



Lesbian Ethics



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Editor's Introduction

No, *Lesbian Ethics* doesn't have a new editor, the editor has a new name. I've never felt like a "Jeanette" to myself and have wanted to change my name for a long time. Fox appeared with multiple signs that it's my name, and I love it.

The events in my life over the past two years, including doing this issue, have changed my consciousness and expanded my understanding of dyke lives more than anything else in the last twenty years. I hope this issue will affect many of you in the same way. You won't find it light reading, however, and you should be aware that some pieces contain graphic descriptions of child rape and torture.

In order to print all the material I wanted to get into this issue, I've printed more pages (subscribers saved a dollar!). I've also reduced the amount of white space, and you will probably notice that *LE* looks a bit more cramped than usual.

The focus of *LE* 5:1 is Our Mothers, the quality of our relationships with them and the influence of these relationships on our lesbian lives. (The focus is *not* lesbian pregnancy.) And yes, the deadline has been changed once again, to July 31, 92. *LE* 5:1 is coming out this year, or my name isn't Fox! The focus for *LE* 5:2 is Radical Healing. Although there are some good ideas about healing from child rape in this issue, we can use more. One thing I'm hoping is that dykes who read this issue and have developed their own new methods of healing from child rape will be inspired to write in about these methods so other dykes can learn from them. But the focus of the healing issue is new ideas and practical methods for healing a whole range of dyke problems, not just incest. Methods involving cooperation among dykes would be especially interesting. Deadline is February 28, 93. Both short and long pieces are welcome for both issues.

As always, an entire *LE* issue does not have to be devoted to the focus or forum topic, so if you are writing a piece on another topic, send it in.

Fox

And this issue too is for JMax

Breaking the Ties That Bind: Healing as a Political Process*

Susan Strega

The night before I started writing this I had another nightmare. I am small, 3 or 4, lying on a bed, and Elmer (my father) is standing over me rubbing his penis. I am crying. He is trying to get me to say particular words, "it's good that it's so big," over and over. He bends over and starts to push his penis between my legs. I shut my eyes and struggle for breath. The tears are leaking out of my tightly shut eyes and running down the sides of my face. I can feel my heart pounding and I am thinking, over and over again, "I am going to die, I am going to die, I am going to die."

I wake up.

I think that now I will not be able to sleep or to be sexual with the lesbian I am involved with. All sexual feeling is absent from me, and I don't know when or if it will return. I feel a great rage, and know that as I let myself express the rage, I will return to myself and ownership of my life. (And I wonder if the shame will ever leave me, for I am still, living in this world, shaming myself for saying those words he made me say.)

I search for the source of the dream, and remember the woman yesterday telling me about her three brothers raping her, and her parents standing in the door and then walking away. And I remember the radio story about the three year old girl, dead, and how they found semen in her chest cavity.

I want such stories to end. When we, as radical lesbians, break our ties to the heteropatriarchy, we take a step towards ending these stories. We have power and I want us to use it. This paper is about how.

*In writing this article, I honour women whose strength and courage has sparked and sustained me. I thank Michaela, who saved my life, Bonnie and Karen, who taught me to enjoy it, and all the survivors I have worked with, most especially the women of Maiya House, Midge, Louise, and finally Esmé and her companions. Thank you.

This article was edited by Bonnie Waterstone, and her edits made it better.

Naming It: Father–Daughter Rape

“A radical lesbian perspective on incest and child abuse” . . . can I write my “radical lesbian perspective” when the title is “incest”? “Incest” is a word that covers up, erases, obscures what was done to me, what was done to so many lesbians I know. It means only this:

incest, *n.* Sexual intercourse between persons so closely related that they are forbidden to marry. (*Webster’s*)

This word lies. Every time a lesbian speaks this word, she lies. This word protects men and protects the patriarchy.

For years now, I have said these more awkward and more honest descriptions: “father-daughter rape” and “childhood sexual assault.” I have done so since I read Elizabeth Ward’s *Father Daughter Rape*, which says clearly on the front cover (of the Women’s Press edition), “Father Daughter rape can no longer be called ‘interference,’ ‘molestation,’ ‘fooling around with’ or ‘incest.’ The feelings and reactions of the Daughters must be named.”¹ Every single time I say “father-daughter rape,” I am honing my rage . . . and remembering the truth.

When I say “father-daughter rape” or “childhood sexual assault.” I am always aware that women I am in conversation with are uncomfortable, shocked. Most of them try to redirect me to “incest,” gently at first, then in anger, insisting that “we are not all daughters and they are not all fathers.” But in the patriarchy, all women are always daughters and all men have the power of the Father. (See Elizabeth Ward’s book for a more detailed explanation.) What these women really want to say, I suspect, is that I am breaking the first rule for talking about sexual abuse: Don’t say who did it, nor who he did it to, nor what it was he did. “Incest” implies that we “participate.” “Rape” and “assault” describe the violence that was done to us, without our consent, against our will.

Father-daughter rape is a basic building block of patriarchy. It teaches us to be silent, to not react to the outrageous violence of the patriarchy, to sacrifice ourselves rather than break this silence. It teaches us heterosexuality, and an understanding and acceptance of sex as dominance and submission.

I know from my own (now ended) experience with sado-masochism that many sado-masochistic lesbians are survivors. I have heard some of these lesbians express that sado-masochistic sex is a good place to work out their feelings about their childhood rape. When lesbians engage in sado-masochistic sex, they recreate the father-daughter rape scenario. *Repeating behaviour reinforces it rather than changing it.* A recent story in a lesbian sado-masochistic magazine featured a top in the role of “Daddy.” I am frightened and angered by sado-masochists’ willingness to

recreate the subjugation that happens in child rape. This is not lesbian sex, it is heterosexual with two women.

Lesbian survivors are often asked if the child rape to which they were subjected is the "cause" of their lesbianism. I used to feel defensive about this question, wanting to be clear that the rape had nothing to do with my lesbianism. I understand now that it is *heterosexuality* that is caused by childhood sexual assault, and I am astonished at the number of women who have been able to become lesbians despite this early hetero training.

Breaking Silence: Confrontation

People say to me, "Well, but at least we're talking about it now." Yes. But it was not our intention merely to start a long conversation.

Louise Armstrong²

"Breaking silence," making a noise into that void of not naming what was done to us, was exhilarating and powerful. It could have made a revolution, and the patriarchy recognized that and interpreted to us the ways in which it was acceptable to break silence. We fell for it.

Now, when we break silence, when we start to remember, we are quickly shunted into therapy, into "recovery." We can vent our rage in the therapist's office, on pillows, in the treatment centre, but not at the men who did this to us, who are still doing this to millions of girls today. Most "self help" therapy books and therapists describe confrontation as an "individual" choice. It is also a political choice. (Remember "the personal is political"?) In any medium sized city a lesbian will be able to find "support groups" for survivors (although they will probably not be for lesbians and they will probably not be free). She will not be able to find confrontation companions who will help her make it safe to publicly confront her rapist.

Confrontation is an essential part of healing. It is also an essential part of stopping the rape of girl children. I think that the rape of girl children (and other violence against women and children) continues because men suffer no consequences for their behavior. We must create consequences. We can abandon men who do this, and we must also be prepared to abandon the women who support them. If all women sexually assaulted as children confronted their rapists, publicly, accusing them and demanding retribution, we would be on course for revolution.

My Experience with Confrontation

For many years I remained in contact with Elmer. One day, when I was making him a special pie for his birthday, I had trouble with the

pastry. Suddenly, I became enraged, throwing the pastry around the kitchen, breaking the pie plate, smashing dishes. Eventually, I calmed down and finished the pie and took it to him. The rage came from the part of me that could not accept that I was being nice to this man who had repeatedly raped me. I swallowed that particular rage by turning it against myself, and continued to do that for years.

It is now almost ten years since I confronted Elmer. At that time in my life I had just started, as a result of therapy that I was doing, to have 'real' memory, to believe that the dreams I had were not sick dreams about having sex with him, but were memories of actual rapes. Up to that time, some part of me did hold the memories, and this part would come forward and explain to lesbians with whom I was making love that I could not tolerate that particular way of being touched "because of something my father did to me." I would later have no conscious memory of having said this, which was quite a puzzle for these lesbians. The part of me that was present most of the time had no memory, and I did not think of myself as a survivor. The protector part which held the memories was also the only part that remembered it when I saw the scarring that I have from being vaginally raped when I was about three years old.

Despite my conscious denial, the therapist I went to believed that I had been assaulted as a child and was insistent (in a very caring and loving way) that I must accept this. The result was that my two parts met up, and memory became integrated. I then wrote to Elmer (by this time, I had moved halfway across the country in search of a geographical cure to my self destruction), outlining what I at that time knew about what he had done to me and asked for his acknowledgement that he had done these things. I also asked for the money to pay for my therapy, but made it clear that the acknowledgment was a minimal requirement for a continued relationship with me. I sent a copy of my letter to him to other family members. I told them that I was not prepared to continue relating to them if they supported him and not me.

I sent these letters a few weeks before my birthday. For about 15 years I had always received from Elmer a card and ten dollars for my birthday. That year, the birthday card arrived as usual, without the ten dollars. I never received an acknowledgement, and I have never, since that time, had any contact with him or with most of the rest of my family, who continued to see him and support him.

When I opened the card, I got the message. I immediately felt a great wash of relief, a sense of being somehow free. I felt both strength and power, and knew I had taken back something that was mine. I had a conscious awareness of having been disloyal to civilization, of having set a boundary, of having drawn a circle within which I stood.

There is another reason why we must do this kind of visible confrontation. We are most probably not the only woman assaulted by our particular rapist, and he has probably continued raping girl children. A frequent result of confrontation is that other women and girls in the family come forward and say, "Yes, he did it (or is doing it) to me too." (It can also happen that other women in the family will suddenly deny what they have previously said about being raped and side with the rapist.)

In losing the women in my family, I had sometimes a desolate feeling, as if I were adrift. I know that my sister was also sexually assaulted by Elmer when she was a child, that my stepmother had been battered severely for years. Could they really be choosing him over me? While I struggled to accept that they had, I had little support from other lesbians, who seemed to think that I could easily continue my relationships with these women, and that, since I saw them so rarely, I should be able to repress my feelings at those times.

From having struggled to have memory, I was now flooded with it, able to remember assaults by my grandfather and my stepmother in addition to assaults by Elmer. I let out my rage, week after week, in the therapist's office and no longer by cutting into my own body. I cried, and learned to comfort myself. Most importantly, I stopped lying. I struggled to discover and speak the truth.

I believe that perhaps I would have done some of these things without the confrontation, and I had started doing some of them in therapy. But I think that my new willingness to tell the truth—to say what I believe even when it made me unpopular, even when it left me alone, even when I was terrified by the consequences—I believe that came from making the confrontation.

One lesbian I know moved from confrontation to suing her father for damages. The court case was in the media, and she made public statements about why she wanted this public acknowledgment of the damage he did. Although her father had never been convicted, she was awarded damages, and other women were inspired to sue their rapists. This lesbian states that she feels stronger in herself and more aware of when she is not being respected.

Two other lesbians I know who have taken their assailants to court (and won) have seen every member of their families sitting on his side of the court, in clear support of the father/rapist. Both experienced this as absolutely clear, unequivocal betrayal, but both have said that this feels cleaner to them than the intimations of betrayal that they experienced prior to the confrontation. Both felt that the alternative was to continue to destroy and betray themselves, and neither lesbian was prepared to do so. Also, both felt more sure of their memories and more definite in their convictions about what had been done to them.

Confrontation and Healing

I believe that confrontation must be part of the healing process for all survivors except for those who have been ritually abused or who for other reasons would be in physical danger or place other women in physical danger as a consequence. *When* it comes in the healing process is different for every survivor, but it is always followed by new insights. One survivor I worked with retrieved memories of being ritually abused after making a confrontation. The realization motivated her to cut ties with her family and to actively protect herself from being cued and triggered by family members.

One reason confrontation is important to healing is that doing it takes a stand in the constant debate that every survivor has with herself about whether the assaults actually took place. Even women I have worked with who had reconstructive surgery as a result of the assaults tell themselves that it didn't really happen, that they are just dramatic, that they are liars, that they just want to be part of a group, over and over again that they are **just making it up**. I still do this. Every time I am on my way to meet with a survivors' group, I start up a litany that I have no right to be doing this group, that nothing really happened to me, etc. Belief demands action and action reinforces belief. When we do take action, by confronting, we powerfully affirm to ourselves that the rape took place, that our memories are correct. This affirmation can itself lead to further memories.

Secondly, confrontation helps greatly with self blame and self destructiveness. Almost every survivor I have ever worked with came into the process still in contact with her abuser and in agony about that contact. I think it is a particular kind of craziness that survivors live with, this being nice to our assailants in the service of family ties. In denying ourselves the expression of our rage and pain, and most importantly, our truth, to our families, we accept on some level that we are at fault, that we are to blame. And so we continue to punish ourselves, many of us by cutting and burning ourselves, by trying to kill ourselves, by putting ourselves in situations (psychiatry, battering relationships) in which someone else becomes the punisher, the torturer. Whatever else confrontation does, it draws a line that says, "I am not to blame." However much we later retreat from that position in our minds, however much we later continue to berate and blame ourselves, confrontation is a benchmark for refusing the blame.

Abandoning the Family

A lot of us are swallowing memory and rage so that we can continue to "belong" to the family in which we were assaulted. Men are still owning us. When I have worked with child survivors, they have told me

repeatedly of their longing to not "belong," of their desire to be separate and apart from. Girl children who are being assaulted run away, and run away, and run away. Those who do not run away in body run away in mind. When we are older, although we are finally able to be free from our rapist, and from the family that allowed it to happen, we stay in contact. It is a way of constantly forcing that child to return, to tell her that she does not yet "belong" to herself.

To make the kind of confrontation I am talking about, a lesbian must be prepared to give up her family. Why is this abandoning difficult for so many lesbians? One reason is that we want to hang onto our privilege in the heteropatriarchy. Being able to describe ourselves as part of a family gives lesbians privilege. For a lot of lesbians, part of that privilege is tied into money and the possibility of inheriting money. I have found dykes of poverty and working class lesbians much more willing to make the break/make the confrontation than middle or upper class lesbians.

Writing in *Lesbian Ethics* a few years ago, Dicey Yates talked about how important it is for her to know where a lesbian stands with the individual men in her family.³ Nowhere is this more important than in the case of father-daughter rape. It sounds strange to me, but a lot of lesbians have told me that sending their father/rapist birthday presents, xmas presents, father's day presents, for example, does NOT give him the message that what he did was O.K. Rhetoric about our commitment to ending the devastation of childhood sexual assault is meaningless unless and until we are prepared to act on our rhetoric on an individual, personal level.

A second reason, paradoxically, is that we did run away when we were assaulted. When what was happening was too scary or too painful, we "left" with our hearts and/or minds, leaving our bodies behind. This dissociative way of dealing with reality is a basic skill that all women have learned; it enables us to live with patriarchal violence without reacting to it. It is dissociation that allows us the artificial distinction between the father and the rapist. This kind of separation is the groundwork for our later lives, when we stay in abusive relationships, for example, and make the separation between our lover and the woman who hits us. This dissociation continues when we make a distinction between "individual men" and "the sexist system," pretending that our fathers, brothers, uncles were drafted into the army of the heteropatriarchy, rather than having eagerly volunteered. If we do not dissociate, if we stay present to what is happening to us, we create the possibility of fighting back.

Groups: Consciousness-Raising, Not Recovery

These days most of our talking to other women about being raped as children is done in a therapeutic context, where the ultimate measure of

success is the victim's ability to put the experience behind her. This experience is never "behind" us, nor is it useful for it to be. Being assaulted as children will always be with us, and that can be an axis of strength and power.

A few years ago I was working with a group of survivors in a small town. The group decided that they wanted to take some public action as part of their healing. Several of us had talked about the abuse we had received from therapists who were supposedly "helping" us. The group decided to offer a day called "Learning from Survivors" and invite all the therapists in town. The group was insistent that we had to clearly identify the patriarchy as the root cause of childhood sexual assault and that we had to talk about healing in the context of getting rid of the patriarchy. As a professional myself, I tried to discourage them, telling them that the audience wouldn't listen. "What's the point of doing this if we aren't going to tell the truth?" was the response of these women (all of whom were heterosexual at the time). Perhaps if we did it now, some of the audience would argue with us; as it was, no one walked out or dared to dispute our analysis.

Outline for CR Groups

I believe that these women came to the analysis that child sexual assault is an essential component of patriarchy because they participated in a consciousness-raising process rather than a "support" or "recovery" process. In a CR group political action against father-daughter rape is identified as a critical part of the healing process. I have worked with survivors for about 12 years now, and out of what they have told me about what has worked for them and what hasn't, I've identified a process which I follow in doing survivors' groups.

1. The first step is **reclaiming our out/rage**. The assaults are always a terrible violation, and when we are unable to fight back or get away the anger and rage we feel is blocked, split into fragments. We may dissociate. To stop dissociating, to gather the fragments together, we must reclaim the rage by feeling it. This begins with telling our stories, which is most powerful if we do it in a group. First we tell the whole story, and then we may retell parts of it. Sometimes we retell the whole story repetitively. Women who have no memory, who believe they have no story, tell and draw their nightmares and feelings.

Often, in a group, we feel the outrage first "on behalf of" other group members before we feel it for ourselves. As part of the telling, we replace words like "abuse" with the words "rape" and "assault." We tell the details, and in telling and hearing the details we start to "lose control," for we have often kept control by never telling the whole story, by never telling the details. When the rage surfaces, it must be physically expressed,

by yelling, screaming, pounding pillows, wielding a baseball bat on a punching bag, drawing pictures of what we want to do to our assailant. This is a part of the process to which we will return again and again as we let ourselves feel.

2. The second step is **confronting blame, responsibility, guilt and shame** and the ideas supporting these painfully intertwined dynamics. What Andrea Dworkin calls the "pornographic lie"⁴ tells us that all women, including all girl children, want to be raped and enjoy being raped. The accepted concept of "protecting the identity of the victim" tells us, over and over, that the raped child is defiled, at fault, to blame. We see that in protecting ourselves from identifying as raped children, we continually reinforce blaming ourselves.

We look at three central beliefs that survivors have:

- I caused it.
- I enjoyed it.
- I allowed it to continue.

These beliefs are not shaken by most popular, therapeutic writing about father-daughter rape, and so reading radical feminist analysis is essential. When we consider "enjoy" we begin with Sheila Jeffreys:

We desperately need and will, I hope, soon acquire a word that will allow us to describe sexual feeling that is not positive, not in our own interests. Such a word would need to sum up the feelings of humiliation and betrayal, the totally negative feelings that women often have when we experience this thing called sexual arousal.⁵

And we talk about how the culture has no way of allowing us to express what happens when our bodies respond, while our hearts and minds and souls want them not to. We consider our belief that we allowed it to continue by looking at the "forces ranged within us and against us" (to paraphrase Adrienne Rich⁶) that make escape impossible. We talk about how to live in this world where there truly never was nor is any safe place for us.

3. The third step is **contacting our betrayed child**. We look at how deeply our rapists and others betrayed us and at our consequent loss of boundaries and fear of closeness. We start to make contact with the child who was betrayed, first by the assaults, second by not being heard or protected, third by being asked to forgive her rapists and maintain the family myth. Finally we look at how we betray ourselves by continuing to be victims. The child part of ourselves will not be accessible to us if what is on our agenda, or on a therapist's agenda, is forgiveness of the rapist. She may also not be accessible if we are currently in a situation in which we are being victimized.

We talk about the steps that are needed to move away from looking after others and to start looking after ourselves. We tell ourselves over and over that we were not responsible, that we are not bad, that we are not making this up. We draw boundaries, we act out boundaries, we begin to see our distrust and fear as protectors, as caution. We talk about making the distinction between what people say and what they do, and only trusting what people do. By doing these things, we reclaim and make contact with the child lost in the assaults. With this contact, there is often great pain.

4. The fourth step is **learning the skills of assertiveness and self-nurturing**. During the assaults we were disrespected and lost the understanding that we had a right to be respected. We came to believe that what we want is not important, that we are not to say what we want or need and not to care if we don't get it. Assertiveness and self-nurturing start to reverse this process. Most survivors that I have worked with have two central beliefs: "If I feel and express my rage, I will kill someone," and "If I feel and express my pain it will kill me." Neither is true. What usually happens when we let ourselves express these feelings is that we make room for being present, for feeling our power, for feeling good about ourselves.

5. The fifth step is **considering contact with our rapist and with our family**. We write and re-write letters to the abuser and to other family members, focussing on the right of the survivor to set all the rules. We talk about confrontation and all its consequences. I set out a bottom line for continuing contact, that the assailant must admit that he did it and that it was all his fault every time it happened, and must agree to do whatever he can (money, a public admission) to make amends. I suggest that without this bottom line, the survivor have no further contact.

6. The sixth step is **examining our sexual lives as impacted by the childhood assaults**.

The myth of the "individual" solution is always exposed. For example, an individual woman's "choice" not to confront her assailant is looked at in the political context that he is probably still actively assaulting another girl child. Many times, women who make the choice to confront are suddenly more able to acknowledge the clues that their nieces and other girl relatives are leaving to say, "This man is assaulting me." Women who will not confront are unwilling and unable to see these same clues.

These six steps are covered in 12 weeks of weekly meetings. Participants use writing, drawing, and role plays to work through each area. The safety guidelines we use are very similar to those in Tamarack and Mountain's paper in this issue of LE. These 12 weeks are only a beginning, and most groups continue to meet, with or without a facilitator.

Examining Our Complicity: Taking Action

Complicity is, finally, a concept which requires of us the burden and duty of proof: namely, that we explain and go into our own actions and responsibilities, our own collaboration.

Christina Thürmer-Rohr⁷

Criticizing a lesbian's "process of recovery" is now unacceptable. A few years ago I broke up with a friend, also a survivor, over this. She had recently returned from seeing her father/rapist, who was dying. She described in glowing, romantic terms her communion with him as she massaged him while he lay in bed. This man has never acknowledged or apologized for raping her. "But how could you do this?" I asked. First, of course, she explained that he was her father. When that was not enough for me, she told me that she did not need to consequence him in any way because he was suffering through having an illness. When that was still not enough for me, she explained that she could "tell by the look in his eyes" that he was sorry for what he did to her. When I told her that her actions have a political consequence for me and other survivors, she said that each survivor "finds her own way of working it out" and that I must respect her solution. But I don't "respect" this solution. I name it as betrayal, of me, of other survivors, and also of herself. I name it as complicity in the heteropatriarchy. As Bev Jo, Linda Strega and Ruston have said, this is just another version of a het love story: "Daddy rapes his little girl, but he still 'loves' her and she 'loves' him and everything is alright in the end."⁸

A friend once suggested that I look at my own complicity and I was outraged, furious. In my well-learned language of therapy I protested that I had been helpless—and certainly, about the assaults that took place when I was a baby, I was helpless. But I thought a lot about what she said, and at some point realized that I had limited myself in how I fought back, in the number of times I ran away. I made an accommodation to the assaults, and that accommodation became part of how I dealt with the world, accepting abusive bosses and being abused in relationships. As I became more aware of how I could have fought back, I searched out and found stories of girls who had run away at 9, at 11, at 13, and who had survived, and become lesbians, without becoming prostitutes or otherwise harming themselves. My life began to change. I became unwilling to put up with abusiveness in my life. I learned to draw a line, and to act when that line was crossed.

We have been trained to believe that we must collaborate to ensure our own survival. We are constantly being told the lie that our participation in the patriarchy is necessary: how else can we get the money that

buys the food and pays the bills? When we examine our complicity, we can see it is not about *our* survival but about the survival of *our abusers*.

Examining our complicity and collaboration is not about self blame. For example, I know lots of lesbians, and I am one of them, who have been assaulted in our late teens. I am not talking about single instances of rape, I am talking about sexual assaults by a family member (in my case, a brother-in-law) that continue for a period of time. We feel trapped, we hate ourselves, but we don't stop it. We keep these later assaults secret. We know we will not be blamed for what was done when we were 3 or 7 or 11, but what about when we were 15 or 19? We were not physically or financially or even emotionally helpless, as we were as younger children, so how could this happen? If we understand that we were trained to accept these assaults, to believe our survival depended on them, we can free ourselves of self-blame and self-punishment.

It is out of examining complicity that I have come to believe that speaking out is not enough: We must also take action. Louise Armstrong says, and I think she is right, that it is women who are taking their kids and running away who are making the revolution, NOT those of us who are "speaking out."⁹

I do think that changing *how* we speak out is an essential beginning. We can support and encourage each other to break the ties that bind us to our rapists and those who support them. We need to hear and broadcast stories of women who have taken radical, confronting action against their assailants. We can challenge each other to act. Every cent that any lesbian spends on flying home to visit her ailing father/rapist, every minute that is spent in lying silence around the family dinner table, has been time and money denied to stopping father-daughter rape.

So many of us are in the social service system, "helping victims." While this has meant that there are now more lesbian feminists offering therapy, it has meant very little in terms of accessibility to a politicized healing process. Lesbian therapists often worry too much about professional credibility and not enough about political credibility. Some are willing to take risks; for example, one lesbian doctor I admire has twice opened her home to create a safe place for ritual abuse survivors.

What if we created and defended safe spaces for girl victims, places where they could run and would not be turned over? I know lesbians who want healing but who have no access to it because they have no money and/or because their friends are afraid of going to those places of pain and rage with them. When will we develop accessible alternatives to the social service system? I have a vision of lesbians creating such communities, where healing is only *part* of what we do to destroy the causes of our suffering and rage. Where we are committed to continuing until every girl child is safe.

Endnotes

- ¹Elizabeth Ward, *Father Daughter Rape* (London: Women's Press, 1984).
- ²Louise Armstrong, "Making an Issue of Incest." In, *The Sexual Liberals and the Attack on Feminism*, Eds., Dorchen Leidholt and Janice Raymond (New York: Pergamon Press, 1990), p. 43.
- ³Dacey Yates, "Dear Separatist Strangers," *Lesbian Ethics* 3:2, 1988, 26-47.
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- ⁵Sheila Jeffreys, "Sexology and Anti-Feminism." In Leidholt and Raymond, Eds., *Op.Cit.*, p. 21.
- ⁶Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language* (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 34.
- ⁷Christina Thürmer-Rohr, "From Deception to Un-Deception: On the complicity of Women," *Trivia* 12, 1988, p. 74.
- ⁸Bev Jo, Linda Strega, and Ruston, *Dykes Loving Dykes* (Oakland: 1990).
- ⁹Louise Armstrong, *Op. Cit.*, p. 45.


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Lesbian Incest Survivors: A Particular Courage*

Sareh Allisen

My purpose in this article is to discuss some of the ways in which childhood sexual abuse and incest affect lesbian sexuality, body image and self-esteem. I was motivated to share my observations on this subject by the profound healing I myself have experienced, and continue to experience, as a result of finally understanding the link between incest and my personal struggles with sexuality. As I heard other lesbian incest survivors describe with unbearably painful intensity similar struggles, I realized that we are grappling with an incest legacy that has unique manifestations. Underlying much of the self-destructive behavior, including suicide, that we encounter in our community, is the terrible suffering of lesbians who cannot get out from under the combined weight of incest and internalized lesbophobia. Too many go straight or remain celibate, because these pressures are more than they can bear. I hope to offer some awareness to the survivor who may still feel ambivalent about her lesbianism even after decades of loving women, whose hatred of her female body renders her incapable of sharing sexual pleasure with another woman or who views her lesbianism as an unfortunate consequence of abuse.

My insights are drawn from my own incest recovery work: three-and-a-half years of participating in meetings of Survivors of Incest Anonymous, a 12-step program for women incest survivors, various forms of bodywork, dreamwork and spiritual work, and many discussions with lesbian incest survivors. For the purpose of this article I interviewed a number of lesbian incest survivors, whose experiences, including my own, comprise the material found in quotes throughout.

*My thanks and gratitude go out to the lesbians who spoke so candidly with me for the purpose of this article. Each one has been an inspiration and a role model to me in my own recovery process. May we all continue to thrive and heal, and carry, through our example, a message of hope to lesbian incest survivors everywhere.

Incest and Lesbian Identity

In order to feel good about ourselves, all lesbians must transcend the ubiquitous lesbophobia around us and our own internalized version of it. Rape and sexual assault by family members and other adults profoundly damages the victim's confidence and feelings of self-worth; this damage later undermines her ability to combat lesbophobia in the society, in other people, and in herself, when she discovers her lesbianism. Overcoming self-hate and self-doubt around being a lesbian is often much more difficult and time-consuming for the lesbian incest survivor than for other lesbians. Concurrently with this, incest, as well as other forms of physical and psychological abuse, has the effect of bonding us emotionally to our abusers.¹ Since most perpetrators of sexual abuse are male, lesbian incest survivors have often had their first "sexual" experience with fathers, grandfathers, brothers, uncles and male cousins. The negative bonding with the perpetrator and weakened sense of self-esteem that incest induces, combined with the pressures and stresses of lesbophobia on the survivor, all mix together to produce a condition where she may live for years in a nether-world of sexual identity confusion, unable to come out fully and leave self-destructive heterosexual reenactments of abuse behind, but unwilling to give up the dream of romantic and sexual love with a woman. Prostitution and anonymous, compulsive sexual encounters with males are not uncommon expressions of that early childhood abuse.

I finally came out when I was 21, after going back and forth for three years. I had my first sexual experience with a girl when I was 8, and first defined my feelings as "lesbian" when I was 15. I remember thinking, this is not normal. I can't let anybody know about this. . . . I lost my virginity on my 14th birthday. . . . I went out with a lot of impotent men, bisexual men, I let men sleep with me who were twenty or thirty years older than me. I was repeating the incest over and over again. I let men come into my room at all hours and do whatever they wanted to me. . . . It was never about physical pleasure. I don't even think I had sober sex until I slept with a woman.

I first had lesbian feelings around the age of 10. . . . I really came out as a lesbian, non-bisexual, when I was 39, very late. . . . There was a compulsion to be with men on some level. . . . I didn't want to be with them to give myself pleasure. . . . there's that type, like my father. Very introverted, very subtly manipulative. All my husbands were like

¹See, for example, Alice Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child* (New York: Meridian, 1986), which describes the difficulty adults have separating from abusive situations which replicate their childhood abuse.

that. It's not that the sane part of me wanted to. I couldn't help it. And I missed women in my life, so I always had women on the side.

I've always felt lesbian feelings. I was a big daydreamer. I would dream of a world with only women and I would be the key character. It was never sexual but it was a dream where I would have much popularity, where I was loved. I think my going after men so much was because of the incest. . . . There was some kind of proving of myself that I was okay. . . . When I started to confront my grandfather, and after it was all out in the open, that's when I began to see that . . . [the abuse] made me focus on trying to be the perfect little lady. It was my grandfather's death that opened the door [to coming out]. There was no grieving process when my grandfather died. I went downstairs and painted one of my most beautiful, colorful paintings.

What on the surface feels like sexual interest in men can still hound the lesbian incest survivor after she comes out. Learning to distinguish authentic sexual attractions from the after-effects of sexual abuse is a major task for some lesbian incest survivors, whose sexuality was usurped and violated from childhood.

I never acted on it, but there were times over the last 20 years that I have had sexual attractions for men. The worst time in terms of its emotional effect on me was about three years after I came out . . . I'd see strange men on the street and feel aroused. This would lead to anxiety followed by depression and suicidal thoughts, because the idea of giving up women devastated me. I would think, obsessively, "It's inevitable that you're going to be straight. You can't fight it. It's what you're supposed to want." It was a real breakthrough for me to realize that my sexual feelings for men felt wrong, not immoral or evil, but unauthentic. I had to challenge in my own mind the popular wisdom that said sexual desire was automatically healthy and good and should be acted on.

The incest still has a big influence on me. There's still this attraction to men. I have to remind myself it's not a genuine attraction. It feels the same way as it feels when you have to have a cigarette. It doesn't feel the way it feels when I want to go to the park and sit under a tree. It feels like "I've got to do this," or guilt if I don't do it. There are all these feelings that I don't associate with free, peaceful interaction. Feelings of guilt, feelings of shame.

Similar to the sexual feelings is the compulsion some lesbians experience to take care of males. In the incest situation, the female child is turned into an object for the satisfaction of adult needs. Her own needs and feelings are irrelevant. She learns caretaking behaviors as a way of preventing further assaults, keeping peace, gaining approval, and mainly, because her perpetrators demand it. While the heterosexual woman

incest survivor learns these same caretaking behaviors and may struggle to overcome them, because she chooses to relate intimately with males anyway, she feels no discord in focusing her caretaking on them. For lesbians, this behavior is the source of much pain and confusion.

I was with two co-workers recently and . . . there was a voice inside me saying, "you have to drive them home." I drove them home . . . And I *knew*. But I could not stop myself from taking care of them . . . It used to bring up confusion about my lesbianism. I would think it's because I like men, I'm attracted to them, that I want to do this stuff for them. But it wasn't that, it was the opposite. I was really hurting myself. It took a long time to find that out, because it was so subtle.

I know how to suddenly take care of men so they don't find me threatening, and I will especially do it when I've gone too far in some way, like I've pushed their buttons or I've argued them into a corner, suddenly I'll take care of them and make them feel it's okay. . . . With my stepfather I could only push it so far and then I'd have to give in. . . or my actual physical safety was in jeopardy.

In addition, loving and accepting one's lesbianism requires that the lesbian incest survivor recognize within herself the pockets of self-loathing and shame that the rapists imposed upon her young body and mind.

There are still ways in which I act heterosexual, that I hide my lesbianism, that I feminize myself. I'm conscious of homophobia in myself, ways in which I downplay my lesbianism. . . . I don't want to seem overwhelmingly lesbian, I don't want to scare people away.

Through my meditation practice I've gotten in touch with a part of myself that is extremely self-hating, violently so, filled with rage and despair. I have dreams where I'm bleeding profusely from the vagina, or where I've been poisoned, kidnapped and tortured and have no recollection of the events but the scars and clues are everywhere. Not long ago I dreamed I was cursed by a devil for being a lesbian.

[My promiscuous behavior with men] had to do with lesbianism in the sense that I believed that *because* I was a lesbian that's why my father couldn't be a good father, that's why he did what he did, like I was perverted, and he was going to reform me, or that I was over-sexed, like I was putting out a scent and he was responding to it. . . . I was told I was a seductive child.

Underlying these conflicts are a number of lesbophobic tenets that every lesbian must at some point confront and discard in the coming-out process. The most common one for lesbian incest survivors is based on the heterosexist assumption that a bad experience with men will turn "normal" females into lesbians.

I ask myself a lot, unfortunately: If I hadn't been molested by my stepfather, maybe I could be with men, maybe I could have a normal, heterosexual life. Am I really a lesbian? Am I just playing lesbian? Incest has made it hard for me to know my own mind. . . . Sometimes I think, gee, maybe there's one man out there. But he can't possibly be there, because he'd have to be a woman.

Ironically, lesbians may also be insecure about our sexual identity when the perpetrator is a woman. The after-effects of sexual abuse by women are equally devastating. The lesbophobic attitudes that underlie this confusion are variations on the theme that assumes heterosexuality is normal and lesbianism an aberration: "My mother used me for sexual gratification, which conditioned me for lesbianism. . . . My mother sexually abused me, all the while telling me how much she hated my father and how horrible sex was with men, and she turned me against them. . . . I had no chance to decide for myself if I was gay or straight because my first experience was 'lesbian'," and so on and so on.

The lesbian survivor of abuse by a female demonstrates a particular courage (all lesbians demonstrate a particular courage!). She must combat the "my mother made me a lesbian" variation-on-the-theme that can undermine her confidence in her sexuality. She has to learn to distinguish her female lovers from her perpetrators. She has to identify and trust that her positive attraction to women is distinct from the negative incest bond. And she must do all this while coping with the pressures that seek to invisibilize, invalidate and destroy lesbians in general.

Whether the perpetrator is male or female, it's always the lesbian who absorbs and struggles with this kind of self-negating thinking. I've never heard a heterosexual woman say, "The reason I'm straight is because my father conditioned me for heterosexuality by raping me," or, "My sister's sexual abuse of me made me hate women, and that's why I turned to men." The straight woman, supported in the patriarchal view that heterosexuality is the only healthy way to be, works instead on recognizing potentially abusive lovers and trusting men. The pain and isolation of being different that is common to survivors of abuse generally becomes magnified for the lesbian incest survivor who, in addition to feeling like damaged goods because of the incest, is queer, and therefore completely unredeemable.

Incest: Female Training

Despite the patriarchal myth that child abuse leads to lesbianism, most female incest survivors, like most females in general, are heterosexual. Indeed, the stated motivation and justification of many adults, male *and* female, who sexually abuse female children, aside from the satisfaction of their immediate sexual needs, is to train and prepare

females to be heterosexual, that is, **not lesbians**. A commonly heard scenario goes: "Whenever my father raped me he would remind me that he was teaching me about sex so I wouldn't learn about it from the wrong people on the street." During childhood rape we learn to be submissive, terrified to say no or fight back, and to view the abuser, male or female, as dominant and superior. As the words of lesbian incest survivors above demonstrate, the early childhood conditioning of sexual abuse that teaches girls to serve and take care of males affects lesbians as well, continuing into adulthood a pattern of compulsively appeasing, pleasing and even sleeping with males. Overt sexual abuse is merely a more dramatic expression of the ongoing, day-to-day socialization/abuse of female children by the institutions of patriarchy—families, schools, religion, the media—whose primary function is to produce new breeders and servicers of males.

The miracle is that in the middle of this hegemony of patriarchal brainwashing lesbians manage to spring into existence at all. To any lesbian wondering if sexual abuse caused her to become a lesbian, my response is: **YOU ARE A LESBIAN IN SPITE OF, NOT BECAUSE OF, YOUR SEXUAL ABUSE**. The lesbianism came first, from the undamaged, untouchable core of the Self, and the sexual abuse, while hampering adult functioning, did not, and could not, kill that lesbian spirit.

Virginia Woolf: A Lesbian Incest Survivor

Virginia Woolf's life offers an example of the kind of trauma and pain that attend the life of the lesbian incest survivor. George and Gerald Duckworth, Virginia's adolescent half-brothers, raped and molested her from the age of 6 to about the age of 15 or 16. Plagued throughout her life with debilitating depressions and suicidal thoughts and attempts, Woolf finally drowned herself at the age of 59. She married Leonard Woolf, but she had several important relationships with women, including Vita Sackville-West, about whom she wrote the novel, *Orlando*. Particularly in her non-fiction writings, *A Room of One's Own* and *The Three Guineas*, Woolf expressed her essentially separatist sensibilities, her hatred of patriarchal institutions and her contempt for males in general.

Louise DeSalvo, whose important, groundbreaking biography² was the first to thoroughly discuss the link between Woolf's so-called "madness" and her half-brothers' abuse of her (see also *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*), unfortunately rehashes the same old lesbophobic opinion that Woolf's "lifelong response to her prolonged abuse was a dislike, perhaps

²Louise DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work* (New York: Ballantine, 1989).

even a terror, of heterosexual sexuality. . . . But she chose lesbian love, with Violet Dickinson and with Vita Sackville-West, as a positive, adaptive response to her abuse, as other women have as well" (119). DeSalvo doesn't offer an opinion as to why Virginia's sister, Vanessa, who was also raped by the same perpetrators, became a heterosexual, albeit an unhappy one. Does she attribute this discrepancy to some deeper kernel of health or holism within Vanessa, or perhaps to a lack of imagination on Vanessa's part? Are we to assume that Virginia turned to women in "response" to her abuse (labeling that response "positive" doesn't appease me) rather than because she found women fascinating, attractive, erotic and companionable and had the good sense to act on it? I believe that had Virginia not been raped as a girl as a matter of course, or had she lived in a place and time which offered validation, healing and retribution for incest survivors, she would never have married Leonard Woolf in the first place and would have been able to fully come out, in all aspects, as a lesbian. Woolf's clarity and brilliance remain as a testament to what the lesbian spirit can envision and accomplish despite great obstacles.

Lesbian or Bisexual?

Some readers may object to my calling women in the above situations, including Virginia Woolf, "lesbians" since they are interacting, or may feel compelled to interact, intimately with men. This is a critical point. Sometimes the female incest survivor who is attracted to women but also feels pulled toward sexual contact with males will be unable to confidently define herself as a lesbian until she heals from the effects of sexual abuse. Other times, she is quite clear that she is in fact a lesbian, and the feelings for men are experienced as a compulsion, or an addiction she cannot break.

This is the difference between the lesbian incest survivor and the bisexual. Bisexuals are generally happy and content with themselves, and work very hard to justify the involvement of males in their lives, which they clearly want. But the lesbian incest survivor dealing with sexual identity confusion exists in a state of self-loathing and emotional turmoil.

When I imagine actually acting on the [heterosexual] fantasies, I feel repulsion, fear and shame. . . . If I think of a man seeing my body or touching me, I feel self-hatred . . . I think my incest experience has left me with a repulsion towards men, as well as a sexual curiosity that often feels out of my control . . . I never could imagine not being a lesbian, however.

I am not an apologist for bisexuals. I strongly disagree with the liberal lesbian trend that seeks to link bisexual women with lesbians, assuming

that since we share an attraction to women the bisexual's attraction to men is irrelevant. I view bisexual women as essentially heterosexual in their allegiance and identification with males.

However, I have compassion and patience for the woman, raped as a child, who loves women and has difficulty committing herself to lesbianism. I offer this information in the hope that it will take the burden off the survivor reading this article who identifies with this phenomenon in herself, and to encourage her to seek help in working through the incest as well as her internalized lesbophobia.

Incest and the Lesbian Body

Being ashamed of and hating one's body are common after-effects of incest for all survivors. Compounding this, girls generally are raised to view ourselves as intrinsically imperfect, requiring make-up, constant dieting and clownish clothing to disguise and alter our natural physical uniqueness. The incest perpetrator attacks the infant/girl where she is most vulnerable, in her small, helpless female body. The incest survivor's body is a target, an object of violence and humiliation, a source of pain and shame. Her genitals, anus and mouth are penetrated, her breasts and rear are mauled, pawed and fondled, her physical appearance is the constant object of obscene leers, gestures, and innuendos.

As an adult, the incest survivor may experience her body as an enemy: she may suffer from stress-related illnesses such as asthma, colitis and back pain, gynecological disorders like severe PMS, cysts, fibroids, irregular menses and severe cramps. In the course of remembering and attempting to heal from her childhood abuse, she may have "body memories," reoccurrences of the actual physical sensations of abuse, such as intense pain and paralysis. A singular feature of sexual abuse is the certainty the victim will blame herself. Infants and small children have no objectivity about their circumstances; they instinctively believe that if the adults who take care of them are hurting them, they must somehow deserve it. Since it is the victim's female body that is being abused, the body itself becomes a target for blame.

Patriarchal thinking equates being female, indeed "being" itself, with being heterosexual. A "real woman" is a feminine female who gets fucked by males, just as a "real man" is a masculine male who fucks females. But lesbians are not genetically abnormal females, we are not neuter, we are not males, we are females who defy the equation by loving females. Every lesbian must confront this false paradigm at some point in the coming out process. But for the lesbian incest survivor, having suffered the humiliation of her female body and the loss of physical autonomy so necessary for living happily within one's skin, accepting and loving

herself as a female person in the face of the patriarchal equation that considers her male, can be extremely challenging.

One of the positive aspects of lesbian life is our willingness to challenge and discard the trappings of heterosexual role definitions that limit female experience. We may shop in the men's department for the superior quality and bargains we find there, knowing that as soon as we put on a piece of men's clothing it becomes women's clothing. We may work at "non-traditional" jobs usually reserved for men. And we actively pursue the romantic and sexual attention of other women. While lesbians think of our behaviors as organic and natural to us, the heteropatriarchy considers these behaviors male. Because of the way in which incest acts to undermine the survivor's faith in her own perceptions and feelings, it is often a short trip from doing what comes naturally to believing the myth that we are "acting like men."

Incest induces feelings of shame and deformity in the survivor; we may come to think of ourselves as bizarre, oddly-gendered beings, not entitled to define ourselves as truly one sex or the other; we psychically separate from our bodies and reject our femaleness. And we may experience revulsion mixed with desire toward the bodies of our lovers.

I was brought up to think that I wasn't "like women." There was a sense that my body was a woman's body, and as such it was an object, but "I" am not my body. "I" am a mind, and I have a masculine mind. So there were two different people, and I dissociated from my female body. . . . Now I'm in the process of being connected. I feel good about it, but I'm not totally connected all the time . . . I feel sometimes the way I felt when I was a teenager and I started having breasts, and I'd say "what's that?"

[Incest] made me realize how vulnerable I was. It made me very miserable for many years about my body, about being a woman. . . . As a kid I kept waiting for the summer when I would grow a penis. . . . Then when I started to get abuse as a woman, develop breasts, then I really hated being a woman.

I realized that I was sending hateful thoughts into my body every time I was naked and looked in the mirror. It horrified me that I was so obviously female, not big and strong.

Before I started looking at how incest had wrecked my life, my ideal beautiful lesbian was tall and thin with very small breasts. You know, not a man, but not particularly "womanly" either.

Lesbian incest survivors may take on an extreme caricature of the butch role in which we maintain distance from our own female bodies by thinking of ourselves as male and our lovers as other. Or we buy into the patriarchal definition of "femininity," assuming it to be a natural

expression of femaleness, and then, believing truly feminine women wouldn't be lesbians, we feel like frauds when we choose to define ourselves as femme.³

I used to play the masculine role. I couldn't get along with women, I couldn't respect them. Women were just sexual objects to me, and I used them . . . I was verbally abusive. I was hard and cold. They were a piece of ass, that's all they were . . . I would say, "I just want to fuck you. Shut up." It was a mirroring of what my uncle did to me.

When I was very little my mother used to dress me in incredibly skimpy outfits, like topless bathing suits. I was supposed to look like a doll. Femme was the only kind of lesbian I could ever be. And that made me feel like I wasn't really a lesbian. Because I couldn't be a femme and be a lesbian. I didn't understand that I could ever leave some of this stuff behind me, that I didn't have to wear skirts and giggle.

We may abuse our bodies with alcohol, drugs, food, sex and other addictive and compulsive behaviors, and pick lovers who verbally, psychologically and physically abuse us. We expend much emotional energy in actively despising and suffering over our bodies.

I like my hands and my feet. I hate the rest of my body. I hate it all the time. Incest is totally and completely to blame. I feel like my body is not mine. I don't see it through my eyes. I see it through other men in my family's eyes . . . I don't see it through my lover or anybody who would appreciate it. . . . It causes me more pain than any other thing in my life, my relationship with my body.

From as early as I can remember I've been a self-mutilator. I'd pick the skin off my fingers, toes and feet until they'd bleed.

When I'm feeling guilty about something, I'll burn or cut myself, "accidentally on-purpose."

I do not like my body, and often feel extreme self-hatred towards it. Sometimes I feel repelled by my genitals. Being involved with abusive, dangerous lovers was potentially injurious to my body, and actually injurious on three occasions with a physically abusive partner.

³I am *not* saying that incest causes role-playing. Incest is not the cause of *any* authentic, positive self-expression, be it the choice of a role or lesbianism itself. It is my belief that the lesbian who would have grown up butch anyway, may become male-identified as a result of the humiliation of sexual victimization. In the course of healing the incest wound, she may be able to psychically reintegrate and accept herself as female without altering in any way her style or butch identification.

Fear of being fat and the subsequent prejudice against fat in oneself and other lesbians, is a common expression of self-hatred in lesbian incest survivors, as it is in women in general.⁴ The acquisition of body fat is a genetic reality for females, and a shapely body with flesh on it, characteristic of the natural female form, is usually labeled "fat" in this culture. Part of our self-hatred as females expresses itself in fat prejudice. Making this issue more problematic is the fact that being fat is sometimes, though certainly not always, a method of self-protection used by the incest survivor to ward off sexual advances from males. Incest survivors will sometimes develop eating disorders such as bingeing and purging, overeating or anorexia, as ways of coping with the pain of sexual abuse and regaining a sense of control over our bodies and emotions. Lesbian incest survivors are often likely to have extreme reactions to fat in themselves and other lesbians.

... now [after recovery], I look at women's bodies, no matter what size, and I find them attractive. I can be around women who are "womanly" and it's okay. Before, the sight of a little cellulite made me want to throw up. Now, it's not so frightening to be fat.

I diet compulsively, and then I'll go through periods where I say no, I'm not going to worry about it, I'm not going to look in the mirror. Sometimes I go a whole day without eating and then I feel like I'm going to faint.

The idea of being fat scares me to death. I think, if I'm fat nobody will ever love me again. Every time I see another stretch-mark on my thigh I get gripped with fear. It feels like some terrifying process I have no control over.

Is There Sex After Incest?

It's easy to see how sexual abuse and lesbophobia combine in the psyche of the lesbian incest survivor in a way that makes being sexually active highly problematic. Shutting off sexual feelings, becoming numb or detached from bodily sensations altogether, inability to come, revulsion toward particular sexual activities, are common for many incest survivors. For the lesbian incest survivor, shame and terror around the consequences of sexual intimacy are exacerbated by the popularly held lesbophobic belief that lesbian sexuality is intrinsically sinful, disgusting and sick. Because the lesbian incest survivor may already feel sinful, disgusting and sick as a result of having been raped as a child, separating from the lesbophobic hatred of our sexuality is all the more troublesome.

⁴For a superb analysis of fat oppression of women and lesbians, see "If Looks Could Kill." In *Dykes-Loving-Dykes*, Bev Jo, Linda Strega, Ruston (Oakland: Self-published, 1990).

Lesbian relationships are special for their emotional closeness. One's lover is also one's best friend, confidant, nurturer and advisor. As the lives of a couple become more and more entwined, the feeling of "family" may creep in. The incest survivor may feel she must maintain psychological distance from her lover in order to avoid that "family" feeling, but sexual pleasure with a partner requires trust and openness without fear. Under these conditions, the relationship will either be emotionally distant, short-term and sexually charged, or emotionally close, long-term and sooner or later sexually shut-down.

I was miserable during these [non-sexual monogamous] relationships, angry and depressed. I felt deprived and 'punished' and powerless. I never took responsibility for having any part in the lack of sex. . . . It took me years to see that my willingness to be in asexual relationships was a way to avoid sex (and a way to reinforce my shame, because I ultimately felt ashamed of and punished for having sexual feelings).

I've had sex only sporadically and never for more than a year and a half with the same person, and I've been out for years. I used to consistently get involved with women I wasn't attracted to, who were strong-minded and made a big play for me and I lacked the willpower to say no. And then after a while, I'd have to reject them sexually because I felt nothing for them, and I'd say, "It's not your fault, it's me." And it was me. It was a major revelation for me to see I was allowed to pick a woman I was attracted to and that sex didn't necessarily mean doing something that grossed you out with somebody you didn't like.

I need a certain 'edge' or boundary between me and a partner in order to be sexual and I think it's hard to have that boundary when you're in a lesbian relationship where there's merging and coziness.

I was in a terrible relationship . . . I decided to throw all of my energy into my spirituality . . . and be celibate. . . . My orientation was "gay," but I was able to go to all kinds of spiritual, christian things as a "non-practicing homosexual." [This lasted] 3 or 4 years.

Even when the lesbian incest survivor is clear that she wants to be sexual, fears run rampant: of losing control (thereby being less capable of defending herself against attack), of being observed feeling sexual (thus proving her perpetrators' claims that she brought on the abuse by being "seductive"), of having sexual feelings at all (which remind her of the abusive situation in which her body responded against her will), of feeling physical pain (which may have played a large part in her sexual abuse). In adapting to these fears, the lesbian incest survivor who wants to be sexual may resist, for a period of time, being in the receptive role.

I prefer making love to a partner to being made love to. It used to be the opposite. As I've gotten in touch with my incest stuff, it's harder for me to be vulnerable. As I get closer to a partner, I feel more vulnerable and sex becomes scarier.

It doesn't matter who it is. I can't [be sexually spontaneous] with somebody once I know them, because that's incest to me. All of a sudden it feels perverted, like I'm having dirty feelings.

I have a lot of problems with sex with somebody I'm close to. There's a difference between the sex you can sort of work through and finally get there, and boom, let's have sex. I feel incested now with that kind of [aggressive] move toward me. We talk and we process . . . and it's not a lot of fun, though there are moments of fun within it.

To be celibate was always a dream. "One day I'm going to be able to be celibate." . . . I somehow realized what that was, the part of me that wants to run away from life, and I gave up that dream. And now I struggle through the intimacy, because it's so painful. Every time I reach a new level of intimacy with my lover, it's like going on a high, and then the down is so bad, because the shame comes up, and all those horrible incest feelings. It makes me see doom, it makes me want to kill myself. But I trust that the feeling will go away and I ultimately have the power, and I will be able to accept life, little by little.

Healing Is Possible

Because I have focused on the negative after-effects of incest on lesbians, readers may be wondering if there's any hope for survivors to ever feel good about our lesbianism, our bodies, our sexuality, our relationships, our Selves. There *is* hope.

We do have to confront the myth that lesbianism is an aberration caused by abuse and that we love women because somebody, male or female, hurt us. We must learn to differentiate "female" from "feminine," understanding that the former is our genetic birthright and the latter a set of culturally-imposed, arbitrary behaviors that may have nothing to do with our authentic selves. We must be clear that loving and desiring women does not make us male or "masculine" and that we do not have to dissociate from our female bodies in order to make love to women. Unless we see through these heteropatriarchal myths, all the incest work in the world will not resolve our underlying self-hatred and insecurity about being lesbians.

All the lesbians I spoke with, myself included, have experienced tremendous healing through a variety of means. While we're all at different stages, we all agree that with a willingness to confront the past and to experience some painful emotions, we can improve the quality of our lives a lot. With sexuality, for example, healing is often quite dramatic.

Now I see that my sexuality is part of my power, which was lost, which was taken from me, or distorted, by my grandfather, early on.

I've accepted that it's okay to receive [in sexual situations], and that's not abuse. Before, I was in this control situation because I felt I had to protect myself, and if I was receiving then I would be being abused. But that's not so. Receiving does not mean that I'm not assertive or that I don't take initiative.

For the first time ever I'm thinking that one day I'll be able to experience sexual pleasure, that it's not out of the question for me. I no longer think of myself as a disgusting, repulsive monster. I understand why I kept "leaving my body" as soon as someone touched me, and that I can improve my chances by being honest about exactly what I do feel comfortable with and what I don't.

Now, before we make love, I always pray to the Divine Mother. I pray to release any inhibitions that were left over. So I believe that things have been healed . . . With [my lover] lovemaking has reached new depths of trust. . . . My enjoyment level has changed.

Healing begins with accepting and mourning the loss of childhoods we never had and can never regain. We must accept that we will never know what it's like to discover our sexuality for ourselves and have it be unpolluted by shame, rage and terror; that we may never be totally free from irrational fears and phobias, self-destructive impulses and addictive cravings, emotional or physical numbing-out or sexual problems. But we can make peace with ourselves by recognizing that we were once powerless infants and children. We begin to heal when we break the incest bond and place the blame for our condition where it rightly belongs: on the rapists in whose hands our lives were entrusted.

I am aware that many lesbians are opposed to the 12-step recovery programs because of their emphasis on admitting ones powerlessness and believing in "a power greater than oneself." However, with respect to sexual abuse, I know for certain that there is tremendous healing value in "admitting that we were powerless over the incest experience and that our lives have become unmanageable." Painful as it may be, admitting that we had absolutely no choice, no control, no power at all when it came to being the target of abuse helps us to accept the fact that it HAPPENED, that there's nothing we could have done to stop it, and therefore, it's not our fault. Without accepting our powerlessness we have no hope of forgiving ourselves for the vulnerability of our own bodies. Admitting powerlessness over the incest experience does not mean we plan to go through life as victims. We are greatly empowered when we tell what happened, break the secret, and stop protecting the perpetrators.

Healing does not require a 12 step incest recovery group, but I believe it is necessary to find some form of women's (and preferably, lesbians') incest support group, with or without a facilitator, in order to heal. There is no more effective way to challenge and break down the isolation and freakishness we feel than to hear others, in the process of revealing their own stories, mirror back to us reactions and feelings we thought were uniquely our own.

I know many lesbians are opposed to therapy, and I admit that I am ambivalent about it myself, but I have personally known several lesbians whose incest memories surfaced for the first time within a therapy situation where, after a number of years enough trust had been established with the therapist that the memories came up spontaneously. Therapy, when used in conjunction with some kind of incest survivors' group, has been tremendously healing for many lesbians. There is no one right answer for everyone.

Without 12-step, I wouldn't have gotten to first base. . . . group work, that's where the healing is, mirroring, getting out of isolation.

Lesbians need safe places to work on their incest experiences around other lesbians. I think a combination of individual and group work is essential. I think there has to be a means of getting less expensive therapy to lower-income lesbians. My incest survivors' therapy group (not 12-step) is excellent.

[The 12-step program] was not helpful after a point. A lot of people are acting out in those rooms, going in and screaming, just to feel the power . . . being dominant in a way they knew they could be because it was only women, who were incest survivors, who would never say anything about it. I would leave there feeling like I'd been beaten up and didn't get anything out of it.

Find a female therapist who's skilled in working with incest. When I envision working out incest, I envision being able to be in that room and have whatever feeling I'm having and know that my boundary will never get invaded. . . . Like if I said to my therapist, "fuck me," she would never fuck me.

Alternative forms of therapy, especially those involving bodywork, may also be helpful, again with several caveats. The incest survivor needs to have support, either from other incest survivors or a therapist or both, in working through the powerful memories and feelings, both physical and emotional, that emerge as a result of bodywork. The body is the storehouse of all our memories and emotions, and unlocking them, while potentially healing, can be devastating without proper support. Also, the practitioner needs to know that you are there for bodywork because you are an incest survivor, and she needs to know what that

means in terms of your probable response to the work. Many people trained in bodywork techniques know nothing about incest and often come with a lot of judgmental, "new age" baggage about the harmfulness of expressing "negative emotions" such as rage. And obviously any bodyworker who thinks that your lesbianism was caused by incest and that she's going to straighten you out, is not the right person to work with.

I did Rebirthing, and I almost had a breakdown over that. It's one of those methods where you get body memories. I didn't know what was happening. It was really terrifying. I had to struggle with everything I had. I had to stay at a friend's house. Very dangerous stuff.

I've met a lot of women doing incest work (writing books, doing therapy, leading groups, etc.) who are not trustworthy people. It scares me that they're helping others.

I started doing yoga about a year ago, and it's been tremendously helpful. You can get in touch with your body without having anybody touch you, so you go at your own pace. I feel like parts of my body are starting to wake up that have been sleeping for thirty years.


Massage therapy was helpful to me. I had to start slowly, keeping all my clothes on, and certain parts of my body were off-limits. Eventually I was able to take off my socks and let my feet get touched, which was a big deal for me.

Some incest survivors feel that only other survivors can really understand and aid in the healing process. There may be some truth to this, particularly where empathy is involved. The cruelty and barbarism of the sexual abuse of children often strains the limits of peoples' imaginations unless they've been there. At the very least, this is what we need and don't need from our friends and lovers: we need to know that when we tell our story, we will be received with compassion, and we will be believed. We don't need to hear that it happened a long time ago and we should get over it. We don't need a lecture on the virtues of forgiveness. We don't need speculation on whether it really happened the way we say it did, and maybe it wasn't really that bad. We don't need to hear that we should stop blaming incest for our problems and take responsibility for our lives. The incest survivor who breaks the silence and tells the secret is taking responsibility for her life, perhaps for the first time.

Lesbian incest survivors *do need* the support of other lesbians in our community, to provide space for lesbian-only meetings, to help organize hot-lines, peer counseling, healing circles and political action groups. How often have we heard stories of lesbians committing suicide, suffering mental breakdowns, slowly destroying themselves with drugs and alcohol, only later to learn they were incest survivors? It may even be that non-survivors are in the best position to organize such help within the

lesbian community, because they are not bogged down with the emotionally exhausting work of healing itself.

Lesbian incest survivors have unique needs and concerns which we must take seriously. As survivors, can we confront the issue of sexual ambivalence without hating ourselves? Can we make space, both physical and emotional, for our own painful truths to surface and be healed in the company of other lesbians? Can we look in the mirror and begin to see a woman deserving of love and affection? Can we value our lesbianism as a precious gift worth fighting for? As friends and lovers of survivors, can we view with understanding the survivor struggling with her sexual identity? Can we be compassionate listeners no matter how horrible or incredible the story may sound? As a community, can we approach the question of incest with righteous anger and self-love? We must, if we are to survive.



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A/Mazing Work: Talking about Satanic Abuse

Kathy (as told to Fox)

The First Interview

I Didn't Know Why

Up until several years ago I thought I knew what my life was all about: I had a normal, typical upper middle class family, but I hated my father and I didn't particularly care for my mother. We weren't a close family. Everyone hated my father. He was a mean, nasty person. He was a civil engineer, both my parents are way above average in intelligence. We said my mom was sick, but actually she was agoraphobic and extremely depressed. It was our role as kids, and especially it seemed to be mine, to take care of her physically and emotionally.

I have a sister 16 months older and a brother 4 years younger. I was kind of the dykey kid. I was almost my brother's body guard, I took him everywhere I went until he got to junior high. Now I know that they used him, they would say to me, If you don't do this, we'll hurt your brother.

I learned about sex and sexuality at a very late age. A lot of it was repressed; sex for me wasn't sex, you know, it was a form of abuse and torture. I had my crushes on women, though, PE teachers and seniors and the older girl scouts and camp counselors. I think I was a dyke from childhood. I didn't like boys much unless I could play sports with them.

Starting in the 5th grade I stole alcohol. I hid it in bottles on the playground and would dig it up during recesses and drink, and this continued throughout junior high, every day I drank. Before that, in grammar school, in 3rd grade, I started eating compulsively and was extremely overweight. And then in high school: drugs. It wasn't hallucinogens, it was pretty much just speed.

I got through high school easily, although I never did any type of homework or studying. I went through life without really being in it. I was extremely suicidal my entire life without knowing why. I just never was happy. I never, ever felt I belonged anywhere. I didn't understand this earth and never wanted to be a part of it.

After high school I got involved with religion, I compulsed on religion for many years. During that time I tried to detox off everything and I gained a lot of weight. I started floating, I lived in different states, and was extremely suicidal. Depressed almost on a daily basis, and actual

attempts were frequent. But, although I'm not afraid of being dead or of what comes next, I saw so many horrible deaths that I'm extremely afraid of actually dying. I think also that the survival techniques I had to learn from infancy on are why I'm still alive.

The Incest Memories

I got to a point in my life where I was stable for the first time. I had a good job with people who were intelligent and cared about me. I was confronted by a doctor because of my weight and began to see a lesbian therapist. It was the third session, we had *The Courage to Heal*, and she asked me questions, Has this ever happened. Two rapes came up first. When I was four, two neighborhood boys pulled me and my friend into the garage and had us do oral sex on them. I knew exactly what they wanted and how to do it, and I was protecting my friend just to get us out of that situation. When I was five, the typical little kindergarten girl walking home from school, a man in a car picked me up, took me home, raped me, and then he stuffed me in a cardboard box on a highway and left me there. A neighbor woman found me and took me home. Both our mothers knew about the first rape, but nothing was ever said to me. And nothing was ever said to me after the second rape either.

My therapist asked me about incest, and I tried, but I couldn't say no, although I had no memories. I didn't know then, this was 3-1/2 years ago, that people repressed memories. I did know people were sexually abused, and every time there was a movie about it on TV I'd have to watch. I would have extremely violent reactions, I'd actually throw things at the TV, and I'm a person who doesn't do violent things.

All through my adult life, and it could very well have gone on as a child, I would wake up in the middle of the night and just scream and cry and be in fits and not know what was wrong. I was in just this pit of hell and despair. I'd call it, if I was in a spiritual system, my dark night of the soul, being tested. I didn't know anyone who felt these things.

The fourth week of therapy I got a coloring pad of paper and started drawing pictures. About once a week I would wake up in the middle of the night, screaming and crying. The crying would indicate to me what age the abuse was, sometimes it was like an infant crying, sometimes someone older. I had the whole couch all set up, in the corner of the room so no one could get me from behind, I had a special light there. I would draw pictures, they were like little kid drawings, but it was obvious they told stories about incest, and then the stories would come up in my head. I would be hysterical; and it would be hard, but I would write them out. Then at my next therapy session, I would show her; I couldn't even read them outloud at first, she would have to read them herself. I'd say, I don't know if this is true or not, I don't know why it's in my head. I just had to put a lot of trust in saying them, I had to say them.

I eventually got to recognize a pattern, that a couple of days before, I'd start getting extremely bitchy to people at work, bitchy to the check-out boy at the store, then I began to get paranoid and hypervigilant, I'd jump at a little shadow, or backfire of a car, and then I would be extremely suicidal. This was on a weekly basis, when a story would come up. My therapy was on Monday, and every Monday for a year I would get up and be sick and throw up. This was an unlivable period for me, I was not functioning well, I was extremely lucky to have the job I had.

These were just the incest stories that were coming up, incest by my father. I love that line, *just* the incest stuff. But I also do have a memory of my mother, when I was an infant, and this is extremely difficult for me. She was sticking something whether it was her finger or something in me penetrating me. It was devastating to believe it. It was pre verbal, I remembered where I was laying and the plastic texture.

Retrieving the Satanic Cult Memories

I got involved with a lesbian incest group, which was pretty safe and good. I told about how my dad did lots of weird things to us to punish us and teach us trust. He'd have me spread my fingers on the table and he'd close or cover his eyes, then he'd take the carving knife and jam it between my fingers, barely missing. The group leader said to me, This was real weird ritualistic abuse. I freaked out. I said, No it wasn't ritual abuse, you don't know what you're talking about, it was not, it was not.

The next day was my birthday. I was home and the ritual abuse came up. It just hit me in the face, like I had run into a wall at 60 mph. I couldn't deny it and at the same time I couldn't believe it. For two weeks all I would do was sit down on my therapist's couch and scream hysterically for an entire hour. Then I started drawing pictures. They were little pictures, like a medicine bottle, and I wrote, This is the medicine that they put in my milk. And as I wrote more and more stuff came up.

My parents were involved in a satanic cult. My father was real involved, I don't remember my mom at a lot of the rituals, I had an aunt and have memories of different people. This abuse happened at a house we called the Castle House down the street. I had what I called my real memories, which were the memories I'd always had, and then these things, what I called the repressed memories. In my real memories I had never been in this house. All of a sudden when these memories came up I knew the door went into a kitchen, and over a period of two years I drew the pictures and I had a detailed floor plan of the entire house.

When I was 3 there was a 2 day ordeal. My father said that I had to do this to take care of my mother, I was clear that somehow this had to be done for my mother's sake. And then during the actual ritual, my mother—she was pregnant, which she would have been if I was 3—gave me to this group, this coven, as her way out.

This was a typical death-birth ritual. They did some real sicko things to prepare me. There was a dead man laying on the dining room table. I sat at the head of the table and they cut him in front of me and took different parts out and held them over my head and said little prayers and made me eat bites of them. So it makes sense now why I've never liked red meat. There was a lot of cannibalism and blood drinking. Then they skinned this man. That night at the ritual I was rubbed all over with blood, wrapped in this skin, and pretty much knocked out from a drug. Then I was put back on the altar, ripped out of the skin and given to satan. Satan was then my father. Which is why my entire life I knew that my father wasn't really my father, I knew I had a different father.

Also, when I was about 3, they kept me in a cage in a basement. I'm sure it was several days. They wouldn't give me food, they'd put food and water right outside and I couldn't get it. When I pooped they made me eat that for my food and when I threw up they rubbed my face in it. They told me I was a dirty animal, and men raped me like I was a dog. And then people would come in and they would laugh at me and throw peanuts. When I got older, in the 3rd grade, they took me on Wednesdays in a van down to this place and did some pornography.

Recently I met a woman who had real similar stuff—it was like a gold mine finding each other—and she said, The weirdest thing happened, when I was in this cage, they'd throw peanuts at me. I just started bawling, it was so validating. What's been interesting is, I've written these things down and I've drawn the pictures, and afterwards I've read similar things in a book or talked to someone who's been through similar things. Even with that validation, still sometimes I think it's not true.

This was the craziest time in my life, retrieving these unbelievably horrific memories. And yet for the first time in my life I began to feel sane. The mysteries in my life, why I could remember part of something and not the rest: All of a sudden the rest was made conscious to me. Things began to click together, memory things and real memories connected.

I was used to have babies, they took my babies. The first time I remember I was in 5th grade. I was naked in the bath tub at our beachhouse. I had no idea what was happening, but my mother was hysterical. This woman I always called the witchy woman, she was like a nurse, kept jabbing something in me to abort the baby. My thoughts during all this were, I can't cry, I have to take care of mom, I can't let her be upset. I was raised at the beach, and when the stuff came out, I thought it was an octopus. Really sicko stuff. I have had memories of at least 6 aborted fetuses about 3 months along and 3 that were 7 or 8 months along. I can't deny it happened, I've remembered too many things about missed periods and trips to the doctor. I wanted to know if it's true, so I went to a doctor, who said, Yes, I'd either had babies or I'd been raped a lot.

I know lots of times they would drug me, because my speech when I would be telling the memory would be drugged or I'd sound drugged for a day before or I would feel that sick feeling that certain drugs give you. The smell comes up, the nausea comes up, because these are actual relive experiences. I've gone through birth and abortions, by myself in my house. In the beginning I'd go to the doctor with these cuts or whatever on my body. When I went back two days later, the cuts would be completely gone, even the doctor's stitches were gone. Doctors started freaking out on me. So I learned not to go to the doctor any more.

Murder, Torture, and Programming

Murders. I saw lots of people murdered. There was a Spring ritual called the Pool of Blood, where an actual person would lie in a scraped out granite rock that we returned to several years in a row. It was a self sacrifice, I don't if they were drugged but they would bleed until their blood was out of them. Lots of babies. They got their babies from me and girls like me, babies that never were reported as being born. They'd hold babies up over the altar and rip them in half like a wishbone, they'd burn them in fires, they'd boil them in pots of water to render the fat.

I resisted as much as I could. They'd take me out of the room and torture me and bring me back. Even then I would not do it, so they'd brutally torture me again, and eventually they got me to do these things. I was maybe 5 years old, standing at an altar, and they made me cut the balls and penis off a baby boy. They put them in a chalice and held the baby up over it and had the blood drip into the glass. Thirteen men drank out of this glass and, over several hours, each one of them raped me. Their purpose in all this was to reach the point of the power. They had different levels of the point of the power. Raping someone or bringing me to a climax was the point of the power. The moment that a baby dies is the point of the power. This frenzied horrid energy is what they get off on.

They would make me responsible by forcing me to make choices. They would say, Do you want to kill your brother or do you want to cut off this baby's penis. When I was 14, they tied me to a pole and held my entire body over a huge pit of fire, until I could not stand it anymore and screamed, Off, Off, Off. Next to me was a girl that they'd hold under water until I couldn't stand to see her drown, so I'd say Stop, Stop, Stop, and then they'd put me back over the fire. So in reality I had to choose to have that girl killed. Stuff like that I still feel extremely guilty over. [F: You shouldn't, of course.] I know that, but it's extremely difficult.

Just a few weeks ago I completed a memory. I had remembered having a baby in high school and knew I was at the ritual where the baby died. I remembered dissociating afterwards, saying, Nothing matters, nothing in the world matters any more. And in a way I never let

anything matter to me since. What I just remembered was that they had me go to the fireplace and put my baby in a fire. And I know what a person looks like when they burn. I've seen babies burned, men burned in fires. It's a horrific noise, they're screaming and they're yelling, the body sizzles, it bubbles, it looks like a marshmallow being burned. I've never ever understood why people wanted to roast marshmallows. And then the body will burn, it will turn black and charred, and red blood will come out, and then it'll turn black and it will crust over, until it rips open again and more blood comes out. I wouldn't be able to describe this if I hadn't seen it so many times.

They did different types of programming to me. They burned beliefs into my body, You'll do what we tell you to do, you'll say what we tell you to say. They'd hold my head under water until I was just about to suffocate and then they'd pull it out until I barely got my breath, teaching me messages. They'd hold burning prongs on one side of my back and one person would say, There's no way out, and then they'd burn the other side, and another person, like my friend, would say, There is a way out, the way out is to kill yourself. And then the bad guy would say, No, there's no way out, the only way is to stay. And then they'd burn me and say, There is a way out, it's to kill yourself. My whole life I've been writing this stuff in journals: There's no way out, there's no way out. Yeah, there is, it's to kill yourself. Then I'd get suicidal and try to kill myself. I didn't know out of what, but I knew the only way out was to kill myself.

Creative Resistance

I did things to survive. While they were doing their frenzied raising of their arms and their weird stuff, I'd be going in my little brain, good, good, good. I was thinking, I'm tricking them, they think they're taking my power and making it evil and I know I'm sending it out as good. All the walls were draped with black cloths and they had candles all over the place. I used to think they were so stupid, that I wasn't so fucking stupid that I was going to keep candles near all this material. I used to look at the flames while they were abusing me and try to get the cloth to catch fire, or to get the candles to go out. At times the candles went out and as a kid I thought I was doing that. It was a way I had control.

There was an inner circle which was usually the 13 people and then an outer circle which was 20 or so more people. The inner people would do things that the outer people wouldn't see, and one of them was to control me. It would look like this woman just had her hand on my feet, but she'd actually be pushing her nails hard into the bottoms of my feet to get me to react different ways, to cue me on what to do. They were always doing things like cuing me, sometimes it seemed like it was an act or a show for these outside people.

When they aborted things from me, they'd have a ritual where they made me eat some of the baby. This is satan and satan came out of you, and you'll ingest satan. I actually believed that my body physically, chemically was satan. I've had to bring these ideas up to a conscious level and talk to myself. It was just me, there was no one who could teach me about this stuff. I'd say, The reality was that some man impregnated you, you were pregnant, the baby came out of you, and they made you eat it. That was a sick and gross thing to do but satan had nothing to do with it. Satan was something they made up, an evil lie. And for the first time in my life I could use a bath towel two times in a row. I'd had this compulsion that every time I took a bath and toweled off, the towel was infected and had to be washed, because satan was coming out of my pores. But I never understood why I thought that, it was just one of the weird things about me that had always been.

[F: JMax acted out the terror without knowing what it was. And often blamed me, saying I was responsible for it.] What happens is, you're finally safe enough to start feeling the abuse and terror, but you don't know what it is. All you know is: I'm living my life, I'm feeling these feelings, you're in my life, so you must be doing it to me. We get in a time warp where we're feeling feelings from 50 years before. Just recently I've been able to do what I call cognitive therapy, where I say, OK the reality right now is, I'm with this woman and we're making love, these feelings are from when I was abused as a kid, they have to be a memory. When I look back at ways I've treated people, I couldn't figure out why I was feeling the way I was, and why I was doing the things I was.

Cults and Class

[F: Who does it, is it the upper class?] All people. One of my friends came from a real poor rural family, and it was done to her. I think some of the people involved were not poor, one of them was a prominent doctor. I've heard of mothers who, to survive, to get a job, to get medicine, give their child over. They go into denial about what's happening to their child. It isn't a whole person that does this stuff. It's fragments of people that do it. A well functioning, integrated person cannot do this stuff.

My family's all intermarried, and it's multi-generational families that do this. My mom's best friend married my mom's brother. My aunt is also my father's cousin. The whole family goes like that. They arrange these marriages, and program people to marry each other, to maintain the group. My ancestors go back to the 1600s in the colonies, they were probably from England and Scotland. My family settled [a wealthy area of the country] five generations ago. They owned all the land, they were among the elite. I met a woman from the same area, who was satanically abused, and her family back then lived next door to my family.

Six Months Later: The Second Interview

Healing, Programming and Lesbian Strength

I'm in a new group. It's the best thing that I've had to measure how successful I've been in my healing, compared to the group I was in 3 years ago when the incest memories had just started. I can stay grounded in the group and I interact much better with individual women and with the group as a whole. Everything that happens in group isn't my personal fault. It's really phenomenal to see the changes I've made.

Actually the satanists had created an environment where I was in a mental hospital. They program you about what will happen when you tell: You crazy girl they'll lock you up. They had this guy come into the room I was in and he had on a surgical scrub type uniform and then he raped me and hurt me, and this was going to happen when I was a crazy girl. I've also had a couple memories of being put in life/death situations and my father was the only one who could rescue me, it had been programmed that I could not live without him.

When I was a kid my father would take us for a drive on Saturday or Sunday afternoon. He'd drive past this hospital and he'd tell me, Now you know what they do with crazy girls, they just put them in the hospital. I'd always remembered this, I just didn't know what it meant. There were so many things like that that he would do. All my childhood memories are things he did to reinforce the programming. Some of the poems were the same ones other kids remember, but mine all had other little meanings in them.

Everything they told you was a lie. They stopped your vital energy from flowing, they tried to kill it. But they never really did. I didn't identify with them and their world, I had my own world inside of me, my true inner self. That's what all these women are trying to do, we're trying to recover our true inner selves. We thought they were fake selves that we made up, but they were our true inner selves. So many of us don't know that it's OK to be good. It's OK to be truthful, to have goodness and beauty. It's OK to live. That's the biggest lesson of all: It's OK to live.

What got me through the tortures was the fact that I would identify with the person who was being tortured, I did not identify with my abusers, the torturers, because their feelings were sicko things, the sick sensations and highs they got off this. From the start, from the very first memory that I knew was a memory, and as insane as it all seemed, I knew enough to believe in myself and let my self be my number one validation. So many women that I know that are healing from this are lesbians. We know that we have the strength and that it's OK for us to use it, whereas some women don't know that yet. Lesbians are incredibly intelligent, that's probably why they're lesbians. The women that I know

that are healing from ritual abuse or really bad abuse are creative geniuses. We've had to develop that genius from a very young age to create the support systems within ourselves.

Kids die from satanic abuse, I had one friend that was on the altar with me and she died. I honestly think they just scared her to death, she didn't have the techniques to get by. The next day you wake up, and you're playing on the sand, and the police are there. That's the only body I can remember being found, they don't usually do that.

When I was going through this it would have been wonderful to have a safe place to do a memory, where I could go for 3 hours or a day, a safe room where my razor blades weren't or my pills weren't. Therapists aren't available 24 hours a day. I don't have any help if it's 3:30 in the afternoon and I really need someone. It would be great to have a number you could call, OK Suzie will be at your house in 10 minutes and we'll talk to you until she gets there. And then next week Suzie's going through something and Janet can go or Becky. I'm extremely good at helping someone through a memory, if I'm in a bad space it can help me up to be helping someone. Or you might have two years where you need help, and then two years down the road you can give back.

I'm not a multiple as in where did this mascara come from, but in therapy when I'm reliving a memory a little kid's voice comes out. I've got some dolls, they are all Kathy, brown hair and brown eyes, my purpose in having them is to just hold them and tell them that was bad and should never have happened. Like I've had a memory in therapy, and then it's, OK our hour is over, and I'm going out to my car as an 8 year old. The car's like a ride at Disneyland: Oh, look if you push this it goes fast. The doll I use the most is a 6 year old and she's real-life size. She becomes the kid when I leave the session. I'm emotionally retarded in ways, so I'm reparenting myself by using her. She's awfully cute, she wants a bra though.

As a kid I didn't know that everyone had periods. I was the only kid that didn't get to go to the sex ed movie; and my friends have confirmed this, my mom didn't take me. I was taught that satan's blood was coming through me. When I was reliving that memory fortunately a friend was there and she said, Every woman bleeds. She retaught that kid. The big girl has learned it, but little Kathy in me didn't know all that.

Cult abuse has gone on for years and years and generations. They're extremely capable at what they do. If you want to know the truth, you didn't get some of the really good stuff. I was protecting you from hearing some of the grossest stuff. And I was emotionally distant from it when I was telling you. When it comes up as a memory you're totally hysterical, but then after I've relived it I can matter-of-factly tell it.

For centuries they've been hushing up women. What they're confronting right now for the first time is, we've started talking. They've never had to deal with this before. They are coming up with these groups now talking about the False Memory Syndrome. [F: There was this guy on Larry King Live the other night saying, At these rape crisis centers they coach women to lie and say they were raped.] When I was planning a trip to the area where the abuse happened, I called the rape crisis center there, and the woman I was talking to would not acknowledge that this could have been true. The director got on the phone and she supported wholeheartedly that it hadn't happened. She said, It's probably books or scary movies that you saw when you were a kid. [F: Maybe she was a cult member.] She said her husband was on the police force, and she knew all about this and it was all false and made up stuff.

I went to a workshop about MPD, most people recovering from this have multiple personalities. The one word that I heard a hundred times during that workshop was *alter*, they call these different personalities alter, alter, alter. The image I had was not of a little girl inside of me, it was of an altar. And the woman—she said she was recovering from satanic abuse—wore a black pair of slacks with a bright red blouse and a vest that came to her knees that looked like a robe. I thought, This woman is either on the wrong team [and triggering programming] or she's not conscious of what she's doing.

A/Mazing Work

Over a period of about 10 years, before the memories started coming and during which I was extremely suicidal, I had experiences which I haven't told many people about because they were spiritual. I was put in life/death situations and given the choice to live or die. In one of them, I was walking home from work and I had a little hard candy in my mouth. I was thinking I just really wanted to be dead, and this candy lodged in my throat and totally cut off my breathing. While I was just standing there I went into a different time and space, and I was given a conscious choice to die at that time or to stay on earth. And I knew there was a work that I was supposed to do; it wasn't just about me healing from this, it's a spiritual healing extremely important to the survival of the earth. I was told, more with feelings than with words, that I could not know all of it at once, I could only go ahead with faith blindly into this work. Then miraculously this candy flew out of my mouth. Seven times at least this happened to me.

I call it Grand Central Station. It's an actual place that I go to, there's all these comings and goings of people making decisions. One night I was in the hospital, because I had broken both my legs. I was going in and out of consciousness—I leave my body a lot, I can do that, that's

from the abuse—and I went to this place. My cousin was there, deciding whether she was going to stay or go, and she decided to leave. The next day when I got home from the hospital I got a phone call that my cousin had died that night. It was out of the blue, she had a cerebral hemorrhage. There's no way I would have known this was going to happen, so I have to believe my experience was real.

I have a therapist and a couple of friends and know some women that are healing from this but live in other states. Yet it's a very isolated work. When I'm just with another woman who has survived ritual abuse, we can talk about the spiritual aspect of healing this, and we know what we're talking about with very few words. I remember from a very young age knowing I had to live through it because I had a spiritual work to do.

I call this work a/mazing. Being whole, uncovering the lies, connecting with my self, my core. My work is telling and talking. They thought they rendered us powerless; we women have empowered our selves. As we confront them and their lies directly, they have no defense. For centuries they've perfected their horrid deeds, their madness. But no more. We allow our inner core of truth, beauty, love, wisdom and goodness to emerge. Our core is good. It's a part of us that was there from the start, the part they never got. We hid it so deep within, we had to, to keep it safe. We buried it beneath our shame, sorrow, pain, horror and fear. And now we dig deep.

And so, Fox, to answer your question (What about the girls?), I work, I live, I continue for them, in order to stop this madness. And you know why they do it? Because they can. We must make this earth a place where they just cannot do it anymore.

All they told us was lies. As we share together all our secrets are like puzzle pieces. They fit together, and we reveal their tyranny and their terrorist deeds. Patriarchy shall be done in. Women together, we shall blow away their smokescreens. All of us together, not just those uncovering our private abuse. Herstorians, sociologists, psychologists, doctors, healers, writers, and readers.

It's almost over boys, we are not divided anymore. Together as integrated women we validate our (selves). Together we dissolve our shame and isolation. Ridding our selves of guilt lessens our desire for death. We are finding our real life's purpose and pleasure. We are making new the world. We are a/mazing this mess. We are stopping the madness.

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Ritual Abuse: Making Connections*

Chris Cuomo

In the last few years, the term "ritual abuse" has been used with increasing frequency in psycho-"therapeutic" language, healing groups and literature, and lesbian communities. My project here is to define "ritual abuse," map out some of the relationships between ritual abuse and racist heteropatriarchy, and discuss why it is important for lesbians to be aware of the connections between these institutions.

I am a trained philosopher who for the past three years has made some of the money I need for graduate school by working at a Rape Crisis Center as an advocate for survivors of many forms of sexual abuse and harassment. I am not a therapist.¹ Much of my active time at work is spent listening to women survivors of rape by family members, incest, who are in emotional crisis and have no one else to talk with. Increasingly, I spend time on the phone talking to women who define themselves as survivors of ritual abuse. I am not a survivor of ritual abuse, although I am a survivor of sexual abuse by the brother of my father. I have talked at length with women who are survivors of ritual abuse, have witnessed their pain and have heard the details of their memories of abuse and torture. My hope is that this piece can spark some lesbian thought and talk about ritual abuse and that our attention will help survivors, disempower the abusers and torturers and murderers, and prevent the abuse of more girls, women, animals, and others.

Some Definitions

What is ritual abuse, and how is it different from other forms of rape and assault? A report of the Ritual Abuse Task Force of the Los Angeles County Commission for Women defines ritual abuse as:

A brutal form of abuse of children, adolescents, and adults consisting of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, and involving the use of rituals . . . It usually involves repeated abuse over an extended period of time. The physical abuse is severe, sometimes involving torture and killing . . . [It is] intended as a means of gaining dominance over the victim. The psychological abuse is devastating and involves the use of

*I would like to thank Sandy Seuser, Claudia Card, Lori Saxe, and Connie Reynolds for helpful comments and conversations, and Fox for her patience and encouragement. Thanks too to Alix Dobkin who got me thinking more clearly about some of these connections.

ritual/indoctrination, which includes mind control techniques and mind altering drugs and ritual/intimidation which conveys to the victim a profound terror of the [abusers] and of the evil spirits they believe [abusers] can command . . . Most survivors state that they were ritually abused as part of satanic worship for the purpose of indoctrinating them into satanic beliefs and practices.²

Although all abuse is heinous and contemptible, ritual abuse is set apart from other forms of repeated and repetitive brutal physical and psychological torture by the integral presence of ritualistic behaviors and mind control techniques.

Ritual: 1. The prescribed form for conducting a solemn ceremony. 2. A body of ceremonies or rites.

Indoctrinate: 1. To instruct in a body of doctrine. 2. To teach to accept a system of thought uncritically [my emphasis].³

"Brutal physical abuse"⁴ includes branding and tattooing symbols on concealed areas of the body (including labia, inside hairlines, buttocks), cutting, burning, flagellation, electrical shock, and truncation of toes and fingers. Ritual abuse survivors remember being raped with penises, knives, sticks or candles. Many survivors report having had shit, vomit, blood, or parts of dead humans and other animals smeared on them and inserted in their vaginas and recta. Sometimes teenage girls are raped by male abusers and made to carry the pregnancy to term. When the child is born it is ritually murdered and the teenage mother is made to eat its flesh or drink its blood. In many instances, the brutal abuse of women and very young children is filmed and marketed through the international pornography network.

Shock: 2.a. Something that jars the mind or emotions as with a violent, unexpected blow. 3. To strike with disgust; offend. 4. To induce shock in [a person].

I am not writing this to shock you. I am writing this because I want lesbians to have information about what is being reported in our communities, and so that we can take the information seriously. I am writing this so when your friend tells you about surviving this kind of abuse, you will be open to believing her. I am writing this so that you know that you are not alone.

"Psychological torture" refers here to forced participation in rape, murder, or mutilation of other victims, forced robbery of grave sites, and ritual marriage to satan. It also includes brainwashing through hypnosis and through constant supervision. Failure to accept the given belief system results in death or more torture. Most survivors report having witnessed

such threats being carried out against animals and other children. Victims may be told repeatedly that the good is being washed out of them with enemas and douches, or that they are omnipotent. They are told that non-participant family members will be murdered if the abuse is ever discussed. Victims remember waking from sedation and finding they have been surgically cut; the child is then told that a bomb has been implanted in her body and that if she tells anyone about the abuse the bomb will explode and kill her and whoever she has told. Many survivors report having been suspended head first for hours, days, or weeks, into a deep, dark pit that contains human and animal body parts, snakes or spiders. Almost all survivors report being told that they have no free will, and having their will broken through torture and deprivation of food, water, light, and space. Victims of such abuse come to believe they are destined to carry out the will of their abusers, which includes torturing others and participating in other ritualistic activities which survivors often describe as "evil" and "sick."

Much of this abuse reportedly takes place within the context of a solemn ceremony in which costumes (such as hooded robes), repetitive speech, sacrifice, symbolic language, incantation, metaphysical references, special objects, special texts, etc. create a surrealistic or seemingly magical environment. Drugs, alcohol, extreme fear or panic, and other mind-altering techniques create heightened sensory awareness and the feeling that the experiences are supernatural. Such bizarre perceptions and the intensity of confusion and disbelief often anchor memories of horrific torture in the deepest levels of the survivor's mind and body, or in what some might call the "subconscious."

Since many of the accounts are childhood memories, and narratives include memories of being drugged or subjected to mind control and programming, some aspects of survivors' memories may not exactly represent what really happened to them.⁵ Evidence other than memories of ritual abuse is scarce. Ritual abuse is often perpetrated by prominent community members who are adept at "covering their tracks." However, survivors' investigations into their own histories, medical records, police reports, and even therapists' investigations, all provide corroborative evidence of ritual abuse.⁶ Satanic texts describe in great detail the protocol for ceremonies which include murder, cannibalism, rape and torture.⁷ And many survivors from all over the U.S., who have never met and who ostensibly have very little in common, consistently report remarkably similar experiences. Discussion with survivors and other research into ritual abuse leaves little doubt that these atrocious stories are true. For most people who do not remember experiencing such torture, the stories of ritual abuse survivors seem fantastic and impossibly horrific. We may not want to believe accounts of ritual abuse because to

believe them is to dramatically change our ideas about good, evil, and the world in which we live.

Making Connections

Solemn: 1. Deeply earnest; grave. 2. Performed with full ceremony (a Solemn High Mass). 3. Gloomy; somber (from the Latin *solemnis*: stated, established, appointed).

In the media and in psychotherapeutic communities, ritual abuse is characterized as: cultic and satanic, based on some strange or sick belief system; isolated, occurring in remote or hidden enclaves of society; abnormal, differing tremendously from "ordinary" incest and rape experiences. Sensationalization of ritual abuse conceals the preponderance of ritual abuse, protects the perpetrators of ritual abuse that do not identify as satanists, allows the "normal" institutions in which ritual abuse occurs to retain their status, and keeps invisible the role that ritual abuse of girls, non-girl children, and women plays in perpetuating the power of these institutions and the power of heteropatriarchy.

Now, it is true that much ritual abuse is satanic, and/or perpetrated by groups which reverse or vilify "common" social norms, ethics, and taboos. It is extremely important that we discuss this fact openly.⁸ But the use of the term "satanic" to refer to all these groups or practices immediately distances the groups and practices from other heteropatriarchal and racist institutions (such as certain christian churches or sects) which enable, benefit from or perpetrate ritual abuse of females and others.⁹ This distancing keeps hidden the relationships between ritual abuse and "mainstream" religious groups the same way the theory that "crazy" men rape women hides the relationships between rape, heterosexuality, and other patriarchal institutions.

Many survivors remember their abuse occurring within the context of christianity; at sunday school, in a church basement, with christian clergy present, and/or with reference to christian symbols and rites. These connections raise important questions: How does organized religion serve as a conceptual and practical breeding ground for ritualized abuse of the socially powerless? How does the secrecy and supposed sanctity of religious persons, groups, and places of worship keep them safe from scrutiny? What are the commonalities between brutal ritualized abuse of the sort described here and the systematic oppression of females in and by organized religion throughout history?

Characterizations of ritual abuse which frame it as isolated and remote also effectively cover up the realities of when and where ritual abuse is perpetrated. The McMartin Preschool case, in which at least 37 children told of satanic ritual abuse by at least 7 teachers (only two of

whom were legally prosecuted) in Manhattan Beach, CA, was a huge media event. The silence-breaking in such cases is valuable, but the sensationalism creates false perceptions that ritual abuse is rare. In fact, infiltration of abusers into schools is prevalent. Many members of abusive groups, including worshippers of satan, are intentionally trained as teachers and childcare workers in order to gain access to children for use in rituals and as a means of recruitment of new members.¹⁰

However, a primary locus of ritual abuse is even closer to home: the heteropatriarchal nuclear family. The family, a self-enclosed, private unity which always requires loyalty and secret-keeping, is a perfect place for ritual abuse to survive and propagate. And it does so there. Many, if not most, survivors have been the victims of multigenerational familial networks of satanic ritual abusers. In addition to being related to their victims, many ritual abusers are socially powerful professionals: doctors, lawyers, university professors, military personnel, members of religious clergy.¹¹ When children have nowhere to turn, when people who are considered closest and most trusted and loved are brutal abusers or part of an abusive network, one has no choice but to submit to the abuse and perhaps to receive training as an abuser.

In addition to its connection to christianity and other organized religious groups and its reliance on the nuclear family as a procreative tool, the institution of ritual abuse of females, children, and animals has close links to other powerful heteropatriarchal institutions. As mentioned earlier, abusers are often part of international pornography networks.¹² The filming and distribution of the ritualistic brutalization of victims likely generates tremendous profit for abusers and their organizations.

There are also coextensive links between ritual abuse and the U.S. military. Ritualistic child abuse has been reported at a number of U.S. army day care centers, which are reportedly very lenient in their hiring procedures.¹³ The military, a wide scale murderer and torturer of usually powerless "others," is itself propagated through the abuse of participants. Mostly poor, working class, and people of color are recruited by a system which degrades soldiers and teaches them to degrade others in turn. This is common in male institutions, including sports teams and college fraternities, where ritualistic abuse of new members is a means of indoctrination and bonding.¹⁴ Is the military also training ritualistic abusers of children?

One suspect (against whom no charges were filed) in a ritual abuse case at an army day care center in San Francisco was a lieutenant colonel, Michael A. Aquino. Aquino is a military officer with access to top-security secrets, who became high priest of the church of satan while serving as a psychological warfare expert in Vietnam. He later broke away from that church and formed his own, the "temple of the set,"

which has mostly middle class members including several members of Mensa (a high-IQ society) and two ex-Jesuits.¹⁵

We also need to take seriously demographic information about ritualistic abusers, victims, and survivors. In my experience, in the experience of all the counselors that I've asked, and in all of the literature I've read on the topic, the perpetrators, victims, and survivors of ritual abuse are overwhelmingly white.¹⁶ Some survivors report that their abusers were members of white supremacist groups, or that there are links between organized white supremacists and satanists.¹⁷ Significant questions arise about why it is that whites tend to engage in this kind of organized abuse (although the answer may be obvious to some), how ritual abuse is used to propagate racism and violent racist behavior in the U.S. and what correlations exist between class oppression and ritual abuse.

All of the connections and links I've discussed here raise intriguing questions about the genesis and history of ritual abuse, especially as it occurs in the context of satanic worship. One connection seems particularly clear. Ritual abuse is an extremely effective way of propagating destructive belief systems—at once indoctrinating children and creating future abusers. If this method effectively furthers satanism and other religious beliefs, evidence suggests it is also used to promote racist, xenophobic, and misogynist beliefs.¹⁸

Toward Healing

One disturbing aspect of ritual abuse is that, compared to other forms of rape and incest, proportionally many perpetrators are women. Given that ritual abuse involves training and indoctrinating victims through torture and mind-control, the statistics are not surprising. As one ex-priestess of satanism remarked, "The ultimate purpose of ritualistic child abuse is to affect the children at a very young age so that when they become older they're easily recruited right into satanism."¹⁹

In order to survive, many victims of ritual abuse keep their memories of abuse in the deepest parts of their minds and bodies; they often have no conscious recollection of the abuse and remember their abusers fondly. Some have continued contact with abusers who are thought of as friends or loving family members. For some survivors, the creation of multiple identities enables resistance to the will of abusers and also allows feelings of sanity and "normal" functioning in life.²⁰ So within one female body it can be true that some identities or personalities experienced and remember the torture while others have no memories because they did not consciously experience the abuse. Some parts or personalities within one woman's body may have been successfully indoctrinated into the abusers' belief systems while other parts remain

unaware. It is even possible for a survivor to perpetrate abuse on others without all of her selves being aware.

Lesbians who do not have multiple personalities must be very careful with this information. Do not assume that someone who is a ritual abuse survivor has more than one identity. Don't assume she does not. Do not assume that someone who has multiple personalities or identities is a perpetrator or is in denial about the abuse she has survived, but know that these are possibilities. Know that any female, and any lesbian in particular, who has survived ritual abuse and rejected the messages and roles that were forced upon her is an incredibly strong no-sayer to a powerful system of abuse and torture and control of females.

Abuse: 1. Misuse. 2. A corrupt practice or custom. 3. Maltreatment. 4. Insulting language (from the Latin *abusus*: a using up [my emphasis]).

Like other forms of abuse and control of females, ritual abuse survives on silence and complicity. Some females seem to get used up by ritual abuse. They become participants in the network of ritual abuse of children, women, and others. As "totalled women,"²¹ they seem to have no choice but to be complicit with their abusers in abusing other women, keeping the family secrets, and feeding racist heteropatriarchy. But some females are able to refuse to keep those secrets and feed those institutions. Each survivor of ritual abuse who tells her truth, who rejects her abusive family, who consciously or unconsciously chooses to create a reality in which she names her own abuse and the abuse of other females is a FAILURE for the institution of ritualized abuse of women, girls, animals, and others.

If our lesbian communities are places where we encourage and engage in the destruction of racist heteropatriarchal institutions, they must be places where survivors of ritual abuse (and all other forms of abuse) can tell their stories. They must be places which take survivors seriously. Unfortunately, the extent of the horror is just beginning to be exposed. What kinds of places or healing will we help provide with and for survivors, especially if we've rejected traditional and other forms of institutionalized therapy? Many ritual abuse survivors are understandably averse to "healing rituals" and "spirituality." If rituals tend to be places in which ideologies are presented as Truth, in which questioning is actively discouraged or silenced, and in which participants engage in behaviors to which they might not consent if they were to be held accountable as individuals, then perhaps lesbian feminist communities need to rethink the value of rituals in general. On the other hand, some ritual abuse survivors need "good" rituals in order to cleanse themselves of abuse. Our

critical thinking about ritual and/or spirituality should incorporate attention to such needs.

What many ritual abuse survivors seem to need is supportive listening and connection with other survivors of similar abuse. Those of us who are able and willing need to listen to survivors and educate ourselves about ritual abuse, while remaining critical of media and other mainstream representations. We also must think deeply about the connections among the many forms of abuse of women, girls, animals, and others, institutions of abuse which are killing and torturing girls right now, and continue our work against these interlocking forces.

Endnotes

¹For an excellent discussion of some of the problems with the role therapy plays in lesbian community, see Joan M. Ward, "Therapism and the Taming of Lesbian Community." *Sinister Wisdom*, 36, Winter 1988/89, 33-41.

²Los Angeles County Commission for Women, Report of the Ritual Abuse Task Force. *Ritual Abuse* (pamphlet, 1991).

³All definitions I use here come from the 1980 edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary*.

⁴It is actually nonsensical to so sharply distinguish between "physical" and "psychological" abuse. I hope the examples make clear the fact that physical abuse hurts the mind and psyche and that psychological abuse involves bodily degradation and harm.

⁵For example, some children and adult survivors report that they were raped by Mickey Mouse or some other fictional character. In actuality, a real abuser may have been wearing a mask so as to trick the child, and also to ensure that the child's stories would not be believed.

⁶Dr. Robert S. Mayer, *Satan's Children: Case Studies in Multiple Personality* (New York: Putnam, 1991), p. 84. Although Mayer's Freudian psychoanalytic perspective is problematic, this book provides lots of information about ritual abuse through case studies.

⁷Mayer, 102-103; Arthur Lyons, *The Second Coming: Satanism in America* (New York: Dodd Mead), p. 83.

⁸Unfortunately, sensationalization has brought suspicion on behaviors which may evidence satanic practice, but which are usually healthy forms of teenage rebellion, such as listening to loud rock music, drug experimentation, and unconventional clothing. I know that listening to loud, even violent rock music as a teenager was an important part of my early political rebellions and gave me useful models of aesthetic and social nonconformity.

⁹It is important to note that there are few reported cases of ritual abuse associated with Jews in the U.S. Despite the empirical and philosophical correlations between ritual abuse/satanism and christianity, fallacious charges of cannibalism and infanticide have been brought against Jews throughout history by anti-Semitic christians. For a thorough historical analysis see Alan Dundes,

ed., *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore* (Madison, WI: U. Wisconsin Press, 1991).

¹⁰Mayer, p. 84.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Mayer, p. 187.

¹³Pamela S. Hudson, "Therapy with Children Who Have Been Ritualistically Abused," unpublished.

¹⁴Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood and Privilege on Campus* (New York: NYU Press, 1990). She describes in detail fraternity initiation rituals which closely resemble common ritual abuse scenarios. Other powerful male institutions that have been mentioned in survivors' reports include the CIA, the Masons, and the Bohemian Club, an elitist male group based in San Francisco. In "Bohemia Ho. . .Ho, Ho, Ho," in *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry*, edited by Frederique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1987), Phyllis Luman Metal describes the opening ceremonies of the yearly meeting as having "the mood of an ancient Druid ritual." Ronald Reagan, other past and present heads of state, and two thousand of the richest and most powerful men in the U.S. are supposedly members of this club.

¹⁵*The Mercury News*, March 1985.

¹⁶Not surprisingly, there are not very good statistics on the race and class of perpetrators. I would welcome any further information or discussion.

¹⁷Mayer, 196.

¹⁸There is also clear evidence that serial killers such as Charles Manson, David Berkowitz, and Jeffrey Dahmer were involved in satanism and/or other cultic practices. See Larry Kahaner, *Cults That Kill* (New York: Warner, 1988).

¹⁹Elaine, an ex-satanist who appeared on the Geraldo Show #44, November 19, 1987. This show was a good example of the sensationalizing of satanic abuse.

²⁰For discussions and studies of ritual abuse and multiple personalities, see Mayer; Judith Spencer, *Suffer the Child* (New York: Pocket, 1989); Michelle Smith and Laurence Pazder, *Michelle Remembers* (Congdon and Lattes, 1980).

²¹This phrase is Mary Daly's.

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Daughter Rape, Lies, and Suicide*

Fox

The Big Lies

What does it mean that three times as many women as men are suicidal? It means that three times as many women as men are raped as children. It's hard to believe now that just such a short time ago, I didn't know this.

What does it mean that males' mystification of suicide has been so successful? That when we hear "suicide is a mystery," or "suicides are strange people who can't be understood," we don't question? It means we do not know how strong our will to live is, we don't know what we were born with.

It means we don't know who we are.

We are not born wanting to die. It takes extraordinary brutality to turn us to our own physical destruction. Having seen this struggle close up, I find most comments about suicide both enraging and absurd. She wants to kill herself because she's depressed about the sad state of the planet, maybe JMax killed herself because she didn't get the response to her class column that she wanted, teenagers kill themselves because their friends do, gay teenagers kill themselves because of homophobia, lesbians kill themselves because they aren't happy about being lesbians. Absolutely inadequate, all of these. Or we talk about suicide as a "choice" each of us has the right to make, as though someone seriously considering putting a loaded gun in her mouth and pulling the trigger is clear-minded, has a true sense of her alternatives, and has evaluated them all. (Most likely she is in a state of confusion and compulsion.)

In this issue, Kathy describes how her torturers programmed her to be suicidal. JMax's suicidalness was similar. Thoughts came into her mind that she had to die. Threatening figures came at her with knives. She felt that she was in a fog and that even though she knew the boys were responsible she couldn't stop the compulsion. This may mean she was programmed, or it may mean that all child rape includes some programming for suicide (and self-injury).

*My understanding of the issues discussed in this paper has benefited from conversations with Kathy and with Gayle Woodsum.



Programming is a way of carrying the past into the present, which in turn suggests that without programming we might be able to leave the demands of our pasts behind. The real tragedy of Jmax's suicide is that it was about horrible things, yes, but horrible things that were past and WERE NEVER GOING TO HAPPEN AGAIN. Sometimes we talk about "the terrible pain" a suicidal dyke is in. I want us to ask questions instead. Why is she in pain, what is causing it in her life now? If, as in JMax's case, nothing much is wrong with her life in the present, where does the pain come from? During memories survivors feel like they are reliving the past, but THEY ARE NOT. Their abusers are not there, and dykes that love them may very well be. Those of us who can and want to offer support, would do better to repeat this often to the survivor, rather than reinforce talk about her terrible pain or be philosophical about her right to commit suicide. Being romantic and philosophical about suicide is what the boys want us to be.

The violent reality of a dyke's suicide shocks us and we wonder what the immediate cause was, but we don't talk much about suicidalness at other times. I want to focus our attention on how many of us are living suicidally. It's not just suicide that takes a lesbian life, it's living suicidally. They steal our lives even as we live. And this is true as well for those of us who are not suicidal. They can only be successful at mystifying us about the causes of suicide because we are not living fully, because we have forgotten how far life is from death.

That suicide is inexplicable is Big Lie No. 1. Big Lie No. 2 is that some of us are born bad, or became bad magically. Or that our souls have been murdered or stolen. Even though I know that I was born good, I still believe in some parts of myself in my own badness, weakness, madness. JMax did not have access to any part of herself that believed she was born good. I tried to convince her that she had been—this incredibly intelligent, experienced, wise dyke, who continued to insist that she had been born bad and hated that little girl.

A survivor I know says, The severity of the abuse is measured by its effects. If you are badly hurt it is because you were badly abused. Very simple, yes? Try believing it for 5 minutes. Survivors tell themselves that it really wasn't so bad. That nothing that bad happened to them, they must have been born messed up.

If we believe we are born bad, then other lesbians can be born bad too. So many pieces in this issue give brave testimony to the devastation that daughter rape wreaks on lesbian lives. And yet, when we see a lesbian who is destructive to herself or to others, do we first think, She must have been raped as a child? Or, do we first think, Wow, she's really sick/bad/oppressive/messed up/male identified? The Myth of the Evil Lesbian is, I think responsible for the cruelty we can heap on each other.

When one of my sister's daughters was very young—she could only walk if she held your hand—I walked with her out into a courtyard full of flowers. She gave a squeal of pure delight that I will never forget. It was the kind of joy I could not even remember having felt. We are born good, full of love, joy, intelligence, and adventure. And from that point on they strive to rob us of our birthright.

Once again, looking at the extreme can help us understand the whole. In this issue, Kathy describes how the satanists tried to convince her that she had been made physically evil. That she had lost her soul. That she had no self. And she makes it clear that this was a monstrous con, because in fact SATANISTS DO NOT HAVE MAGICAL POWERS, they do not have the power to steal souls or turn souls evil. If they did they wouldn't have to take such horrible but absurd measures to convince the child they do. And she says something else important: The survivor may think she has no true self, that all her selves are false, but what she thinks are false selves are in fact true ones. This rings true to me about JMax. Though she often said she felt ungenueine, acting only to please others, in fact there was no one remotely like her.

Why are some tortured girls able to hold onto life and some sense of self? Perhaps their torture began at a later age. I think also that class and race oppressions are involved. The middle or upper class girl, even when severely tortured, is still trained in many ways to take care of herself in the outer world. Poverty undermines the ability to protect oneself. JMax was *actively prevented* in many ways from learning how to protect herself. And the lives of the most oppressed are so full of abuse, that it is hard to say when rape stops and some other torture begins.

Incest and Physical Illness

Suicidalness is not the only way incest diminishes lives. I suspect that incest is responsible for a lot more physical illness than we have yet fully understood. I do NOT mean that these illnesses are 'in the head' or can be cured by mental techniques, exercise or meditation (anymore than any physical illness can be). I am talking about child abuse as a physical cause of physical illness. The situation that first got me thinking about this was the death of a friend's lover. Yes, she smoked, but how many smokers die of emphysema at 39? Under hypnosis she remembered her father coming down the hall to assault her when she was an infant in her crib. She stopped breathing at these times and her lungs failed to develop. The same thing happened to the brother of another friend.

Child rape is an intense stress. Stress, especially when it is ongoing, has physical effects on the body. Because the immune systems are not fully developed, infants' and girl's bodies are more vulnerable than the bodies of (younger) adults. I am suspicious about all diseases that

affect women more than men, especially the 'mysterious' ones. And about immune system diseases and diseases which affect organs that respond to stress. MS, lupus, asthma, environmental illness, chronic fatigue, diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, hodgkin's disease and any other cancer that occurs in young adults, among whom cancer is rare.

Survivors, women nurses, and women physicians are beginning to talk about the correlation between daughter rape and 'gynecological' diseases and disorders. Roz Dutton addresses this in the Readers' Forum in this issue. I think we should talk more, too, about the direct physical effects of child rape: Sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, which are greatly increased by rape, where the victim doesn't get to "choose" a "safe" "partner"; the effects of child pregnancies and crude abortions; the reality that a child resulting from father-daughter rape has a 50% chance of being disabled. And so on. How many baby girls and girl children being raped as I write this are being infected with AIDS? (How many male cult members are getting it from the blood they drink? Great, except they are passing it on to girls. And what are they going to do to get 'safe' blood?)

I suspect it may be hard for a survivor to think about the lasting physical effects of the childhood assaults on her body. She would understandably hope that the psychological healing would be enough! I think, however, that we have to understand the true extent of the devastation caused by child rape and incest. I hope lesbian researchers will take on this task.

Sometimes Finding the Memories Isn't the Problem

I agonize over, If I knew then what I know now I had heard lesbians say, "The memories don't come until you're ready." DON'T BELIEVE IT. I trusted this, and I trusted JMax, that if she was finally confronting her childhood assaults, she could handle it. Also I had seen her go through an intensely suicidal period and a horrific suicidal cold turkey detox from xanax several years before and had been deeply impressed by her inner strength. You must understand that her ability to enjoy life and her will to live were very strong. Now I know reality is more complex. In the previous episodes she had decided not to pursue the incest, this time she did.

I now believe that the view I hear most often of how to heal is too narrow and perhaps too middle-class. We see the problem as one of remembering, unlocking the memories, working through the feelings. I suspect JMax needed more defenses, not fewer. Her memories and the associated feelings were in too-big chunks too close to the surface. I saw them, they manifested as hours-long sieges of terror. JMax needed to learn a variety of ways to control her own mind. I urgently want dykes to hear

this, I'm afraid there are other dykes out there like her who can be hurt in the same way she was. Thinking about and planning suicide was a major defense she had relied on all her life, although I know of only one actual attempt, when she was in high school. I suspect that all the times she had come close to an attempt operated as disinhibitors, that she had dismantled her own resistance to suicide piece by piece.

I also believe the treatments she found for herself were destructive. She did bodywork intensively and was getting a lot of colonics and acupuncture. Take VERY seriously lesbian survivors' cautions about bodywork. I hated seeing her after these treatments, I thought they were too invasive. I told her what I saw and thought, but she didn't stop. There isn't much I wouldn't give to have another chance to convince her. I would try to find someone in the community who was experienced at dealing with this kind of intense crisis who would put her foot down and say STOP IT.

We need to remember that memories trigger programming for suicide. In some cases, the deprogramming should perhaps be done before the memories are recovered. This is what they do to us: They plant their poison so that as we approach the truth we are punished. Survivors do get past this programming, but we must take care.

And as we approach love. She accuses me of causing her internal terror. Why? Because I am there. Why am I there? Because I love her. Because she loves me.

The great majority of therapists are either criminally ignorant about suicide or they are perpetrators. I have a young lesbian friend here who thinks of suicide everyday. She too feels knives coming at her. She attempted suicide and was in a day treatment program for 6 months. They gave her art therapy, which helped her for a while, but they DID NOT MENTION the possibility she had been raped as a child. This is the same system that produced Anne Sexton's renowned psychiatrist of many years, who didn't 'think' she was 'really' an incest victim. (Anne Sexton was a poet who killed herself.) Any survivor could read one paragraph describing her life and know. The only lesbians I meet who ASSUME a suicide was caused by child sexual abuse are survivors.

We must also realize that, just as cult members and perpetrators infiltrate school systems, they also infiltrate mental hospitals and therapy communities and they program their victims to do the same. Gayle Woodsum has pointed out to me that some ideas about healing in current circulation—for example, references to "soul theft" and "soul murder"—actually reinforce cult programming.

Lesbian Strength and Male Absurdity

Survivors are doing work that will benefit all of us. Learning how to tell the difference between feelings from the past and feelings of the present, dismantling programming—these are skills we all need to learn. By outlining the structure of child rape and child torture, they are showing us the patterns that the rest of us can then find hidden in our own herstories.

Consider that women are much more likely than men to be suicidal, but that men commit suicide more frequently (these are the statistics I hear, I don't know how good they are or where they come from). This is astonishing. Women's life force is so much stronger than men's, our urge to violence so much weaker. They can barely control us now, even with all their horrors, what will they be able to do when these methods don't work on us any longer?

Learning about cult abuse has taken my understanding of male sickness and emptiness to a deeper level. This disgusting system is reflected in all their disgusting systems: war, work, torture (where do they get their torturers?), religion (what is this stuff about consuming the body and blood of christ?), pollution and depletion of the earth, slavery, etc., etc.

But while the horror can overwhelm me, their absurdity and emptiness has never been more obvious to me. These boys running around in dresses and uniforms, chanting and mumbling nonsense, pointing at charts, constructing ever more complex smokescreens, ever more obsessive mazes, so we won't get it that they have no power and they have no magic. They want us to be horrified. They don't want us to laugh.

My Silent Self Speaks*

Sumica Midcalf

The first 17 years of my life were filled with physical, emotional and sexual abuse. I have spent a lot of years coming to terms with this issue, which was hidden from me and is so hidden in society, and finally have decided to talk about it. In this paper my long-silent self begins to speak. An important part of that is giving graphic descriptions of the abuse.

Incest began in my life when I was two years old. My stepfather and my mom had drinking gatherings. The incest happened towards the end of these gatherings. My stepfather would take me up to the bedroom and undress me. When I tried to cover myself up, he would prevent me by lying down on top of the covers at the bottom of the bed. I didn't understand why he would ask me if I could feel anything. He would put his hands on my stomach, which would scare me because I didn't feel as if I could breathe. Then he would begin sticking his finger into my vagina. I tried to squirm away but he would grab me by the hair, pull out his gun and tell me that if I moved, made any sounds, or told anyone, he would shoot me. I would lie very still and cry silently. He would show me things that he would then stick in my vagina: a pencil, a butter knife. Once he left the knife inside me and went downstairs to drink more. He told me not to move, because I would die. I don't recall how much time went by. I knew that I was wet and it was nighttime. When he returned, he wiped his penis across my face, put his hand across my mouth and put his penis in me. I cried and cried and passed out. When I woke up, my sister was changing the bed. I was not wet anymore but had a large piece of cotton between my legs (which I now know was kotex). The only thing my sister said was that I was bleeding from a cut, and that she cleaned me up.

These rapes continued until I was at least five years old. I always wondered where my brothers, sisters, and mom were and if my mom liked me or not.

At the age of seven, I went to live with my father whom I had never met until that day. He introduced me to his kids and wife. The first day I met him, he and his wife got into a physical fight. He dragged her down the stairs and then left for two days. Every time they got into fights, she wouldn't comb my hair, and I would have to wear the same clothes to

*Thank you to Jamie Hecker for her help and patience and for being consistent in my life.

school and bed. Ever since the incest began, I had wet my bed. During this time, if I wet the bed I had to go to school still smelling of urine.

Because my father and his wife worked second shift, I was left home with my stepsister and three stepbrothers. My stepsister was 13 years old and had started to have sex with males. She enjoyed making me have sex with my stepbrother who was 12 years old. I would cry and cry and they would scream at me about being a baby. He would rub his penis against my vagina and then squirt semen all over me. My stepsister and brother would then laugh and laugh. I felt ugly, nasty and dirty.

Then I returned to my mom's house. My family never included me in conversations. If I was present I was invisible to them. I loved hiding in closets. By the time I was three years old, I would hide in closets, and I felt very secure in them . . . until I was nine. That summer my mom was having one of her drinking parties with Eddy, her boyfriend, two of my uncles and a family "friend," Frank the policeman. All of the men had been sexually assaulting me at various times. This time, they all got together. I was hiding in my bed where I spent a large percentage of my time. Frank pulled me up out of the bed and proceeded to put his finger between my legs. He took off my socks while whispering to me that I was a whore. He tied the sock around my wrist and took me into the closet. He tied my wrists to the coat rod, took off the underwear and began squeezing my breasts. He closed the door and left me hanging there. I don't know how long I was there. Then all four of them returned together and poured liquor on me. My uncle put his penis in my ass. I felt like I was dying. All I could think was that I must not scream because he was a good friend of my mother's, and I knew she wouldn't believe they were doing this. They raped me, and I had to suck them off.

When I was seven years old, the school counselor decided that I needed counseling, because by then I was cutting my wrists with razor blades and giving myself eraser burns. By the time I was nine years old, I had a nervous breakdown. They put me in a state mental institution. This was the beginning of my education into how the system deals with Black children and incest. I was hospitalized for six years at four state institutions. At the age of nine I was put on 250 mg. of thorazine four times a day. I couldn't move or talk. I would see a therapist once every two weeks for five minutes. No one ever asked me why I wanted to die. Every therapist I saw, when I began to talk about the sexual abuse, would say my mother was doing the best she could and why was I such a liar, or else they would end the conversation.

My medication was changed to mellaril in high dosage. I stopped talking about the sexual abuse. I began slicing myself with a razor. They put me in restraints for two days. It seemed like cutting myself was the only thing I could do to get attention. While I was in the hospital I could go

home for weekends. My mother's boyfriend would continue to rape me while I was there. One time I had gonorrhea; the hospital staff treated me for it and told me, that was what I got for being promiscuous. I could never say that I was being fucked by my mom's boyfriend.

I got out of these institutions at the age of 16 and went right back home. Now I was on tranquilizers that I took to keep me down. By this time, my mother's boyfriend was beating her a lot. I would hide in my room like I did when I was younger. My mom's boyfriend told me that if I sold my body to his friends and brought in \$500/week, he wouldn't beat her. I did it for awhile and learned that, of course, he lied.

I left my mother's house when I was 16. Today I'm 32 and am still piecing together how this emotional, sexual and physical abuse has affected me. I have tons of phobias—the dark, my family coming to get me, open closet doors, etc. It's very hard for me to believe in my thoughts and feelings and to communicate them. I'm very insecure about friendships and love relationships, I have a strong fear of abandonment. Physical touch is hard for me to give or receive. I have poor academic skills, having missed six years of school. I never feel financially secure, because I can never make enough money to stop the chaos of my life.

I'm angry at the white, male system that cared so little about me as a Black child that it lied about what was happening to me (lied so much that I began to believe I was the liar) and that punished me for things that weren't under my control. They experimented on me with drugs and gave me drugs so that I could be forgotten. I believe I developed an addiction to marijuana because of having been so heavily medicated as a child. Marijuana helps keep me numb to my past. I have low self-esteem. I feel that my feelings and thoughts don't matter. This is still confirmed even now, because society doesn't want to hear what Black women and children have to say. I remember attempting to bring up the abuse in therapy when I was 18. The white, female therapist told me that incest was not an issue for Black people, that it only happens to whites.

A Black child gets burned by the system even when she does come to the attention of the authorities as being in an abusive family. They may remove you and give you a sense of hope, but in the end you will be back in the same abusive family system, either because there is no place for you to go or because there is no money. The system is about money and power. So if you are a Black female child, you are at the bottom of the hierarchy.

I have lost many years of my life. That brings me great anger and great sadness. I need and want to feel comfortable with myself.

When I was 25, a therapist told me that I was an incest survivor. It was the first time that reality had been confirmed. For so many years I had

felt something was wrong and no one would confirm it. Now I became ENRAGED. I felt I had to tell everyone I met that I was an incest survivor, so I could repeat the process of confirmation.

I began going to groups with women. This was in 1984-85. I felt great that I had something with which to identify. However, incest was just beginning to be a "popular" issue. I found that group leaders didn't really have the skills to cope with all the effects incest had on women. They didn't maintain boundaries, and didn't or couldn't deal with the more intense problems such as suicide. I was always the only Black in these groups. The leaders presented the groups as a group of peers working together but weren't even remotely educated about class and racial differences. They operated from a white, middle-class value system. There are lots of value and cultural differences based on class and race. On these issues, I felt no affirmation of myself and my reality.

When I talked about incest in the Black community, about moral and religious beliefs that serve to justify its existence and isolate the victims, group leaders said that it was just like poor Appalachian whites. I don't think so. Historically and currently, the Black woman's life is filled with pain and pressure. Her pain is held up as an ideal. It's almost like the worse your life is, the more "powerful" you are; your abuse/pain is a positive thing.

My favorite kind of group is a 12 step group. It is very structured and so boundaries are maintained. No one can respond to what you said and it ends in one hour. I've done a lot of individual counseling and have had some good and some bad experiences. It has been my experience that many white counselors do not understand racial differences. They listen to and understand each other easily, but they become frustrated with and do not want to do the extra work necessary to understand Black lesbians. It wasn't until whites in 12 step programs began to acknowledge incest for themselves that there was a sudden swift growth in specialists and therapists to deal with it. They mostly treat whites with privilege and therefore have white values. Where does that leave Blacks?

Sometimes I sit in my groups and wonder, where are all the Black women? It seems to me that incest is viewed as acceptable by the Black community. In slavery, a Black woman was used to being raped by the masters, the husband and whoever wanted to dominate her. I remember my cousin telling me that I was a woman: I should be able to live through and take this abuse which has happened to so many Black women for so many years. This was what Black girls were supposed to do to keep peace in the family. In the Black community, we are so busy protecting the Black male that women refuse to hear their children screaming for help. To tell what the Black male is doing to our family system is said to oppress Black men and our race.

In the Black community, to get therapy is considered a white person's thing. It confirms to the whites that we are fucked up. (And so we end up supporting the lie that societal oppression does not cause us problems.) I have felt shame in reaching out for help. The feedback from Black friends and relatives was that strong.

Black incest survivors need therapy, we need guidance. To help heal, I have used yoga, exercise, relaxation tapes, reading about other women and their triumphs over obstacles, and being playful whenever I can. If Black women don't acquire these and other positive skills for surviving incest, we will continue to die in deep shame.

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Lesbians Surviving Childhood Rape

A Readers' Forum

I Know You Know

I am an incest survivor. On Sunday, August 11, 1991, I travelled 5-1/2 hours to the first Harris family reunion in at least 20 years, and handed leaflets to my family. The leaflet also included facts about incest and some resources for incest survivors. I did not reach as many people as I had envisioned, but interestingly enough the family members that I know were abused by the prick who abused me (my uncle) were all present. And the woman whose child I feared might be left alone with him was there.

My cousin K had already told. She told her brothers and her husband; and she confronted the same perpetrator, her father, telling him that she did not want to see or talk to him. She got sympathetic support from some—the sort of sympathy a person might get for a broken leg or some other blameless misfortune. But the knowledge

of incest as a political act, an act of continuing hatred of one gender by another, was no doubt conspicuously missing. The anger and knowledge that the perpetrator is responsible and should be held accountable for his actions was not present. Encouragement to tell others was certainly not forthcoming. This is the support a woman gets from patriarchy: none.

I am a Dyke, and virtually all the people I discuss my life and the world with are Lesbians and feminists. When I began to talk about the incest, the people I told understood immediately that what happened to me was part of the vast, interlocking violence that is patriarchy. Women were angry, even furious, at the perpetrator. I was rewarded for telling. Women believed me, encouraged me in my telling, and from the moment I made known my decision to leaflet, responded with incredible love and warmth and enthusiasm.

Lesbian ethics call for us to tell—to confront patriarchy, to spill the beans, to point the finger—and to aid and abet women who are victims or survivors of male violence in any of its forms.

Kate Ellis

I was
sexually abused
by
Tom Harris, Sr.

from the time I was about 6 to the time I was 12 years old. - Alice (Niece)

Why am I distributing this?

- Because for my own peace of mind, I must speak out.
- Because I know that two others have been abused by Tom Harris, Jr., and I suspect that many have.
- Because children should be protected from Tom Harris Jr. I wish I had a son!

Learning to Cry, Learning to Speak

Tuesday, Dad's day off. I have a sleep in the afternoons. Mum goes to clean her uncle's house. Dad looks after me. She tells me to be good for Dad. I hear her footsteps fading as she walks down the road to the bus stop. It's deadly quiet. I fade in and out of myself, fear comes really bad.

I hear him coming today, sometimes he just sort of appears, like some sort of evil magic. I'm scared, my stomach shakes, my feet and hands shake, I'm cold, I'm hot, I'm scared.

He puts his things onto the tallboy next to my bed. He pushes me out of the way while he puts the big grey blanket down on my bed. I'm so scared I want to go to the toilet, I don't, I've got to try to be good this time. He says if only I was good it wouldn't hurt as much. He talks all the time, his voice comes out sort of funny. He takes my clothes off, I let him, he folds them all up. Roll over and show me what a good girl you can be, I'm on my stomach, I can't see him, I can hear what he's doing. The smell of the vaseline, my stomach churns, I want to be sick, I won't be, he gets angry when I'm sick. I hear the squelching noise, his hand grabs one side of my bottom, it's like a cold lump of glue on me, he grabs my hair and pulls my shoulders off the bed, Mum's too nice and good to do things like this, she doesn't do bad things, I try to get away from him, I move towards the wall. You have to wreck it all the time don't you, now I'll have to stop you moving. He ties my wrists together to the side of the bed. If only you'd cooperate it wouldn't have to be like this. My whole body goes so tight, like it's going to break. He gets me by my hips, pulls me up off the bed, Relax enjoy it you know you really want to. All of myself off the bed now, ropes hurt, I wonder if my hands will fall off. Mum says tight things around your wrist make your hand fall off. I hope my hands fall off, he might stop. It hurts, feel like I'm splitting open, it hurts all the way up to my throat, he's getting angry, If you can't do this it will have to be Dawn or Brian. You're no good at it, you can't ever do as you're told. I want to do as I'm told, it just hurts so much I can't help it. Looks like we'll have to use the girl opener, doesn't hurt me but it will hurt you, one day you'll learn to do as you're told. I'm crying, he's laughing, he picks up one of my legs, he pushes the stick up into my anus, I want to do a poo, I don't, then he'd get really angry, he laughs and laughs, I can't stop crying, he hates me crying, he's pushing it in and out. I get out, it's better when I get out, it's like it all stops for a while, Now he's got his thing in me, I'm back, I want to be sick it hurts so much, he laughs and laughs, he pulls my hair, I can see his face laughing in the mirror, he keeps going, then he stops.

He walks away from me, I hear him turning the bath on. My hands haven't fallen off, they never do, he'll come and get me soon. He pushes

me under the water, laughs all the time, I swallow water can't breathe, going to die, I hope I die, he pulls me out of the water, waters all pink, little bits of poo floating in it. I can't stand up, he's trying to dry me, I keep falling over, What are you shaking for, all this fuss over nothing.

Back in my room, Dad's whistling, dresses me, folds up the blanket, puts me to bed, kiss goodnight, tongue yukky, still shaking, stop before Mum gets home, have to, go to sleep.

One day in March 1990, I visited my parents. My father poked me in the stomach with a pool cue, just being playful. By invading my body just once too often he had provided me a key to unlock the memories of a childhood of horror. It was like unlocking flood gates when my memories began returning. I was three years old again, I could see myself being raped, I could feel myself being raped, I could smell myself being raped, I could hear myself being raped.

Since I began having memories my life has fallen apart around me. My entire life suddenly became a huge lie. Wanting to be dead a constant option that sometimes looks wonderful sometimes scary. Knowing that only death can bring the kind of cleansing I crave.

Sometimes I'm so frightened I lock myself in my flat hiding under the bedcovers. For days I can stay like that not wanting anybody, not asking for help. Learning to cry, I can now spend hours crying myself to exhaustion, pain slowly seeping out until it's bearable again. At other times being alone scares me so much that I go to friends looking for that elusive feeling of safety.

The positive side, there is one, as time goes on I am less often reliving my life as a young child. The memories have slowed down. Slowly I'm finding some essence of myself. Some days now I go out and forget that I need to be afraid. There are even some times that I don't think about my father, being raped or the pain.

The support and love given by friends is my lifeline. Not always understanding but loving. Often questioning but yet still accepting. The guidance, support and caring of a great counselor has also been vital. Someone who pushes me so gently that I often was unsure that I was being pushed. Someone that can back off when I say stop.

I would like to see rape and child rape become subjects that are often spoken about. The louder, the more vocal and aggressive we are in telling our stories, the more people will have to listen. We as wimmin have for centuries been raped, tortured and murdered. It has to stop. I would like to see survivors of rape come together. We could share experiences and strengthen coping strategies. We could create our own voice, our own power and our own lives.

Helland Duncan

Blood and Words

Our bodies don't lie. They tell us again and again in different ways—"We still feel the pain. There is pain in every cell." I want to write specifically about an obvious yet rarely discussed effect of sexual abuse/incest: menstrual problems—endometriosis, fibroids, painful periods, absence of periods, and other problems with the ovaries and uterus. Since sexual abuse is a trauma that directly affects our sexual selves it seems logical that our vaginas and menstrual periods would be affected.

I have only made the connection for myself within the last several months. But that knowledge helped me diminish the psychological symptoms that accompanied my period—the severe dissociation, feeling as though someone is taking over my body, hearing a voice inside my head say, "Your body is not your own." I have felt that way for so many years I am relieved to know the thoughts and reactions come from my abuse and not from some form of my own craziness.

I am now recovering from an abdominal hysterectomy, my final solution after years of working with non-traditional healers. With the help of those healers finally I was able to diminish the dissociation and psychological mini-trauma I experienced every 24 days, but I still had the fibroids and endometriosis within me.

I lost my uterus and one ovary to gain my freedom from the cyclic horror of my periods. They were a constant reminder, a form of slow self-torture. I hope other women like me will free themselves in whatever way they choose from the tyranny of their periods and release the physical hold of the sexual abuse on their lives. I hope some woman will research the connections between sexual trauma and pelvic/menstrual pain.

By not wanting to know about our abuse we hold ourselves accountable for what someone else did. By not recognizing that menstrual problems can be caused by sexual abuse, we hold our own bodies culpable for the pain someone else inflicted. Let's put the responsibility where it belongs.

Roz Dutton

Incest, Surviving It

When I was 35, I discovered that I was a survivor of incest. I am now 45. The first cock I remember sucking is my brother's. I remember being a little girl and being held down by my brother, his friends, and/or one or more male cousins. They pulled down my underpants and examined, and touched and stuck things in my vagina. They made me kiss and touch their pricks.

I remember being a little girl and my grandfather sticking his fingers in my little girl vagina and french kissing me. I remember being a teenager and my middle aged dentist rubbing his prick up against me and reaching under my skirts and shirts to feel me up. I remember my mother's uncle trying to grab and fondle my cousin and me. I am now beginning to remember that my father and his brother also molested me. In addition to sexually abusing me most of these men and boys were often cruel to me in other ways.

I am beginning to understand how much of my life has been lived in response to the abuse I experienced as a child living with my rapists. I was actively suicidal for 35 years; cutting my wrists, ODing on various drugs. Using downers and alcohol in combination. Driving too fast under the influence of any and every thing. Being a call girl in San Diego when the hillside strangler was brutally murdering call girls. Being a topless dancer and going home with whoever took me. Hitching around the country getting rides from men who would often end up raping me. Living with and marrying a man who regularly beat the shit out of me and sometimes my daughters and threatened to kill us all.

Being an incest survivor has had a major economic impact in my life. Most of my jobs have been servicing other people, usually men. Except for my work in the sex and entertainment industries, my wages have been consistently low and my jobs often unpleasant. Presently I am paid \$6.75/hr after three years of working in a group home for adults with disabilities. Before this I was on welfare for 10 years. And when I do have money it is hard for me to use it for myself. It is much easier to give it away or get ripped off. For most of my life I have had to depend on my family of origin to supplement my income. It has been crazy making trying to reconcile my dyke separatist identity to the fact that I remained financially dependent on the men who abused me.

As a little girl I learned that "home and family" is where you get hurt more than anywhere else. The only people I have felt truly safe with have been my daughters, and that has placed an incredible burden on them. The place I feel safest is alone in my car.

Remembering and disclosing the truth are healing processes for me. They allow me to reject the shame and to hold my perpetrators responsible for their violence. Talking with other lesbian survivors and working with a lesbian therapist who is herself a survivor are helping me heal from incest. Sometimes I think it's not worth it, that just surviving isn't enough. Sometimes I am aware that I am getting stronger and I am healing and I do have more control of my life. And so it goes.

ANA R KISSED
(Cathy McIntyre)

Death Machine

Family Rape. It shattered my life. Survivor? I'm not sure. At times I have no idea if I will survive. They were fairly successful, they systematically destroyed me, fragmented my mind and soul.

I remember them so clearly, working together, jointly contributing to my destruction. Parents. I looked to them for all my needs. I was a small, small child. We were already beaten down. Racism and classism were destroying us anyhow. None of my needs were cared for. Hunger, cold, pain. I struggled each day to survive. I was four or five.

I remember them handcuffing and tying me to the bed. I remember the beatings, the suffocating, the laughter, the humiliation, the Rape, the pain searing through my body. "It will never stop." That was my thought, my only thought. "This pain will never stop." And it hasn't. I feel it still today. I see it tear me apart, with every touch I receive, with each effort I make to be intimate.

For me breathing is an effort, often a struggle. They suffocated my screams, and now my lungs struggle to do a basic task. Breathe. Leather straps, handcuffs, rope, these are things I can't look at without feeling a wave of nausea spread throughout me.

My parents were part of the death machine, caught beneath their own oppression, instruments of the oppressor, the system, with the destruction of females their goal. At first they thought I would self destruct. Drugs, homelessness, violence, abuse, they were sure I'd never make it. But I have an amazing strength they didn't know about, and I broke free.

I still survive today. Sometimes I'm depressed. I know where it comes from. At times I've been suicidal. I know where it comes from. I did drugs. I did S/M. I did anorexia. I lived on the streets. I took violence and abuse. I hated myself, and destroyed myself some more. But now I see that I was becoming another part of their machine. No more will I contribute to my destruction.

Today I love myself. It's not simple. It sounds simple sometimes, just love myself, but it's hard. It's also my survival. Today I will survive. I will eat. I will think clearly. No one will beat me. I will laugh a healing laugh. I will cry healing tears. Today I will survive.

Chana Solomon

I am an Israelite, poverty class, disabled, lesbian separatist. I have been a lesbian all my life. I am a survivor of many forms of heteropatriarchal demolition, including mental health oppression, lesbian battery, and drug addiction, as well as all those described above. I am also a lover, dreamer, artist, writer, musician, herbalist, and animal rights activist. I live on lesbian land in south Oregon.

May the Circle Be Broken!

As a child I used to wonder how my friends could remember events in their lives. Family gatherings, vacations, special occasions. My memory was told to me. I could feel nothing and could remember nothing. I sometimes could not tell if I thought a thing, or if my thoughts were also myth. Indeed I wondered if I really existed or if I was just some observer.

I reminded myself that I was the one who was lucky; my family told me that we, my mom and siblings, got out before I had to go through the rape and beatings of my father. Nothing was ever said about my mother.

I took my first drink that I remember when I was five, when I visited my oldest brother. My next method to help shove those ghost memories down was when I was 11 and developed a lump on my spine. I got pain killers and stayed zoned as long as I could. When I was 12 I found pot.

My mother died the summer after I turned 14, after having been very sick with cancer for several years. Other than sadness, my main feeling was of release! I couldn't quite understand. I lived with different siblings until I finished high school. During much of that time I used some mood altering drug. When I was 17, I started doing cocaine and found my drug. Alcohol was my favorite, and with coke I could drink a lot.

I should have died many times and almost craved that excitement. I challenged death and fate. My drug use accelerated. The fear was with me, but took the form of anger. I picked fights with people twice my size. I took pride in the fact that I rode with bikers without fucking them. I picked fights with groups of people. I would have gladly have faced that pool team I picked on.

I went to college when I was 23. It was during my work in sociology that I slowly began to take a look at myself and my family. I gave up drugs. I got into therapy. I began to let those fears have a voice. I began to remember my mother putting her feet and hands on me during the night. I remembered her making me sleep with her until my siblings confronted her one too many times, or until I could no longer be made to. When I remembered this abuse by my mother I had a hard time believing it. Society at least acknowledges to some degree that men rape and abuse, but does not allow women to be sexual or have power.

My rage had a name. I finally understood a part of myself. It was at this point that I came out as a lesbian. In the middle of pain and terror, I finally felt free to be who I really was. Once I remembered the abuse by my mother, I no longer had to mask it.

I was 26 when I was raped by a woman that I had known for several years. When she raped me, and said she was raping me, I was a child again. I was defenseless. I realized that when I was drinking, I had no defense against abuse. When I was drinking, I could not feel.

Five months later I got sober. It was only after I got sober that I really began to remember the abuse I went through. I was very depressed, on suicide alert for over two years. The abuse that I suffered from my dad consisted of rape and beatings. I remembered him on top of me when I was a baby, raping me. Suffocating me so I couldn't breathe. To remember him means death to me, to the child me. He would grin like he had gotten away with something. He violated me in every way that a person can. He clearly saw this rape as his right. This was a way to take power. My power. I am just starting to reclaim that part of me he forced me to shove to the back of my child mind—the part of me that is intuitive and has sensory knowledge of where I am, what I need and what I am experiencing. The abuse I suffered at the hands of my mother was less physically brutal and more emotional, less visibly destructive but more difficult to confront or name. This is so even though there was at least seven years of continuous abuse.

I remember surviving, often with barely enough to eat. Sometimes not knowing where I could sleep. I remember hanging on. I remember telling myself that I needed to get through high school. I remember being nine years old and cutting my arm with glass. I remember my brother setting me up with his friends when I was 14 and they were 27 and 40.

The drugs that saved me from losing my mind or committing suicide had begun to kill me. Alcohol had saved my life; I felt too much pain to live without the anesthesia. But it came very clear to me that if I did not quit drinking I would die, and would have survived for nothing.

The abuse was power; the rape was not sexual, for either of my parents. It was a way they chose to meet their needs to feel powerful. I see it as very important to hold these rapists, no matter what their backgrounds, responsible for their individual choices and behavior. I believe we as a community need to accept that rape happens at the hands of both genders. Hopefully then we can reclaim the power that we lose in denying this.

Ellyn Taylor

I have moved from my home in Eugene, Oregon to Cleveland Ohio. I am healing and refuse to participate in using power over anyone or anything, to the best of my ability.

For Friends and Partners of Suicidal Dykes

This is a list of some things I've learned and thoughts I've had about suicide, primarily from the point of view of and for a friend or partner.

You're right, **you can't handle it alone**. You will want to, because you will feel very vulnerable. And to friends of the friend or partner: Offer your help and offer it again, even if she doesn't ask.

Suicides are likely to happen at holiday time.

Suicides can happen as things seem to be getting better (one suggested explanation is that when you are at the bottom you don't have the energy to do it).

The dyke may have been intensely anxious and talking about suicide or she may give you no clue.

Suicides can happen when external life problems have been overcome, because then she knows those successes haven't solved the internal problems.

Suicide is murder. Suicidal lesbians do kill their lovers as well as themselves.

Suicide can be preceded by a period of calm and insight. But the calm will be distant and detached. Suicide may occur as anxiety begins to return.

Suicide requires detaching from the life and loved ones around you. Suicide note writing may actually stop, because the activity keeps her connected to others. She may think that she can convince you that she should die, she may try to talk you into dying with her.

She may get in touch with people she's been estranged from, contact others to say what you will realize afterwards was good-bye.

People say, "You know it doesn't mean she didn't love you." I don't understand this. When you love someone you want to be with them.

If a lover is talking to you about killing herself, she is telling you she thinks a lot about leaving you forever. Is there any point in staying then? Is there even still a relationship?

If you are living with or very close to someone who is suicidal and in therapy, you have the right, for your sake and hers, to go to therapy with her sometimes.

And you should stay in touch with someone who is experienced and knowledgeable about suicide, someone you can talk to about what is happening. Such people are not easy to find.

I imagine her thinking in the split second after she pulled the trigger, "This was a mistake." I have, any friend or partner has, the right **NOT TO BE COMPLICIT** in a suicide. That means you have the right to stop her. If she means it, she can figure out a way to do it so you don't know ahead of time.

Stopping a suicide does not solve the problem of suicidalness, it just gives her another chance to live. If she can be distracted for a time the

crisis may pass. She has many other chances for suicide if you do stop her, no chances to live if you don't.

Be prepared to lose the relationship if you do stop her.

Besides prozac, other dangerous drugs are prednazone (spelling?), a steroid which can cause deep depression at some doses in some people, and xanax, an anti-anxiety drug which is dangerous when you go off it, worse than valium.

I still shake when I open a dyke publication, wondering will I see her picture, find an article about her, will what I read be true. The dykes who are at "ground point zero" should be told ahead of time when something is going to be printed.

Fox

I See You Now

It's a Saturday morning and I am lying in bed too late. My short, wild, white-haired grandmother comes into the bedroom that I share with my two sisters and yanks the cover off me. I don't remember what I was doing, if anything. But she gives me a look. I feel guilty. Perhaps I have been caught masturbating?

In first grade I told my teacher that I wish I was dead. That I wish I had never been born.

I don't remember much about my childhood before the age of ten. As a teenager, I was always afraid to be in the house alone with my father but I didn't know why. He had never done anything to me except physically beat me, which started when I was 10 and stopped when I was 12. In 1969 I lived in Blythe, CA and worked as a parole officer. I think I had sexual intercourse for the first time then but I am not sure. I cannot remember. I often wondered why.

In 1988, I was working as a lawyer for legal aid in Albuquerque, NM. The continual build up of stress in my body became intolerable, and I decided to try rolfing. It worked and it brought about the release of long pent up energies. I began to remember some of my earlier life. I remember my father picking me up out of my crib when I was about eight months old and carrying me into the living room. I remember my father riding me around on the floor playing horsey. I remember being seven and dressed in my Easter finery with shiny black shoes and my father taking hold of both my hands and dancing in a circle with me. For many years I had mourned my loveless childhood. My mother didn't have any love for us, a fact she'll admit to this day. But with this new discovery, that my father was the one who gave me affection, I was happy. Happy that I did have love as a child, only from the wrong parent.

About a year later I was at a friend's house watching a video about Dr. Elizabeth Morgan and her fight to save her daughter from the daughter's sexually abusive father. A psychologist rattled off a list of symptoms that suggested when a child had been sexually abused: no childhood memories, extremely depressed, suicidal, precocious sexual behavior, abuse of drugs or alcohol, abuse of food, cannot recall first sexual experience, sexual problems as an adult. I heard no more of the tape. I knew someone who had every single one of those symptoms. Me.

I went home and researched the topic. One expert claims that no child would be suicidal but for sexual abuse. Even young children who are physically abused, even beaten and tortured brutally, are not suicidal; only young children who have been sexually abused. My death wishes in first grade continued throughout much of my life. In high school I was obsessed with suicide and considered it constantly. While I don't remember it, my sisters tell me that I was very suicidal my first year in college. Certainly my eating and drinking behaviors which continued until I was 44 and 32 respectively are society's acceptable but slow method of suicide.

The next night I retired to my meditation space. I went deeper and deeper into myself asking all the while, is it true, is it true? The answer came back a clear and unequivocal, Yes. "No," I cried outloud. "No, it can't be. I'm making it up. I'm crazy. . . . I won't believe it. It hurts too much. I won't give up my loving father who I just found." Yet I knew that's just how battered women feel. That's just how abused children feel. They don't believe it. They think they must be crazy or making it up. They don't want to give up what little snatch of love they have stolen from this world. And I knew it was true. I cried in such racking pain that I thought I would vomit.

Then I began to remember my childhood. Memories that were left buried until I could cope.

At eight months, I lie in my parents' room in my crib perpendicular to their bed. It is night. My father gets up, picks me up and carries me down the hall to the living room. It is August. It is hot. I have on only a diaper. He removes it and begins to rub my genital area and then lick it. A creak from a floorboard in the hall explodes like a shot in the quiet night. My mother enters the living room. "What are you doing?" "Nothing. Changing her diaper. She was crying." His voice is raw, pent up sexual energy pulsing through his loins.

"Let me have her." He handed me over and she put me back in the crib, laid on the bed and turned her back to my father.

My two sisters slept in the double bed and I slept in a single bed across the room. I always slept on my back with my knees bent,

together, and swaying back and forth. It was thus I rocked myself to sleep at night. But one night I woke up and saw the shadow of my father in the door. "No," I recall screaming silently to myself. "He can't do anything here. My sisters are in the other bed. He won't do anything here."

He came in, picked me up and took me into the living room. I remember the weight, the suffocating weight of his heavy body on mine. I remember the smell, the smell of a body excreting alcohol through it's pores. For many years I thought that was just the way men smelled. And I remember the pain, the screaming, searing pain as he shoved his penis into me. I don't remember any more about that night. I left my body which was the method of survival I used from then on.

Now that the memories were coming strongly, every other night I would go to my meditation space to try and remember more. To try and work out of me the anger and hatred, the grief and mourning that scarred my life. I asked the heavens, "Is there more?" The answer, to my surprise, was, Yes. "What else could he have done to me for gods sakes. Sold me?" Instantly I knew it was true.

The dark kitchen of the bar smelled of hamburger and grease and stale beer. Spots of light gleamed off the shiny aluminum like wild animal eyes piercing through the dark. The man held me around my waist and was violently smashing my small body on his rigid penis. I screamed.

He growled, low lie the beast he was, "Shut up or I'll kill you." I knew then it was not my father. He never said those things when he raped me. I shut up.

When he finished, he stood me on the floor and then, gripping me tightly by the shoulders, forced me to my knees. He rammed his penis into my mouth until I gagged. Finally satiated, he zipped his pants and walked out.

As I stepped out of the hall into the bar, every man turned and stared at me—leering, smirking. I turned and walked swiftly back through the kitchen and out the back door into the dark, unknown night, alone.

I was only 8 years old.

Someone recognized me and gave me a ride home. I don't know what I told my mother. I don't remember any other incidents of actual assault but I do remember walking to school in the morning feeling like a marionette, a puppet on a string. Pick up this foot. Put it down. Swing arm forward. Swing arm back. I was not there. I was not in that 8 year old body, ritually moving down the main street to the school house.

When I entered the schoolroom my mind jumped to alertness. "I can do this," I thought. "I can excel here." I could add and subtract and read and think far beyond my chronological years. I could control what happened to me here. I cared about being in control. It was the only place I could be.

Darian

A Lesbian Who Loves Herself Can Do Most Anything

i have been doing intensive incest work since fall of 84. when the memories first came, it felt like i had just been violated yesterday; i would feel numb, sick to my stomach all day, full of grief and pain with my mouth and cunt hurting.

after awhile, my memories had a box to fall into: when i remembered yet another rape, the memory would go into the box labeled rape and the energy required to get thru the memory was reduced. gradually, more categories were made and there were less memories that threw me to the floor gasping for a pain-free breath. i now have places and strategies for dealing with toddler and baby rape, gang rape, father rape, being used for child pornography, beatings, and being molested by womyn. every once in awhile i find it necessary to spend a whole night and day on a memory, but usually i can work thru it in an afternoon or evening.

all of my close friends are lesbians who understand the dynamics of incest and are not afraid to listen to my stories or to hold me as i remember. this support is crucial to my healing. there is part of me who is always fearless in going back into that chasm of terror and isolation that is being violated as a girl; sometimes this part of me needs a mirror. without this circle of loving hearts and hands i wouldn't have love and gentleness reflected back at me, but instead fear and uncertainty. this doesn't mean i demand loving attention of my friends unceasingly and on call. but there is a difference between a lesbian who can't be there for me at a particular moment and one who is afraid of me or my stories.

my most crucial tool for fighting back is learning to love myself. it's such a simple thing: self love. my favorite womyn to be around are lesbians who love to live their lives, who aren't afraid of change, who strive to love themselves deeply and without question. the longer i am on such a path, the more centered and powerful i feel. in loving ourselves, we reclaim what they tried to take away from us in the first place.

kaseja O.

i am a white, working class presently able-bodied dyke separatist living in the cuntree. my vision is to live on land with a circle of lesbians who love and share deeply in intimate community. i welcome correspondence from like-minded lesbians: p.o. box 143, Wolf Creek, OR 97497.

Cleaning Dead Birds

1.

My father's students brought him gunnysacks of dead birds, mallard ducks, Canadian Geese, they had shot down over Flores Lake. Rifles left in the back windows of pickups, they lumbered up to our house, rubber boots muddy, mumbled about hunting season, too many birds that afternoon, see you Monday, Mr. Radcliffe, left quickly.

We cleaned mallards at his workbench, wet feathers burlap, he'd cut the gizzards open, dark and course, bits of crushed gravel inside, I'd play with the guts, stretch the intestines out long, blood on my hands, shirt, red and fierce.

Eating the roasted birds, sometimes I'd bite down on buckshot, taste hard and acid.

That was twenty years ago and now if students come bearing lifeless gunnysacks to my father's door, they are younger than I am.

2.

Twenty years and my father plans his second wedding, invites me.

I trace old maps wondering where the ceremony will be held: clearing at the foot of Humbug Mountain, Sixes River Grange Hall, church down the street from the grade school. Trace those familiar places and think of the girl who will become his stepdaughter.

With her joy will she follow him, learn the shape of hills and forest, books and music from him, only to wear his semen nearly transparent against her body in silence as I once did.

Will she spend hours in the woodshop as he sands and oils bird's eye maple, that sweet wood smell, the woodshop where they'll clean mallard ducks together, pain and fear taste of buckshot.

3.

After the vows, my father stands outside the Grange Hall, beard trimmed tight, three years grayer, drinks champagne and begins to turn the ceremony into one of his favorite stories. I call it a funeral.

The danger too real: whether they clean dead birds together or not, laugh wildly after dinner, or become family sure as the salmon run upriver to the spawning beds every year, he must stop here.

Leaning against grief, hope, I warn my stepmother, tell her the stories my father denies, pitting my memory against his, the only proof lodged in my body like buckshot.

Elizabeth Clare

Dangerous Connections: Lesbian Sado-Masochism and Mother-Daughter Incest*

Ardel Thomas

One day when I was five my mother's accumulated pain became stronger than her self control. Before I could escape she caught me by the collar of my snowsuit and in her terrible frustration she picked up a piece of the wood. The first blow, swift and strong, landed in the small of my back and drove me face first into the jumbled, harsh wood under my feet. . . . I remember screaming and trying to twist loose, but soon I was simply gasping and sucking for air and getting only the taste of my own bleeding in my nose. . . . The funny thing is that, in the end, I couldn't feel the blows. It became more like hearing someone fluff up a feather pillow. (*When You're Ready*, 5-6)

The chains around her wrists were too cruel for her simply to drop all her weight and hang. But the thick soft leather around her ankles fooled her into thinking she could move. Her open stance made her very aware of her availability. She would writhe, take up all her slack, not be able to stand up at the same instant she realized she could not collapse. Suddenly the blows stopped, and with her body singing her hair was grabbed tight and her head forced slowly all the way back. Past comfort. Wrists calling. She found herself staring deep into the eyes of her lover, who was saying, "You're getting too loud, Sweetie." Before she was gagged, her lover slid the whip handle through her wetness and kissed her long and deep. (*Macho Sluts*, 18-19)

The above quotations are from Kathy Evert, in the workbook she and Inie Bijkerk wrote for survivors of mother-daughter incest, and from Pat Califia's collection of short stories on lesbian sado-masochism, respectively. I have chosen these particular passages to illuminate the point that these two issues are interconnected, if not inseparable.

I am a 27 year old upper-middle class white lesbian. My mother incested me throughout my childhood. I am only now starting to think of myself as a possible incest survivor, instead of a victim. I have experienced one overt sado-masochistic encounter with a woman in

*Thank you, Catrióna, for helping me not be afraid of the night.

which I was forced into the role of masochist. I was also involved in a two year covert sado-masochistic relationship with another woman in which I was what could be called the masochist. I suppose I gave my consent to the relationship, though I am not sure why or how. It is only now with distance and time that I wonder to what extent I was not consenting, but merely playing out the role I was taught from a young age.

The role given to me by my mother. I was named after the woman she was in love with. The woman she lost in Vietnam. I always wondered what I had done to make her so angry. It was my name, Ardel, because I couldn't be Ardel. So she punished me for that.

Lesbian sado-masochists such as the political San Francisco based group, SAMOIS, claim that non sado-masochistic lesbian-feminism is deluding itself because, as "Lucy" says in *Coming to Power*, "... we all have power-over & power imbalances drilled deep into us. I began to see a pattern of emotional pain between lesbians that no one seemed to talk about."(32) SAMOIS then asserts that, because lesbian sado-masochism is simply a "more honest" version of the emotional sado-masochism that already exists within lesbian-feminism, S/M must therefore be healthier than what they call "vanilla" lesbian sex and relationships.

I do agree that lesbian sado-masochism is a blatant example of women acting out on each other everything they have been taught by this society, including their own families. I don't think this is healthy.

She picked me up at a lesbian party. I had never slept with a woman before, but was looking for someone to get my first time over with. I'd been drinking Southern Comfort and champagne, and the room full of women dancing together with their shirts off felt hot in some sort of comfortable, erotic way. She approached me wearing leather cuffs and a labrys around her neck that looked like it really could kill someone. As she was leading me out the door, I heard a couple of women laughing and telling her to be careful since I was a virgin. She laughed. I still didn't understand. Until we got to her house and she said, "You will be my slave for tonight. I am your master—don't forget it." She handed me a leather vest, the only thing she wanted me to wear. I remember wondering if I was going to get out of her house in one piece. When did I really give my consent? She tied me to the bed post, where I remained all night. She fist-fucked me. I couldn't walk the next morning. She called me her pretty slave and bit and slapped. I just stared up at her lavender light bulb and the blown up poster of her doing a roundhouse kick with her black belt in her karate gi. Sometime, I left. After all, I was just an object—she didn't really need or want me there.

Lesbian sado-masochism thrives on humiliation and a cathartic release of anger on the body of the Other. I also want to make the more specific argument here that underlying these dominant/subordinate situations is mother-daughter incest. Within our capitalist system, children are equated to property; legally children still have very few rights because they are viewed as belonging to their parents. Once again, we have a situation loaded with power imbalances. When I think about it now, it scares the hell out of me to think that my mother had literal control over my body. Up to a certain age, she could have ended my life at any point she desired. How can power like this not be abused?

My mother was a doctor. When she wasn't seeing patients, she was teaching medical students. I must have been about six years old. One afternoon she got me excused from school and took me to her office with her. She had asked me the night before if I wanted to be her example of a "normal" child. I remember feeling so proud that she wanted to use me, so I told her I would do it. (As I look back at this now, I wonder how much a six year old could really give consent.) There were at least six of them, mostly men, with their eager, probing hands. Cold hands. I had to take all of my clothes off, except for my underwear. My white cotton panties. They thumped on my chest. Looked in my ears. Looked in my eyes. I was getting tired and hungry and remember just wanting to go home, but this was a two hour medical class. The office door was shut and locked, and I didn't feel like I could ask to leave to go the bathroom.

Some of them were rough, sticking the instrument used to look in my ears too deep. It especially hurt in the ear where my mother had poked my eardrum with a q-tip a couple of weeks earlier. My stomach was starting to hurt because they each had to poke at me to make sure all of my ribs were there and that my liver and spleen felt normal. My mother was in her white coat, lecturing them as they experimented on me. I don't think she ever used my name directly, but just "she."

When they left, they each told her what a beautiful daughter she had. She smiled proudly and told them "thank you." Now, I remember it sounding like they had complimented her on some new painting or a dining room set that she had just purchased. I was still standing there in my underwear. I was getting cold. She came back into the room. Shut the door. She looked at me, but Mom wasn't smiling anymore. She asked me if I had put on a clean pair of underwear that morning. She asked me if I had washed myself. I said yes. She told me I smelled bad and the whole time that her medical students were in there, she was embarrassed. She said I was dirty. I wanted to hide under her desk. Away from her eyes that kept looking over my body like something was wrong with me.

The following are excerpts from an "erotic" story in *Coming to Power*:

Carole took Meg's jaw firmly in her hand and drew Meg's head up to look her in the eye. "Are you going to act like a baby about it? Throw a temper tantrum?"

"Carole, you know how much I hate being a 'girl.' It's embarrassing, humiliating ." (235)

"Sit Meggie."

Meg sat back on her heels and Carole knelt down and clipped a clothespin to each of Meg's nipples. Meg flinched, her eyes closed, her mouth opened with a gasp. "Bad dog. Sit up!" "Let's see how well you walk on the leash." The tension of the clothespins pulling at her tender nipples made Meg instantly get back on her hands and knees. (241-242)

"You look like some lousy, cheap disgusting slut."

Meg cringed. The . . . derision clawed at her. (243)

The sadist in this tale utilizes animal imagery to humiliate and to remind the masochist that she is merely a piece of property, devoid of control over her situation or her body. Note, however, that not only is the masochist called such names as "slut" and "dog," she is also humiliated as a "girl" and "baby" cringing in front of "mommy."

It's vague. Not exactly a memory but a set of images. I couldn't have been over three. Mom held my hand, walking me through the corridors of the hospital. It was kind of dark because they were tearing some of the walls down or something. I remember her trying to force me to pee in a cup. Next thing I remember, we're walking down the hallways at the hospital again, but this time I can't walk. She had clipped some sort of attachable bag onto my clitoris. It pinched and rubbed as I tried to walk along. She was pulling me by the arm. I was trying to keep up, but the pain kept coming. I couldn't understand what had bitten me and wouldn't let go. I tried to think of Dad and my dog, Princess, back at home, but it didn't help. Mom said something about how I should have gone ahead and peed in the cup.

Lesbian sado-masochistic stories often depend on the idea that the dominatrix actually owns her slave. In Pat Califia's "The Calyx of Isis" we meet Alex, a dominatrix who has decided to test out her slave's endurance at the hands of eight lesbian sadists. Alex slaps her slave, Roxanne, and tells her, "If you are mine, I'll give you to whoever I please. If you don't belong to me, why are we here?" (137) Roxanne gets sliced with a razor while simultaneously being fist-fucked up her anus and vagina by two women. She faints due to the physical torture.

July 1977. I was thirteen. I kept losing weight because everything I ate made me sick. I felt tense, on edge all of the time. It was like I was walking around waiting for something terrible that was going to happen. Now when I look back at this, I think that I may have been on the edge of remembering . . . I don't know what. But, something.

My mother got me in, as usual, to the same hospital where she worked. I was there for a week while several different doctors, interns, and residents poked at me, took blood every hour, and administered every type of gastro-intestinal test possible. One day, I counted twelve people who had given me a rectal exam. I told Mom, hoping she would do something about it. Instead, she smiled at me and said it was their job. The head doctor came in, greeting my mother by her first name, then asked her if she would like to feel something interesting. Maybe I'm misremembering it all, but Mom and the other doctor were smiling at each other, almost like they were enjoying themselves. Then, my mother put on the gloves and gave me my thirteenth rectal.

In her story "The Finishing School," Califia is very conscious of writing a lesbian sado-masochistic mother-daughter incest 'fantasy.'

The girl bowed her head again, and her shoulders trembled. The woman resumed stroking her hair, lifting handfuls of the champagne tresses and slowly releasing them. Her little beauty was wearing a black velvet corset, cinched just tight enough to set off her small waist and plump up the perfect round cheeks of her behind. . . . A pair of black silk stockings encased her coltish legs . . . and disappeared into a pair of black velvet high-heeled shoes. Each shoe had a tiny silver chain that ran from ring to ring, constraining the length of steps Clarissa could take and the positions she could arrange her limbs in when at rest. In addition, a silver chain was looped in a figure-eight about each instep and heel, securing the shoes to Clarissa's feet. . . . Berenice remained seated, enjoying the sight of the tiny steps permitted by the silver chain. (63-65)

The chains around Clarissa's feet eroticize the idea that she is Berenice's little slave. Later in the story, the reader finds out that Berenice is actually Clarissa's mother. So, Berenice possesses Clarissa as her daughter and her erotic slave, thus bringing together lesbian sado-masochism and mother-daughter incest.

My mom said I was pigeon-toed. That's why she got my special nighttime shoes made for me. I wore them for at least a year. At night. In my bed I couldn't move my feet because these special shoes were connected by a metal bar. They kept my feet pointing outward. I would fall

out of bed and try to stumble somewhere. I couldn't untie the laces because she double knotted them and I was too young to figure out how to untie shoes anyway. My dad told me later how he used to hear me falling on the floor and crying all night because I couldn't understand why there was a metal bar connecting my feet in shoes that were tied too tight. My dad would lie awake and feel bad. He never came to untie my shoes.

Califia writes her daughter character as the sexually open, vulnerable little girl who not only "deserves it" but "wants it." I cannot help but relate this to typical male fantasies and the arguments that fathers/rapists use, such as, "I couldn't help myself," or "She was dressed provocatively." What are we going to do with a lesbian 'fantasy' that perpetuates the incest/rape myth?

When I was little, my mother used to come kiss me good-night after I was asleep. It still makes me want to vomit when I think of her breath on me. I wonder if she only kissed me.

The branding of the masochist as a piece of property is a common theme in S/M stories, such as this example from *Macho Sluts*:

[Jessie] smiled at me and traced the crisscross scars with a forefinger, then turned so I could follow them onto her back. "I wanted you to see these, she said, so you'll know that whatever I do to you has been done to me. I know what you feel, laying there bound, awaiting punishment. The first rain of fire fell upon my skin. I struggled and cried for mercy.

"I can't stand this," I wept.

"You have to," she replied. Again and again, she let the molten liquid sear me. She watched my face carefully . . . doling out the pain with absolute precision. She moved from thighs to belly to breasts and back down to my thighs. I could no longer tell whether the burning wax hurt or not. I forgot what was producing these intolerable sensations. I gasped, cried out, beat the mattress. (56-57)

When the narrator, who remains nameless, wakes up the next morning, she has the permanent scars to show that she is Jessie's property.

In "The Finishing School," Berenice scars Clarissa with a cane:

Thus far, she had inflicted moderate pain and reddened the skin until it was warm and slightly swollen to the touch, but she had not bruised it. She was not in the habit of marking Clarissa, preferring her skin smooth and unblemished. . . .

"The marks will move up your legs from the back of the knee to the top of your hips. They will be evenly spaced and parallel to each other. You will not move."

Berenice's voice was calm and deadly. Clarissa froze. . . . Each stripe was awful. Berenice alternated sides so that each thigh would match. . . . Then she struck out like a tigress and left her with a perfect row of weals from the tender roll of baby fat just beneath the buttock to the thin, tightly stretched skin at the tip of the tailbone. (70,71)

Berenice leaves her daughter scarred for life, and Clarissa is actually proud of these scars. Clarissa has been stamped with the seal of ownership. Not only is Berenice Clarissa's mistress/dominatrix, but she is also her mother. What lesbian sado-masochism is doing at this point is eroticizing mother-daughter incest and its permanent effects.

Kathy Evert answered a friend who asked about the scars on her back:

I told her about having two spinal surgeries. And inside I felt as if lightning, out of the blue, had struck too close. I felt a charge pass through me and twist my stomach.

And anyway, I'm fine now, I said.

That was it. No big deal, but I realized that for a moment, when she first said it, I felt ashamed. I felt exposed and vulnerable. I'm still embarrassed that I was at one time valued so little as a human being that I was injured like that. And that's the real weakness in my back. (84)

Kathy Evert was viewed as just another piece of property when she was a child, and she will always have the scars to show for it. Throughout their book, Evert and Bijkerk discuss the tie between battering and the disregard for the powerless person that comes with it, and how sex, in this case the mother molesting the daughter, is used as a tool to humiliate and dominate. Even if no one else sees the scars, each of these women will always be fully aware of exactly who her mistress/dominatrix/-mother is.

When we were out in public, my mother used to always slap my ass. She only did it when she made sure other people were watching, other women in particular. It was as if she was reminding them and me that I was hers. I was hers.

When I started this paper, I wasn't sure about the connection between lesbian sado-masochism and mother-daughter incest. As I read my books, however, it became obvious. For example, several of the lesbian sado-masochism stories discuss how the sadists give their masochists enemas for pleasure. Then in Evert and Bijkerk I read:

I'm aware of the feelings of being entered by fingers . . . and the enema bag. I can feel it in my vagina and my rectum. It hurt—sometimes a lot. I'm aware of trying to hold cold water in and feeling terrified that I couldn't hold it long enough . . . [D]uring the enemas it was like being searched for something wrong hidden in my body. (98)

I could see her taking her hand out of my rectum. We were at home. She had some sort of gel all over her fingers. My mother looked at me angrily. Told me to hold still because she had to do this—had to clean me out because I was dirty. She tried to make me go to the bathroom. I couldn't. She let me up, quit holding me down. She started yelling at me in the living room. I remember looking behind me and seeing my own shit all over the throw rug.

Throughout the course of my research, the lines between lesbian sado-masochism and mother-daughter incest have become so blurred that I am no longer sure which is which. As I was reading "The Calyx of Isis" in particular, I had two separate incest memories. At the same time, I need to be honest enough to admit that Califia's text made me face being a victim/masochist in the past. With my mother, there are really no questions of consent. She did, after all, possess me. But for my later experiences, I have no answers. I know now that if I were to ever engage in lesbian sado-masochism, I would take on the role of sadist, merely to gain some power. I can't, however, see doing this to another woman.

Maybe this incest survivor has made a conscious decision *not* to work out my victimization on the body of another woman. It makes me wonder, though, how many women who are into lesbian sado-masochism have come from some sort of battering relationship where they had no control? Is mother-daughter incest more prevalent than we are led to believe by this lesbian culture, that reveres our mothers as the most sacred icon? Are lesbian sado-masochists acting out a cultural construct meant to destroy us? I don't have any answers, just suspicions. The idea of becoming a leather woman may, on some days, seem erotic to me. The fantasy of dominating a woman might appeal for a moment. But then, I only need to remember my mother.

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For Your Own Good

Anna Murray

First Episode

Mother, beautiful, smiling and capricious, slides into the bedroom, smelling good, she smiles and coos at Ann. The room has a crib, a small white dresser and many toys. It has a fashionable air about it, in the shadow of a city park, where nannies and maids stroll with babies.

Mother kisses Ann, who is glad to see her. She reaches out to clasp mother with her tiny hands.

"Time for your exercises, dear."

"I hate to do this, but the doctor says I must."

She grabs the child's right foot, small, deformed and turning out. Sitting on the end of the bed, cooing about how necessary it is, she turns and stretches Ann's foot inward.

She meets resistance.

Ann cries.

Mother pushes harder trying to straighten the foot. She wants it to stay upright, to look normal.

Like other children's feet.

To quit reminding her she has produced a malformed child.

Ann screams.

And begins to arch her back.

Mother, still talking in a soothing voice, pushes Ann down.

Her hand comes to rest on Ann's genitals. She twists the foot harder. Ann continues to scream and wets her pants.

Mother is now angry. But she doesn't want to show it. She is a good mother. She grabs a diaper off the nearby stack and pushes it into Ann's genitals so the pressure is overwhelming. She applies external pressure so Ann's back can't rise off the bed. She twists the other foot, which isn't as bad as the right foot.

"You'll thank me some day for doing this. No one else will do it. But I have to! For your own good."

Ann screams and fights. The maid has gone to the other end of the house to her own room where she hopes she can drown out the child's screams with the wireless, with the news of World War II.

This goes on everyday, until Ann gives up struggling. Ann is left with blurred memories of pain in her feet, cloth stuffed in her vagina, pain in her body, and her mother caring for her lovingly. Mother twists Ann's hands too, because they are small and flop down and out.

Mother says: "They are too small."

Ann forgets, and floats off in her head to where it is safe. Later, she pulls the sheet up over her head tight, and tucks it under her head, so it stays taut—and makes a tent—so safe with blurred light.

Everyone says, Mother is so wonderful to take care of a sick child like that! But they couldn't twist her feet even for her own good!

Second Episode

Ann is two, three and four years old. She is sitting on a wooden potty seat in her bedroom. Strapped in with little straps and buckles, so she can't get off. Mother says Ann has to shit—she doesn't call it shit, it is called "Ah, Ah"—after every meal.

"You must or you'll get sick."

She gives Ann a book. Ann gets lost in the book pictures. Sometimes she can produce a bowel movement. This is so good because Mother gets so excited. She giggles and points and wipes Ann, long and slow.

The trouble is, Ann doesn't always need to have a bowel movement, especially three times a day. Then there is trouble!

Mother says: "Oh, I don't want you to be sick!"

Mother becomes visibly excited.

She lets Ann up off the potty, and lets her watch Mother get out the rubber red enema bag, that is very big.

Ann feels sick to her stomach, which knots up. She watches Mother fill the bag with hot water, with lots of ivory soap. Real sudsy and hot!

Mother takes Ann in the bedroom and takes off all her clothes. She lays down newspaper on the bed. She lays Ann on her side and sticks a tube up Ann's rectum. She lets the water run fast and slow, until Ann's face twists up, and Ann whimpers, she can't take it anymore. Mother shuts off the water and leaves the tube in Ann until the cramps stop, and then Mother says:

"I'll give you a little more!"

She lets the water run, getting more and more excited. She likes making Ann get rid of her feces. Ann's stomach cramps very bad, and she cries out. Her body breaks out in a sweat. Beads of sweat all over.

Mother takes the tube out, holding Ann's buttocks carefully shut, real tight, so the water can't come out. It hurts.

"This will work better, dear!"

She strokes her daughter. Then she sits her on the potty and lets her shit. Her mother seems to like it!

Sometimes she gives her laxatives—milk of magnesia and ex-lax—if Ann is real constipated. Ann hates the laxatives. She just hopes she can go after every meal, so her mother won't have to give her an enema.

Ann had trouble eating and sometimes got sick AND THREW UP A LOT. Then the kind mother gave her retention enemas (retention enemas are supposed to be cool water held in her for five to ten minutes and then released). Mother, however, would give Ann over one-half of a big bag of water, and she would hold her buttocks shut until the water had been absorbed. A LONG TIME it seemed to Ann.

Ann left, went inside herself. Waiting each moment for the pain to end!

Sometimes Mother had Ann watch Mother give herself an enema, and Mother got very excited.

Ann is now seven. She throws up so much. The enemas don't help. They take her to the hospital.

She is dying.

Mother is angry.

Ann is so much trouble!

Third Episode

Mother likes to be good to Ann.

"Come in," she says. "And watch me get dressed."

They are in Mother's bedroom which has twin beds—her husband is on the road selling for his company. She lets Ann watch her put on all her clothes and try on different costumes. Ann begins to like this because it makes Mother like her, and Ann feels close to her.

One day Mother gets very excited, and backs her ass into Ann's face.

Ann is sitting on the ottoman in Mother's bedroom.

The buttocks feel so big!

Overwhelmingly big!

White. Very white. Soft.

Much bigger than Ann's head.

She screams inside: "I am going to drown."

The buttocks hang out either side of her head!

"I can't breathe!" Backing into her face!

"Why? Why is this happening?"

The smell. So bad. The taste!

Ann is a scream.

She is dying.

The ass is pushing into her face. So big.

BIG. Bigger than her.

Mother's always naked.

Ann can't stand it when Mother's pants are down.

Can't stand her touch!

She is being smothered.

The ASS!

It's big, hot, wet! Stinks!

Suffocating.
Like ether. Like a mask.
Like when she goes into surgery.
Scared.
She goes away.
Into blackness.

Fourth Episode

"Where did I come from?"
I remember my grandmother's house. I am four.
Grandfather looks at Mother!
That look! Seductive.
Mother giggles. Silly.
Tells me always, how wonderful he is.
Handsome.
All dressed up. Nowhere to go.
Not to work.
He waits for her to come home, she says.
He says, she is wonderful.
She struts in it.
"Did I come from you, Grandad?"
"Did you fuck her, over and over again?
Even when she is an adult? Married? And comes to visit?
You didn't care if she got pregnant.
You didn't care if she miscarried time and time again.
One baby born dead.
You didn't care.
You trained her well.
She doesn't remember.
You didn't care
if I was born with a twisted body.
Over fifty percent of babies born to father-daughters are, you know.
My body holds your pain.
Damn you.
She carried on.
She fucked me.
The pain.
The pain in my body.
I hate you.

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This Is Not About Confusion*

Bee Herd

This is about a knot of lies.
That she is called mother,
that I am called daughter;
that someone else named us both.

My mother was raped from age 5 to 15 by her father, a highly regarded preacher in the Assemblies of God church. Her mother was witness to her abuse and also sexually abused her. My mother blanked out each moment of her childhood and much of her adulthood, as it happened. She lived most of her life in shock, illness and crises.

Five years ago, in the midst of a deep suicidal depression, she began the recall of the daily terrors and violence of her childhood. Her memory is still revealing itself, spilling out images, sensations, dreams and horrors that are forcing her to rebuild the entire foundation of her life.

While my mother is new to her memory, I forgot very little. Somehow, I came through my childhood with a clear memory. I remember, in the midst of violence and grief, taking it all in through a distant, unclosing eye and reciting to myself: 'I will never forget this, I will always remember this.'

From the age of 6 until 12, I was raped and molested by the husband of my mother's best friend; who was also the children's minister of our church. I was violated by my stepfather, my father and my grandfather. My early adulthood was spent prostituting myself for drugs, money, alcohol and affection. I was raped many times as an adult, mostly by men I knew. I was married briefly to a man who frequently raped me and withheld my earnings.

Father rape; the dismemberment of our lives in the name of love, the greedy distortion of girl beauty, is a common experience my mother and I share with millions of women, dead and living and yet to be born. It is the deadly glaring light that robs us of more than sleep and illuminates the ways in which we are twisted away from each other and our own reflections.

The woman who brought me into this world; from whose face I learned to smile, from whose words I learned to talk, from whose arms I learned to walk, from whose vision I learned to see, was a woman

*For EDW and the mother of us all.

robbed of memory. She was a woman displaced from herself. She was blinded, by the glare of her father's hatred, to the beauty of her dangerous, knowing self. She was blinded to the beauty of a daughter, like her mother and the mothers around her. I was the frighteningly familiar mirror image of her childhood. Rather than protect me, she could only punish me.

Through my mother's remembering and what it awakens in me, I am beginning to understand where I came from. I was shaped in and born from a body that was thoroughly traumatized by violence. I was, for 9 months, at the center of my mother's being. The center where she buried the memories of a not so distant past. A place of horror, terror, violation and grief.

It is clear to me why a primary focus of my life is the investigation and articulation of my physical and cultural experience of sexual violence against girls. And why the destruction of the female spirit from infancy is a vital connection I need to make in my confrontation of white patriarchal supremacy and all forms of death and denial it creates out of its self hatred. It is clear to me why I have always needed to talk about it. Why I have chosen a lover who is a survivor. Why I have spent the last 6 years writing a novel inspired and shaped by where I came from and where it takes me. It is clear to me why I have deep wells of resentment and rage tucked into numerous parts of my body.

I have been talking about incest for 15 years. Almost every woman I have ever talked to about childhood rape, torture and manipulation has experienced it herself in some form. I lost friends and lovers from insistence at 'dwelling upon' such a depressing subject. Several Christian 'helping' professionals tried to discourage me in my telling, but I continued divulging my story and discussing the prevalence of a sexual violence that was considered among the survivors I came across in the early years, as 'normal'. It certainly was not unusual. What was unusual was talking about it.

It has only been in the last 7 years that I have begun to recover, remember and reconstruct the voice of my feelings. Like many women who did not forget their abuse, I convinced myself that I had not been affected by it. I could look right into it and feel nothing but pride in my success and not needing and awe at my survival.

It was in the middle of this excavation that my mother and I began to establish a real relationship. A relationship with my mother is what I always wanted. It is what I lived my life for as a girl, trying to be all of the things I wanted her to be for me. Trying to do the things that would make her love me enough to want to listen to me, touch me, smile at me. After years of the futility of being a good girl and the unpredictable reactions

to my attempts, I forced myself, through threats and self imposed abuse, to not care. To not want anything as badly as I wanted my mother.

As my mother begins to recall the pain she experienced she is also recalling the pain that she caused. Recently in the middle of a discussion in which I was angry, she mourned that she would never be a good mother, she'd caused us so much pain and would never be able to do it right. I snapped at her that it wasn't her job anymore. I was learning to care and want and need. Learning to be my own mother, defender and provider was my work now. She couldn't do it for me and I couldn't do it for her, but what she could do was acknowledge the fine job I was doing. And she could take responsibility for her part of the relationship now.

My relationship with my mother is current and electric. I have decided that I have the authority to assert that the healing work of our relationship is a vital part of our individual work. This deeply uncomfortable relationship is where I have begun to feel huge gusts of the frustration and rage I, rather unsuccessfully, repressed. It is where I sometimes stand with the phone in my hand and wish that she would just kill herself like she's been wanting to do since before I was born. It is where I become aware of how small and empty I felt I had to make myself to contain all of my mother's grief and anger. It is where I am deeply disappointed that my mother cannot replace or heal any of my broken parts, even those she broke with her, then unfeeling, hands. It is the place where I begin to understand that my mother's inability to connect with me was not about me, or any badness at the core of me. It is where I find that my longing and desire to connect with her was not 'needy' or selfish. My relationship with my mother is where I squirm, recognizing how I have learned to be in relationship. It is where my grieving digs so deep it strikes the grave of fury.

My fury is becoming precious to me, as is my resentment, my envy, my sorrow. Even when it is misdirected, I can learn from it. Focussed clearly or not, the amazing thing about it is that I can feel it and identify it as coming from my body and being of great value to my life. It makes me know I am alive.

It almost doesn't matter what I start with, my anger brings me eventually to it's source. I recently was asked to participate in a reading with other survivors at a major art exhibition. I decided not to go, when every time I imagined standing up at the microphone, I wanted to be screaming at everyone to shut up. I was furious about the name of the show, *Silent No More*. I hadn't been silent. I thought it should be called, *Silenced, Not Tonight*. I was furious about the flyer. I was furious about survivors. I was furious about my writing. I was sick of talking about incest, I was sick with fury. I couldn't write enough about it, long, raging,

paper shredding pages that led me right to the edges in my body where the fathers staked their claim.

I had just returned home from visiting my mother. My mother is remembering into a space opened up by women like me. By women who kept talking even when somebody told us to shut up. My mother was one of the people who at one time told me to shut up. I would like to know how many more of them later came to their own memories, so I could be furious with them too.

I have decided to take my fury to mean something wonderful. I have decided that my fury means I am in movement. I have decided that I must be free to be angry at my mother for however long and for whatever reason. To be furious for every moment that I was not heard or seen. To be outraged that I came out as a survivor when there was no support structure. To be incensed that I am supportive of my mother in ways she could never be for me. I have realized that my mother will not die if I get mad at her, nor will my lover, nor will my friends. I have decided that the fury in my body does not want to kill me, it wants to keep me alive for a long time. I have decided that if fury will stand with me, there is work for me to do that I could not do without her.

It is with this often uncomfortable, awkward as a new fire anger that I can apply what is needed to my wounds, find a kind of daily life that honors feeling and gather my forces for the reclamation of my ground. For rage is my birthright, it is my inheritance. I am certain that it is what my grandmothers wanted me to have.

Three Rituals for Incest Healing

Debby Earthdaughter

Getting a sudden flood of incest memories really shook me up. I so often wanted to kill myself in that first year. Fortunately I was living in a place with many resources. I found groups with a focus on incest healing—that it was possible to recover from the effects, and on political analysis and activism around violence against women.

I painted and wrote intensely—stacks of sketches of my memories and writings calling upon the power of the earth to help me heal. I went to a self-help art group for incest survivors and started showing my work through that group. That was a powerful experience for me—to go through my fears and desire to be invisible (as if that could have stopped the abuse) and be part of speaking out publicly about incest.

Just as I was getting memories I also started reading a book on witchcraft. I started a ritual circle during that time. I've found rituals some of the most transformative work I've done. In calling upon the power, the energy of all the biophilic beings of earth—on all women, the trees, the birds, the rocks—I feel the greatest part of life behind me, giving me strength. All of that is *much* bigger than my despair and fear.

I'd like to describe three specific rituals I created and found very useful: ritual to separate from mother perpetrator, ritual to separate from family, and ritual to release a pattern from the incest.

At the beginning of each ritual, cleanse, ground, banish, cast a circle, and invoke the four directions and any other protective spirits.

At the end of each ritual ground the energy generated and direct it to your healing. Open the circle.

Ritual to Separate from Mother Perpetrator

Take a big stack of pieces of paper. Write on each one a phrase—whatever comes into your mind. Such as:

"I'm so angry at you!"

"I hate you!"

"You put your fingers inside me."

"You violated me."

"I'm sad you didn't love me."

"I'm sad you hated yourself as a woman."

"I miss you."

Keep going until you run out of things—I did over a hundred.

Take material and cut out two doll shapes. Sew them together around the edges (leave a space to stuff her), chanting: "I did not make you. I am not responsible for you. You were made out of the pain of before me."

Stuff her and chant: "I stuff you with your denial, your alcohol, cigarettes that block your feelings, your fears, your hate of your woman-self."

Finish sewing her, chanting: "I did not make you . . ." as before.

Tie a thread from the doll's yoni to your navel (wear pants or scarf) to symbolize your connection through birth. Tie another thread from the doll's third eye to yours (wear scarf or hat) to symbolize still being tied to your mother by her thinking of you or you of her.

Chant "I cut the ties that bind," as you cut through the threads.

Drum and sing to Hecate:

Hecate I call you
 call you
 call you

Wise death crone
I bring you dead
I bring you my mother
eat her well."

Burn the cards and the doll, chanting:

"I release you from my life.
I am free of your abuse!"

This was a very intense ritual for me, I had fasted beforehand to feel more open. After the ritual I felt very freed up and went and played in nature. I came across a road-kill porcupine—a symbol of innocence. This ritual helped to restore my innocence that was violated as a baby.

Ritual for Separation from Family

This ritual is best done by a river or stream, but any flowing water will do—could be city plumbing.

Cut paper dolls—as many as you and the family members. Cut four sets of these.

Call to the east.

Tear off one doll (you) chanting "I break the ties that bind."

Put her in your pocket.

Tear the others up and release them to the wind.

Ask the east for clarity, fresh thoughts, lightness, release from negativity

Call to the south.

Tear off one doll (you) chanting "I break the ties that bind."
Put her in your pocket.
Tear the others up and burn them.
Ask the south for transformation, spiritual connection, passion.

Call to the west

Tear off one doll (you) chanting "I break the ties that bind."
Put her in your pocket.
Tear the others up and throw them into the river.
Ask the west for flowing emotions, release of blocks, transformations of painful emotions into useful energy to make change.

Call to the north.

Tear off one doll (you) chanting "I break the ties that bind."
Put her in your pocket.
Tear the others up and bury them.
Ask the north for healing any physical effects of the abuse and for the physical embodiment of your dreams.

Take the four self-dolls out of your pocket and hold them. Give thanks for the fact that you survived. Be amazed at your own power to have gotten through such horrors as well as you did. Think about the beauty of things you have done in life despite the abuse. Congratulate yourself.

Realize you have much healing power that will carry you further. Think about the amazing energy of the earth, all creation, that you can tap into to heal yourself. Nothing is too much for the goddess earth alive.

Set the dolls out with hands touching. Let them represent the new family of friends you are making for yourself. Color them pink for friendship. Keep them to take home and put on your altar.

Ritual to Release a Pattern from the Incest

This is a ritual that can be used many times—to break patterns that started as coping mechanisms while you were a child but no longer serve you now. They may be the release of addictions that blocked your feelings when you weren't ready to feel their full force. They may be patterns of behavior—like being invisible, being afraid to connect with people, avoiding conflict, not taking your needs seriously.

Cut out a paper doll of yourself. Sing happily, "A child is born, what a wonderful child." Celebrate your birth.

Then think of the abuse. Cut chunks out of the doll or make slashes—saying she is wounded, she is wounded. Feel the grief.

Think of how scared you were with the abuse. How you were alone. How you created your coping mechanisms as the best thing you could do at the time. Think lovingly of the pattern you are working on now.

Crunch up into a ball. Pull a blanket over yourself til you're all covered. This pattern is familiar—warm and comfortable. Think of what you like about it: When I eat sugar I don't have to feel so much. When I keep people at a distance I am safe. If I don't make myself known, I feel no one will notice me to hurt me.

Keep feeling this til you feel a bit restless, hot and stuffy in there. Then think of what the familiar pattern keeps you from doing, what it blocks you from. Keep thinking until you feel like throwing off the pattern.

Throw off the blanket and shout at your perpetrators, "Hah! You can't hold me back any more! You hurt me but you can't keep me beaten down. I'm free of your bullshit. I'll heal regardless of what you did!" Laugh at your perpetrators. Imagine them as very small. Powerless to have had to resort to violence. You are powerful now. Stomp on them.

Now return to the wounded doll. Sing to her, tell her you're sad about what happened to her, and that she didn't have help to deal with the abuse better then. Thank her for how hard she worked to stay alive and grow despite the abuse. Thank her for getting you to this place where you can grow even more now. Bury her. Say goodbye to her. Tell her you will miss her but you're ready to let go of her.

Now cut out a new doll self. Color her in joyous colors. Be happy in the transformation of the wounded self into the healing self. Think of how freed up you are. Keep her to put on your altar.

You can bury the doll in a place where you can return and put flowers on her grave. You can mourn your old pattern here, remember the comfort it gave you. And come here when you want to lapse back into it. You can talk to her and tell her that you want sugar but remember how much it held you back, so you don't eat it. Or that you are afraid to speak out about something but know your silence harms you, so you will go through your fear.

Amputation—In Memory of JMax

Can you help me come through call me into being naked I want a home
 hungry I want freedom terrible need argues me down a canyon wailing
 Can you help me come through call me into being Naked I want a home
 Hungry I want freedom Terrible need argues me down a canyon wailing
 Can you help me come through Call me into being Naked I want a
 home You're like all the rest in your bright blue betrayal socks I'm dead
 he pulls my tendons to stimulate life Can't stuff no more Another unsent
 letter Add to the avalanche Launch me out into space where I could
 burn alone undisturbed no excuses Dark into dark Nobody can take this
 tic toc of unceasing isolation Let's razor my masks See what we've got
 then Twenty years I've hung on my teeth writing this book or salvation or
 revenge or escape Can't do it rises in my throat screaming Angel of
 Death kiss me until I fly My head unravels His cock cuts to bone Blast
 him out flatten his balls They're all the same dead pricks run by strings
 operated from hell Home is where the rape is Choking down this old
 vomit I gag in nightmares Can't breathe He's on me again His dick push-
 ing my teeth open Why didn't she bite when she had a chance Stupid
 bitch she wanted it Wake me up middle of the night yelling Is it true Is it
 Sure anything you want is true now let me go back to sleep I'm alive
 don't know why Crack me with your fake trust phantom pain All in my
 mind your step now Pull yourself together too late for the rope Tie my
 hands behind your back I'll show you who couldn't care less Need is a
 razor better left alone They're clapping That mouth must be making
 sense Take it off & go to sleep Burning stomach too much semen rotten
 lining Pump me out you'll find his pus & pubic hair Don't call me All a
 sham nice girls don't get this bad Bad girls don't count Get lost You think
 talking will help this hell We're done thank you with that very much
 Think this doesn't make sense shows how little you NO Don't know a
 thing about me Sweep up the dead petals Match your art to your couch
 it's the crouched thing to do Don't call me/we won't call you A fair bar-
 gain for you who don't know what the hell to do with me Chronic in-
 curable but I pass I pass Nothing can't be fixed Goodbye over & out ten
 four Bad enough without your sympathetic reminders of unavailable sym-
 pathy Write me a symphony Fake sin Kind that doesn't count called
 ethics Don't open up to a whore says she's a therapist whose ear is tin
 Sets up the demons full-throated Told you so you no good cunt go back
 to your gutter I put you in hate for closing in on me with no visible
 means of support When the door slams I'm fine go to hell Miss Angel of
 Mercy go back & pretend you're safe I'm making perfect sense don't
 bother to see me out I know the way down these cruel stairs

Chrystos

The Present Is Not the Past

Shel

When I go to bed at night, alone, I am scared. Frightened. Terrified. And not because of a lack of security in my home. I am terrified of my past. My memories of being snatched from my bed in the middle of the night stay with me. My memories of my father intruding into my room, into me, seem to never leave me, especially at night when I go to bed.

As he woke me to take me with him to the woods to be raped during satanic rituals, I would plead, "No, not tonight; I have school in the morning." I was a six-year-old more concerned about school than normal. My cries did not stop him: off to the woods we went.

My father raped me in my bed too. And did other foul things to me there. So did my older brother. So did my mother. I must have been bad from birth, I figured. Why else would they do these things to me? Bad down to the very bone. I decided as a small child that if I could only be good enough, then they would stop subjecting me to ritual abuse with strangers in the woods, and they would stop torturing me in my own bed. I was a good kid; I behaved perfectly. And the violence and hatred against me continued. I did not know then what I know now: that I didn't deserve what they were doing to me. I thought I did.

This "knowledge" of my badness has stayed with me all these years. I strive to be good so you out there will like me. And so you out there will not abuse me. And, you know what? It works. I have friends and no one is abusing me!

Still, at times, I "know" that I am deep in my gut bad. "They made me bad, they ruined me," I cry to my lover. I get scared. Then, I think I am bad, stupid, for being scared. I get scared that my lover will leave me because I'm so stupid. Then I feel even more stupid because: 1) she shows no sign of leaving, and 2) even if she does, it's not the end of the world. Yet, it feels like I will die whenever I am left alone. I spiral downward, feeling worse and worse, and no amount of rational explanation helps.

Rationally, I know that I am not bad. But I know there may come a time in the next week or so where I will hate myself and want to do damage to myself. How can this be? I seem secure in myself. I go to work and act responsibly. I laugh and am funny. How can this be? I've wondered for most of my life, but only recently have I begun to understand.

I blanked out memories of nearly all of my childhood abuse. I first started remembering in May, 1989, when my at-the-time monogamous lover of seven years chose to develop a sexual relationship with another

woman. She was not breaking up with me or leaving our home (except to be with her other lover). The nights that she was gone, I cried and rocked myself to sleep, then woke up at 3:00 a.m. or so to cry and rock and howl some more. I felt that I was dying. I felt that I would explode from fear and grief.

My lover was very smart. She said to me after a week of this, "Shel, you are over-reacting. I am not leaving you. I love you. Something else is going on here." She was right. As soon as she said it to me, I recognized the truth of it. My fear was much bigger than the situation rationally called for. This became the key to my eventual memories. Each time I over-reacted to some event, I realized that the event was triggering some feelings/memories of past abuse.

When my lover went to her other lover's home, I felt that she hated me and would never return. I felt this even though she reassured me constantly. We still live together today, so obviously she wasn't leaving me. Yet I felt like I would die whenever I was left alone.

You know what the operative word there is in the last sentence? It *felt* like I would die. It is a feeling; it is not reality. I do not die every time one of my lovers decides to spend time with another dyke or leave town. When my parents and brother raped me and terrified me, I was afraid I would die. I'd plead with them to stop but they wouldn't. I learned that it didn't matter what I wanted. So, now, when I think that someone is disregarding what I want, the recording plays back again: "You don't matter, Shel. See, I told you." I don't play the recording again by choice. It plays itself because I learned it at an early age. It is stuck in my brain, for the time being. This recording, "I am bad; I don't matter" has played in my head for most of my 39 years. I didn't know that I could stop it.

I always have believed that I am no good at relationships. That I am un-lovable. No matter what my lover does, I can easily think that she is on the verge of breaking up with me and really doesn't care about me. These are irrational thoughts, messages that I learned from my parents and brother. When I started this process of remembering where these "lessons" about myself came from, I thought this view of myself would stay with me forever. I didn't know that I could change it, that I could choose to think and feel differently.

Here's another example: I am leaving my lover's home. We have had a fine time, but now she is anxious to get back to some work that she was doing. I leave feeling, "She never cared; she's just using me; she's leaving me." Hmmm. Irrational, huh? I don't believe that she could care about me and her own work at the same time. I distrust her because I learned not to trust people who said that they loved me. Many of them did horrible things to me even while acting in public like they liked me.

In the old days (before a year ago when I figured this out!), I'd leave feeling very bad about myself and about her. It makes sense that she'd prefer her work to me, right? "I'm a chump for ever believing that I meant something to her, blah, blah, blah." Now, I think to myself, "Oh yeah. There go those damn recordings in my brain again. This is not the past. This is my lover who loves me [because she does, you know] and who is good to me and caring and **not abusing me**. This is not the past."

Am I simply re-programming my brain to think good things about myself? Isn't this like doing 'affirmations'? No, I am not brainwashing myself to believe something contradictory to what my family taught me. I am able to remember that the present is not the past because I spend a considerable amount of time feeling the past. By feeling, I mean crying about the past and grieving over what they did to me. By doing so, I can much more easily separate the present from the past patterns.

This process of remembering and grieving/feeling the past is what I learned to do through a process called Re-evaluation Counseling. This is also called RC, co-counseling, and peer-counseling. RC was first written about by a man. This makes it inherently suspicious to me. What I have found, however, is that the way dykes co-counsel with each other is not the same as I have seen hets do it. (As with many things we do!) I have a much greater sense of trust with dykes. I have taught about RC to friends in a "formal" 8-week Basics class, in workshops at Michigan and Sep Camp, and by informally "counseling" my friends. It is possible to learn how to counsel other dykes without ever dealing with men at all.

With RC, we help each other discover why we make choices and decisions the way we do and why we get certain feelings in certain situations. Two dykes take turns talking to each other in a structured setting. For example, I meet with a friend, and we each get 45 or some agreed upon number of minutes of the other's attention. When I am talking, the attention comes without interruption from my friend, except when she asks questions which help me to figure out how my past affects my present. Then we switch, and I give her attention for an equal time. No therapist is present! No money is involved. (I also pay a therapist for her time. She uses RC techniques. This too has been very helpful to me.)

RC works for me. Reviewing my life and remembering past events in a safe co-counseling relationship with a friend has helped me to realize my strengths and my ability to rationally think and make decisions. It has helped me to remember (most of the time, anyway) that I am lovable and loved. I also see that other dyke incest survivors are working through their own pasts with it. It is a process that is helping us all heal.

The article that follows this one was written by my lover, Laura. I am happy to be in a lover relationship with her. She has been a great deal of help to me over the past two and one-half years. One of her special

strengths is her ability to separate the truth about me from the bad things that I say about myself to her. She knows, when I accuse her of not loving me because she didn't call exactly at the appointed hour, that I have a deep fear of being left, abandoned, and that my hurt feelings and accusations against her result from the horrible treatment I got as a kid, not from anything she really did. We have spent some time in developing the ways that she has learned to help me face my past.

This has not been easy; it has taken time and a commitment from us both to do it. It is a measure of how much dykes can care about each other that we can do this.

Laura has not identified herself yet as an incest survivor, but this doesn't mean that her past has not adversely affected her in some ways. Sometimes the things I say about myself or her make her feel bad and make her act irrationally. We all need to be cared about and to get real attention from those who help us to feel safe.

The system Laura and I have built together helps us to keep in contact with the fact that **we love each other**. We get to enjoy each other lots more than I knew was possible. I get to enjoy life much more than I ever thought possible. A good friend of mine said that what she wanted most was some freedom from the constant threat of being ambushed by her past. I feel that confronting my past and feeling it, as scary as it is, has helped me have more control over my emotions and life decisions.

When my parents raped me, when they took me to be raped by strangers, I was terrified. I continually thought I would die. I often hoped I would die. Sometimes in this process, I have thought that this life is too painful to stay in, and I have thought about how to kill myself and what a relief it would be to do so. But, I don't want them to win; they tried to kill me, my spirit, and my body, and I don't want them to win. The process of remembering, facing the feelings, and feeling the pain and torment is difficult, and frightening, again. But each time I take on a new bit of the past—each time I cry and scream and hurt—I end that time feeling myself coming back to myself. Part of me got lost when I was a child. A happy part, a loving part. I feel her coming back, and I am able to love better: My friends and myself.

Helping Your Lover with Her Memories

Laura

In my circle of lesbian friends, almost nobody isn't an incest survivor. Incest is a horrible thing; as Lee and Shel said at the 1991 Sep Gathering, it's the "ground zero of patriarchy," where the most damage is done. What can we do about it? We separatists like to fantasize about a world with no men. Maybe a virus will evolve which will kill anyone with a dick. Maybe cosmic rays somehow will cause only girl babies to be born, eventually leaving us with a lesbian planet. Wouldn't that be swell.

Well, yes and no. Sure, I'd love to be on a planet with no males. But, dykes, much of the damage is already done. If all the boys dropped dead tomorrow, we'd still be here with our incest-implanted time bombs ticking away, our pain unrelieved, our self-hatred intact. What can we do to help our friends, our lovers, the lesbians we're with and love today? I think that for many survivors, the negative effects of incest don't end until the dykes remember and discover their pasts. It's an act of incredible courage. It's something best done with the help of other dykes. It's something we can do right now.

Some of the dykes closest to me have been doing this work in the last 2 years. I want to share with other partners/lovers/friends of survivors some things I've learned about helping survivors have memories. While my experience mainly has been with lovers, most of what I talk about here works for friends, too. What I describe here is a way of helping that my lover Shel taught me and that we've worked out together over two years. We've slowly figured out what works and what doesn't. Some of this is based on co-counseling, as Shel describes in her article.

I've read racks of books about incest, and very little is written for partners. *Allies in Healing*, by Laura Davis, has the best information I've seen for partners. I think it does a swell job with many aspects of being a partner of a survivor, the stuff about keeping clear boundaries, about finding others to talk to, about what's okay and what's not okay. But even *Allies* doesn't talk about what to do when your lover is having memories. I mean in-the-thick-of-it gut-wrenching sobbing choking memories. I want to try to do that here.

Not all survivors should start having memories today. You can't talk a survivor into having memories, and you shouldn't try to. But if your friend has started to, her journey will go faster, better and easier if you go with her. Partners: You can't save her, no matter how much you love her

or how hard you try. Survivors: She can't save you; you have to save yourself.

Helping a survivor with memories in the way I'm about to describe takes intelligence and courage. As a lesbian, you've probably got tons of both. If your experience is anything like mine, you might find yourself using them in a new way.

The Goal

When Shel works on her incest memories, the goal is for her to feel what it felt like back then, and "discharge" those feelings completely. When the bad things were happening to her, she wasn't allowed to cry; her crying did no good, nobody cared about her crying or paid attention to her feelings; or she left her body or in some other way distanced herself from her feelings. Couldn't afford to have them. So the bad feelings just stayed inside, like the pebble I have in my knee from falling off my bike at the age of 12. When I bump my knee in a certain way, the pebble hurts all over again. When Shel's feelings get bumped in a certain way, the bad stuff hurts all over again. This makes her miserable and limits her abilities.

So there are two things Shel and I could do. Plan #1: Don't ever do anything that might bump her feelings in a way that makes her feel bad again. This would mean no making love, no having other intimate friends/lovers, very little joking or teasing, never going away overnight on business or fun trips (either of us), and tons of other things. Any of these might bring up the bad feelings. Neither Shel nor I wants to do Plan #1. So we go to Plan #2: Let Shel's feelings be bumped by whatever happens in everyday life, and then let her, encourage her, to cry, shake, laugh, or whatever until she's discharged all the bad feelings.

This doesn't take away the past. What it does is relieve the memories of their emotional charge. Eventually, she should be able to say, "Yes, my father raped me" in the same way, with the same feeling as I say, "Yes, I fell off my bike and scraped my knee." In no way does this take away from the importance of the event in her life or politics. But it frees her up emotionally to do whatever political work she wants to. And it takes away the limitations of "Plan #1."

So, I guess the goal of doing memories is to get Shel to cry.

Time and Place

If Shel is freaking out or has asked me to listen to her feelings, then now is a good time. But here's the Big Secret: I can almost always get her to do some memories when she's crabby at me, or trying to pick a fight. When she's irritable, it's Memory Time. Here's why: 1) when the bad feelings start coming up (unrelated to anything that I have done, e.g., she has a bad dream and wakes up feeling cranky), she gets scared

and tries to distract herself by doing whatever will work. What she thinks will work is starting a fight with me. That way she can have a reason for feeling crummy, and she doesn't have to think about the scary stuff. 2) If I do something that is not very thoughtful, or that makes her feel bad, it flips her back into the times she felt bad as a kid. So the scary feelings come up. Then she's likely to overreact to whatever I did "wrong."

These are the times that it's important for me to remember that it's not about me. I am not my lover's parents. Maybe I did something that reminded her of them, but this is not the same as what they did. And doing something that reminds her of what they did is not abusive, unless I deliberately do it to scare her or make her feel bad. If she overreacts to something I do, it's a signal to me: Shel's bad feelings are close to the surface. Maybe the bad memories are, too. At these times, I may want to explain why it was perfectly rational and reasonable for me to do whatever I did ("But, honey, I always do it this way, and you never minded before!"). This doesn't help. Instead, if I can recognize what's happening quickly enough, I invite Shel to tell me what she's feeling.

Shel's bad feelings sometimes come up when we're making love. When this happens, it's a great time to get some feelings out. (Of course, again, I have to remember that it's not about me.)

Here are some more times when bad feelings come up: Sep Camp, conferences, sleeping in an unfamiliar place, having to deal with obnoxious or abusive people, having a minor accident (e.g., accidentally breaking a plate), getting frustrated (maybe by an asshole at work, or by a jar lid that won't come off), or sudden surprises (e.g., a cat unexpectedly jumping on her as she's drifting off to sleep). Any of these might (or might not) start some scary feelings coming up. (Frankly, some of these situations scare me, too. As a friend says, "Everybody's got stuff.") Maybe your lover reacts to these things too; maybe she reacts to other things. You might ask her. I try to watch Shel's reactions, and when she starts to get irritable or upset, I know that the bad stuff's coming out.

It sometimes is good to find out how she's feeling when she's calm: when we're snuggling together or sitting and talking. I think the calmness of moments like these allows her to feel safe enough to have some scary feelings without having them triggered by something in her environment. These can be the best times for both of us to have her feel the terror of her past. Good times *not* to bring up incest are when she needs to concentrate on something else, in the middle of a work day, when she's about to give a presentation, or when she's driving. If in doubt, I ask.

Before We Do the Memories

Doing this feelings stuff is a new thing for me. I've been at it maybe 2 years. It hasn't been easy for me, especially as I'm the butchy, steady

type. But doing it has developed and revealed a new part of my self, and I find it tremendously exciting and satisfying. Helping Shel with her memories has been easier than looking at my own past. At the beginning, it didn't seem critical for me to look at my own stuff. But in recent months, I've found that I've had to do some of that to effectively help Shel. For example, sometimes she tells me I can't possibly love her. It's difficult to hear that, when I feel I've tried everything to make her understand that I do. I've tried to figure out why it's so difficult by looking at my own past. Helping Shel also has required that I be able to put myself in her shoes and try to figure out how I'd feel if I were her, which means I've had to be in touch with my own feelings. I've found that to be hard, but really useful.

Before I ask Shel about how she's feeling, I think about myself. Do I have the energy and desire to listen to her right now? Can I stay attentive, even if she "goes away" for long stretches of time? Can I stay awake? It doesn't pay to fool myself about this. Most survivors I know can spot insincerity a mile away, and distrust it greatly. Shel can, and does. If I don't think I can stick with her for as long as it takes to get the memory out, I have to tell her so. I've found that it's better to be honest at the outset than for her to get started and for me then to fall asleep, or lose my concentration. That just seems like another betrayal to her.

Inviting Her to Have the Feelings/Memories

If the survivor has started having memories, or has started talking about it, incest is probably on her mind a lot. So for the most part it won't hurt to bring it up. Don't be fooled into thinking that if only you don't mention incest, she won't remember it. If she's anything like Shel, she feels bad and remembers the incest lots of the time anyway. If you're still worried that asking if she feels bad will make her feel bad, then consider this: you really don't even need to bring up incest *per se*; you can just ask how she's feeling. And be ready to listen to the answer.

I can't make Shel work on her incest; I can't make her have memories. But I also can't (and shouldn't try to) stop her. What I can do is to invite her to think about it, invite her to feel it, invite her to feel safe enough to remember the scary stuff. So the attitude I must have is welcoming, encouraging, inviting. I look at her with what I hope is a pleasant and interested expression, with just a touch of concern. If I look worried, scared, or sad, then she feels like she has to come out of her bad feelings and take care of me. This doesn't work; the focus has to be on her, not me.

I invite Shel to talk about her feelings by putting my arms around her, looking into her eyes, and asking. "How are you feeling?" "How are you doing?" Often, I have to invite her several times, maybe many times, before she will let me in. She's likely to say that no, she doesn't want to

talk about her feelings. Occasionally, she means it. Usually, she doesn't. I am not satisfied with a simple "I'm fine" and a bravely faked smile as an answer. Likewise, I won't accept a flat-voiced "My father raped me; how do you think I feel?" I invite her again. The main thing is that she has to feel as if I care about her answer, about her feelings, about her.

Doing the Memory Stuff

When Shel feels safe enough to have some memories, or even just bad or scary feelings, I ask her what she's feeling, or what's going on. I hold her and try to keep her enough in the present that she feels safe enough to have the bad feelings. I reassure her. Mostly, I follow her lead.

I don't really have to say much; I just listen attentively. I let her do the talking. I ask questions if it seems appropriate. I try to frame the questions so that they help her focus more on what she's feeling or encourage her to talk about what she's remembering. I try to remember that they should not be simple information-gathering questions, or questions about stuff that I'm interested in knowing but that might distract her.

If she's crying, I don't interrupt. If she's "discharging" (shaking, teeth chattering, yawning, laughing hysterically) her feelings in some other way, I don't interrupt. If she's talking, I don't interrupt. (That is, unless she's talking as a way of avoiding feelings—talking about unimportant details that have no feelings to them. If that's the case, then I gently try to get her back to whatever it was that scared her in the first place.)

If she seems to need some encouragement or some reassurance, I say her name and stuff like this: "It's okay." "You're safe." "You're okay." "It wasn't your fault." "You're very important." "You're very lovable." "Lots of dykes think you're terrific." The idea is to contradict whatever the old pattern is telling her (e.g., that she's stupid, worthless, ugly, in trouble, unlovable, that it's all her fault). In one way or another, the survivor will probably let you know what she needs to hear.

Early in our process, it seemed to help if I asked specific questions about what Shel was seeing or doing: "What room of the house are you in? Who is with you? What can you hear?" Lately, I haven't asked those things as much, because she's better at remembering on her own.

Sometimes, she feels like she's getting too far out of touch, and she asks me to bring her back. When this happens, I invite her to breathe deeply, to look at me, to look around, maybe to feel some neutral part of her body (maybe hands, toes, or ears). I reassure her. I might talk about something un-scary for a minute or two, until she feels anchored again.

I try to ask how she's feeling in her body. Sometimes I touch her lightly on spots that seem to be affected—tense or frozen. I try to be observant about changes in her body, skin, or voice. This can help me figure out what's going on.

I hold her.

Body language counts for a lot. I hold her, keep her safe, without squishing her. Shel says that all she ever wants is to be held, safely, by someone who cares about her. Sometimes she doesn't want to be held, but I stay in physical contact with her. If she doesn't want any contact, then I at least lean towards her.

I always look at her, even if her eyes are closed. What she wants is attention. If she opens her eyes and finds that I'm staring off into space, or reading, or playing with the cats, it makes her feel like I'm not paying attention. Looking at her also helps me notice what her face and body are doing; this can give me clues about what she's remembering.

I try to keep eye contact with her. Sometimes when she starts talking, she stares off, away from me. (It's easier to remove yourself from your feelings if you don't have to look anybody in the eye.) So I follow her eyes around, even if this means I have to move my position to do it.

Sometimes she closes her eyes. Often, this isn't a problem. But sometimes, it seems like she goes too far away, leaves her body. Sometimes I'm not sure, so I ask, "where are you?" When she's this far gone, I try to get her to open her eyes and look at me. (The goal of doing the memory stuff is for her to get into the memories enough so that she can feel how it felt back then, but not to go so far that she thinks she is back in that situation. What she did back then was to "go away" in her mind, leave her body. If she does that now, she won't have the bad feelings, and if she doesn't have the bad feelings, she won't get anywhere. So I try to get her to stay present enough that she can feel bad.) Getting her to stay present can be tough, especially if the memory is a particularly awful one. One way of doing it is to get her to open her eyes and look at me. Another way of doing it is to talk to her, reassure her, use my voice as a link between that far away place and the present.

I try not to move around very much, especially big or sudden movements (they scare her). If I'm going to make a big movement, I tell her first. It's tempting to want to stroke or rock her. This distracts her. I've also found that what I'm trying to do with those motions is to rub away the pain, take away the terror. This is not helpful, since the idea is to have those feelings come up, not get repressed again. Stroking and rocking have more to do with what makes me comfortable than what helps her. Your lover may feel differently about this; you might ask her.

Stopping

Shel usually lets me know when to stop. Sometimes, she just tells me she's done. More often, I recognize it in her: she's relieved, her face and body are less tense, she seems (relatively) more content. She has cried enough of the bad feelings.

There's a catch to letting her verbally tell me when to stop: often the memories get so terrible she wants to stop just as she's getting to something big and important. She gets really scared. When this happens, it's important to keep on going. I recognize when this is happening because she still seems afraid, tense, unhappy. I try to help her feel safe enough to go on. I invite her to do a little more.

I have found that if Shel doesn't cry enough, if she stops too soon, she is miserable until she gets to cry and have the memories again. She can go days, even a week or more, in this state. It's no fun, for her or me. So I try to help her get it all out while she can.

Sometimes It Doesn't Work

I want to be clear: I'm not a saint. (Some would say: "I'm not co-dependent.") What I've described here are things which usually work with me and Shel; but I don't always do them or do them well. If I'm crabby, tired, or whiny ("Do we have to talk about incest again?"), if my mind is on something else, or if I just don't feel like it, it's likely that I can't give Shel good attention. In the past, I have cared about some lesbians who needed lots of attention, way more than I could give them. Although I had good intentions, I wasn't capable of helping them. And sometimes, despite my best efforts and Shel's best efforts, her bad feelings don't stop.

Fortunately, I don't have to always be ready to be the Perfect Listener. First, it's not my job, and she doesn't expect it or want it to be. Second, she has friends and a lesbian incest survivors support group who help. She's incredibly courageous, and works amazingly hard on these memories. It's really scary stuff.

Okay. So that's what I do. Maybe none of this will work for you. Maybe some of it will. The co-counselors have a rule that says to try something 4 times before you give up on it. If you're just at the beginning of this, then I think the main thing is to recognize when your partner has some bad feelings close to the surface, and to invite her to feel safe enough to bring them all the way up. Good luck.

I and We: Survivors in Lesbian Communities

Amanda Hayman

Dealing with incest can overwhelm even dykes who've coped with many different kinds of emotional trauma in the past. For more than 20 years I worked on changing myself, alone, in groups and through co-counselling. I've written about fat oppression and being a psychiatric patient with perfect clarity, but I find I cannot step back sufficiently from my subject matter to write here from an objective standpoint. The first part of this article documents my experience as an incest survivor up until September 1991. It is followed by an analysis of the effects incest has on Lesbian communities.¹

Just Another Personal Account

If anyone had told me a year ago that I'd be in the midst of recovering my memories as an incest survivor I wouldn't have believed them. Sure, I'd had problems when I was a child, had been very unhappy, in fact, but nothing as tangible and horrible as *that*.

Then I got involved with someone who was a survivor, and in an effort to understand her I borrowed a book² on the subject of incest. Before I had a chance to do more than flip through it, the relationship was over, and I was devastated. I cried for a week, cancelled work, felt a despair that was completely out of proportion to the brief time I'd been with her. Something major was happening to me, a part of me oh, so well hidden, was sliding out into the light.

I read some more, examined the feelings I didn't have, and then decided I was going to go for it, to do everything I possibly could to discover what had happened to me. This was a decision that would have more far-reaching repercussions than I could ever have dreamt. Everything was shifting, forcing me to change my perception of life and everything in it.

I went to incest survivors' group meetings every fortnight; only three of us, but it was quality that counted and there was plenty of that. I set up

¹Lee Evans and Shel presented a workshop on incest at the 1991 Separatist Conference. Many of the issues they raised are incorporated in this paper, and I should like to thank them for the inspiration.

²Ellen Bass & Laura Davis, *The Courage to Heal* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988.)

as many co-counselling sessions as I could, and worked once or twice with a Lesbian healer on recovering my memories. Gradually little bits and pieces started to emerge. Nothing overt, nothing I could point to and say, "Yes, this was incest." I remembered a co-counselling session three or four years before when I'd been working on going to see my mother, and had ended up by saying, "She tried to steal my soul," as a result of which I learned of the concept of emotional abuse. I'd always had the memory of a scene from when my mother was in hospital having my sister, of sitting on my father's lap, crying and crying, clutching a new doll. That doll was part of my family's myths. Her name was Jade, and she'd been sent by an aunt in Borneo for my birthday, but I cried so much my father gave her to me three months early to shut me up. There was a dark, dark pit I was afraid of falling into. My father featured again in a bathtime memory. No details, just him sitting next to the bath with a towel, but every time I got out of a western style bath and started to dry myself that centre of distress, my solar plexus, would lurch and nudge me. I had constant fantasies, that tore a hole in the very same place and stole my time and energy. These consisted of taking care of other people, women, who desperately needed me. Of course it was really some deep down lost part of myself that needed help.

For a few weeks I pushed at these boundaries, with no results, and then another book came my way. This one suggested that sometimes the trauma of incest was so intense that the mind seals it up completely. In order to get at such information hypnotherapy was recommended. Memories can be recovered in a couple of sessions that would take three years just talking, was the message the author gave.³ I read the book from cover to cover, and then decided that that was what I would try. Not an easy decision for a radical Lesbian separatist who had always loudly proclaimed that self-help was the only way, therapists promoted hierarchy and dependance. But the time for political correctness was past. I had to know what had happened to me, or live the rest of my life with a searing in my solar plexus and the inability to believe in myself.

I started going to see a hypnotherapist in Tokyo, and almost at once memories returned. Immediately after coming out of a trance I cried, remembering what I had felt when I was three, or eight, or a baby. I was afraid, angry, revengeful. Then the feelings receded, very quickly. The only way I could get inside the feelings again was by drawing pictures. The trouble was that most of the time I couldn't believe it was true, that that really happened to me. But at least by now I had proof in the shape of childish scrawls in my otherwise neat notebook, and the pictures where I didn't know what was coming until they were on the page.

³Lynne D. Finney, *Reach for the Rainbow* (Changes Publishing).

That was just the beginning. My father, who had died when I was 11, and had been canonised as the family saint, emerged as a major perpetrator. I knew he got angry now and then, but 'he wasn't a bad man.' He was sick, my mother always said. I know now that he started abusing me when we were alone in the house for two weeks while my sister was being born. Every night my father would drag me out of bed and torture me sexually in the most obscene and disgusting manner. He told me he would kill me if I made a sound, that I was wicked, evil, and that I deserved it. And all the time he watched television.

On the days when I can step back enough from the pain and disbelief I am angry. Angry at a society that condones the perpetration of such a system. Angry at my father, mother, teachers and friends, for the damage they wreaked that deprived me of a tolerable childhood and led to constant self-doubt as an adult. Other times I am an eight-year-old who knows that her desolation of spirit is seen by everyone as surliness and a refusal to co-operate. Is there a place for three-year-old adult girls in our Lesbian communities?

More memories surfaced, about sexual abuse by my mother when I was a baby, and emotional abuse in every area of my life. I was a fat child, and from the age of seven I was horribly abused by schoolfriends, teachers and relations. I was taught to believe that my body was the most loathsome thing on the face of the earth, and that because I had allowed it to degenerate into this state I did not deserve to be treated as human. I want to make it very clear that I consider the treatment fat girls receive to be sexual abuse. What else can you call it when strangers, friends and family alike are given licence to ridicule and torture in the name of societal norms?

Slowly I'm starting to accept that a huge number of the problems I've had in my life can be traced back to the effects of incest. By the time I was ten I was reputed, at home and at school, to be a trouble-maker. I shoplifted, I lied, I was totally unreliable and I refused to obey authority. In the following few years I fought all the time with my mother, screamed when I thought I was being unfairly treated, and worst of all, I deliberately obstructed attempts to make me lose weight. It was such a perfect set up—one after another the responsible adults in my life abused me, and then, when I reacted to the abuse, they told me I was crazy.⁴ Of course I believed that it was me, not them, that was the cause of all my problems. Now I am clear that this belief contributed greatly to the ineffectiveness of all the years I spent trying to sort out my head—I was blaming myself for things that I had had no control over.

⁴From a conversation with Lee Evans.

I've never been able to trust my own perceptions, either. Why should I? I tried to tell about the abuse, and was first ignored and then branded the family liar. Now this lack of self-trust manifests in my politics. If someone disagrees with my analysis, tells me blue is yellow, I see no reason not to agree, and then get angry at allowing myself to back down so easily. Until very recently I didn't know why I did this and labelled myself wishy-washy and undecided. And I'm aware that all this goes on inside, that no-one can see my vulnerability.

On a personal and social level I've been constantly on guard. I couldn't trust dykes who say they love me to be trustworthy, to really accept me as I am, pain, anger and all. Part of me would still like to believe that I'm bad and evil, and sabotages relationships to prove this to be true. Because *somebody* was very wrong when I was a child, and if it wasn't me then it was my parents. If they were bad then I really am an incest survivor, and part of me doesn't want that to be true. In the past this sabotage has been effective, like the time a few years ago when I screamed, very loudly, at several dyke events. The Lesbians I believed to be my friends and community were shocked. Some suggested I not be allowed to attend any future events. Two good friends didn't call for months. And one invited me back to her apartment for a cup of tea. Should I not have screamed? I know that it wasn't premeditated, and that if I hadn't there was a good chance I would have cut myself up later on. My silent analysis was that it was as dangerous to me *not* to scream as it was to them if I did.

Survivors in Lesbian Community

When I first realised I was an incest survivor I felt that the only women who could possibly understand me were the ones who shared my experiences, and that everyone else was an outsider. I thought—transferring analysis that was appropriate in other political situations, such as classism, racism or fat oppression—that it was a case of 'them and us,' with incest survivors being oppressed by dykes who do not identify as such. (A similar viewpoint, that I heard expressed at the Separatist Conference, was that incest survivors feel oppressed by dykes who insist that they 'get over it' so that the 'real' business of life can continue.) Now I believe that a more accurate assessment would be that we have *all* been damaged by patriarchal sexual violence. We all have to fight the monster and prevent it from tearing apart our communities. The agent or infiltrator we fear is built into our own heads, and is, I suspect, far more effective in preventing us from being able to work together to crush patriarchy than any individual sent by the CIA.

This leads into the questions I want to raise about the place that incest survivors occupy in Lesbian communities. Our pain is fearsome,

to ourselves and others. Does this mean that we should keep it hidden away, unless cosmetically arranged so as not to be offensive? I believe we all have to be scrupulously honest, allies *and* survivors, and examine exactly *why* exposure to anger and pain threatens us. We have to own our distress, so that instead of saying, "Her actions are unacceptable because they make me hurt," we say, "I'm hurt. Why? What are the past events in my own life that her actions remind me of?" In doing this, of course, there is a good chance of digging up things that we may not want to look at. Because the process of dealing with incest is so painful, many dykes choose not to actively work on these issues. We tuck them away somewhere they won't bother us all the time, and sometimes that works fine. In other cases, however, the pain refuses to be contained, and sneaks out through any available crack. Then the source of the pain is harder to recognise, and harder to own. Is it possible that incest survivors have a responsibility *to our lesbian communities* to acknowledge the source of the pain within us, and not to push away the memories?

Fox asked me whether in the above paragraph I was referring to the incident in a workshop on incest that occurred at the Separatist Conference.⁵ My answer is that I don't think it would be fair for me to address that directly, as I wasn't there. I saw some of the aftermath, though, and my feeling is that organising ourselves in groups and factions, running importantly about and planning strategies of revenge could all be put in the category of smokescreen, those actions that prevent us from having to deal with the real, raw, individual, personal feelings that such an incident raises.

There *are* things we can do to make acknowledging our own, and others, pain, easier for ourselves. I don't think that large group, free-for-all workshops on the subject of incest are useful. Pain and anger build up very quickly if we have to listen to someone else expressing feelings without being able to speak. The community I live in, in Japan, has progressed in being able to deal with issues of incest, alcohol, etc., because we take great care that workshops are structured to allow each woman time to speak, near the start. In September Kate Pickford and I facilitated a workshop for incest survivors and allies. At the beginning all participants were asked to talk in pairs, about why they had come to the workshop. One dyke talked for three minutes about her feelings and the other listened, and then they swapped. Halfway through the workshop

⁵Editor's note: Very briefly, one lesbian made a statement in therapy language and repeated it several times, although asked to stop by the facilitators and others. On her way out of the room she repeated it again. Another lesbian became angry, threw two chairs at the wall and screamed "Stop therapizing me" several times. The workshop broke up.—Fox

the process was repeated with a different focus. Lots of women cried. Some sounded angry. But no-one felt attacked, and no-one left. Small groups work well, too. More dykes get to speak in a short time. Sure, we don't all hear what everyone else has to say, but I think there are more important things than that, and the group membership can always switch around for different sections of the workshop.

A final point, while I think it's OK for survivors to ask for leeway from the community from time to time, I don't think we can expect to get it. We don't stop being responsible for ourselves because we are having horrible memories about our pasts, and we cannot demand that other dykes make our issues a priority over those that they are working on themselves. I've thought a lot about this issue, and in the end I've come to the conclusion that the place of incest survivors is not so very different from that of any dyke struggling to free herself from the patriarchally-induced clutches of oppression or addiction. What troubles me is the way we all (myself included) seem so anxious to insist that *our* pain is so much more deserving of attention than that of the next Lesbian. We're saying 'what can I get for *me* and my group,' rather than, 'how can we find mutually acceptable ways of increasing the comfort of the maximum number of dykes.' Until our communities decide that we will never all think the same, and we do want to co-exist, I don't think there'll ever be a place for incest survivors, or anyone else.

Incest affects every aspect of a survivor's life, whether she consciously identifies as such or not. It will continue to do so until she faces this fact and works to undo the damage to her physical, mental, intellectual, psychic and emotional health. I've never met a dyke who has worked through incest and calls herself recovered. I have no idea what she would be like. I can only imagine that our Lesbian communities would be different, if they were filled with dykes whose natural energy and power had not been devoured by patriarchy.

A Year in the Life of a Partner: The First Year After the Memories Began

Linda Peterson

Autumn 1990

Amanda and I have been together nearly ten years. We're already in a chaotic phase when Amanda begins having memories of incest. She doesn't talk to me about it; she tells me she doesn't trust me about that and gives me a book about incest and asks me to read it to find out what she is up against, to find out what I am up against. She asks me to tell her whether or not I want to try to continue our relationship while she goes through the healing process. The book is discouraging. There isn't much in it for partners, and what there is just tells me this will be long and hard. Don't expect much satisfaction, it tells me. If you choose to help her, you may not get much back during this time. You will have to take care of yourself, and it will not be easy.

I tell Amanda that I cannot do it 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, indefinitely. But Amanda and I decide to continue our relationship. I remind myself that the foundation of our relationship is positive; Amanda and I came together and have stayed together because of strength; we have developed our politics and helped build a community and a life together.

We fight a lot. She tells me she will not help me with my feelings and reactions to her healing process. I feel that her expectations of me are unrealistic and unreasonable. It seems to me that, because she is going through something horrible that I can't understand, she wants me to give her the benefit of the doubt in every situation. I feel I am not allowed to expect anything of her. I feel that if I make a mistake I will be punished. She is angry at me a lot, but I am not allowed to be angry with her.

Amanda gets very close to other incest survivors. I am embarrassed because I feel left out. She doesn't trust me; they don't trust me. I feel that the incest survivors are taking an "us and them" attitude, and making me part of "them." My pain is not as important as theirs.

I am confused. Amanda, who has always been anti-therapy, is suddenly going to a hypno-therapist. Among the incest survivors it seems like a new language, incest-ese, is being spoken. I can't detect any political analysis among them; that makes me nervous. I feel that if I question the use of therapy or therapy-language springing up in my community, I will be accused of not being supportive of Amanda and other incest survivors.

When Amanda told me she was an incest survivor, I wasn't really surprised. But I have been thinking that she'll be okay. I have seen her struggle with fat oppression, with depression, with other crises, like being trashed. I have been thinking she'll be okay because she always has been okay, she always has pulled out of it after a while. I have been telling her she's pulled through crises before, she has support and skills.

Bad news comes from the States. A lesbian separatist has killed herself, rumor says it was because of incest. I never met her but I am disturbed. What does it mean that she killed herself because of incest? I am too afraid to talk about it with Amanda.

Winter 1991

I go to Hedgebrook on Whidby Island in Washington state for a six-week stay at a retreat for women writers. I think I can get away for a while, but of course it isn't like that. More than one of the other writers at Hedgebrook is writing about incest, and the topic is constantly up. When I get back to Japan, we have a few days of being glad to see each other. Then I begin to chafe at the lack of privacy. We have both gotten used to living alone. I am less able or less willing to tolerate mood swings and apparently irrational reactions to facets of everyday life, even when I know that what is happening is that past pain is intruding into the present. Why should she be angry at me? Why should I accept it? I don't want to be there when she feels bad, especially since I can't help.

We househunt. We find another apartment ten minutes from the small house we have shared for nine years. Amanda moves, deciding that starting fresh, with better sunlight, will be good for her. I stay in the house I lived in before she lived there with me. After I help her move, I clean, sort, and rearrange everything to make the house mine.

The adjustment is hard, but much of the time I feel relieved to be living alone. It takes the pressure off being with Amanda. If we're together and things get sticky, we aren't stuck. One of us can go home. We can sort ourselves out individually, and try again later.

Summer 1991

I go to support groups for partners of survivors at lesbian weekends in Japan and at the Michigan Women's Music Festival. I am sick of talking about problems with sex. Why is sex the easiest aspect of this subject to talk about? I am amazed that sex, in the context of incest survivors, is the least taboo subject.

The taboos are power, control, anger, how past pain intrudes into the present. What is taboo is to say, "When she is hurt and caught up in something from the past, she yells horrible things at me and I feel powerless to do anything except say, 'It's okay honey.'" What is taboo is to say, "When she is hurt and caught up in something from the past, she

threatens to hurt herself, to kill herself, and I don't know what to do." What is taboo is to say, "I am angry with her for hurting me, for being depressed, for not wanting to have fun, for thinking about herself all the time."

At the Sep conference one of the first seps I meet is Fox, the lover of the sep who killed herself. I don't say anything about JMax. When Fox comes to the partners' workshop, I am surprised that it didn't occur to me that she would be there. The first thing she says is that she is not hopeful about relationships surviving one partner's beginning to deal with serious incest. She says that she is interested in efforts to deal with incest as a community issue, not just a partners' issue.

I am disappointed that the group seems to be having basically the same discussion, a lot of it about sex, that we had in Tokyo and at Michigan. Later, I talk to Fox. In a way it's lucky I didn't know JMax. I am not interested in JMax, I am interested in Fox. I ask her what she would do differently if she had a chance. She says that she would be less hesitant about bringing others in, that she would try to overcome the pull to handle everything alone.

I am surprised at some of the things she talks about, like magic. She asks me if I believe in it and tells me that she and JMax did a ritual for things to turn out the best they could. She says she sometimes wonders if that is what happened. What if she and JMax had spent ten years struggling and in pain, and had then found out that JMax had cancer? I think about the terrible question I have tried to put aside—How long is this going to take? Maybe a better question is, How much can I take? Fox says that suicide is also murder. JMax had thought of killing Fox, too, because JMax didn't want to think about the pain her suicide would cause Fox. I am glad Fox is alive.

I think that in a strange, sad way, Fox has nothing to lose and can speak from a different place, maybe not so bound by loyalty. I feel quite brave about asking Fox questions; I have felt encumbered in other conversations with partners. I don't know what others would think if they heard our conversation. I am afraid there will always be someone who would be angry at my questions, someone who won't like Fox's answers.

Loyalty, is it disloyal to talk about what's happening to me? I know partners who don't go to partners' workshops because their incest survivor partner doesn't want anyone to know, or because the survivor doesn't feel safe. I am glad Amanda is not like that, but I feel cautious when I talk about what happens between us. Loyalty seems very connected to the issue of safety, an issue I am beginning to think is a big red herring. Sometimes we try to get safety by proving we are the most hurt; sometimes we try to get it by proving we cannot be hurt. Attempts to create "safe space" in a psychic or emotional sense seem futile and

sometimes manipulative. Noone can make anyone feel safe. I want to know how we can all get stronger, not who should be taking care of who.

Autumn 1991

At the end of my time in the States I visit my mother. She tells me that my cousin says she was raped as a child by her father, my uncle Steve. My mother doesn't believe my cousin. She doesn't think her brother would do that, even though he was convicted of abusing his step-daughters. I tell my mother that I have friends who remember incest. I tell my mother that I believe that many men have raped their children but that mostly those women hurt as children lived their lives without remembering. For some reason they are remembering now.

I call my cousin and we talk. I am shocked at how much more personal the whole subject of incest seems to me now. It's not just other families. It's my family too.

Back in Japan, at the September lesbian weekend, Amanda and another dyke do a workshop; they speak about themselves, and how incest has affected them and others. I see that some of these effects occur in me. I don't know if this means there is something I don't remember. It is finally becoming clear to me that incest is not just something that happens to some unlucky women. I am not free from its impact, I am not undamaged. What I thought was a clear line between incest survivors and others is blurring.

For some reason I find this more comforting than depressing. It is comforting because Amanda and my friends are not disappearing into some kind of recuperative isolation. Some of them are standing up and saying, This is not a mystery. This is something we can see through and fight and refuse to sweep under the carpet. It seems like a beginning, but I am not much clearer about how to deal with it, whatever all of "it" is. The damage to our personal and community relationships. Even the damage to the seps conference. I remember Fox saying it was no accident that the workshop that exploded was about incest. I don't know where we go from here, but I want to be hopeful.

Amanda and I are talking more. One day we are going to work together and I can see she is in a bad state, but I don't know what to do about it, so I do nothing. She gets very angry at an asshole taxi driver, we end up getting out of the taxi and going back towards home instead of going to work. Luckily Amanda's therapist can see us and I go with her for the first time. I am a wreck; I am angry at Amanda for messing up my day; I am pleased that we can go to the therapist together; I have been suspicious of the therapist, but I am relieved that Amanda and I can get some help today.

At the therapist's office Amanda talks about what has been happening and I mostly listen. One topic is anger, hers and mine. A few days before, Amanda had wanted to come to my house but only if I would promise not to get angry with her; I said I wanted her to come and she could be any way she wanted but I wouldn't guarantee not to be angry. These small negotiations are frequent and difficult and not always successful; the therapist thinks we are doing well. I realize that I have no reality checks on what is happening between us; I have been doing my side of it mostly alone.

I go back to Amanda's therapist alone. I take a list of things I'm afraid of—it'll never change, I'll be trapped, she won't be able to work, she'll kill herself, I'll get really angry and screw things up. No matter what I do it seems to be wrong, either for Amanda or for me. I hear from the therapist that this is a hard time in the process, that, yes, things probably do seem to be getting worse rather than better. She asks me if I can intellectually give Amanda complete responsibility for her own life. I have no problem saying yes. She asks, What about emotionally? That's much more difficult. I am angry that I feel manipulated by talk about suicide, and I am relieved that the therapist says it's okay to tell Amanda I would be pissed if she killed herself. My other big fear is of being trapped. I don't seem to be able to get any breaks. I don't even think this is Amanda's fault; I don't know how to balance concern and support for her and getting enough time for myself. When Amanda is deep in her pain it is pointless to talk to her about things she does that hurt me; when she's feeling better, I don't want to mess things up.

I know that Amanda is struggling with conflicting feelings, but that doesn't make it any easier to deal with. I'm getting tired of being told that I don't understand and that it's okay for me, I can just walk away when I've had enough. It's hard to see her pushing people away when she needs them most.

One thing that is definitely different after my trip to the therapist is that I call my friends in Tokyo and talk about what has been happening and what I am thinking and feeling. It feels strange and a little risky. I have been talking to friends far away, not closely connected with Amanda, but now I talk to friends who know her. I talk more openly, less "loyally," than before. It is a relief to be less alone.

How to Be a Political Dyke and a Childhood Abuse Survivor at the Same Time, or,

Why Are All the Dykes I Know Reading *The Courage to Heal*?*

Shana Rowan Blessing

Our membership in the lesbian separatist community is determined by choice and commitment. Our ability to participate as active members of this community is determined by choice, commitment, and personal ability. Frequently, we neglect to acknowledge that personal ability is a real factor. As a lesbian separatist community, we must recognize personal ability as it is a reality for each community member.

Politics and Healing

The ideal lesbian separatist community is one in which we care for ourselves while caring about each other and our political work. For many of us, this ideal does not exist. The reality is that an overwhelming number of womyn are trying to heal from childhood abuse, incest, ritual abuse, and resulting dissociative conditions, including Multiple Personality Disorder. The current structure of the movement is such that healing womyn and political womyn generally belong to mutually exclusive groups. If a political woman attempts her healing from abuse while maintaining her political vision, other healing womyn perceive her as a traitor—as someone who focuses on others before focusing on herself. Womyn whose primary focus and expenditure of energy is on healing from abuse may resent that this woman has the time and energy to stay connected to her political work. Non-healing political womyn perceive her as someone who is somehow weakened because she has not resolved her own issues and whose political work is diluted due to her

*My thanks go to my cherished friend and partner, Ruta Mazelis, without whom this article would never have been written for many reasons. Ruta's courage in talking and writing publicly about her healing process and her politics has been inspirational. (Ruta publishes *THE CUTTING EDGE: A Newsletter for Women Living with Self-Inflicted Violence*, P.O. Box 20819, Cleveland, OH 44120.) I also thank the dykes who were courageous in creating a workshop at the 1990 Separatist Conference in which to talk to other political dykes about incest and who encouraged me to participate and read my first draft of this article. And thanks to Frankie, too.

personal focus. She is perceived as a potential drain on the limited energy of other political womyn and is ultimately defined as "other."

We have already seen—in the mass depoliticization of womyn who have joined 12-step programs—the numerous dangers inherent in dropping out of politics while healing from abuse. As more of us uncover and recover that we have survived atrocious abuses, we have to make room for ourselves in the movement.

Child abuse is the ultimate reenactment of the dominance-submission paradigm. Children are without power and without voice. We are aware that children are neglected, emotionally abused, physically abused, and sexually violated and assaulted. We are becoming increasingly aware of how frequently children incur unimaginable torture and how frequently children are abused by forced involvement in satanic and other cult activities. We are aware that these things exist and we are sympathetic. But, we say these are not really our issues; we are lesbian separatists. What I am saying is that, yes, we are lesbian separatists. And, these *are* our issues. It is at this point that we recoil, whether in denial or horror.

Often, the movement's view is that children are relatively unimportant to us because they are products and perpetuators of heterosexuality and of heteropatriarchy. We don't deal with children until they grow up and until they are lesbians. Then, we don't deal with the lesbians until the lesbians are finished dealing with their own shit because we are clear that we don't "caretake" other lesbians. Again, this is an ideal, and it doesn't exist. Lesbians come from the same pool of children as non-lesbians. These children have been neglected, emotionally abused, physically abused, sexually violated, and subjected to torture and ritual abuse. Some of these children manage to survive and grow up. Some of these children grow up to be lesbian separatists. **THESE CHILDREN ARE US!**

Most womyn who are healing from childhood abuse perceive themselves to be dealing with personal, intrafamilial issues. The questions they ask are. "How come it happened to me? What was it about me and my family's dynamics that made me the victim? What was it about my family's dynamics that made my father/uncle/brother/mother the perpetrator? What could any of us have done to stop it? What can I do to help myself get better?" The truth is that childhood abuse is not a family issue, it is a political issue. Womyn and children constitute a readily available, powerless, voiceless class of victims for men. Childhood abuse is *not* a consequence of "dysfunctional family dynamics." It is a consequence of the heteropatriarchy. It is normal in heteropatriarchy that men are the perpetrators of abuse and that womyn and children are abused. There is little to nothing that a single victimized woman or child can effect against a monolithic, institutionalized, heteropatriarchal norm. Part of getting better is becoming aware that childhood abuse is a

political issue and that it will not cease until men cease to have power over womyn. Part of getting better is growing into the ability to choose to be as separate from the heteropatriarchy as possible and to become part of a movement of womyn who are creating womyn-centered ways of living and healing that are not based upon the dominance-submission paradigm.

Dissociation and Its Effects

What we know about child abuse is that children repress memories and dissociate from feelings in order to survive. If a child experienced feelings when she was experiencing the actual abuse but can no longer recall those feelings, these are called *repressed* feelings. If the child was able to cope with the abuse by separating from her feelings *at the time* of the abuse because she could not tolerate feeling them, these are called *dissociated* feelings. Abuse survivors unconsciously utilize repression and dissociation as survival skills to separate themselves from abusive experiences. They are coping mechanisms that protect the child from overwhelming trauma. One reason that dykes who were severely abused as children may have a hard time recalling details of their abuse, or do not recall the abuse at all, is that the painful memories are sealed off from other memories. These "split off" or dissociated parts of consciousness remain apart from a woman's normal waking consciousness.

During an episode of abuse, a child can dissociate in an endless number of ways. Dissociation from the physical body is one way the child separates herself from abuse. She may say she hid under the bed while it was happening to her. She may say she went up to the ceiling or became part of the wall. She may, then, be able to describe the abuse from an external or third-person perspective. She may talk about it matter-of-factly; she can remember facts, but the feelings have been dissociated and are not available to her.

In many cases, a woman cannot remember the abuse. It is not that she can't or won't talk about the abuses she has suffered. It is that she *actually cannot* remember them. Her dissociated memories and feelings have been sealed off from conscious waking memory. There is a correlation between the severity and age of onset of the abuse and the severity of the dissociative response. The more sadistic the abuse and the earlier its onset, the fewer, if any, memories are consciously available to the survivor. When parts of these split-off memories "leak through" into normal waking consciousness, they can be experienced as sudden mood swings, extreme anxiety, intruding fleeting images, nightmares, flashbacks, and a woman's feeling that she is "unreal," "mechanical," or "dead."

The most extreme type of dissociation is Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD), which is the result of extreme dissociations that occur under

persistent traumatic stress. When a child is bombarded with more abusive violations than one person can handle, her dissociative response is to split into pieces. The child creates alter personalities, each of whom have their own different styles of coping.

When we hear the phrase "Multiple Personality Disorder," we may think of *The Three Faces of Eve* or *Sybil*. In reality, only a small percentage of all adult multiples openly exhibit such distinct personalities or vividly switch personalities in front of other people. More commonly, MPD is much less visible. It is the norm for MPD to evidence as a complex *internal* world. The same things are occurring that occur with someone like "Sybil," but those of us on the outside generally cannot see very much of it. To complicate the process further, many womyn with MPD are also not aware of their other personalities. Since the woman has developed refined skills that help her *not* remember many things, the alter personalities are frequently also stored away in the subconscious. However, just as dissociated memories affect a woman's conscious life, alter personalities—whether or not the woman is aware of them—do function actively. The woman is, then, not just one person. The woman is a collection of people living in one body. (Imagine the experience of a lesbian separatist with a heterosexual male alter . . . Things are infinitely more complicated than we generally take into account.)

Many womyn are generally unaware of the majority of their abuse herstories or, in some cases, *any* of their abuse herstories until their late twenties, thirties, or forties. It may be that dissociated material begins to leak through in early and middle adulthood because the woman is no longer in present and immanent danger from her childhood abusers, and because her coping mechanisms may be a hindrance in her daily life. Suddenly or not so suddenly, we find that we, too, are survivors.

Survivors in Lesbian Community

Until recently, survival of childhood abuse has been perceived as a personal issue. We wondered why there were so many individual womyn healing from abuse. Now we ask, "What has each of us survived?" There are too few of us who were exempted from the norms of heteropatriarchy as enacted by each of our abusers. These are the painful issues that directly impact the lesbian separatist community. They affect our interactions with one another and the concepts we have developed for relating to one another, such as accountability to each other; our caring about, caring for, and caretaking each other; and the types of relationships in which we choose to engage as activists, as friends, and as sexual partners.

One of the primary assumptions we make when we interact in the world is that we know ourselves, our motivations, our intentions, our

desires. We also assume that those with whom we interact have the same awareness of themselves. Although these ideas seem simple, they are unfortunately illusory. We all act from our earliest experiences—from what we saw, heard, and experienced as infants, from before we could conceptualize our experience, from before we could speak. There is much resistance to this truth because we do not want to imagine we are not in total control of ourselves. However, the reality is that the internal responses we developed to our experiences during that time in our lives are the same internal responses that are active in the present. Therefore, we are usually nearly entirely unaware of the origins of our motivations. We reenact with uncanny exactness what we learned in infancy and early childhood, almost as if we have been programmed. With this understanding, we no longer have to wonder why we may behave exactly like our parents even when we have tried very hard not to be like them.

Survivors of childhood abuse have a disturbing repository of unconscious information. This unavailable information acts as a filter through which experiences pass and actions are decided. It informs the motivations, intentions, desires, and interactions of the adult woman who has survived childhood abuse. We find ourselves acting in ways we do not understand, having fears we cannot attribute to anything, and feeling disjointed and "crazy." We are ashamed of what we perceive to be our personal quirks. We keep our feelings from the community and withdraw.

When we gather together with other lesbian separatists, we do not speak of these experiences. We do not speak of our fears. Our political work is supposed to consume us. Often, our feelings and fears are consuming us. It is our political work that keeps us connected to hope and change, yet we are not able to speak in our own community. The lesbian separatist community has categorically rejected therapy as politically unacceptable. If we seek therapy, we feel we must hide this choice from the lesbian separatist community.

We are free to talk about how we have been oppressed by psychiatry. It is true that our horror stories are very real and very horrible. We are not free to acknowledge that in some cases, this kind of outside help has kept us alive. We are free to talk about "therapism." We have seen far too many women lose their political analysis when they buy into self-help trends, the "disease concept" of "addiction," and therapist-dependence. We are tired of listening to these women talk "therapuke." However, we are not free to talk about the help we do receive in our own therapy and about the liberation we feel when we free ourselves from years of repression and dissociation of childhood trauma that has impacted every aspect of our entire lives.

That we do not or should not need help, that "each man is an island," is a canon of the heteropatriarchy. If we do acknowledge that many of us

could benefit greatly from help, we like to think that we can provide this help within the lesbian separatist community. It is a nice fantasy, but the truth is that to provide effective help, we would need specific knowledge, skills, and depth of commitment that very few of us have right now. We need to openly support dykes to seek competent help when they feel they need it. We need to learn the skills to support dykes during the painful process of working through childhood abuse and trauma. If we are truly a community, we need to openly accept and support dykes in pain as well as dykes in joy.

Beth Daily has spoken to me of "emotional giants" in the lesbian separatist community. Emotional giants are not star material. We are the dykes who are left over when cliques form. We may even be the nerds among lesbian separatists. We often speak with strong emotion and we are trying to stop apologizing for emoting. Feeling is healthy. We do our work in both the emotional and political realms, knowing that if we don't feel personally effective, we aren't politically effective. I truly hope that within the lesbian separatist community, we do not relegate dykes who acknowledge our emotional needs, and choose to try to integrate our emotional and political lives, to each her own island

This paper is for lesbians only, and can be copied by them for non-profit, educational purposes.

Pressure to Heal

Carolyn Gage

I am a survivor of incest, and in the last year, I came to realize that what I thought was voluntary sexual activity, was not. My sexual journey had led me from traumatic father-rape, to marriage with a passive "nice" man, to sexual activity with lesbians. Each step had been a dramatic improvement over the previous one, but each step was still a concession to what I experienced as pressure to fuck.

The pressure from my father was violent and life-threatening. The pressure from my husband was the legal and societal definition of the marriage contract, and at that time, I felt that I desperately needed the protection of marriage as a buffer from sexual aggression. Eventually the marriage became asexual, but I had to suffer the stigma of a partner who was not holding up her end of the bargain, a partner who was dependent on the goodwill of her tolerant husband.

After I came out, I enjoyed a freedom and joy in sex that I had never known, but as I continued to explore the effects of incest, I realized that I was still experiencing sex as compulsory, even with lesbian partners.

There is a large recovery movement for lesbian survivors of sexual abuse, but unfortunately, much of it is aimed at the survivor's so-called return to regular and voluntary sexual activity—in other words, "normal sex." That this is desirable is assumed. But to the lesbian whose rape experiences began before she was even old enough to talk, she has no natural sexual state to "recover." For lesbians like me, our recovery is the freedom to define the limitations of our disability for ourselves and to live as fully and honestly as we can with that knowledge. Strangely enough, the current "recovery" movement, with its assumptions about "healing," makes that almost impossible.

Some of the literature does make passing reference to the needs of lesbians like me, but with nowhere near the same interest, commitment, or enthusiasm elicited by the subject of this so-called return to "normal sex." Some books begrudgingly allude to celibacy as an option occasionally chosen by a survivor of severe abuse, but they never concede that it is a condition necessitated by our trauma. Such books make clear by implication that the lesbian who "chooses" celibacy either lacks the courage to heal or is a hopeless case, because she is beyond therapy. Either way, she is an embarrassment to the movement, as well as to other lesbians—and she is strictly on her own.

The literature of "recovery" pushes us to learn to enjoy, or at least to find ways to tolerate, sexual activity with a partner. The question is always, "How can we get you back up to that level of sexual activity which is mandatory for adults in this culture?" Granted, these books acknowledge that survivors are entitled to certain indemnities. We may, for instance, demand that our partner modify any specific movement or gesture which may be bringing up unpleasant memories for us. We may also claim the prerogative of being the one to initiate sex. But in chapter after chapter about touch, about breathing, about grounding, about communicating with one's partner—the focus is unwavering and the progress towards it inexorable.

For lesbians like me, who have been victimized by dozens, even hundreds, of techniques of sexual coercion, our knee-jerk response to all this helpful literature is, "So you want me to fuck, right?" The therapeutic disclaimer is, of course, "Not at all! We just want to help you get to the place where you will want to fuck." And I have to say, this distinction is completely lost on the part of me that looks at the world through the eyes of the ever-distrustful and chronically-violated child. Can anyone honestly expect that girl to trust a movement directed towards her sexual performance? Haven't the experts figured out that sexual rehabilitation is always the excuse for violating her? Don't they know that the only thing she has ever wanted to hear in her whole life is, "You don't have to fuck. You *never* have to fuck."?

But therapists will not say, "You never have to fuck." They can't. Our universe turns on fucking. In the dominant culture, compulsory heterosexuality defines the economic order, the social structures, and the political systems. But sex is only slightly less mandatory among lesbians.

Lesbians, who traditionally refuse to defer to men and who frequently position ourselves outside mainstream institutions, often must struggle along with limited and unstable incomes, minus the cushion of medical benefits. Living together not only offers a financial buffer, but it can also serve as a social survival unit.

Lesbians, as Sarah Hoagland points out in her book *Lesbian Ethics*, have not evolved true communities yet. At this point in history, we are operating as a sub-culture, without the institutions or identity of a genuine community. This lack of communal stability creates pressure on lesbians to pair off, even if only temporarily. Lesbians who became estranged from their families as a result of coming out have even more incentive to seek partnership with other lesbians. And "partner," "lover," "significant other," and "girlfriend" all spell the same thing to lesbians like me: fucking.

Can a lesbian expect primary intimacy without having to fuck? Who will love her through the years—or even just through the night? Who

will stand by her when she is sick, or unemployed, or disinherited, or mentally ill, or disabled? Who will understand her sense of humor, care about her victories, or share her pleasures? Does she have a right to expect this level of commitment and loyalty if she can't have sex? And if she doesn't have this right—and I maintain that in this culture she does not—where does this leave her?

Remember, this is a lesbian whose world is already terrifying (and no amount of therapy can erase the growing violence towards women), who has experienced the underbelly of patriarchy that other lesbians don't even want to think about, whose basic life skills are seriously handicapped by the developmental trauma she has suffered so early in life. Let's think about this lesbian for a minute. Does anyone really believe she will choose to live her entire life without intimacy? Or is it more likely that she will yet again rely on her expert skills in self-deception, numbing out, and pleasing others to come up with the sexual compliance which is not only a prerequisite for intimacy, but also the credential for having been "healed" of incest? It's a simple matter to shift from faking an orgasm to faking a "recovery."

Lesbianism as a traditional refuge for women, as a cultural sanctuary where violated women could define and customize our intimacy needs, is disappearing. Instead, we are adopting the obsessive, compulsive beliefs and sexual behaviors which have always characterized the cultures of heterosexual women. Lesbian culture is being inundated with sexual commercialism and heterosexual consumerism—value systems that equate intimacy with the frequency and intensity of sexual experiences. I see recently het lesbians becoming the sex therapists, encouraging everyone with their "if-it-feels-good-do-it" imported het philosophies.

What "feels good" for a survivor, what arouses her physically, may violate her deepest values, cause her to identify herself with her abusers, and may fill her with suicidal self-loathing and rage. So where does she fit? I see gay-boy leather values infiltrating our images of ourselves. I see sado-masochism teaching the confusion of pain and pleasure as a liberating philosophy, instead of the mind-fuck it is.

Many therapists use a simplistic concept of "the inner child" when working with survivors. What these therapists fail to understand is that survivors have many children within us. The gates of healing are not necessarily guarded by some tear-streaked, teddy-bear-clutching little wounded innocent waiting for a hug. Often the keeper of the keys is one tough animal, and the last thing she wants is a hug. She knows that after the hug, comes the fuck. And above all else, this inner child does not want to fuck. And she does not want to learn how to want to. In fact, she wants to live in a world where fuck has never been invented.

This inner child hates adults, understands dominance, and can smell hypocrisy a mile off. This inner child observes the therapy session from the same corner she observed mommy. She watches as yet again her primary caregiver, this time her adult self, lets herself be mesmerized by the same male-identified authority figure who is still stealing her precious resources in the name of providing her with the correct context for her experiences. This child knows that context by heart. It's the one thing adults agree on: The necessity of sex. This inner child, not the romanticized fantasy from the therapy models, sits back and watches the "recovery" charade/parade in enraged silence. She knows exactly what she needs, but that is the one thing no one will ever give her: The right not to fuck.

Can we find the courage to face the fact that what men do to little girls is so overwhelming, so horrific, that the damage can be deep and permanent? Can we admit that a lesbian's honesty, strength, and willingness to face her experiences may just as often lead her to conclude that sexual activity is not a healthy option for her? Can we acknowledge the survivor's right to assess her own damage and decide what she does and does not want to work on?

Can we create a culture without stigma or penalty for lesbians who choose not to engage in sexual activity?

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Back to Grass Roots and Out of Therapy: Suggestions for CR Groups

Tamarack and Mountain

Over the past 15 years or so therapists and professional counsellors who do not have firm grounding in basic lesbian to lesbian talk and in the powerful effect we can have simply by getting together have been making a lot of money providing "professional services" for victims and survivors¹ of incest. Those of us who offer assistance designed specifically as an alternative to years of private therapy have been continually shocked at the number of lesbian feminist counsellors who have opted for conventional training and who now deny the grass roots origins of their knowledge and exhibit lack of respect for consciousness-raising groups set up by and for survivors of incest.

Consciousness-raising groups—which may have originated during the Chinese revolution, where they were known as "women speaking their bitterness"—were adopted with powerful effect by many of us in the early 1970s in the women's liberation movement and the lesbian movement. The words "consciousness-raising" refer to the understanding that takes place in these groups as we realize more consciously that our lives are similar and that more than fighting personal battles we are fighting social battles. Meeting on our own, away from "therapy groups," we have avoided the division that therapy creates when it labels dykes who want to talk out pain as "clients" and "patients." CR allows room for a social perspective, erasing the myth that incest is an individual problem.

CR answers the need survivors have to come together when there is no "professional" available or when a "professional" is not wanted. And above all, when free, no-fee support is needed.

From the beginning CR groups, even groups for us simply to come together to talk, have met hostile resistance: accusations that these meetings are self-indulgent, that they don't work, that they are dangerous, that lesbian only groups are limiting in scope, that even women-only groups are selfish and narrow in perspective. All this while rape and murder of women increases. We need these groups more than ever.

¹We use both "incest victim" and "incest survivor," as both are important. Some prefer "victim," not wanting reality to be understated. Some prefer "survivor," wanting strength and ability to survive to be recognized.

Incest victims and survivors who have met in women-only groups have written and spoken at length of the degree of safety felt and of the unique non-judgmental atmosphere. For lesbians, finding a lesbian-only group has the same advantages, magnified by the power and freedom to concentrate on lesbian issues, without facing prejudice or fear from straight women. We foresee a time when lesbians meeting alone with lesbians is regarded as it has been in the distant past: with respect, as a natural and creative activity, never to be lost again.

Consciousness-raising groups have been known to meet for a few meetings, a few months or for many years. Some find that open-ended groups or drop-ins are working better than the more structured CR. Whatever works well for you, we are offering the following information to supplement your own ideas, and to make it easier for those who have no group to form one for yourselves.

Starting a CR Group

CR groups can be started by one or two organizers who have basic information on CR, or by a leaderless group of lesbians who want to meet together to discuss incest.

When one or two dykes are responsible for organising a group, it is important that you make the difference between CR and "therapy" groups clear at the beginning to those who join the group. "Techniques" are not used in CR groups. A dominant leader destroys the purpose of the group. An organizer gives out information on CR and gets the group started. She then drops the organizer role so that the group can become one of equal participation. The organizer can either stay as a participant in the group or leave. The information she offers is meant to enable every one in the group to organize CRs for herself and others in the future. Usually after the fourth week the group is ready to function without leaders. Any organisational jobs, such as getting the meeting started, can be done on a rotational basis.

An organiser must be comfortable about being an organiser and also about giving up that position. She needs to be open to new ideas, have a grounding in feminism, and be conscious about class and cultural differences and about disabilities. She should be aware of any of her own internalized prejudices against lesbians and be prepared for radical lives, such as separatism or total rejection of patriarchal values.

The organizer opens up discussion rather than imposing her own ideas and gives out information without taking up too much group time and energy. Otherwise she can ruin a group. The most important function of an organizer is to stress that CR can be carried out by anyone.

Many successful CRs have been leaderless. Interested dykes decide on a date and meeting place, share with others present the information they

have on CR and launch into discussion. Some are reluctant to meet with no organizer. This is certainly understandable, as talking about incest can have profound and painful effects. Many, feeling at a low level of energy when in need of a group themselves, are concerned that they will not be able to cope with the additional pain of others. It does take a certain amount of energy to get out and get a group started.

What is not widely known, though, is that the telling of painful stories often has an unexpected and energizing effect. Setting a solid structure for the group at the beginning, and making an agreement that each member is responsible for solving her own difficulties, eliminate many problems leaderless groups are susceptible to. Even so, because the effects of talking about incest are so unpredictable, a back-up dyke, e.g., a dyke from a rape crisis centre or women's centre who is familiar with CR, can be valuable to a group as a consultant in case of difficulty. Reading the same book on incest prior to the group's beginning or following a list of discussion topics can give leaderless groups a basis for discussion.

If a group is plagued by one or more members who begin bizarre or aggressive behaviour, who argue every point or dominate discussion constantly, the other members may have to insist that she/they leave, so that the group does not fall apart. This can be extremely difficult to do. Yet it is important to remember that you have come to the group to find solutions to problems, not to have new ones heaped on you by someone who is not ready or able to help form a group in which everyone is equal in the amount of energy given and received.

First Steps

1. Read about CR. Meet and talk with others who are interested.
2. Decide on a starting date, starting time and length of first meeting.
3. Decide on a maximum size. We recommend 10 or less, to allow plenty of discussion time for each member.
4. Find a place to meet.
5. Find a phone number or address that potential members can contact.
6. Advertise. Put up notices in lesbian gathering places, bookstores, etc.
7. Have someone call interested dykes back, to answer questions and confirm date, time, and place for the first meeting.

The environment is important. Choose a room that is accessible to dykes with disabilities, environmentally as safe as possible, easy to get to, physically comfortable with a choice of chairs or floor cushions, with natural rather than fluorescent lighting, and with a bathroom nearby.

Avoid meeting where there are children. Being interrupted by children is disruptive to the whole group. Children are able to pick up pieces from the discussion at early ages, even from other rooms. This makes

talking about incest difficult or impossible. Many groups pass a hat at the beginning of the evening, for dykes needing money for child care or bus fare. Some group the children together for the evening in another house.

Houses with pets are not ideal for CR. Many lesbians suffer from allergies to domestic animals, and many have been attacked by them in the past. Animals can also be disturbing, finding ways to disrupt the meeting. If everyone is careful not to come using scented soaps, shampoos, perfumes, etc., there is more of a chance that a dyke with environmental sensitivities will be able to participate.

The First Meeting

1. Sit in a circle, or whatever form is comfortable (check, because some who have been ritually abused in satanic circles are not comfortable in a circle), do a short round where each gives her name, why she is there and what she would like from the group meetings.
2. Review "Guidelines for CR Groups" (below) and decide the best structure for your group.
3. Discuss "confidentiality."
4. Do a round of talking about incest, even if only to indicate the type of incest and the identity of the attacker(s).
5. Decide on topics that everyone is most interested in covering over the next few weeks.
6. Discuss background information on CR.

There may not be time to cover 5 or 6 on the first night. It is important that everyone has a chance to say what she wants from the group, before the first meeting is over.

Guidelines for Consciousness-Raising Groups

1. **Lesbian only.** To raise our consciousness of our position as lesbians, we need time with other dykes.

2. Decide the **number of weeks** the group will meet and **how often each week.** This should be decided at the beginning. A group that wants to continue past the end date can set further meetings at that time. Some groups meet once a week, some twice, some three times. Some have a day long session followed by shorter weekly meetings. Most meet weekly for 8, 10, 16 or 20 weeks, then take a break to assimilate what went on. Some then begin again, with the same or new participants.

3. Decide **how long** you want to meet each time. Usually 2 to 3 hours of steady discussion, with a break in the middle, is long enough. Stop at the agreed upon time, not later, to be fair to those who must leave and to those who have gauged their energy to the time expected.

4. Everyone agrees to come on time and to come to each meeting until the end of the group. It is important not to make others wait for you and a participant's absence from a group meeting can upset others.

5. Decide at what point the group will be closed, i.e., no new members. This may be the first week. We suggest no later than the third, to prevent having to backtrack.

6. Agree that each is coming to the group to gain knowledge about her self, exchange stories, look at herself and her past and at any self-destructive habits she wants to change.

7. A basic rule of CR is that no advice is given. A member can ask for feedback if she wants it.

8. When someone is speaking the others listen, giving her undivided attention. If someone is dominating (draining) the group, the others must be prepared to say something. Everyone is entitled to an equal amount of uninterrupted time over the weeks.

9. Discuss alcohol and drugs. Agree not to drink or take drugs (apart from medical needs) 24 hours prior to and after group meetings. Agree to talk about it if anyone is having difficulty with this one. Or better, agree not to drink alcohol or take drugs for the whole time the group is meeting. The longer away from these substances, the deeper the discussion.

10. Decide on smoking or non-smoking. We recommend no smoking in the meeting room with a short break halfway through the meeting.

11. Food. We recommend keeping eating separate from the CR. Eating can be distracting, and breaks up solid discussion time. Food can present difficulties to those struggling with eating problems and some foods, especially sugar, can block memories.

12. Establish confidentiality at the beginning. The basic rule is, tell your friends about your own life, not about others' lives. Talk about what confidentiality means, outlining what you want from each other, what you want kept confidential and what you don't mind others speaking about. Many incest victims want some experiences known, but may want much kept within the group. Confidentiality is critical to creating the trust to speak openly.

13. Decide on what type of hugging or physical contact you want in the group and how to end your meetings. There has been a move in therapy and women's groups toward "group hugs" or hugs between individuals. Some may not want to hug, hold hands or have any sort of physical contact. This must be respected. It is important for the group to come together at the end of the evening, so that no one leaves feeling scattered or alone. We suggest sitting quietly together for a few minutes without speaking, to feel the collective group energy before going home.

14. **Discuss celibacy.** Agree that no sexual relationships will be begun between participants during the time the group is meeting. You may want to have a complete break from sex to focus time and energy on yourselves.

15. Each individual agrees **not to commit suicide** while the group is on. This is critical, and can save extreme concern later, especially if some are experiencing anguish that needs to be expressed.

16. **Passing.** No one is forced to speak. You can pass when it is your turn and be returned to at the end of the round. If, however, someone hasn't spoken for three weeks or so, the others ought to ask her if she plans to participate. Someone who is not prepared to speak at all puts the others in a vulnerable position, as they have given information about themselves and know nothing about the silent one. If someone finds herself unwilling to speak after a time, she ought to leave. She would do better to find another group at another time, when she feels more ready to take part.

17. Some exchange **phone numbers**, others don't. This should never be required, and numbers should never be given to others. Privacy may be essential to safety.

18. CR groups are **free to anyone**. If donations are suggested for any reason, they must be totally optional.

Types of Discussion

1. **Rounds:** Each takes a few minutes to speak, about what is going on in her life or her thoughts on a topic.

2. **Individual Time:** The amount of time available is divided by the number of dykes in the group, and each talks for the same amount of time. To prevent a feeling of being left up in the air, the last few minutes of the turn can be used for responses from others, if the speaker chooses.

3. **Open Discussion:** A free-form discussion of an issue or event. This type of discussion needs care to ensure that the conversation doesn't go too fast for some or that a few individuals don't take over.

4. **Topic Discussion:** When the topic is chosen a week in advance, each member has a chance to gather her thoughts. Individual Time is the preferable format for topics, although Open Discussion can be used.

5. **Role Plays:** One participant describes herself and the others in her life, an event, and her own and others' responses. The situation is played out by the group, who plays who being decided by the one wanting the role play. The roles can be reversed and reversed back again.

6. Information Gathering: Some nights may be set aside for exchanging information on, for example, resources for lesbians in the area, self defense, body strengthening exercises, helpful books.

7. Reading Journals: This may take place in a round, with each reading from her journal. A group may plan to write with the aim of reading to each other on a given night.

Some Discussion Topics

Myths: About incest and incest survivors.

Telling: Who could you/did you tell and what happened; deficiencies and malpractice among professionals; court experiences.

Self destructive behaviors: alcohol, drugs, junk food, self-hatred, self-mutilation, suicide, blocking memories, splitting, workaholism.

Silencing methods: Violent threats/acts, fear tactics, torture, seduction, promises, favours, lies, brainwashing, "gaslighting," guilt.

Guilt, shame, humiliation: For what happened, for talking; as method of control, religious organizations and guilt.

Types of incest: Fathers, step-fathers, uncles, grandfathers, brothers, sisters, mothers, others.

Violence: Done to you; violent feelings and actions of yours.

Seduction: Recognizing it; ways seduction was used, that you feel vulnerable to seduction; ways you have been taught to use seduction.

Family: contact or no contact; confronting or not confronting; the pressure to forgive, to keep the family together; role of the dutiful daughter.

Mothers: Abuse by mothers—physical, emotional, sexual; your relationship to your mother; betrayal by mothers; blaming mothers.

Anger: As a child; now; ways to get it out.

Fear: As a child; now; ways to alleviate it, protect yourself.

Blocking: Methods of blocking memories; methods of unblocking.

Splitting: Splitting as self-protective device; out of the body experiences.

Relationships: Vulnerabilities/patterns/present problems; sorting out what you want from what you don't; violence in lesbian relationships.

Sexuality: How incest has affected you.

Lesbianism: Discrimination against lesbians; lesbian culture; effects of incest on lesbian relationships and community; coming out stories.

Prostitution: And incest; and economics.

Celibacy: Myths about celibacy; discrimination toward lesbians who choose celibacy; celibacy and healing from incest.

Losing friends: Others' reactions to your life.

Making friends: Telling others about your life.

Saying No: Reconstructing personal boundaries that were violated by rape and incest; ensuring a safe distance from your attackers; recognizing and stopping re-victimization.

Dreams: Memories, messages through dreams.

Journals: Keeping journals; recording dreams, body reactions, flashbacks, thoughts, ideas, changes.

Reading: Writings by other survivors; incest and rape throughout history and internationally; pornography, prostitution, woman hatred.

Action: writing, public speaking; confronting perpetrators; exposing malpractice in your community; locating and expanding support.

Back to Basics

We are not saying that CR will work for everybody, or that no one has been helped by someone that they have paid to see, or that all professional counsellors neglect to put violence in context, or that meeting with someone individually isn't sometimes preferable. Some like groups, some don't, and some are going through too much to listen to what anyone else is going through, or to wait for a turn to speak. What we are saying is that some are making a lot of money on the backs of women in pain, and that the demystification back to basics is necessary and ethically overdue among lesbians who want to help.

This paper is for women only and can be copied by them for non-profit, educational purposes.

Notes on Contributors

Amanda Hayman plans to stick to writing fiction in the future. Please do not assume that because she has written this article she will be willing to discuss incest at any hour of the day or night. Approach with sensitivity.

Anna Murray (a pseudonym) is editing a book on sexual assault of daughters by mothers and other female caretakers. She is a counselor and is an activist for lesbian disability rights.

Ardel Thomas. I will receive my M.A. in Literature from the University of Colorado in May. For the past nine years I have been a lesbian activist in Boulder. I have three cats and a rabbit. The two things that keep me sane: coffee and swimming.

Bee Herd is a pseudonym for a writer who has been dying for an excuse to use this pseudonym for a long time. She lives in Seattle with a cat whose pseudonym is B. Asleep. She has work in the recently released, *She Who Was Lost Is Remembered: Healing from Incest through Creativity* (Seal Press).

Carolyn Gage is currently Playwright-in-Residence for Tribad Productions in Sonoma County, California. She is an incest survivor and activist for lesbian culture.

Chris Cuomo. I'm an Italian-American Lesbian philosopher who relies on my sense of humor to keep me going.

Chrystos was born November 7, 46 in San Francisco of a Menominee father and Lithuanian/Alsace-Lorraine mother. She has been a proud lesbian for over 25 years. She is the author of *Not Vanishing* and *Dream On* and is a contributor to numerous anthologies. She is active in land and treaty rights work.

Debby Earthdaughter. I'm 30, from German/?? heritage, from mixed working/middle class, now living on SSI with chemical sensitivity. I'm learning more and more to honor myself by taking good care of myself and using my writing, art, and ritual-making to make change.

Elizabeth Clare. I am a lesbian/feminist activist, poet, and essayist, living in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I am currently getting my M.F.A. in Creative Writing at Goddard College. I have pieces published in *Sinister Wisdom* and *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*.

Fox will be happily growing into her new name for some time to come.

Kathy is the name of several ingenious little girls who live inside the author. They like to draw and paint, camp and swim. They love their Auntie Jodi and their Auntie Alix.

Laura is a midwestern lesbian separatist who was raised in the white working class.

Linda Peterson. I have been writing this paper for months. It changes every time I work on it. That's good. Writing it and showing it to Amanda at every revision is probably the smartest thing I've done as a partner.

Mountain. I am a 59 year old Canadian lesbian separatist, eco-feminist, vegan witch, but then, who's into labels?

Sarah Allisen is a pseudonym. I'm 40, Jewish, vegetarian, and a separatist. I've been an office worker for over 20 years. I am interested in music, metaphysics and the nature of the healing process.

Shana Rowan Blessing. I am a lumpy, hairy, opinionated, radical dyke who loves children and animals. I believe truth is often found in paradox.

Shel. I am a lesbian separatist who cannot reveal her whole name or home for fear of reprisals from those who hurt me. I am loved by some wonderful dykes and I love them back. I am grateful to my lovers and to my separatist, dyke community for support.

Sumica Midcalf. I lift weights. I work in an abortion clinic, because the right to abortion is important to survivors and was important to me. I like to play, I'm into being silly.

Susan Strega. I am 37, white, dyke of poverty, a survivor of childhood sexual assault, battering, and sado-masochism. I have worked with survivors for 10 years now, and currently work at Maiya House, a treatment centre in British Columbia for alcoholic and addicted women.

Tamarack. I am a 43 year old lesbian feminist from Canada determined to effect global change.

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SHE Land Trust to help more lesbians/wimmin live on land. Write with ideas, contributions, for info: POB 5285, Tucson, AZ 85703.

Seeking dykes who are currently fighting back to destroy oppressive systems to share strategies, reports of actions and more. Carrie Louise & Valerie Jean, POBox 7029-PRS, Minneapolis, MN 55407-0029.

Calls for Papers

Ritual Abuse and Feminist Critiques of Therapy. Calling for writings by women for two anthologies. All forms, artwork. Send work or queries to: Fighting Words Press, POBox 4, Northampton, MA 01061-0004.

Lesbian Gardening. By 8/1/92. HerBooks, POB 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

Anthology of Contemporary Black Women's Personal Journals. By July 1, 92. Patricia Bell-Scott, Dept. Child & Family Development, Dawson Hall, Univ. Georgia, Athens, GA 30602.

Short Fiction by Women. New magazine. Box 1276, Stuyvesant Station, New York, NY 10009.

At the Crossroads. A new feminist magazine brings together feminism, spirituality and new paradigm science. POBox 112, St. Paul, AR 72760.

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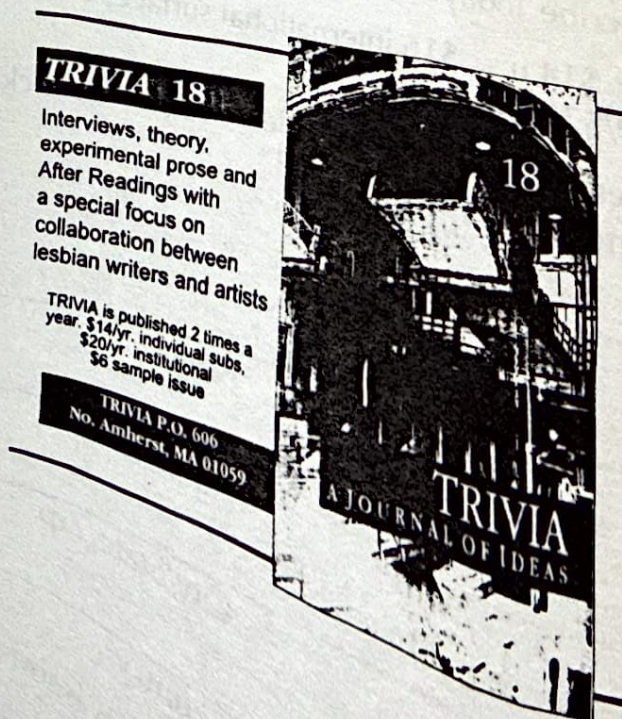
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