

SCARLET WOMEN 13

Part 1 Sexuality

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WOMEN ONLY

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Editorial Statement

"Socialist Feminism is a distinct revolutionary approach, a challenge to the class structure and to patriarchy. By the patriarchy we mean a system in which all women are oppressed, an oppression which is total, affecting all aspects of our lives. Just as class oppression preceded capitalism, so does our oppression. We do not acknowledge that men are oppressed as a sex although working class men, gay men and black men are oppressed as workers, gays and blacks, an oppression shared by gay, black and working class women. Sisterhood is our defence against oppression, and as such is part of our revolutionary consciousness.

Socialists sometimes see the struggle as being about a change in the economic structure alone. For us the struggle is about a change in total social relations. We are concerned to develop an understanding of the real relationship between male supremacy and class society. As Socialist Feminists we have to examine socialist feminist thought and seek to develop it. What we are looking for is nothing less than a total redefinition of socialist thought and practice. We are working towards a socialism which seeks to abolish patriarchy.

What this means for Scarlet Women

We want to publish papers, letters, articles, ideas that develop the thought and effectiveness of socialist feminism. The debate about the class struggle and relating to left groups can take place in our pages only if contributions are based on the belief in an autonomous Women's Liberation Movement and also on the belief that autonomous movements have the right to define their own oppression and the struggle against it."



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LESBIAN ARCHIVES COLLECTIVE

A group of lesbian women have got together to form a national lesbian archives collective, to be based in Manchester. The archives will use the Manchester base in an attempt to de-centralise London. The archives will be controlled and used by women for women and will exist to collect and protect lesbian herstory.

We want: Support - money, typewriters, cassette recorders, filing cabinets, any donations of money, equipment or practical support will be appreciated.

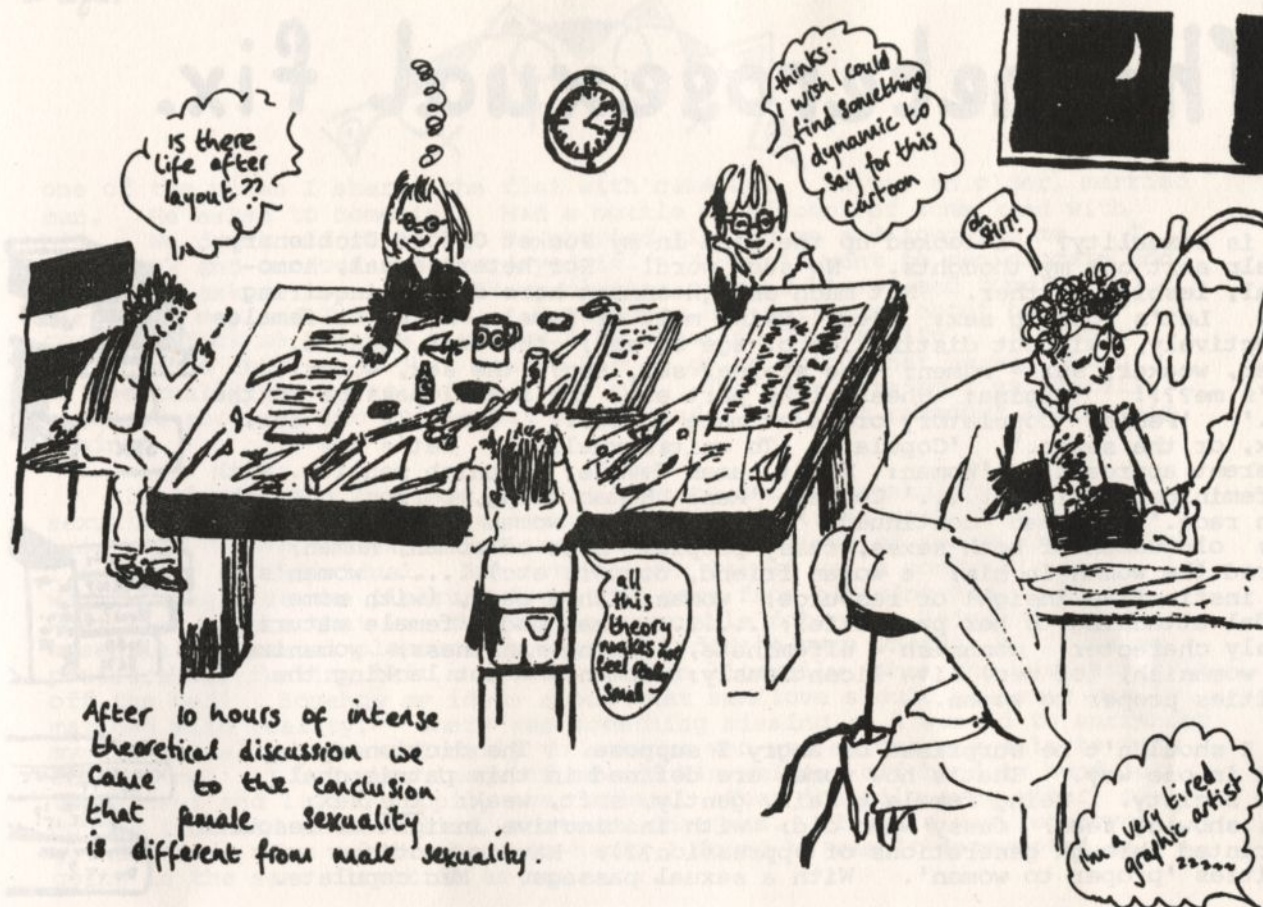
We need: Material, oral or written, from lesbian women about campaigns, papers or recollections of conferences, drafting of demands and discussions involved, and struggles that lesbian women have been involved in. We need recollections from

older lesbian women about the herstory of lesbians in their locality - all these things can be collected and stored in the archives.

At present the only Lesbian Archives exist in the U.S.A. and Canada, and we think it is time we preserved our own herstory.

For more information, send support and material to:

Lesbian Archives Collective,
Lesbian Link, 61A Bloom Street,
Manchester. Phone: 061 236 6205
or Rochdale 40878



Editorial.

So many women sent in contributions for this issue that we decided to print it in two parts. In this way, we can sell part one and use the proceeds to help pay for part two. It also means that women will have to fork out for one part at a time, rather than paying 80p. to £1 for a double issue. Although we don't like to create a distinction between theory and practice, we have had to divide the articles, so we did so on the basis of whether they were more personal (part 1) or more historical or theoretical in approach (part 2). We felt this was the only realistic way round the problem. This issue isn't available to men and we hope sisters will make sure they don't get hold of copies. As we won't be able to sell it through bookshops, would sisters please buy extra copies to sell to other women.

Talking about the articles stimulated a whole lot of discussion amongst us. For example, about sexual attraction: Is it determined purely by chemistry or is it conditioned by male power and cultural, racial and class background? Are women born lesbian or heterosexual or are we all 'really' bisexual, heavily conditioned into heterosexuality? However we see ourselves sexually, our feelings cannot be separated from the male power system we live in. Where having a relationship with a man means access to social approval and 'normality' and where lesbians get beaten up for being 'perverts', the way in which we define/express our sexuality surely becomes political? Even tho' so very few of us have much choice in the matter, and our sexual feelings are inevitably tied up with other factors like financial dependency and/or affection for those we live with.

Because heterosexuality is 'normal', there is a power relation between heterosexuals and lesbians - a relation reflected in the WLM. Many financially independent heterosexual feminists can control their relationships with men. Women's power supports them as a counter to the male power of their lovers. This poses contradictions for lesbians in the WLM, for this women's power is also lesbian power. The WLM is fuelled by lesbian power - although this fact is often ignored by heterosexual feminists who feel threatened by lesbians because of the implicit challenge to their own sexual identity and security.

Many of the articles show how deeply we are affected by male control of our sexuality, and how male power divides us from each other - heterosexual/

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The heterosexual fix.

What is sexuality? I looked up the word in my Pocket Oxford Dictionary to help sort out my thoughts. No such word! Nor heterosexual, homo-sexual, lesbian, either. Not much enlightenment here for an inquiring mind! Let's look up sex: 'Sex: Being male or female, males or females collectively, (without distinction of age or sex; the fair, gentle, softer, weaker, sex - women; the sterner sex, men; the sex, women). That's me??!!' 'Vagina: Sheath-like part esp. the sexual passage to the womb.' 'Penis: Copulatory organ of male animal.' 'Sexual: Of sex, a sex, or the sexes.' 'Copulate: To unite sexually.' Let's try a different approach. 'Woman: Adult human female, womanish man (... with the feminine emotions).....' Compare 'Man: Human being, person, one, the human race.' 'Woman' continued: '.....(play the woman - weep or show fear; old women of both sexes, fussy people; born of woman, human; stirred the woman in him; a woman friend, doctor, etc)..... woman's wit, instinctive insight or resource; woman with a past, (with some scandal attaching to her past life); womanhood - female maturity, womanly character; womanish - effeminate, lacking manliness; womanize - make womanish, (of men) live licentiously; womanly - not lacking the qualities proper to woman.'

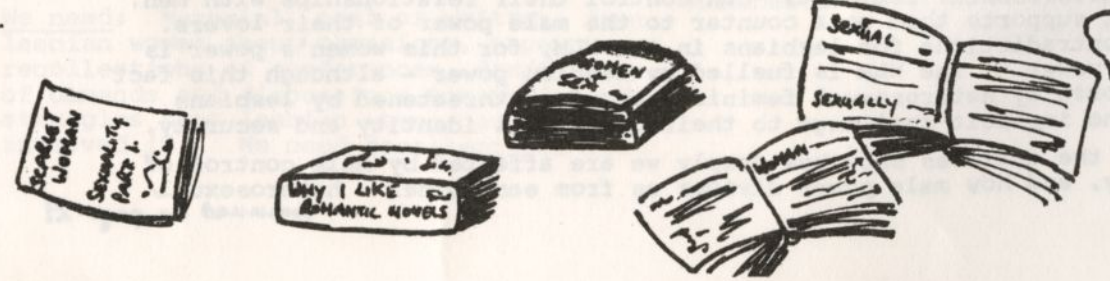
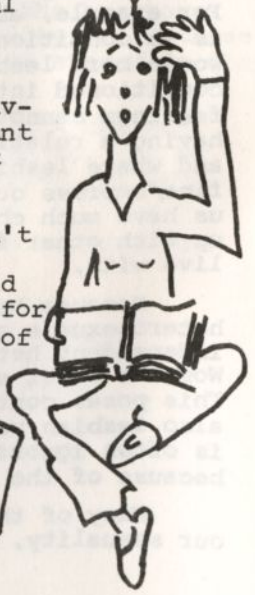


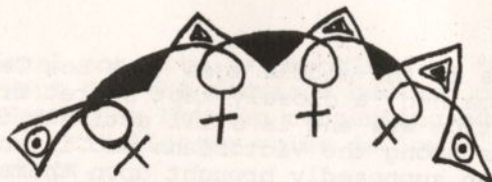
I shouldn't be surprised or angry I suppose. The dictionary is right in one way. That's how women are defined in this patriarchal class society. Being female = fair, gently, soft, weak; the sex; weak, showing fear; fussy when old; with instinctive insight or resource (imprinted through generations of oppression??); having emotions and qualities 'proper to woman'. With a sexual passage. Men copulate.



I remember looking through the dictionary (probably the same one, in fact) like that when I was at school, looking for answers to questions I couldn't put into words. Sex was obviously much more than being male or female. It had something to do with making babies. But there was more to it than that too. It obviously felt good, the way adults went on about it. But what did that mean, how did it feel? I acted out being male and female in my imagination, using ideas taken from films, magazines, comics, television, books. I had a very complicated fantasy life which allowed me to be male or female depending upon how I wanted to feel. Female was being desired, being found pleasurable; male was in control, doing what felt good. Sometimes the two merged. As I got older I realised there were more complicated emotions attached to sex. I had crushes on older girls, and teachers, at school. A younger girl had a crush on me. I had my first kiss from a boy. Yuck, what a disappointment that was! I left home and got fondled by several men; I would have enjoyed it more if I had felt more in control of the situation - it was always with older men. I found a man I felt more equal with - I didn't like him particularly - to whom I lost my virginity. (I still think of it that way). It was a planned happening - I was actually in love with (that is, I felt lust for, 'lust: Sensuous appetite regarded as a sin; passionate enjoyment or desire of; lascivious passion.' 'Lascivious: Lustful.') another man, but I didn't want him to think I was sexually inexperienced (sort that one out!). That relationship lasted quite a long time, but he didn't want the kind of sexually passionate relationship I did; and he couldn't fuck me. I found that really frustrating, after all, 'real' sex was fucking, wasn't it? I found other men to fuck me. I didn't enjoy it particularly, but I knew it would be different if he did it. Everything else we did in bed together was much more enjoyable than with other men. Except for one experience: I was in our flat by myself one evening and a friend of

What IS sexuality???





one of the women I shared the flat with came by. He was an older, married man. He asked to come in. Had a bottle of alcohol of some kind with him. We drank and talked. He started kissing me and touching me. I was drunk and curious and I enjoyed it. I didn't want to reciprocate and he didn't ask me to. He took my clothes off and kissed and fondled and car-essed me, and I loved it. I remember him muttering about how he couldn't fuck me because that would be cheating on his wife. I didn't want him to fuck me, I just wanted him to go on doing what he was doing. He eventually put me to bed and left me. The next morning I was totally confused about it and put it out of my mind. I don't remember seeing him again.

If someone had asked me at that time to define 'sexuality' - my sexuality even - I would have found it difficult (even more than now) to know what to say. Sexual feelings were the feelings of sexual desire that I felt for an individual. But somehow sex itself was a confused area. Sex was fucking, but the pleasure from that came from pleasing him. It was what went before that was the most pleasurable for me. Being in love was essential to sexual pleasure because if I didn't care whether he found me pleasurable, fucking left me cold. Often literally, when the blankets fell off the bed! Somehow my ideas about what sex/love should be never really matched with reality. There was something missing. I wanted to surrender myself sexually and emotionally to someone who was strong and able to take care of me. I had this image of me and him walking off hand in hand into the sunset and living happily ever after. That 'happily ever after' of course included sexual bliss, whatever that was. Trouble was, whenever I got anywhere near walking hand-in-hand, I found he wasn't interested in going in the same direction as me

How do other women find out about their sexuality? I learned through men - a long and tortuous route - and I was relatively lucky in my sexual encounters with men. Some women learn to explore their own sexuality through masturbation (definition: 'Masturbation - Bodily self-pollution'). I never did until I was in my 20's - strict parental control ensured I never touched 'down there'. Some women learn from other women. There was a heavy taboo on girls being 'too close' at the girls' school I went to, 'though. I do remember rumours that some girls were doing unmentionable things together. Many women I'm sure remain unknowing about themselves sexually, because of guilt or ignorance about masturbation, or because their sexual experience is within relationships with men who do not allow them to find out what they like or want, or if they find out themselves, the men aren't interested in giving them what they want.

Many women like me put together their ideas about what they are sexually by absorbing the messages that are beamed at us from every quarter (including the Pocket Oxford Dictionary) about what we should be sexually/emotionally as 'woman'. Patriarchy goes to great lengths to make sure women do not discover, explore, develop their own sexual identity. There is only one culturally approved sexual identity for women - to be desired by men. A woman who rejects this identity - well, there are dozens of disparaging words to describe her depending upon her particular activity in this field. A woman who desires other women - well, that just doesn't happen....

Male homosexuality has a history and is recognised in law (it even exists in the Pocket Oxford Dictionary as sodomy and buggery) - 'unnatural' though it is deemed to be by patriarchal culture. Whatever the reasons why lesbianism was not included in the laws making homosexuality illegal, the effect was to refuse it recognition and keep it hidden, thus removing it from the realm of even negative sexual identity for most women. The fact that the clitoris is the centre of sexual feeling for women, although



'discovered' by (male) anatomists in the middle ages (see Bea Campbell's article in Feminist Review 5) remained a closely kept secret from women until quite recently. Masturbation was and is still actively discouraged, although not as virulently now as among the Victorians who invented an amazing variety of ills that women supposedly brought upon themselves by masturbation, including what appears to be the moral equivalent of advanced stages of syphilis. Masturbation by men was/is also disapproved of, but here again the double standard between sexual possibilities for women and men is reflected, for masturbation by men is at least recognised as an activity, and, along with homosexuality, is acknowledged to exist as a practice particularly in all-male environments like the army, boarding schools, etc.



While denying women the opportunity to define their own sexuality, patriarchal culture also promotes an ideal of female sexuality which encourages her to define herself sexually in relation to men. There are obviously lots of examples of this - films, books, plays, painting and sculpture - but one that had a particularly strong influence on me was the romantic novel. Georgette Heyer was my favourite. I used to find her and other similar books a real turn-on (I could still, I find, reading through a Mills and Boon paperback while thinking about writing this article). I think romantic novels are a sort of alternative pornography for women. Mainstream pornography for men is strictly about male-dominated (patriarchal) heterosexual penetration sex. It defines in a very explicitly sexual (genital) way how 'men' get sexual pleasure. 'She' is there for him to gaze at, fondle, use to excite and satisfy 'him'. It also defines how 'men' relate emotionally to whomever it is they are getting their pleasure from. Pornography is not aimed at women, although women may also find it erotic (identification with the fucker, or the fucked, perhaps, or maybe just turned on by the pictures) - and deeply offensive at the same time because it uses women to re-inforce male power by validating/encouraging individual men's identity with the male role within patriarchal social relations.

The romantic novel on the other hand is produced for women and read by them in vast numbers. Ann Barr Snitow in an article entitled "Mass Market Romance: Pornography for women is different" (Radical History Review 20) notes: "If you add to the Harlequin (Canadian equivalent of Mills and Boon - my note) sales figures (variously reported from between 60 million to 109 million for 1978) the figures for similar novels by Barbara Cartland and those contemporary romances published by Popular Library, Fawcett, Ballantine, Avon, Pinnacle, Dell, Jove, Bantam, Pocket Books and Warner, it is clear that hundreds of thousands of women are reading books of the Harlequin type."

Romantic fiction does acknowledge female sexuality, of a sort. Unlike pornography for men, the sexuality it describes is not genital, but mediated through the emotions. "In romanticized sexuality," says Ann Barr Snitow, "waiting, anticipation, anxiety - these represent the high point of sexual experience." The heroine, even though she may initially rebel and reject him, ultimately succumbs to the strong, arrogant, capable, 'stern' male. The first line of the Mills and Boon I just read says it all:

" 'I'm not going and that's final!' Helen said." (Moon of Aphrodite by Sara Craven).

I recognised the story immediately. I knew she would go and that she would marry - after a struggle - the 'overbearing Damon Leandros' mentioned on the cover. There are three scenes of sexual assault, of increasing severity, during the course of the book. The final (fourth) sex scene, in which they admit their love for each other is a disappointment because

very little sexual/sensual activity is described. 'Going the whole way' one suspects, will be kept for the marriage bed and certainly outside the scope of this book. HeteroSex between consenting adults is obviously not worth writing about, its titillation value is low. In this at least it reflects reality perhaps.

Women obviously enjoy this kind of story and the sexual expression which is the focus and purpose of it. The fact that the HeteroSex act is rarely described in detail from the women's point of view (as it is in technicolour detail from the male point of view in pornography) seems to me to be particularly significant. If women enjoyed the kind of sex experienced in marriage, why keep quiet about it? It would make men's job of keeping women confined within the patriarchal family much easier. And women who did want and manage to live outside the family would not be such a threat. There must be some reason why instead of telling us we will enjoy sex in marriage, they fill our heads instead with confused and mystified ideas about romantic love. Here's Helen, from the story mentioned above, bitterly regretting her refusal of marriage to him:

"She thought, ' I should have married him when I had the chance. I should have taken him on his own terms. He wanted me, and perhaps in time I could have made him love me. If I'd had his child, he might have loved me then.....'"

Helen has capitulated to patriarchy, accepted her role as a woman, understanding perfectly her place in the scheme of things - but believing because she wants to believe that her love will change him. What a familiar story that one is!

[Handwritten scribble]

So why does patriarchy do this to us? (Hetero)sexuality as defined by patriarchy is about reproduction - penetration is the climax, the 'real' sex act. What goes before, if anything, is mere foreplay, what men have to do to get women to open their legs voluntarily. (I wonder how much affect having easy access to the Pill has made to young women in their sexual relations with men - at least when contraception was more difficult to get hold of a woman had an excuse for not wanting to jump into bed and insisting on petting instead. Is it more difficult for women to resist the pressure to have 'real' sex, ie. get fucked, now?) Patriarchal heterosexuality is defined in this way because patriarchy as a system of social relations is about the control of women's reproductive capacity - our capacity to have children - by men. Herein lies the problem for patriarchy, and the basis for the complex sexual/emotional brainwashing inflicted upon women in patriarchal (class) society. Procreation is women's primary role in patriarchy. For a man to be certain that a child is 'his', he has to make sure his woman doesn't have sexual relations with other men, hence the monogamous (for women) patriarchal family structure. Penetration is necessary for procreation. Therefore the kind of sexuality which has to be fostered in women has to be receptive to penetration. There are two problems in this. The first one is that whereas for men sexual pleasure and procreation go together, for women they do not necessarily do so. The vagina is not the primary centre of a woman's sexual feeling; the clitoris, which is, does not necessarily get stimulated during penetration. Women therefore don't necessarily get turned on by penetration. The solution to this problem is to convince women that they don't have much 'sex drive', that their sexuality is actually tied up with having children and pleasing their man.

The second problem is that patriarchy has this sneaky suspicion that women do in fact have a very strong sex drive, are in fact sexually 'insatiable'. Look at the primates, for example, our closest animal relatives. When a female primate goes into heat she will sexually exhaust a whole string of males in one session. If women were allowed to recognize and develop their sexuality, would one man be able to satisfy her?

Would she not also seek out a whole string of men when she was feeling randy? And if she got pregnant in the process, how would anyone know who the father was? How would a man know his own child? And where would the patriarchal family, and the social structures and assumptions built upon it, be then? Uncontrolled female sexuality is dangerous. The solution to that problem is to define all women who do exhibit any form of sexual independence as whore/prostitute (or lesbian/frigid/spinster, depending upon the way in which the woman rejects her sex role) women who have forfeited the few privileges and protection 'respectable' women have a right to within patriarchal society. Thus in patriarchal culture there is the dual - and contradictory - image of women as a sexual being: the asexual submissive virgin and the sexually voracious nymphomaniac.

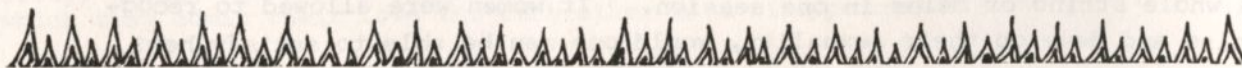
Which are we, virgin or whore? Somewhere in between, or neither? How do we even begin to find out, hemmed in as we are not just by patriarchal assumptions about what we should be, but also by the very real social and economic structures of patriarchal class society which keep most of us tied to men. Perhaps primates - and the new generation of women who are studying them, can give us a clue. Here's a quote from Elizabeth Fisher's book, 'Women's Creation' (Wildwood House, 1980):

'In 1971, Suzanne Chevalier-Skolnikoff conducted a year-long study at..... Stanford University (of)stumptail macaques, monkeys whose sexual behaviour has several characteristics that make it easier to observe than other monkeys. She produced incontrovertible evidence of orgasms in the females - "the first observations of orgasms in any nonhuman female mammal". She recorded both heterosexual and homosexual behaviour among her subjects, reporting that homosexuality occurred in the rather high (!) proportion of one to every four heterosexual encounters. Female homosexual behaviour was observed more frequently than male homosexual activity - twenty three female-female encounters, several of which led to orgasm, as opposed to thirteen male-male ones. "All normal animals probably have the capacity for both male and female sex roles throughout their lives," she concluded....'

Feminist and feminist-influenced anthropologists and archeologists are also beginning to challenge and break through patriarchal assumptions and interpretations of women's sex role (and economic role, which is closely connected) within pre-patriarchal societies. When patriarchal blinkers are taken away, a new world of female culture and sexual expression come into view, and male sexuality is seen in a different light too. Masturbation, homosexuality and heterosexuality, couple sex and group sex, pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relations, - all forms of sexual expression begin to take on a new significance within societies in which women's economic role is valued as much as men's, and men have less interest in biological paternity. What becomes clear is that human sexuality as it is expressed by individuals follows no rigid monogamous norm; on the contrary it is probably almost entirely culturally determined. What is 'natural' sexual expression is probably any kind of sexuality which gives pleasure to those engaging in it. When assumptions about 'inherent' male dominance are thrown out the window, rape and other forms of male sexual assault (unknown amongst primates in their natural environment) and passive, masochistic female sexuality, can both be seen as abnormal pathological sexual expressions, reflections of female subordination within patriarchal society, not 'natural' expressions of male/female sexuality.

The right to a self-defined sexuality is a major demand of our liberation movement. Like so many of our other demands, it will never be achieved for all women until we overthrow patriarchal class society. And also like some of the other ideas we may have about what 'liberation' means to us, we can only guess at how self-defined sexuality will be expressed 'after the revolution'. In the meantime, (whilst also battling away at other aspects of this oppressive society we live in) we can begin to understand how patriarchy has infiltrated and structured our innermost being, and grope (!) towards new forms of sexual expression and relationships which reflect what we think we want as autonomous sexual beings.

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Asian Women : Interview With Asha Chand

Jo: "How do you think the Immigration laws affect Asian women in Britain?"

Asha: "Before the 1974 Immigration Act was passed, Asian women in Britain were not allowed to bring their spouses into the country. As this rule did not apply to men it lowered the status of Asian women in Britain considerably. It was very hard for parents to arrange marriages for their daughters in Britain. Boy's parents were able to ask for enormous dowries from the girl's parents when arranging marriages. If the girl's parents did not comply with their wishes then the boy's parents had the alternative of getting a bride from India/Pakistan. If the girl had to be married in India/Pakistan then she had to go and live there."

"The 1974 Immigration Act allowed both male and female spouses to enter Britain, which enabled Asian girls in Britain to have an equal choice. The changes in the Immigration Act which were passed in October and came into operation in 1980, made matters worse by allowing only British born girls to bring their spouses to Britain, thereby creating a split among women in Britain, sometimes with tragic consequences."

Jo: "Is it true that Asian men living in Britain send back to India/Pakistan for their wives, rather than choose a westernized Asian woman?"

Asha: "Yes it is true because Asian women who have been brought up in this country tend to have more liberal attitudes than the majority of women who come from India/Pakistan. Asian men are quite happy to go out and have relationships with these westernized women, but in most cases the relationship does not end in marriage, as the pressure for arranged marriages is very strong from both families, particularly the man's family. The Asian woman is expected to live with, or at least have very close contact with her husband's family, therefore their interest lies in choosing a daughter-in-law who is most likely to fit into their family system. Also she is more likely to be manipulated as she is bound to be very vulnerable, especially if she has no family support in this country and speaks no English. She will be totally dependent on her in-laws."

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"The man is more likely to succumb to family pressures as, in the long run, he too will benefit from marrying a girl from India/Pakistan. She is least likely to make demands on him and put restrictions on his freedom. His only disadvantage will be that he will not have a partner that will suit him. However most men compensate for this loss by having affairs with other westernized women. Lots of Asian men are never seen out with their wives, but they are usually accompanied by a woman/girlfriend. I know a man in the Asian Youth Movement, which is supposed to be a liberal organization, yet he is never seen out with his wife."

Jo: "How does this affect the sexual relationship within arranged marriages?"

Asha: "Most traditional women from India/Pakistan are sexually very passive and naive. They are full of romantic illusions which are encouraged by Indian films and the media. These women listen to their married women friends who have described their 'first night' in glowing colours. A traditional Asian woman pictures the ideal man whom she will meet on her wedding night and fantasizes how wonderful it will be. The majority of Asian women are ignorant about their bodies and sex."

"In terms of sex, most Asian men find a woman's naivety appealing. I was told on my wedding night that "a woman's best ornament is her shyness". If a woman initiates any sexual moves she may frighten the man, who has illusions of the shy and passive woman. Men usually have more power in the sexual relationship because of the woman's ignorance. He will make love to her the way he wants to and the woman will accept whatever the man does because she has nobody to compare him with. This is one of the reasons why an arranged marriage tends to work, because it is very rare that a marriage will break up due to sexual problems. Most Asian women will not complain about their sexual life unless the man is completely impotent."

"If a woman is sexually active, some men may put this down to experience with other men. In some cases men may be turned off if the woman is positive and demanding (eg. lose his erection); because she knows



what she wants sexually, he may be scared that he will not be able to satisfy her and this in turn threatens his 'manhood'. I think this is true of some English men as well as Asian men. If a woman is sexually demanding it is possible that the relationship may not last very long and she may be called a 'sex maniac'. It is very rare that Asian men and women will talk openly about sex, sometimes even within marriage the woman may not say that she wants to make love.

She will usually get her feelings known by dressing provocatively or moving in such a way that he will know what she is thinking!

Jo: "What are attitudes like towards a woman who sleeps with more than one man?"

Asha: "If an Asian woman sleeps openly with more than one man; she will be ostracized by the community. Men will forbid their wives and daughters to speak to her. Asian women will not support such a woman, even if they are aware of the circumstances as to why she might be sleeping with another man. Women do not back each other up, even if they themselves are doing the same things. This is true both here and in India. There is more understanding for a woman who has refused an arranged marriage than for a woman who commits adultery. To do something just for sex (rather than love) is very wrong and totally unaccepted in Asian culture. The need for sex is no excuse for adultery. These attitudes have more to do with tradition than religion- not that religion makes any allowances for adultery either. Sex is something which rarely gets talked about, even sometimes amongst married couples."

Jo: "What about sex outside marriage?"

Asha: "Sex outside marriage is something to be ashamed of. Even the most liberated Asian woman hesitates before admitting that she has had sex before marriage. If a woman is known to have had a relationship with a man she may have difficulties in being accepted for an arranged marriage. However an Asian man in similar circumstances will encounter no such difficulties; Asian men on the whole have much more freedom than Asian women. If an Asian man is known to have relationships with women, people will put that down to experience, but if the same thing happens to a woman then she is stigmatized for life. I left home when I was fifteen because I had a boyfriend and I rejected the arranged marriage. Although I was gone for only two nights, which I had spent with a married woman friend, and was a virgin when I finally did give in to an arranged marriage, people still say, now that I am separated from my husband, that they always knew I was 'like that' and would never settle down."

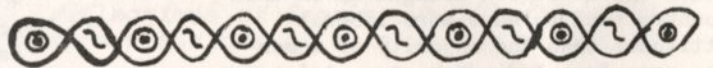
"There are certain things which I think are bad in western communities. I think too much importance is placed on sex- it seems to be seen as the cause and solution of all problems. As I see it, the first thing the western woman will do when she meets a man is to go to bed with him, and the sex determines the relationship. However there is

a much more relaxed attitude towards sex and this is a good thing. People talk about sex freely and accept it as a need.

People are more honest about it, so when a woman is asked she has more choice about accepting or refusing the offer.

Jo: "Can you tell me about love marriages?"

Asha: "A love marriage is one in which the partners choose each other. In most cases these marriages are not accepted or approved of by families or people in the community. It is not even valid in the eyes of the parents, especially the man's parents. They will still keep on pressurizing him to give up his love marriage and have an arranged marriage. So in actual fact there is very little security for the woman in a love marriage situation especially if they are having problems already, because the man might be tempted to succumb to his family pressure and agree to have an arranged marriage. The love marriage is a very risky proposition for an Asian woman, who stands to lose her family, her friends and possibly her chosen husband: not to mention the fact that she would be stigmatized for the rest of her life.



Feminist Publications Conference.

Any women interested in such a conference (possibly in the Autumn)

please contact :- Anne Torode

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# LESBIANS (a personal view)

## in the WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

I have been an affirming, positive lesbian for two years now, and during that time have worked in a collective made up of fluctuating groups of women who see themselves as heterosexual, lesbian, celibate or 'confused'. Recent stays in both Melbourne and Oslo, where I was able to converse with and be among lesbian separatists, has left me with a different perspective on being a lesbian in the women's movement in a north-east English city. Before I went I floated along on a wave of good-will for both my lesbian and heterosexual sisters, and used to think of women who related to men as 'woman-identified' or 'lesbian-affirming' really. I ignored the near-demise of the collective last year when a lot of bitterness and abuse was levelled at the 'too articulate and politically worked out' lesbians. Because some lesbians participated in the lesbian-bashing I didn't see it in lesbian versus straight terms.

I returned to England invigorated by the injection of positive lesbian culture from Australia, and determined to be more vociferous about the whole issue. 'It's simple' I thought naively. 'The women's movement is about reclaiming our culture in every way. Lesbians are generally strong in the movement, working very hard in most areas. Of course my heterosexual women friends will see that lesbian rights and issues are crucial. Only when women in the movement as a whole identify positively with lesbianism will heterosexuality become one option among others, and not the norm and the mainstay of patriarchy. We have to change the balance or else we are in a heterosexist women's movement where our status is still deviant. If all women are in the process of trying to break out of our conditioning and become woman-identified, rather than identifying with our oppressors, of course heterosexual women can make the jump of becoming imaginatively lesbian-identified. Yes, I'll tell them this; I'll initiate lots of discussions in this area.'

But an accumulation of incidents since my return has made me feel that we have built no bridges of communication at all yet. I can see the patterns and processes more clearly which, after some years of lesbian activism, make us function still as a heterosexual women's movement. Personal examples will make my point most clearly, but even as I write this I'm worried about hurting the feelings of my heterosexual

friends. The urge to conciliate dies hard, and makes me realise how apologetic I am even now about being a lesbian.

The first incident is something all lesbians experience in women's meetings -

polarization. I am part of a group which is working towards defining a feminist literary theory. We began one meeting by discussing an article written by a male academic about male authors' views of women. I asked why he was chosen to begin with, and said I read only books written by women. I was amazed and upset by the response, especially since I thought my stance was not uncommon nowadays. I happened to be wearing a badge reading Lesbianry and I wondered later if that influenced the turn of events. I was told my 'separatist stance' was 'unrealistic', 'prejudiced' and 'negative'. Everything I said was attacked. Personal opinions I contributed were interpreted as 'forcing my views upon others'. (Calling a separatist stance prejudiced, etc. was not doing this, presumably). When I pointed out I was given discriminatory treatment in the group I was 'paranoid' and 'defensive'. I was also seen as disrupting group consensus and told after the meeting by one woman she felt bullied by me.

The whole incident was so close to the rows and splits in our collective last year when I and other lesbians were 'extreme', 'oppressive' and 'intimidating' that I would have smiled had I not been so upset. (Lesbian-bashing does affect out of all proportion).

The other incident, which occurred in our collective, is a common one. A lesbian puts forward a proposal to discuss 'lesbians' and heterosexual women's images and fears of each other'. This is politely but oh so vaguely accepted in good liberal manner, but somehow is put off...and off. In stead, in this instance, we talked about masochistic sexual fantasies and sex in power relations with bosses, both implicitly to do with women's relations with men. When I asked the woman who prepared it why we started with a heterosexual assumption she felt attacked and could only talk from her point of view. This occurs over and over. When I talked recently with another woman about how heterosexuality and my lesbianism was creating a real barrier to our friendship she told me it was a shame if I 'cut myself off'.

Note the emphasis. It is always lesbians who are cutting off, or attacking, or not being reasonable. The norm prevails

implicitly - we are the deviants. The heterosexual woman never has to make the effort to see things from a lesbian point of view, although every lesbian woman has had a heterosexual culture thrust upon her forcibly in exactly the same manner as a heterosexual woman has.

And it works. Lesbians are always in a double bind. How often have I assured heterosexual women friends I'm not extreme and man-hating, although I think man-hating is politically honourable. How often have I suppressed my view that lesbianism is the only logical and honest stance for a feminist. How often have I choked on my anger

*continued on page 16.*



# DISABLED LESBIANS and the LESBIAN COMMUNITY

(I am writing this article as a member of Gemma, the group for disabled and able-bodied lesbians. Gemma was formed to be a link between isolated disabled lesbians and the gay community. We've been going for four years and there are 80 members nationally of all ages.)

Should the two have to be discussed as though they are separate? Regretfully, I begin to think so. Some lesbians with disability appear to have no difficulty in forming friendships/relationships but others who want a relationship cannot even seem to get friends let alone progress further. In some instances, no doubt, this may be due to their own personality problems but in other cases one must ask if lesbians are prejudiced against gay women who have disabilities.

The ignorance of and discrimination against disabled people in society generally is repeated in the lesbian community. Using 1,825,000 as the figure for disabled women in Britain (this doesn't include the under-16's) then there may be 91,250 lesbians with disability varying from severe to lesser impairment. How many of these have any contact at all with lesbian groups? The latter are not concerned with integrating disabled women; most groups meet upstairs or in basements, thus presenting wheelchair-users with access difficulties, and few groups make it clear that they expect/welcome disabled women. When last did you see publicity for a women's meeting/social/disco state something like "Signer for deaf, w-chair access not good (door 28", 9 steps) but help available"? And if we're not expected to meet able-bodied women then we are probably not expected to have sexual relationships with them either.

It is only recently that disabled people have begun to be accepted as sexual beings and this acceptance is not widespread; disabled people are often regarded as eternal children (and, therefore, in our culture, sexless) so that a woman of 27, because she is disabled, will be asked why she wants to leave her parents' home and set up in a flat of her own.

I suspect that heterosexual disabled women may be more "acceptable" because it is still assumed that women are/should be sexually passive; lesbians are sexual equals, either can initiate sex, either can make the first overture. So that when there is a belief that disability diminishes or abolishes sexuality, then the disabled lesbian may seem an impossibility. "What's she doing here, she can't even dance, how can she be gay???" A disabled lesbian may even be embarrassed by these sexual feelings that she's no longer supposed to have, yet as Denise Sherer, peer councillor for the disabled at Berkeley's Centre for Independent Living in California says, "Sexuality is often the one trait unaffected by disability" and "What is so important about sexuality is that it is universal to all people. It is one thing that we all have in common whether we're disabled or not."

The advertising media and our whole culture with its stress on physical qualities can make us feel self-conscious about our bodies, as if we've lost our sexual validity unless we're body perfect. If you lack confidence it affects the way you interact with people, and if you've come to believe that you look like a non-starter sexually, this may be a self-fulfilling prophecy. But not many lesbians (we hope) would react as badly as some 'friends' we heard of who tried to separate the partner of a disabled lesbian from her once she was less capable of an active social life.

Few of us grow up familiar with disability, seeing it as a possibility for ourselves or our partners. Until we ourselves were disabled we never gave disability a thought, even though in Britain 98% of us will have some form of arthritis before we die. So influenced are we by the media's emphasis on physical perfection that even disabled people may unconsciously assume their future partners will be able-bodied and not be that person over there with hearing difficulty, epilepsy, chronic bronchitis or whatever. (I'm writing this as someone disabled in her teens; a woman who was born disabled might have a quite different perspective.)



At a mixed workshop recently it was suggested that able-bodied Gemma members ought to provide sex for disabled members. Leaving aside the fact that this is not the purpose of our group and the whole question of 'surrogate sexual partners', the suggestion illustrated a patronising attitude towards disabled people - just because you're able-bodied doesn't mean you're good at sex, and the disabled might find many able-bodieds sadly wanting!

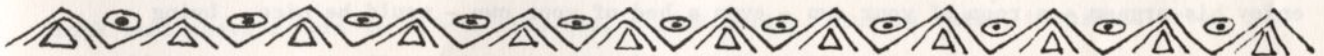
Obviously some disabilities present purely physical problems in sexual activity (you may have limb contractures or pain in certain positions) but counselling (1) is increasingly available and we are told that homosexuals are often readier to consider other methods of sexual expression than are heterosexuals.

Sexuality is often regarded as only sex-in-bed whereas it is so much more (Mary Rodacker, course co-ordinator at Berkerley says, "Our real sexual organ is our brain): it's part of your well-being, being in harmony with yourself, it pervades life, it is being with, laughing with, working with those attractive to you or who find you attractive. How can you appreciate yourself in this complete way if those around you deny you have a sexuality to express?

1981 is International Year of Disabled People. I'd like to ask all lesbian groups to use this as the year to begin including disabled lesbians in their activities. How are you ever going to know that 91,250 of us are real live lesbians if you never meet us?

Elsa Beckett

(1) SPOD - Sexual and Personal Relationships of the Disabled, c/o RADAR, 25 Mortimer St., London W1N 8AB



a love song

You, twist my words round your prick,  
 You, suck the bits you want,  
 Mould my shape with your lashes  
 Mould my mind with your thoughts,  
 I bend, twist, squash -  
 Big soft cushion me  
 I don't see  
 I make space in my belly  
 Part. let you in  
 I'm warm -  
 Soft and warm  
 I ooze and reform into the  
 women you lust for  
 again I slide apart to become  
 the pillow breast,  
 earth mother for tears -

You - twist my cunt round your words  
 thrust your ideas into my mouth  
 but pull out - feet smothered  
 It's my fault - of course.

I ooze and slide away -  
 Alone I scream -  
 I don't need your want  
 I don't want your hard  
 I don't want you in.  
 I don't need you -

e- can't stop records.

nicole-leads





# CELIBACY



I get tired of reading articles by women who've just discovered the joys of celibacy, women who decide to give up sex for a while and who wax lyrical about how they find themselves, get into a project, go walking in the mountains and so on. Doubtless a temporary period of voluntary celibacy is invigorating, doubtless it does strengthen a woman's sense of self, especially if you've been in a disastrous and/or draining relationship it's true you can discover your own interests, reintegrate yourself and all the rest of it, but we are talking about voluntary and temporary celibacy here and temporary, voluntary celibacy is not really what this article is about - and not many women have that kind of choice anyway... if you're living with a man, married or not, you can't just remove yourself from his bed for a period of self-realization, half the time you have little choice but to lie back and enjoy his orgasm - a room of your own - even a bed of your own - would be nice. Lying under a bouncing man, thinking that it's dustbin day tomorrow is hardly the most sexually exciting experience. Maybe sex where women are left frustrated and lost can be seen as a form of celibacy too, but even as I wrote that I heard myself shouting 'no, no, that's not right', for there really is nothing worse than having your body used, half turned on, perhaps, over long periods of time, knowing it'll go on forever till death does its part. A married woman I know once said to me, 'I could crawl up the wall during the day after a bad night - I cling to the walls crying with an intolerable ache'. Celibacy is infinitely preferable to the rape and pillage of our bodies that men all too often insult us with in the name of 'marital rights' and/or 'love'. At least if you're celibate, voluntarily or otherwise, your body is your own ... in your mind, if not in the mind of potential rapists at work, in the buses, on the streets and everywhere else!

Your body is your own ... you curl into yourself at night and don't need anyone else anyway .. you raise the drawbridge between yourself and others and feel safe behind your moat - safe and remote - distanced from pain, distanced from the relationships of 'real' people and distanced from possibilities - and possible hurt ... safe, secure, curled into yourself.... Your body is your own, but at the same time you cease to exist in bodily terms, cease to see that you can make a physical impact on others. Floating above 'real' people, unable to hurt them, just as they can't hurt you, a perpetual outsider, seeing the game, but unable to .... It never ceases to surprise me when a sister picks me up on a negligence that has hurt or annoyed her. I feel surprised yet I'm also pleased that she reacts to me, even



though she has clearly been hurt ... but this surprise never translates itself into a conviction that I am real too! It's almost as though there is a glass bubble around you and this bubble protects and defends you from the hurt of expecting anything other than its security. Celibacy is a process, a vicious circle rather, forcing a mind/body split on you, removing you from the problem even as it exacerbates it, making you aloof where you'd most like to be warm and open, telling you time and time again that your sexual interest in others can only be a burden and embarrassment to them and best kept hidden, making others see you as distanced and indifferent and/or problematical and potentially demanding. You are unable to relax unless on safe, neutral asexual ground, not daring to admit to yourself and others that you'd quite like to be 'real' too if you knew how to get there.

Meanwhile your sexual feelings are damped right down. You can cope better that way. It only becomes painful when they are aroused, when you are reminded that other people are enjoying sex without too much hassle. Love scenes on telly don't help you in the pretence that the whole thing is overrated anyway, that there's more to life than sex ... it's no wonder to me that so many women object to the sex on TV - too many of us would prefer to think that there's more to life - like tea, a good gossip, country walks, baths and cream cakes. But why should country walks and cream cakes be a form of sex replacement therapy for so many of us ... why can't we have our sex and eat cake too?

As I was saying, your sexual feelings get turned right down. I find that I rarely fantasise about sex. I certainly never fantasise about myself in a sexual situation ... at least not any more. I quickly learned that that was the way to tears and sadness only. I learned to concentrate my mind on the day ahead ... the things that have to be done and the things I enjoy doing. This was written in 1976:-

Desire surges against the confines of my body  
 I feel tears tingling in my breasts  
 emotional tides waxing through me  
 climaxing to ultimate fulfillment onto my  
 already saturated pillow

I am sad

lying alone, I try to conjure up images,  
 necessarily alienated, to stimulate the process  
 of self induced satisfaction  
 fighting it with rigid body  
 wishing it would go away  
 wishing I could sleep instead.

Aloneness

too many years stretch ahead  
 too many lists of plans drawn up at night  
 warding off consciousness of unfulfillable desire  
 consciousness of difference - of isolation.





I don't often feel that kind of tension now, luckily. As I was typing out this poem, I thought there's me and thousands like me with our lists of plans and there're all those other sisters, women with men, staring at the ceiling and planning their lists while a man has sex upon them. Ye gods!

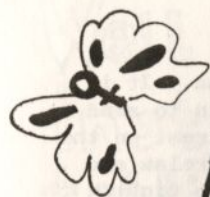
Having just read all this through, I realise it sounds like one big winge, and as any good feminist knows, only men winge! It's not really meant to read like that. I wrote it at great cost to my self esteem because I think that a feminist magazine tackling the issue of sexuality has to reflect the experience of all women and celibacy in one form or another is a painful condition of existence for so many of the world's women ... and yet, apart from the honourable exception of a paper produced for the Brighton Sexuality Conference of 1976,<sup>(?)</sup> it's rarely discussed by feminists, in this country at least, as a painful and limiting experience.

As I said at the beginning, we mostly hear about the positive, joyful aspects of voluntary abstinence when the matter is discussed at all. I have exposed myself in this article, writing about feelings I would prefer to overlook as I rush off to the next meeting, feelings that are the other side to my autonomy and freedom and the time I have to myself. The way celibacy takes me may be different in many ways from the feelings and experience of other celibate women, but at least this issue of SW which is about the ways in which male power controls and distorts female sexuality to its own ends will not be altogether exclusive of our experience.

Anne Torode







# just me and my body....

I wake for the fourth time and reach out, blearily, for the clock. It is well past midday; so I force myself out of bed. Sunday again. Through the mist in my head I hear the cheery voices of activity emanate from the kitchen.

I don't really gain consciousness until I'm sitting on the loo, with my voluminous nightdress clutched haphazardly round my middle. However it is a depressing consciousness; which starts when I glance down and see my thighs: grey-white and blotchy - clumsily spread like dough. I begin to grimace; Oh dear god, it's a FAT day!

I peel myself off the seat and lumber into the bathroom. I feel insular and unfit for human contact - I hope nobody comes upstairs for a bit. I put the hot tap on for a bath, and sit on the edge holding my head. I feel fallen apart; somehow life has no knowable structure and I don't want to have to cope with myself or the world today. At least a bath will give me space. I play around with the taps until I have adjusted the temperature of the water and then I slip my nightdress over my head.

Suddenly, unfortunately, I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror. Everywhere I go it is there to watch and judge me. It draws me in and then traps me in its image. I see my outsized purple flesh and distorted shape. I move nearer the mirror trying to ignore the growing folds of skin. I stare at a close-up of my face and try to fix my brain and make contact with my identity; but all I see is a stray blackhead. I squeeze it and explore every pore of my skin until I steam up the mirror.

Sitting on the edge of the bath, I slowly lower my foot into the water. I retract it immediately - the water is far too hot - and nearly fall off. Having run the cold tap for a bit, I obstinately put both feet into the bath and stand up. My feet and calves throb with the shock of the heat as I pose pathetically above, waiting for the courage to sit down. Awkwardly I lower myself into the water; I stop halfway in a clumsy position and gasp from the heat. I slip and fall gracelessly into the hot water. I make a few stifled noises as my skin smarts, and I rapidly sit up. Then, at my leisure, I look down at my body; sadly, I feel like an unfinished clay model.



As I adjust to the heat, I unfold my legs and slowly ease myself down into the hot water. I stay in that position, blank, for a long time. It is my form of meditation. Gradually my mind begins to clear and I become more aware of physical sensation.

I lie back with my eyes gently closed and feel the heat suffusing itself into my limbs. The muscles slowly relax and the tension begins to drain away. I feel the edge of the water round my breasts and arm-pits making me aware of the texture of my skin. I move slightly and watch the water creep up the valley between my breasts and then wash over the humps. The thin pale hair that runs between my breasts and on down to meet my pubic hair, sways with the water's motion.

My skin has lost its purple tinges and now it looks pink and warm. I feel the silky smoothness of my thighs under water; then my fingers break through the water-line and jerk awkwardly up the cool dryness of my knee. I wait a few minutes playing with sensation and then I lower my leg into the warmth. My leg tingles thankfully, muscles release and the limb abandons itself.

I move gently backwards and forwards in the bath, and feel my hair getting wet round my neck. The water creeps round and laps at my scalp. As I move I lower my body into the water and watch it covering my nipples. They slowly loosen from their hard balls of wrinkled skin and fill out gently pink.

My fingers follow the outline of the curves of my body, down to the tuft of my pubic hair. I curl the hair, which is now soft and play with it. The hairs pull pleasantly at the fleshy mound beneath and I become aware of the full red warmth of my labia. My fingers slips into the



folds of skin and runs down the slimy smoothness to play round the mouth of my vagina. It is like touching an oyster, and my finger becomes lost in the sensation. The lips begin to send out ripples of pleasure. My finger glides backwards and forwards until it comes to rest on the hard tip of my clitoris. My legs gently open and all the muscles between my legs relax and the blood rushes to my skin. My whole body feels pleasure. Then my muscles begin to tighten with the urgency of pleasure; my finger presses more firmly; other fingers join in the caressing. They slide quickly, excitingly, in and out of the crevasses of skin, teasing the hard bud.. I grow and expand reaching for ever higher levels of abandonment. Muscles quiver and then tremor in waving patterns. I fall, loose and given, but my lips still cry for more touch. But I want the gentle warmth again, I don't want to lose the soft joy. I sink back into the bath and my fingers play gently round my erect nipples; a localised sensation, prickly and tantalising. I move my body to feel the water touching it.

My whole body feels loose and calm. I sink further into the water and put my feet up, out of the water, on the edge of the bath on either side of the taps; the water hovers pleasantly around my labia.

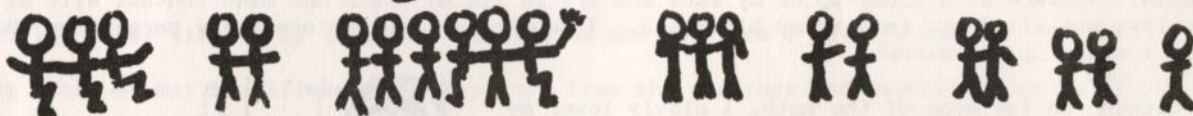
I reach, lazily, for the soap and turn it in my hands to form a layer of slimy bubbles. Then I sit up and begin to soap the tops of my arms, my breasts and stomach; skin smoothly touches skin; the folds are soft and flexible under my touch. I feel good. Then I lower myself, for the last time, into the hot water.

I lie still for a long time enjoying the awareness of my body in the water; and slowly I feel myself begin to smile.

Clare.

Clare Wigzell,

Leeds. '81



lesbians in the Women's movement continued...

when a straight woman seeks me out at a party especially to tell me about lesbians in various women's centres of the world or in her own home 'eyeing her up' or 'kissing her aggressively in a male way' and made excuses for this woman. And I can't win. If I say what I think I'm oppressive and aggressive. If I remain silent, her views stand.

As our views are threatening to other women because we have the integrity not to engage with men, the fears and frustrations, and the compromises straight women make, are projected on to us. If we want to retain heterosexual friends, we are constantly placating them. If ever I try to raise the topic with a friend of why she is not a lesbian she gets confused and upset. Somehow I'm laying it on her. She doesn't have to justify her heterosexuality, but I'm constantly under threat from women who aren't lesbians.

Now, I know the experiences I have described are absolutely familiar to every lesbian associated with the women's movement. But I believe it is unproductive for lesbians to withdraw from working with heterosexual feminists. A lesbian perspective needs constantly to inform feminism to keep it radical and while an autonomous lesbian movement can do this itself, we must not fall for the patriarchal trick of

being divided from, suspecting and fearing each other. Lesbian women need the support of all women for their struggle and vice versa. To develop theoretical directions within the movement we must confront threatening areas, not avoid them and divide against each other even more.

I feel that the whole issue of how women are perpetuating male supremacy by giving their primary allegiance to men should be discussed more honestly. As a movement we need to examine the institution of heterosexuality much more thoroughly,

and no matter how painful it is, examination of our own sexuality is crucial to this. I agree whole-heartedly with Loretta Ulmschneider who says: 'It is difficult and often debilitating to work with women whose commitments are not clear, and who cling to privileges without recognizing the power they gain from them.'

As a lesbian, I would like to discuss these issues without being labelled a sexual fascist.

Elaine Hutton

Elaine Hutton.



Well if I get my natural feminine instincts biologically, I don't need you telling me how to be a woman!

I'm sure we've all felt that at some point in our lives but how do we then operate? - how do we define our sexuality? Possibly the safest answer is, that we should start to define it, from our own inner feelings.

In a society that is continually alive with connotations of a sexual nature - making us out to be almost pre-occupied with sex, we must not only challenge a sex-class identity but the identity presented for us in this male dominated society.

Kate Millet states 'Sexual politics obtains consent through the socialisation of both sexes to patriarchal policies'. Expanding on this, we see the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of a sexual category, based on the needs and values of the master class and dictated by what he would cherish in himself and find convenient in an under class. Aggression, intellectuality, force and efficiency for the male - passivity, ignorance, docility, 'virtue' and ineffectuality for the female.

One could expand of course, however we are trying, within the Womins movement to define for ourselves 'our sexuality'.

As this area is such an intimate and emotional area dealing with the core of our self-hood, it is not surprising that it appears to be the area of greatest conflict and division within the Womins movement. Again it is not surprising that the debate and confusion and pain regarding sexuality which we experience in the movement, is a faithful reflection of the distorted, debased and inhuman notions about sexuality which exist in the society as a whole.

I believe that perhaps we would save ourselves a great deal of pain and suffering and despair and prevent the existing division in the movement between heterosexual and lesbian women if we realise that being feminists does not automatically enable us to be full sexual human persons. So one of our first tasks must surely be to unravel the distortions in our heads.

A feminist analysis and perspective has helped many women come to understand that the unequal and destructive relationship between males and females which has

persisted throughout history and in almost all cultures, is the core of sexism - the ultimate key to radical social change. So we strive to build 'sisterhood'.

What is this sisterhood I am suggesting? To me, sisterhood means that we identify with all other oppressed women, and that we regard all women as human beings - who therefore have different aptitudes and potentials which we value. Hence we should try to relate to other women, both inside and outside the movement from a basis of mutual strength, unity and recognition.

A key obstacle preventing us developing sisterhood then, must surely seem to be our own feelings of uncertainty, guilt or shame and therefore our unwillingness to reveal ourselves to other women and make ourselves vulnerable. Let us not also forget the sometimes arrogant way other sisters impose their claim to self-awareness on women... their self exposure being as inhibiting. Consequently, until we are able to overcome our own inadequacies in this area, we may be unable to confront and deal with the problems of sexuality.

So how do we reclaim our sexuality? Who turns on who? Well for me - I turn on myself. This doesn't mean just that I dig who I am and the way I look and feel and taste and smell - it also means that I am the one decides how emotionally and sexually excited I am by someone!

I guess this concept applied to female sexuality is different to what might be called the 'Midas philosophy' - i.e. the concept that I have dull-to-average sensations going on generally in my body, until a man comes along from the outside and with his marginal touch, coats my average-feeling body with delightful and rare exciting feelings - he 'turns me on!' It doesn't happen like this!

Why is it - if we know what we like, that sometimes we hesitate and don't say? Are we yet again protecting their egos - perpetuating the notion of our function being to give pleasure not to receive it? Are we loath to assert ourselves for our own satisfaction for fear of upsetting the apple-cart....does the performance become so habitual, that we fake, we rationalise our feelings away - relying at these times on all the messages we've received about what we are expected to be, say and feel from society at large?

Can we talk about our feelings for other women - our sexual fantasies while





masturbating, our pleasure of centering our own energies and releasing it with safety ?

Because of the monopoly of male sexuality models in our culture, it is difficult for me to develop my own female sexual identity. The concept that men are sexual beings and women their neuter playthings prevents the development of any independent female sexuality culture. Where are my models for female orgasm, female porn, independent female sexual energy....?

Ah...some of these questions are of course answered by my opening myself up to women, to sharing myself with women, identifying and experiencing sexual sharing with women. Guess - even if not a model, these communications do reflect my own sexuality - they enlighten me to energies buried.

So in discovering my womanhood, my female sexuality, must I hide, ashamed ? Do I view my discoveries with the same lack of understanding society shows by labelling its mysteries as dirty, sordid, nasty ?

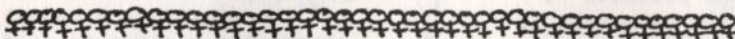
Firstly - I AM A PERSON of potential - an individual, whose identity as such is the most significant. This is then followed by my inner identity - that of being woman identified and opening and challenging all the myths that detract from women sharing in this kind of space.

For as long as this society has a sexual emphasis and identity, I will want to be identified first by my 'personhood' and maybe almost take on an asexual-front. My sexual feelings are important but not to the world at large - to me !

Maybe as we strive together, as we begin to listen to one another, to women, our sisters, learning about ourselves and allowing others likewise such freedom, female sexuality may see new definitions as women are able to feel safe to question, discover and experience.

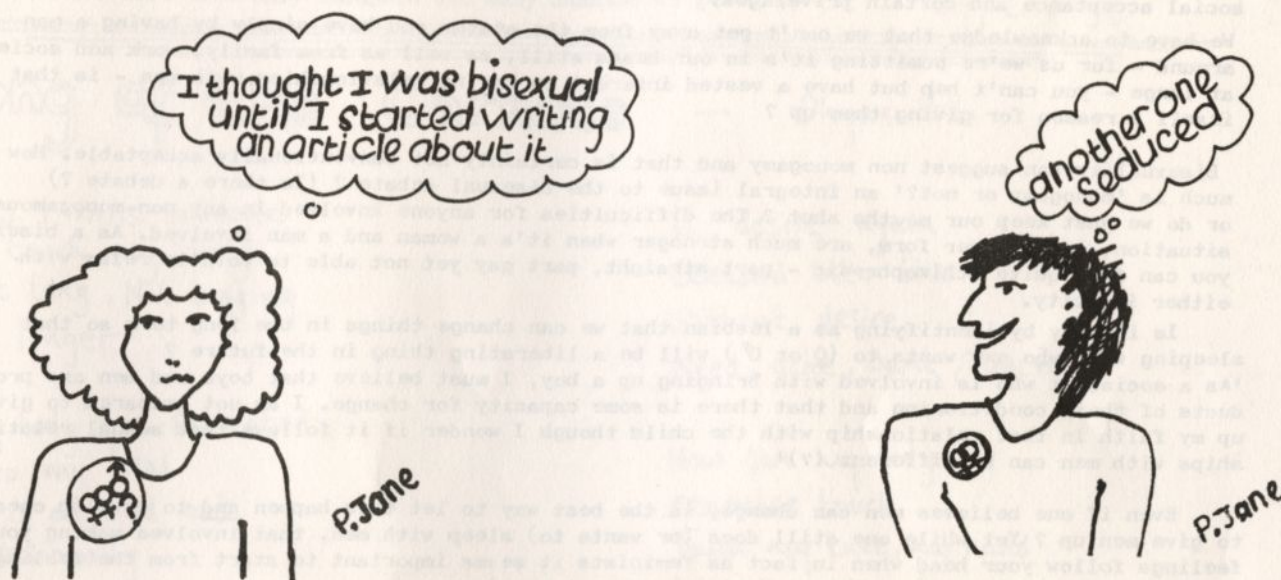
*d'Reen Struthers,*

Stirling, Scotland.  
23rd, Feb. '81.  
d'Reen Struthers.





# BISEXUALITY



Following a long discussion meant to be transcribed as an article on bisexuality we were ourselves amazed at the number and variety of issues the theme brought up. We've tried to pick out the main points from a very long dialogue, using lots of quotes from it and raising even more questions (for ourselves at least!) As we both presently see ourselves as bisexual, either having relationships with women and men or open to such, we felt it important to try to write about some of our thoughts, feelings and experiences.

The term 'bisexual' seems confusing for both of us, or rather not one we identify with strongly as a label. For us, the concept means thinking out lesbianism and heterosexuality, plus the 'middle bit' - 'sitting on the fence', 'living out your contradictions' (courageously or as a copout?), or as 'being open to anyone'.

'For my own sense of identity, and for an imposed one (from the Women's Movement) I feel it's not enough to say "well I'm having a relationship with a woman and it's great" - I feel I have to have slept with lots of women'. Somehow we felt we had to prove ourselves as lesbians, 'Am I genuine?'

'In fact I spent years immobilised by the pressures - I felt attracted to women but didn't do anything about it. These pressures are overt generally in the women's movement and are also very strong from my lesbian friends, but they are also internalised - I ended up in a position where I felt scared that I'd only be sleeping with a woman to find out if I was really a lesbian and that felt wrong. I perhaps also had a stubborn reaction to being told what I ought to do.'

'I'm increasingly identifying with the term lesbian because in fact I have to say that to myself, let alone anybody else, very strongly....whereas "I am homosexual" doesn't mean very much to me.'

'For me it hasn't been saying, I'm bisexual - it's been coming to terms with whether I'm a lesbian or not...But I'm coming more and more to feel you do have to make a choice, because it's so hard being a lesbian...It's very scary how totally unaccepted it is and the pressures which go on and on, and which you have to put a lot of energy into fighting, are rarely talked of - you've slept with women, you're a lesbian, you're strong and sure...'You only need courage' our lesbian sisters have told us. We do recognise our fears - although we can sometimes feel easily mistrusted by heterosexual women and lesbians alike, we acknowledge that we are in a 'safer' position in so society and our own sense of identity.'

We both seemed to feel very concerned about being worked out, about treating women right.

'I'm much more conscious of feeling I have to be more right on in the way in which I am in a relationship - I'm much more wary, more scared of coping with any possessiveness, jealousy...with acknowledging how much I'm caught up in the romantic illusion.'

I also get into a position where I assume lesbian women to be more sorted out and therefore that I'm not making the grade. There are so many 'oughts' and 'shoulds' about the way you've got to be that we i.e. women never think we're good enough and we're always putting ourselves down. For in-



stance I admit I'm still hung up over dependency in relationships but don't expect 'strong' women to be - somehow it can seem that women who've come out strongly as lesbians have been able to reject their conditioning so much that, by implication, they will relate more honestly, and as strong individuals and not get hooked into the the games of romance, possessiveness, monogamy nor the sexual duality of active/passive.'

Is it unfair on a lesbian woman to have a relationship with a man at the same time ? As bisexual women we can't understand the pressures in the same way as lesbians - we keep the social acceptance and certain privileges.

We have to acknowledge that we can't get away from the status you have simply by having a man around - for us we're admitting it's in our heads still, as well as from family, work and society at large - you can't help but have a vested interest in having relationships with men - is that in itself a reason for giving them up ?

Bisexuality can suggest non monogamy and that is certainly not conventionally acceptable. How much is 'monogamy or not?' an integral issue to the bisexual debate ? (Is there a debate ?) or do we just keep our mouths shut ? The difficulties for anyone involved in any non-monogamous situation, in whatever form, are much stronger when it's a woman and a man involved. As a bisexual you can feel quite schizophrenic - part straight, part gay yet not able to totally relax with either identity.

Is it only by identifying as a lesbian that we can change things in the long term so that sleeping with who one wants to (Q or O) will be a liberating thing in the future ? 'As a socialist who is involved with bringing up a boy, I must believe that boys and men are products of their conditioning and that there is some capacity for change. I am not prepared to give up my faith in that relationship with the child though I wonder if it follows that sexual relationships with men can be different (?)'

Even if one believes men can change, is the best way to let this happen and to develop oneself to give men up ? Yet while one still does (or wants to) sleep with men, that involves making your feelings follow your head when in fact as feminists it seems important to start from the feelings, to start from where you are. Relationships are about emotions.

'If you are trying to work out the lesbian side of yourself, you do end up denying to yourself and to other women how important your relationship with a particular man is... I said, 'I'm gonna give men up' but, in doing so, I only denied my feelings and the importance to me of the relationship with Z, but I also couldn't give any commitment to women because that long term relationship to him was there - so I'm working that out now but feel I can't have equal sexual relationships with women while I'm involved with a man I live with.'

It seems important not to apologise for our relationships with men - we do not see ourselves as passive victims of conditioning. We want to have relationships with men or we wouldn't be doing so - we are there because we want to be not just because we can't give it up!? "I want to be given credit by other feminists that I've thought about it a lot".

But, however much you try to work these things out there is a power relationship between men and women and it's very hard not to play those games (especially if you sleep with more than one person - it becomes more complicated). We have to develop further our attempts at honest, open ways of relating to each other - that can feel very risky and make you very vulnerable. You do have to be wary of carrying over the bad patterns of relating from your relationships with men to those with women and this seems even more likely if you're sleeping with men and women at the same time.

When we have had relationships with women, we have both experienced heterosexual women friends becoming very defensive about their relationships with men, or even too ready to criticise our relationships with women - it seems that we become, at least for them, a link with their image of lesbians with such a strong sense of themselves which is perhaps far from how they perceive themselves - it inevitably must make you think about your contradictions as a heterosexual feminist. We've had to face those challenges surfacing in our friendships - it can seem to polarise our feminism - a feeling many women must have had when they come out as lesbians.

As women we want to explore sex as well as sexual identity and, although it is scary and hard to share verbally, its an area we see as still not discussed nearly enough. The active/male and passive/female roles are all we have been given to work from. We are concerned that in rejecting male defined sexuality (which we do) we can end up dismissing active sexuality and even orgasms rather than finding new forms of sexual behaviour which are neither aggressive nor passive.

"I feel I've been told how to act sexually (or not act) all my life - I want to feel as free as I can do in this society to explore who I am in all sorts of ways, sexually too - I want doors to be open and not to have to decide the theory before the practice" However you can make 'head' decisions that do open up your feelings - like you fight your conditioning about wanting marriage



even though its a feeling you might have - so really its not as clear as just going on what you feel. Personal decisions are political and do make for changes within oneself and society. It seems important to do things when we feel ready, to give and get support for where we are and yet to be constantly able to challenge ourselves and others without being so threatened or threatening.

We wonder if we have the right to use the term lesbian at all about ourselves? Can we wear lesbian badges? - It can feel dishonest within the WM yet we want to challenge assumptions about our heterosexuality 'outside'.

We are left with busy thoughts and many unanswered questions.

Maggie d Jc

## Song of the Carnate — Dhyani Priti

How I miss someone  
to touch my body  
Not long, Not longing  
No longer

My body has retreated  
Into my head  
It is allowed out  
Occasionally

Occasionally, when alone  
I feel the rush of desire  
In the pit of my groin  
My cunt is empty

My breasts sitting firm on  
my chest  
Nipples need sucking  
Head needing holding  
I Ache for love

Aching desire,  
Aping desire  
Desire me, you, who?  
I desire myself

I am not whole  
When desire comes  
I want a union with my spirit  
how long will desire  
keep coming  
When will I, released,  
hang on the scaffold of my  
own construction

To desire again  
Released into bliss  
Without desire,  
Need, ache, want, Touch

How can my body  
reunite touch  
Touch my knee, my hand  
It's all — the same to me

I see you, who do not exist  
Sitting there softly smiling  
I know you are a silly imagining  
of a past life  
old age can come  
at seventeen  
I was taught it young  
and I played it well

youth returning with wisdom  
Is very painful  
Age is an excuse  
Death inevitable

But if it came again  
Who would I be?  
Onward and new  
or backward and old



# Compulsory Heterosexuality

| Time  | Subject         |       |
|-------|-----------------|-------|
| 9-10  | MATHS           | Rm 12 |
|       | BREAK           |       |
| 10-11 | HISTORY         | Rm 20 |
| 11-12 | ENGLISH         | Rm 35 |
|       | DINNER          |       |
| 1-4   | HETEROSEXUALITY | Rm 69 |

In looking at the question of heterosexual/lesbian conflict within the Women's Liberation Movement, two strands appear that I want to try to knit together. They are: - the systematic destruction of lesbian existence (1) by male power because of the threat that it represents; and the continued denial of the significance of lesbian existence by feminists who want to remain within the institution of heterosexuality.

My starting point is the premise that heterosexuality is unnatural and has to be taught to women. Why else is heterosexuality impressed on us so rigorously from an early age, and the lessons of heterosexuality so pervasive in every aspect of our lives? It exists to serve men's needs, and because our co-operation is needed, we are made to believe they are our needs too. We live within a system of heterosexuality where any rejection of our role as servicer is severely punished and blotted out of history because of the risk of a wholesale walkout by women.

Heterosexuality exists as an institution in order to control women through the exercise of male sexuality, women being allowed no independent sexuality within it. Our power to reproduce is made the justification for having to fuck, at the same time as being controlled by paternity and marriage. I am hoping to give these assertions substance through my arguments.

Men hate women; how else can we explain the existence of sexual violence? Why is there rape, battering, pornography, prostitution, sexual abuse of girls by adult men, women making up 60% of mental patients, violence in obstetrics, gynaecology as butchery and all the rest? Male power has devised many ways of controlling us through fear because they need us to serve them, to bear and nurture children for them. As in the witch trials of the Middle Ages, mass-murder of women can always be resorted to. Our culture and creativity is suppressed so we have no separate existence from men. Romance, Motherhood, and economic dependence all ensure that we stay within the institution, alongside the fear of punishment.

Feminism is out to change all that. Within that structure, I was able to recognise male oppression and hatred of women which led me to hate men. I found women could give me all I need, my emotional and political life centres exclusively on women now. So I am a lesbian in common parlance. I can not give an adequate description of the experience and meaning of being a lesbian because it is so obviously outside male definition and reality, as well as suffering through the devaluing of lesbian existence which male power deliberately carries out. Being a lesbian is hard, risky and complicated; we have to form our own identity in the face of a void which is filled with male-manufactured lies. I am not a lesbian simply because I make love with women rather than being fucked by men. I am not different biologically. I am not a lesbian because I did not find the right prick. I am not a lesbian in order to upset non-lesbian women. As far as I am concerned, the Women's Liberation Movement is itself lesbian; it is about defining ourselves in terms of women, women relating closely to women for our own good, it is about building women up, finding our strength, it is about throwing off the stranglehold of male sexuality. I know a lot of women who stay in service to men, despite a feminist consciousness. They claim it makes them happy, that economics or parenthood confine them within the institution of heterosexuality. Marriage was the target for feminist scrutiny in the early seventies, we recognised how it functioned to keep women under control. It was inevitable that married women felt attacked and misunderstood. The enormous pressures that exist to keep us within these institutions see to it that we feel confused and lost when we question them. I want us now to broaden our scrutiny to include all sexual servicing of men as basic to our oppression.

Women who are in a position to resist the pressures male power exerts



who stay within the institution of heterosexuality claim they are exercising the right to choose. They accuse me of oppressing them because I seem to be saying that they have made the wrong choice. I say rather, that there is no choice, it is not simply a matter of who you choose to go to bed with. Once the huge potential of relating to women in every way becomes part of our consciousness, it is a question of following those feelings or living in contradiction to them.

I seek to counter the arguments of women who say that as they are working to change the men they live with and service, that this justifies their staying within the institution of heterosexuality, that these women somehow comprise the "vanguard" of feminism because they can be seen to be effecting change. I do not believe men will change as long as women are giving them what they want; they will only tolerate a situation as long as they are having to make no real concessions in it. We will only force them to change by getting strong about what we want as women who refuse to define ourselves in accordance with male needs.

Most women have no alternative to a lifetime of drudgery, of suffering all the indignities of being a servant, feeling their usefulness is over once children leave home; their lives determined totally by male need of them. After all, feminists are still a tiny minority. The misery of most women's lives seems totally dismissed by feminists who stay in service to men voluntarily. Men don't need to change as long as women are adapting feminist ideals to suit their "preferred" situations so as to remain within them.

There are also many bad adverts for lesbian lifestyles, within the Women's Liberation Movement. I know from my experience of being put off by pre-WLM lesbians for two years consciously, that it is easy to use this excuse. I am, however, angry at how some lesbians live and think, but I explain it in terms of how deeply male power has subverted and penetrated our thinking. Then again, I find it hard being expected to live as a paragon of feminist purity, in lesbian bliss, in order for women to feel able to make the supreme sacrifice of giving up men.

I am accused of laying down a line, a good way of dismissing my ideas, but nonsense as I reject that notion as much as any other woman. I am suggesting a course of action in opposition to the line male power lays down for us. I know how hard it can be for women to stop servicing men, women face murder sometimes when they walk out and go into Refuges, for instance. There are privileges to be had, along with all the horrors, male power makes it almost worth our whiles. We don't know until we try how strong we are as women living away from men.

Men are not slow to recognise the strength we are getting, especially those who live with feminists. They have access to our lives through the women who have allegiance to them. They will be able to smash separate women when they need, because they can use our tactics against us. Their women do a lot of work for them, if they are not careful. It is seen as s<sup>o</sup> anti-feminist to want women to stop pulling the carpet away from under our feet? I survive because I am able to put up defences against most men, but men who are being serviced by feminists can see straight through them if they try a bit. Accusations of sexism and fascism abound, from women as well as men.

I do not deny that women can get into a position of relative strength within heterosexual relations, but I think their men only allow it because they are benefitting from it in some way. If it were at all permissible for women to be strong, why are the structures which exist to cripple and limit us so violently upheld? Sexual violence exists to keep us weak;



men can always fall back on it; only women's strength independent of male power will stop that. The strength that can come from refusing to service men and put all our energy into working together for all women.

An examination of male sexuality as control is essential for getting an understanding of how the institution of heterosexuality works. But that is really hard when women have no sexuality of our own to hold against male sexuality. I know women who are attempting to redefine fucking by taking a more initiatory role, by refusing penetration; but this only serves to obscure the nature of male sexuality. As long as male sexuality includes rape and pornography how can fucking ever be pleasurable for a woman?

As lesbians we are defined by men in terms of their sexuality. So what we are is distorted, discredited and vilified. So-called lesbian sex is the subject of pornography, male sexual fantasies, is even supplied with artificial aids! We are being prevented from feeling positive about ourselves, denied a sexuality which makes us stronger. Lesbians include in our number, women who are celibate as a reaction to how problematic sexuality is made. They are still lesbians because they reject male sexuality, the all-important factor.

I want to make two points clearly; if heterosexuality is seen as conditioned, it is necessary to question it all the harder; were it the "natural" state for women to be in, it would be the "deviations" that needed justifying within feminism. Also it is not sufficient for women to withdraw their emotional and political support from men if they still allow themselves to be fucked. They are still serving men's needs. Lesbian existence is still essential to any feminist future. Every fuck sends that future back a step. Male power would suffer its worst loss if all women refused to service men sexually, because an important means of control would be lost.

Marian Morrigan, Feb. 1981

(1)

This phrase and the title are taken from an article by Adrienne Rich, Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence, from Signs, Journal of women in culture and society 1980, Vol. 5, no. 4. Which I found very inspiring.





# Scarcity Value or Divide and Rule



The way that most feminists write about 'sexuality' seems very alien to me when I look at the lives of many women round about where I live. The very word 'sexuality' doesn't mean an awful lot to me - it usually reminds me of the articles I see in women's liberation newsletters and magazines, rather than being about anything so crude as sex. Some of the articles I think are really good, like a recent article in Spare Rib about 'Sex with men' :

"Changing the basis upon which we're prepared to have sexual relationships with men has meant not simply trying to find new techniques for increasing our sexual pleasure but changing the balance of power and control within the relationship itself. Many of us, for example, are now only prepared to have sex with men when we initiate it and never allow penetration unless it is something we actively desire."

But really a lot of us must be thinking how lucky the women are who wrote that article. How lucky they are to 'have a man' at all with whom you can even begin to talk about these things, let alone achieve some results.

I can't help looking at it from a different angle. Most of the women I come across living round here, in a working class area, live with men, or else struggle on their own as single parents. Most of the men either beat the women up, or are useless about the house and with the children. We spend a lot of time discussing the misfortunes of different women and often hear ourselves saying things like - "he's really good to her - He's never laid a finger on her." You end up thinking women are really lucky if their men don't beat them up, or if they can get a man to 'take them on' when they're alone bringing up three children.

The obvious difference between these women and the women who write the articles is that the women round here are financially dependent on men, particularly because they have children.

Many working class women weigh up the possibilities and decide that marriage is a better option than working in a factory or office. They see life with a man as being the only other alternative but what an alternative! The treatment that is often dished out once women start living with their men makes us realise that there is no real choice. It is simply a gamble, a gamble that seldom pays off. What they do when they have lost their bet depends on the choices that are left. Will they go it alone and face the indignities of the social security system? It isn't any secret what this entails. Your friendly SS officer knocking on the door to bring to light things about your life that you had almost forgotten about. It is possible to cope with this, but what's in store once the SS is sorted out and the order book has been made out? A life at home, looking after kids, staying in every night, counting the pennies to buy a packet of fags. I wouldn't call that a pleasant life. However, we must look on the bright side and maybe, just maybe another knight in shining armour will come to rescue the ladies in their distress. And so it starts all over again.

Many women have taken their gamble once and are not prepared to do it again. The 'devil you know is better than the devil you don't know' so they stick with their first man and tolerate their position, which by anybody's definition is not an enviable one. So, for working class women the choices are very limited, and when women talk about trying to dictate the terms of their sexual relationships it makes me think they are very lucky. It isn't that I think they shouldn't be doing this, every luck to them, I have just tried to point out that women that I know are nowhere near that stage, simply because they are not financially independent and will not be until there is a radical change in the overall system.

But even though some of us have some financial independence from men, it's very hard to get away from that attitude of mind - thinking in terms of 'trying to get a man'. Weighing up your 'chances' of trapping a reasonable man given all the odds - your 'looks', your clothes, your independence (can you get a babysitter), your reputation (will he tell all his mates you're available) and - the big problem - the scarcity of 'decent blokes' anyway.



This 'scarcity value' of available men is a factor which I feel increases amongst left wing circles where men strive to be 'non sexist'. Because few men are considered to be tolerably nonsexist by feminists, those few who are granted this status by women who sleep with them, take on a certain amount of power. After all, they are fairly hard to find, so we daren't push our luck too much by being critical of their behaviour. So, in many ways heterosexual feminists are in a similar position to most women. Although we are usually financially independent of men, we still see our choices as very limited. This is more than just an attitude. Men can make lots of choices that women often can't make. For example, a friend was disturbed to find out recently that a man she had been sleeping with occasionally (when he wanted to come round to see her) in fact lived with another woman who had his child. Although asked repeatedly, the man had withheld the information about the woman he was living with so she never had the choice to be loyal to the other woman. Relationships between men and women are generally in a position of stalemate(!) where men have all the choices and women have few.

Could things be different ? Can men change ?- a question desperately asked by heterosexual women. I have to be optimistic ( or else I'd go crazy). It's said that men have no interest in giving up power. Objectively, this is true. But perhaps it is in men's subjective interests to change, to have more human relationships with the women and children they live with. Most men must despise the women they live with, women they consider to be inferior to themselves. Living with someone you despise is not so satisfying as a more equal relationship.

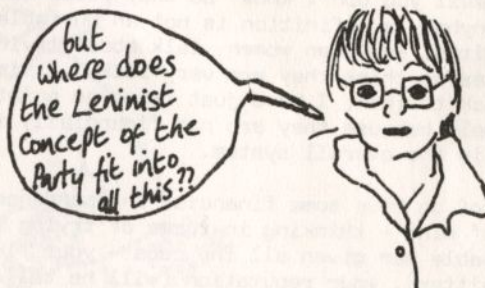
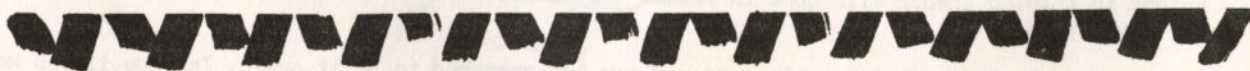
How to bring about this change if we think it is possible ? I think it is hard, if not impossible for women to change men through close relationships. It's merely part of the old pattern :- the man finds it hard to be emotionally open except with his female lover, and with her he feels very vulnerable and dependent. The woman is the outlet for all the man's emotional needs. So, if the man recognises the need to combat his sexism, relying on the woman to show him how is perpetuating precisely the emotional dependency on her which he needs to break away from.

I think it is 'outside' factors which have an impact on men and force them to change. Outside factors ranging from war which changes women's employment patterns and financial dependency to the threat of lesbianism, which has at least made a dent in the status quo of male-female relationships in feminist and left wing circles in Britain. Many feminists have decided to give up relating to men sexually and have become lesbians. It is this threat of 'losing their women' to lesbianism that has forced men in these circles to change, although many of us may be sceptical about whether these are real changes or mere 'behaviour modifications'. Lesbianism has given women more power in their relationships with men, by presenting an alternative to us, and a threat to them. The threat of women getting together, sexually, socially, politically may make some impact.

But we have to change as well. If we could get away from that attitude of thinking we're lucky to get a man, competing with each other for reasonable blokes, things might change. We should instead think - he should be bloody lucky he's got me, that I condescend to live with him. Sex continues to divide women from each other more than anything else - more than class or race, as it divides women within the same class and race. We're frightened of 'losing our men', of being judged inferior to other women sexually, we feel that everyone else must be having a more sexually satisfying life than we do. The only unity is often to link up together to distrust the lesbian, the prostitute or the woman who is different. It's a pity we can't overcome that and see that we've been conned - divide and rule.

Relationships between men and women are generally in a position of stalemate(!) where men have all the choices and women have few.

Fiona  
and  
Betty





# Reflections on the break-up of a lesbian relationship.

## One side of the story.

P27

As a lesbian, I have a clear idea of the nature of my oppression from patriarchal society. And I believe I have an accurate perspective on the ambivalence towards lesbians within the women's movement. I can cope with being a semi-public lesbian; I approach prejudices (ranging from my aunt's reception of my new self with 'I don't mind, I'm a triple-certificated nurse' to 'Lesbians are oppressing the other women in this room') with zest, if not sheer glee, strong and articulate in my arguments. But where I am floundering in a morass of pain and bewilderment is in the sphere of the emotions. I am not coping at all well, and haven't in the past, with the feelings generated from loving other women. At the moment I am in a chronic condition of agony as a result of the ending of a two year relationship. I want to walk alone, proud, autonomous and strong, but presently I feel weak, clinging and very weepy.

I realise that in adding another voice to those talking of failed lesbian relationships, I am not saying anything that hasn't been said before, and I'm also aware of playing into the straight world's hands. But somehow the essence of the problem lies right there.. From within the cosiness of my secure relationship I used to be annoyed and pitying of the negative view of strong women in post-'60's novels who ended up alone and damaged. I began to think I would have to write the Definitive Lesbian Novel, as an anti-dote to the pessimistic view of free women. But I'm uncomfortably aware now that I don't feel all that different from Anna Wulf in The Golden Notebook when Michael left her.

I'm in the position of not really knowing why the relationship ended, and worse, having no established patterns to refer to, so that I can evaluate what has happened. When men treat us badly, we have now a solid feminist analysis to draw on. But with our lesbian lovers, who are often our closest friends as well, how do we assess the situation? I can't say simply that she treated me badly because it's not clear-cut. After all, we see ourselves as sisters together who are fighting against the damage wreaked on us by patriarchy. It's men who damage women; we don't oppress each other. I have to understand what she's going through - I can't blame her for rejecting me. And is she rejecting me? That's not even clear. She still wants me as a friend and lover, but not exclusively. Has she developed further than me in the direction of radical lesbianism, or is she exploiting me under the guise of feminist jargon?

While I'm in this weakened state, I hear the heterosexual world playing on my doubts by assailing me with its sage dictums:

"Lesbian relationships aren't any different from heterosexual ones. Look at your unhappiness. It's just the same as if she'd been a bloke."

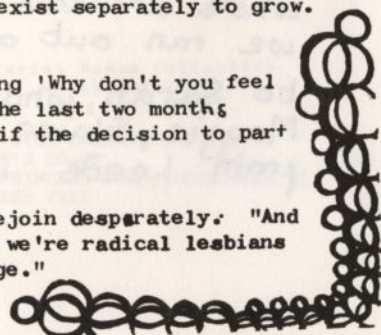
or: "Unstable. They're not prepared to commit themselves. The average lesbian relationship lasts only two years."

or: "No-one can tell me you don't play roles. Someone is always more powerful and the other is hurt."

"No!" I want to shriek. "We are different. We're friends. We're not breaking up because we can't commit ourselves, or because one has decided it's best. We are two strong women who have come a certain way together. We have had a sweet, loving, two years, and have developed in leaps from where we were and aided each other's development. Now, in order to be autonomous, and define our own lives further, it's imperative that we part. We have to exist separately to grow. We can't chain each other down like men do with women."

But a persistent little inner voice insists infuriatingly on murmuring 'Why don't you feel good then? You haven't been doing a lot of dramatic development over the last two months; have you? Why do you feel as though you've been booted in the stomach if the decision to part was a positive, affirming, equal one?'

"But she says we've gotta break out of patriarchal patterns!" I rejoin desperately. "And I agree with her. Closed monogamous relationships are restrictive. If we're radical lesbians we have to take risks. We can't just emulate the institution of marriage."





'No, of course not,' replies the little voice. 'I take your point entirely. Pity, though, you never really communicated about this during your time together. Odd that she's initiating so much talk about splitting up so as not to emulate patriarchy, but is willing to end the relationship in such a classically patriarchal fashion - by withdrawing, informing you of her decision without entering into discussion on the matter, accusing you of clinging when you are left devastated and entirely disbelieving of her news that 'we' have decided to part.'

My analytic self is unhappy with the little voice on this last point, so I'd like to say something about the word 'patriarchal'. Because of the confusions and lack of patterns for our behaviour, it is very easy for us to accuse each other of acting like men, of not having rid ourselves of 'the patriarchy within', when this may not be accurate. For instance, the word 'patriarchal' can be used to apply to all kinds of lesbian-feminist behaviour. We can call monogamy patriarchal (The danger of monogamy - I only love you) because of all the associations of property/possession. But we can also call non-monogamy patriarchal when it's expressed as: Why should I deny myself as many sexual partners as I want just because my lover feels hurt? or, Why should any of these women put demands on me? I'm free to sleep with them all. In the latter case, we have the problem of morality. In trying to invent a new existence, we hurt others. Does our freedom justify this suffering? (And we can also call non-monogamy patriarchal when we are the one who is suffering, in this case, me.)

As I write this, I'm uncomfortably aware that I sound like the wailing, betrayed woman pleading for the (female) world's pity. It occurs to me to wonder if the article is merely a thrust at my lover, a taking of revenge. Yet, from my present state, I feel unable to write or experience it differently, though of course the other woman involved would give a very different interpretation.

I'm aware of the unevenness of what I'm saying - I haven't found a way of writing about what I'm really feeling because I know what a radical lesbian should feel and so analysis and personal feelings are all muddled up together, with nothing expressed adequately.

At the moment I feel devastated, betrayed, outraged, raging, anguished, bitter, vengeful, judgemental and many other things. But I feel guilty for feeling these emotions, because part of me says I shouldn't be expending this amount of energy in suffering. I should be trying to solve the problem of bringing my emotions into line with my political consciousness. A barrier of revolutionary posturing seems to stand between me and what I feel.

I'd appreciate some feed-back on this article.

*Clare Rutter*



♀ The Scarlet Women Collective would like to thank all the sisters who have helped us to put this issue together - including those who's articles we were unable to include because we ran out of space and money. Thank especially to Sarah, who typed until 5a.m. for us, Margaret Maggie, Elaine, Moss Side press and to Pink Jane from Leeds who emerged as a brilliant cartoonist we couldn't have done it without you all.

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## Editorial continued - .

lesbian, whore/virgin, etc. Several women suggest that we are all really lesbian and that men have imposed heterosexuality upon us, in order to control and divide us. Are they saying that no women ever have sexual feelings for men? That all heterosexual women have been duped and bullied into heterosexuality? It is true that heterosexuality is rigorously imposed. But this doesn't necessarily mean that men imposed it on us in order to control us. Rather it is a reflection of the control they have over our bodies and our sexuality, exploiting both as natural resources whatever our feelings.

So the question is, how did men come to control our bodies? We don't have room in this editorial to explore this, but we take it up in part 2. Don't miss the next exciting installment.....!!!!

There are a few other comments we want to make here. Do all women, whether lesbian or heterosexual, have the same kind of sexuality? We think so and we also think that there is a real difference between women's sexuality and men's - perhaps related to our different reproductive functions, differences exacerbated by patriarchy. Another thought: we have taken 'sexuality' to mean genital sexuality primarily. Is this a patriarchal trap? What about other sexual feelings, like lying on your tummy just after having a baby and feeling delicious squeeze sensations in your womb, sexual feelings related to breast feeding, feelings and fantasies connected with menstruation, fantasies in general of sexual turn-ons, reactions to outside stimulation unconnected with physical presence of anyone else, like smells, sounds etc. Are these part of our sexuality too, which we should have included?

Finally, sadly, most of the contributions for this issue, parts one and two, were written by white feminists and the kinds of questions, concerns and experiences talked about in the articles reflect this. This is particularly ironic after the last issue on Imperialism. We had hoped to have many more articles showing how culture bound our assumptions about sexuality are and showing the many different cultural faces of patriarchy. We have to take responsibility for this. We hope, however, that despite this limitation sisters will find this enjoyable and interesting.

Scarlet ♀, editorial collective.



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