was not told that *Sex Work* would be co-edited by Priscilla Alexander, co-director of C.O.Y.O.T.E. (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), a San Francisco based group which addresses "prostitutes' issues." This group has very liberal politics. For example, what is wrong with prostitution is not ". . . the stigma imposed on sex work, keep[ing] all women from determining their own sexuality" (Priscilla Alexander, "Prostitution: A Difficult Issue for Feminists," *Sex Work*, p. 184). Identifying "stigma" as what is wrong is a re-naming of reality that unfocuses perception of real harm to women in prostitution. Most people recognize harm when they see it. Whatever the response, the harm is noticed. The shift from seeing harm to criticizing emotional responses emanating from the perception of harm targets a non-primary issue. It is a smokescreen, used so that no one will challenge the actual harm.

The *Sex Work* bibliography, section 8 – "The Pornography Debate," is skewed: with exactly one exception, one half of the "debate," the radical feminist critique, is missing. The political bias of *Sex Work* seems to grow out of its association with COYOTE. Alexander is the only contributor who has not worked in the sex industry. COYOTE is the only contact for women organizing on the issue for which an address and phone number is given, although other groups with different analyses are represented in *Sex Work*.

Bohemian Club is mentioned by name in at least two prostitutes' stories. The first woman stiffly walks us through the staging area of her experience as though it were a grade B movie set. She doesn't say how she feels. Her description struck me as perfunctory and disconnected. Scarlot Harlot's profile of the Bohemians is one of her 11 submissions to *Sex Work*; her style is much more personal and engaging. She also admits that she'd make more money in a massage parlor than working the river's rich trade. To understand the amounts involved, we have to move to another story in *Sex Work* called "In the Massage Parlor." It gets specific: \$10 for a "tip," or a \$15 blowjob that deflates into a \$5 "tip." The massage parlor worker also reveals how she feels about the actual "work" that she does.

When they [the johns] touch my breasts, I tell myself they're not really touching me . . . [a]nd sometimes I wonder how I can let the men do that. I wonder what is left for me. I wonder where I am. (p. 63)

In *Sex Work*, Joan Nestle has contributed a piece called "Lesbians and Prostitutes: A Historical Sisterhood." She says, "Besides recognizing the history of prostitutes as a valuable source for lesbian history, another connection that emerges is the lesbian customer [sic] and protector of prostitutes" (p. 238). She illustrates this with "the wonderful and moving story" of Jeanne Bonnet who is a transvestite and a john, who winds up "decid[ing] to enlist some of the women she visited [sic] in her all-women's gang" (p. 239). Blanche Buneau, won away from her pimp by Bonnet, is shot and killed by him in their bedroom. The year is 1876. Nestle adds later, "Lesbians have and still do turn to prostitutes for sexual comfort [sic] as well as work as prostitutes themselves" (p. 249). Nestle attempts to draw connections between prostitutes and lesbians, but she has no radical analysis of the condition of women, lesbians or prostitutes.

There are connections between lesbians and prostitutes. I know because I am one. A lesbian. An ex-prostitute. I have lived the connection. I still live daily with the results. I have been a lesbian for about 30 years. Coming out butch (transvestite actually) as a young teenager in the late 50s meant that I couldn't finish school, couldn't get a regular job, couldn't rent a place to live after home became unbearable. The irony that loving women created a situation for me where the alternative to jail or the street was the street, jail and fucking men for a meal, small change and a temporary bed is only surpassed by the damage. Consider the fact that I learned what sexuality meant from johns and pimps before I could find out what it *might* mean with the girl I loved. This lesson is not erasable. My body remembers all of it. It seems that bodies learn — in the body, physically — how sex is to be *felt*, not just done or gone through. I submit to my readers that it was not a good thing for this girl-child, this young lesbian to do with her bright-fired spirit.

II.

The Man's Lie: Strategy and Damage

The removing of oneself from one's body is a strategy for immediate survival; many prostitutes acknowledge this. This numbing – whether done like other torture victims do it or done with drugs and alcohol – is flight from that which is intolerable. Numbing mechanisms become reflex quickly. Reversing the process, later or in other circumstances, is difficult. It is my belief that such numbing in sexual assault situations sets women up for tolerating abuse, especially prostitution and sado-masochism.

Although I used this strategy as often as not, I also used a more damaging one at the same time. Today, I call this second strategy the Man's lie, but then I called it pro-sex² and my choice.

The Man's lie is still passing as truth not only from the Man but also through the lips of women, who – like I did – believe the lie. I mean, when Scarlot Harlot quotes her friend, Priscilla Alexander, as saying, "The right to be a prostitute is as important as the right not to be one. It is the right to set the terms of one's own sexuality . . . [my emphasis]" (*Sex Work*, p. 61), what I hear is that someone thinks that prostitution has something to do with women owning our own bodies – somehow – while at the same time selling the very same bodies to men who hate women, whores³ and lesbians and who do not make any excuses for their hatred.

This mind-fuck is very familiar to me; I thought for the longest time that I had invented it. I double-fucked myself for years before coming face-to-face with the truth of how male supremacist sexuality got to me. Not just remembering, but feeling; not just looking at all of it momentarily, but living it; not just opened up, but analyzed from a radical feminist politic for what it is and does. I have not always been a feminist, but I have always wanted to be free and female.

²Andrea Dworkin (*Intercourse*, New York: Free Press, 1987, "Communion," pp. 48-9) writes, "Lost in the simple-minded prosex chauvinism of Right and Left is the real meaning of affirmation, or any consciousness of the complexity – the emotional tangledness – of a human life. 'It is really quite impossible,' writes James Baldwin (*Notes of a Native Son*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, p. 131), 'to be affirmative about anything which one refuses to question; one is doomed to remain inarticulate about anything which one hasn't, by an act of imagination, made one's own.' There is no imagination in fetishlike sexual conformity; and no questions are being asked in political discourse on sex about hope and sorrow, intimacy and anguish, communion and loss."

³The word *whore* is an insult to all women, commonly, like the word *dyke*. When I use it here, I do not mean it in that way, although I am not attempting to reclaim it as *dyke* has been reclaimed by some lesbians. I use it because I want my readers to occasionally *feel* the feeling associated with it. I also think that no one has the right to use the word *whore* unless that person has been one of us. And then, only carefully.

What I did in my mind *did* have something to do with freedom when I spoke the Man's lie silently to myself about prostitution. I felt closer to freedom when I told myself that I chose what happened (even the rapes), that I felt OK about what was done to my body (even against my will), that the sex in the room had something to do with me and my sexuality (even though when she was in the room, too – my lover – the only thing I tried to do was keep him interested in me so he wouldn't fuck her . . . some butch role), that the nausea-alienation-bruises-humiliation-STDs (sexually transmitted diseases)-poverty-abortion all were somehow fixable with what amounts to an EST positive attitude.

Oppressed people develop a sixth sense with which we anticipate the next move of our enemy in order to try to be successfully out of the way or in the most acceptable pose. The EST positive attitude served that purpose, as well as twisting my own mind; that is, the Man's lie not only took the truth away from me, but it also served the Man by allowing him to point to me and say, "See. She loves it. She chose it. She's even a lesbian . . . they all want it. Women are whores by nature."

This strategic lie attempted to turn my degradation into something else, something more human, something that was not force and coercion. Poverty and oppression against women and lesbians certainly qualify as force and coercion, even if the barrel of the gun is behind the curtain of sex. What was accomplished with this lie was not a changed reality but merely a renaming of reality for something other than what it was. Reality did not change until I changed it, personally, for me; I got a different "job." I wasn't successful the first or second times. Even after I got out, I took my EST positive attitude with me when I went. What it didn't explain was why I'd rather work in a hot commercial laundry for \$1.00 per hour than fuck another man. The Man's lie should have been exposed at that point, but it wasn't. I hid behind the fact that I was a lesbian; that is, I told myself that I just didn't want to fuck *men*. There was no understanding that there was something wrong with what happened to me as a *woman*. That lie stayed coiled like a viper for many years, waiting.

The lies that I've lived with, trying to make prostitution into anything other than what it is, are why I'm writing this paper; them and the damage. I did not want to do this paper. I hate every minute that I have been forced to spend on it. Like every fuck. Confronting how I've been hurt is the hardest thing that I've had to do in my life. A hard life, if I may say so. It is humiliating to acknowledge victimization. It is really quite simple: if you lose, you don't win. One cannot be hurt and not be a victim to the perpetrator, and to all those who come after to watch the show. To avoid further abuse by the sexual practice of humiliation, I claimed the intolerable as my own, because being a victim was and still is intolerable. What I am doing in this paper is the intolerable. I want you to know that. I'm doing it because I can't stand it that lesbians are buying women for sex and calling it progress, freedom, our sexuality, lesbian politics. I cannot stand the pretense of regard towards the women bought. Buying a human being is *not*

regard. It is another lie. Prostitution is not freedom, not just another job. It is the abuse of women. It is sexual slavery. Period.

I want to say one thing about "healing." For me, it is a fact that so-called healing is an empty and desperate gesture towards that which we do not have: freedom to be equal, creative and as safe as men are safe. I know that some damage is permanent; that is one of the reasons to stop what happens to women. Among other damages, what has outraged me most deeply is the damage done to my sexuality; it is the one thing that I had thought that I had saved⁴ out of that disgusting abuse. Somehow. I despair of any hope to undo this damage.⁵

I wonder to myself what it means that so many women lovers have told me that our love-making was "the best it's ever been" when what I held in my body was this incredible abuse. Once a whore, always a whore? I mean, how could they not feel what was going on? Was I that good of a performer? I'm not talking about faking orgasm either. I'm talking about how orgasm felt. How the sexuality itself felt. Fucking my way to heaven with thousands of orgasms and many truly loved partners did not "heal" the abuse. It may actually have deepened the learned sexual dynamic; it certainly caused confusion between this dynamic and any regard and respect we enjoyed with each other.

While I may not believe in "healing," I do believe in change.

III. Sexualized Inequality

Dominance and submission is the basic dynamic of sexuality; regard for an equal is not sexy. Hierarchy is sexy. Power is sexy. Vulnerability is sexy. Humiliation is a sexual practice. It is humiliating to be a second class citizen; that's why men keep women second class. Men as a class devised male supremacy because men – but not only men – find it exciting to use force and

⁴Andrea Dworkin, *Op. Cit.*, p 50: "Truth is harder to bear than ignorance, and so ignorance is valued more – also because the status quo depends on it; but love depends on self-knowledge, and self-knowledge depends on being able to bear the truth. For Baldwin, in his fiction and essays, being human means that one pays for everything one knows and for everything one refuses to know; that 'you have to, in order to live, finally, make so many difficult and dangerous choices that the one thing you're really trying to save is what you lose. And what you're trying to save is your ability to touch another human being or be touched by that person' (James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni, *A Dialogue*, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1973, p. 86)."

⁵In *Sex Work* Gail Pheterson claims that it is ". . . another illusion . . . that male sexual violence causes irreparable damage to female personality" (p. 224). I say it is no illusion.

coercion. "The good news is it isn't biological."⁶ This dynamic is best expressed through prostitution; ruling class men buying women to feel their power manifested. Workingclass men, middle-class men, men of all races and ages, disabled men and gay men are also to be counted as johns when I start counting. Name your category and I'll tell you what he looked like. It is felt in bodies as sexual, this expression of power. (It is a sexual rush to just contemplate it; ever watch some up-scale man thumb through a *Vogue* magazine? He consumes it like other men do actual pornography. Watch the body language. Whores are good at noticing men's body language. I watch them, openly. It disturbs them to be watched.)

I know that some gay men do not flinch from fucking women or lesbians. My own experience stands: some of my johns were gay men who just thought I was a young teenage boy turning tricks for spending money (blowjobs reveal nothing in terms of biology and I consistently passed for a straight boy when I chose to), but some of them knew I was a lesbian and thought it cute to buy a gay "sister." Someone once asked me why it was that gay men seemed to have a stake in *female* prostitution; I think I know. Our gay brothers directly profit from keeping all women down and prostitution is central to keeping women down as a class; gay men sometimes use women that way, too.

Without dominance and submission sexual boredom sets in. My guess about why many lesbian couples who stay together over time seem to coast to a dead stop sexually – or at least turn to on a slow bell – is that familiarity breeds a working knowledge of the other person, while commonality creates a rough-cut version of respect. That is, the more we like each other and the more actual respect we have the less dominance and submission is left, and therefore sexual feelings are not aroused as easily. Even built-in hierarchies like class, race, age, disability *sometimes* soften over time. Heterosexual hierarchy is much less likely to soften because *male* and *female* are terms defined by the dynamic of dominance and submission; it is categorically defined as *sexual* hierarchy where other hierarchies are not seen immediately as necessarily sexual. (They are, but it requires some analysis to get there from here, e.g., pornography shows us that Black women are used in specific ways to make their skin into a sexual organ to be then violated like genitals. We do find much visible bruising on Black women's bodies in pornography.)

I want to ask my community: When we have sexual feelings, *what* are we feeling? Is it the pleasure and danger, perhaps? Have we eroticized our own destruction, as in the *Story of O* by Pauline Reage? Do we, like O (stands for "nothing"), murder our self? *I wonder what there is left for me. I wonder where I am.* Or, do we, like Pat Califia, San Francisco's picture-perfect 'lesbian' sadist, who left town after allegedly carving an unwanted swastika into a workingclass

⁶Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Pleasure Under Patriarchy," In, *Theories and Paradigms of Human Sexuality*, Plenum Press, in press.

dyke's body – I know the Jewish nurse who had to clean the wound, and who "... couldn't figure out how to reach orgasm with a (woman) lover," turn 180 degrees from 'sexual dysfunction' into a sadist who would rather fuck a hot male masochist than a vanilla lesbian?*

It seems to me that what might have been Califia's original problem is simply that two women – without more – don't generate enough dominance and submission for her arousal: the sexual dynamic of hierarchy was missing. I think that perhaps more women than Califia might feel this way. Maybe sado-masochism has been the key to inventing arousal, so that orgasm is possible for some lesbians. I know that butch-femme roles work that way even when mixed-and-matched (kiki in '50s language). I know that many, if not all, of my women lovers were aroused by what they perceived to be my butch ways. The difference between Califia and myself is only a matter of degree, not content. Sexual hierarchy is sexy. This is why I think that many lesbians have embraced sado-masochism and other trappings of male supremacist sexuality such as pornography, prostitution, strip shows, etc., as a "newly found, previously denied, to-be-explored" sexuality that we need to adopt, adapt, white-wash and call our own. (I also think that some lesbians learned "their" sado-masochism directly from gay men, as well as from prostitutes, ex-prostitutes and pornography.)

Prostitutes have been known to express our utter contempt for the johns that use us, but usually only to each other. We do not correct the power imbalance when we do this, although it does feel briefly better to vent the outrage and disgust. This is one way to acknowledge abuse of our bodies while attempting to block the fact that we are second class citizens being used for what women are: sex. The bravado about having power over men because men buy us is simply bullshit. "When those who dominate you get you to take the initiative in your own human destruction, you have lost more than any oppressed people yet has ever gotten back."⁸

The prostitute who performs as a female sadist, a dominatrix, does not reverse the dynamic of dominance and submission. It may be true that she has "complete power" (*Sex Work*, p. 51) over the male masochist's body for those moments that she is paid to do what she is told to do by him; but I think that is

*The failed orgasm quote is from, Pat Califia, "We Know What We Want," *Sinister Wisdom*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Fall 1976, p. 67. Her preference for a male is stated in her, "Unraveling the Sexual Fringe: A Secret Side of Lesbian Sexuality," *The Advocate*, Dec. 27, 1979.

⁸Andrea Dworkin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 142-3.

a matter of this man wanting to violate the social taboo⁹ against men giving up male power. It is also true that the power of male supremacy is so great that a man can feel very safe even while he chooses to toy with "submission" momentarily. Let me suggest to you that if the dominatrix used that "power" that she has during this singular moment in history – in the way that men use their power over women – she'd be either in jail or dead. It is phony power.

While men eroticize the "exchange" of money for sex (arousing in and of itself because it actualizes and symbolizes the woman's *subordination*), the female sadist may eroticize her perception of "power." This is learning sexual hierarchy from the dominant's point of view. However, individual perceptions do not alter social structures. It is conceivable – even likely – that some women have adopted this point of view as their "own." This is possible because dominance and submission is learned behavior. If and when some women learn to eroticize dominance in its complete manifestation, what we will have will be biologically female people who are socially men. That is, it is possible that such a woman could eroticize the murder – sexual murder – of men. Picture a female Green River Murderer who murders men. For sex. There can be no subordination of anybody without the ever-present threat of murder to give the threat life. Liberal men who promote sexuality-at-any-cost for "women, too" probably have not thought about this possibility. Even if they have, what it would mean – socially – would not be what it means for a man to do it to a woman while male supremacy remains intact. Biological hopscotch cannot alter the system. Social transformation to *female* supremacy would have to occur before it would mean the same thing that it means now.

Personally, I think that it's not what I have in mind when I think of freedom.

IV. About Class Solidarity

I have watched with some interest an element of organized pro-prostitution women adopt language from the organized labor movement. They argue that prostitution is just another job, albeit a relatively high paying one. They call pimps "managers" and johns "customers." They say that what is wrong with the "business" is that it is illegal, or, as in the case of Nevada, that the State controls it. They contend that what is wrong is the social "stigma" attached to prostitution. They claim that what is needed is a union to bargain for wages (already high, they say), hours (already good, they say), and working conditions.

⁹It is my opinion that taboos exist to be violated and that such violation is a sexual practice. Rape laws are that way. Likewise prohibition against sex with children. Sexual crimes are enhanced by male laws against them; such laws do not seem to deter very much. It is sexy to be an "outlaw." Violation of anything is sexy. Especially women.

If wages and hours are already good, the issue must be working conditions. These same women argue that what is better about prostitution than other jobs for women is that prostitutes have "control" over what they do, what they "choose" to do. They don't explain why prostitutes can't control pimps and johns who hurt them right now. They slide past hard issues and blame them on the illegal nature of prostitution.

The fact that prostitution is illegal does not explain why men sexually murder women and children for sex. The fact that police do not seem to care about dead prostitutes, or other dead women either, does not explain why men do it. The fact that some police officers are corrupt and brutal when they harass and arrest women for prostitution is a secondary issue.

It is not that I think that prostitutes should be arrested; I do not. My solution would be to make *buying* women illegal, as well as all third-party involvement, but to "allow women to sell their bodies" without legal penalty. This would put real power into the hands of prostitutes; they could overlook the crime committed against them by the john if he abided by their agreement, e.g., paid them, did not otherwise abuse them. This suggestion is not a solution to prostitution; it is a transitional bandaid.

None of this addresses the system which *requires* male sexual access to women and children at all times. The analysis exhibited in the "business-as-usual" presentation of prostitution is one that does not in any way challenge the harm of prostitution itself. If workingclass people had no analysis of capitalism, then what we would have is what this element of organized prostitution has: no structural challenge to the status quo. Men *must* have this sexual access to women and children. (Why?) Fringe benefits like worker's compensation, demands for no more arrests, or somehow resisting torture and murder are OK as far as they go, but they do not challenge the system of male supremacy of which prostitution is the ultimate systematic expression. Trying to make an inhumane system more humane with reformatory adjustments is like spitting in the ocean: I'm not against it, but it doesn't do much.

Finally, I want to say that – as an ex-prostitute, a workingclass woman, a radical labor organizer – I have to wonder if the women who are using the language of organized labor are seriously trying to make common cause with working people. I wonder about this because of the contempt that is frequently expressed for other women who work at low-paying, low-status jobs everyday, who do it all their lives, who frequently challenge *their* wages, hours and working conditions (including sexual harassment). For example, in *Sex Work*, Scarlot Harlot says, "Ex-prostitutes are out of touch with the true glories of the trade. Plus, they were never very good at it. That's why they're ex-prostitutes" (p. 123). (However, she also said on the TV show "People Are Talking," KPIX, San Francisco, July 2, 1987, that she didn't want to be doing this for money but couldn't make as much money otherwise. She was the only woman on the

show who still did prostitution; no one asked her why she didn't want to do it.) In *Sex Work* "Aline" says, "I much preferred exhibiting myself, flirting, showing off my body than working at some shit-job cleaning someone else's toilet for poverty level income" (pp. 131-2). (However, on the next page she finds her "work" intolerable and says it's "time to clean toilets.") Prostitutes, ex-prostitutes, and "feminists" cannot succeed in making common cause by ridiculing other women who are struggling to get by *without* fucking men.

V.

Sisterhood: Just Another Brotherhood?

Now what about lesbians buying women, prostitutes, other lesbians? For sex. Like men. It isn't news.¹⁰

Lesbian pimps have always been around. Lesbian prostitutes have always been around. Lesbian johns have always been around. I've known some of them. What has not been challenged is the harm done to those women who are positioned to be bought and sold. It is the failure of "feminism" to leave the structure of male supremacy intact while women pry their way into it. It is outrageous to me that women attorneys, who call themselves feminists, who don't have to sell themselves to men for \$15.00 a blowjob, say, "I think that prostitution is an excellent way to earn a living" (Flo Kennedy, attorney, activist, TV interviewer, *MS Magazine*, July 1987, p. 18). Kennedy is just the most recent example. Attorney Nan Hunter, who wrote the FACT brief against the Dworkin-MacKinnon anti-pornography civil rights ordinance, said in it, "A range of feminist imagination and expression in the realm of sexuality has barely begun to find voice. Women need the freedom and socially recognized space to appropriate for themselves the robustness of what traditionally has been male language" [my emphasis].

Never mind the *other* women, who are not attorneys, who are crushed by the weight of the pornographers, pimps and johns. I want to know why anyone thinks that they have a *right* to buy a woman for sex.

The connections between pornographers and women who call themselves feminists have always fascinated me. For example, we find Susie Bright, editor

¹⁰Lesbian battery isn't news, either. But it has been only recently taken up as a political issue by the lesbian community. (Battered women's shelters have been reluctant to accept either battered lesbians or battered prostitutes, a "connection" missed by Joan Nestle.) It is no solution, but the feminists who organized the first conference on lesbian violence are to be commended on their work (May 2, 1987, San Francisco). However, the tough issues of sado-masochism, pornography and prostitution were not addressed; when I brought them up they were shuffled aside. For instance, I want to know about the connection that pornography has to both battery and sado-masochism in our community.

of *On Our Backs* (lesbian pornography) in such publications as *Penthouse's Forum*, and *Hustler*. See "Confessions of a Teenage Lesbian," by Susie Bright, "a real live dyke," in *Hustler*, March 1986. I found in *Sex Work* another such connection. Debi Sundahl, also known as "Fanny Fatale," a stripper, says that the first place she worked was called the Lusty Lady Theater and that the owners of this place "... were involved in founding ... the Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality in San Francisco" (p. 176). Sundahl takes credit for "... start[ing] the first women-only strip show at a lesbian bar in San Francisco" (p. 177), for publishing the first issue of *On Our Backs*, "a lesbian sexual entertainment magazine," and for making "adult or x-rated videos for lesbians under the name Fatale" (p. 178). It is also interesting to me that Phyllis Lyon (of Del Martin/Phyllis Lyon fame) is the Registrar for this Institute; she is also a FACT member.

I can't say I have a lot of hope for change. I can't say I've noticed much difference between the heterosexual community, the gay male community, and lesbians, except that women as a class do not have power as men do. But I have noticed that some women are aspiring to join the Bohemian Club. Similarly, in San Francisco there has been a hoopla around the 87th U.S. Open Golf Championship hosted at the S.F. Olympic Club's lakeside golf course (one of several men-only clubs; it has 7000 members). Seems like the city leases 17 acres of land to them and that it is unseemly for a city run by a woman mayor, a woman president of the board of supervisors, and a woman city attorney, to contribute to the success of the club's discriminatory policy. News, it is: the city may not renew the lease unless the exclusionary policy changes (*S.F. Chronicle*, June 23, 1987).

Some women seem to think that if they can do what men do then "we" will be equal. The question to be asked is, if women get to do what men get to do, and one of the things men get to do is buy women, who is going to be left for anyone to buy? Some women want to rule, and have the privileges, too. Some lesbians buy women for sex like the Bohemian Club members do, **already**.

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the tender areola path

I want to share with readers my sexual growing over the past year plus with my new love, Pi. She is 28, I am 38. We fell in love the summer of '85.

We're still deeply in love. We came into this relationship with a variety of sexual experience, including recently ended long-term (8 and 5 years) relationships.

First date we went out to dinner. Afterwards, at my house, Pi drew a tarot card from the MotherPeace deck with the ostensibly frivolous inquiry, "What will be the outcome of this budding acquaintance?"

The six of cups came up, known to me as the "orgasmic joy" card. Pi herself as new to the tarot cheerfully wanted to know what the card meant. I thought, "What is this? If this is a line, it's the slickest one I've seen." I wanted to throw her out the door.

I didn't. Soon afterwards we went hiking. Under aspens while rain drizzled across our mountainside she turned quietly to me and asked, "Do you feel sexual?"

I didn't show it, but the question startled me. I'd always thought I'd love to have a lover that I could be very open with sexually, but here I found myself tongue-tied when presented with a simple question. In response I kissed her. We kissed a long time, approaching and then retreating from doing more than kissing. We each sensed potential here and didn't want to push too fast.

The first time we made love Pi rubbed against me and then we used our fingers. We were passionate but I wondered if she were against oral sex. My previous lover had been. I felt scared to ask. I liked Pi too much to want to know bad news. Later she told me that the first few times she makes love to anyone she never does oral sex because she is shy and it feels too intimate.

I forced myself finally to speak. I wanted to be comfortable talking about sex.

She agreed. Where to start? It felt scary. We decided to share what we particularly liked and didn't like as a beginning. Neither of us liked anything that hurt. Her breasts weren't very sensitive; mine were. She didn't like the idea of strapped-on dildos – "too male" – I liked the feeling of deep penetration that way coupled with kissing. She said she couldn't picture herself doing it.

The hardest initial information to share was that I like anal stimulation. She'd done it, received it, but said she only liked it "sometimes." We left the subject quickly.

That was how we started. Better talking came as trust deepened. We hit Aphroditic energy and began lovemaking almost constantly, stopping only to work or to eat food. We burned red candles, had visions during sex, felt insatiable. The word "repeatedly" took on special significance.

Mostly we ate and rubbed against each other. At last, at last, I thought, a lover who really and truly loves to be eaten and to eat! It was bliss, ecstasy in bed. We couldn't believe how our bodies absorbed orgasm after orgasm and still felt desire.

We deepened our talk about sex and agreed on three affirmations:

1. We are each complete sexual beings by ourselves; we are gifts to each other, not indebted.
2. We love and lust openly and with abandon.
3. We are sexual for its own sake, not to "achieve" orgasm.

The first affirmation means respect: sexual activity is something we each assent to and each retains absolute power over her Self. Pi sometimes tells me, "Yes, I could get to feeling sexual but at the moment I'm not 100% there. And since 100% is where I like to be when I'm sexual, let's wait a bit."

The first affirmation also means I realize she may want to love herself, I may want to love myself and that's good. The first time we integrated self-loving into our mutual sexuality was on the occasion of yet another yeast infection. Actually we passed the yeasties back and forth over several months this way: I had the infection (whether I knew it or not) and she loved me by eating me deeply. Then we would kiss – we like the taste of sex juices – and spread the yeasties from her mouth to mine. Then I would eat her and she'd get it. About seven tubes of monostat later, we wised up and gave ourselves simultaneous treatments followed by yogurt followed by abstaining from that way of passing it (what an ordeal!) and finally got clean again.

Anyway, Pi had the yeasties and I felt sexual. "Let me hold you while you love yourself," she suggested. The experience felt kind of weird, a combo of how I feel alone and how I feel with her. But since then we have used it occasionally when one of us for some reason doesn't feel physically into sex but is there in feeling, and it works nicely.

The second affirmation is semi-political and sensual. We push the usual social conventions a little, as opportunity presents itself, holding hands and embracing and kissing in public. This physical closeness feels safer than openly discussing lesbianism. A lot of times we let a conversation die because, in a public place, we don't feel so safe.

Another way of loving lustingly openly and with abandon is to make full use of nature. We both especially enjoy lovemaking in the woods, by the ocean, on mountaintops.

I have to say we have had one bad experience with a man intruding on us. He couldn't believe it when we jumped up and started screaming at him and throwing rocks at him, finally driving him off. He apparently thought he'd be invited in. We have been careful since to choose our private places more carefully and to have rocks (at least) very available.

Sometimes instead of orgasm we – especially I – experience plateaus of intense pleasure that last a long time, do not peak, and leave us feeling good, tapering off into a bask-and-glow. We find that if we pause a few minutes and then begin anew with stimulation, the "plateau" will deepen in feeling, usually accompanied by a change in the taste and texture of sexual juices.

Our affirmation to be free of orgasmic goalsetting has taken on more usefulness as the Aphroditic energy gradually subsided over the first year. In the A.e. stage (when it's constant) passion and orgasm seemed unavoidable. Now we sometimes are sexual just for the play or the sensuality of it.

What we've come to appreciate sexually is that we both like "soft" sex. As opposed to "hard" sex. We like it as soft as the skin around the nipple, the tender areola. Thus the name of this paper: the tender areola path.

Soft sex is open: especially open to trust. There is no fear. We urge each other to relax, to take a long time, to take a deep breath and just enjoy. We tell each other, "Don't even think about coming, if you do it's alright, if you don't it's alright. I just want you to feel great and if you like, I can love you for hours, all day, all night."

By the way, we now talk about anal sex much more easily and practice it . . . softly. We've decided to try the dildo trick anyway and see if we like it but we're reluctant to go to the bookstore to get the right kind of strap or belt. The bookstores are so hard, so male, creepy. We have dildos between us but we find we don't really care to use them very often. Lips and fingers and breasts feel so good.

We use soft words. *Yoni* is our favorite word for genitals right now. As cat-lovers we also like *pussy*. *Your lips, your sweet lips, your woman-place, your kundalini*: this is how we talk during sex. Often we image kundalini the great snake curled inside the vagina and we speak directly to her while making love. For me she shows green eyes and stares at me. Pi urges her to stretch and rise.

We drift and dream. This comes with long stimulation of the yoni by oral and finger means. "Just lean back, you are by the ocean . . . the water is lapping at

your fingertips, the sun is warm . . . you are half asleep, drifting and dreaming.* Out of this kind of sex often come visions. When we read "Stroking the Rose" in Judy Grahn's *Another Mother Tongue*, we both cried, "That's it! We do that!" Our drifting and dreaming corresponds to Judy's "psychic sex."

Recently I had an experience with new levels of opening. Pi and I took a two week camping vacation. Constantly together, we had to problem-solve several times and expanded our trust and intimacy with each other emotionally.

Inexplicably I began feeling a slight tension sexually. I felt like I wanted to tense, orgasm, and be done. Pi was eating me one night and I felt tension rising. Suddenly I realized that what I really wanted was a lighter, gentler touch. Just as I had exposed my psyche more thoroughly and had received tender care on an emotional level, my yoni seemed to want corresponding tenderness.

"Love me more gently, very gently," I urged Pi. She immediately slowed her tongue-strokes and used much more saliva. I relaxed. It felt great. Pi reminded me to relax every time she felt the least tension, she told me each change she tasted, I drifted far away into black starry space. When I came, the orgasm was all-encompassing and totally ecstatic. It was so different from previous times that I cried, holding Pi joyously. Then I laughed. My body felt great, not at all spent. If I hadn't fallen asleep soon, I could have continued.

Drifting into sleep, Pi murmured, "I know just how you feel, I went with you. It was great."

Anonymously by a SouthWest reader

Sex

So you want to know what sex means to me, how i do what i do?? As a lesbian living in this culture it means an affirmation of my womyn loving self, a way of expressing love, affection and sexual pleasure/tension. I like my body mostly and am fairly comfortable being sexual. I like to be active, coming up with suggestions for different positions, things to do, moving around. As i have gotten older (i am now 38) i have noticed changes in my sexuality. For me, these changes have been positive ones. They include feeling less driven to orgasm (for instance, i used to feel "horny" all the time . . . sorta itchy constantly) and now i experience my sexuality in a continuum of sometimes feeling sexual and sometimes not. Other changes include a greater sensitivity to my emotions while being sexual. Again, i used to be so bothered by my need to have sex that i think sometimes i wasn't very in touch with ways that i might have felt shut down, or emotionally withdrawn. I used to have sex and sometimes wonder why i felt release, but not a sense of completion. Now i feel more in touch with my whole self and there are times when in my mind i want to be sexual, but it simply isn't in my body. Usually talking about this changes it. I have had to make myself say exactly how i'm feeling . . . talk about how my

mind wants to be sexual but my body doesn't. And conversely, now when i am feeling sexual it seems a more whole experience. I feel the best in a sexual experience when i feel connected to the lesbian i'm making love with both sexually and in some spiritual way. By this i think i mean a way of feeling known and understood, recognized for who i am.

Now, about what i "do" sexually. This feels vulnerable to think of reading my writing in a magazine, but i want to share it, as i want to read about other lesbians' sexual lives. So, what i do. I like to be held and hold, to stroke all over, and feel another womyn touching me. I love to kiss, all over her face, neck, breasts, tummy, inside of her legs and cunt. I also in turn love to be kissed in all those places. It turns me on a whole lot to be kissed on my back, up and down. I love to kiss and suck on the lesbian i am making love to, put my fingers in her cunt. I like to do that to her while she is laying on her back and simply feeling it, as i like it best when she does it to me so i can experience it fully. Sometimes it is fun to suck and kiss simultaneously, but invariably i lose my concentration when i start coming and occasionally feel bad because i stopped paying attention to her. I am not into s & m, feel uncomfortable with some thoughts of it and turned on to other parts. For instance, i would like to be made love to with my arms tied to the bed, and make love to her that way. Sometimes, i have had lots of fun telling stories while making love (like, "did i ever tell you about the time i met this lesbian in the park and she said this and then she did this . . ."). I have used cucumbers while being sexual and that sometimes feels extremely pleasurable and a turn on to me. Certainly i am most comfortable if my lover also wants to do that. I have used a vibrator while making love. I both like the orgasm from it and sometimes feel the need not to use it too often. I like a kind of mutuality of play and exploration while being sexual. I feel open to suggestions and like it when my partner has ideas of things to do. I haven't yet played very much with butch and fem roles while being sexual . . . we are more just ourselves. I would be open to playing with those roles, yet would feel uncomfortable with any type of role playing that had to do with dominance and submission.

Other things i like to do (ways i like to come) are with me laying on my stomach, on my pillow and/or hands, with my lover on top of me. I love to lay on top of my lover, face to face, and move around. I like to come with her fingers inside of me and mine inside of her. I know there are other things, but i want to talk some about how i experience sex as nurturing.

Certainly as a lesbian, sex is nurturing as a way of seeing myself reflected in another womyn's body, as a way of being physically touched, held, stroked, literally feeling skin to skin. I also believe that the vulnerability that comes from taking our clothes off again and again, with the same lesbian, can lead to a kind of intimacy and depth that is not the same when we are sexual with a lesbian and then another and then another. I also think it is OK to be sexual with lesbians i don't know real well, and have it mean a sexual experience which

does not necessarily have to develop into a deeper/different type of relationship. Sometimes i feel weird that because i might make love with a lesbian, she then takes it to mean we are in an ongoing committed relationship. For me, that takes time to develop, and being sexual is one way (of many) that i can decide if i want to be more involved with her.

I feel pretty lucky in that i don't feel very sexually damaged by the years i was a heterosexual woman, although that damage is there in other ways. In my years as a lesbian, i have experienced positive and healthy sexuality. I think there have been moments that have been damaging for my partner when i have wanted to make love and have pressured. Having experienced the other side of that, i feel i am now very careful not to pressure. That reminds me that i like it when my partner and/or i can masturbate in front of the other if one of us is feeling sexual and the other not. I appreciate the pain that many lesbians carry from the patriarchy about sex and think it is very important that we begin in specific and honest terms to share with each other.

minna seva

I'm writing in response to your forum question of 'why women get into s/m and why they get out.' I came out in a midwestern college town slightly after its s/m heyday, but not far enough past it to quell the powerful and colorful rumors concerning which community women were (or had been) into s/m, and what they'd done with whom, and where. There were still occasional discussion groups concerning s/m, so the topic was present enough for a newly-out dyke to bump into.

I was intrigued by s/m for a number of reasons. First, the couple that served as my "coming out mentors" were involved with s/m. The three of us were in school together; we had class together, went to the gym together, met each other at parties. At the time, I respected them and their commitment to each other immensely. They were my example of strong women who were proud of being lesbians, and who were not afraid to show it to the straight world.

I found out about their involvement with s/m when they asked me if I was going to go to the yearly s/m discussion group put on by the local dyke network. I didn't take them very seriously and made some snide remark. Dead silence fell. One of them said: "With that attitude, you'd better attend." Realizing that they must do s/m, I resolved to go, feeling that if the two women I respected most in the community were doing s/m, I'd better learn something about it. That was the beginning of my book-buying, bar-going, and discussion-attending on the subject.

Second, my attraction to s/m came out of a strong distaste I have towards being naive — being a "virgin" — about *anything*. I was already tense about having come out without yet having slept with a woman. And once I *had* slept with someone, I was tense about not having slept with so *many* people that my nervousness would disappear (as I imagined it *would* with experience — HA!).

So my interest in s/m came out of a desire to be sexually knowledgeable, daring, and already "jaded." I associated s/m dykes with power, with being in control of their situation, and with mystique.

Unfortunately, I became clandestine lovers with one of the aforementioned couple. We began to do scenes together, and I used these scenes to fix this woman's attention, to make myself more desirable in her eyes. I figured I would do all those things in s/m sex that her lover had not yet been ready, or willing, to do. I would be the "most" daring, the "most" willing to experiment and to give my all. At the time, I felt very sexual, passionate, and brave. Now, with hindsight, I realize I was emotionally insecure. I wanted this woman to leave her lover. I wanted to get, hold and manipulate her attention. (It might be added that I was far more comfortable being "bottom" than being "top." In retrospect this seems to coincide with feeling out of control, being the "third wheel" in this woman's love life. At the time, I felt that being bottom allowed me to demonstrate my openness to this woman, my receptivity, my desire for her.)

After these two women moved (together, I should add), with my next partner I also practised s/m. We were in a sex discussion group where we spoke about role-playing, sex toys, fantasies, etc.; yet this group did not make me more reflective about my sexual practices, but, rather, more determined to do even *more* to prove that I was sexually adept and powerful. I not only practised s/m, but I also wrote s/m poetry and short stories, and did illustrations that I've sent to *Outrageous Women* and other such s/m rags. (I should add that this partner was an alcoholic, and that I was an ideal "co," coming from an alcoholic home environment; so later, when I looked back on our sexual/emotional dynamic, I realized how perfectly being a co-alcoholic meshed with being an s/m bottom.) After she began AA and we broke up, I began to realize how I used s/m in my relationships, and decided to stop practising s/m until I could figure out if these uses were "inherent" to s/m, or if I just had too much emotional baggage to handle s/m.

What I found was this: if the people practising s/m have unexplored and unacknowledged power/control problems in their relationship to begin with, s/m will only exacerbate them. Such role-playing, rather than being cathartic (as s/m dykes claim) will substitute for discussion, or for couple's counseling, and will deeply entrench these dynamics in the partners' sex-life, and into their self-concepts.

For a woman who was afraid of being ignored/left by her partner, being an s/m bottom served perfectly to play out these fears. I offered myself sexually to be tied up, hit with hands, belts, crops, called names, because in such a way I got attention from my lover. Being hit made me feel present, grounded. I also felt that "taking it" was a challenge, made me tough. I thought that if I gave my lover what she "wanted," then she would stay with me. Ultimately, I only felt more distant from her when we weren't engaging in s/m.

Also, my second s/m lover had told me that the most intense sex was s/m, an assertion that people like Pat Califia and s/m dykes at other workshops seconded. Before I'd practised s/m I'd imagined that with the "right" chemistry two lovers *not* into s/m but committed to "hot" sex could achieve the same intensity and closeness (an assumption I've since found to be true), but after being exposed to the opposite viewpoint I began to doubt my previous belief, and was afraid that going back to "vanilla sex" meant that I couldn't take the "real" stuff, that I couldn't handle powerful eroticism.

I think that a lot of my attraction to s/m sex came from being an ACOA [Adult Child of an Alcoholic - Ed.] and having "co-alcoholic" patterns down pat. I loved the look and stance of leather dykes. If I couldn't be one (and I assumed I couldn't, especially since I was uncomfortable as a top) then I would love one. In being bottom, I would open up this tough woman, get her to respond to me, need me, admire me for all I was willing to give her.

What I found was that I let myself be used. I never got the closeness I craved, but rather, a pseudo-closeness that disappeared when the scene was over. Even though leather clothing, and watching leather dykes move at the bar still turns me on, I don't think I could practise s/m again. I'd be afraid of losing my self respect, afraid of losing myself in my partner. For me, s/m brought up too many manipulative games and patterns, but it didn't give me the tools to deal with those patterns, or the means to change them.

Anonymous

Excerpts from 'Seven Heresies'*

We hear a lot of rhetoric directed against old-time stone butches, these last ten years. I was not around in the 50s, and only a child in the 60s; from all I read and hear I suspect that a lot of these cultural forebears of mine were indeed male-identified, and had exploitative notions about other women. But I praise them in this: they drew their boundaries and they held them, and for any woman in any decade to claim and maintain control of her body as her own turf is radical . . . It seems to me that women who seldom wanted sexual attention from others, or were picky about the kinds of touching they liked, may have found it easier to proclaim themselves stone butch and avoid the whole hassle. I feel for them. I don't want sexual attention often myself, and I don't miss it when I don't have it. Given the choice, most times I'd rather not be made love to . . .

In the interest of passing for normal (among lesbians!) I have allowed things to be done to my body that I didn't want, and I have endured them and tried to be polite about it. I have put myself in sexual situations where I was unsafe, embarrassed, tense, and just plain miserable. I have tried to convert the body's dim chemical message of fight-or-flight into some kind of rush, and all I have

achieved in every case is numbness, nausea, and grief. (In fact, these were often my reactions to heterosex and for the same reasons.) Basically, unwanted sexual touching that you have to endure is molest. There is no way out of it. And molest makes you feel ill and awful . . .

A friend pointed out that 'withholding' can be a power trip, that it doesn't always have to do with feelings of safety and unsafety but can be a way of punishing a lover. When we talked about this a little more I suggested that this had to do with withholding of presence: refusing to communicate about what's happening, alleging no sexual feeling while actually feeling a lot, playing 'I'm only doing this for your sake,' and so forth . . .

One way in which I have avoided the trap of denying or concealing my sexual feelings, is that I feel safe and strong about my own excitement and have often been held and encouraged by a lover as I created my own orgasm – because I seldom want extended sexual attentions from my lover doesn't mean I want to exclude her from my sexual experience. It has always been a policy of mine to make sure that "doing it for yourself" was OK with my lovers and myself . . .

Safety and joy – I have had both, with a lover who was willing to think about sex and not to assume that it comes in a can. We had to work hard on honesty, that was the hardest part . . . What I love best about sex is communicating honestly and gently with another lesbian; creating joy, creating happiness, pleasing her, being appreciated, feeling safe. Good sex can be deeply healing. I like stretching all my senses to detect No and Yes, respecting both, accepting No not grudgingly but with love – trying to love the pride and self-respect of this woman as I love my own. Trying to get out of my own ego for a little while. In being pleased – I love best the generosity of a warm-hearted lover, the sense of really being pampered and treated specially; it doesn't happen to any of us often enough. Sex is such a luxury . . .

To be active, the one who does the pleasing, is seen as "being the man" (men do sex and women permit it) – yet it has always been women whose work was pleasing men, whose work is caring, lying, flattering, being nice, putting the man's sexual experience first and devaluing their own. This is rather confusing when you consider traditional butches, who are called "man-like" but whose responsibility for sexual pleasure is a traditionally feminine one . . .

Fantasy in shared sex I think is inappropriate . . . I speak here from long personal experience; my adolescent sexuality was an extension of intense childhood make-believe games, and was incorporated into them. My first lover and I met when we were twelve, and never made love as our own true selves for all the six years of our relationship; as have many lesbians, I think, we also managed to deny that we were lesbians, by reassuring each other that we were "just playing." . . . Our "playing" relationship was quickly modelled on mainstream hetero literature of this kind, and predictably became an sm

relationship. I am furious that the sweetness of my first love affair was lost in pretense and game-playing and the imitation of straight pornography; that I spent six years in almost constant intimacy with a young woman whose real personality is now dim and vague to me; what I remember is our games. Using shared fantasy as sex was for us an evasion; I think it is always an evasion, an escape from the real lover and the real sex, and the necessity for honesty . . .

My sexuality has been a source of struggle and pain for me at times; growing out of my teenage sm relationship and repudiating my cultural indoctrination into sm took several years. . . . I have been dismantling and rebuilding my sexual ideas for about seven consecutive years. I have never experienced these struggles as an attempt to live up to a party line, but as a ceaseless investigation into what is ethical and what is not. . . . The hardest lesson from those years has been that bad sex is worse for me than no shared sex at all, far worse. I have been "celibate" now for about one year after leaving my last lover; and though I sometimes miss the sexual sharing I had with her, I am in no hurry to find a new lover. Women who share my heretical sexual ethics are probably rare, and I have no interest in fighting anyone into agreeing with me . . .

Sex without personal honour is no longer attractive to me; I want goodness and honesty in all of my life, and not all that is sex is good. . . . I do not wish you to take me for a mawkish sentimentalist, trailing floral metaphors. All I can tell you is that there is a profound stillness and silence at the core of my sexual excitement; that I am awed by the sexual vitality and strength of the women I have been lucky enough to please, and by the irreproducible beauty of physical pleasure. The sexual communion of two women is for me the living enactment of ancient and powerful magic.

D. A. Clarke

*In, *I Know It When I See It* (Santa Cruz, CA: HerBooks, in press).

Although I fantasize sometimes about seducing a woman I've never met before, what I like to do most in the whole world is make love with the woman I have been in love with for over a year now. I feel very much in love and want more time and more lovemaking whenever possible. When I fantasize about making love I always imagine going down on her – that is the image that comes to mind instantly. I imagine kissing her, caressing her breasts, kissing and sucking her nipples, kissing her whole body – I hardly ever seem to actually get to kiss her whole body – and I imagine the taste and smell of her cunt, I imagine what I'm going to do with my mouth, with my tongue. When she's down on me and I'm close to orgasm, I often imagine for an instant what she tastes like, and that makes me come.

Sex means sharing with this woman in my life. It is by this experience, the intensity of this joy, that I measure the rest of my experience. This shared joy is what I want. It is top priority: the strongest thing in my life. It's how I know I'm alive. By "alive" I don't mean living, I mean *vital*, full of life.

Any experience which is less than vital, which deadens, I reject. Any experience which has an element of this kind of aliveness, I cultivate. This forms my ethics. Ethically, I support that which supports life in its fullness.

With my lover I want honesty, especially while making love. Why lie there wishing for something or tolerating something? I want her to tell me: "Up, no, over to the left, down" – whatever – and I want to tell her, too. We like to make love in the light, to see each other. We compared cunts once, using a mirror to see our own, too, and that was fun. Talking about exactly where we like to be touched, when, and how. When the intimacy is so intense, the vulnerability and openness require honesty. Lies, even little ones, even of omission, create immediate barriers.

Ethical lovemaking is of course consensual. I don't want to make love with my lover if she doesn't want to. What kind of sharing would that be?

We are monogamous and I think that allows for a greater trust and openness. I would probably close a part of myself off, perhaps the part I would be intimately sharing with another woman, if I wasn't being monogamous. I can concentrate the most intensity and the most honesty – it takes energy! – relating to one woman sexually.

Bonnie Sullivan

A.H.L.A.

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Sexuality in My Life

Since the greatest erogenous zone is the mind, and since, in my opinion, what renders two lovers compatible is a similarity of the sexual imagination, I must begin this with my fantasy life.

As I write, I am preparing to spend twenty-four hours with a woman I have never met, who had originally called to network about writing and ended up inviting me for a visit. My fantasies are wild. She will meet me at the station; the day whirls on, a heady mixture of talk and unspoken undercurrents; at night's end, she walks me to the place where I have a room. I turn and ask her, "Will you stay?" We fall into each other's arms, make passionate love, sleep entwined, awake, and begin again.

The trouble with this fantasy is that for me it can't just stop there. It's got to have a corollary, the one in which we repeat this, her place or mine, every weekend, until we finally move into a two-word-processor house by the sea for life (during which the sexual ecstasy never abates), and have amusing people in to dinner.

"You can't expect both passion and stability," my therapist keeps trying to tell me, to explain why my five year live-in relationship went boring, or why my recent torrid two-month affair ended with me being tossed aside like a used kleenex. My problem is: I want both, I want it all. And the current state of lesbian relationships, given our history, collectively and individually, is just not a fertile field.

I have no issues with my own sexuality, only with finding a woman to share it with. I am sexually eager, enthusiastic, creative, uninhibited, experimental. I love my body; I feel myself to be, at forty, in my prime, which I expect to continue without decline. I love the bodies of other women. I love tongues, nipples, earlobes, bellies, juices, smells, hair, the exquisite colors and shadings of our sacred places. I love talking while loving. My most exciting lover knew how to talk; our sexual dialogue was, ultimately, much more erotic than what we actually did. I mean by this a poetic verbalization about what's happening, what I want, what she wants, what's going to happen, how beautiful we are, how much we appreciate that beauty. My most disappointing lover, ultimately, although we were intensely compatible physically, would not talk, would not cry out my name, would not open her eyes and look at me during our passion. Of course that passion died.

I love making love, not only for what can happen between two lovers in terms of trust, nurturing, celebration, healing – but for what can happen for me. Sex is a vehicle for me for self-knowledge, a spiritual conduit toward what I

can know most deeply, by-passing intellect altogether, about my relationship to the universe. What I especially love is seeing how far out I can go, how far I can push my own limits. What I need to do this is a safe harbor to come back to, the trustworthiness and caring of the lover/midwife who makes it possible.

For all this, about which I have no ambivalence, I rarely experience what I have described, because I cannot find others who will journey with me. Women often seem to me to be terrified of sexuality, of real intimacy, commitment, spiritual depth. I, unlike many others and most of those I have tried to love, have not been sexually abused nor had my personal boundaries severely violated in childhood or adolescence. I have had only one major relationship with a man (a husband), and that was positive and affirming, emotionally and sexually. (I came out anyway because I desire women.) Most of my lovers have been threatened by my sexual ease and assertion, which I always wish to share equally and desire as well from them. Most have not been able, due to past hurts, to enter the deep places our eroticism might take us. It has taken me a long, healing time to realize that I have been rejected, not for being an unworthy lover, nor because sex is bad, but because serious damage to my lovers' sexuality had already been done before we met.

I do not seek the long-term cozy-cuddly "dyke fusion" we see so commonly in our communities which seems to lead to what feminist therapists call "lesbian bed death." Nor do I seek any more torrid affairs that end cruelly and abruptly because the "hot lover" exists split off from any capacity for love, friendship, dailiness, and true intimacy.

I cannot have a casual one-night stand, or a meaningless "fuck," because, for me, to participate in an intimate dialogue with another woman is to touch souls. I want her in my life, then, in some fashion, for awhile. I do not feel "superior" to any woman because my own sexual history has not contained bodily trauma nor emotional rape; I am merely weary of having my own desire spurned as if it were evil.

I feel that I speak exquisitely a language that is forbidden in the country in which I live.

P.R.S.

Addendum: The author has now found the relationship she was looking for and believes that the release of writing the above piece helped make that possible.

Licking each other's vulvas, spreading each other open, burrowing into each other, squeezing flesh, rubbing our lips and tongues together, exploring each other's holes and crevices, tasting and smelling our juices, bringing each other to climax, we affirm our own and each other's womon-ness. We act out our womon loving and create womon loving vibrations that ripple out into the universe. This act, in a womon-hating world where we have been tortured and punished for our carnality, our powers of life bearing, for our connection with Earth, this act carries the potential for revolution. A world of womyn loving each other and ourselves would tilt the scales of patriarchy/womon-hating and create an energy of healing and life-affirmation on the planet.

As lesbian feminists we know the inter-connectedness of everything and we know the power of visualization and how every act vibrates the entire web of life. As lesbian feminists, womyn-loving-womyn committed to empowering ourselves and healing the Earth, we are responsible for our every action, thought and mental image. Who we make love with and how we make love are important social/political/spiritual acts. We have the power to choose exactly how to vibrate the web.

The inside of a shell, the open persimmon, the lips of a rose, the swell of a mountain remind me of our cunts, of our breasts, of our lips, of how we are made. The goddess has made us in her image and the eroticism of nature everywhere is our own. We nuzzle into ourselves and each other, pushing our faces and tongues into the tunnel to the womb, where we nurture life, where we bleed in synch with the cycles of the moon and the planets. We explore our assholes, explore and caress the dark, the soft, the rich flesh and spicy smells of each other. We delve into the places from where we shit and piss and give birth, touching the power sources of life. We open ourselves, give ourselves over to instinct and primal need. Our need to be touched, to be loved and to be at the source. We orgasm and connect with an ancient and powerful force. We release our energies into the world with the images and feelings we experience. If those images are ones of healing and love, we pump healing and love into the web.

We have been brought into and up in a world where men have defined eroticism, sexuality and womyn. Domination, control and violence have been men's sexual stimuli. Our own sexual fantasies and desires have been shaped by this culture and we need to work on changing them to reflect our ideals. When my lesbian feminist awareness dawned, many of my sexual fantasies became unacceptable to me. I realized that if I was masturbating while fantasizing about a womon who did not know it, I was intruding upon her psychic space. That if I imaged bondage or domination, I was feeding the actuality of those things. So I interrupted those fantasies and created new ones. I began concentrating on the feel of my own flesh, the textures and smells, the sensations of my touch.

I use my climax – my climb to the max – to clean me out. I imagine the universe pouring into me and out the top of my head, I picture the ocean rushing in and out of me, cleansing and stimulating. I envision womyn I love being loved and happy. I visualize colors lighting my body. Sometimes I use sounds to enhance the vibrations. When I am licking, touching, squeezing and exploring my lover I see her in a collage of glimpses of everyday life. I see us together. I see flowers and fruit. I feel that we are connecting as channels of life. I feel comfort, excitement and joy. I am loving my own flesh, fat, smells, as I love hers. I feel like an infant suckling, being nourished and cared for. I imagine threads of love and light pouring into her from out of my tongue, my fingers. I feel extremely tender, open and at peace. So connected to her. And when she orgasms or I do, I feel the rush of her energy or my own, and marvel at our power. Sometimes we get so caught up in our lives we forget to make space and time to make love. Then when we do, it feels like a missing piece of our relating has been replaced and I wonder how we could have neglected this bond for so long.

We come together naked and open, vulnerable and trusting. We share what happens to each other's bodies. We allow each other to kiss and lick and touch those parts of ourselves so personal and privately connected to our cores. What we have experienced since birth shapes our attitudes towards those places in our selves, whether our feelings are affection, fear, love, or repulsion, etc. How much violence has been woven into our past sexual experiences may determine how much we can truly open. Continual visualization of healing, loving images can help us go beyond our fears.

I see cervical cancer, toxic waste, Pelvic Inflammatory Disease, strip mining and hysterectomies as one and the same, stemming from men's violation of Earth and womyn. I like to imagine a globe full of womyn loving womyn claiming our love as a healing force for Earth and all life. That image, of all of us connecting in a conscious collective way via the power of our cunts/wombs/carnality/sexuality is strong within me. I see the prick-dominate-conquer-control MENTality as the death force, in direct opposition to our energy, which is a celebration of life. Guns, bombs, nuclear warheads, missiles, rockets, etc., are made in the image of the prick. I will not make love with a lesbian who makes love with a lesbian who makes love with a bi-sexual woman who makes love with a prick because I want that energy NO WHERE in my sexual/psychic/spiritual realm. Using prick-like objects like dildos sends images of more pricks out into the world. Practising sado-masochism, acting out bondage or violence of any sort sends those pictures out into the world, reinforcing and strengthening the heteropatriarchal views of womyn and sex.

I am currently involved in a very painful dialogue with a lesbian I was lovers with for years who is now into S&M, particularly whipping and bondage. She is a lesbian "feminist" who worked in the anti-porn and anti-violence-against-womyn movements for years. In exploring my hurt and rage I find I feel betrayed because I had known her to be an ally in our struggle for safety and freedom for all womyn. Now I feel mistrustful of her. I don't want to be intimate with and share my energies with one who is using a whip on another lesbian . . . who sends that image into the world. Whips symbolize domination, control, and violence. I do not understand how a lesbian who has seen so much violence against womyn can participate in an act which pantomimes that same violence. I am infuriated by what I see as her (and other sado-masochists') lack of responsibility for the pictures projected by her (their) acts.

Our responsibility as lesbian feminists is to create and act out our sexuality in the most womyn loving, life affirming ways possible. To affirm our connection with the vulvas present everywhere in nature and take our cues from the Mother. Our bodies and our love making are power sources we can use to vibrate the web and transform our lives and Earth.

Kris Drumm

I'd like to thank Jean Faith, my lover, for helping me with this.

"But Then What is Liberation?" (Hortense and Gladys on Sex)*

Hortense: Gladys, do you know that there is a "disorder" labelled "lack of interest in sex," so that if someone isn't interested in sex, she is supposed to need treatment, need to be changed? That idea has so influenced me that when you want to have sex and I don't, I'm inclined to think that there's something wrong with me.

Gladys: (Thinking: Oh-oh, what now?)

Hortense: Most people (here Hortense really means Gladys) would think that *of course* there's something wrong with me. But I think that your being interested in sex when I'm not requires explanation just as much as my *not* being interested when you are.

Gladys: Yes, but you are hardly ever interested.

Hortense: But that's appropriate if sex really is an invention of the patriarchy, a tool men use as a means to keep women down and to ensure hierarchies. I mean that we are erotic beings, that we have sexual urges, are capable of

orgasms, etc., because men have created us that way. Our sexuality is not a part of us as liberated, it belongs to us only as enslaved.

Gladys: You're just saying that to get out of having sex.

Hortense: Yes. I like my life, I'm absorbed in going about my business, sex is an intrusion. Almost like a penis coming in to interfere with my internal processes.

Gladys: Flow.

Hortense: Flow. Right now the watery processes of my work, projects, daily life don't "naturally" include sex every day or, probably, every week. And when I'm alone, I sometimes masturbate without much interruption of the flow, while I'm reading or planning a lecture. But making love with someone else requires attention to the love-making.

Gladys: You're so self-centered.

Hortense: Yes, I am.

Gladys: But I know you like love-making. Sometimes. When your mind is on it.

Hortense: Of course I do.

Gladys: And you prize relationships, I know you do. You were desolate – for years – when Alice left.

Hortense: Yes. I love Alice. I love you. And relationships need sex; we need to know one another sexually, to share sex. But why so often?

Gladys: You might as well say one *hug* a month would be enough.

Hortense: Well, one hug a month is not enough. But hugs don't take so much energy. Also, it's relevant that I'm over fifty. Not because I'm "not sexual" physiologically, but because I've had so much sex, and know myself, and know that time is short. I don't drink as much as I used to either. In both cases I want the energy for work, for politics, for other kinds of play.

Gladys: You're blocking. There is something that is *keeping* you from wanting sex more often, some block, some fear.

Hortense: Well, alright. If you insist on an explanation, here's one. Consider the theory that sex, the erotic, is an opening up, that it moves to opening and merging, a return to the original oneness with the mother. My mother abandoned me – as you know – psychically, by leaving me alone between feedings, following doctor's orders, for at least the first several weeks of my life, and I screamed and raged. So maybe I'm afraid of merging because I think it leads to being abandoned again. How's that for an explanation?

Gladys: Fine. But I'm not your mother, and I won't abandon you.

Hortense: Ha! You might. Alice did.

Gladys: Yes, but I'm not Alice . . .

Hortense: Anyway, I'm not convinced that love/sex *is* an attempt to repeat an original identity with mom. Perhaps in feminism we will construct some different account of the earliest processes. Perhaps we should think of a foetus, an infant, as an isolated individual who has to learn not separation, but

connection. Or as something else entirely, away from this dualism. Why should we accept *their* account of our earliest experiences?

Gladys: I like it, it feels right.

Hortense: Well, okay, suppose sex *is* about merging, returning to mother. And you want to do it and I don't. Why should your desire be "natural" and acceptable and mine not? Isn't it natural and healthy to want to be independent, separate, adult, oneself? Anyway, this whole idea of merging is something the boys feed to women so we will want to merge with *them*. But *their* reasons for having sex are different; for men, sex is masculinity and power and triumph, not merging with a woman. I can't stand it that DYKES are importing into wimmin's spaces an idea that has as its main function making women willing to be fucked.

Gladys: No, no. Of course it's true that men use sex and the ideology of merging for domination. But this is just a *misuse*. Sex and closeness can be good, used for good. It makes no sense to say that patriarchs *created sex*, created our most precious experiences. Unless you think that they created people too. Or all animals, for that matter. Or everything.

Hortense: Just so.

Gladys: But, then, what is liberation?

Joyce Trebilcot

*With appreciation for comments by Tess Catalano.

Conversation with a Dyke Who Knows What Doing It Can Do

I want to do it most during ovulation and menstruation, the latter event considered by many of a like mind to be inopportune and unsavory. Nevertheless, my labia swell, throb and itch. My vaginal walls pulsate and I want them pushed out. My clitoris emerges and shimmies . . . It is difficult to concentrate on anything other than to be touched. For the rest of the month, doing it is a subject for the head, an imaginary "must-have" inducing fantasy, gossip and flirtation with a lover or intriguing stranger. Doing it saps my strength, makes me lightheaded and irresponsible for a short period of time.

Doing it has given me fingers, an appetite for darkness, and breath. I was not raised in the church, so I never learned it is a sin to enjoy doing it. Momma did try to warn me that if other people learned that I enjoyed doing it, I would get a bad reputation. I learned that if I were a boy, I would have gotten a good reputation. Since I was a girl, I tried to hide my large breasts and I was careful not to let my hands go near *down there*. Whore! Slut! Trash! Show what you got and you'll deserve all you get!

Doing it is the greatest expression of love toward another. That is what I hear. I am abnormal if I do not want to do it with a man. Frigid. Dysfunctional. Less

than a woman. I do not do it with children or with pets or with men. My mother once told me it is nasty to her when two women do it. I hear it is all right for women to do it with each other if a man can join in and have it done to him. Adults can do it in the privacy of . . . the minds of righteous people.

I hear I must sit with my legs closed, but I don't. I hear I must not wear a red, red dress or black lace silks, but I will. I hear Blacks love to do it and get loud doing it in many different ways. I hear that women really like being forced to do it and that pain enhances doing it. I hear Lesbians are women who could not do it with men. I am a Lesbian and I have done it well with men and had no trauma from doing it with men. But I am still a Lesbian. I hear that old people do not do it anymore. I have heard from old people that that is a lie. I hear that white people read books to do it right and that the Chinese wrote those books. There is a good deal of mythology that revolves around doing it.

My lover has asked me to initiate doing it more. I am trying. I do not always ask to do it with her directly. Sometimes I will catch her eye and hold it, smile slowly or slide into a pose, touch her face, flex a calf muscle, offer her a Coke or snuggle under her in bed. I sometimes fantasize about doing it while wearing black leather and steel studs but I usually do it in nothing at all. I hear we fat women can not do it very well because of the size of our bodies. I hear no one wants to do it with a fat woman. Well, I know differently. And I hear that the use of drugs makes doing it better. I would not know. I have read a scientific study that women can not have orgasms through vaginal stimulation alone. I know better!

Doing it does not have the great importance to me as it seems to have for other people. It brings together and takes apart. I can always do it with myself and oftentimes do! I am never ashamed.

Terri Jewell

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Franny: Stories of Lesbian Resistance*

Janet Capone

Franny Martimucci, 27, has recently moved to the San Francisco Bay Area and has started working as a canvasser for Bay Area Women Against Rape (BAWAR).

I.

Tonight she would be working with Kam Sing. Franny smiled, flashing on the two of them with their clipboards, canvassing the neighborhoods of Fremont, California. Franny: scruffy 5'4" working class Italian-American dyke with her short hair, blue jeans and dark sunglasses; Kam Sing: a few inches smaller, with longer hair and a thick Chinese accent. How unlikely that the two of them would be found walking the streets of this very white, upper-middle class section of Fremont. Even more unlikely, or so it seemed to Franny, who was feeling dykier with each passing minute, was the prospect that they could go door-to-door and actually raise money.

As she walked to the corner with Kam Sing, Franny began a doleful mental reassessment of her choice of attire for the evening: blue-striped men's oxford shirt, levi's, and black hi-topped boy's sneakers. Why hadn't she worn her red sweater instead? Too late now. Reaching the corner, the two women separated, Kam Sing crossing over to work the other side.

"Good luck!" Kam Sing called out from the far side of the street. Franny approached her first door for the evening, cleared her throat and rang the bell.

"Hi! I'm from Bay Area Women Against Rape." She forced herself to smile at the sullen face of the huge white-haired old man who answered. She lifted her

* Excerpts from an autobiographical work in progress. Many thanks to Jeanette Silveira for her editorial help with this piece.

clipboard toward him for emphasis but received no indication that her words had registered. Quickly, she continued, "This is an organization that works to stop violence . . ."

"Forget it!" the man bellowed, waving his hand in the air. For a split second, Franny thought of the Tin Man, the Scarecrow, and the Lion receiving a booming roar of "Silence!" from a phony image cranked up by the Wizard of Oz. "See this?" The man pointed repeatedly at a dingy sign in the corner of his window: "No Solicitors, Peddlers, or Agents," he read it out loud. "Forget it!" he bellowed once more with relish, raising his hand in the air like a stop sign to quell her attempts at speech. Now Franny was reminded of the pope, in a video she had seen recently, reprimanding the people of Nicaragua in their struggle against the *contras*. He had stood there in his Imperial Margarine crown, one hand raised, solemnly roaring "Silencio! Silencio!" at the disapproving shouts of the crowd. By this time the white-haired man had gone back inside his house. With exaggerated finality and righteousness he slammed the door in her face. Franny stood looking at the grainy minutiae of the brown wooden surface in front of her.

"Stupid asshole!" she muttered. She had the urge to guffaw loudly. Instead, she walked away. "Start my night off right!" she said loudly, deliberately walking across his well-groomed lawn and up the path to the next door. Across the street she saw Kam Sing talking with a woman on her front porch. Franny rang the doorbell and a bearded man in his early thirties answered.

"Hi! I'm from Bay Area Women Against Rape."

"Who?" he smiled and opened the door wider.

"This is the Rape Crisis Center for Alameda County."

"Oh!" His face broke into a grin and he chuckled. Franny's skin crawled. She quickly decided on a short rap.

"We're in Fremont tonight giving information and raising donations. Can you help?"

"Well," his laughter subsided slightly, "what do I have to do? Sign something?" He chuckled again.

"No."

"Is that a petition you got there?" He leaned forward.

She stepped back, clipboard in hand. "We're raising donations so we can keep our services available in the Bay Area."

"In other words, you want money."

"That's right." Franny smiled.

"How much?" He dug into his pants pocket.

"The average donation is twenty dollars," Franny lied, "which goes toward maintaining our 24 hour hotline and toward supporting the educational workshops we do."

"Here you go," he interrupted, putting two dollars in her hand. Quickly she handed him a flier. "Good luck!" he grinned widely.

"Yeah." She walked away, escaping his gaze as he closed the door. In seconds she could feel the familiar rage boiling up inside her. She struggled to control it, knowing it could affect her tone of voice and therefore her total for the evening. On the way to the next door she pictured his smiling, bearded face rising into the atmosphere on a bloated balloon. She breathed deeply. Pop! It entered the stratosphere a shriveled, flaccid skin lost in a gust.

After eight weeks of canvassing she was discovering that, more often than not, the people who made donations, and the biggest donations, were women. Significantly, they were often women who had either been raped as adults or assaulted as children. It just wasn't right. Why should the victims have to pay for their own recovery services? Why weren't the pricks shelling out their money instead? They were the ones doing the raping. Besides, they earned more money than women did. Why wasn't the damn government earmarking significant funding to help the victims of rape and 'family' assault daily piling up in epidemic proportions? Several times a night she would quote her memorized statistics (estimates by the FBI and the Rape Crisis movement): Two in five women will be sexually assaulted in their lifetimes. One in three girls will be sexually abused before the age of eighteen. The average length of time the girl will remain a victim is eleven years. Eleven years! So much for the myth of the happy childhood. And the FBI, she would always be quick to point out, estimated that only one in ten of these assaults were reported. What, she wondered, were the statistics on the number of rapists and child abusers she encountered in one night of canvassing? Every other door? Every other man?

She felt stymied. She felt frustrated. Was it realistic? Was it politically effective to use a method such as this for dealing with men's assaults against women? There probably was a rapist or molester behind every other door she canvassed.

Of course, the services were direly needed. The rape hotline received 200 calls a month. At least 50 of these were immediate crisis calls and many others were from survivors assaulted five to ten years ago and only now seeking help. The hotline was barely keeping up with the total number of casualties, let alone making significant headway in preventing the mass attacks from happening! Franny was furious. In her fury, she resolved to use every lying, guilt-tripping, manipulative fund-raising ploy she could think of to get the men – the fathers, the sons, the husbands – to shut their mouths and hand over their damn checks.

Feeling low, Franny reminded herself that she would be seeing Fury later that night. Her mood lightened. She recalled the first day she had met Fury, and how the name alone had made her smile.

In the two months that Franny had been living in Oakland she had met several lesbians who, like herself, identified as separatists. A small community of separatists. Franny was excited and tense on meeting each of them. For the first time in her life she could say she knew more than one other separatist besides herself. Fury was a friend of Cheryl's and Tyne's, two separatists Franny had

contacted after reading their article in a lesbian newspaper. After the three had gotten to know each other, Tyne suggested they all get together with Fury some time. Meeting Fury, Franny immediately felt a different kind of attraction. As the four of them walked through the tree ferns in Golden Gate Park that first afternoon, there was an emotional connection and a sexual draw that compelled her. Fury strode along, tall and confident, pissed off most of the time, a gray tweed cap covering her spikey short blond hair.

Fury's well-directed, vocal anger toward men and heterosexist society excited Franny. She recognized herself in this woman and, as with Cheryl and Tyne, felt complete permission to voice her own rage. What uncommon relief! Franny had craved such companionship for years, and for years had felt others, even other lesbians, try to hem her in, to quell her with platitudes. She had experienced fear of her intensity, appalled hostility at her words. *Franny, don't be angry, don't be so vocal, don't be.* She was a starved animal, teased with bits of food over the years, but never permitted a full meal. Now she was wild with hunger, wild with her own anger and alienation. *Damnit! We have the right to be angry! Why aren't more women angry? Why aren't lesbians enraged? Men start raping us when we're still babies. They are attacking us in the streets, abusing us in our homes, constricting our minds and spirits everywhere. Why aren't we furious?*

Returning to the present, Franny walked on. She got three "no homes" in a row. At the fourth door there was no bell and she knocked loudly. "Who is it?" someone called out in a meek voice. A youngish woman with permed blond hair opened the door.

After her introductory words, Franny waited for a response. "Here, why don't you come inside," the woman said, opening the door. Surprised by the woman's courtesy, Franny stepped into the carpeted hallway, her anger momentarily subdued. The hall was dimly lit, but Franny could see a look of concern and anxiety on the woman's face. She had spoken softly, in a tone that seemed to imply that Franny too should whisper. Franny felt as if this was supposed to be a clandestine conversation.

"Are you familiar with the Rape Crisis Center?" Franny asked.

"Sort of. You read about it in the paper now and then. Places for women to go if their husbands hit them."

"Those are shelters for battered women. They're a little different than what we do."

"Oh."

"We focus on women who have been raped, either by someone they know or by a complete stranger. We also help children who have been sexually abused. Our hotline is good throughout the county. Would you be able to make a donation tonight to help keep these services going?"

"Yes, I can make a donation." The woman walked to a bench in the hall where her purse was lying.

"We prefer checks. It's safer for the canvasser and it's a better receipt for you."

"Well, I'm going to have to give you cash tonight. My husband gets mad when he sees me writing checks all over the place."

"OK, I'll write you a receipt." Franny was amazed at the things some women put up with. "We're asking . . ."

"You know," the woman interrupted her, "something terrible happened recently." There was obvious pain in her face. Franny felt a sudden contrast between her own business-like manner and this woman's now more personal, vulnerable tone. "My friend had a 19 year-old daughter who committed suicide last week."

"Oh."

"The girl was an alcoholic. Her father had been molesting her ever since she was a child. They just found out he's been abusing the 14 year-old girl too. Now she's pregnant."

"That's horrible! Are they taking him to court?" Franny thought immediately and only of revenge.

"No. The mother won't believe her. Her husband is still living in the house with her. On Tuesday the 14 year-old girl ran away. We don't know where she is."

"Poor kid!"

"I know. And the mother won't talk about any of it. If anybody says anything bad about Bob, she gets mad."

"So she's selling out her own daughters to keep her disgusting husband!"

The woman nodded, looking downward. In silence she took a twenty dollar bill out of her purse and handed it to Franny. Stunned, Franny automatically passed her a flier, then pushed herself to focus. "This is our crisis line number," she said, pointing to the bottom of the flier. "If the 14 year-old comes back, tell her to call that number. They can help her. They can offer her more options than the cops would. They can go to court with her if she wants to prosecute."

"OK," the woman followed Franny through the hall, "good luck with your fund-raising." She smiled sadly, "I'm glad you're doing this."

Franny thanked her for her donation and walked down the hedged path to the sidewalk. She couldn't go to the next house right away, but kept walking instead. Hearing these awful stories night after night was debilitating as hell. She did a quick calculation: She heard three or four stories every night, she worked four nights a week, that made 64 horrible stories a month. Would she be able to stand it? Would she burn out with utter despair? Ninety-six percent of the time the rapists were getting away scot free! For the rapes occurring in California there was only a four percent conviction rate. Four percent! Nationwide the conviction rate was even lower. Two percent. She also knew that fewer of the white rapists were convicted of these crimes than were men of color. Apparently it's OK for a white man to rape. But, with statistics as low as these, sexual assault in general seems a negligible crime in the eyes of the

courts. Violent criminals are free and at liberty to rape again! This she hated with her whole self, angry and bitter and hating them all, every man, every rapist prick and every passive woman who ever collaborated to keep him, selling out the women in her life, her own daughters, in the process. Were they stupid? How could anybody be that brainwashed?

She passed several houses, finally slowing down. She plopped down on someone's wall. A deep despair welled up inside her. She knew it was always there, under the anger. At that last door she could not evade its monolithic presence. She sunk into tears. They fell quickly, rolling in silence down her cheeks. Slowly, her shoulders heaved. Her throat ached. She wanted to make a sound, but couldn't. Repressed crying. She had done a lot of this in the months after separating from her first lover, Louise. In fact, Louise had been on the periphery of Franny's thoughts all day. They had separated more than two years ago, but still sometimes she felt as though she was going through it all over again, the loss and disillusionment of that first relationship as acute as ever, even two years and two thousand miles away, Louise still in Texas where their relationship of four years had dissolved into bitterness, dishonesty and tears.

When they first met, Louise was 19, the same age as the woman who had just killed herself. Louise too was a survivor of sexual abuse as a small child. Then she was assaulted again in her early teens by a neighborhood boy. Franny recalled the broken bits of information Louise had told her during the course of their four years together, the painful flashbacks Louise inevitably got day to day or whenever they tried to make love.

At 13, Louise was beaten and raped by the brother of her first female lover, a boy one year older than herself. She attempted to press charges, but was told by the police that according to law a 14 year-old boy was not yet capable of rape. When the police had showed up at the front door, her mother had cheerfully welcomed them into the living room and had made coffee. In the presence of her mother and these two male cops, Louise had had to answer detailed questions about what had happened, only to discover that she had no legal recourse whatsoever.

Much earlier, as a three year-old, Louise had been sexually assaulted repeatedly by a close friend of the family, a man who also had small children of his own. Louise had not been able to remember when her abuse by him had started, how long it had lasted, or what exactly had happened. She did have clear memories of a cold, damp garage, of the man's large, forceful hands around her small wrists and ankles, of offerings of chocolate ice cream to bribe her into silence.

During Franny and Louise's relationship, Louise started having several new and vivid memories of this childhood torture. Suddenly ordinary household items would be laden with long-forgotten images of abuse at the hands of that man. Louise would remember and re-live specific events, sometimes while at work, sometimes while at home. It was an agony just to get through each day. She

was a counterperson in a busy print shop and was expected to provide constant service, courtesy, and cheerfulness in response to the demands of customers, many of whom were obnoxious fraternity boys from the local university. She would often come home irritable and scream at Franny the minute she came through the door.

Those were hard months, hard years. Though Franny tried several approaches, she was unable to help Louise. Franny would offer comfort and affection whenever she could. Louise would usually push her offers away. She encouraged Louise to talk about what she was feeling, about the painful memories that were coming up. However, Franny realized she herself was not emotionally prepared to handle the horrors this woman she loved so much had been put through as a baby and again as a teenager. Louise, too, grew resentful of Franny's wanting her to talk about the abuse. Franny would be overcome with grief, sometimes sinking into tearful, sobbing depressions she couldn't shake off for hours, even days at a time.

To Franny it seemed that Louise often responded to Franny's own sexual advances — motivated only by love and desire — as further attempts to exploit, control, and objectify her sexually. Franny was beaten down by this crazy, undeserved punishment. What was the toll on her own lesbianism? She requested, pleaded, and finally demanded that Louise work with a therapist. Reluctantly, Louise set up an appointment with a local lesbian counselor. Franny, still newly out as a lesbian, felt increasingly starved sexually. They hardly ever made love, and when they did it was fraught with problems. She craved a reciprocal sexual relationship. She began discussing and then claiming the right to be sexual with other women. They fought horribly. Finally, after being monogamous for 2½ years, they tried a few rocky months of nonmonogamy.

Inevitably, though, the strain of their back and forth struggle, their teetering seesaw of trust and suspicion, now compounded by a trial nonmonogamous arrangement, pushed their relationship to disintegration. Intensely anxious, Franny moved out, and in May of their fourth year together they separated. It took the remainder of the summer to fully complete the split.

Each of these events flashed before Franny now in quick, painful succession. And she remembered Marge, a woman she had dated briefly during her nonmonogamous period with Louise. On one of their first evenings together, she had learned that Marge too had been sexually and physically abused as a child at the hands of her own father, a well respected, well paid doctor in a small community in Michigan. Marge, too, had a girlhood ransacked with misery, ten years of beatings and sexual assaults by her maniacal father. Her mother's passive obedience stood out for Marge as a lifelong betrayal. At 13 she ran away from home. Here she was at 24, only remotely beginning to acknowledge the devastation that had been daily life for her at five, six, seven, eight years of age.

This new information had caught Franny in a whirlpool of rage and grief. She became aware that Marge had a serious drinking problem and was self-destructive in other ways as well. Gradually Franny dropped all hope of being lovers with Marge. Even their friendship, though, was plagued with new discoveries of Marge's attempts at self-destruction and her struggles to hide these from Franny.

Franny knew now that alcoholism and sexual abuse of children were intimately related. Many incest survivors become alcoholics, or junkies. Marge had a history of both. As an adult she was now participating in the destruction of the self she had been trained to despise as a child.

Two in five women, one in three girls. What were the statistics in other countries and cultures? Franny tried to imagine the real incidence of assaults in the lives of the women and girls alive today in cultures throughout the world. She tried to imagine, but it was like trying to imagine a million dollars. Unfathomable. It was like trying to imagine the solar system in the galaxy. Unfathomable. And because she couldn't imagine it, visualize it in a real, concrete way, she couldn't completely grasp the anger, the rage she should feel. Her rage eluded her, and this itself was part of her oppression as a woman and a lesbian, that it eluded her. It would be almost in her hands and then it would slip away. It built and built but never actually happened. She would feel anger, but not rage. She would feel alarm, but not hysteria. She wanted to feel hysteria, the violent outrage of a time bomb about to explode. She wanted to hone her rage till it was as palpable and accessible as the pin on a hand grenade, the trigger on a rifle. She wanted the ability at any moment to summon that rage and direct it, unleash it, explode it. She thought of a battered wife, passive for years until she one day murders her husband. She believed that globally, collectively, women were that battered wife, our humiliation building to a pitch only homicide can satisfy.

She thought of the millions of girls who were being permanently mutilated emotionally and sexually by their fathers, uncles, brothers; black girls, white girls, Puerto Rican girls, who felt ugly and repulsed by their own young bodies, who felt frightened and ashamed of their own developing sexual feelings. She thought of the millions of young girls as familiar with the smell of a horny man as they were with the smell of their crayons. She thought of the terror that smell must inspire. She thought of being watched, approached, trapped alone and without hope of rescue, utterly in fear for one's life. She tried to imagine living for years in a predatory environment, silently enduring, and calling that environment home.

She thought of Marge, who had to muster all her strength now, ten years later, to fight off the desire to die. Marge, who at 24 was familiar every day with the urge and the resisting of the urge to die.

Franny was exhausted. It was only eight o'clock. Still an hour of canvassing ahead of her. She resented the drudgery and humiliation of the job. What a

way to fight your oppression! Women out in the dark, in fear for their own safety, asking for money. Slowly, she slid off the wall and made her way to the next house.

II.

"Who's this?"

"My great-grandmother," Fury answered. Franny had a pillow propped behind her. It was nearly 11 p.m. Friday night and they lay on Fury's bed, flipping through some old pictures of Fury's family. With her fingers, Franny lightly stroked Fury's hair and neck, down her spine and bare back. They were lying close, both wearing only their underwear. Franny had waited all week for this moment of intimacy. She savored it.

"She looks like Elizabeth Cady Stanton." Franny was fascinated that Fury, as she had once told Franny, could trace her lineage all the way back to the Mayflower. She also felt annoyed, because Franny's own parents had been the children of anonymous immigrants from Italy, sorted out with the rest of the incoming peoples on Ellis Island. They brought few items with them when they left their small village in Naples. Franny had no personal knowledge of relatives, nor indeed any photographic record, further back than her grandparents, all of whom were now dead.

Fury grimaced, shrugging her shoulders nonchalantly. Her nonchalance and apparent boredom irritated Franny, but she said nothing. "They're all so het," Fury finally complained, exhaling loudly. "They all had husbands and tons of children." She closed the album and got up to put it on a shelf. On her way back, she grabbed a t-shirt and put it on.

"That's true," Franny said, watching her. "But it's still great that you have pictures so far back."

Fury waved her hand in the air. "I wish I could say I came from a long line of lesbian separatists. I wish I could show you pictures of my great-grandmother the lesbian who established the first lesbian rights movement of her time." Frustrated she sat down on the edge of the bed.

Franny thought of all the unknown lesbians in cultures throughout the world who courageously rejected marriage, who risked becoming pariahs in their communities, disinherited and outcast, suffering and starving, or dying alone because they refused to be the property of any man. She imagined having a history dotted with numerous female ancestors who had made that choice, ancestors she could look back on with pride. She knew she wasn't the first in her line. She imagined women who with their own lives and their own hands had pushed back the patriarchy to create a definite space for all lesbians. She fantasized actual photographs, faces, postures, eyes.

For several moments she felt proud and strong. Then, elusively, as with her rage, the feelings slipped away. There was vagueness where seconds before there had been clarity and enthusiasm. Why was it so hard to hold onto such ideas? She looked at Fury and felt warmer towards her now, because Fury had the power to inspire such terrific, lesbian visions in her. She loved her for having the courage and imagination to ask for that much of life, and for pushing Franny to ask for that much as well. She moved toward Fury now, putting her arms around her shoulders from behind. Lightly she kissed Fury's neck and pressed her face against her skin. She felt Fury's cotton t-shirt against her own bare breasts. Fury rested her hands on Franny's arms, stroking them.

"It's been so long since we've been together," Franny said. "I had a hard week at work."

"Really? I'm sorry," Fury turned to face her. "I'd get very frustrated if I did that kind of work."

"I do. Sometimes I think the hell with going door-to-door. I want dyke vigilante groups!"

Fury smiled at her. "Fuck, I'm ready for that!" she whooped, smacking the pillow with her fist. They both cracked up laughing, tumbling over each other on the bed and giggling.

Then they fell silent for a few moments, holding each other again and catching their breath. Franny happily cuddled closer to Fury. Gently she ran her hand down Fury's hip and thigh, caressing her. She leaned into her, kissing her face. Their mouths found each other and they kissed gently. She wanted her hands on Fury's waist and thighs and began to pursue this. Fury did not move into her touch. Instead, she hesitated, shifting onto her side. Franny saw tension in her face, a disturbance. Franny rolled onto her own side, watching her. Fury shook her head, looking away. They were silent for a few moments.

"I want to talk," Fury said abruptly, looking at her hands. Franny's insides plummeted. Fury neatly lined up the fingertips of her right hand against the fingertips of her left, forming a sharp angle. Over the weeks Franny had come to associate this mannerism with a worried mood.

"If you don't want to make love tonight, that's ok," Franny offered. "I like just being with you."

"I like being with you too. I mean, I like you a lot. I just . . . I don't know." Fury fell silent. "Look, I don't think I want a lover relationship right now." She turned to face Franny directly, meeting her gaze for the first time in several minutes.

Franny returned her gaze. "I've been feeling a lot of resistance from you." She looked away then, her disappointment mounting.

"I should have said something sooner."

Yeah, a lot sooner, Franny thought. Like three weeks ago.

"I've been going back and forth about it," Fury continued.

Franny suddenly felt naked. She sat up and reached for her own shirt from the door knob and pulled it over her head as Fury went on. Fury spoke about past relationships. She emphasized one in particular with a woman named Emily, with whom she was still close although they lived in separate states.

"We try to see each other as much as we can. It's been six years now. We love each other a lot. See that painting over there?" She pointed to a water color on the far wall of the bedroom, a brilliant flower garden full of daisies and fantasy flowers. The painting shone with a hazy yellow glow. "Emily painted that. It's me, or her sense of me."

"Oh."

"I don't know what to call our relationship. We're not lovers. We haven't made love in years. Emily still wants to, but I . . . I don't know. I just don't feel that way toward her. You know, the way you feel toward a lover. I think she's very handsome physically. I love her a whole lot. She's my best friend anywhere. But, I don't know. I just don't have that feeling you get. You know?" She looked at Franny now.

Franny looked back in silence. Her mind drifted in a lulled state of concern, disappointment, and surprise. Six years of relating like lovers and no lovemaking! Poor Emily!

Fury continued, speaking briefly about a recent five month relationship. This one was sexual but ended quickly and bitterly over political differences.

"Frankly, I never want to see the woman again," Fury said.

Franny shifted restlessly on the mattress. Her thoughts turned to Texas and the lesbian community there. She knew that in her circle of Texas friends there were quite a few couples in a state similar to Emily's and Fury's. Her own relationship with Louise had been like that for a long time. In fact, eight different lesbian relationships came easily to mind in which the women were having trouble being lovers, or didn't make love anymore although they continued to relate as more than friends. In many of these relationships one of the women still wanted to make love. Also, in most of these relationships one or both of the women were healing from sexual assault, rape or incest. She remembered Fury once telling her that she herself had some unclear memories of her father molesting her when she was a child. Franny thought about bringing up this subject but decided against it. Whatever her reasons, Fury had decided that she did not want to be lovers with Franny. Period. This rejection was pain enough.

"I should go," she announced, angry, sad, and exhausted. As soon as she said this, she was overwhelmed by the resource of energy she would need to get herself out of the apartment and to drive her bike back over the Bay Bridge in the dark. They both looked at the clock. It was 1:30.

"It's late," Fury said. "Why don't you just stay?"

Exhausted, Franny gave in. "We'll talk more tomorrow," she said, already moving into sleep. She could feel Fury put one arm around her as they dozed off.

III.

The next morning, driving over the Bay Bridge toward Oakland, Franny was angry. During the night some prick had fucked with the ignition switch on her motorcycle. She was lucky the bike hadn't been ripped off. "They violate everything," she hissed. She thought of last night's conversation with Fury. She thought of Louise, and of Marge, and of her disappointment. She thought of Sarah, a woman she had been with briefly before leaving Texas. Ironically, a sexual relationship had existed with Sarah, but in other important ways, emotionally, Sarah was not present. After four months Franny, in disappointment, had ended the involvement.

What the hell is going on? She yelled, inside her helmet: "Fuck this fucking relationship shit!" The wind whipped past her. "I risk my life, my job, my welfare, to be a lesbian, for *this*? Nobody told me that once I came out it was a celibate hell from then on!" Angrily, at 70 m.p.h. she passed cars. Her anger accelerated with the engine; she glanced around for cops. "Bullshit lesbian relationships!" But even as she said this, her own facility for cynicism and bitterness scared her. If she hated all lesbians, what the hell was she going to do, go straight? A fate worse than death. That thought humbled her away from further reckless pronouncements of rage. What made her think she'd had enough experience at 27 to draw such overwhelmingly negative conclusions?

Still, being a dyke scared her. She was terrified of the isolation and loneliness she might have to face later in life as a lesbian. Just like the stereotype, she thought, cringing. But then she realized, "Fuck later! I'm struggling with loneliness now!" What the hell is going on with lesbians? Why don't our sexual relationships last? Whatever the reason, lesbians as a community aren't talking enough about our sexual relationships, or our friendships for that matter. We aren't organizing to come to some sort of political understanding or to chart out a direction for progress. We are backed against the fucking wall, she thought, slipping carefully through traffic. We only have each other to count on. Nobody else. Damned if she'd end up in some het old age home!

Exhausted with the larger questions, Franny groped for a perspective on her own personal circumstances. What were they about? She thought of her family and the environment she grew up in. Her mother and father were both typically overworked working-class people. Emotionally, they were unavailable, and neither one was affectionate or physical with their children. She remembered her feelings of neglect and deprivation even as a young girl in her family of seven. Her brother, who became an alcoholic and a drug user when they were teenagers, would often laugh at her and ridicule her. Overwhelmingly, she remembered feeling starved. Not physically. She was fortunate there. But starved spiritually. Starved emotionally.

She reminded herself that she was the one who had initiated the sexual relationship with Fury. And she had done so even though she had felt Fury's hesitation, her tendency to be distant, from the beginning. Did her choice to pursue Fury reflect something about her own familiarity with deprivation and neglect? And what about Fury? She sure talked a great pro-lesbian line. But what did she actually back it up with? It's hard to walk like you talk. Separatism had to be more than just anger and verbalizing the right political line. Where was the support between lesbians? Where was the commitment to creating living, strong, healthy lesbian relationships, and a healthy lesbian sexuality, in the midst of a brutally woman-hating culture?

Overhead was the sign for Oakland and Berkeley: Route 24. Franny shifted into higher gear and changed lanes. On the side of the road a huge billboard loomed in the morning sun. A made-up, smiling, blond het woman lounged suggestively in a slinky black gown, a huge bottle of Seagrams whiskey suspended to her left. "Feels like velvet," in bold, black letters. Franny lifted the visor on her helmet and screamed. "Stupid fucking prick images everywhere! They shape our whole reality! Pricks in the media, pricks in the White House, pricks at my job, pricks in my fucking brain! I hate it! Their disgusting idea of sexuality shoved in my face everywhere I turn!"

She knew many lesbians who'd suffered some kind of hideous sexual abuse at the hands of a man. For the hundredth time she ran through the statistics she quoted every night at the doors. The casualties were astronomical. Our whole sexuality as women and as lesbians is formed in a predatory environment. The hell with working through the system! Every other people seeking liberation has its frontline armed freedom fighters. Even if they're underground, they exist! The most we can *legally* be are Florence Nightingales staffing overcrowded Battered Women's Shelters and Rape Crisis Centers. The most we can do *legally* is count and mourn our dead, attempt to heal our surviving casualties, and solicit money on behalf of the still living and the half alive. Who the hell is out there to meet the armies of attackers, rapists, molesters, and pornographers? Nobody! It's not a war between the sexes, it's a one-way slaughter!

She remembered a woman on her turf one night whose daughter had been molested by a neighborhood man. On taking the case to the police, the woman discovered that this same man was suspected of assaulting nearly twenty other neighborhood girls. She saw and heard again the woman's grief and rage. "Rape the lawyers and the judges who let these guys go," she had said. "Rape them and then maybe they'll understand!" She remembered another woman who had said, "We should just get some guns and go out there and take care of the problem." Still another woman, one of the canvassers, suggested in anger, "A man for every rape statistic. What are we waiting for?" And Franny herself thought: Why are we waiting for the cops to solve the problem? They're part of the problem. Policemen are known to have more wife-beaters and rapists

among them than any other profession. If we're counting on them for answers, we've got to be crazy!

Suddenly a car in the next lane pulled out in front of her. She jammed on the brakes, downshifted, and flipped him the bird. "Asshole!" she yelled. "You drive just like you probably fuck – no respect for anybody but yourself!" She fumed. Would she be in a revenge mode for the rest of her life?

Her thoughts blazed on. She compared sexual assault to malnourishment. Sexual assault causes lifelong impairment in women and girls. It limits us spiritually much like childhood malnourishment in third world countries causes permanent physical and mental deficiencies in those adults who were starved as children. If you can be mutilated permanently on a physical level, Franny reasoned, then you can be mutilated permanently on an emotional and spiritual level too. What better way to keep us controlled and dominated, unable to fight back? Sonia Johnson says that individual rapists are the patriarchy's "national heroes." She says it's a wonder they don't receive awards for the work they do on behalf of other men, keeping women in line.

Is it because so many women are too busy rehabilitating from our sexual assaults that we don't rise up *en masse* and go after these rapists and child molesters ourselves? Otherwise we might be bombing the porno theatres that serve as the training grounds for the rapist's mentality. We might be sending death threats to judges and lawyers who give minimal sentences to rapists or set them free altogether. We might be exposing any men whom we personally know to be guilty of rape and child molesting: fathers, husbands, boyfriends, uncles, brothers, co-workers, bosses. Our silence keeps other women and girls at risk.

As Franny shifted into lower gear and prepared to get off the highway, she thought of herself. What about the quality of lesbian lives? Clearly many of us are in lifelong recovery from sexual attack. If we ourselves are lucky enough not to be recovering from some kind of sexual assault, many of our partners will be. And so our intimate relationships are affected, shaped, and limited by these assaults. It's inescapable. Each one of us is affected. It's very difficult for women to establish a healthy, reciprocal sexual relationship with each other. If alcohol and drugs are in the picture, as they often are, it becomes almost impossible. One woman's sexual paralysis can complicate and limit a relationship for years.

She, Franny, had experienced again and again that the women she loved could not love her back. Not physically. What does that particular deprivation do to lesbians? To her? We look to our love relationships for the confirmation and healing that is refused us elsewhere. Too many times even this realm results in frustration, disappointment and pain. "They try to kill us in our innermost places!" she yelled angrily. "They're robbing our power!" Her thoughts were finally jelling. Maybe riding her motorcycle helped her focus. In fact, maybe riding her motorcycle was essential to thinking like a dyke.

She guided her bike around a corner and down several more blocks toward home. She was as furious as ever, and there didn't seem to be much relief in sight. She eased the front tire of the bike over the curb, let it roll down the inclined driveway, and parked it in the backyard.

Afterward, she tried to fill the rest of her day. She got errands done, laundry washed, but the lethargy of her grief was thick and unmistakable. She thought about calling Fury several times but didn't. In fact she talked to no one significant that day, lacking the energy to explain her state of mind.

Lying in bed that night she was overwhelmingly lonely. Is this what being a lesbian amounted to? She picked up the book from her lap and put it on the nightstand. Her thoughts drifted months back to Sarah, her last lover. Their early lovemaking was still surprisingly vivid. Before their relationship changed, that is before Sarah's increasing emotional distance eroded even their sexual intimacy, their lovemaking was wonderful and exciting. Franny had learned so many new things about her own capabilities as a lover and her own needs and desires as the recipient of love. In her hunger, she had felt like she was 18 and coming out all over again. She saw Sarah's face now, her skin clear and lightly freckled, her thick hair dark and mingled with gray. The midnight light from Sarah's quiet street would filter into their room through white gauze curtains. Shadows would hover on their bodies as they rocked slowly in love. Like whispers they soothed, allowing Franny and Sarah to open to each other gradually, without fear.

She could almost feel Sarah's touches now, caressing her thighs and buttocks, Sarah's tongue moving insistently over her clit. She lingered in this imagery for many moments, breathing deeply, touching her own body. She realized that she craved these images intensely. She needed them in her life, her mind, her dreams: images of herself, of two women making love. Her own reservoir, drawn from past experiences, was scant. She needed and deserved a life full of these images, a culture that affirmed and mirrored lesbian love.

She focussed for several minutes on Sarah's face, her body, her hands. While it lasted, their time together as lovers had been delicious. This she remembered with both sadness and joy, recalling and reevaluating. She missed Sarah sexually, or perhaps what she mourned was the lack of love and sexuality in her life now, but she recognized that she had no real desire to be reunited with Sarah. Her thoughts flowed on until finally sleep overcame her.

In later scenes Franny participates in a Take Back the Night march and in a guerilla action by the "Women's Army" against a porno theatre. She begins to put the several strategies against male assault into an overall picture. She also continues to explore the patterns of her own sexuality and her lesbian relationships.

Thoughts on Love and Romance

Donna Allegra

I write of many women loves and have no lovers. I speak of multiple-dwelling unions, encourage other people to sleep with their friends, and dream in my own monogamy. I share my life with friends over the phone, at meetings, on projects. At my best, I'm timid, at worst, a paranoid schizophrenic held in check by shell-shocking shyness.

When I think about friendship and love and caring and boundaries, I look at the fact that I was raised by a man in a house with another young man, all of us such strong silent types that women I'm attracted to have never known of my yearning. The pattern of my love life is that I regularly get a crush on some woman. I am charmed: she delights me, I rhapsodize over her, see significance in our every interaction. I fill myself with hopes unspoken, based on years of fantasy, planted and nurtured by TV, records, movies, fiction, based on an abundance of ignorance, promoted U.S. style.

The crush runs its course, stimulating my blood, making my days brighter with this woman at the focus. After a few weeks, the high ebbs. My energy level at the thought of her sags and the absence of elation feels like a promise unkept.

I don't know any other frame to hang my feelings of attraction, warmth, and affection on other than the stance of being in love. In the aftermath of disappointment, my position is broken-heartache because the person I've fixed on doesn't act in the ways I'd been so kind as to design for her in my mind. What is reflected in my crushes is actually my own character. In my younger years, I didn't have the perspective and awareness to be able to see the patterns in my behavior. This present enlightenment has come through time and many repetitions. I'm a slow learner. I've had the insight that I would develop a crush on a woman every few months, that I felt a vague anger because I've seldom lived out my desire to be one of a long-term couple. Alone, I'd see other people in pairs and wonder, where's mine?

When I did connect with someone for some manner of love and romance, the feelings actually generated didn't match enough of the joys I sought in my dreams. The vision of one-plus-one conjured thoughts of security, love, and a

peace I wanted for myself. I just couldn't figure it: I'm kinda cute, if you like the type; I'm intelligent; I'm nice and well-mannered; I know how to act right and I don't go around embarrassing people in public. How come I can't get anybody?

Asking these questions brought up some interesting answers. I began to see how I'd actually kept people out of my life. I may have been wanting a lover at times, but I was primarily geared to being alone and to keeping things that way. I stayed jam-packed busy with work projects. People who liked me had "flaws" I disapproved of and these seemed justification enough to cut them off at the pass. I had my ideas for what the woman I was saving myself for would be like. Sometimes the people I crushed on fit the model at first sight, but later, on closer inspection, they weren't quite the right size.

When I outgrew that particular process of elimination, I graduated to a definite sense that I don't want to keep picking up and moving away from women I am drawn to connect with. It took me some time to understand that in a one-to-one, my part is to accept people for who they are rather than insisting on how I'd like them to be.

Onward into the next stage of the game, I viewed my next trick. In this, I could never bring myself to tell a woman I was romantically interested in her. I could send out vibes and would put out the energy to charm her into liking me, but my limitations drew the line there. I'd stand back hoping the attraction was mutual and that she would come and get me. On an occasion when that strategy seemed to bring results, the experience showed me that not only could romantic attraction inspire me to flights of fancy, but sexual attraction also moved me.

In fact, I now find lots of ways to be drawn to a woman, none of which make for conclusive evidence that I've met my one and only true love. The way my mind was programmed to look for romance, I could allow myself sexual attraction to women only if I believed I was in love. Previously I could not conceive of sexual attraction as a starting point for a relationship possibility. Being in love was the only acceptable position for me.

What I'd judged as casual relationships were fine for other people, but I wanted to get my love life seriously hooked up and tucked into bed. The way I figured things, with love settled once and for all and finally out of the way, I could get back to my work and the important business of life.

As I said before, I got tired of discarding people. It seemed a better idea to be able to stick with relationships and maintain them: to grow and change with the people who make up my family of friends. Their bright and shining personas drew me in, so if I wanted to keep from picking up and moving on, I needed to examine the mechanisms that would ordinarily send me away.

I used their lack of perfection, the "flaws" marring my original vision of them, as reason for caring less about them. An example: I watched a friend play basketball one day and saw that she didn't move as well as I remembered her on court. I saw a train of thought start and I asked: Am I going to use this as

evidence against her so that I can put her aside and not have to deal with the increasing seriousness of us? When people don't seem as "good" to me, an aspect of myself decides that I now have the right to drop them. When I sit on my throne of judgment, "human imperfections" are an excuse I latch onto to keep limits on how far I go with people.

I observe a lustful, calculating aspect to my nature that wants to grab the women who attract me. A fearful insecurity laces my behavior in courting. On dates I would move into good behavior to impress my woman friend. I didn't do this because I was a dishonest person. I was frightened, perhaps, because my first love relationships – Mommy and Daddy – were rough on the kid. Today my parents aren't around checking up on me, and so this behavior is mine to have and to hold. My parents aren't my excuses, just some background to my whys and wherefores.

The head I go into when I'm attracted to someone and am trying to interest her often blocks me from seeing the real woman at hand, and it blocks me from being who I actually am. By putting myself on hold, I would give that woman special dispensations and smile over my discomforts. I was seeking to be consistent with the pictures that rolled off in my fantasy of romance. As lovers, we'd have no disagreements, no petty angers. Nothing less than adoration graced my visions of loving and courting it up. I literally did not see who was before me because the camera reeling off in my mind cut out those parts of our interactions that didn't match up with my pretty pictures.

When the inevitable disillusionment came, I got particularly angry at what was there all along, but which I'd done her the favor of overlooking. And maybe I was mad for having cancelled my own true feelings and instead tried to subscribe to my ideas of how I thought things should be.

I've since discovered that dating is about getting to know people and is not entirely preliminary to bed and board. Some people may already know this, but for me, it was like discovering electricity to understand that a date is an opportunity to see who a person is and to see what pans out between us. Barriers have a chance to come down and you experience more of the person than you'd get in ordinary social interactions. In a way, a date is living with someone for an evening.

In thinking all this lovey-dovey stuff through, methinks that I am the person I have been looking for. I was at some level looking to another person to fulfill the things I wanted to be doing and have going on in my life. I think I was seeing inner and outer aspects that I wanted for myself, and when my chosen individuals didn't follow my whole program, I decided they were worthless. The only solution I can come up with is to work on myself to get and do those things I want. Satisfying my own dreams will free me to let other people be themselves however their inner workings dictate. We can then be whatever "we" will be.

It's hard to see the simple unadorned reality of a person without changing it to fit a set. The radio, TV, movies, books and theater keep throwing out the idea of the one and only in our mass culture. I wonder if "they" want us to stay busy with sex and romance so that we don't have the time to think about how we are oppressed and how to liberate ourselves.

I understand that friendships need time and care and cultivation in order to grow. They don't just happen, as I image "falling in love at first sight."

What is actually most important in life? I think the answer lies in finding a wholeness – the right balance of nutrients like work, play, sleep, being with people, learning the lessons of life. It has also been pleasant to see that there are people who like me and treat me as a total person. They are the reason that I am trying to figure out how to stick around for relationships with the ones I let into my life.

I used to believe the idea that a good person did not have or show certain feelings. It was almost a moral issue: Thou shalt not get angry, thou shalt not like anyone who does not like thou, thou shalt be cool above all else, thou shalt understand that there is something wrong with thou if thou ever feels unsure or afraid. From unspoken inner commandments such as these, I've refused to be so much of myself, especially when it came to feelings I didn't want to recognize or accept.

But I've noticed a few snags in this system. Many of the rules I laid out for myself to make life easier at 16 just don't fit ten years after and their ghosts rise up and get in the way of my freedom to develop. I've discovered that there is no way that I can effectively run away from my feelings, and, the feelings running their course did not destroy me. In fact, they are useful as sources of information. They are part and parcel of my growth and development. I can examine and root out destructive notions by exposure, much the way water evaporates into the open air. I used to think strength was not to feel fear, to do everything absolutely right, to be perfect and to make no mistakes. I held myself rigidly to that model and let nothing in. Now I know my strength is to pick myself up when I fall and to continue onward, that from every situation something can be learned.

Having discovered that people are indeed a noble enterprise, what I see is new and shaky ground. What does spending time with, getting to know, sleeping with women mean for me as I move in areas that formerly would have embarrassed me, areas where I feel inadequate? One of those places is the point of saying to a woman that I like her, how I like her, and seeing what comes out of that.

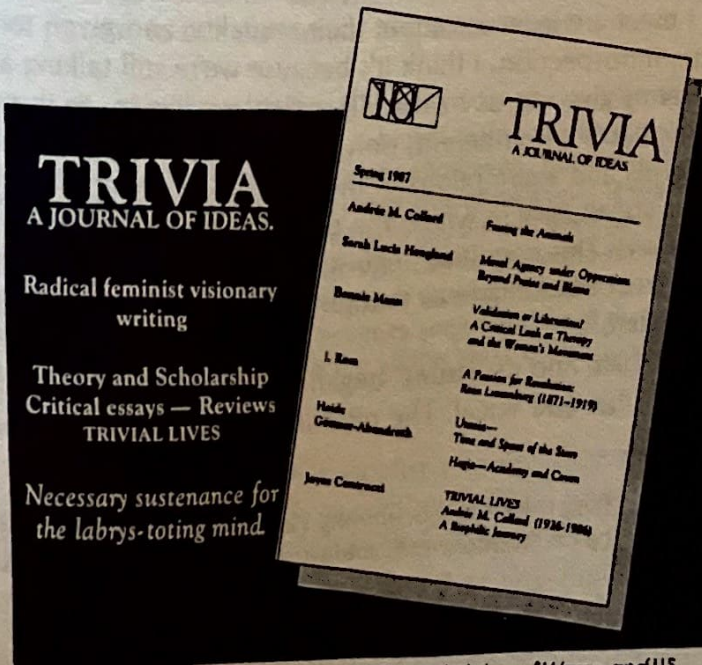
It's also comforting to know that I am allowed to move on if at closer inspection I find I don't want to be involved with the woman I am starting to know. In the past, if my enthusiasm had dimmed for someone I'd connected with in affection, I felt I had to keep up the front of glad interest and pleasure in

her. I had terrible guilt about losing interest and wondered painfully what was wrong with me.

Ultimately the relationship I make with myself is the one that has got to last. I'd like that extra special delivery package of a woman to share myself with, but I see that I get a lot of things from a lot of people. Different parts of me are fed in different places. Everyone (I think) wants a soul mate and wants that closeness with at least someone. Yet I know that no one person is my constant supply. I am nurturing the growing decision that I don't want to keep pushing away from people who attract me. I have sometimes wanted the right things from the wrong people and felt shame and guilt for those times I'd been in love for a while and then didn't want to be bothered.

I know I can't hold onto folks – we move in and out of the weave of each other's lives – but there is definitely a sense in which I can expand my reach, and can also move on emotionally from those from whom I've learned what I've needed in the process of connecting with them.

Now that I recognize that I can have a sexual interest in a person which doesn't mean I want to mate with them in everlasting love; now that I can see that the vision of forever-and-ever-amen is what my dreams have been culturally programmed to, but that real women have more blood, bone, and possibilities to them; now that I can see some of the ways I've kept all manner of relationships out of my life; now, now I am more free to shape true dreams of love and romance into the fabric of my life.



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The Illusion of Control: Sado-Masochism and the Sexual Metaphors of Childhood*

Julia Penelope

I'm going to talk about sex and power; more specifically, I'm going to talk about how we talk about sex using heteropatriarchal language (hereafter I'll abbreviate both *heteropatriarchal* and *heteropatriarchy* as HP). Most of the quotations and examples I'll use are excerpted from Pat Califia's *Sapphisty: The Book of Lesbian Sexuality* (hereafter *S*) and the Samois anthology *Coming to Power* (hereafter *CTP*).

In spite of the politicization of sex among Lesbians in the past 10 years, a lot of the Lesbians I meet are insecure about their sexuality, and given to lengthy, often inarticulate, introspection. I think it's because we're still talking about our sexuality in the terms given to us by the HP society we live in, as though the terms of heterosex had some inherent, universal validity. We haven't seriously questioned the terms and assumptions of the English vocabulary for sex and sexual activities, a vocabulary in which the concepts of sex and power are metaphorically linked. This cognitive/linguistic link has been treated in the Lesbian/Feminist Great Sex Debate as though it were accurate, indeed, as though it were inevitable.

The Great Sex Debate and its "issues" began when Lesbian sadomasochists made themselves visible and vocal. The resulting debate hasn't been an

*Excerpted from "Controlling Interests, Consuming Passions: Sexual Metaphors," a paper first read at the conference on "Feminism, Sexuality, and Power" at Mt. Holyoke College, October 25-30, 1986.

Although I've thought about the questions I raise here for several years, the development of my own ideas about Lesbian sexuality owes much to discussions with many friends over the years, among them: Sarah Valentine, Kate Moran, Debbie Alicen, Beth Binhammer, Ellenora Ward, and the members of my incest survivors' groups in Lincoln, Nebraska and St. Louis, Missouri.

altogether pleasant, rewarding, or enlightened exchange of views. The effects of this debate have been, in some respects, good. Radical Lesbians must, I think, take some responsibility for neglecting Lesbian sexuality. Our failure to address our sexuality openly created a vacuum around sex and how to do "it" that the S/Mers gladly stepped into. Where there is ignorance, shame, inexperience, and secrecy, some information is better than none. The Lesbian S/Mers did what no one else seemed willing to do, take Lesbian sex seriously and attempt to educate Lesbians about their anatomies, sex techniques, and the importance of talking about what we like and don't like sexually. Because there has been little reliable said about Lesbian sexuality, the S/Mers gladly filled the void and have made the totality of Lesbian sexuality their "domain," virtually without challenge.

Childhood as Drama

One essential feature of the S/M context is said to be mutual consent. Another is a necessary distinction between "reality" and "illusion." Pain and humiliation, administered as ritual or drama, are the catalysts for the masochist's ability to "lose control," "go beyond her limits," or "break through the wall." According to some writers on S/M, its essence is theatre, the ability to create an illusion so powerful that the participants are transformed by their shared experience.

Susan Farr, addressing the issue of reality vs. illusion, says, "One clue to how much of drama and how little of reality is involved is that the roles change" (CTP, 185). She returns to this distinction at greater length:

The apparent power relationship being enacted in a punishment ritual is that the dominant person is in control, the submissive Person completely vulnerable. This is indeed the scenario being followed, but the reality behind the scene is more complex. The first rule of discipline games is that they are played by mutual consent and end immediately when either party wishes them to. It is the 'victim's' consent that is crucial because she must endure the pain. It is the victim's tolerance for pain that sets limits to the severity of the punishment . . . Thus the behind-the-scenes senior author of the production that features an imposing punisher is the victim herself. The illusion, however, is the opposite. (CTP, 187-8)

This sounds familiar, an echo of the masculist assertion that women **really** rule the world from their prone position. According to this description, the masochist, the "victim," is "responsible" for her punishment; the sadist, who appears to be "in control," does nothing more than give the masochist what she "asks for."

How, then, is one to interpret the many instances in S/M literature that describe a masochist saying "no more," or "stop," or otherwise protesting, and sadists saying, "I'll stop when it's time. I know what you can take. And I know

you need it, too." (CTP, 49)? Where does S/M "theater" get its scripts? From our childhood. The voices we hear are those of our childhood – ourselves, the powerless, dependent child who has no control and the powerful parent who ignores our cries and tells us what we need. What is the meaning of "no" and "stop" in an S/M context? Neither can be used in an S/M context as "safe" words because they're meaningless in HP contexts of violence and abuse. If they have any meaning in an S/M context, it's the opposite of what they should mean: "no" means "yes" and "stop" means "continue." The S/M drama strips the vocabulary of intentionality, and takes us back to the masculinist cliché, "When a woman says 'no' she means 'yes,'" because she doesn't know what she wants (or means). Where is the line between consent and coercion to be drawn, and by whom? The sadist, as superior, is the only hearer and interpreter.

S/Mers say that what we hear is the illusion, the drama of childhood, being re-enacted in "highly controlled situations" (CTP, 181). S/M sex, according to its practitioners, "involves playing with the issues of power and control" (CTP, 62). Who is "really" in control? According to Kitt, "Everyone who is Playing" (CTP, 62). But Califia, in her chapter on the "Erotic Imagination," contrasts fantasy and reality: ". . . the essential difference between an arousing daydream and a real sexual encounter [is] in the fantasy, you are in **complete control**" [my emphasis] (S, 9). Does this mean that in the real, illusory S/M scene, the participants aren't in "complete control"? Recall Farr's description, "The dominant person is in control, the submissive person completely vulnerable" (CTP, 187). The "control" of the masochist, according to Farr, lies in her "consent" to the game.

But what does the crucial idea of "consent" involve? What does it mean to "consent" in an S/M context? If one belongs to an oppressed group, is "consent" a meaningful utterance? Johanna Reimoldt says it is.

Those who perceive S/M as *inherently* non-pleasurable and/or *inherently* exploitative will simply use the argument of the Idiot-Woman against her: she (unlike them) cannot sanely choose because she has been too warped and brainwashed by her society, poor thing, to know what she's doing. (CTP, 83)

The issue of "consent" figures most tellingly, I believe, in S/M arguments supporting adult/child sex. This is no surprise. S/M ideology, and the polarities that make it "work" for some Lesbians, draw on our experience of power and control as children, on the acknowledged power differential that exists between those who have power, adults, and those who don't, children. Gayle Rubin, a vocal supporter of adult/child sex, has stated that ". . . statutory rape laws function, not so much to protect young people from abuse, as to prevent them from acquiring sexual knowledge and experience," but goes on to say that ". . . the vast majority of non-consensual incidents [of cross-generational sex] are heterosexual (older male, younger female)" (CTP, 196). Is "consent" a Lesbian issue? Yes – especially for those of us who were victimized as children by adults we trusted.

Childhood as Reality

Under the guise of advocating the sexual rights of children, S/Mers promote a very different agenda: adult sexual exploitation of children. They'll deny this, but their arguments for the sexual "rights" of children echo the kind of leveling one hears in the phrase "we're all human beings." Libertarian rhetoric substitutes a truism to avoid acknowledging the real and tragic power imbalances essential to the structure of HP society. In the case of adult/child sex, any assumption of equal power must be suspect. Adults have more power in the world, more control over their environment, and greater mobility, whereas children have no power in the world, almost no control over their environment, and no mobility. Children can't just decide they don't like a situation and move out of it. The younger a child is, the more dependent they are on the benevolence of adults. Are adults known for their benevolence? In most cases, children are stuck with whatever adults have accepted responsibility for them, at least until they reach adolescence and can seriously consider running away. Even then, they will find themselves at the mercy of other adults who will exploit their need for food and shelter. Prostitution and hustling are virtually the only occupations open to young people on the streets. Given the stark reality of a child's situation in this society, in the families so eulogized by HP propaganda, what does "consent" mean? S/M sexuality is said to be about control, power, and trust, but these issues seem to disappear when the topic is adult/child sex.

Pat Califia would say that "Children need to know that they are entitled to say 'no' to anyone who wants to engage in sex with them" (S, 88). Yes, I agree. But so what? Does Califia remember how hard, even impossible, it was to say "no" to an adult, any adult when she was a child? When a child does muster the courage or desperation to say "no" to adults, how often do adults honor or heed the child's assertion of their boundaries? Does the child "really" mean "yes" when she says "no"? Califia assumes an equality of power and control in a situation where it cannot exist.

I speak now from my own experience as a survivor of incest. I was sexually molested by adults at least from the age of eight until I finally got away from my mother and step-father. I was molested by my mother, her boyfriends, a step-father, and a man in a movie theater, even though my mother had warned me about "strange men." (She never thought to warn me about "familiar" men. What do we mean when we talk about "getting familiar" with someone?) I didn't know what he was doing to me! All I knew was that I didn't feel good about it. Nor did I know, at first, what my step-father was talking about when he kept asking me to "be nice" to him. I was 11 or 12, old enough to know the mechanics of heterosex, but I thought he was talking about our being friends with each other! Moreover, when I did finally realize that he intended to fuck me, saying "no"

didn't make any difference to him. It didn't stop him from trying to rape me. A kick in the balls, however, did.

Teaching children to say "no" to adults is a good idea, but it's not enough to protect them from adult predation. Most children aren't old enough to know what their boundaries are, much less to defend them. Nor do statutory rape laws "protect" children. Perpetrators are seldom stopped before they've already done serious damage to the emotional development of the children they abuse. The power imbalance between adults and children is easy to exploit because many children feel unloved and unlovable. Some children are so emotionally needy that they'll say "yes" to all kinds of propositions. But that's not all. Children are also extremely curious, especially if their curiosity hasn't been stepped on, and they're as curious about their bodies, and adult bodies, and their sexual feelings as they are about clouds, and thunder, and what makes grass green.

Many incest survivors, myself among them, report having said "yes" to the adults who sexually molested and raped them, and that "yes" came out of an uncomfortable mixture of wanting to please, wanting to be loved, wanting to be touched and valued, and plain old curiosity. As a result, incest survivors tend to carry around an unwelcome quantity of guilt, particularly if they agreed to it somehow, either tacitly or by saying "yes." What does it mean for an individual to give "consent" when they have no way of knowing or evaluating the circumstances or consequences. I suspect that, when we say "yes" in many HP contexts, we most often mean "no," and we are aware that our intention is meaningless and irrelevant.

I'm not saying that children aren't sexual, or that they "shouldn't be" sexual. Nor do I believe that children are "innocent." I certainly wasn't. I don't think we can doubt the sexuality of children, just as we must take account of their curiosity and exploratory impulses. I know we need to find ways to reach out and support young Lesbians. I feel strongly about this issue because I was a Lesbian teen-ager who thought I was "the only one." No one should have to live with that kind of loneliness. We have no agenda at all for dealing with young Lesbians, for letting them know they're not alone, for reaching out to them across the laws that separate us.

There's also some degree of difference between adult/child sex and child/child sex. Even in cases of child/child sex, though, we can't ignore the fact that male children and adolescents often force violent, non-consensual sex on other children: girl children, smaller, younger, more timid boy children, sisters, brothers, cousins, and neighborhood scapegoats. Just as sexual feelings are common in children, so, too, are sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. We are animals. Children are young animals. All of these considerations make the issue of childhood sexuality and its expression complicated. It's not an either/or problem with a single, obvious solution.

Finally, I simply cannot believe what adults say children want, and I suspect such adults of indulging in projection, utterly egocentric and self-serving misinterpretations of children's behavior. Even the curiosity of children can't be interpreted as necessarily sexual in intent, even though it may seem to be to the adult perpetrator. My capacity to trust was violated by adult perpetrators at an early age. I've worked hard regaining the ability to trust myself, and it's what I need most. Having someone else tell me what I need won't help me. It's taken me years to regain a still very shaky trust of myself and my perceptions. That's common among victims of adult rape and molestation; as a survivor, I can't predict that I'll ever be able to heal myself completely. I'll probably be dealing with my childhood experiences until I die, and I wouldn't wish that, ever, on another child.

The Ups and Downs of Control

I know the barrier or wall so often described in the literature of S/M, I know what it feels like, and I know how frustrating it is to try to breach that wall. But I also know the origins of that wall – I built it as a last defense to protect my autonomy and sense of self against the perpetual assaults of adult predators. Adults aren't trustworthy, and neither are a lot of children. Sometimes, trusting someone else, delivering ourselves into their hands, is a way of not taking care of ourselves. When we don't want to be responsible for ourselves, we "entrust" ourselves to another individual. In fact, what we mean when we talk about trusting or not trusting another Lesbian is an issue worth spending time and thought on, but only if we reclaim the word from S/M discourse first.

The issue of "consent" is a false one, I think, in discussions of adult/child sex. What, then, of the adult female and her "consent" to S/M sex? Is it necessary to resort to what Reimoldt calls the Idiot-Woman argument? I don't think so. As Sheila Jeffreys pointed out in the fourth issue of *Lesbian Ethics*, "The triggers to a sexual response built around masochism are the symbols of power and authority. Particularly powerful symbols are those which represent abusive, cruel and arbitrary power and authority" (73). Sadomasochism is ". . . built into our personalities from the . . . kinds of authority we are subjected to throughout childhood and growing up" (72). It's no coincidence that the symbolic content of S/M scenarios sexualizes childhood pain: spanking, discipline, punishment, humiliation, and powerlessness. In the rhetoric of S/M, what we were never asked to "consent" to as children, since consent is premised on the possession of power, the adult Lesbian can "consent" to. The S/M context is framed by the metaphors created by HP culture and its values.

Control is a central issue of HP society, and so it becomes crucial to the child's developing personality, and as a metaphor it's the underlying concept

that holds the SEX/LOVE/POWER/VIOLENCE equation together. CONTROL/LACK OF CONTROL is the conceptual axis of the equation. Early in our childhood we are taught, forced, to control our bodily functions. We learn that "controlling ourselves" is a good thing and "losing control of ourselves" is a bad thing. These lessons establish for us the dual orientational metaphors CONTROL IS UP/LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN. In HP English, we speak of "losing control" of our emotions, tempers, anger, bodies, and weight. Ads for diets routinely talk about "the battle of the bulge," "losing the battle against fat," and "controlling weight." Fat people are described by the medical folks as having no "will power" and being unable to "control ourselves." Being "fat" is understood as a "control" problem. Since being "out of control" is bad, fat people are bad. Those who are "out of control" are the powerless. Since we cannot "control ourselves," someone else will step in to do it for us.

In other contexts, Lesbians talk approvingly of friends who "have control of their lives" and disapprove of those who don't. Lesbian rap groups often have as a stated goal "getting control of" and, therefore, "power over" our lives. In incest groups, this takes the form of talking about one's boundaries and limits, setting boundaries and not allowing them to be crossed or violated. "Having control" is understood as "being powerful," whereas "being out of control" is equated with "being powerless." The issue of control is central for incest and rape survivors because our inability to be powerful in a dangerous context resulted in numbing our minds and bodies to external stimuli. Because feeling anything was so threatening and painful for us, because our need to repress painful experiences was so strong, many of us have spent years of our lives in a numbing fog.

This self-numbing, which I used to think was "self-control," was really lack of control. My past controlled me. Defenses that had served me well as a child had become obstacles to the adult. My mind and body were disconnected from each other, especially with respect to pain. A body that's out of control doesn't feel pain. The pains that signal the onset of serious illness or disease aren't felt or recognized as pain. The body's messages are so "damped down" that illness isn't identified until the pain is so excruciating that it has to be named. By then, some illnesses are serious, even fatal. Only extreme pain can get through that numbing, and the number we become, the more pain it takes to get through to the mind's pleasure/pain center.

In the language of S/M, being "in control," "letting go of control," and "taking control" are frequently used to describe the feelings of the participants, and associated with loss of the self during sex. The metaphor CONTROL IS UP/LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN is acted out by the "top," who takes control, and the "bottom," who must be forced to abandon her control. In this "exchange of power," having control is "good" for the sadist, being "out of control" is "good" for the masochist. For example (CTP):

. . . she knows I can control her physically . . . (21)

. . . I had let go, leaving her to end it. I had, after all, given myself to her. I was hers . . . (49)

I lie there, spreadeagle, arms out of my control, as her breasts, covered in the cool, self-contained silk, rub over my body. (64)

Clearly it is time to control this youthful exuberance. (68)

It was exciting to be tied down and to give up the power to Jan. (88)

. . . it [bondage] gives you a chance to be sexual without any responsibility for your sexy feelings, without any control over what happened. You were being "forced" to submit. (88-89)

It feels good (at times) to let go of the struggle to be powerful and just relax and give up all claim to that power. (90)

She's got this wall around her that I don't know how to break through. It feels a lot like Jan, in control, controlling. (91)

Sex puts me in someone else's power . . . I'm scared to death . . . of . . . losing myself, liking it too much, not liking it at all. (93)

I like the feeling of giving up control, and I like the feeling of taking her to that edge . . . Being given such power and responsibility is as erotic to me as giving it up. (103)

I begin to lose myself (you have me) . . . you push me over the edge . . . (138)

When I'm to deliver a spanking . . . I feel powerful, responsible, and in control, both of myself and of the situation. (183)

Does Sex = Power?

S/M sexuality is a **constructed** desire made of a circular equation familiar to all of us:

SEX = LOVE
LOVE = POWER
POWER = VIOLENCE
VIOLENCE = SEX
SEX = LOVE, ad infinitum.

Those who have power and authority control the child. Power and authority, especially the violent abuses of power and the arbitrariness of control, are sexualized by the powerless child. Parents tell children, "I'm doing this because I love you," "This hurts me more than it hurts you," "If you love me, you will: behave, be good, do what I tell you to do, jerk me off, suck my cock, please

me." The authority figures who make demands of us, who force us to perform for them, who control our bodies and our environment, are perceived as wielding absolute, complete power over our lives. Because we have no control and no power as children, we internalize the message that being powerful is the same as being "in control." In the mind of the beaten child, violence as an exercise of control equals love. In the mind of the raped daughter, sex as an exercise of power equals love. Love, sex, and violence are intertwined in our minds, and that conceptual network is created by the HP metaphors that lie at the "joints" of the network. We take that construction with us into our adult lives to enact and re-enact in intimate contexts.

I think it's unfortunate that the control issue for Lesbians has been raised in a sexual context, because it makes it seem as though control is an issue important or resolvable only in a sexual context. The equation, among Lesbians, of sexual energy with power goes back at least to Audre Lorde's pamphlet, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*, in which Lorde says, "When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life-force of women; of that creative energy empowered . . ." (3-4). Lorde intended, I think, her equation to be affirming and expansive. Instead, it has been used in a reductive way that limits both our understanding of and feeling about energy in general and sexuality in particular. Identifying sex with energy reappears in the literature of S/M as part of the rhetoric of justification. Juicy Lucy says, for example:

Our sexual energy is literally our life force at its rawest . . . This is especially true with S/M. Sexuality is energy as tangible as that which turns the earth. It is both power and a pathway to power. I see most lesbians being terrified of their power . . . (CTP, 38)

Susan Farr makes the equation more strongly: "Power is the capacity to make things happen – power is energy – and we would do well to know as much as we can about it" (CTP, 182). Problems rooted in control and power issues permeate the lives of Lesbians. To imagine that they can only be dealt with successfully in a sexual context seems, to me, an overidealization of our sexuality.

Making sexuality, sex, desire, the **locus** of our power is, I think, a mistake. First, it is reductive, because it again makes sex the focus of Lesbian identity. Second, it denies our strength and power in the other ways we can act in the world. Third, it repeats the masculinist, HP fallacy of equating sexuality with identity, will, and action. Finally, it reinforces the connections between power and control, manipulation and guilt, strength and coercion, joy and pain, pleasure and evil. These are links I think we must at least question, at best, dissolve.

The childhood linkages among the concepts power, control, violence, and sex are explicitly sexualized in S/M. The sadist forces the masochist over the "edge," and destroys her "barrier" or "wall." The context of S/M is the sexualization of

control as the focus of sexual energy. It gives the masochist permission to be "out of control" and the sadist permission to be "in control," as though control were identical with power. But the HP description of control and lack of control isn't changed or transformed by the S/M context; it's essential to the existence of S/M sex. Perhaps a more accurate description would be to say that the S/M context provides one way of understanding that many of the sexual frustrations lesbians experience as "blocks" occur because our bodies still respond to the signals of the heterosexual code we learned as children. As long as we're controlled by our past, we will not have control in our lives and actions.

Practitioners of S/M claim that they're learning control of their bodies, getting in touch with their own feelings. But S/M descriptions, particularly those of masochists, illustrate the process of going away from one's body. Sometimes this is described as a "turning inward," but it's still a disassociative process by which one loses touch with her body, becoming numb. Putting ourselves "in our heads" distances us from our bodies and what we're feeling physically. A body at the mercy of the mind isn't a body "in control"; it's a body denied and abandoned. Is it possible to learn to have control over our lives, to be empowered in daily living, by denying our bodies, by learning to ignore what we're feeling? Or does S/M teach us to be so removed, so distanced from our bodies that very little can touch our awareness? Intense pain is said to focus all awareness in one's body, but the trick is to transmute that pain, to "transcend" it. If we translate this sexuality into life, it no longer matters if I'm oppressed because I'm so numbed I don't recognize it. What I don't feel doesn't exist to my mind.

As Jeffreys has said, "It is very hard to fight what turns you on" (73). But we must. If, as she suggests, S/M sexuality is constructed, we can deconstruct it. "We are not to blame for the way our sexuality is constructed, though we have total responsibility for how we choose to act on it" (73). We can begin the reconstruction of our sexuality by untangling the unlovely intertwining of SEX = LOVE = POWER = VIOLENCE = SEX. The S/M "turn on" is grounded in the powerlessness we experienced as children.

Given the deep-rootedness of the SEX = VIOLENCE cycle in the way we think and talk about sexuality, I don't think we can afford to have "complete trust" in our "gut feelings." I know this will anger many feminists, but I believe that not questioning our feelings will lead us to continue to act on our feelings without understanding why we have them, where we got them, and what they mean in our lives. "Complete trust" itself is suspect to me. Like any absolute, it is meaningful only in an either/or context. I don't think it is realistic to speak of any abstraction as complete, whether it's trust, control, or freedom.

As children we believed that adults were all-powerful, all-controlling, and all-knowing, because that's how they presented themselves. But we know now, or should know, that in areas of their lives where they didn't have power over

another individual, their control was considerably less than "complete," as ours is. What we learn is that power and control are relative, not absolute.

Lesbian sex should be fun. I say "should be," but is it? Is it possible for sex to be a joyous, exciting, celebratory frolic when it is surrounded by oppression and constant reminders of oppression? Can Lesbians create sexual contexts that are original, that don't borrow from HP sexual frameworks? Maybe. But first we have to end the HP patterns of sexuality reflected in the ways we think and talk about Lesbian sex and sexuality. We comprehend our lives through metaphorical concepts. The only way to change our situation is to provide new constructs and metaphors for interpreting and enjoying sexual desire.

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Let's Discuss Dyke S/M and Quit the Name Calling: A Response to Sheila Jeffreys

Jeanne F. Neath

This S/M Dyke Is a Separatist, Not a Fascist

I have just read Sheila Jeffreys article, "Sado-Masochism: The Erotic Cult of Fascism" (*Lesbian Ethics* 2:1, Spring 1986, 65-82), and I am very angry that once again it has been implied that I am a fascist or fascist supporter. In the past I, and other separatist political dykes, have been called fascist because of our separatism. Now I'm being called a fascist for doing S/M sex. Well, my political beliefs are one heck of a long way from right wing, fascist, pro-racist, pro-sexist, pro-heterosexist politics. I have been a very politically active and politically responsible dyke for over 10 years. I read and talk about Lesbian and feminist politics all the time. I was part of the Lesbian collective operating a womyn's bookstore for the past 7 years. My decision to do S/M sex is well informed. I don't need Jeffreys or any other Lesbian to tell me I'm supporting fascism or being a bad girl. I put womyn and especially Lesbians first in my life; I am a separatist, not a fascist. I do not become a fascist because of some of the ways my girlfriend and I choose to do sex with each other.

Fighting Fair: A Criticism of Jeffreys

A great way to denounce something as unquestionably bad is to call it fascist or racist. Then you can dismiss it. It's just bad, all bad, so you don't have to think about what it really is, or if it might really have some value, or if it might have something to do with you. S/M is a complex topic, on an intellectual and on an emotional level. We in our Lesbian communities are not doing ourselves much good when we censor S/M or dismiss it as fascist.

When I read Jeffreys' article I kept wanting to know: What are this woman's actual feelings? Has she talked to any S/M dykes? What I want is *discussion*

about S/M. I'd like to hear more about what anti-S/M dykes are *feeling*. I'd really like some *self-analysis* from anti-S/M dykes about why they hold the position they hold. The kind of theory/analysis I've come to trust and appreciate from other dykes is based in clearly acknowledged and stated feelings. Jeffreys' impersonal account does not offer me an analysis I can trust.

In addition to dismissing dyke S/M by associating it with fascism, Jeffreys uses other tactics that distress me. When she recounts fascist atrocities for us (for example on p. 67), she plays with our emotions. We read about a genuine nazi torture and feel horrified by it; then by immediately comparing the nazi torture to dyke S/M practices, Jeffreys tries to connect our feelings of horror to dyke S/M. Jeffreys also makes unfounded generalizations throughout her article. In one striking example, Jeffreys writes, "It does not seem that British SM women are as yet troubled by their consciences, since at least one has been seen out and about in swastikas" (p. 76). Here Jeffreys draws a conclusion about all British S/M womyn from *one* woman wearing a swastika. Throughout her article Jeffreys talks about what "SM proponents" and "SM promoters" do or think. I get the impression that for Jeffreys there exists only one S/M politics, probably as represented by Pat Califia.

I think S/M is something like feminism or separatism: there are different politics held by different separatists or feminists, and likewise there are different politics held by different S/M dykes. My politics as a separatist dyke who does S/M are not very similar to Pat Califia's politics. Pat Califia is in an easier position to speak out about S/M than are some other S/M dykes because Califia has made alliances with gay males and heterosexuals who practice S/M.¹ As a separatist dyke who lacks the kind of privilege Califia gets from her male associations, I have been hesitant to risk speaking out about S/M issues. I already get about as much harassment as I can handle just for being a separatist dyke. However, I guess my time has come to risk whatever I am risking by speaking out on S/M. Pat Califia does not speak for me. As far as I'm concerned there is no reason for Sheila Jeffreys to assume that Pat Califia speaks for anyone but Pat Califia. I'm sure that Califia does not regard herself as representative of all S/M dykes.

I would like to see S/M treated as the complex issue it is. For this to happen we need to cut back the condemnations, intellectualizations, and generalizations. I'd like to see constructive criticism of particular manifestations of S/M rather than broad-scale condemnations of all S/M.

I certainly have criticisms of some manifestations of S/M, in fact of some of the same manifestations to which Jeffreys objects. I think that public displays of S/M would best be limited to a consenting audience. Nor do I like it that anyone wears nazi paraphernalia in public. The meaning of nazi symbols is too terrifying to be played with, especially if everyone present has not agreed to the

presence of the symbols. I do not live in an area with much S/M public activity, but I do differ from Jeffreys in that I'd like to hear why the S/M dykes who do wear nazi paraphernalia do so.

I don't like the term *vanilla sex* and do feel it is a derogatory term. However, I certainly understand why a lot of S/M dykes feel like retaliating against the anti-S/M forces by using derogatory terms like *vanilla sex*. Occasionally I am driven to retaliation myself. At a conference where my girlfriend was told her "sexuality was fucked" when she identified herself as an S/M dyke, I took a lot of pleasure in sitting around with some friends flagrantly reading *On Our Backs*, an issue with a particularly flashy cover. Nonetheless I'd much prefer that the anti-S/M forces stop attacking and the S/M dykes stop retaliating.

I don't like the 'sexual minority' liberal politics that I see some S/M dykes advocating. I don't like it when dykes are apolitical, and I don't like it when dykes are anti-political. I want to see S/M sex in a radical dyke separatist context. I think Lesbian S/M is a very different phenomenon than heterosexual S/M or gay male S/M. I think S/M done with a political consciousness is different than S/M done without a political context and focus.

However, while I agree with Jeffreys on some points, the generalizations Jeffreys draws about S/M have very little to do with my own experiences with S/M. I am completely opposed to any emotionally or physically battering relationship, but unlike Jeffreys I do not think that S/M relationships are more likely to be battering than non-S/M relationships. If Jeffreys or anyone else has statistics I'd like to see them. S/M is a powerful and sometimes risky activity. In doing S/M we are exploring how oppression works. We need to be very clear and very careful that our playing and acting do not slip into a reality of real oppression. *Consent* is the key word for S/M and the only condition under which play-acting remains play-acting. I think and hope that most dyke S/M is truly consensual. The account of one S/M battering relationship, cited by Jeffreys from *Against Sadomasochism*,² does not prove anything about anything. The placing of that account at the beginning of *Against Sadomasochism* was a cheap shot and Jeffreys' citation of the account is a second cheap shot, particularly when Jeffreys refers to the woman as an "SM survivor" (p. 80) rather than as the survivor of a battering relationship.

My recent experiences as a collective member of a Lesbian-operated bookstore that has chosen to sell Lesbian sex magazines and S/M books such as *On Our Backs* and *Coming to Power* were quite different from Jeffreys' description of S/M dykes dividing Lesbians and "intimidating and harassing feminist bookstores" (p. 80). Our bookstore collective believed it was important not to censor Lesbian materials, but to give womyn a chance to read materials and form their own opinions. We had some anti-S/M feminists and Lesbians threaten to pour soft drinks on our books, and we have had womyn actually vandalize our books. We were boycotted by individual womyn. We were yelled at, and had our business disrupted. We had a womyn's group refuse to let us

sell our books at their womyn's event, even though we offered to leave the "offensive" materials home. I don't know what really happened in San Francisco, but I am pretty confident that the treatment our bookstore received from anti-S/M feminists and Lesbians is at least as bad as and probably worse than the treatment of San Francisco bookstores by S/M dykes.

Our attempts to initiate discussion with anti-S/M feminists and Lesbians met with only mediocre success. In my perception the anti-S/M feminists and dykes are doing more than their share of the dividing which Jeffreys tries to pin on S/M dykes. Anti-SM Lesbians and feminists are in the power-over, patriarchally accepted position relative to S/M dykes. The larger society supports an anti-S/M-dyke position far more than it supports a pro-dyke-S/M position. Imagine telling your mother you're an S/M dyke.

Moving On: What Can Dykes Learn from S/M?

Why do Lesbians do S/M? Why is Lesbian S/M valuable? How does Lesbian S/M fit into a dyke separatist politics? I don't have all the answers to these questions, but I'd like to help start a discussion about them by sharing a few of my thoughts. One reason I do S/M is that I have a good time doing it. However, I get some other things out of it besides a good time. I am learning a lot about myself. At an earlier time in my life I wanted to see myself as good, as a good girl. Through a variety of experiences, including my S/M experiences, I have come to see myself more realistically. I am still a nice dyke. However, there is a part of me that is an excellent victim and another part that is an oppressor/victimizer. I play both roles – in bed, where I know it's a role, and walking around in the world, where sometimes I am hurt or hurtful because I am not aware that I am being the victim or the victimizer.

In patriarchy we are all both victim and oppressor. As a white, middle-class, U.S., medium weight Lesbian I fill an important job in patriarchy oppressing people of color, children, working-class and poor people, fat people, animals, and many others. I also benefit patriarchy when I am a good, unaware victim for men, rich people, heterosexuals, etc. The more I learn about myself as victim and oppressor the more effective my political work can be. I can see more about how oppression works, I can be clearer about how to relate to other dykes in a non-oppressive way. The more clearly I can see oppression, the better I can fight it.

One way that patriarchy keeps us in our place, not causing trouble, is our own self-hate. When I do not feel good about myself I do not fight patriarchy very effectively. I can't write. I don't want to talk. I want to hide out. I am a good, quiet victim. In the past it has been very easy for me to hate myself when my sexual desires have not matched up with some internalized Lesbian-feminist standard for sex. Since I have been doing S/M sex and reading Lesbian erotica such as *Coming to Power* and *On Our Backs* I have begun to recognize what

my sexual desires are and to accept my sexual desires and fantasies as OK parts of myself. Parts of myself are being validated in ways they have never been validated before. My acceptance of these sexual desires and fantasies does not mean that I'm imposing them on anyone else or that I am now a fascist, racist, dyke dildo rapist. It means that I am not hiding from myself as much and that I am hating myself less. I cannot eradicate a lifetime of oppression by the patriarchy by making an intellectual decision to deny my feelings, fantasies and desires. I see no advantage to myself or anyone else in "stuffing" some of my feelings in favor of some hypothetical sexual standard that denies part of me.

I believe that most, if not all, womyn have S/M fantasies and desires. All of us live in this miserable patriarchy, and I doubt that any of us have avoided internalizing and eroticizing the victim and victimizer. The question, then, and this needs to be openly discussed, is, how do we deal with the fact that dominance and submission are an important part of our erotic selves? Pretending we are not turned on by dominance/submission does not strike me as much of a solution. When Jeffreys condemns S/M and calls for "a sexuality that is positive, egalitarian and free from SM overtones" (p. 72), I hear her calling for denial and stagnation, in our Lesbian communities and within individual Lesbians.

I am interested in being and try hard to be open to constructive criticism about any of my political beliefs. But discussions like Jeffreys', emotional onslaughts disguised as abstract arguments, are not helpful to me. Instead, I'd like to see personal statements about how S/M feels to dykes, both dykes doing S/M and dykes who feel repulsed by it (afraid of it, angry about it??). I'd like to see the Lesbian and feminist press and bookstores do a lot less censoring of S/M. I'd like heterosexual feminists to explain why they think they are justified in making judgments about Lesbian sexual matters. I'd like to see *On Our Backs* become more politically responsible. I want more radical political analysis about S/M from S/M dykes. I want anti-S/M dykes to start listening to real live S/M dykes. I want dialogue.

Notes

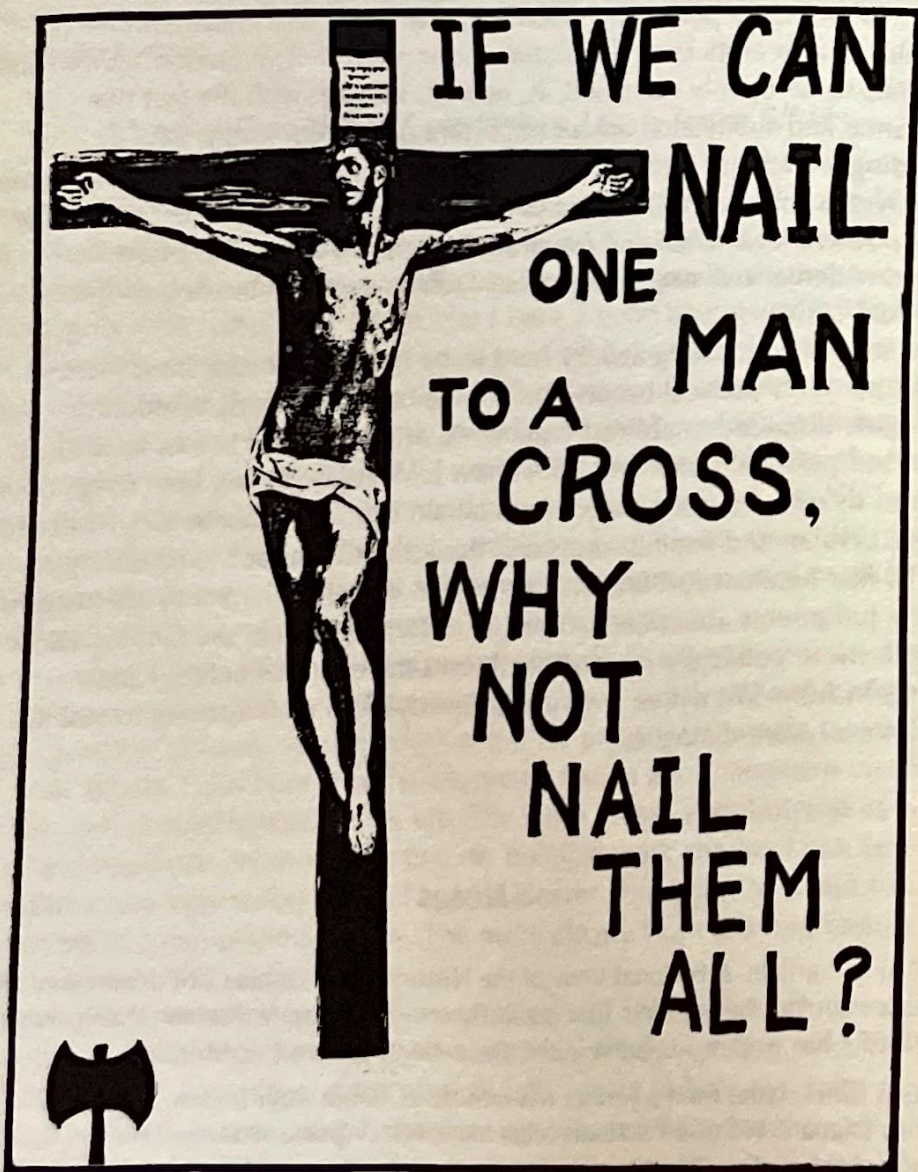
¹See Califia's article, *A Personal View of the History of the Lesbian S/M Community and Movement in San Francisco*, in *Coming to Power, 2nd Ed.* only (Boston: Alyson, 1982). Also Califia has written a column in the gay male magazine *The Advocate*.

²Marissa Jonel, *Letter from a Former Masochist*, in Robin Ruth Linden, Darlene R. Pagano, Diana E. H Russell & Susan Leigh Starr, eds., *Against Sadomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis* (East Palo Alto, CA: Frog in the Well Press, 1982).

Nexus

Nexus is an information exchange. A place to ask questions, to make suggestions, to report on things that have worked (or haven't). Each new connection increases our power geometrically.

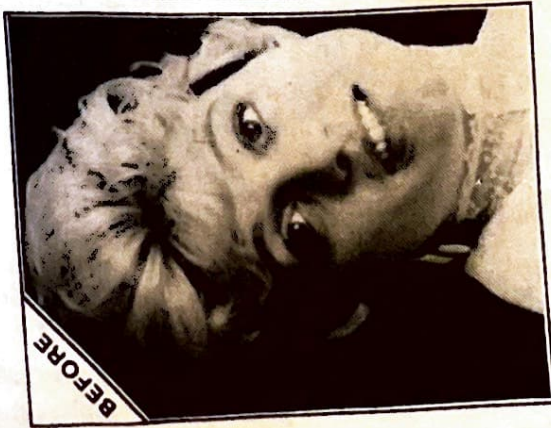
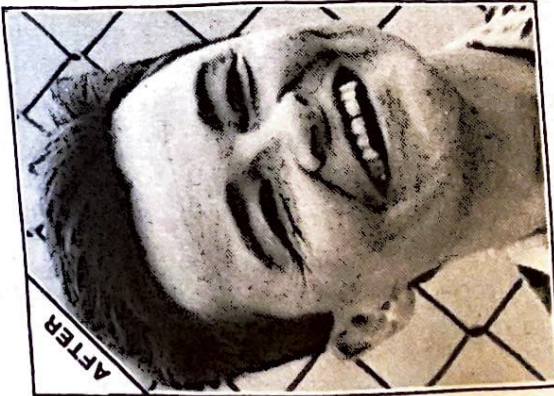
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Responses/Letters

Dear *Lesbian Ethics*,

Sidney Spinster's article, "Biophilic Lesbian Separatism: Lesbian Freedom in Our Lifetimes," *LE* 2:2, is harmful to Lesbians who are ill. There is a high correlation between oppression and serious illness; the last thing sick Lesbians need is self-blame.

Spinster implies Separatist politics were keeping her sick, and celebrates her new tolerance for everyone except radical Dyke Separatists. Ex-lovers going het can make her feel ". . . spiritually enriched, educated, intrigued, or even amused by the experience." (!) But not Separatists who feel pain and anger when any Dyke is abused and betrayed. With smug superiority, she calls us "necrophilic," and says we have an ". . . attitude that stinks." We began practising healing arts long before she came out. Why does Spinster write as if she's bringing new positive ideas to a cranky old political group? Her resentful caricature of Separatists is hardly "biophilic."

Spinster's liberal politics aren't new: suppress anger at oppressors, find individual solutions, and abuse Dykes who insist we can only accomplish real change **together**, by fighting all oppressions as an organized Movement. Individual solutions work only for the privileged, because privilege buys protection, comfort, and the illusion that, as Spinster says, "We create the world with our beliefs." That's what ruling-class Patriarchy wants us to believe: poor people create poverty and illness, racially oppressed people create racism and their own genocide, people who worry about nuclear catastrophe will cause it to happen, females of all ages cause rape, and Lesbians create lesbophobia. As long as the victim is blamed, the perpetrators of injustice are safe to continue their destruction.

Spinster directs a stunningly offensive aside to more oppressed Lesbians: "What ways have you Lesbians who are living on a low income, or in an institution, or on the street, found to heal your bodies and spirits? Is it possible to love your life despite your situation?" The next line begins, "For those who have had the resources to make lifestyle changes, . . ." and advises them to give themselves permission to get well. Spinster dismisses the majority of Lesbians and addresses only her peers.

Later she says her ". . . anxiously awaiting something bad happening may have contributed to creating an energetic pattern which gave rise to a racist comment being made." It's another case of "We create the world with our beliefs," and is clearly racist. Racism is a real, enormous, institutionalized social structure. Attributing another Dyke's racist remark to Spinster's own anxieties trivializes the reality of racism and makes herself the center of the universe. Racist remarks originate in the racism of the speaker. Does Spinster think that racially oppressed Dykes also ". . . create an energetic pattern giving rise to racist comments" when they feel anxiety about racism?

As a working-class, chronically ill Dyke Separatist, I object to Spinster's expressing racist, classist, ableist, and ageist attitudes under the name of Separatism. Our politics oppose those injustices. Spinster's article is anti-Separatist — she redefines Separatism into a muddle of psychotherapy and "spirituality."

Her use of "necrophilic" is cruel. Our Lesbianism and Separatism — evidence of our intense love of life, ourselves, and other Dykes — when combined with other oppressions, result in destructive living conditions that we cannot control. All the ill Lesbians I've known of who died young were oppressed in ways that caused their illness and prevented recovery. I cannot let Spinster call those Lesbians "necrophilic." They loved life and fought for it, and were murdered by Patriarchy.

Spinster attacks the politics of fighting privilege and oppression. She says she wants politics that offer hope, but then criticizes Dykes who say we **can** have loving, strong communities, and therefore better lives, if we stop oppressing each other.

Spinster shouldn't blame **us** if she thought being a Separatist meant she had to be miserable. Most of us are working-class or poor and are far from the grim upper-class WASP values she describes.

Spinster says she resented having to be a groundbreaker when she came out. If she read Julia Penelope's "Mystery of Lesbians," why doesn't she understand how much Dykes had accomplished by then, and against what odds? Their political work made it easier for her to come out. Why doesn't she give them credit instead of complaining that they didn't do it all? Instead of continuing their work, Spinster is helping tear it down with reactionary politics.

Her article is contradictory, because she's retreating into privilege while pretending she's not. Psychotherapy is the modern religion of the privileged: it tells them to think individualistically instead of in terms of mutual responsibility and commitment, and to keep aloof from physical realities instead of fighting passionately to change deadly conditions.

To be life-loving in Patriarchy means to be angry about oppression and to fight for life-giving conditions. Dyke Separatists are already "biophilic." It's psychotherapists and their followers who need advice about embracing life passionately.

In Dyke solidarity,
Linda Strega

These Dykes signed this letter in agreement and support before it was extensively edited for printing:

Carla Duke
Rhona Lishinsky
Ruston

Senecarol Rising
Moire Martin
Isabel Andrews
Sue Zieke

Mary S., Canada
Katinka Ström, Sweden
R.N. Fiamma
Fran

Bev Jo
Hilary Oxley, Aotearoa (New Zealand)

Spinster's Puzzle: A Suggestion for Formulating Lesbian Ethics

Linda Strega, whose article "Lesbian Femininity" appeared in *LE* 1:3, is a Dyke Separatist and lesbian outsider whose organizing work and writing I have admired greatly. I am generally impressed by the clarity of vision she achieves by standing outside the backwaters of heteropatriarchy and recording, almost as an anthropologist, its impact upon our lesbian community and individual personalities. I think "Lesbian Femininity" raises meritorious questions which each of us would do well to consider. However, its tone and even direct pronouncement of judgment upon many of us suggests, for me, some problem in the way that even our best thinkers are formulating lesbian ethics.

About butch and femme behavior Linda states that, "Butches are treated as more Queer, and therefore, less acceptable not only by hets, but by femme lesbians" (p. 74). She also concludes that *only* butch dykes resisted feminine training as girls (p. 75). But her most cutting accusation is that a lesbian in a dress is a "queeny femme" who is engaging in queer-baiting and game playing (see pp. 77, 79, 82 and 83). These are strong words for one lesbian to use against another.

Because I think that our best philosophy comes from sharing our perceptions of our own experience, not generalizing about the behavior of others, I'd like to reflect upon Linda's judgments from the standpoint of my experience as a femme.

I am a femme lesbian (not a feminine het or a gay woman) who enjoys dressing up. I do not shave my quite noticeably furry legs or armpits or wear make-up. I wear flat shoes. I am not into appearing as a hairless infant, a painted lady, or a woman with bound feet. When I work as an attorney in the straight injustice system, I dress in clothes that mean strength and unavailability to boys: jackets, pants, and shirts. I do not verbally pass as straight. Unlike many butch lawyers I know, I am out to my entire family and most of the people I work with. However, I do have long hair, and when in the dyke community, I often wear earrings, skirts and soft dresses or robes, weather permitting.

Contrary to Linda's assumption (p. 83), though, my dress-wearing is not a come-on to men or an invitation to rape. Rather, as Jesse Wells (*The Dress, The Cry and a Shirt With No Seams*, Oakland: Diaspora, 1985, p. 5) states:

... The air coming up my legs (under my dress) doesn't tell me that I am unprotected in a world of men, but that in my safe world of sex with womyn, I choose at this moment to make myself vulnerable to my lover.

As Jesse also notes, no straight feminist would wear the clothes that she does or that I do. "Dressing" to me means circling my arms with snakes, draping myself in a lavender gauze sundress that reveals the amazon with labrys tattooed on my thigh, ornamenting myself with crystals and amulets, and wearing my long,

curly hair in snake-like tendrils. I do not get into satin with pearls and dyed-to-match pumps. In brief, my dressing up does not permit me to pass as straight — nor do I wish to.

I'd like to mention also that dress-wearing does not seem to cause me to lose myself in a stupor of female passivity; nor did it have that effect when I was a child. I was seldom forced to wear a dress. But doing so did not mean lack of resistance to victim status. Then, as now, my resistance was strong. I verbally and physically fought back against my father, the batterer, who carried guns and bows and arrows and constantly weight trained, the better to grind us under his heel. Some butches I know identified with the batterer in their family. This demonstrates that role does not serve as a fail-safe litmus test of resistance.

Lastly, I am not butch-baiting; nor is most of my community. I (as femmes have for decades) will take my butch lover's hand (if she consents) if someone misunderstands my image as passing. And in my community a butch image, as it has been for at least the last eight years, is more the norm. T-shirts, flannel shirts, cords and jeans, short hair and little or no jewelry or ornamentation are dyke standard. This norm was the reason that I long avoided costumes like the ones I have begun to wear. The result was only that I felt drab and stripped of part of my identity, not more in solidarity with butches. Now, as always, I admire and support womyn who cherish their butch style.

I have no need to argue with Linda about what each of us should wear, or who is the better Separatist Dyke. I am what I am, at this time and in this place. But I would like to suggest that there may be a better process of arriving at values than that chosen by Linda Strega and several other dykes published in *Lesbian Ethics*.

The technique of these lesbians seems to me to be one of examining the lesbian community under their own critical lens, tallying up what they see as its faults, and then passing judgments. Seldom are other wimmin's efforts or strengths noted. And even less often are the author's biases disclosed, her needs or goals stated, or her responsibility in creating the situations which she judges admitted. The writer (or better yet, some other selflessly chosen group, e.g., the butches in Linda's article) is the victim. The writer then presents her judgment as to how this all came down, and what we all must and should do to act right in the future (not what she would like for us to do in order to meet her needs better).

Control through the sanction of judgment is not the best method for formulating lasting values. Perhaps instead we could share our *perceptions* of situations, owning these perceptions as our own. Then we would add our *experiences* in similar situations. Lastly, we could offer our *suggestions* as to how the problem/ethical issue before us might be resolved. This process would encourage us to air out our strongest feelings about matters, without covertly manipulating others through the threat of imposing judgment upon their "unacceptable position."

The model for processing that I offer (that of stating our experiences, needs, and goals) is by no means new or even my own. In womyn's circles all over this country, I have seen this process used when we are striving to include rather than control each other. If we share our stories, as well as the biases, needs and hopes that arise from them, we may just be able to negotiate the compromises necessary for living together as lesbians, with honor. When I deviate from this process, I find my "victory" in controlling another lesbian through judgment and rejection (the lesbian sentence to Siberia) to be short-lived. Each of us sees life with honor somewhat differently, and we will not be permanently deterred from our own striving for it.

As much as anyone I have wished for some *a priori* law of right lesbian conduct, some clear directive handed down by the goddess – through me, if possible. But I do not see this as feasible or even desirable at this time. I would like instead to challenge Linda Strega and others of our best and brightest to offer us their views, not judgments, in written forums such as *Lesbian Ethics*. Perhaps in the composit revealed in its pages, a truer picture of our values will emerge than in the judgments of individual writers.

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To the Editor:

Although the title is "Heterosexism Causes Lesbophobia Causes Butch-Phobia" (Ruston, Bev Jo, Linda Strega, *LE* 2:2), the article concerns itself primarily with describing the truly evil nature of the Fem Lesbian, who is never adequately defined.

Butch, *Fem*, and *Dyke-identified Fem* are terms used throughout the article without tangible definition. What is supplied seems to be more of an afterthought.

So how do you know who is Butch or Fem? **You can usually tell by how Queer or normal a Lesbian makes you feel.** (p. 29)

The definition is less dependent on the individual in question than it is on the Lesbian herself who is trying to decide.

One would gather from the article that there are a lot of pathologically malicious Lesbians in the world. These power hungry fems collect lovers and toss them aside when they are through. The scenario given is that of victim and victimizer. The dichotomy is far too extreme to be real. So much hatred is expressed toward these "Fems."

One ex-het Queen we met, surveying the swath of heartbreak and self-hatred among Lesbians she had manipulated and abandoned, and the collapsed political alliances she had contributed to, remarked mildly, "It's really different with Lesbians than it is with men, isn't it?" (p. 23)

The obvious implication here is that the "Queen" caused the heartbreak, self-hatred, etc. How is it possible to understand the dynamics of these acts without knowing the context? Judgments are passed without any explanation of context.

On the other hand, the "Butch" is depicted as the supreme Victim who has no control over what happens to her.

A Butch focuses her attention and care on her lover's pleasure, fulfillment, orgasm, etc., and her lovemaking is also a way of creating strong, emotional and psychic intimacy with her lover. (p. 35)

Oh come now! No Lesbian can live up to those standards each and every time. That is the stuff of which *dreams* are made. The "Butch" is the true, romantic Martyr who gets kicked in the face every time she tries to please. She is unable to think for herself; unable to examine and learn from past experiences and change herself for the better, and to finally no longer be the victim of someone's manipulation. The "Butch" *must* have absolutely no free will or self-determination in order to be unable to avoid those patterns which caused her such emotional damage. The authors criticize the "Fem's" actions in a way which reinforces the very power they criticize.

At the end of the article, lip service is paid to the dangers of generalization but is followed directly by a sweeping generalization about "Fems."

To portray an entire group as all having the same characteristics is to objectify and deny their real personalities and individual differences. Just as there are many sorts of Dykes, there are many sorts of Butches. *As long as Fems are projecting stereotypes . . .* [my emphasis] (p. 38)

This is exactly what has taken place in the article. Descriptions of real people are not given, caricatures are – very unreal ones at that.

Good points are made concerning class oppression.

Because of oppressive stereotypes, privileged Dykes are more likely to think of racially, ethnically, class, fat and looks oppressed Dykes as Butch . . . among Lesbians, the "normal" Lesbian image is a middle-class stereotype. (p. 32)

This further explains why those Dykes who are passable should not get caught up in appearance and criticize or judge a Dyke for her less-than-passable appearance. Perhaps instead of using the herstory-rich and consequently confusing terms "butch/fem", we could use "passable/non-passable" to indicate a Lesbian's impression to the heteropatriarchy. There are responsibilities, if one is committed to fighting oppression of all Dykes. One should not use her appearance consciously, in order to get her way with anyone.

Lesley Giovanelli

Dear LE,

Thank you, Julia, for your essay ("Heteropatriarchal Semantics," LE 2:2), which untangles the confusion I've always felt in LE (and elsewhere) about butch/femme, masculine/feminine talk.

My own experiences: I grew up during WW II and absorbed all those posters and movies of heroic women – remember? I also grew up a third-generation Ashkenazy (Eastern European Jew) in a similar community in New York City. Much later, after I came out (for the second time at 33, the first being 11) I was very puzzled by the definitions of butch I heard around me. I was also embarrassed and ashamed because I hadn't the slightest desire to fix cars, play softball, fight, be "physical" and all the other things I saw/heard were "truly Lesbian" or "truly butch." I was usually characterized as a "butchy femme" because, although I liked clothes and sewing (which I learned from my *father*, originally, and later taught myself; he had learned it from his *mother*) and didn't fix cars, etc., I was articulate, "bossy," pushed everyone around, insisted on doing so, got openly angry and passionately bitter about sexism, and so forth.

I have just realized: when I was called "male-identified" (by other Lesbians) or "femme," what the Lesbians around me were perceiving wasn't the same split I made between "masculine" and "feminine" because theirs was Gentile. Mine was Jewish.

No man fixed cars or was athletic in my neighborhood. No man ever fought physically with another. To the first and second generation *shtetl* descendants around me, what was reserved to men, and what made them superior to women, was not the qualities Julia lists but intellectuality, scholarship, and religion, all activities denied women. The third generation Jewish boys I knew at college were quite viciously sexist, but it never would have occurred to them to claim a monopoly on cars or athletics; what they claimed for their own was poetry, philosophy, science, fiction, all the things I loved the most.

They were the rabbis, the *melameds* (teachers) I wanted so passionately to be. As for clothes and jewelry, first and second generation Ashkenazy women wear them the way their ancestors did: not so much as badges of "beauty" or "weakness" but as loudly competitive signs of wealth. They are not so far from being 12th century small-town ghetto dwellers, after all.

To have weakness or fragility or gentleness as ideals for women would have struck them as crazy; a *shaine maedeleh* (lovely girl) was "beautiful," true, but she abounded with health, she knew how to run the family finances, she could work, she would be fertile, and she would form part of the practical network of community services Jessie Bernard has called the "integrity."

And of course there were *no spinsters* in the Ashkenazy community, not even devalued ones. Family was all. Which drove me more batshit than anything, even then.

It's a heteropatriarchal system, all right, but not the same one!

Of course, by the third generation we were also being assimilated into the American Gentile ideals, so that what Julia calls the HP system was superimposed over our own Yiddish system.

It's natural to me to believe (underneath the assimilated values) that the ideal human being is a combination of *balabusteh* (crackerjack housekeeper), community leader/organizer, businesswoman, needle trades worker (all female excellences) AND a spiritual leader, poet, historian, philosopher, counselor, political analyst, story-teller, and teacher, in short a *rabbi* and a *melamed* (the excellences reserved for males).

This combination is perplexing to women grown up in a different tradition, it seems.

Our ethnic differences must make many differences like this. I think CR is necessary to dis-cover and un-tangle them: your Reader's Forum is CR, to my mind, i.e., specific. Let's have more.

Joanna Russ

Notes on Contributors

Dacey Yates is a pseudonym. My piece in this issue contains information about other womons, one of whom might be identifiable to a few readers who would know me by name. In *Gossip* #3 "Maggie X" said ". . . [it] gives me pause every time I think about writing something 'personal' because, inevitably, my 'personal' experiences involve other women . . . I hope this will be discussed." I hope so, too. I am a proud Dyke. I don't want to be a nameless shadow. I hate it. Yet I would worse hate knowing I presented information that in the wrong hands could be used to personally hurt another woman. But what gags me most is that first among "the wrong hands" I worry about are Lesbian hands. So much for a Dyke's ethical "choices."

Toby Summer. I have worked on the issues of pornography and prostitution for years now. I raise the issue of prostitution in as many situations as possible. I assisted Sarah Wynter as a co-editor of *WHISPER*, a national newsletter by and for prostitutes and ex-prostitutes (PO Box 5514, Rockefeller Center Station, New York, NY 10185). Together with others, I am organizing a group in San Francisco to address both pornography and prostitution (if interested, *Lesbian Ethics* will forward your name). For a reprint of a longer version of my essay in this issue of *LE*, contact me through *WHISPER*.

Janet Capone. I am a 29 year old never-het lesbian and a separatist. I was raised in New York and now live in Oakland. I'm an activist both through and in addition to my writing – I write short stories, poetry, plays and essays. My material comes very much from my own life. I feel intensely and constantly

aware of how difficult it is for myself and other lesbians to survive, to take our own multiple oppressions seriously, and to put ourselves first.

Donna Allegra. I'm a writer of my journal, poetry, fiction, essays and cultural reviews. I'm also an African folkloric dancer and percussionist. I work in NYC as a construction electrician. The balance of the different aspects of my life changes so that sometimes one facet is more prominent than others and then once again, I have to reconsider who I am.

Julia Penelope. Appropriately inappropriate, Julia Penelope persists in her blatant, unspeakable behaviors, making heterosexuals feel awkward, according to eye witness accounts. She remains socially unacceptable, but has never been apprehended writing *Dykes Ignite* on bathroom walls.

Jeanne F. Neath is a 35 year old, white, separatist dyke who has just left her home of 18 years in Lawrence, Kansas. She will be moving to 40 acres in the Boston Mountains of Northwest Arkansas in September, with her lover Paula and three wonderful dogs and two obnoxious cats. She is in the process of leaving Spinsters Books and Webbery, Inc., the lesbian operated bookstore and resource center in Lawrence that she's been a part of for seven years.

Ruston, one of the authors of "Heterosexism Causes Lesbophobia Causes Butch-Phobia," *LE* 2:2, included the following inadvertently omitted sentence in her bio: I want Dykes of Western, Northern hemisphere countries to stop ignoring the existence and political work of Dykes of South Pacific Nations.

Guidelines for Authors

Starting with the next issue, LE 3:1, maximum length for letters is 1000 words; submit longer responses and comments as articles. Include your phone number if you want to approve any cuts made in your letter for space-saving purposes.

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The Readers' Forum topic for *LE* 3:1 is Radical Lesbian Spirituality (it may not be too late to send in your contribution!); for *LE* 3:2 the topic is Separatism: After the Debate (tentative deadline May 31, 1988).

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Calls for Papers

HerBooks is now accepting manuscripts for the *Lesbian-Feminist Essay Series*. We are looking for original, personal, passionate and persuasive essays by and about lesbians intended to inspire dialogue. Writing should be non-scholarly and accessible; combinations of poetry, narrative and research are welcome. PO Box 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

Lesbians who have relinquished children for adoption – including intra-family adoption. Contrary to what most of us were told, the effects of surrendering a child are life long and negative. This book is for the articulation of our experience. Natural Mothers' Publishing Project, PO Box 146401, San Francisco, CA 94114.

We are Lesbians collecting stories of how womyn, of all backgrounds, came out to their mothers for an anthology. Poetry, photographs, etc. also welcome. PO Box 6031, Minneapolis, MN 55406.

WRITERS SEEK STORIES for a book on Lesbian Weddings. Tell us about your ceremony, help us document a part of our culture that has existed for thousands of years, silently. Becky Butler & Pat Bralley, 1309 McLendon Ave., Atlanta, GA 30307.

