

# HBOOMB

A background image of a person wearing a leopard print hat, with only their eyes and part of their face visible through the hat's opening. The image is partially obscured by the text and a pink banner.

VOLUME 4

SPRING 2009

## UNCENSORED: *COLLEGE* *SEXUALITY*

NUDE CO-EDS!

QUEER POLITICS!

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CRITICAL THEORY!





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PHOTOGRAPHED BY JASPER VAN VREDENBURGH







## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR MARTABEL WASSERMAN

Dear HBOMB readers,

The world has changed dramatically since our last issue came out. Our economic bubble burst. Barack Obama was elected. We had a woman candidate for president and vice president. In popular culture, there were more representations than ever before of the LGBTQ community. And these are just signifiers of undercurrents we have yet to articulate. While these changes in mainstream culture and electoral politics are positive, we must remind ourselves that gender, racial, class and sexual equality have yet to be achieved.

So where does that leave HBOMB?

Practically speaking, the aesthetic of our magazine is recession-chic. We weren't able to go full color, the best paper, the nicest gloss finish. While ultimately it privileges content over spectacle, we did have to compromise a lot of wonderful color content. Most of the images you are seeing in here are representative of larger bodies of work that we weren't able to include. Luckily we have the web as another platform, so please check out [hbombmag.com](http://hbombmag.com).

In this chaotic moment of flux and change, we have the opportunity to dream bigger than ever. Now is the time for us to state our demands about how we believe issues of sex, sexuality and gender need to be rearticulated in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It is time to reflect on past social movements and look towards the future. HBOMB strives to meet the board's utopic standards for the dialog about the politics of sex, the role of art, democratic media, and activism today.

We have been fortunate to receive emotional, intellectual and financial support from many generous sources that made this magazine possible. Please see our back page that acknowledges all the wonderful donors who gave what they could in order to bring this magazine to you. Additionally I would like to thank: Professor Stephen Prina, the Dudley Co-op, Amie Siegel, Carlton DeWoody, Eric Adolfsen, Stefanie Wilson, all of the contributors, interviewees, friends and families.

It has been an honor to relaunch this magazine and serve as editor-in-chief for two years.

XOXO,  
MW

# HBOMB

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# FINAGLED

KATHLEEN HALE



Collage by Rebecca Lieberman, 2008

The last guy I was dating was always wanting to put his balls atop my face. I'd lie down and he'd come over me so that his taint and balls and hairy ass crack were all that I could see, (he was hard, see, so I couldn't see what mattered), and then he'd sort of pliéd down toward me, and I'd have to snap my teeth at his balls, try to catch them in my jaws before he pulled away. That was my job.

He always pulled away in time. I didn't want his balls gone or damaged because I wanted him to fuck me, but that only happened every other week or so. All the rest of the time it was testicle ballet inside my bedroom, or sometimes he'd slobber on my genitals and I'd pretend to have an orgasm. I was getting pretty sick of it, so I told him that the ball game was boring, which was true. He said, "Sweetheart, if you won't try new things, then how can we finagle a relationship?" And then he left.

That was my last boyfriend.

I've never been that into fantasies or role-play. My uncle got me a subscription once to World of Warcraft, and when he came over to get me set up and introduce me to his online guild, I kept laughing nervously and probably offended him, because a few months later I signed on out of boredom and realized he hadn't renewed my subscription. And back in high school all the teachers tried to get me to do theater, because the school only had three hundred kids and I was pretty and I think they thought that'd work. So I tried it but could only do the roles of awkward and nervous wives or children, because it made me so embarrassed to

see everybody pretending it was real.

One time I guess I sort of got into it. Funny sex, I mean. I had this boyfriend who couldn't get it up. I was nineteen and loved his guts out, and I thought, *this should be the fun thing to work on, come on*, and so I got myself geared up and ended up trying a few things for his benefit.

My friends all told me, *he's gay, all right? He's gay*. But I told them they were ignorant. Gay guys could get it up for women. It was biological. Touch it, up it goes. This was mental, I explained. He was just too smart. He just couldn't turn his mind off.

Rape scenarios didn't work for him, and I didn't like them because he always forgot to hold my hands down, or couldn't hold himself up long enough and ended up just flattening me to the sheets with his chin digging at my collarbone. We tried a little girl-older man thing, and we both sort of liked that, but felt bad for liking it, and so didn't even go through with it (besides, I think he was only half erect). The only thing that really worked was this doctor-nurse behavior, which is pretty hackneyed anyway. I had to call him Dr. Cock and up it went—bing! Boner victory—and we'd have a few minutes to work. I always had to lie perfectly still (changing positions turned him flaccid all over again) and whisper, *Dr. Cock, Dr. Cock, ooooh, your cock*, until he came.

We broke up a few months later because he found out he was gay. Go figure. He's very happy now, fucking the



poop out of some boy from Long Island. We have lunch and talk about it sometimes.

I just want to have regular sex where the guy fucks me and I have an orgasm that sends my head knocking against something from the flailing thrill. But I keep on finding all these boys who need it in a special way. I don't want it boring, but, I don't know, I guess stuff like that just always leaves me dry, or turns me giggly at the thought of, *what if someone else could see this?* Between Dr. Cock and testicle ballet, I couldn't get into it, and to tell you the truth, I don't think I'll ever be into it. I figure I've tried the weirdest most exciting stuff and found it boring, and that's never going to change.

I'm wrong, of course, but I don't know that till I meet Miss Lee-Lee.

She's sitting next to me at this crowded bar down in Wicker Park. She's on her third or fourth vodka tonic—I don't know, she tells me later on but I forget—and I've switched from G&T's to beers, because I'm bending toward a black-out but don't want to look it. It's been a week since the ball game, and I look over and there's Lee-Lee, just This Woman, at the time, and she's drawing people at the bar on this little napkin. Caricatures or something. It'd usually piss me off a little because it's kind of like, *oh look how alternative I am, I'm the muse for Zach Braff's next movie girlfriend, I'm that girl at the Laundromat who dances alone with headphones on to music nobody can hear*—you know, that unaware-they're-typical-because-they're-typical-in-atypical-ways. Whatever. But for whatever reason it doesn't bother me, her drawing, it gets me going, like I've found a friend or something.

I have on this white onesie underneath my jeans and mesh tank top. A sort of cotton leotard that eliminates any need for underwear or bra. It's something I got at some very indie store I've forgotten the name of, and is itching me like crazy. I feel about seven years old, and I try to search for something good to say. Compliment This Woman on her cool nail polish or the Marc Jacobs sailor top that she has on (except not say Marc Jacobs because that'd make me a snob and point out that she is one, which wouldn't work at all).

I tell her she is pretty.

I expect her to blush or scoot away or at least say something cool, like, *I don't swing that way, baby*, but instead she looks straight back at me and tells me, "You are too."

That's when I start to realize something I haven't considered. That this woman might be interested in me, might even want to take a tumble with me, and I've never done any of that stuff before. The closest I have ever come to being with a girl was the time my friend Erin and I did shrooms and made our teeth touch just to hear the click.

Sure, I think some girls are pretty. Sometimes I even think about what it'd be like to freeze time so I could undress one or kiss one and not have to deal with the Are You Gay stuff. But usually those are with ex-girlfriends of my boyfriends, and I always figure that I'm jealous and just want to compare our bodies, and besides, the fantasies always end at kissing and looking and touching. When it

comes down to O-time with my vibrator and me, I always have to think of being fucked.

"I'm Miss Lee-Lee," Lee-Lee says. "But you can call me Lee-Lee."

She draws my picture, which is good, I think. It gives me a sort of big nose, which I sort of think I have, but she keeps on mumbling, "No the nose is all wrong, all wrong," and wringing out her hands. Then I buy her a drink and she writes me a message on an index card. "I write backwards," she explains, and tells me to go read it in the bathroom mirror. I do and it's nothing naughty or exciting. Just telling me about how white my teeth are and reminding herself that I like lots of extra lime inside my G&T's, which I guess I've started drinking again at this point.

I go back upstairs and she swivels toward me on her stool. The tiny straw—those bar ones with the double holes—is pressed between her lips, and I think I hear a tiny swoosh of bubbly air, which means there is a hole somewhere. I push away the elbows and the shoulders of other people to get to her, to tell her about the hole, but the bar is so crowded that everything is buzzing and I can't hear what she is trying to say. I put my hand against her knee to steady myself, then leave it there. "You're really so pretty," I shout, and everyone around us turns around.

\*\*\*

Back at her apartment Lee-Lee makes me a gin and tonic with lots of lime and I pretend to drink it. What I really need is a glass of water, but I don't want to ask for one because I think it might come off as, *I'm wasted party's over*, which might ruin the mood. So I go into the bathroom and scoop mouthfuls from the sink until I feel a little better.

There are little framed photos of ballerinas all around the mirror. Most of them are just of the girls' bodies, the frame holding only downward pointed toes to skyward pointed chin, jumping and bending in their tutus. Some of them show faces but I like the non-face ones better. I don't know much about ballet but figure with the chorus girls it's probably more about fitting in and looking same, and so probably these no-face photos mean something. I don't know, though. I'm pretty drunk.

When I come out, Lee-Lee's in the hallway holding my drink. She's barefoot, and has changed into pale pink tights under a leotard. Her hair's in braided pigtails, and I guess she stuck some pipe-cleaner in there, or something, because both tails are curved out and up like Pippy Longstocking.

"You really like ballerinas, I guess, huh?" I say. "They're your favorite, it looks like."

I don't know what I'm talking about, and neither does she, it doesn't look like. I point toward the bathroom. "All those."

"Oh, those." She laughs. "Those are me."

It's true, I realize, and I'm embarrassed that I didn't see the resemblance right away, because now in all this hallway light I can see she's older than I thought. Thirty something, maybe. It doesn't matter except I know that 30's are when girls get ashamed of age, and so maybe she's self-conscious about it, and maybe by not recognizing her I've made it worse.

She holds my drink out away from her body for balance and rises up up up on her bare toes, then trembles a bit and falls. "I'm retired."

"Geeze louise," I say, and take my drink. "So you were in the ballet, or?"

"The circus," Lee-Lee says. "My parents were crazy." She looks down at her get-up. "I've worn this stuff all my life. It's comfortable. I wear it to bed."

I put my drink down on the floor, between the carpet and the wall. I'm starting to feel a little weird. I thought she was more experienced than she's acting, and I can't see things going very well if I have to initiate and plan things out.

I lean back against the wallpaper and raise my hands above my shoulders. *I don't know*, I start to say, but then Lee-Lee barges toward me and pulls hard at my mesh top, gathering it up into her fist. She wraps her hands around my ribcage, tugs her nails in, and my forehead starts to buzz like I know she's going to kiss me. "I got your license out of your purse while you were peeing," she says. "I'm ten years older than you. Can you tell?"

My eyes dart back and forth across her face. I try to think of something good to say. "Not with your hair like that."

Lee-Lee laughs and leans her forehead into mine. She traces her tongue between my lips. "This is going to be very fun," she says. She leans back and gathers up the hem of the mesh tank top in her other hand. "Just as long as you play. Promise?"

I smile, nod, and then she digs her nails into the mesh, rips my tank top straight in half.

\*\*\*

The most difficult thing about having experimental sex is regaling it, I think. For instance, after Lee-Lee ripped my shirt off and pulled the straps of my onesie down around my waist, she started kissing at my tatters, which is strange, because it's not something I would think to do to a woman. It seems like something boys do because they've seen it on pornos, and it's stupid. Because we don't suck on their nips. And all nipples are the same. Unless they're fake, I guess, tattooed on like the ones that ladies with mastectomies get done.

Anyway.

I was getting into it, actually, because she wasn't just

sucking, like a boy, she was nuzzling and squeezing and licking all down my stomach. Then she started biting. First around the edges of my areola, then my actual nipple. Tugging a little bit at it with her teeth. Now I regale that and the listener, if she's got nipples, says, *ow*. And even just thinking back on it, I think that too, because I'm a little sore from it. But at the time I was soaring. My head all tingly and in this kind of headache. My eyes aching with involuntary roll.

She bit my tits and I wanted her inside of me right then. That's how good it was. Except she didn't have a dick, but I didn't think about that much till later.

After a little while in the hallway, Lee-Lee stood up pretty abruptly and spun me around by my pelvis so I was facing away from her. Then she pushed me, hands low on my hips, all the way into her bedroom, where she kind of tossed me on the bed. (She was a former ballerina, so she was small, but she didn't need to do much to get me on there. I was so woozy from the biting that I pretty much just tipped.)

I lay on my back and looked around the room while she looked at me. I felt shy all of a sudden because I didn't know how much we could actually get done without a penis, and so I tried to seem absorbed by the scenery. There was a paper lantern by the bed, a poster of Audrey Tautou, and some leather straps wrapped up and slipped around a hook against the wall.

wwl didn't know how to tell her that I wasn't into fantasies. "Um."

"Listen," Lee-Lee said. "I know this is your first time, but you can't be totally passive."

I lifted my head and started to tell her that it wasn't.

"I know," she said. "But it's your first time with Miss Lee-Lee."

"I thought you said that I could drop the Miss," I said, and lunged at her.

My onesie was still down around my waist and while I pushed her back against the bed she traced her fingers up and down my chest, pulling my bellybutton and tucking her fingertips into the top part of my jeans. I couldn't do anything but breathe hard with her touching me like that.

"You have to really try," she said, and so I tried to touch her while she distracted me with all her touching. We grappled like that for a minute and then finally I pinned her down by her wrists. She pressed her head back into the mattress and smiled at me, then hawked a loogie at my face. I laughed, asked if she was serious, and then she called me a bitch and so I slapped her.

"Okay," she sighed. "Now you can begin."

I was really excited. Thought for a second I might have my period—that's how wet I was. But I didn't even check because she was so still, and it was just like I had imagined it. Time frozen and a girl lying down and waiting for me. I pulled the tight straps of her leotard down by her elbows,



then peeled the whole thing away from her skin and left it dangling at her knees. Her breasts were medium, I'd say, bigger than mine, but so high and round they barely had any shape. There weren't any folds where they fell, they just sat, and her nipples were light pink and darted out with stretch marks like miniature suns.

I've heard sex is like a massage, you give like you want to get, and so I rubbed my cheeks and temples up against her tits before I took each nipple sideways for a second in my mouth and rolled it like a pencil in between my teeth.

"Keep going," Lee-Lee said.

Her legs were bent over the edge of the bed, and so I scooted down between them, and lifted her butt up to pull her thighs down.

"Could you take them all the way off, please," she said. "My feet are sweating."

I pulled gently, then remembering the hallway, harder, causing runs and then rips in Lee-Lee's stockings, which I threw into the corner. She was completely naked then, and she actually had pubic hair, lots of it, so I figured she was definitely a lesbian.

Lee-Lee watched me watch her, and then brought her hands up behind her head. "Go ahead," she said. "Explore."

But I didn't want to anymore. I wanted to eat her, push my fingers up inside her. I buried my face between her legs. I always thought I'd hold my breath down there but when it came down to it I breathed, and then I opened up my mouth and tried to give it like I'd want it. Big broad tongue strokes from her anus to her pubis, then some pinprick, pointy-tongue stuff near the opening, the actual vagina, and then I licked in circles around that. I waited until she was sweating to rub her clit back and forth with my tongue, and then, not knowing what else to do because I'd never come from cunnilingus, I stood up and pulled the rest of my clothes off, let her take in my grown-out pubes for a second and then scrambled up atop her, pressed against her, and reached down to curl my fingers up inside her.

She used the back of her hand to press my tongue deeper into her mouth, and then she grabbed my wrist so that I'd stop what I was doing. I figured I'd messed up—that she was going to tell me to stop finger fucking her like a stupid little boy.

"Turn over," she said. I did and she grabbed me by the hips again, pushed my butt up toward my head so I was stretching like a cat. Then she dove in and started eating my ass, really going to town, while I writhed, both because I liked it and because I thought it was only polite to act like I didn't want to put her through it. No one had ever done that before. It was hard enough to get a boy to eat my pussy.

"You don't have to," I said finally, but I said it like a question, and I made sure that she knew that I was out of

breath—was loving it.

"Oh but I do," she said. "Now we know each other. Now we can do anything." She climbed up and flattened me against the mattress. Her tits were pressed into my shoulder blades. "Do you want to try something really fun?"

I turned my face so that my cheek and not my nose was pressed against the sheets. I nodded that way, sideways, and then she scrambled backward, got off the bed and pulled at a string, releasing the black strappy loops from off the wall.

"Ever seen one of these?" Lee-Lee asked. She was opening a drawer.

I wasn't scared of her. She was a ballerina. "No."

She turned around and held something out to me. More black straps and a dildo with some plastic on the back. A strap on. I took it, thinking she just wanted me to hold it. "You do it like this," she said. She sat down into one of the leather loops and tucked her feet into two more, holding out her legs like stirrups. She pointed at the strap-on. "It's clean."

My clit was pulsing, but I didn't know what to do and she could tell. She rocked forward and pointed to rubber dick and leather straps. "It's like underwear," she said. She tapped one leather loop that hung against the dildo. "Right leg." She tapped the other. "Left leg. You tighten the waistband like a belt." I climbed in and Lee-Lee pulled me toward her. She flipped something at the end of the rubber cock and I fell forward, my legs jerking. It was buzzing on my clit.

She leaned back against the leather web and smiled.

I looked down at the contraption. I had a hard on. I had a vibrator. I could fuck Miss Lee-Lee and get off at the same time. It was perfect. But as I looked at her reclined body—her elbows and knees and ankles laced through leather strings—I knew that I still had some questions.

"But what's next?" I said. "I mean, how do we finagle this?"

Miss Lee-Lee laughed and said, "Well honey, we take turns."



Why  
  
not ?

Naked

Relaxed

Sweaty

Exhausted

Hot

Uncertain

We're  
friends

L  
e  
t  
'  
s

Celebrate

Uncharted  
territory

At least!

'  
s

You

Me

Maybe

We'd be the  
first

a pound

a shake

Probably  
the only thing

Both

Giving

a slap

Would you  
like to try the  
lumberjack?

Your hand

they

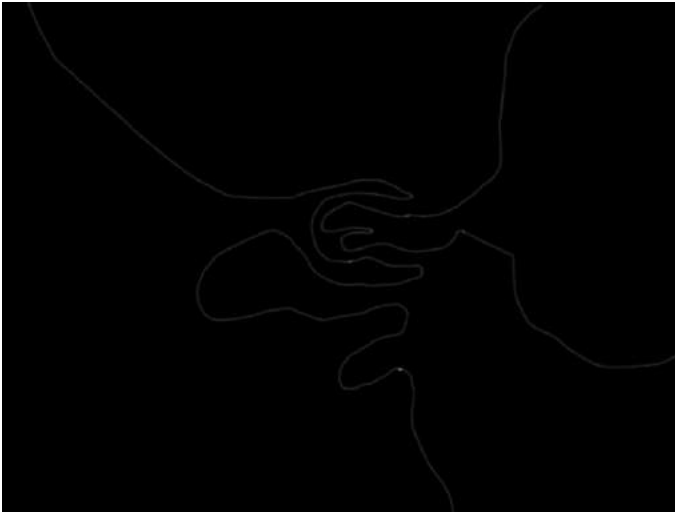
My hand

Haven't touched all night

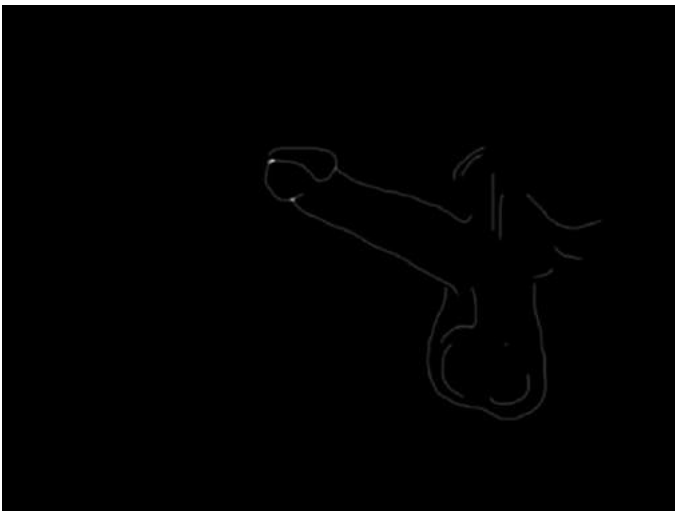
Giving

5



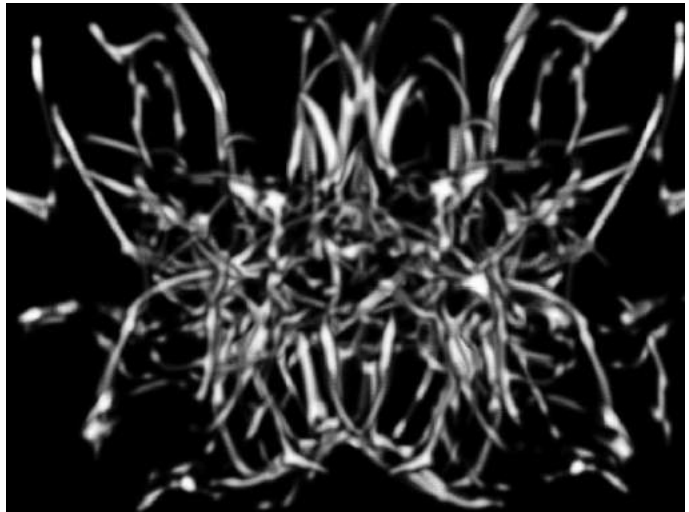
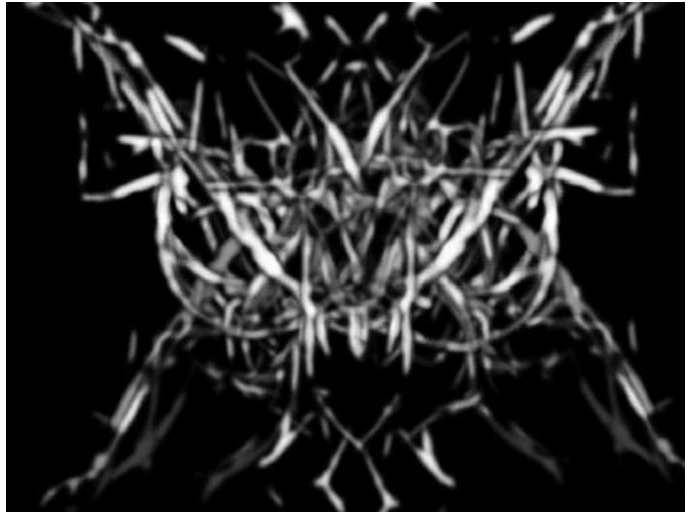


HBOMB is proud to be able to present audio excerpts and stills from VES Professor Ruth Lingford's short animated film in progress, *Orgasm Project*. Lingford was originally interested in exploring the failure of words to describe the physical experience of an orgasm. To her surprise, she found people to be both very articulate and specific in their responses. Lingford surveyed a diverse cross-section of people to create this unique archive of experience and sensation. The interviews simultaneously de-mystify and complicate the notion of the orgasm. They reveal the wide range of aural, visual, and physical experiences as well as the breadth of complex emotional, mental and spiritual responses. Like an orgasm, the video can be funny, poignant, frustrating and infinitely pleasurable.



Ruth Lingford  
Orgasm Animation, 2008  
Animation and poem  
In progress

climbing yet at the same time falling  
high up on a swing  
gates are opening  
chocolate mousse  
laughing  
like a sneeze  
like an itch, and you need to scratch it  
a wave going up  
a pleasure bomb dropped deeper in your body,  
and it explodes so soft and muffled  
um...have you ever done heroin?  
Blank out  
Everything shuts down  
Just gone  
you momentarily cease to exist  
obliterated  
as a person you are suddenly basically void  
A big light  
Goes to white  
Whited-out light  
snowstorm  
broccoli  
filigree icing  
cathedrals  
giant spaces  
a certain street in Riga  
Rorschach honey-bees  
Paisley..some reds in it  
In a cave  
Dropped  
What did I just do?  
What Have I Done?  
Ok, we're done  
The illusion of not being alone...almost  
convincing





# TO CALL DOWN THE TWELVE LEGIONS OF ANGELS: MEDITATIONS ON VIOLENCE AND LIBERATION FROM POLK GULCH

PAUL GREGORY NAUERT

*O let none say I Love until aware  
What huge resources it will take to nurse  
One ruining speck, one tiny hair  
That casts a shadow throughout the universe:  
We are the deaf immured within a loud  
And foreign language of revolt, a crowd  
Of poaching hands and mouths who out of fear  
Have learned a safer life than we can bear.<sup>1</sup>*

## I.

The guy reminded me of myself. A slightly younger version of myself: About 20, white, average height, and shortly cropped hair. He stood alone at the corner of Hemlock and Polk, palpably unsure of himself, shivering beneath a thin hoodie on one of those fog-chilled nights common to San Francisco even in the middle of August. As River and I halted to cross the street, he glanced at us with deliberate curiosity.

After a decade and half of work on the streets, River can immediately tell who the sex workers are. I could not. This was one of the first times I had gone out with River. River had explained his work the day before and given me a tour of Polk Gulch in the daylight. Yet, little could have prepared me for this evening or this encounter.

I had a spent last summer living with Catholic Workers around North America. The “Catholic Worker” is a term, identity, and movement that has confused, scandalized, and inspired many since its founding in 1933. The movement iconoclastically fuses traditions of American Left radicalism and a profound openness to faith experience. Emerging from Roman Catholic social teaching, European notions of anarchism, and the interwar Village scene in Great Depression-era New York City, it today embraces a range of faiths from Buddhism to atheist humanism, with communities in most large American cities and several cities abroad.

In seeking genuine solidarity with oppressed communities, most Catholic Workers move into houses in materially downtrodden areas of urban America, engaging in direct service and direct action for social justice. These communities work on almost every imaginable Leftist issue—from anti-torture activism to green urban agriculture to providing sanctuary to “illegal” immigrants.

The Tememos Catholic Worker is located in the Polk Gulch/Tenderloin district of San Francisco. This area historically has been—and remains even as straight gentrification creeps in—the main gathering point for male sex workers in the City. Guys come here from all over to buy sex from guys. The workers sleep on the streets and alleys here when they have nowhere else.

The primary focus of Temenos is a direct, unflinchingly engagement with queer sexuality, making it virtually unique within the Catholic Worker movement. River Sims, the founder and sole intentional member, describes his work as “a sacramental ministry of presence and harm reduction for sex workers and homeless young adults.” Following the peak hours of the sex worker trade, most of this presence occurs at night. River makes rounds along the sidewalks of the neighborhood, handing out syringes (called “points” on the street), condoms, socks, and food. Yet, as he emphasizes, this ministry of things is but means to the end of “being there” for the male and trans sex workers of the area. These guys are often struggling with mental health afflictions, substance addiction, and unresolved sexual orientation issues. He is one of the few who treat these men not as a commodities or objects, but as fellow human beings, worthy of dignity and respect.

River knows the names of every guy who has been on the street for more than a temporary period. None of the saccharine façades, false piety, or uptight humorlessness most associate with clergy animates River’s manner. He is frank, direct, blunt to the point of rudeness, takes and gives no shit, but is deeply compassionate, possessed with a deep sense of the injustice of the situation and faith in his work. The guys on the street clearly trust him deeply as someone who will listen, someone who will help them if he can.

The young guy glancing at us was new to the streets. River had not seen him before. He asked the guy if he needed any “points” (needles) or food. The guy just wanted one needle. This was an unusual act—most ask for handfals. The situation became doubly unusual as he actually gave us a used syringe back. In principle, though rarely observed in practice, needles are to be exchanged, not just distributed freely. (Needle exchange is, in spite of overwhelming evidence to its public health benefits, kept illegal in many places in America and in California. Exception has been made for major urban areas through a “state of emergency” declared after the outbreak of HIV/AIDS.) River then asked him if was “new out here.” The man nodded yes. He handed him his card, telling him “Anytime, I am here to talk.” We went on our way.

About a half hour later, we were walking up, back towards California and Sacramento Streets, and the guy appeared from behind a bus stop. He approached River with the look of a kid working up his courage to ask a difficult question of an intimidating teacher, “Hey...is it true that you are a Catholic priest?” (River’s card has this information on it.)

River responded, “Yeah, I am.” River has long hair, dresses in a hippie-inflected punk style. Though he also wears a great number of medallions and crosses, a Roman Catholic priest would be the last thing most would mistake him for.

The young guy began to walk with us. River asked him if he wanted a new shirt. This puzzled me. Then, I noticed the guy was still wearing the bright orange shirt underneath his light jacket. When you get out of certain California prisons, you are not given your clothes back, but given only a bright orange jumpsuit, a neon mark of Cain to warn “normal” society of your ex-con status, a final slap of humiliation against individuals, many of whom did not commit violent crimes, if they committed any crime at all.

The young man refused, but began to speak again, “I was

raised Catholic,” he told River. An awkward pause as we waited for him to continue.

“If you are a priest, I have a question for you that maybe you can answer...” River nodded.

“What does the Church teach about homosexuality? Is it a mortal sin or the other one, the smaller one?” Roman Catholic theology distinguishes between “mortal” and “venial” sins—the former requiring Confession and sending you to Hell if you die with them unconfessed. Such a question revealed that he had been socialized to Catholicism fairly deeply in his childhood.

River responded, “I don’t believe that homosexuality or being gay is a sin.”

The young man seemed unconvinced. “But...” he began.

River cut him off, saying with firm conviction, “That is what I believe and I do not believe God sees being gay as a sin.”

Silence.

The guy then began to gush forth his story. I did not catch nor write down all the details. But, he followed a trajectory common to many of the guys working in Polk Gulch. Some are my age—most much younger. River told me that 22 or 23 is “old” on the streets. Many workers are not from the Bay Area or anywhere remotely tolerate of queer identity. I heard lots of accents from the Midwest, the South, or Texas. Often cut off by families for expressing any form of queer identity, they made their way to California with little formal education and less money. Many got thrown into prisons for absurd crimes (possession of tiny amounts of cannabis), and now are strangers in a strange land, with criminal records, unresolved questions of sexual identity compounded by homeless, hunger, and, frequently, substance addiction.

So was the story of this guy: He had left home for some reason (probably related to his sexuality), ended up in Californian prisons for a (probably nonviolent) crime, and had no money or friends in the City. Through it all, he continued to ask River what levels of sin different practices of sex equated according to Catholic doctrine. He used the term “homosexuality” repeatedly, yet explicitly denied being a “homosexual.” Whether or not this is “true” does not matter. (As all good Social Studies and Women, Gender, and Sexuality concentrators have learned from Foucault, such a designation is a historical-social construction.) His anxiety emerged from being a man who has sex with men. More importantly, he seemed deeply reluctant and ambivalent about selling sex to men.

After many mornings at Haley House—a Catholic Worker house in Boston—and a summer living in several other Catholic Worker houses, I had learned fairly well how to tell the difference between a rehearsed tale measured to get a bleeding heart liberal to give some cash and a total outpouring of desperation. This was the latter—and River is no bleeding heart liberal anyway. River has a policy of never giving out cash. He is on the street everyday and would quickly give away the very little Temenos has. Instead, he hands out actual clothing, food, condoms, points, and sometimes buys coffee or pizza for someone in need. But, the young guy persisted,



concluding his story: “I know you said you don’t give out money, but I really need something. This city is a hard nut to crack. Just five or ten bucks could make the difference for me between a mortal sin and the other one.”

“The difference for me between a mortal sin and the other one.”

Three times he made this plea. After the third plea, River gave him some cash—the only time I ever saw him do this for anyone. The young man thanked River profusely, said a goodbye, and disappeared into the foggy night.

*Et factus est in corde meo quasi ignis exaestuans claususque in ossibus meis et defeci ferre non sustinens.*<sup>2</sup>

## II.

River and I walked on without talking for several blocks. He spoke after several silent minutes, asking me what I was thinking. I mumbled something about having never recognized the full extent of my “privilege.” Internally, something was breaking apart rapidly, robbing me of my usual verbal capacity even as it opened within me the possibility for an intense, new way of seeing and being.

“Privilege”—as I uttered it the word made me want to gag. It suddenly sounded utterly weak, naive, sterile, and theoretical. Deployed in the world and in a moment of crisis, it stank of the nervous, action-adverse, self-important academy from which it came before it collapsed back into itself, producing a cloud of useless dust—“privilege.” It confused and attempted to excuse emotions I knew must burn brighter and hotter within me to reveal their lessons.

After we had completed the round, I told River I could not stay there that night. On the bus ride back to the apartment I was staying at (with friends living in the Mission, who got me through a very tough week), I wrote down some thoughts.

Above all, rage filled me. While hearing the young man’s story, chills repeatedly blasted through me, my eardrums throbbed, and the neon lights on the street seemed to shake and then settle into laser-point, burning clarity.

In my life, I had known anger, intense emotion, and impotence against injustice—all the constitutive elements of rage. I recognized the power, even healthiness, of some anger when clarifies your vision and renews your focus upon injustice. But, never had I known this sort of rage—absolute, annihilating, exhilarating, totalizing, and supreme anger transcending anger—cresting in a painful yearning to achieve justice through violence. This rage exploded forth against injustice, but did not halt there, sweeping all things up into itself.

Adrienne Rich speaks of a “phenomenology of anger.”<sup>3</sup> I was trying to unpack a phenomenology of rage—a very specific rage whose sources and targets are the manifold obstacles to human social liberation. This rage reaches culminates in a searing confrontation with the temptation—or is it necessity?—of violence to achieve this liberation.

First, there is the anger at the system—really a system of systems: In this case, homophobia, the prison-industrial complex, and underfunded social services for addiction. These systems had utterly fucked over and beat this guy down as completely as a human being can be beat down. He himself had responded by reluctantly entering the sex worker world.

This aspect of the rage was not an unfamiliar or wholly new experience. All summer I had known this emotion, witnessing first hand how the system kept down especially women and families at the Denver Catholic Worker. (We have all of us witnessed how these interlocking systems operate recently in the dining halls on our campus where homophobic, sexist, and racist slurs have been used—vainly—to frighten outspoken workers into silence as Harvard slashes jobs, wages, and benefits. I would hope others feel the same rage over such acts.) It is an anger born from encounter with the radical material inequality in our society and the mechanisms of violence used to maintain—and increase—this inequality.

Yet, to this man’s story was an element of twisted hypocrisy on the oppressor’s part. Here is a man crucified, and here is the sneeringly pious Church hammering extra nails into him, twisting the spear in the side, and suggesting that soldiers tighten the ropes. The ultra-homophobic, anti-pleasure, anti-love doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church had been so deeply socialized into him that even at this point of absolute desperation and human defeat, he worried about “what the Church taught.” The whole life of Jesus—as Catholic Workers read it—amounts to radical love to all, without condition and especially towards those shattered by the world. Add conditions or limit this love, and you deprive the Jesus narrative of its subversive power and its core message.

To actively carry out, in the name of love, campaigns of hatred and fear—is a transgression that infinitely amplifies the horror of the act of oppression itself. The Church is not alone in the history of such transgressive hypocrisies. Every world religion has been made its own libRARY creed into an apologetic for cruelty: “The very voices that cried out against injustice had been coopted to justify oppression.”<sup>4</sup> Likewise, every world-historical ideology has done likewise. This mode attained new heights in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Albert Camus wrote: “In more ingenuous times, when the tyrant razed cities for his own greater glory, when the slave chained to the conqueror’s chariot was dragged through the rejoicing streets, when enemies were thrown to the wild beasts in front of the assembled people, the mind did not reel before such unabashed crimes, and the judgment remained unclouded. But slave camps under the flag of freedom, massacres justified by philanthropy or by a taste for the superhuman, in one sense cripple judgment. On the day when crime dons the apparel of innocence—through a curious transposition peculiar to our times—it is innocence that is called upon to justify itself.”<sup>5</sup>

On the heels of this entire sequence, came the destructive cousins of rage: Guilt and despair. Everything and anything in my life I thought “difficult” as connected to my queer sexuality (the only part of my identity not in a socially dominant group in America) suddenly and radically shifted in perspective. I did not feel suddenly free from the oppression connected to my queerness—but, it suddenly felt very, very small and I felt very, very lucky. For example, since coming

out to my parents, I have never questioned their love for me. They have never threatened me materially because of my queerness. Just as crucially, I thought of the many, many beautiful friends and communities I've found in my life journey that support each other with a radical love, acceptance, and comradeship around queerness and other struggles for greater justice: Harvard, the First-Year Urban Program, the co-op, and individuals within the Catholic Worker movement. I thought of my healthcare and the resources (intellectual, cultural, social, and financial) I have to engage and work through my sexuality. I felt what I had abstractly always known: These all function as safety nets that protect me and keep me, for example, from having to take any job I would consider personally unsafe.

Through love and solidarity, because of my many hours of conversation with good friends, mentors, and mental health resources, I had shrugged off my own Catholic indoctrination concerning sexuality and most of the oppressive socializations related to queerness with relative ease and no material consequence. I could do this not through my own strength, but largely because other systems of, yes, privilege—class, race, education, nationality, and culture—had brought me to such a point.

Then came thoughts of rich gay men from the Castro, who I felt similar to in terms of class and education, but not in terms of politics. The Castro of today differs immensely from the Castro of Harvey Milk's days. The Castro men I met were shockingly conservative, materialistic, and pro-Establishment in everything except a narrowly defined ranged of "gay rights"—read "rich white male gay rights." This represents a general trend undermining the American

gay community through a willful depoliticization and commodification of the gay experience and identity. Benign and banal embourgeoisment has become the single political aim of all too many white, middle-class gay men—or so say the voices that claim to speak for them (or, I should say, us.) Besides a few, tastefully small rainbow flags in the windows of expensive boutiques, I saw little evidence that anyone thought of themselves as an "oppressed" community.

Though you can walk easily from the Castro to Polk Gulch, a distance wider than the one between Abraham and Lazarus and the rich man separates the queer communities of these two neighborhoods. The bourgeois gay community does not stand in visible political solidarity with the male sex workers to fight for better public health and social services. Or at least not in any sustained way that has generated lasting material results. Polk Street is not even offered crumbs off the banquet table of the self-acclaimed heirs to gay power.

You can buy exploited sex far cheaper on Polk Street than you can buy jeans in the Castro. I say "exploited" because the men here are forced to compromise their price due to addiction, criminal records, general material desperation, and the lack of any laws regulating prostitution in San Francisco. If solidarity and comparison of queer people can be utterly annihilated by class differences, then what hope is there for any sort of revolution that transcends race and class, much less race, sexuality, and class at once? Let us not forget that the jeans were also most likely made exploited labor—simply by workers dwelling further away and even more difficult with which to cultivate radical empathy.

This is the phenomenology of the rage as I can sketch it in my threadbare words—a confluence of anger at the material basis of systems of inequality, anger at the hypocrisy of hate under the banner of love, guilt and despair over personal luck, and complicated identification with the oppressed and the oppressors.

But, this specific rage, one of the most vast feelings possible within a human being, is a merely a symptom of something that goes beyond words. To experience this rage is merely to trace the jagged-edged, gaping abyss of faith within the human heart. The span between this rage, the bottom of the abyss, and the height of joy encompasses the entire infinite span of human being and becoming. Like two wings of an archangel, the span stretches asymptotically—"the wings are wide, the wings are wide"<sup>6</sup>—one towards the transcendent experience of perfect enlightenment and the other into the emptiness beyond light, beyond dark, into the endless, silent void crushing down with the mass of the atom from which the universe was born billions of years ago. If words fail, then certainly theory fails. At this point, all we have only stories, whose unspeakable contours gesture at the "the hidden purposes in all things."<sup>7</sup> These stories urge us towards this jagged-edged emptiness and, ultimately, to plunge into the abyss.

There is one story I keep playing over again and again in my mind: The Passion narrative. While I use Christian poetics because I am most familiar with them, I know every faith and cultural tradition could provide a way for me to rearticulate this story. Indeed, all too tragically, our own times and nation render new iterations of the Passion each day. Let me tell it in a way that might at once defamiliarize many who believe

*Victoria's other secret.*



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they know and put it in familiar terms to those today who do not know it.

There is a guy, born to poor parents and growing up as refuge from genocide, who struggles for justice and liberty against an imperial occupation. He critiques authorities at all levels without fear and without pretension. He builds community of radical inclusion with women, the poor, ethnic minorities, the sick, and other “social undesirables.” Central to his analysis is an argument for a nonviolent mode of resistance. Opportunities for higher political state power arise, but he turns them down, perhaps over-thinking it, but always conscious of his human weakness.

He goes to the local center of imperial power, of his own initiative, to make a nonviolent point and step up his efforts. Almost immediately upon arrival, he explodes in clarifying anger against the collaborators, hypocrites, and corrupters of his society. This is the final straw for the authorities, already nervous with him.

Though he hears rumors that his life may be in danger, he continues undaunted. Like many times before, shares a meal with his closest friends. Yet, privately the threats trouble him. He goes to reflect on them in a garden.

His friends, despite their best efforts, were human like him, and they could not stay awake. Several times he got up from his prayers to seek their comfort. He sought comfort from what he called “God.” God was in his friends, but they were asleep. This perhaps accounts for God’s seeming silence—and perhaps why he sweats blood. A loving friend sitting with you silent, holding your hand, listening—offers a form of healing and support in those times when clear prayer and mediation are impossible.

The cup came swifter and earlier than anyone expected that night. (Such is always the timing of the cup.) It came carried by a crowd of heavily armed men. Peter, defying constant entreaties for three years, still carried his sword. So did many of the others. From this crowd stepped one of his best friends, who walked up to him and kissed him. As Judas pulled back, the armed men advanced, seizing him.

This moment seemed to prove what the disciples had all told themselves: “His charisma and ideals—however brilliant—can never protect him in this world. To protect him and allow him to retain his ideological purity, we must be prepared to transgress his teachings. Our love for him is so great we would rather make ourselves hypocrites, rather risk his disappointment than to see him harmed.” They were human, all too human.

Peter acted first, chopping off the ear of the high priest’s slave. (The human ear can be detached, as someone once told me, with ease of plucking a living leaf from a tree—one firm tug can do it. With a steel blade this must have been an easy, smooth cut, with agonizing consequence.) Peter and the others were ready to die and to kill. (Certainly ready to kill Judas.) The other men ready to kill and to risk death for money and out of fear of Jesus.

The great bulk of human history and much of its literature boils down to such situations: two groups of armed men

facing one another—the logic of fear overtaking their minds, governing their actions, escalating into violence.

The tiny handful of exceptions to this general theme has enabled history to stagger forward yet another generation—bloodied, bruised, and broken. There is a pathetically small moral distance from the wars on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates in 2009 BCE and the same location in 2009 CE even if the technology of the warfare has “advanced” considerably.

Jesus knew this was the moment for which he his entire life had been a sort of preparation. (Although, in some sense, such is every aware moment of every life.) He confronted the final and ultimate choice between violence and liberation. If ever there was a moment to deploy violence—to call down the twelve or more legions of angels—this was it. The entire anti-imperialist, radical egalitarian movement he had started seemed to be on the line.

He halted the escalating violence, rebuking both his captors and his would-be defenders. He reprimanded Peter, healed the slave’s ear, and submitted to the arrest. His disciples—shocked and terrified—fled.

After the arrest, he is brought to some underground chamber and tortured all night. The next day he is forced to drag the implement of his own death through jeering crowds, who see him as a criminal, a fool who has attempted to rebel against the empire out of some insane vanity—the utter opposite of his life’s work. At the top of the hill, he is nailed down to the cross and raised up. The agony is unspeakable. (Through millions have felt such pain and millions more would, many at the hands of those who later called themselves his followers.) And then he cries out to God. Nothing. He dies. His mother, Mary, and his two closest friends—Mary and John are there—but besides them he dies utterly alone, utterly in failure.

That is all. Only this can be added: He was a victim of the death penalty in an occupied nation on the dusty periphery of the Western world’s current superpower. But, the worse was over: He had refused the terminal temptation to violence. This question had plagued him his entire life.

It is neither a story nor a decision I pretend to understand. Debate usually revolves around the aftermath and this question: Did the resurrection happen or not? Yet, to me talk of the resurrection feels less important to me than the moment in the garden (as well as all his living moments of community before and the living moments of this community afterwards.) Towards the garden I am continually pulled back. Sometimes I place great revolutionaries in history there in his stead—Moses, Nat Turner, Thomas Jefferson, Vladimir Lenin, Ché Guevara, Malcolm X, Mumia Abu-Jamal, or Subcomandante Marcos. They would certainly call down the angels, the perfect weapon—a blast of cleansing violence. There are a few—Gandhi and King—who would, perhaps, refuse the temptation also. But, they remain as inscrutable as the original protagonist to me. Would I stand with the former or latter group?

From the safety of Harvard, I had always thought the latter. But, that night in August, when I actually confronted



the question in a more real way, I felt myself drawn to the former. Perhaps—if I could—I would call down the angels to Polk Gulch, to the Vatican, to the White House, to the prisons in Oakland, to rural Midwestern towns, to the Castro—all the sites that had generated the oppression and exploitation of this man (whether through commission or omission)—and cleanse from these sites the oppressors with angelic lightening. Perhaps I would have them raze almost the whole world in a tsunami of fire and extinguish all the sources of injustice. A clean slate.

Of course, this is never the choice given to us. We human beings cannot hand over the task of violence to any one else. We must take up the sword ourselves. The blood must stain our hands if we believe its spilling can bring us or others liberation. Only a few have the nerve to act. Far fewer have the nerve and still reject such action. Yet, this violence never seems to bring true liberation or any significantly lasting liberation.

Age to age, light to light, true God to true God, we despise, we torture, we kill them all. Gandhi and King, the post-apartheid neoliberalization of South Africa, the corruption of the revolutions in Russia and China—these crosses stand at the crossroads of our history, the corpses still rotting upon them, warning others—“This is what happens to those who dare to love all without fear.”

What is the meaning of such a world— with “truth forever on the scaffold/ Wrong forever on the throne”<sup>8</sup>—where violence seems at once the one answer and forever doomed to tragic failure when used?

This is a question that can only be answered through a movement of faith. It is a crisis that I find myself within—and so many other people in this society. We dwell in a society where some violence is sanctified—the military and the police—yet in a culture that lifts up nonviolent martyrs as the great paragons of virtue: Jesus, Gandhi, and King.

The question is not: Is violence qua violence wrong? The question is not: What is “violence”? The question is not: Is violence, even if wrong, more effective for achieving liberation for all and thus somehow justified? These questions vary according to the set of casuistry, semantics, or sophistry applied to it.

Rather, this question must concern us: How to engage the “temptation” to violence? We must not suppress it and ignore. If we do that, it will explode forth at the absolutely worst moment. We must not resent or become anxious that we have confronted it. It is the central dynamic encountered when the paths of the mystical and the social join in the great causeway to revolution. We must learn from it, speak to it, and listen to its reply—we must not fear it, but instead love it. We must accept as the foundational premise of this loving engagement that it contains truth—partial or even complete. We must accept that we may, through our investigation, come to see it not as temptation, but true answer.

At this point, I arrived at my bus stop and began walking down 18<sup>th</sup> towards Guerrero in a daze. Someone (or someones) had postered all over the construction boards around a gentrifying building in the Mission with witty anti-

capitalist protest art with facts on poverty in San Francisco (“Milton Friedman: Godfather of Global Misery” and “The lack of safe, affordable housing will not be solved by criminalizing those without homes” in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Vietnamese.) I was staying in an apartment very much a part of the gentrification vanguard—and I could also imagine myself hanging up such posters. Yet, again, guilt and despair over the contradictions and complexities of my identity. Already on the knife-edge of social consciousness overload, I could only smile ironically to myself.

When I reached home, one of my friends was drinking red wine. I poured myself a glass and tried to relate some of the evening to him. He listened and offered some quality words, but I could not communicate everything coursing through me. The conversation with the young sex worker, the subsequent rage, the Catholic Worker movement, the posters outside, mine and my friends’ residual economic-cultural tastes, and the revolutionary way many of us seek. The whole summer has been about these things in part—my whole life really since the second American invasion of Iraq—but the direct intersection of all these things with my queer sexuality in San Francisco brought it all crashing down with particular acuteness.

Soon, I reached the end of words again. We cranked up Radiohead and had another drink—which felt like the only things possible to do right then, at 1 am in the middle of a shattered world.

Låt mig med öppna ögon läsa den bok mena dagar skriver—och lära.<sup>9</sup>

### III.

Two weeks later, in Vancouver and visiting another Catholic Worker, I re-read the First-Year Urban Packet (FUP)—a document of social justice readings prepared for first-years participants (Fuppies) and Leaders. Suddenly this sense of being at an end, of preparing to tread one last time a path tread many times before, filled me. This experience went far beyond—although rooted in—FUP, where I would be a group leader for the third and final time. Certain words I now re-read had been seeds for action, for love, for anxiety, for hope, for failure, for growth in all manner of ways. This peace did not resolve the paradoxes of the past weeks, but brought me an unexpected clarity and calm.

Frequently as I enter any new, clearly-defined chapter of experience, I feel either like Isaac being led up the mountain—innocent wonder—or Abraham leading him up—weighty anxiety. Last fall, returning to Cambridge, I felt different from either. I felt like Gabriel<sup>10</sup>, watching all from afar, knowing the ending and the actions of all the actors. He is unsure about the whole project, but loves Abraham, Isaac, and even the ram whose spirit will shortly be rejoined with God. He loves the Earth despite the failure again and again of its inhabitants. He glances now and then to God, asking “When shall I go? Is now the moment?”

God nods at last at Gabriel, who spread his wings and flies through the stars, through the atmosphere—without

panic, assured of his timing and his grace—knowing that the moment must be Keatsian to be true and good.

There the mountain, there the moment, there the flickering of a small camp fire, there the trembling, bound body of Isaac, there the unlit pyre, there the ram ascending, about to be caught in the brambles, there Abraham, his hand upraised—the starlight glancing from the obsidian—his eyes upon his son, while his heart—which Gabriel, although not Isaac, can see—trembles, his hand does not. The flash of nerves, from the deepest, most mysterious part of the human mind, through the neck, down the spine, branching to the arm, the hand—intent ignited like the Big Bang, flashing through him like the illumination of galaxies and constellations—and in that infinity—between decision and motion—one moment to pre-scientific humans, but as long and slow as centuries to neuroscientists and angels—Gabriel’s hand reaches out, his fingers wrap around his wrist, and with his whole being he grips—a grip strong enough to lift a soul from hell, but gentle and loving enough to carry an eggshell—and holds.

In this holding, Abraham is so released. He gasps in—he has forgotten that he has forgotten to breathe—he knows he is released as certainly as he also knew he was to sacrifice Isaac. All in what is one moment to him—the infinite depth and height of love is traveled. The angel is not there to embrace or to physically comfort. They shall accomplish this.

Abraham cuts the cords around his son. The two collapse into tears. Each drop is a universe containing all other human tears that have been, are being, and shall be shed in the innumerable and forgotten floods, famines, and killings of history, in all the breaking of all hearts and unspoken sorrows that constitute all cities destroyed, built, and to be built, in all the terrors recorded by history—a single page from a book of a billion billion pages—whose first line is so much that even God must turn away and weep upon reading it.

In it is written—to choose pages at random—Herod’s infanticide, the Diaspora that gave all others its name, the Mongols, British, and Americans in Baghdad, Columbus on Hispaniola, the slave-ships departing West Africa, Gettysburg, Verdun, Dachau, the Great Leap Forward, Cambodia, Gaza, the Sudan, Tibet, Abu Ghraib (under Saddam and Bush), and the farmworkers of Immokalee. The book has all the stories of individuals and groups, complete and unabridged—and they enter into you literally and literarily as easily as you read these words.

But, the tears of father and son are also contain all those shed in joy over improbable triumphs of love. Human love, even imperfect and faltering, breaks through the chains of the horrors wrought by human hands: The Magi’s refusal to snitch, the traditions held and strengthened by rabbis and mothers through 2,000 years of oppression and minority status, all those who overcame religious divisions to protect Baghdad’s cultural treasures over centuries, Bartolomé de las Casas who spoke out against the Spanish Empire in the early days, the traditions and sense of humanity kept alive by West Africans through the Middle Passage and in the plantations of the Americas, the bravery of Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey, all the secret rooms and hushed transfers along the

Underground Railroad, the similar escapes in occupied Nazi Amsterdam and Copenhagen, keeping others alive at great risk to themselves, the families in famines everywhere that shared with others despite not having enough themselves, the witness of the Dalai Lama and Tibetans, and all the protesters in Beijing in 1989 and 2008, the ultimate victory of all these individuals and so many more: Gandhi and India, King and America, and the partial victories of so many others.

Perhaps God looks away not just from sorrow, but also—perhaps even primarily—to pause in contemplation, overwhelmed by the ecstasy experienced in witnessing the activity of human love. So great is human love that it inspires her to perfect her own love. The example of love unchained gives her the courage to come and dwell among us and add her example to others. In doing so, God also is shattered by love as much as by suffering.

All this can be only a “perhaps” for we dwell in a world of suffering and of love, with no certain knowledge of the exact amount of each or relation of the two to one another. The two co-exist, each as real as the other. The sole consolation to the truth of suffering is the recognition that love also is real and powerful. But, this does make a world any less shattered. There is no guarantee that suffering sometimes holds secret meaning. Nor is there any guarantee love can or will triumph always. When it does triumph, its victories are never permanent. Our telos is liberation, but we might never attain it for all. And, unless all have achieved it, none have. Nothing tells us, with certainty, whether the struggle for liberation must or must not entail violence. Besides the exhausting annihilation of rage, we can only find a way to dwell in the mystery of these paradoxes, retaining this hope: That all our tears—of sorrow and of joy—might somehow be joined together into a final tear that clarifies our sight absolutely. Perhaps then we can all see and become to one another the core reality of all things we glimpse occasionally through experiences of suffering, moments of rage, acts of courage: A radical love beyond all experience, an infinitely deep and total unity of what we presently call “suffering” and “love.”

<sup>1</sup> W.H. Auden, “In Sickness and in Health”

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 20:9—“And there came in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was wearied, not being able to bear it.”

<sup>3</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Diving into the Wreck*

<sup>4</sup> William Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*

<sup>5</sup> Albert Camus, *L’homme révolté*

<sup>6</sup> Leslie Feist, “I Feel It All”

<sup>7</sup> Khalil Gibran, *The Prophet*

<sup>8</sup> James Russell Lowell, “The Present Crisis,” as cited by W.E.B. DuBois in *The Souls of Black Folks*

<sup>9</sup> Dag Hammarskjöld, [Markings]—“Let me read with open eyes the book my days are writing—and learn.”

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 22 does not identify the angel. I follow Yasmina Khadra in *A quoi rêvent les loups* who, along with others, implies that it was Gabriel.

# VAGINAS OF THE HARVARD COMMUNITY

"Bull drove a VW Beetle. The rounded form of the car, with its buttock bumpers and mammary bonnet...defined him sexually...He...assumed the automatism of London driving...Doors, windows, garage forecourts, railway tunnels, even bus shelters. All struck at him with forceful, imagistic resonance. It's all cunts! Bull explained to himself, his eyes flickering from the cowed hollow of the car's fascia to the numerous portals that studded his route. It's all openings, entrances doorways...London itself, Bull now realised, was essentially a network of tunnels. It was patently absurd to describe the city's architecture...as 'phallic'...The real lifeblood of the city, Bull now saw, was transported in and out of quintillions of vaginas...This was a function of his new awareness of vagocentricity."  
- Will Self <sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Self, Will. Cock and Bull. London, Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd: 1992. 250.

<sup>2</sup> <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/Texas crops/leafy greens and petioles/lettuce.jpg>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.webdesign.org/img\\_articles/7477/flame-slice\\_18.gif](http://www.webdesign.org/img_articles/7477/flame-slice_18.gif)

<sup>4</sup> [http://farm1.static.flickr.com/135/327162117\\_b4b4990b97.jpg](http://farm1.static.flickr.com/135/327162117_b4b4990b97.jpg)

<sup>5</sup> [http://img.alibaba.com/photo/10856781/Calla\\_Lily\\_White.jpg](http://img.alibaba.com/photo/10856781/Calla_Lily_White.jpg)

<sup>6</sup> [http://wsnwsu.edu/stories/2007/November/\\_%2F\\_%2F\\_%2Fuser\\_pics%2F183x295\\_HalfPear.jpg](http://wsnwsu.edu/stories/2007/November/_%2F_%2F_%2Fuser_pics%2F183x295_HalfPear.jpg)

<sup>7</sup> [http://farm1.static.flickr.com/130/385900938\\_143dfb3237.jpg](http://farm1.static.flickr.com/130/385900938_143dfb3237.jpg)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.strawandfeathers.com/order/images/MaryGrace\\_big.jpg](http://www.strawandfeathers.com/order/images/MaryGrace_big.jpg)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.gualalaarts.org/artist/paulkozal/Tunnel-of-Trees.jpg>



# LETTERS

## HBOMB AND TRUE LOVE REVOLUTION

HBOMB's editorial staff contacted True Love Revolution (TLR) in an attempt to start a dialogue about their organization, how its platform incorporates non-heterosexuals and people who choose not to or are unable to marry, and how it navigates the religious and secular approaches to abstinence.

TLR's response: "Our secular organization does not really have a stance on non-heterosexual sexual orientations or gender identities, as our message is to promote premarital sexual abstinence."

In response, we've composed the following open letter, once again with the hopes of opening a dialogue with the organization.

To the members of the Board of the True Love Revolution,

HBOMB believes it is of the utmost importance that we respect differences in sexuality and sexual decision-making. This is a founding goal of our publication. We are writing you this letter because we hope to have an honest dialogue with you about your organization and its mission.

Our board asked you to address some specific issues in your platform for this issue of HBOMB. Since you elected not to respond to our questions, we are posing them to you and the community in the format of an open letter. We would like to address heteronormativity, your stance on sex education, and your statements on sexual contact excluding intercourse and masturbation.

We challenge your views on marriage and its relationship to sex. While we agree with your position that sex is a very special act, we challenge the notion that marriage is a unique institution worthy of claiming exclusive rights to sex. It is a fact that marriage excludes a large part of our population in most of the United States (and beyond), especially gay and lesbian couples. Do you stipulate that these people abstain from sex, even if the inequalities built into our legal system and the prejudices of the greater population prevent them from marriage? A 2004 census shows that while divorce rates are currently at 3.7%, the number of people entering into marriage is declining while the population continues to increase. People are abstaining from marriage. Is it your opinion that these people who forego marriage, whatever their reason may be, should also abstain from sex? Your position holds that marriage is the only place wherein sex between two people who truly love each other can occur. Even if mandate that the penultimate form of sexual expression can only be found in marriage, marriage does not guarantee a life-long relationship, a faithful relationship, or a loving relationship. Can't love occur outside the confines of marriage? What about those for whom marriage is not a possibility, or appealing?

Secondly, you argue that there's an over emphasis on "safe sex" to the exclusion of other options; you claim that the information given about sex is always "safe sex, safe sex, safe sex." We wish to argue the opposite. While Harvard has taken that approach to safe sex education, not every institution across the country has followed suit. Abstinence education programs have been emphasized at schools in which funding for safe sex education has been cut by the Bush administration. Many religiously affiliated schools do not provide students with access to condoms, birth control, or abortions on campus. It is our belief that safe sex education is wholly inadequate, and a recent study by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy is a testament to that fact<sup>1</sup>. It states that teenagers who have taken virginity pledges are actually just as likely as everyone else to have premarital sex, but less likely to use the

necessary protection – and therefore more likely to contract STI's or become pregnant. An argument for the protection of both physical and emotional facets of being necessitates an argument for extensive safe-sex education.

You have said that condoms and birth control are not 100% effective (while it's a near guarantee for protection against pregnancy and most STI's with proper use). True enough, but few things in life are. Wearing a seatbelt doesn't guarantee you will survive a car crash, but this doesn't mean you should never get in a car. You should just be as responsible as you can be and take the necessary precautions. For many who choose not to abstain from sexual activity, sex can be an important exercise in self-discovery and expression.

Your argument that “there is no condom for the heart” contends that, after the break-up of a relationship that included sexual intercourse, “the partners often feel a palpable sense of loss, betrayed trust, and unwelcome memories.” What you fail to acknowledge is that these feelings are hardly unique to sexual relationships; they are present in the ending of non-sexual relationships, too. And you elide the benefits of sexual expression in relationships.

The New York Times featured True Love Revolution in an article from March of last year. One of your members was described to have these feelings about sex:

He told me that he struggles constantly against “physical lustful temptation” — that he can be aroused just by a woman's touch, by even a look at a woman or at a photo or sometimes by “thoughts that just come out of the blue — basically pornography in my head.” They come to him when he's merely walking around campus, or even when he's alone in the library — “like a fly buzzing around.”

To the matter of masturbation, he said, “This was really tough for me . . . because when you have a habit that's so deeply ingrained, it's hard to stop.”

And on your website, you declare the following about sexual activity that does not include intercourse:

TLR is not concerned with drawing specific boundaries or proclaiming rules. While our arguments focus primarily on sexual intercourse, many of the reasons to save sexual intercourse for marriage also apply for other kinds of sexual intimacy. The intense emotional bonding associated with sexual intercourse also results from any sort of mutual sexual activity that culminates in an orgasm. The probability of contracting STIs is even higher from anal sex than it is from vaginal intercourse and oral sex, and other sexual activities still involve widely-underestimated risks.

Your claims that you do not promote a specific set of rules and that your ideals are non-sectarian are highly problematic. Silence concerning those who don't identify as heterosexual is taking a position; if we are to abstain from sex until marriage, how then is such an ideal possible for those who will never marry? How can one support and protect the physical and emotional self with only abstinence-based education, when evidence shows it to be ineffective? We are grateful that you are presenting another option in sexual decision-making, and we raise these concerns from that position of respect for an individual's choice on abstinence. We do so simply because we believe that any doctrine of sexual norms should be an inclusive, safe, and healthy platform.

Best,  
HBOMB

<sup>1</sup> The Huffington Post has an interesting article on the study that can be found at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/12/29/study-virginity-pledges-a\\_n\\_153928.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/12/29/study-virginity-pledges-a_n_153928.html)

# LETTERS

## TRUE LOVE REVOLUTION AND HBOMB

Dear HBOMB,

The True Love Revolution recognizes the differences in opinion regarding sexuality and sexual decision-making at Harvard. We understand that people view sex in different ways for different purposes, but we also understand that despite the intentions of some of our peers, sexual relations are best saved for a marital relationship. The purpose of the Revolution is to foster life-giving relationships that have healthy emotional and physical boundaries.

We realize that sex is desirable. We realize that it is expressive and often beautiful. We realize that human beings are sexual creatures who long to bond with others sexually. The True Love Revolution embraces sex while remaining convinced that the best way for sex to exist is in a life-long marital relationship.

While it is true that we did not intend to engage the H Bomb board in a community discussion over certain issues, I would like to offer a reply to your open letter. Let me clarify the True Love Revolution's stance on heteronormativity, sex education, and sexual contact.

First of all, the True Love Revolution does not have a heteronormative stance. We do indeed believe that sexual relations belong in a marital relationship. Therefore, to be clear, if you are not married, you should abstain from sex. We adopt this belief whether everyone in the world marries at age 18, or whether no one ever marries. The True Love Revolution is not concerned with the legality of marriage in various states nor the decision of an individual to remain unmarried or live in a state that does not allow him or her to marry. You are correct in noting that marriage is sometimes flawed and that love is not necessarily a product of marriage and is often found outside of marriage. The True Love Revolution is aware of these realities, but we are convinced that the way to ensure that a marriage is based in love and continues in love is to be faithful to one partner throughout an entire lifetime (as long as death, domestic abuse, and the like are out of the equation).

Sidestepping marriage cannot rationalize premarital sex. It is not acceptable to partake in sexual activity merely because marriage may be flawed. Marriages are wildly stronger and healthier if both partners abstain from sexual activity beforehand. Premarital sex is scientifically associated with increased depression, STDs, maternal poverty, and increased abortions and out-of-wedlock births. Those who are virgins when they marry are far less likely to divorce or cheat on a spouse. Marriages last longer and are happier. Levels of trust are higher, not only because partners are faithful, but also because the powerful bonding hormone, oxytocin, is released between the two partners and stimulates trust and fidelity. This is where the somewhat ridiculous "there is no condom for the heart" phrase comes from: when people engage in premarital sex, they are prematurely releasing oxytocin and their emotions unintentionally outweigh the nonsexual facets of their relationship. This causes an increased sense of loss and betrayed trust when the relationship comes to an end. This biochemical reaction is physical, and while those who abstain may also have difficult break-ups, the physical bonding has not yet begun to attach partners in a way that precedes the actual progression of the relationship. Sex outside of marriage is harmful, whether or not one intends to marry. We maintain that people who want to engage in sexual activity *should* marry and *should* abstain from sex beforehand, no matter their orientation or the current societal laws. Marriage is a personal and societal good.





Sex education is a hot-topic issue, and I would like to clarify that while the True Love Revolution advocates sex education programs where abstinence is given priority and explained in its best light, we do not advocate abstinence-only education. We recognize that it is inevitable that raging hormones and sexual desire will lead some young people to engage in premarital sexual activity. Thus, we must ensure that every sex ed participant is aware that although condoms and contraceptives cannot protect from many diseases, forgoing “protection” has significant consequences.

Young people who sign virginity pledges, though more likely to delay the initiation of sexual activity and have fewer partners than their peers, are sometimes more likely to engage in riskier sexual behavior. The True Love Revolution agrees that mass purity pledging is not the way to go, and schools should educate students about hazardous high-risk sexual behaviors, such as the dangers of oral and anal sex.

HBOMB asks us why we do not draw specific boundaries and outline what behavior is acceptable for those who choose to embrace abstinence as a lifestyle. The “How far is too far?” question is one that True Love Revolution constantly fields. Abstinence is not a set of rules; it is a change of heart. It is a belief that love is best expressed in a committed, life-long relationship where each partner may freely give and express themselves without the regret, disease, or lust that may linger from past relationships. We see abstinence as a sacrificial expression of love cemented in faithfulness to your future spouse. Thus, we trust that everyone who chooses abstinence will know how best to protect their hearts and bodies and wait for their future spouse. Some decide that certain behaviors do not compromise their emotions or bodies; others decide that they would rather sidestep physical activities like kissing, making out, etc. Ultimately, the goal is to refrain from igniting sexual passion and instead get to know people intimately and deeply without a physical component that mars judgment and questions authenticity.

The True Love Revolution wonders why HBOMB questions our “nonsectarian” position. Also, why does H Bomb encourage sexual gratification of the individual? Philosophically speaking, this stance exalts the selfish desires of the individual and places physical urges above love, finding out if you truly love someone, or simply the exploration of another’s emotions. Socially speaking, this is harmful to the individual and to societal structure. Is sexual activity worth it? We believe that there is immense value in waiting for a single future spouse and guarding present emotions. We believe that rather than immediately gratifying sexual desire, it is much more valuable – and indeed beautiful – to be recipients and givers of deep, loyal, sacrificial love.

HBOMB seems to seriously and thoughtfully explore sexuality on campus, and I would be interested, on behalf of the True Love Revolution, in engaging a member of the H Bomb board in a discussion at a co-sponsored event.

Thank you,  
Rachel Wagley  
True Love Revolution President

# INTERVIEW: GIRL TALK

MARTABEL WASSERMAN

“I want Jesse’s girl, but I’d  
rather get some head.”

– lyrics from Girl Talk’s  
“Here’s the Thing”

Purposefully walking the line between underground and mainstream, high and low culture, serious and silly, Girl Talk has snuck into popular consciousness. Girl Talk, aka Pittsburg-based artist Gregg Gillis, released his latest album, “Feed the Animals,” online last summer with a pay-what-you-want model on the label Illegal Art. This mode of circulation is a result of the fact that his project is exclusively constructed of copyrighted material. “Feed the Animals” has notably interesting interweavings from Britney Spears and Air, to Jay-Z layered with Radiohead. His straddling of genres attracts a diverse audience to his house party style concerts. The concerts usually consist of Gillis stripping down to his tighty-whities, rocking out on his saran-wrap covered laptop, while the audience surrounds him on stage.

I was able to interview Gillis before his ill-fated gig at the Harvard/Yale Pep Rally. He had to end his set early because of an out of control crowd that struggled to follow the basic directions of not trampling people or pushing up against the flimsily constructed stage. Luckily, I spoke to him before the debacle. I sat with Girl Talk in the basement of a freshman dorm. The theme of juxtaposition seems to follow him everywhere.

Girl Talk invokes an internal debate I have about enjoying mainstream pop while hating the often sexist and homophobic lyrics. In our conversation we focused on two issues I find relevant to HBOMB’s mission. We discussed cultural production and representations of gender and sexuality within it.

A significant part of the brilliance of his project lies in Gillis’s acknowledgement that what he is doing has been done before. “For me, there is a history of this. A lot of people have done this and there are people who have done it who aren’t called DJs. Like John Oswald. They are just considered artists or bands. Those guys are the reason I got involved in this. So I am not insulted by the phrase DJ but I didn’t get into this because I was into DJs.” (The Harvard Crimson referred to him repeatedly as DJ Girl Talk)

Curious if he was purposely playing with the representation of gender, I asked him why he choose the name.



"I knew the phrase 'Girl Talk' from board games and Stephanie Tanner's band on *Full House*. It seemed like the exact opposite of a single male playing a computer. That's why it was interesting to me, it seemed almost inappropriate when you see it on a flyer, it seems like the outcast."

While he recognizes that what he is doing situates him in a lineage of mash-up artists, he seeks to break through into the realm of pop.

"The more it crosses over, the more I am actually making pop. Everything I sample, I really like, so as it gets bigger, as it is in the *New York Times*, it's almost like I am getting closer to the idols I am sampling in a weird way. More mainstream types are coming out. To me, that is the goal. The closer I can come to Michael Jackson, the better."

Gillis is well-versed in many aspects of popular culture, evident in the diverse group he cites as influential. He talked about music ranging from Lightning Bolt to Lil' Mama. When asked about non-musical artistic influences, Gillis said that growing up in Andy Warhol's hometown might have played a role in his music.

"It's funny, looking back, because I don't think that's something that directly influenced me. I have always just been so into music. I was really nerding out on that level.

But when I started this, I was directly connecting to all these other people who did this before me. It's cool because I have actually gotten a chance to play the [Andy Warhol] museum at this point. To be accepted into that world to some degree meant a lot to me. I definitely relate to him. You know, somewhat similar philosophy: appropriation, celebrity, and characters."

Gillis sees his own ascent into fame as being constructed from the ground up. He prides himself that he wasn't spoon-fed to mainstream audiences by MTV. This is one example of resistance to modes of cultural production from the near past. There is a recurrent thread in his work and our discussion about challenging the existing establishments in music. He talked about being the guy who played Kelly Clarkson at the indie-rock fest Coachella, and how he is likely to take the comment of a blogger more seriously than something written in Rolling Stone Magazine. (Being very much of this moment, he also confessed to sometimes spending a little too much time googling himself.) A clear product of the 1990's, Gillis repeatedly referenced the pop culture of my youth, from Full House to Nirvana, and cited the landscape of the decade as part of his incentive to bring pop music to the underground and vice-versa.

"When I was in high school, I was listening to underground music. When you found a band it was yours and you held onto it. That's why there was such a divide between mainstream

and underground. You cherished this thing. Now, if I found out about an underground band, every other person with an internet connection knows about it."

"I do take this seriously and want to get people involved. I can see someone looking at me and saying, "Who is that asshole who thinks he is the best, and is jumping around with a bunch of people, taking his shirt off and playing this pop music that he is probably not even sincere about." When they go with that angle, I can relate to it. I can see that if I was watching the same thing and it wasn't me, I would maybe have some of the same opinions. It's a tough thing. I didn't build this project to have guards up so people couldn't insult it. This is a project that is easy to knock down. It's a guy appropriating pop music and making a performance out of it. But I am a hundred percent about what I do."

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Like his favorite visual artist, Gillis is about the surface of things. The goal of recontextualization in this case is not about pointing out what something is lacking, be it a song or musical genre. This applies to his appropriation of lyrics. He uses sound bites such as "Your bitch chose me, you ain't a pimp you a fairy," and "Let me see you drop that pussy." I asked him if one of his aims in his appropriation of pop music was to point out ways in which the content of popular music can be problematic.

GT: For me, it's not really problematic. I think when there are lyrics that are misogynistic or anything like that, for me its a presentation of entertainment. When you get excited about watching someone die on TV, it doesn't mean you're a horrible human being. In the same way, whether you are in an underground band that plays basements or you're Radiohead, I would never take Radiohead more seriously than Two Live Crew; to me, it's all entertainment.

*MW: So it's democratic?*

GT: It's like a character you choose to present to the public. What if Radiohead says things that are slightly more controversial, or direct, or sexual, or misogynistic? Everyone has plenty of different dimensions to their character when making music, especially on a major label, on a pop label. You choose a character to present. So when there are lyrics like that, I celebrate it as entertainment.

*MW: Like the Eminem school of thought?*

GT: I think with the specific stuff I appropriate, when it's like Kia "My neck, my back," it's so over the top, they are completely aware of it.

*MW: Like when you use Three Six Mafia "I love having sex but I'd rather get some head..."*

GT: They are sincere about it, but they also know how forward they are being and how over the top it is. I like that. When I recontextualize it, I ideally want to break it all

down to the level of entertainment. It's no different than Paul McCartney saying, "I love you" - do you think he is telling everyone he loves them? He doesn't love everyone. It's a silly love song. It's very similar to saying, "I love having sex but I would rather get some head." That's not their philosophy.

*MW: But it could be...*

GT: It absolutely could be. I am just saying, to me, presenting music, it's very serious and sincere in everything that I sample, but it's all a form of entertainment and a form of expressing a character you choose to invent.

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In preparation for my much-anticipated sit-down with Gillis, I spoke to another fan, Bill Arning, who is the head curator at the M.I.T List Visual Arts Center. In addition to enjoying rocking out to Girl Talk at the gym, Arning sees the music as something more than inspiration for the treadmill. He was generous enough to suggest some questions for me to ask Gillis about his performances. Arning posed the question: Is there a conceptual correlation between an authorless or multi-authored music and a stage show where the audience is on stage? How does your presence get lost through appropriation and the audience being on stage?

Gillis responded, "That's a tough question, I definitely see correlations there. With the audience, the game plan initially was always to get people involved. The goal is to make something new, but I am referencing things from people's past. When you drop a sample, it's like memory. Memory, memory, connection, connection, connection, and everyone understands it in a different way. A whole bunch of people on stage reacting to it is the presentation of that. Some people will lose it to one thing and some people will lose it to another thing. For me, that is just on a very basic level about getting people involved."

His concerts parallel the confusing status of the author in his work; everyone is on stage as Gillis stands behind his laptop. He wears track pants and sweatshirts, which he strips off layer by layer, until you wonder if you have accidentally walked in on some teenage boy rocking out alone in his room.

Arning also asked, "What is it in your music that makes audience members want to strip?"

"I think it's partially my sound, but also the context in which it's presented. It was never a goal. I always just wanted to have a fun show. How it developed from there became interesting because I didn't come from a DJ world, I came from a performance world. I would always open up for bands, so my set had a distinct beginning and end. So it was about concert energy where you are always watching something, but not really a part of it. I really wanted to get the audience involved, get them on stage. I always took off my clothes as an easy way of saying, "look, we are having fun." That promoted the vibe I was going for. Not like I was saying everyone should take their clothes off, but I was comfortable with that, and I wanted to make the room seem open. You're




not in an art gallery, you're not at a show, you're at a party and this guy is almost naked. I think from there people just kind of grabbed on to the idea. People would come to the concert knowing it was going to be an hour, or however long, there is a distinct beginning and end, and they have that amount of time to have a good time. It's kind of like a mosh pit. That's not something you normally see on the street. In that context, when you are really excited to see this band and everyone likes this music, you do things with your body that you wouldn't normally do in a normal social context. Things are appropriate in this context that aren't normally."

Not only do audience members like to strip, they also like to get it on. I asked Gillis to comment on how his music inspires people in this particular way.

"I think it's sort of the excessive nature of it. Its like pop from all over. Ideally, my philosophy on music is that I like to enjoy everything. Even if I don't like everything, I want to like it from a quantitative point of you. What is cool about this on paper, how can I get into it? With my music, it's something where you almost have to drop your guard and be open to everything. There is a lot of different music coming in and out, and there is obviously a lot of sexual rap lyrics appropriated within it. It's just very over the top, free for all.

It's also dance music, which is inherently sexual. I think all of this coming together creates a lot of sexual chemistry. The nature of the show, too - it's that house party meets concert vibe, where it's a free for all based around dancing. It's different from going to a club where it's a bit more formal. You're supposed to dance with someone this way, buy drinks for someone, dress a certain way. It's different from going to a rock and roll show where there are no rules. It's those worlds coming together. To me, it's like what a house party should be. When the music is going and people aren't thinking about where they are or what they are supposed to be doing. To me, a solid house party is a very sexual thing."

Girl Talk is situated as a commentary on musical production. He is an active contributor to many of the important debates occurring in the music industry: copyright, distribution, originality and the rapid commodification of the underground. In terms of looking at representations of sex, sexuality and gender in music culture, he sides with the record companies that he protests in pretty much every other way. The recycling of these lyrics with no self-consciously critical lens continues the perpetuation of negative stereotypes. Nevertheless, his embrace of appropriation and genre melting is original despite its unoriginality. Gillis weighs in and rocks out.



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## WHY REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS STILL MATTER (WE'RE NOT POST-FEMINIST YET)

KAREN NAREFSKY



Photograph by Kristen Jones, 2009

“Post” is a hip prefix these days. Everyone’s studying post-modernism, except those who have moved on to post-post-modernism. And in these glorious post-Bush days, we constantly have to remind people that the election of a black president doesn’t mean our country has yet become post-racial.

One of the most disturbing posts, though, is post-feminism. In the same way that resting on our laurels after Obama’s election would allow racial injustices in our country to go unaddressed, the idea that feminism is over and gender inequality has been solved is deeply dangerous. As nice as it would be to live in that world, we don’t, and we have to keep fighting to solve the injustices that persist, particularly in the quintessentially feminist arena of reproductive rights.

Reproductive rights. What are they? The phrase seems so catchy in its alliteration that its meaning is sometimes obscured. Reproductive rights are the rights that relate to having or not having children, and the health and protection of the physical reproductive system. Birth control. Emergency contraception. Abortion. Pap smears. In vitro fertilization. Sex education.

Reproductive rights are the rights to the aforementioned, not only in law but in practice. This is the challenge – not to merely accept the idea that the law protects us but to fight until it does. We have to make sure that “choices” are given more than lip service. A poor single mother whose health insurance does not cover abortion (as is the case in most states ) has to “choose” between paying for her abortion and feeding her family<sup>1</sup>. A woman on welfare whose payments will be cut off if she has a child has to “choose” between the child she wants to have and the financial support she needs. These are forced choices, if they can be called choices at all. Accepting them as they are is simply not adequate.

As a pro-choice activist on campus, I see the trend of inaction manifest itself clearly in the small numbers of the pro-choice movement. Most undergraduates, if asked, would identify themselves as pro-choice, but few feel the need to align themselves with the movement because *Roe v. Wade* exists as a reminder of past success, seemingly de-necessitating future action. Carol Hanisch, a member of New York Radical Women, said after the passage of *Roe* in 1973

that she was “glad for the advance but feared that it would mean the end of the struggle as women got complacent thinking they had won it all,” when in fact they had won “only ‘choice’ for those women who fit the criteria of the court<sup>2</sup>.” Unfortunately, this fear rings true today. The only perceived threat to reproductive rights is the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, when in fact, reproductive rights are under threat even as the decision continues to be upheld.

In fact, even as *Roe v. Wade* stands unrepealed, court cases have undermined and restricted the right to a safe and legal abortion. In *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, a Supreme Court case in 1992, the court upheld *Roe v. Wade* in theory but allowed states to enforce parental notification and waiting period laws, which effectively make abortion impossible for teenagers in many states<sup>3</sup>. In Massachusetts, for example, as in 17 other states, the consent of at least one parent is required for a woman under 18 to have an abortion. *Gonzales v. Carhart*, a case that went through the Supreme Court in 2007, upheld a ban on late-term abortions (that is, abortions performed in the second or third trimester by a method called dilation and extraction) with no exception in any case, even if the mother’s health was in danger<sup>4</sup>.

What’s so frightening about these decisions, apart from their life-altering consequences, is the outrageously condescending way that they talk about women. “It seems unexceptionable to conclude some women come to regret their choice to abort the infant life they once created and sustained,” said Justice Kennedy in the *Gonzales v. Carhart* decision<sup>5</sup>. Okay, point taken. But Kennedy and the other majority justices went on to say that women would never have abortions if they understood the way the procedure worked, operating under the insulting assumption that women don’t bother to find out what an abortion is before they have one. “It is self-evident that a mother who comes to regret her choice to abort must struggle with grief more anguished and sorrow more profound, when she learns, only after the event, what she once did not know.” Silly women! They don’t even know how an abortion works! They’re so selfish and thoughtless that they never even considered it! It’s up to us men to tell those women what they’re doing to their bodies, and then they’ll definitely all change their minds and do what we tell them.

I hear this anti-woman language in the pro-life movement at Harvard as well. At the Harvard Right to Life events I have attended this year, especially one featuring “pro-life feminist” Ericka Bachiochi, I have heard the following views expressed: women who have abortions are selfish, they haven’t considered the other possibilities available to them, they shouldn’t have been having sex in the first place (because women always have to be the ones who say no). It’s not the view that life begins at conception that makes me angry – although I disagree, I can understand and respect it. It’s the fact that the only justifications I hear for the pro-life position are condescending and blatantly sexist. Harvard women who support the right to choose need to defend ourselves against the slander propagated by people who want to appropriate the label “feminist.”

We’re used to defending ourselves here. Many Harvard students have grown up with access to the resources and means of expression that allow us to fight for our rights. But people who grow up in disadvantaged communities don’t always have access to those resources. And with the stated intent of Barack Obama and Drew Faust alike to focus on

public service and community-building, perhaps now is a good time to consider those who are not privileged, upon whom our society has not bestowed resources and advantages. An article from January 4’s *New York Times* described women of color in New York City performing dangerous, risky self-induced miscarriages because they either didn’t have access to safe healthcare or didn’t feel protected and supported by the system that exists<sup>6</sup>. One woman said that “she was in the country illegally, and worried that a doctor might turn her in [if she went to a clinic to get an abortion].” Instead, she took misoprostol, a prescription drug meant to reduce ulcers which can also induce miscarriage, but whose label includes “F.D.A.’s strongest warning against use in women who are pregnant.” The drug can cause the uterus to rupture, leading to severe internal bleeding. Our society inflicts enough disadvantages on immigrants and people of color – it’s time to recognize that being pro-choice isn’t just about protecting wealthy and middle-class white women, but about erasing the injustices and hierarchies in American society.

The reproductive justice movement has been at the forefront of the battle against these hierarchies. A movement created by women of color to confront the sexism, racism, and classism they encounter in the United States, reproductive justice takes a comprehensive view of reproductive rights and a community-based, grassroots effort to fighting for them. According to the website of SisterSong, one of the leading reproductive justice organizations,

the reproductive justice framework envisions the complete physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of women and girls. It stipulates that reproductive justice will be achieved when women and girls have the economic, social, and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our bodies, sexuality, and reproduction for ourselves, our families, and our communities in all areas of our lives<sup>7</sup>.

This approach is extremely relevant and appropriate, given the nature of choice. In order to make choices and realize them, women do need economic, social, and political resources. Women of color are regularly denied these resources on the basis of race, gender, and socioeconomic status. As Trina Jackson, a reproductive justice activist who spoke at Harvard in March, said, reproductive justice is about expanding the pro-choice movement from simply securing the individual right to an abortion to dismantling the structural forces that prevent choices from being made. I would love to see increased awareness of this movement, and I would love it if the mostly white middle-class pro-choice movement broadened its sights to include the powerful writings and strategies of women of color.

As President Obama said in his speech to the Democratic National Convention, “We may not agree on abortion, but surely we can agree on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies in this country<sup>8</sup>.” Reducing unwanted pregnancy would have a powerful and empowering effect on women and communities across the country by chipping away at the burdens imposed on women by patriarchal society. There is an easy way to do this: make birth control cheap and accessible everywhere. Not just on college campuses, not just in affluent neighborhoods, not just in cities. Birth control empowers those who want to have sex to enjoy it as a wonderful part of being human, and prevents the agonizing choice that has to be made when unwanted pregnancy happens. Birth control is

affordable and simple, and its effects can be huge.

Unfortunately, people are slow to realize this. All across the country, and as close as Somerville, CVS drugstores lock condoms, lube, and other sex-related products in glass cabinets...but only in communities of color<sup>9</sup>. The Bush administration, as its final fuck-you to women, passed a law allowing pharmacists who oppose abortion on moral grounds to define birth control as a kind of abortion, and therefore deny basic information about contraceptives to women. (President Obama has promised to overturn it). These fights can be won: Wal-Mart, a notoriously anti-choice company, just agreed to sell the emergency contraception pill Plan B at all of its stores<sup>10</sup>. We just have to demonstrate that birth control, in the end, is what will save lives and reduce the need for abortions.

People say that our generation is apathetic, that we don't engage with politics in the same way previous generations did. They don't know what they're talking about. We got a president elected! We are a generation of activists and advocates. And what better cause could there be for our activism and advocacy than the rights of women – our mothers, our sisters, our friends, ourselves?

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.aclu.org/FilesPDFs/map.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Baumgardner, Jennifer. (2008.) Abortion and Life. Akashic Books: New York.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.oyez.org/cases/1990-1999/1991/1991\\_91\\_744/](http://www.oyez.org/cases/1990-1999/1991/1991_91_744/)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.oyez.org/cases/1990-1999/1991/1991\\_91\\_744/](http://www.oyez.org/cases/1990-1999/1991/1991_91_744/)  
[http://www.oyez.org/cases/2000-2009/2006/2006\\_05\\_380/](http://www.oyez.org/cases/2000-2009/2006/2006_05_380/)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.oyez.org/cases/2000-2009/2006/2006\\_05\\_380/](http://www.oyez.org/cases/2000-2009/2006/2006_05_380/)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/05/nyregion/05abortion.html?\\_r=2&pagewanted=2&ref=todayspaper](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/05/nyregion/05abortion.html?_r=2&pagewanted=2&ref=todayspaper)

<sup>7</sup> [http://sistersong.net/publications\\_and\\_articles/RJ\\_Comp\\_Movement.pdf](http://sistersong.net/publications_and_articles/RJ_Comp_Movement.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.demconvention.com/barack-obama/>

<sup>9</sup> [www.CureCVSNow.org](http://www.CureCVSNow.org)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/04/business/04walmart.html>

**JOSEPH I. SHEFTTEL**

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# SEX HOROSCOPES

ANA HUANG

Sex is complicated. You have to work out all your social reservations and power dynamics, double-check on safety and consent, attend female orgasm workshops, have your own study sessions to make up for the complete sex-ed you never got in school... but there's just some intangible thing that's missing—your handy sex horoscopes.

We don't really understand how sexual attraction works, why women living in close quarters end up with synchronized menstrual cycles, how wholistic medicine affects cancer and various incurable "syndromes." But we do know that female hormonal cycles match the phases of the moon, the rise and fall of the tides obey the gravitational pull of the moon, and human drives and moods tend to reveal patterns along the lunar cycle. If the magnetic field of the tiny moon is so tangible, what about the astronomical forces exerted by Venus, Saturn, or the Sun? Could the relative positioning of various planets with their respective gravitational pulls, at the moment that you left the protection of the womb, affect your personality?

Things that lie unseen, even under a microscope, can be frightening to our confident, scientific minds. But just maybe, feminine intuition is onto something. Maybe the wisdom of "old wives" and "hags" are worthy something after all.

## ARIES

MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Element: Fire

Direct, straightforward, with strong libido and a fiery passion. Hence its element is fire. Impatient and eager to get to the point, they don't like to waste time on a lot of gentle cuddles and complex fantasy scenarios. They want to lead and conquer, and sex does not equate love. They can be too wrapped up with themselves to notice the other person's needs. Most likely horoscope to engage in S&M and use sex toys, but also lacking endurance in bed. After they get off, be prepared for them to stand up and leave.

Tender Spot: The head. Getting a head massage on an lover's knee makes for a great break from all that charging.

Best Action Award: Very physical acts, such as biting and wrestling.

## TAURUS

APRIL 20-MAY 20

Element: Earth

Usually have an earthy sensuality, and a powerful sex drive. Considers sex very important for the consummation of love, so it's never casual. They like to have it slow and steady, with formidable endurance. Likes lots of caresses and skin-to-skin contact, before, during, and after sex. The touch of hand and body communicates love. They focus on the physical sensations so much that they may not move around much in bed. Eating and sex are two big pleasures of life, so dinner followed by sex makes a perfect evening.

Tender Spot: The neck area, as well as skin itself.

Best Action Award: Tantric sex. They are the masters of marathon sessions and pure sensation.

## GEMINI

MAY 21-JUNE 20

Element: Air

Many are players, for whom sex is just sex. Just as their personalities are double-sided and apt to change, they can't stand consistent and unchanging methods. Yet they don't take risks without making sure of its ultimate safety. Just as air is intangible, they constantly change their minds, and it's hard for them to stay faithful until they've matured and experienced enough flings. They love talking, whether it's phone sex, during sex, or after sex. Their double-sidedness also means that many have androgynous qualities. They tend to tire themselves out with their hyperactive energy, so late night sex can be draining. Try early morning or afternoon getaways.

Tender Spot: Arm and hands. They like to use their hands to its full potential and often take good care of them. Beautiful hands are turn-ons.

Best Action Award: Spontaneous sex, where you can hear people talking nearby or music in the background.

## CANCER

JUNE 21-JULY 22

Element: Water

Sensitive to your needs and feelings, with an instinct to nurture. Sex is strongly connected to love and intimacy. Needs the other person to initiate sex and lead. Their desire is highly affected by the lunar cycle, with the height of desire happening at full moons. They can be emotional and moody, according to the moon as well. The moon affects the tides, and Cancer loves to be near bodies of water, such as rivers and lakes. A sense of emotional security is vital to them, thus a sensitive, reliable partner and a dependable, protected love nest are the best turn-ons for them. Remember to keep reassuring them of your eternal love while you have sex.

Tender spots: Breasts! Both men and women have sensitive nipples.

They know how to appreciate the majestic beauty of breasts.

Best Action Award: Any kind of sex that they believe will create a beautiful memory between two lovers, regardless of their own interest in the act itself.

## LEO

JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Element: Fire

Likes to be the center of attention, charismatic, like your fellow President Obama (born August 4<sup>th</sup>). They like to show off their prowess in bed, and wants lots of displays of pleasure from their partners as confirmation for their ego. Receiving compliments is a major turn-on. Maybe this is why lions form "prides." Their mane also must look good. They can be big flirts, which may lead to some unavoidable hurt feelings by their significant others. They are proud of their numerous conquests and ends up heartbreakers. A Leo woman makes the best dominatrix, because she gets to be the sun, who is generously bestowing on you the permission to worship in her circle of solar light (as appropriate for a Fire sign).

Tender Spot: Small of the back.

Best Action Award: Sex on different kinds of furniture, possibly in public places, because they love looking good and being seen looking good.

## VIRGO

AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Element: Earth

Perfectionist and anal. They find clean bedsheets essential, and well-kept lovers are a must. Not into wild positions, but they tend to be extremely physically sensitive, even to the lightest touches. Often indecisive and shy about sex. Some actually love to talk about sex, but most can't stand doing it with the lights on, or in front of a mirror. They have a reputation for having low sex drives, but remember, they are also very self-less, giving types who put your pleasure first. Their spirit of service, combined with the quest for perfection in everything, can add up to amazing skill in bed. They're turned off by perfumes that are strong and sickly sweet. Don't like to rush, and enjoys a lot of cuddling.

Tender Spot: The stomach. Kiss and caress this area, with washed hands.

Best Action Award: After a light and healthy dinner, going straight from the shower to a clean bed, with relaxing music and plenty of time.

## LIBRA

SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Element: Air

They love the aesthetic experience, enjoy elegance and movie-like settings. Being air signs, they value the atmosphere the most. Thus, they tend to fall for flowers, candlelight dinners, and romantic movies. Could focus on appreciating the beauty of the act so much, that they seem to be overlooking the other person's needs, but overall they know how to reciprocate in a relationship. They are often passive because they want to be classy. Like other air signs, they can be changeable and not follow through flirtations with action. They tend to like balance, so a kiss on the ear on the left would be best followed by one on the right. Not a fan of heavy tattoos or extreme S&M. Sex is not more important than the mental aspect of things.

Tender Spot: Lower back.

Best Action Award: Eating sweet edible lingerie off the body. What an elegant, tasteful experience!

## SCORPIO

OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Element: Water

Enthusiastic, energetic and passionate, they are often very attractive, with a reputation for being the "sexiest" horoscope.

(continued on page 34)



Sanford Biggers  
 The Afronomical Ways, 2003  
 Ceiling (8 x 8 feet), rubber tiles,  
 fluorescent auto paint,  
 floor (8 x 8 feet), mirrored plexiglass

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**  
 Fluorescent, Afro-tantric zodiac chart installed  
 on ceiling. Mirrored floor of same size installed  
 directly below for walking on and viewing.  
 Viewer sees themselves "floating" against the  
 Afronomical backdrop.

They want to conquer and possess you thoroughly. Be prepared for unreasonable jealousy. Their hatred and vengeance for those who betray them is not something you want to try. Everything comes intense for them. They are often secretive about what lies in their inner core, needing time and trust to open up. But then again, the mysteriousness is also part of their irresistible appeal. Also the most likely to experience love at first sight. Good at keeping secrets, good at seduction, good at sex talk, and they know it too. They can make great lovers, until you wrong them somehow.

Tender Spot: The butt. No surprise there.

Best Action Award: Anything involving secrecy, including a secret fetish you have, a private rendezvous, a special role-play scenario only the two of you know.

## **SAGGITARIUS**

NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Element: Fire

Adventurous and have strong desire, with low inhibition and no holdbacks. They're bold and decisive about sex. They will tell you what they want, and when they are really feeling good, your roommates may be hearing it through the wall too. But if you ask them to rate your performance, be careful, because they can be brutally honest, even with the best intentions. They get bored with the same person very fast, because they love new experiences and taking risks. They are easily turned on, so they can be ready to do it anytime, anywhere, but don't expect them to have the endurance of the Capricorn or Taurus. This horoscope makes the best playmate, with plenty of tricks up their sleeves, if you are not expecting more. Their love of movement translates to an enjoyment of sex outdoors.

Tender Spot: Thighs and hips, where the strength of horses resides.

Best Action Award: A quickie on an airplane: the ideal fucking-in-motion.

## **CAPRICORN**

DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Element: Earth

They take sex very seriously as another realm to succeed at (along with everything else in life). Has a strong sex drive and endurance, but they don't tell you how much they want it, rarely making the first move. Despite the passivity, they actually like being in charge in bed. As all earth signs, they love sensual textures, such as satin sheets and fur rugs. May take a long time to really relax, with all those responsibilities and stress on their minds. But once they unearth the repressed desire, you will realize the magnitude of their sex drive.

Tender Spot: Shoulder and neck are always in need of a massage. They carry the world on their shoulders every day, so there're plenty of tension in those muscles to rub away.

Best Action Award: S&M (as tops). Most capricorns are rather conservative, but some can find powerful release in bondage and discipline games.

## **AQUARIUS**

JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Element: Air

Wealth of knowledge about sex due to a natural curiosity, also interested in wild sexual experimentation, such as creative positions, unique places to have sex, and new sex toys. But they may get bored very quickly after they've tried it, and soon move on to a new hobby, or a new partner. Sex and love are two separate things. Values the atmosphere more than the practice, so they sometimes prefer fantasy to reality. They tend to favor equality between men and women.

Tender Spot: Wrists and ankles are sensitive.

Best Action Award: Polyamory or group sex. They love to keep a wide circle of friends and lovers.

## **PISCES**

FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Element: Water

Sensitive, romantic, and empathetic to your point of view. They can be creative in bed, but easily hurt as well. They often seem passive, because they don't want to hurt you with how they really think. In return, you should also not be too honest, and don't play with their heart. Can be impulsive with too much love to give, even when it's unreciprocated. They are faithful, enjoys long walks on the beach and cuddling and whispering after sex. Least likely to talk explicitly about sex. A fantasy is to have sex in water.

Tender Spot: Feet. Feet massages are superb.

Best Action Award: Oral sex, because it's tender and soft.





Martabel Wasserman  
and Rebecca Lieberman  
CUNTRY FIRST, October 2008  
DIY Armbands (felt, glue,  
puff paint and elastic)  
Dimensions variable



Danny Gordon  
Nude Portrait, 2008  
C-Print  
50 x 60 inches



Danny Gordon  
Torso, 2008  
C-Print  
50 x 60 inches





*(Above)*  
Danny Gordon  
Interlocking Hands, 2008  
C-Print  
50 x 60 inches

*(Right)*  
A.L.  
Found Image (Purple Fashion Magazine #08),  
2008  
Posters  
Dimensions variable





The model in the photograph is me.

The boredom of working a retail job at American Apparel was alleviated by my thrill of stealing. I stole clothes as often as I clocked in. At work I stood in the Mens section fingering the rainbow rack of crewneck t-shirts. Cranberry, sea-foam, charcoal, lavender heather, organic unbleached cotton, chartreuse. Each color grew on me, jewel-like, stirring my desire. By afternoon I was slipping a t-shirt into my tote bag. At night in my apartment I would cut them up and make them into different clothes. I experimented with pleats and tucks, the deconstructed possibility of the t-shirt. I wanted layers, a loose drape. No cloth pulled taught over the body. Nothing revealing. I wore them back to work. The coworkers went wild. 'Oh my god. Let's show this to Dov. He'll flip his shit.'

Dov stepped back to give me the head to toe. 'Perfect,' he said, 'Let's get her pictures.' He turned away to deal with other issues; the lights, the shipping, the store opening in Paris, the factory, the fabric manufacturing in L.A. One assistant handed him a mobile phone. Another, dressed in a full body leotard and Miu Miu platforms, placed a takeaway bowl of mac and cheese in his hands. Dov, the mastermind of vertical integration, ate with a plastic fork as he talked to Paris on his mobile. Dov, the global distributor of American hipster mythology, thought I would work.

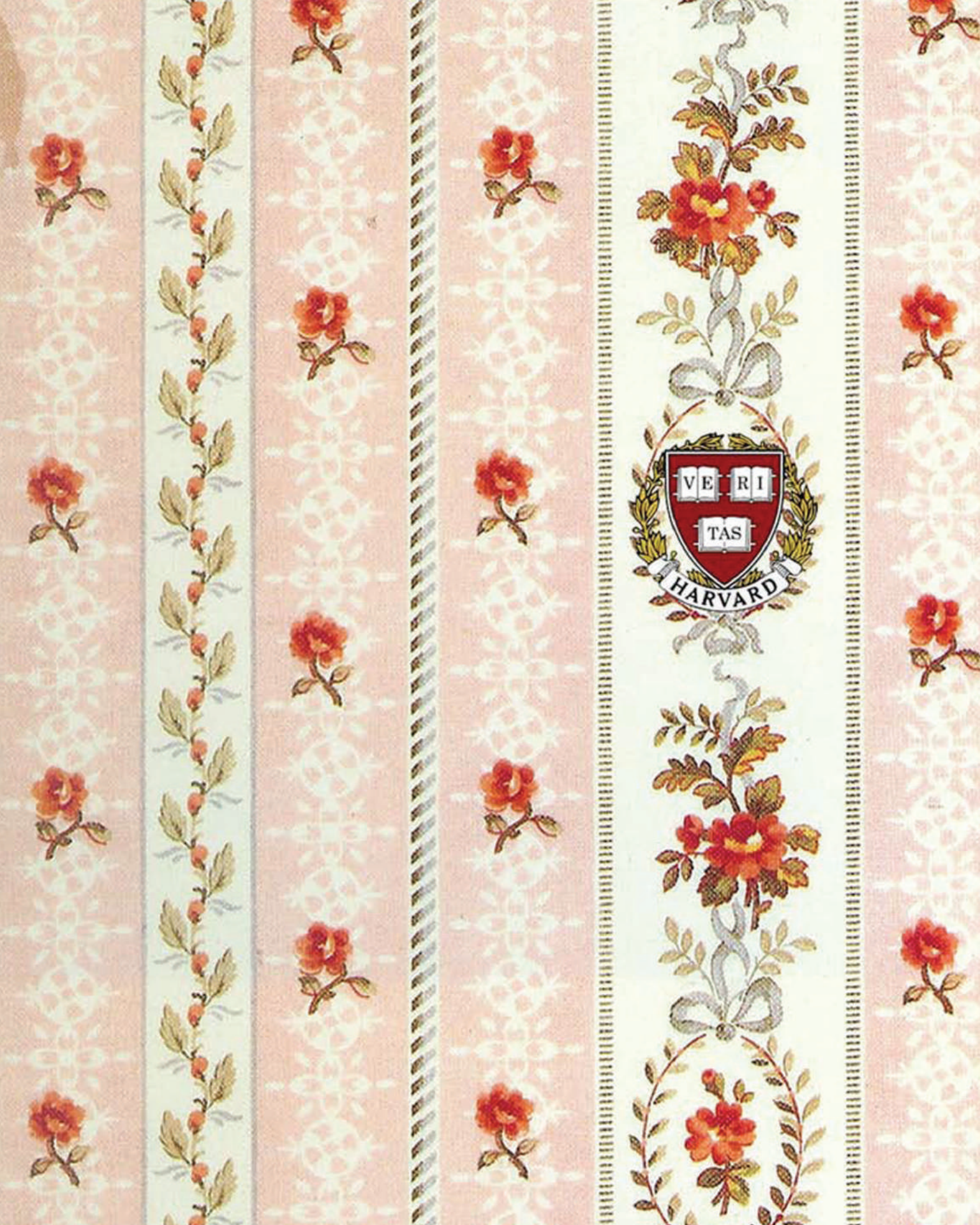
The basement stockroom in American Apparel's Lower East Side store was where the photo shoot took place. I tried on everything and ended up in nothing. I flung off a pile of velour jumpers, bandeau dresses, backless leotards, tube socks, panties. My hair flew up in static and was tousled down with pomade. The photographer and his assistants kept the music going. We smoked out the windows and bitched about the managers. They fed me lines of coke and I revisited the gymnastics of my childhood. They got down on the floor with me. Tilted my chin and adjusted my sunglasses. Picked a lint ball off my shorts. Agreed on how hot they thought I was. Told me to 'work it.'

I clutched at the mirrors above me. I arched my back and stuck out my ass. I channeled all my anxieties into one sultry stare; glared 'sex' at some point beyond the camera. I bent my body in anticipation of being fucked; I kept my sunglasses on. I disdained their dumb fawning. I relished the attention. 'Fuck yourself. You'll never be able to strip away my inner complexities,' the words pounded through my head. Stretched, topless, I blushed and tried not to shake. Late, late that night, I signed the release and received three hundred dollars.

I didn't bother to ask about the prints. After the fact, I felt embarrassed by the whole episode. These photo parties occurred almost every other week. Each sweet-faced new employee was quickly wooed into the flash. I had thought my look deviated from the American Apparel archetype. I was too Asian. Too nerdy to be the real thing. If anything, the photographs would eventually find their place in Dov Charney's personal collection.

Imagine my surprise when, sitting in my studio two years later, I recognized my likeness smoldering back at me in Purple Fashion Magazine.







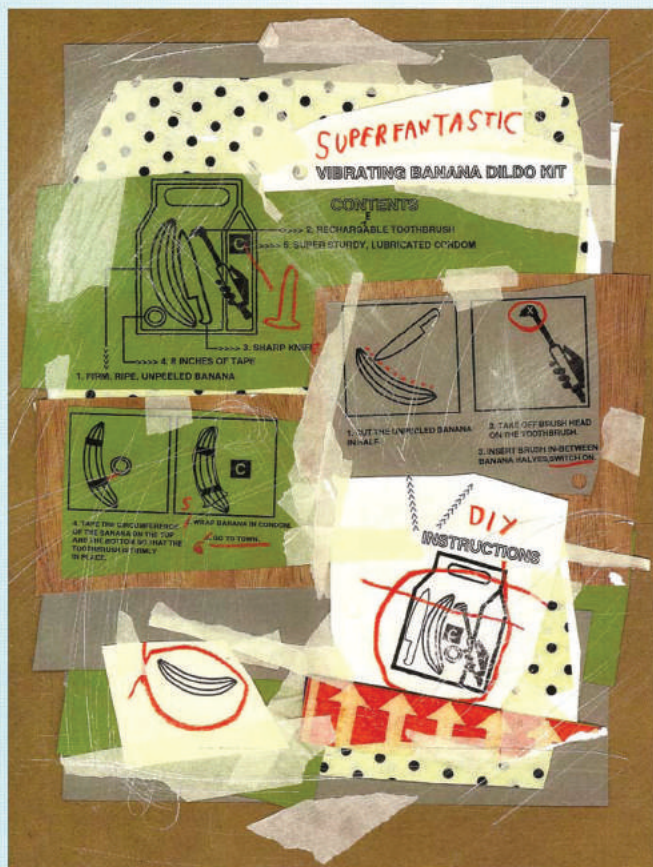
# THE HARVARD MANUAL FOR D.I.Y. SEX TOYS

with  
eric adolfsen  
sasha cole  
jen denike  
louise erhard  
elsa hansen  
elizabeth huey  
terence koh  
annabel linguist  
van neistat  
casey neistat  
randy polumbo  
melodie provenzano  
lisi raskin  
sara rossein  
kathy rudin  
tom sachs  
ariel schulman  
vadis turner  
martabel wasserman  
sandy white

fucked and sucked by  
carlton dewoody



## HOUSEHOLD craft fun!



## PEEKIN' WHILE FREAKIN'

DOES THE THOUGHT OF SOMEONE WATCHING TURN YOU ON?  
YOU WILL NEED: PLASTIC MCNUCKET TOY, DIRTY MAGAZINES, CUTTING TOOL, GLUE.



1. FIND A MAGNET.

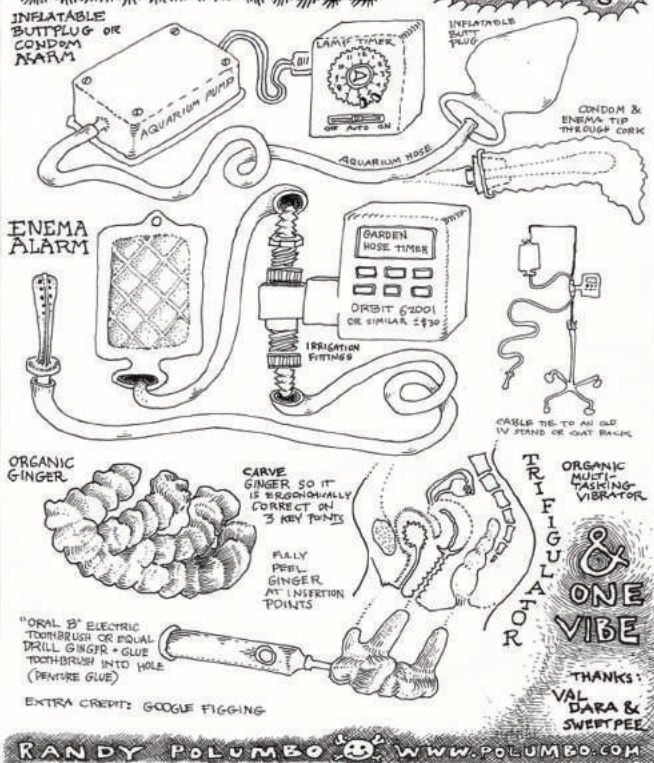
2. LOOK THROUGH MAGAZINE, CHOOSE BODY PARTS OF CHOICE, TEAR OUT.



3. CUT OUT PARTS AND GLUE ON ACCORDINGLY TO MCNUCKET.

4. PLACE FINISHED MCNUCKET IN VIEW AND LET THE VIBRUM BEGIN!

## ALARMING alarms

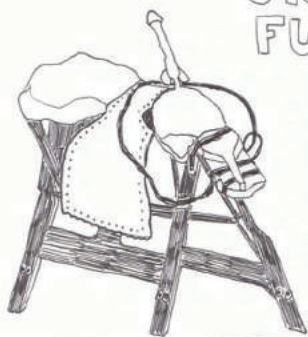






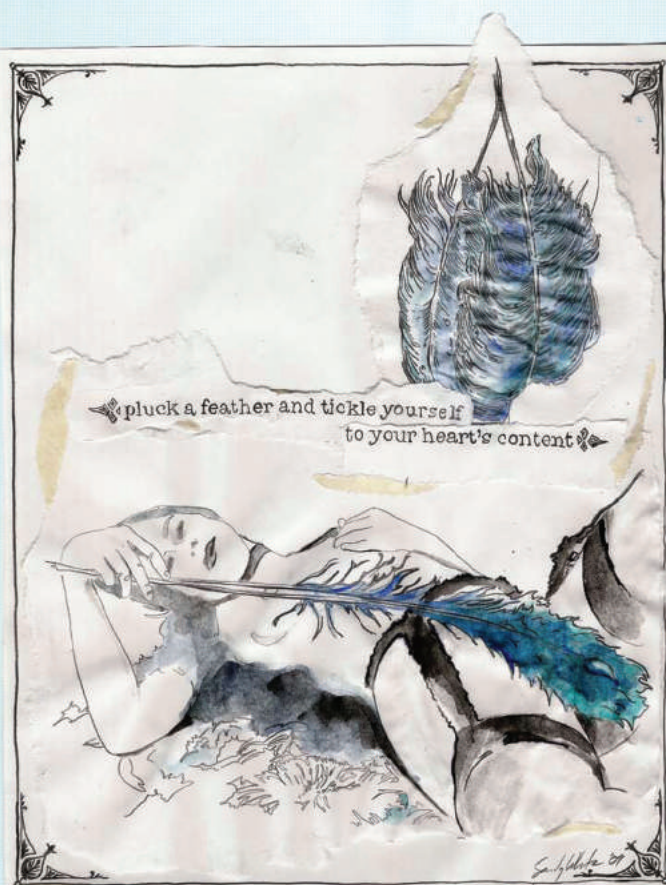


# STAR WARS FUCK PONY



1. Saw horse
2. Roll of duct tape
3. Sprayfoam saddle
4. Piece of carpet
5. Rope
6. Chainsaw handle
7. Dildo of choice + harness
8. Copy of The Rolling Stones - Tattoo You

© Lisa Raskin, 2009  
(TM)



**SOMANY USES**

**PUEDE DARLE TANTOS USOS...**

**GLAD Sandwich**

**IN A PINCH**

**FOR THE PROTECTION YOU NEED TO GET THINGS DONE.**

**PARA LA PROTECCION QUE NECESITA PARA DEJAR TODO LISTO**

**GLAD Sandwich**

**Tuck the flap inside the bag.**

**Fold cuff over end of bag.**

**IN A PINCH**

**For the protection you need to get things done. Para la protección que necesita para dejar todo listo.**

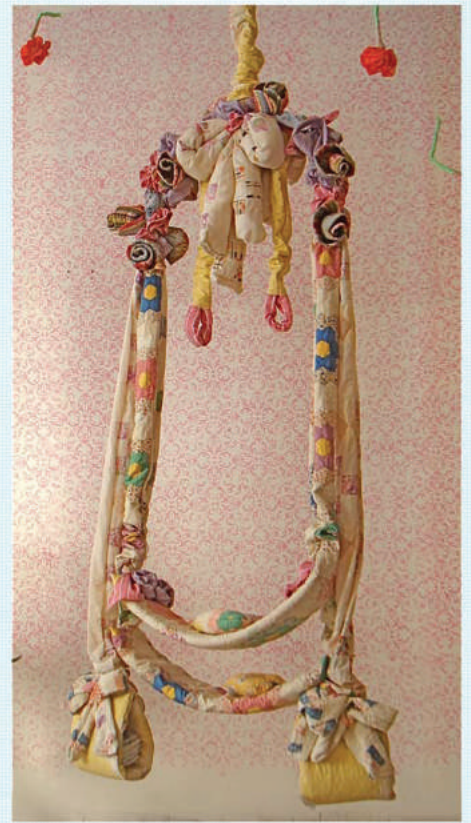
D.I.Y SEX: SANDWICH BAG AS EMERGENCY PROPHYLACTIC.  
KATHY RUDIN MIXED MEDIA COLLAGE (2)



11.



12.



13.



Tantric specialist Giant Squid seduces orgasmic Sperm Whale  
 Free Porn: Nature's Best  
 Where: Natural History Museum, New York, NY, Hall of Bio Diversity  
 Directions: Take Pung Wah Bus Boston to NYC, take B subway to 72nd Street

14.





Love Potion No. 54321

Maker of SCANDY

# Love Potion No. 54321°

20 oz plastic squeeze bottle

*Person aphrodisiac collected from  
land and sea, combined with smart  
water for drinking, lubrication and  
sexual stimulation.*

**"foam-born!"™**

*Ingredients: smart water,  
chocolate syrup, spanish fly,  
raw oyster, dried shark fin,  
gonad of sea urchin, and  
panax ginseng.*

*Extremely perishable. Discard unused portion after 24 hours. Warning: contains  
shellfish. Consuming uncooked foods like shellfish can cause illness or death.*



LovePotionNo54321.indd 1

2/18/09 11:42:59 PM

LovePotionNo54321.indd 2

2/18/09 11:42:59 PM

Love Potion No. 54321 'Make it Yourself Just for You' plain instructions:

1. Visit <http://LovePotionNo54321.info> for a Watch & Learn movie, and follow the recipe.
2. Cut out the labels above (you might consider stealing extras of this magazine).
3. Paste the labels on the smart water bottle (you may substitute non-smart water).
4. Share your Love Potion No. 54321 with the people you love.
5. Don't miss dedicating your first spill to Aphrodite the immortal.

The H. Bomb Cut-Apart Series is **5.4** of 321 and has been approved by

*Eina.*



2.14.09

N.Y.C.

STONINGTON

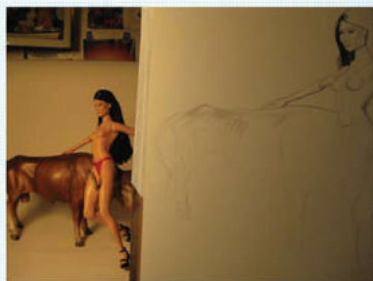
In a small connecticut fishing village, Elsa and I rent the attic in this place. It's where we play house.



Hier de hier. "The Vision of Ecstasy"

1. Find erotic objects
2. Compose story still life
3. Add angels
4. Draw sensitively
5. Gaze with your eyes

Melanie Peary 2009

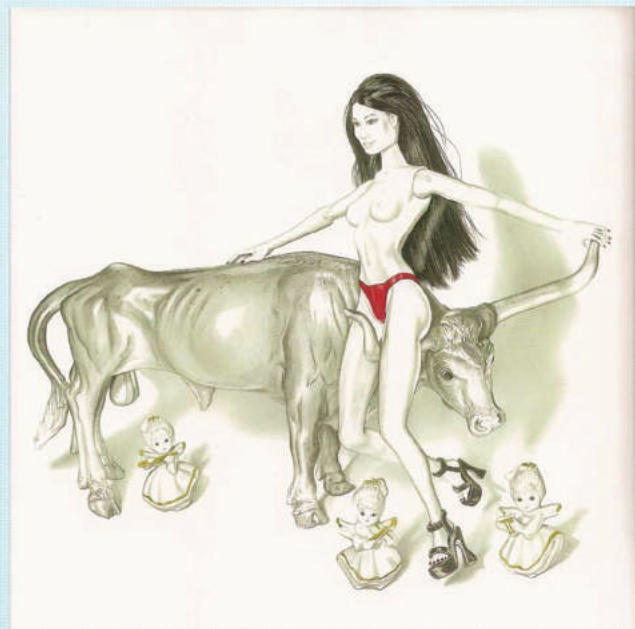


2.14.09

N.Y.C.

MY BEARD

*His beard complements my Bush*

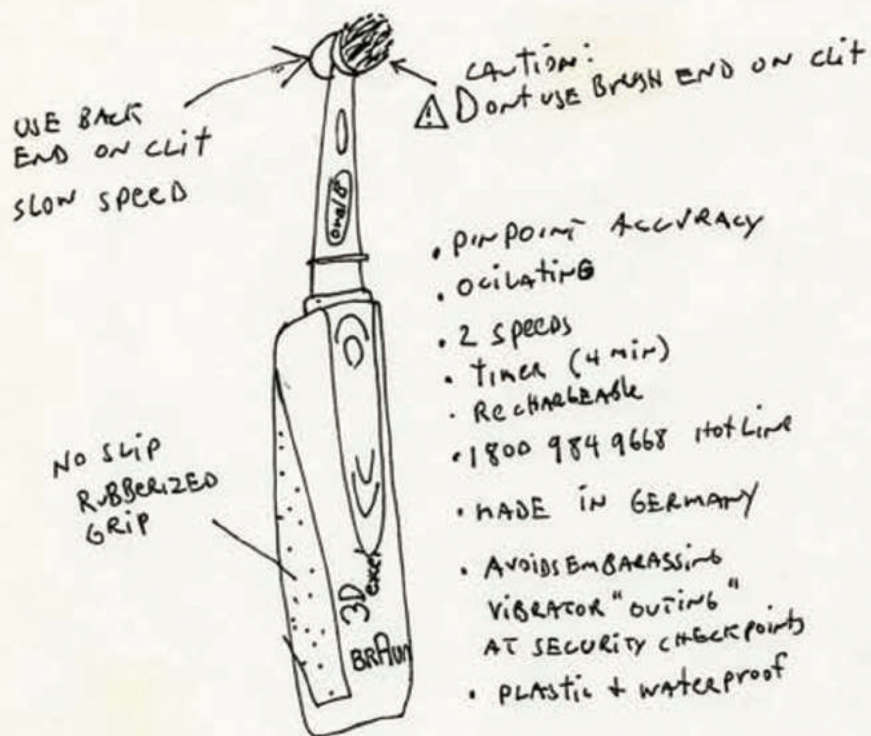




take a piece of toilet paper 8 sheets long  
move it gently back and forth around your butt hole completely naked  
and imagine that's the fingertips of angels caressing your skin

always  
terence

## JEN'S TOOTHBRUSH CLIT OFF



FOR BEST RESULTS: USE ROOMMATES TOOTHBRUSH (THAT BITCH!)

6/3/03  
Jan Sado



# WHAT IS THE FIRST OBJECT YOU MASTURBATED WITH AS A CHILD?



GROWING UP IN PARIS, JOSEPHINE'S  
SHOWER HEAD WAS DETACHABLE.



WHEN SHE WAS 13, AUDREY'S DENTIST GAVE  
HER AN ELECTRIC TOOTHBRUSH AFTER  
A CLEANING.



JESSY AND A PURPLE  
MAGIC MARKER.



ISABEL DRESSED UP A LARGE PILLOW IN HER  
LITTLE BROTHER'S CLOTHES.



LENA AND HER MOTHER'S  
CHILDHOOD DOLL.



JULIA JUST LOVED RUNNING WATER.



MASTURBATION AND MORALITY  
an abbreviated report by Casey Neistat

'if you misuse them while young you will not be able to use them when you are a man' -Lord Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts, writing in Scouting Today referring to 'private parts'



'Look at me, jerking off in the shower. This will be the high point of my day'

-Lester Burnham

The Latin manus (hand) and the Latin turbare (to disturb).

Alfred Kinsey interviewed thousands of men in the 40's and concluded that 95% masturbated. In the 60's William Masters and Virginia Johnson raised that to 99%.

In ancient Egypt the G-d Atum was believed to have created the universe by masturbating, and the flow of the Nile was attributed to the frequency of his ejaculations. In response to this the pharaohs were required to ceremonially masturbate into the Nile.

In the ~~1640's~~ 1640's the code for puritan Law in my home state of Connecticut stated that masturbators were eligible for the death penalty.

Job 31:1-3

'I made a covenant with my eyes not to look upon a girl with lust. I know full well that the Almighty U-d sends calamity on those who do.'



index

1. martabel wasserman
2. elizabeth huey
3. annabel linquist
4. randy polumbo
5. lisi raskin
6. sandy white
7. & 8. kathy rudin
9. louise erhard
10. eric adolfsen
11. & 12. vadis turner
13. jen denike
14. sasha cole
15. & 16. elsa hansen and van neistat
17. terence kok
18. tom sachs
19. & 20. melodie provenzano
21. sara rossein and ariel schulman
22. casey neistat

with thanks and love,

CARLTON



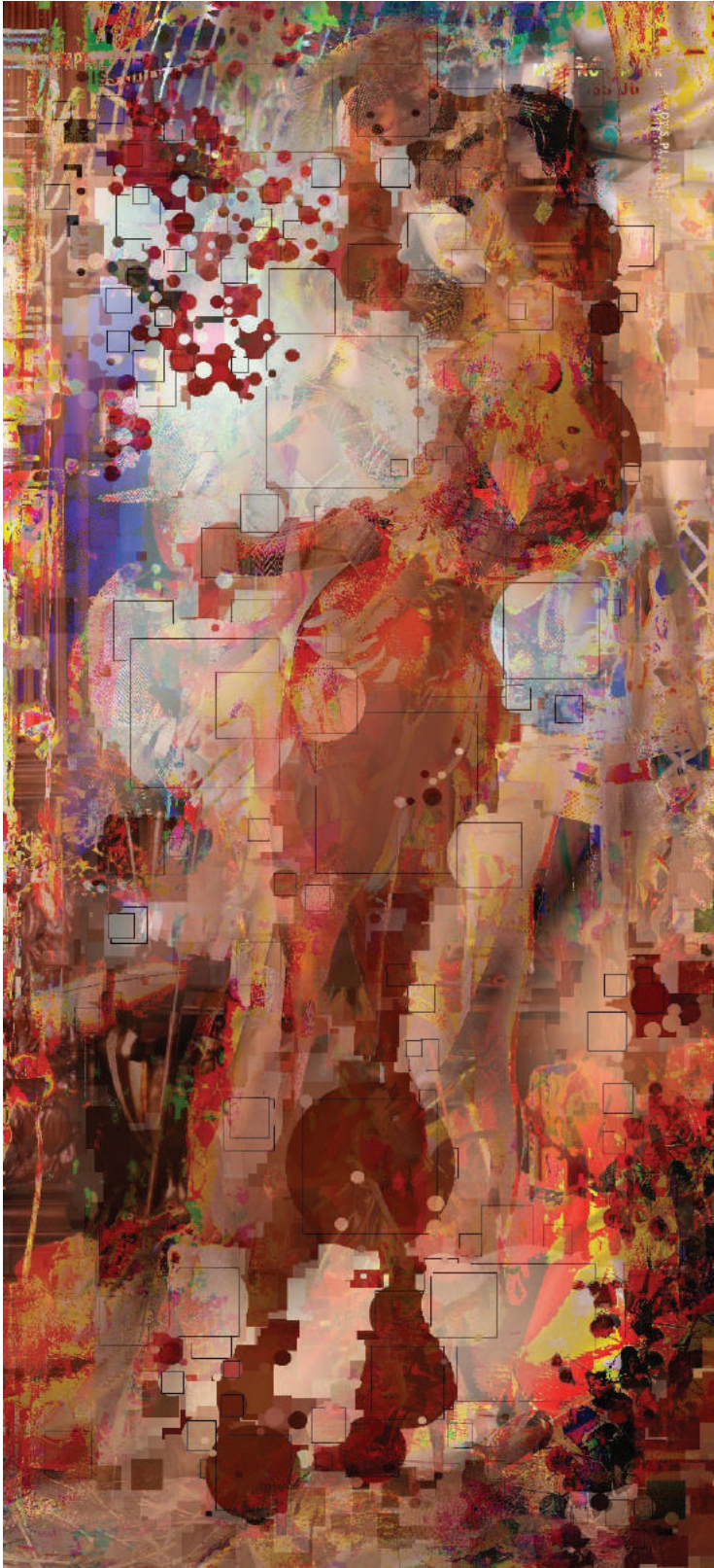




*(Above)*  
Remeike Forbes  
Safe War, 2008  
Photoshop collage  
11 x 8.5 inches

*(Right)*  
Yunhee Min  
'Oliver Mellors'  
Lady Chatterley's Lover, 2009  
Digital pixels  
Dimensions variable

# Oliver Mellors



Tim Credo  
Playboy Project, 2009  
Python



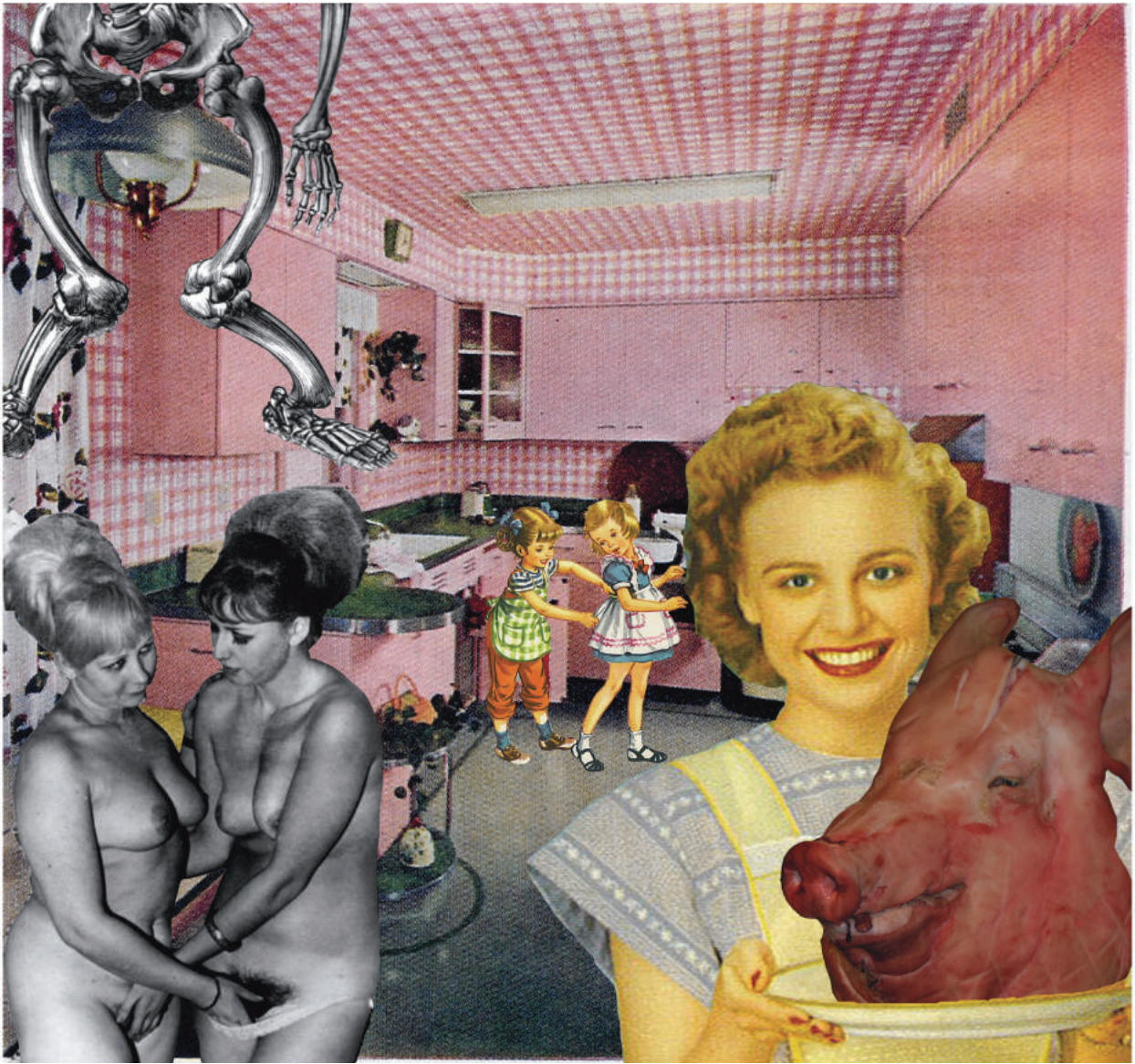
The images in this series were created by applying several different numerical algorithms to a set of Playboy centerfolds.

When I began the project, I worried about the violent reduction involved in representing the human form as a series of numbers to treat mathematically.

Initially, these images implied to me a devaluation of the human in favor of the technological.

This interpretation breaks down because the Playboy women are abstractions to begin with, tricks of photography and airbrushing. Instead I prefer to imagine that I am carrying Playboy's project to its completion. The magazine wanted to portray the women of dreams or fantasies; it is these dream images that I have tried to create out of Playboy's tawdry approximations.

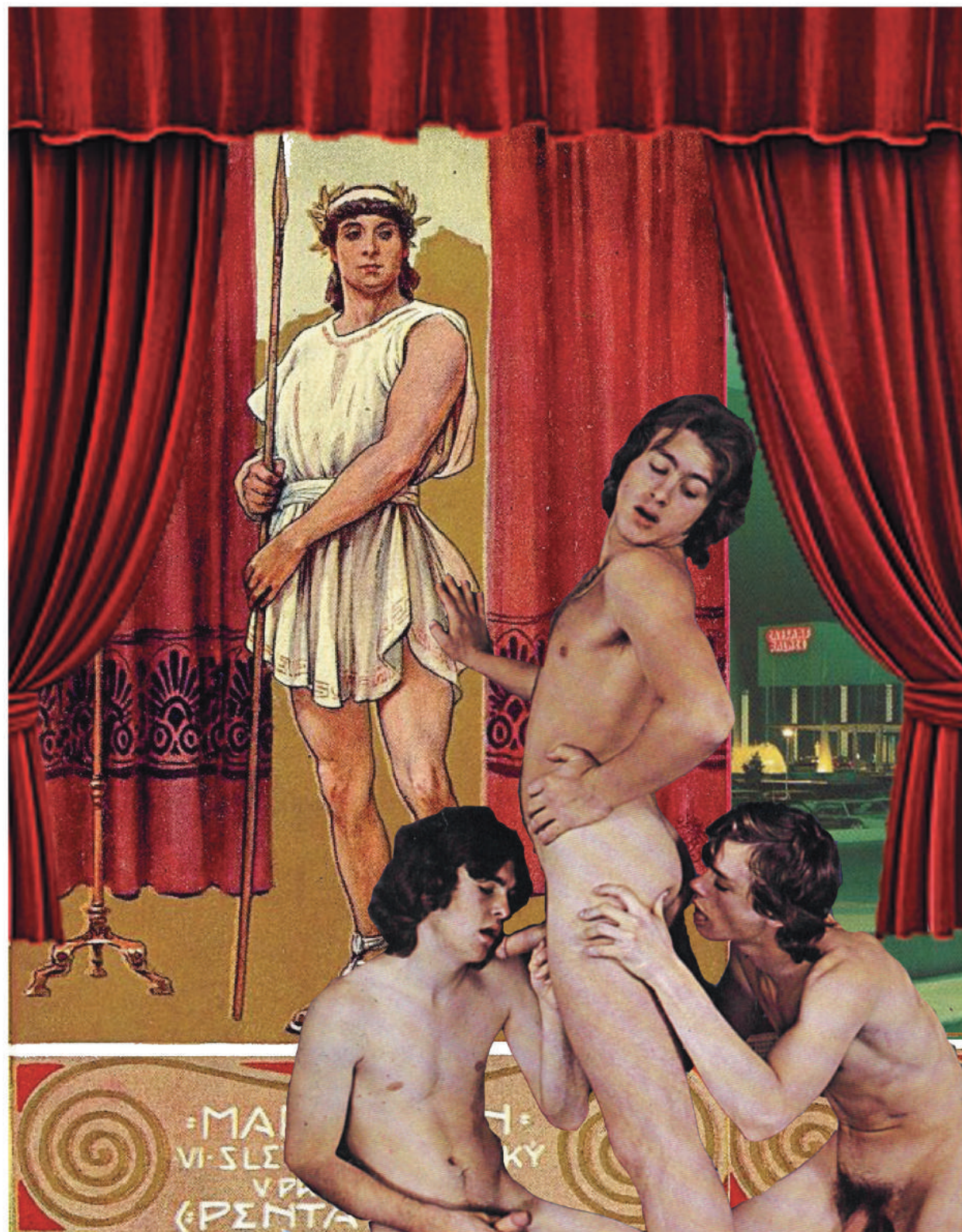




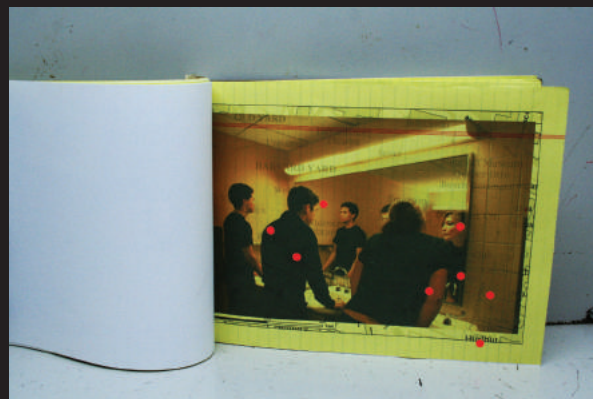
*(Above)*  
Rebecca Lieberman  
Untitled, 2008  
Digital collage  
Dimensions variable

*(Right)*  
Rebecca Lieberman  
Untitled (Caesar's Palace), 2008  
Digital collage  
Dimensions variable









#### ARTIST STATEMENT

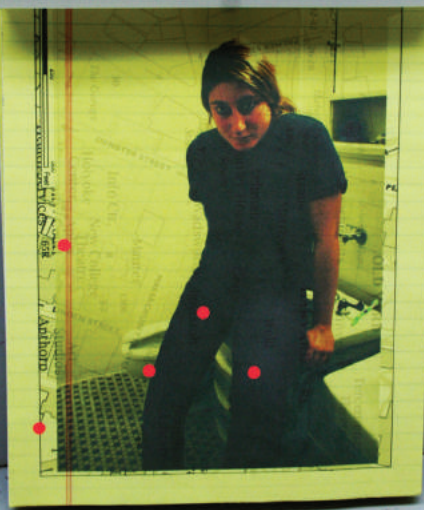
In this piece, I have used maps of Harvard to show the locations of various gender non-specific bathrooms on campus. By layering these maps with photographs taken inside Harvard's bathrooms, I hope to draw out the performativity of gender in a space that sits precariously between public and private, and to provoke discussion about the limited number and distribution of gender non-specific bathrooms on Harvard's campus.

*(Above and right)*

Kristen Jones  
Untitled, 2008

Legal pad, sharpie, labels,  
digital photographs  
8.5 x 11 inches



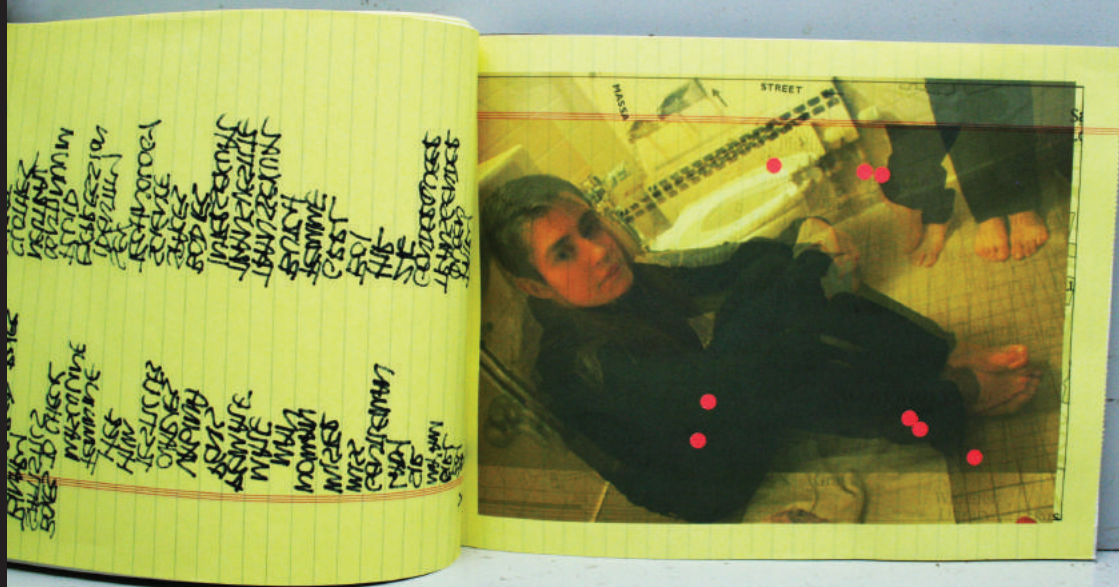


**INTERVIEW ROOMS**  
 WARDEN  
 HALL BUT  
 GEDDUGH  
 WARD (2)  
 SHAW (2)  
 HOLLOWAY  
 ARIEN COURT  
 WOODSOUTH  
 HOLLOWAY (2)

**OFFICE BUILDINGS**  
 WARDEN  
 BARRACKS CENTER  
 BULLY ST. WIL  
 WARDEN HOUSE (2)  
 BULLY ST. WIL (2)  
 HOLLOWAY (2)  
 BARRACKS CENTER  
 BUILDING (3)  
 PRESIDENT BULLY'S  
 OFFICE (3)

**LAPTOP CLASS ROOMS**  
 ADAMS (3)  
 DAVIS (3)  
 CURTIS (6)  
 DUNSTON (3)  
 FLUOT (4)  
 FREEMAN  
 LEVERETT (3)  
 LINDLEY (3)  
 MATHIAS (3)  
 PETERZHEIM (4)  
 CLINCH (2)  
 WINTHER

**91 BATHROOMS  
 TOTAL**







(Above)  
Martabel Wasserman  
Untitled, 2008  
Sculpture

(Right)  
Chris Verene  
Self-Esteem Salon Movie, 2009  
Poster  
Dimensions variable

(Page 62)  
Chris Verene  
Birds Feeding, 2009  
Photograph  
Dimensions variable



STARRING CHRIS VERENE • ANI CORDERO • MARTABEL • JESSICA GRABLE  
CHRIS BUTLER • JEN DeNIKE • AMY BOYD • CARLTON DeWOODY  
AND INTRODUCING OUR AMAZING MODELS

# THE SELF-ESTEEM SALON

"...knockout work... Its action simultaneously evoked ballet class, Montessori schools, revival meetings, toddler birthday parties, and recovered cult-suicide tapes; I could have watched it all night. Completely fucked-up, completely without pretension, and willing to go anywhere." -ARTFORUM

SOON TO BE A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE  
2010



DIRECTED BY CHRIS VERENE DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ROB FEATHERSTONE PRODUCTION DIRECTOR ANI CORDERO SELFESTEEMSalon.COM







# EXPANDING CONSENT

## AN INTERVIEW WITH JACLYN FRIEDMAN

COLETTE PEROLD

Allow me to introduce you to Jaclyn Friedman. A performer, poet, writer, and activist, Jaclyn is most recently co-editor of the groundbreaking anthology, Yes Means Yes: Visions of Female Sexual Power & A World Without Rape. Program Director of the Center for New Words in Central Square, Jaclyn organizes workshops, open-mics, speakers, political discussion, concerts, book groups and a slew of other events and activities all related to creating spaces “where women’s words matter.” Jaclyn also worked as Program Director of the LiveSafe Foundation, which organizes its advocacy around self-defense and reducing violence. I first saw Jaclyn speak when I went to the book reading of her new anthology at the YMCA in Central Square. I left there with tears in my eyes, breathing a little easier. I was overwhelmed by this book’s impact on my own life and its unapologeticness around positive female power. Yet I also knew I was on the brink of understanding just how pervasively the reverberations of this anthology that wholly re-theorizes our current rape culture would be felt. I quickly contacted Jaclyn for an interview. We met in the yard one rainy Sunday morning, and proceeded on a tour of a variety of freshmen common rooms to find a quiet place to record the interview. After running into studious groups of freshmen sprinkled throughout, we finally found the only quiet, unlocked, unoccupied room in the yard: the garbage room of Weld. That’s right. I interviewed Jaclyn Friedman amongst bags of trash. Jaclyn was an amazing sport, and once I was over my embarrassment, we began one of the most inspiring hours and a half of my thinking life. So sit back, relax, and be prepared to have your mind blown<sup>1</sup>.

*CP: Can you explain the history of your title, “Yes Means Yes”? Where does this framework come from, and what are you trying to suggest with it?*

JF: I think most people are familiar with the concept “no means no,” and that’s not an accident. A lot of activists worked a lot of decades to get the concept of “no means no” into the mainstream consciousness. “No means no” is to say that when a person says “no” to a sexual encounter or a sexual advance, you ought to stop. It’s very basic at this point. And still needs work today. I don’t think it’s a fully universally accepted concept unfortunately. But the problem with “no means no,” as important as it is, is that it doesn’t go far enough. And most of the time when we’re talking about “no means no,” we’re talking about men needing to listen to women’s “no’s.” And when we leave it there, it underlines all of the sort of diseased ideas about sex and sexuality that we have in our culture, which is that women are the keeper of the “no,” women want to say “no,” women don’t like sex, only bad women give it up, and men only want “yes.” It leaves all of those messed up dynamics in place. So “yes means yes” is about suggesting that none of us can have a complete independent sexuality – a full healthy sexuality – unless we have access to “yes” and “no” equally.

*CP: What is the feminist model of enthusiastic consent and how does it tie into “yes means yes”?*

JF: So “no means no” has brought forward this idea that if a woman says “no” – and I’m saying woman here

in particular because that’s the construct that most of us imagine around “no means no” – you have to stop. And the corollary to that that you hear very often is, “Well, she didn’t say no.” That leaves what people consider a very blurry area where a lot of people do things that they know their partner isn’t into or doesn’t want, but will do anyway because they can “get away with it.” And what we’re saying is that those things are still sexual assault and rape. Unless you have enthusiastic consent, which is more than just the absence of “no,” consent is not complete. When all you’re relying on is the absence of “no” to equal consent, you leave out coercion, you leave out the possibility that someone is panicked or terrified, or even that the person is confused in the moment about what they want and isn’t given the space to figure it out. A healthy sexual encounter – one that is free of coercion or violence – requires enthusiastic consent, which means it’s your responsibility to make sure your partner is having a great time. Not just that they’re willing or will let you, but that they really are excited about doing whatever it is you want to do with them. And that also is where that “yes meaning yes” comes in. And that requires a culture where women are allowed to want to have sex without being ashamed or blamed for that.

*CP: How might extreme gender roles lead to a culture of rape?*

JF: I think that the commodity model is a good framework for this. The commodity model is this: sex is a thing. It’s something that women have. They have The Sex. And

they're supposed to keep The Sex as long as they possibly can, because they can only give it away once for something of worth. After they give it away once, it has much less value, so they have to make the best trade they possibly can for their Sex, because it's really valuable, and they only get to give it away once. So they have to play keep-away with The Sex until they find the ultimate trade, which is "a good husband." That involves money and a ring [ed: thanks Beyonce] and whole bunch of other social constructions. On the other hand, on the other side of the commodity model are the men, and they're tasked with getting The Sex for as little as they can, because this is a capitalist model. Supply and demand. It's a very standard market, right? So that is where you get coercion and pressure and all of those "grey areas" because men are trying to trick women into it or sweet talk them into it or get them drunk to sort of convince them to give The Sex away without the sort of "husband" part. Now few men stop to think in this model, "Do I want The Sex? Do I want sex from this particular woman? Do I want sex right now?" Men are told from very early on, "You must get The Sex. Get it however you can. Get the best kind you can." And that's about valuing peoples' looks, peoples' skin color, peoples' youth, a whole bunch of stuff. So how a woman looks, and how she presents herself, her race, her body type – those things all play into the value of her Sex as well as whether or not it's ever been given away.

But her ability to do the Sex never comes into play here. It's about an object. So men don't have very much agency in this either – they're just playing out a script. And women on the other hand, they're not saying, "Well maybe I want to give away The Sex! Maybe I feel like having The Sex right now!" One of the most insidious things that comes out of it is that once a woman consents to give away The Sex, however tacitly, even if she just leaves it unguarded and does not object if you try to take it, then it's all fair game. Maybe he sweet talks you into it, or gets you drunk until you say "no" fourteen times but on the fifteenth time you say, "Okay, fine, take it and stop bothering me." This is all fair game in the commodity model. And then once you've said yes, it's done, it's a contract, you've signed it. You can't change your mind in the middle, you can't say "yes" to part of The Sex.

*CP: The essay in Yes Means Yes which deals with this is called "Towards a Performance Model of Sex," and it's by Thomas Macaulay Millar. In it, he proposes, in contrast to the commodity model of sex, the performance model of sex. What is he getting at?*

JF: He says, and what I fully believe in, is that what we ought to have, and what really blows the whole thing open, is a mutual improv performance – a jazz performance, say, although it doesn't have to be jazz – where two or more people start jamming together, and they're taking cues from each other, and they're having a good time, until they stop having a good time, and then they stop jamming. Maybe they'll jam again, or maybe one person will go jam with someone else now. If somebody kidnapped you and forced you to go play music with them, it would be a musical act in some literal way, but mostly it would be a kidnapping. And that's what rape is. And when you think of sex as a collaborative performance instead of this crass commodity

exchange, it just explodes all of our bad assumptions about sex and rape, and how those interactions work, and shows a world of how they could work. If you're a huge fan of somebody's music, you still don't want their very first performance unless you're an obsessive completist, because it probably wasn't that good. They didn't know what they were doing yet. And yet we have this obsession with virginity and saving it. Which I mean let's face it – some of us had a pretty good time our first time and some of us didn't have a great time, but we've all had better sex than our first time after our first time, because there are things to learn! Both about what we like, how to communicate, what other people might like, there's a lot of things. This fetishization of newness and lack of knowledge and lack of experience is really sort of sick and twisted if you think about it from a performance model. The whole slut-shaming thing disappears, because you wouldn't tell a musician, "You're a slut because you play with too many people!" You'd think, "Wow, they're really into music because they're getting a lot of practice in. They clearly enjoy it." You'd think either, "I like their music," or, "I really don't like their music." All the baggage that comes along with the commodity model just falls away when you turn it on its head and think about sex for what it is – what it really actually should be – which is a collaborative, enthusiastic performance, between two or more willing partners.

*CP: What are the limitations of this model of enthusiastic consent?*

JF: Well, there are plenty of contexts in which consent is a non-issue. I mean there's an essay in the book about immigrant women and how this model does not help many of them because no one cares about their consent. No one is pretending they're consenting or asking them. That many are getting raped systematically as they enter the border from Mexico is considered by many people a price to pay. So much so that when many women cross the border illegally, they take birth control just so they don't get pregnant at the very least. And then there's rape as a weapon of war as well. Enthusiastic consent is not going to solve the question of rape. And I think that's really important to say. This is mostly about rapes that happen in a purportedly sexual context. What we're trying to do here is not to educate rapists out of raping. And I think that's really important to say because I think there's a sort of a myth that in a lot of rapes, especially those "drunken encounters between people who already know each other," the hook-up kind of rapes, the "grey rapes" – I hate that term – there's this common belief that it's hard to know what happens. Women are confused and men are confused, and it's totally possible that he thought it was fine and she didn't think it was fine and there was some miscommunication. But the research doesn't say that. The research shows that men who rape almost always do it repeatedly. Even in these college, drinking-hook-up contexts. And what that says is that men who do this know they're doing it. They may not use the word deliberately in their head. But they know that if they asked their partner, their partner would not be saying yes to it. Let's be clear: you cannot rape someone by accident. These men are under no illusions that the feeling is mutual. So they're clearly not interested in enthusiastic consent. What we want to do is educate the culture that allows for that to continue. So all the people who are on



the juries and making the media and listening to the media and in the public conversation about rape who say, "Well, it was probably a miscommunication, it's really hard to know, because you know, well, she didn't say 'no.'" If we as a culture had enthusiastic consent as a threshold, then those jerks who are raping and saying, "Well, she didn't say 'no,'" would stop getting away with it. And that's what we're trying to accomplish here. I don't think you can educate rapists out of it that easily. I don't think they're confused.

*CP: In your essay entitled "In Defense of Going Wild or: How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love Pleasure (and How You Can, Too,)" you talk about women "policing their own safety." What problems arise when society puts the burden on women to do this?*

JF: I love this question. So, as a culture we have decided that one of the ways that we can keep women safe from rape is to scare them. Most of the time when you hear that a rape has happened, it's a stranger rape: somebody got grabbed, and they didn't know the person, and it was in an alley or the bushes. Stranger rape is about 15-20% of the rapes that happen, but we don't hear about those other ones. But when a stranger rape happens, what do you hear? You hear, "Okay women, here are the safety tips about how to keep yourself safe: don't go out at night, don't go out in this area because there's obviously something dangerous happening." It's all that range of stuff that we tell women and girls from when they're three about how to curtail their own activities in order to imagine that they're safer. And I say "imagine that they're safer" because it's obviously not stopping rape in any meaningful way. Rape keeps happening, at more or less the same rate. So it's not working. That's number one. One of the reasons it's not working is because that stranger rape scenario that sort of policing of women's behavior in the public sphere is supposed to prevent, is a fairly rare occurrence compared to rapes that are committed between people who have a preexisting relationship. Which studies show are between 75-85% of all rapes that happen. And so whether or not you wear that dress is really not the point. In any of those situations. It really isn't in stranger situations either. But beyond the fact that it's not working, and beyond the basic unfairness that most rapists are men, it is women who are asked to do the actions to keep ourselves safe. Men are not asked to behave responsibly.

*CP: You talk in your article about drinking and rape. In what ways are our messages about safe drinking gendered?*

JF: When you hear people talking about drinking and rape, you hear people telling women to keep an eye on their drink, keep their drink covered, don't drink too much, make sure you're with your friends, make sure a guy walks you home, all that stuff. Well that guy walking you home is more likely to rape you than somebody standing in the bushes, unfortunately. Unless you are smart about choosing your friends. You need to be following signs, not just "I know this person." "I know this person" does not keep you safe. What they don't tell you is that when a rape happens and there's alcohol involved, it's more statistically likely that the guy has

been drinking than the woman has. And yet you never hear men get the message: "Hey guys, be careful, don't drink too much, because you might lose your ability to judge whether or not you're raping someone." Have you? None of us have, and yet it's statistically more likely that a guy would need that than a woman. It's simply unfair to ask women to be the people to police their own safety.

*CP: How does this self-policing relate to pleasure?*

JF: So on the other side of these gendered messages is pleasure as a universal human right. When we tell women, "Don't act that way, don't be that way, don't go that place, don't go to that place at this time, don't go to that place wearing that, don't go to that place and bat your eyes in that way," first of all it's not like we don't all know that stuff. We know it from when we're very little. But we're going to do that anyway because we're human, and most of us chose short-term pleasure over long-term, abstract safety goals at least some of the time. But second of all, we're also sending a really clear message that women's pleasure in our own bodies is not as important as men's. No one asks men to curtail their own behaviors around this stuff, but we do ask women. And that means that women are told that our body, our experiences in our own body, our own pleasure, what makes us happy, what's fun, what makes us feel alive – that's not as important. And I consider that a human rights issue. Pleasure is a universal human right, and we need to start treating it as that. Once you start using the human rights framework, it really links together women who are fighting for sexual freedom and against sexual violence, queer people who are fighting for civil rights, and a whole mess of people who have been denied their own pleasure by the culture, or who's pleasure of any manifestation the culture has deemed is not okay. And that when we come from a standpoint where, as long as you're not hurting anyone, taking pleasure in your own body and your own life is a human right, it really cuts across a whole lot of that.

*CP: You write in your chapter about the importance of learning self-defense. How do we resolve the tension between not policing our own safety, but still preparing ourselves to protect ourselves?*

JF: You know how when you get on an airplane, the flight attendants are doing their little safety chat, and they say, "In the event of an emergency and the oxygen masks come down, you should put the oxygen mask over your own face before you go and help somebody sitting next to you, say a child or someone who needs help." I think taking self-defense is like putting on your oxygen mask first. There's a huge amount of systemic change we need to do to the culture in order to make it safe for everyone to be sexually equal, sexually free, and sexually safe: huge paradigm shifts, institutions that have to get destroyed, and so on. In the meantime, we're still living in the current reality. And that means a lot of women are going to face situations where someone is going to try and pull shit on them. And we're going to be distracted by fear and trauma if we don't learn to take care of ourselves in those situations first. When we get those skills under our belt we can start focusing more clearly

on making systemic changes happen, without living in fear. I took self-defense a long time ago, unfortunately, after I was assaulted. My wish for everyone is that we take it before it happens so that it doesn't happen. But what it did for me, even though it was a scary experience in some parts of the class, is actually liberate me from fear. It means that I spend so much less mental bandwidth worrying about where I'm walking, or who I'm talking to, or what I wear out in public when, or if I have that drink or not, and all of that stuff that so many women spend so much bandwidth on. I trust my skills, I trust my instinct, I trust what I've learned, so I know that if something bad happens, I'll know how to handle it. And that frees me to focus on the bigger picture. And it also frees me to not fall for all of those fear lines we get from the culture about what I as a woman should or should not be doing or saying in public. So I think self-defense is actually key to making us all ready to make those systemic changes. On a practical level, I also think that it will hasten an end to our rape culture. Because I think that a lot of men will stop raping if they have to think twice about getting hurt. And I think if there were a critical mass of women who were actually trained in real safety skills and real self-defense, you'd see rape drop off pretty dramatically. I would much rather put the fear on the rapists.

*CP: So where can we take a self-defense class?*

JF: I highly, highly recommend Impact Boston, which is a holistic, feminist grounded self-defense program where you get to do realistic scenarios with a fully padded role-playing assailant, and you get to practice verbal and emotional boundaries as well as physical self-defense in an adrenalized fear state. They actually create a situation that feels real, so that you can learn how to react while you're freaking out. Because learning how to hit as a technique is really only about a third of it. Learning how you react to fear and how to make clear decisions in that adrenalized space is really the key to self-defense. [ed: [www.impactboston.com](http://www.impactboston.com)]

*CP: Rachel Kramer Bussel talks in her essay "Beyond Yes or No: consent as Sexual Process" about "sexualizing consent." What is she getting at here?*

JF: Well I don't know if folks in your generation know what happened maybe ten years ago with what was called the Antioch code. [ed: I told her we wouldn't. I now regret that. Google it as you read on.] Well there's a common cultural belief that getting explicit consent – the kind that's required for enthusiastic consent – is unsexy. Or that talking about sex at all is unsexy. Which is really laughable! But it's pretty pervasive. The idea is that it would sound if you did it, something like this: [ed: in a deep, choppy, robotic tone:] "May I / have permission to / touch / your / right / breast / on the side / now?" We have this really schizoid relationship with sex as a culture where everyone should be trying to get it and doing it, sort of like girls-gone-wild, pornification-of-America side of things. On the other hand, you're not ever supposed to talk about it like an adult. You're just supposed to instantly know what to do it, psychically. There's this romantic idea of the guy who's the perfect lover, who just instinctively always knows what

his lover wants, and every woman wants to be with that perfect guy. The assumption is that we're not supposed to talk about or negotiate consent with our partners. One of the things its going to take to overcome that culture is helping people realize that negotiating consent can be very sexy. It can be hot. You can say things like, "I am dying to kiss your neck, can I please." You know, you can make a game of it. Rachel in her essay actually talks about a questionnaire that BDSM [ed: Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadomasochism] folks use that can be adapted for any couple or set of partners, where you can literally fill out a questionnaire about what sorts of things are you into, what sorts of things would you never be into, what sorts of things are you maybe going to be into, etc. That's a great way to spur a conversation with a sexual partner about where you overlap, whether you want to push each other a little, talk about boundaries. That conversation sounds sexy as all hell to me. And the fact that it doesn't to a lot of people is a symptom of how diseased our culture is about sex.

*CP: How can women know when a partner will be safe in bed? What kinds of clues do you suggest that we think about as we're flirting with a potential partner?*

JF: Well I would suggest that we not think of consent as one moment, in that we look in our partners for someone who's listening to us. And that can be, if we say at the bar – and I'm using a total cliché – if I say I don't want another drink and somebody goes ahead and buys me another drink. That's a clue to me that they're not listening to me, and they have their own agenda and their own script that they're going to follow regardless of what I want. I am a big fan of setting small boundaries early, to see how somebody responds. For example, "I don't want another drink." Or, "Could you wait here a second? I want to go talk to my friend." Or, "Hey, you're standing a little too close, could you just step back?" If someone responds badly to those boundaries, it tells you a ton of information. You can get as close as you want later. Just because you want a particular distance in one moment doesn't mean that's the distance you have to maintain.

The first step is getting in touch with what we want. And that can be really hard in this culture because we're told two things sort of simultaneously, with no space in between them. We're told either: "Be a good girl, save it until marriage, be pure as the driven snow; also be white, able-bodied, skinny, and conventionally pretty." And then on the other hand we've got the girls-gone-wild, Pussycat Dolls, women-are-empowered-by-being-aggressively-sex-objects-for-men side. And you're not allowed to stand in between those two points. So if you've stepped away from that virgin model, or if you never fit what we thought it should be in the first place – for example, if you're a woman of color you're not invited to that virgin model because you were always assumed to be oversexed anyway – in either of those positions, you're already the ho. And you get whatever's coming to you. So you might as well lay back and enjoy it. You might as well be the freakiest freak who ever freaked, so that you can win the ho competition.

Between these two poles there's no room for women to know what they actually want in any given moment. So



maybe you had sex with someone previously. Maybe you had freaky freaky sex with them. Maybe you don't want it right now. Maybe you might want it in three hours from now but maybe now you want to go talk to your friend. Maybe you don't know if you want it with them right now. We get to make those decisions at all times, but the culture is not down with that. And so the first thing and the hardest thing to do to know if your partner is going to be safe in bed, is to know what you want. And that's an ongoing process. And self-defense training, if I can come back to that, actually helps with that. Because you need to explore what your boundaries are to know when and how to defend them. So working with the assumption that you know at any given moment what you want, the best way to know if a partner is safe is whether they're listening. And again, pay attention to the small stuff. "Big deal, he bought me that extra drink. I was kind of on the fence about having that extra drink anyway." The point is they didn't listen to you, not whether or not you care about the outcome of that particular moment. And that said, you really can't ever know a hundred percent if somebody new is safe. Listen to your gut, even if you don't have any evidence. We're taught as women to sort of override our emotional instincts because we're always told that women are emotional and irrational. But those feelings and instincts can be very self-protective.

*CP: What advice do you have for men as they decide whether or not to have sex with a woman?*

JF: My advice to men, especially men who are thinking about what it's okay to "get away with" and what it isn't, or where that line is between raping and not raping, to these men, I would say: Are you really so hard up or believe you are so hard up that you can't find someone who would be psyched about sleeping with you? I want to say, find someone who is unequivocally psyched about sleeping with you, or don't have sex. I really feel like it is that simple, and if you are unclear if someone is psyched about sleeping with you, you can ask questions. You can ask sexy questions. And you should listen to the answers. And honestly, this is the advice I'd give to anybody of any gender. It's just most necessary in certain quarters.

*CP: Onto a technicality question, how do we move beyond the heteronormative framework that contains so much conversation about rape and consent?*

JF: You know that's hard. I've been talking about these things for a really long time and I still struggle with that because I think there are two truths that compete a little bit that need to be conveyed. One is that the vast majority of rapists are men. This is not a gender-free situation. And I think that treating it as one in order to be inclusive is sort of false. When you look statistically at rape as a whole, it is a gendered act that men perpetrate. I am not saying that all men are rapists because we know that the vast majority of men are not rapists. But the vast majority of rapists are men. As far we know, about 95%. And the majority of victims are women, although the percentages aren't as stark as they are for the perpetrators. So that bears discussing. But at the same time, I'm a queer person, I've had queer relationships,

I have a ton of friends who are in queer relationships, and I don't want to make invisible the fact that men rape men, women rape women, and women rape men. That's the other truth. I mean rape is an act, and can be perpetrated by anyone, against anyone, regardless of "equipment," shall we say. Which is, as an aside, why the whole castration-as-punishment thing drives me nuts. That does not prevent someone from raping someone with a broom handle. Like without the penis you can't rape! Isn't that nice? Anyway, we need to be able to have complex conversations about it so we can expose both of these truths. I think that we need to have more than just sound bytes.

*CP: What can you tell us about understanding rape in specifically queer contexts?*

JF: There's obviously so much to say, but for one, Toni Amato has a really beautiful essay in *Yes Means Yes* called "Shame is the First Betrayer." What Tony argues is that when we as queer people are taught that what we want sexually is shameful and horrible and gross, then how can we ever know if we're being abused? Because we already feel wrong about what we're doing because the culture's already taught us to hate our own sexuality. So it makes it so much less clear whether someone is being abusive to us while we're expressing that sexuality because we already feel awful. So it makes queer people sort of doubly vulnerable in those sorts of relationships, and it can make things very confusing.

*CP: What are the dangers of using the words "rape" and "rapist" as descriptive terms too loosely to describe sexual violations of all degrees?*

JF: I think it depends on what you're trying to say. I think that, as far as I'm concerned, there's a gap between my moral standard of rape and the legal standard of rape. I say that when I was in college I was sexually assaulted because what happened to me did not meet the legal standard of rape. And I'm speaking on the record a lot of times. And I believe that morally it was rape. And that furthermore, it only ended because somebody walked in and stopped it. And it probably would have become the legal standard of rape had that not happened. I'm not a fan of splitting hairs. I leave that question up to the victim in terms of having her describe her own experience. I'm not a big fan of the hierarchy of pain. That, "Oh well, I wasn't penetrated so I obviously had it less bad than you." Or, "There was only one person involved in my rape, so..." The ranking of pain is fairly useless because people experience things differently. So I like to leave that question up to the victim. In terms of a society looking in or looking at an example from a distance, my threshold more and more is about enthusiastic consent. Did you proceed without ensuring enthusiastic consent? Is it clear to me from the outside that probably you didn't have enthusiastic consent and that's why you didn't try to acquire it? You are probably a rapist as far as I'm concerned. I know that's not a legal standard. It's a moral standard. I don't think that will become a legal standard for along time. It has to become a cultural standard first before we even think about codifying it, and we're so far from it being a cultural standard.

I also think that men have to get over themselves when they hear conversations about rape. Men who are on my side recognize that I am not talking about them. And men who get really defensive when the word rape or rapist is used, especially when it is not used or directed at them, and then go to great pains to explain that it does not apply to them when no one asked them and no one tried to apply it to them – that’s telling me a lot about them. That makes me, well, not want to sleep with them.

*CP: What are the dangers in using the word “victim” over “survivor”?*

JF: I want to debunk the word victim. There’s this whole culture of shame around rape victims. And a lot of rapists put that shame on the victims and teach them to feel shame. But the truth is that there’s nothing to be ashamed of. The only person who should be ashamed is the rapist. I did nothing wrong. And I think it’s very powerful to say that. I wish more rape victims/rape survivors – depending on how they want to identify themselves – could know that about themselves. The victims of rape have done nothing to be ashamed of, just like the victim of a mugging should have nothing to be ashamed of. You don’t hear about someone feeling ashamed to have been kidnapped. And you hear the word victim. You don’t hear that we should be calling them kidnapping survivors to help them know that it’s okay and that we’re not weakening them. I think that we need to get real about it. I think that a lot of rape victims are survivors in that they have figured out how to survive and transcend what happened to them. And I probably claim the word survivor. But I don’t think it negates the word victim. Both are true.

*CP: Is rape more about power or desire? Is rape even about sex?*

JF: There’s a truism in the anti-violence movement, which is that “rape is not about sex.” What is meant by that is something I totally agree with, which is that rape is not someone who desires you so much they can no longer control themselves. It’s not that romantic idea of the sexually incontinent man that is just driven to desire and Must Ravish You Now. That is not what rape is about. But rape is absolutely related to sex. And that’s part of what we’re trying to do in Yes Means Yes: point out the ways in which rape and sex are intertwined. The ways our sexual culture functions has a lot to do with allowing rape to function, or even encouraging rape to function. So rape is about sex in exactly the same way that if you kidnap someone and force them to play music, kidnapping is about music. Rape is about our diseased sexual culture. Rape is an expression of the commodity model of sex. Rape is an expression of the patriarchy. Rape is about controlling women’s sexuality, teaching women to stay in their place, and a cultural fear of women’s power.

*CP: Talk about that – how is rape so interconnected with patriarchy?*

JF: This is tricky because most rapists probably are not thinking, “I will rape to keep women in their place.” Although some rapes happen as a way of an individual man thinking he wants to keep an individual woman in her place. But I think there’s a misconception that patriarchy is run by a committee of men in a smoky room somewhere. Probably here at Harvard. Really I mean if patriarchy is going to be run somewhere wouldn’t it be run here at Harvard? [ed: you mean it’s not?!] That idea is that the Patriarchy Committee, or the Council of the Patriarchy, decides, “This is what we will do to keep the woman down.” Actually, patriarchy is a system, and many, if not most, of its participants are unaware that they are participating in it. It’s a structure that we are operating in in the way in that there are a lot of things that are happening in this room right now that I’m unaware of. For example, where are the pipes? Why was it built in this way? We’re in this room, but mostly I’m focused on talking to you, not about why and how this room is constructed the way it is. If this room were constructed differently, [ed: or weren’t the garbage room in the basement of a dank freshman dorm. Thanks for sparing me the embarrassment, Jaclyn.] we might be having a different conversation. I might be more or less comfortable, and more relaxed, or less relaxed, and therefore saying different things in a different way. The way something is constructed creates certain possibilities that would be different if it were structured in a different way. So patriarchy is one way the culture is structured, which means that men have more power than women, structurally.

*CP: So how does rape become a tool for this system?*

JF: Rape as a tool of the patriarchy is an expression of the values of the patriarchy, which are that men ought to have dominance over women, women ought not to have free equal humanity to men, and the continuing prevalence of rape helps to continue that dynamic. It traumatizes women, keeps our energy focused on worrying about whether or not we’re safe, on healing from violence, on trying to change things instead of freely live our lives the way men do. There’s a point in my essay actually about how rape is not a risk inherent in partying behavior or hook-up behavior for half the population. If a straight guy’s getting ready to go out for the night, he might be worried about getting in a fight, or getting rejected by a sexual prospect, or throwing up if he drinks too much, but he’s probably not worried about being raped. And that worry – that self-policing, to get back to the beginning of the conversation – all of the stuff that women have to deal with around rape, both in terms of trying to prevent it and in terms of trying to heal from it – that keeps us from doing other things with our energies that men don’t have to be limited by. They just go on earning a dollar for our every seventy cents, and basically running the world. It’s the prevalence of rape – and again I’m not talking about an individual rapist going out with this purpose – but the prevalence of rape and the way the culture allows and encourages rape to function that keeps women afraid. It keeps women understanding that men are sexually dominant even when that’s not necessarily true. It keeps women from the pleasure of their own bodies. It keeps women from being fully able to experience their own humanity. And it conveys very clearly the message that if a woman expresses or enjoys her own sexuality without concern with how the culture feels



about that, there's a huge price to pay. That's the way rape functions. Again, I think it's important to separate that from the intentions of any individual rapist, who may be just a cog in the wheel of the patriarchy. A cog in the wheel of that commodity system, who has been trained to say, "I must get The Sex. There is The Sex. I will get it." Now I don't think that lets them off the hook. I don't think this cultural argument says that men are just victims of the system the way women are, because we have to return to the fact that most men don't rape. The vast majority of men manage to get raised by this fucked up culture, and not be rapists. So I don't think the cultural argument lets individual rapists off the hook, but it gives them a context.

*CP: A lot of women take part in victim-blaming just as often as men. While many of these women have never been coerced into sex, many have, yet remain comfortable with their sexual customs. The fact that so many women have an "aha" moment where they recognize past experience as rape later in life is proof enough that a lot of people don't understand the unhealthy dynamics they're engaging in. What can we do, as activists, to teach about the dangers of a rape culture without infringing upon other females' sexual self-determination and looking with disdain upon her sexual culture, on both a big picture level and an interpersonal level?*

JF: That is a really important question. I think that if women stop blaming and judging other women, that would be a huge step forward. That if we women stop staying, "She's such a slut, she's a ho," if women stop judging what women look like, what they're wearing, that whole mean girls culture, that would be super helpful. And again, we could spend all that energy fighting rape for example, instead of fighting each other. But more than that, we do sometimes consider ourselves more enlightened than other women, and think, "God I wish she could see what a victim she's being." And the truth is that you can't tell someone they're being a victim. What you can do is help them see that there are other ways to be, and they can choose that. If you think someone is being abused or taken advantage of, and its someone you care about, what you can do is ask them how they feel about what's happening. And then actually listen to them. If we see a friend and we think they're being treated badly by a partner, the inclination is to intervene and say, "I know what's right for you, and here I'm going to tell it to you." And then we get really frustrated when they don't listen to us. Well here's the thing: if they're being controlled by their partner and then we come in and tell them what to do, we're actually not behaving that differently from their partner. We're not showing them that there's a different way to be. I think it's always legit when it's a friend – not someone that you just see from a distance and want to tell them their business, because that's none of your business – but when it's a friend, that you have an actual relationship with, it's always okay to say: "Hey, here are some things that I'm seeing in your life and that are concerning me, how do you feel about these things?" And your friend may say things that don't feel okay. And that's a hard place to be in. But there's not a lot you can do about it except to say, "Well okay, I hope you're right. I love you regardless, whatever you do. I'm going to trust you, and if you change your mind,

know that I'm always here to talk to." The biggest gift you can give another person, especially a woman who is in an abusive situation, is the gift of trusting her to deal with her own situation. To give her whatever resources you have, give her a sense of what it looks like from the outside, and then be her friend regardless of what she decides. And that's hard. That's really hard. That's harder than saying, "But don't you see?!?" Mostly that's going to alienate your friend.

*CP: And how does abstinence fit into this whole equation?*

JF: I think the most positive thing we're fighting for is the freedom to discover what it is you want sexually. And that means in general as well as on a given day. It does not have to be a static thing. I think that if you want the experience, experience can be fun. If you don't want the experience, then don't have experience. I think that honestly it shouldn't be anybody's business except for yours and your sexual partner's if you have any. What we're fighting for is the right to make actual free decisions, that are free of shame, censure, pressure, threat of violence – decisions that are legitimately free. And if what you want to do with that is not have sex, I am happy for you. It means you're doing what you want with your body. And that's what I want.

Can I say something else about the abstinence thing?

*CP: By all means!*

JF: I think that the creepiest part of the abstinence movement is the way that it basically says to women that their value is totally tethered to their sexuality. The abstinence movement is guilty more than almost any other force in the culture of sexualizing women at younger and younger ages. They say to eight year old girls, come to this Purity Ball, let's talk about your virginity! When you're eight years old you barely know you're a girl! You're not doing anything with your vagina except maybe fiddling with it from time to time because it feels interesting. You don't have any actual concept of your sexuality. And it's the abstinence folks who are putting a sexuality on that eight-year-old girl, who are telling that young girl, "Your value is in whether or not you have sex with men. And when and how and under what circumstances and whether or not you allow men to control you. Your value is defined by men, and your value is about your sexuality." I mean if you want to talk about sexualizing young girls, I don't think there are worse criminals out there than the abstinence movement.

*CP: So how should we be coming into our sexuality?*

JF: With freedom of our own curiosity, and freedom from threat of violence. With free access to information. And lack of shame.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.centerfornewwords.org/>

# CON-SENSUAL

TASH SHATZ



I'm a too shy shy  
I'm a gentle person  
I'm just a big softie  
not gonna try and pretend  
but I'll tell you babe  
once you're in my bed  
oh I'll tell you babe  
once you're in my arms  
I'm not so shy anymore  
so don't be alarmed  
'cause I think of this connection  
as one to be respected, see  
the way I look at it  
consent is fucking sexy  
and what I want to do to you  
you better want done by me  
there's no other way to roll  
and no better way to please

consensual  
it's just required in my mind  
just essential  
that we both make time  
to make sure the other feels great  
about what's going down  
make no mistake  
I've been around  
and come to find  
that harmony  
is the finest way to have the finest time

so let me know  
where to go



how to do what you need  
help me navigate  
your seven seas  
'cause if you ain't getting off  
then I ain't getting it on  
when you say the word  
that's when I'll start going strong  
writhing and bitin  
giving and taking  
I feel the whole world  
movin and a shakin  
'cause when we're in sync  
it's all good vibrations  
so beautiful when we've got  
mutual relations  
I can't help but be fascinated  
about the consistency  
and the calibration  
between you and me  
'cause when we connect  
all that's coming through  
is a shared "yes"

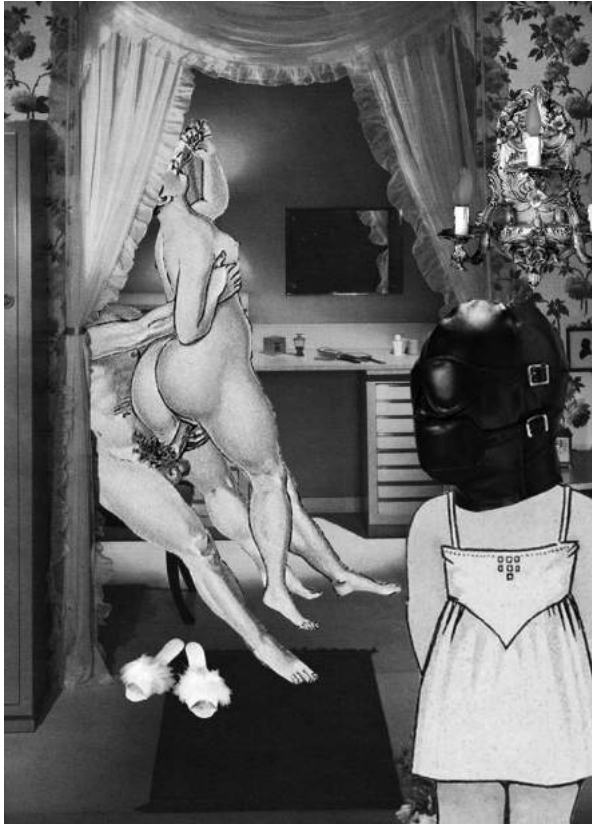
and I want you more  
when you want me more  
want you as I treat you with respect  
every facet of your being is one to adore  
want you as I treat this sex with value  
be safe for the good of us both  
whether we're fuckin, making love  
or anything in between  
we gotta assess the instruments  
before we play this symphony  
always be certain that  
the situation's clean  
(if you know what I mean)  
making sure we're both in tune  
is top priority

every touch is consensual  
'cause when we both know  
it's just more sensual  
can't forget the key part of the word  
so I use consent or forget it  
it's better that way  
and if someone don't get it  
then it's not their place  
see yes means yes  
anything less means no  
so if your partner's not saying yes  
you got somewhere else to go  
when a person's getting laid  
gotta make sure your partner  
reciprocates  
'cause if it ain't happening for both  
it ain't happening, babe

# THE CLOTHES UNMAKE THE MAN

## PLEASURE AND ANXIETY IN MALE SEXY DRESSING

UMMNI KHAN



Collage by Rebecca Lieberman, 2008

### SEXY UNDRESSER

I had just done my first deep sea dive. At that depth, the colours are muted and grey, nothing like the spectacular rainbow sea life you see at 20 feet below the water's surface. But hell, anyone can go 20 feet deep. You don't even have to be certified, as long as you're with a dive master. You have to be advanced (or getting trained to be advanced, as in my case) to go as deep as I had gone, one hundred and fifteen feet to be exact. A glimpse into a world that your body was not built to see.

Scuba equipment gags your mouth, leaving you speechless during a dive, and for some reason this makes it hard for me to describe it afterwards. I'll just say that we saw a school of barracuda fish suspended in the water, sleeping, eyes open. Oh man. At that depth, you actually get a little high, an effect of nitrogen narcosis.<sup>3</sup> It's one of the reasons you can't stay down there very long. When we surfaced and clambered onto the boat, I was wiped. Scuba tanks feel like nothing in the water, but they can be oppressively heavy when you are in the open air. When we got back to the



dive centre I was cold, wet and triumphant. My sister and I were the only women who had risked going that deep on that day. I was dressed in a full body wet suit that clung to my skin from neck to ankles. Although we were in Cyprus, hot Mediterranean conflicted site where I was born – but that’s another story – when you penetrate the ocean that deep, it gets inhumanly cold. My fingers felt wobbly, clumsy as I tried to unzip myself and take the wet suit off. You do this outside, in public, where you can then dunk the suit in fresh water. Clean it off for the next dive. I looked around, surrounded mostly by men. There was my sister, of course. Three years older than me, but we look so much alike (I’ve been told) that people who know one of us often do a double take when they meet the other sister. I said out loud, “Won’t someone help me take this stupid thing off?” Three guys descended upon me in a flash and each grabbed a different part of my suit. I was out of that thing in no time, wearing a bikini (not skimpy, but still, a bikini) underneath.

That was so. Much. Fun. The undressing I mean. And the bikini stunt. And my sister watching. Disapproving. Disgusted. Or so I liked to imagine.

I read Duncan Kennedy’s essay “Sexual Abuse, Sexy Dressing, and the Eroticization of Domination” and thought about that incident.<sup>4</sup> That moment of sexy embodiment. Not just the bikini – sexier than the context of deep sea diving calls for – but the performance of helplessness: I’m too tired to even take this wet suit off. If you like male attention, dressing sexily can do the trick, sure. But it helps if you can work it.

In his essay, Kennedy considers this feminine ability to work it – work what? dress codes and sexuality – in the context of our socio-legal regime that officially condemns sexual abuse against women, but tolerates a wide variety of abuse in practice. In a transdisciplinary vein, he combines cultural studies with legal analysis, and in a transpolitical gesture, he unites radical feminist insight with a law and economics distributive approach. He understands that the patriarchal regime in which we live allocates privileges to each man, regardless of whether that particular man is abusive or not. Women ultimately have less bargaining power when they tacitly negotiate the minutia of daily hetero-interactions because they live with the threat of sexual violence breathing down their neck. If you think your boyfriend is selfish, at least he doesn’t rape you, like the next guy might... With this backdrop in mind, Kennedy argues that female sexy dressing can become a field upon which the meaning of sex, gender, power, oppression, agency and pleasure are contested by men, women, conservatives, liberals, feminist radicals and postmodernists.

What is the upshot? Kennedy unapologetically prioritizes his erotic interest as a “white heterosexual middle-class male” to foreground and justify his investment in having women transgress the social norms of dress – pointedly not towards more androgynous clothing, as some feminist men have advocated, but towards more revealing attire. He argues that while he might lose some bargaining power if our socio-legal institutions did more to condemn and criminalize sexual abuse, he would gain in aesthetic and voyeuristic pleasure: more women would dress sexily if they felt safe to do so. And that would turn him on. But not just that. Kennedy insists that the master’s tools – including the eroticization of male dominance/power and female submission/vulnerability – could be used to dismantle the patriarch’s house. In this

way, Kennedy aligns himself with a postmodern agenda, where sexual subjects are neither completely constructed nor completely free in their identities and desires. While patriarchal coercion is harsh, its force can be used against it, the way a strong person’s punch can be manipulated by the intended victim to throw the aggressor off balance. Kennedy sees the imposition of patriarchal scripts as holding this weakness. Sexy dressing has the potential to throw patriarchy off balance.

According to Janet Halley, and to Kennedy himself, many (especially feminists) were and are scandalized by the stance taken in his essay.<sup>5</sup> Personally, I liked it. Part of why I liked it was because of how I imagined him. I read the essay last year, when I was finishing up my dissertation at the University of Toronto on the topic of sadomasochism in law and culture. I had read some Duncan Kennedy stuff before in law school. I knew he was a big wig; a key figure in critical legal studies; powerful and influential; a star at Harvard law school. I imagined him in a particular way, that weird fantasy you have about the professor, someone who makes you rethink everything, someone who makes you feel naively stupid and naively full of insight at the same time.<sup>6</sup>

His article validated something important to me: the notion of female agency in self-objectification – and this coming not from a power-femme, not from an appreciative butch or a supportive transguy, but from a heterosexual non-trans man. It is audacious. It is, paradoxically, downright exhibitionist. Kennedy is exhibiting his voyeuristic tendencies. Like a woman flaunting her cleavage at a board meeting, Kennedy’s blatant sexualisation of the legal journal article was transgressive and inappropriate. Those of us with a penchant for sexy dressing – like bikinis under scuba gear – feel awfully affirmed by this.

But, like Kennedy, I also have a voyeuristic side. A serious voyeuristic side. And what I want to do in the rest of this paper is take up a thread in his essay regarding the possibility of a reversal in the trajectory of the gaze. Kennedy suggests that instead of throwing out the voyeurism/exhibitionism dynamic whole hog, we should “...restor[e] symmetry by men dressing sexily for women and women watching, and vice versa, rather than restoring symmetry by rooting out male voyeurism and female exhibitionism (so that no one is performing and no one watching).”<sup>7</sup> In this vein, what follows is an exploration of male/masculine exhibitionism and female/feminine voyeurism in our cultural imaginary.

I begin by considering some archetypal and pop cultural narratives of men’s relationship to dress and appearance. In these stories, male cognizance and consciousness of appearance comes to be identified with the folly, vanity and superficiality of the woman, dandy and gay man. In tension with these morality tales, I consider the new male category, “the metrosexual”, as a kind of chimera that seems to be made up of female, dandy and gay male elements. I first analyze the pejorative account of the metrosexual in two articles by Mark Simpson, the columnist who apparently coined the term. I then turn to men’s style books that use a variety of strategies to defend a man’s right to male exhibitionism/self-objectification. Throughout, I draw on insights from cultural and academic texts, as well as conversations I’ve had with a number of people, including a discussion with Kennedy in January of 2009, which I recorded and transcribed.

My project is in progress and thoroughly eclectic. This article – my first stab at putting my ideas down on paper

– focuses primarily on the (ostensibly) heterosexual male relationship to dress and its navigation around its other(s): woman, dandy, gay man. My larger project remains heterogendered, but not exclusively heterosexual. In future instalments, I will include butch subjectivity not just because I take heed of Judith Halberstam's warning not to collapse masculinity with maleness,<sup>8</sup> but also because I cultivated my female/femme gaze through a romantic relationship with a very well-dressed working-class butch. In other words, like Kennedy, I am writing from my own standpoint as a player in the exhibitionism/voyeurism cultural dynamic. This isn't to deny that I reap erotic pleasure from gazing on sexy femmes (I do!) or femmey guys (I do!). But, I want to focus on masculinity as a response to Kennedy, and because I see masculinity as a kind of neurosis haunted by the fear of not being man enough. I hope to diagnose the symptoms of this condition that manifest as delicious and dangerous performances, often through the medium of dress.

### ADAM

To begin to explore male apprehension towards the significance of dress, consider creationism's origin myth of the first outfit ever worn. According to the New International Version of the Bible, the story goes that Eve and Adam began naked and shameless.<sup>10</sup> But Eve, tempted by new tastes and new knowledge, succumbs to the pitch of the serpent – a wily advertising man if ever there was one. Adam follows her lead. As promised: "the eyes of both of them were open", i.e. they became aware of themselves as aesthetic objects. We soon learn that they fashioned garments to hide their suddenly-noticed nudity. But another way to read this story is that they put on clothing to draw attention to their nakedness through a strategy of blatant concealment. The fig leaf announced that there was something to hide. According to Milton's version in *Paradise Lost*, after they indulged in the forbidden fruit, they indulged in lustful sexuality.<sup>11</sup> Dress, then, from the beginning, is associated with sin, sexuality, body-shame, and feminine fallibility.



### THE EMPEROR

Like Adam before the Fall, the emperor is unaware of his nakedness as he strolls through the crowd. This time, it takes a child to break the unstated pact of silence and scream what everyone knows but has disavowed: the man is butt-naked. Because the emperor succumbed to flattery and frippery, he ends up exposing himself to public humiliation. Here, fancy dress is associated with self-deluding aristocratic vanity.

### VANITY SMURF AND NARCISSUS

Of all the Smurfs in Smurf Village, Vanity Smurf – a guy – is

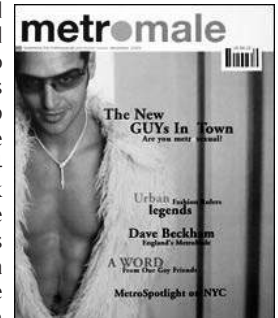
the only one who seems preoccupied with his appearance.



Donning a flower in his cap and never without a hand mirror, his self-love evokes the figure of Narcissus. This ancient myth tells of a vain and heartless youth who scorned all of his suitors, both men and women, until he finally met his match: himself. Gazing at his reflection in the water, Narcissus comes to be homo-smitten by his own staggering beauty.<sup>15</sup> Like Vanity Smurf, Narcissus can't tear himself away from his mirror-image, even when he realizes that it is himself for whom he yearns. He finally dies of grief – the original tragic gay love story – his body taken to Hades and in its place a flower; perhaps the one that Vanity Smurf has adopted for his signature look.

### THE METROSEXUAL

Although many understand Vanity Smurf to be a gay figure,<sup>17</sup> in the show, he is presented as heterosexual; at least he does seem attracted to Smurfette, that is, when he can tear his eyes away from his own reflection. In this way, he might better be understood as a metrosexual icon. And indeed, the first reference to "metrosexual" in print evokes Vanity Smurf's favourite prop in its title: "Here Come The Mirror Men" published in 1994 in the *Independent* by Mark Simpson.<sup>18</sup> And, as with the normative message in the Smurfs television show, the notion of a man focussed on his appearance is meant to draw contempt from its audience.



Simpson portrays the metrosexual as the latest darling of consumer capitalism. While he is usually constructed as heterosexual, Simpson suggests that: "the metrosexual man contradicts the basic premise of traditional heterosexuality – that only women are looked at and only men do the looking."<sup>19</sup> While this might seem like a promising strategy to undo the heteronormative strictures around the gaze, Simpson concludes this observation with the insulting remark: "Metrosexual man might prefer women, he might prefer men, but when all's said and done nothing comes between him and his reflection."<sup>20</sup> Narcissism, apparently, is the defining feature of the metrosexual. And to feed this self-adoration, the metrosexual man must shop.

In Simpson's view, this narcissism and consumerism become the two tragic flaws that neutralize any heroic



disruption to gender or sexual identity. The metrosexual's deep love of himself and the finest designer clothes render him a pawn of the beauty industry and a public joke to on-lookers, much like the proverbial Emperor with no clothes. In a follow up article from 2002, Simpson concludes his portrait of the metrosexual with a definitive blow: "The final irony of male metrosexuality is that, given all its obsession with attractiveness, vanity for vanity's sake turns out to be not very sexy after all."<sup>21</sup>

There is an aspect of Simpson's critique that I find hard to figure out. Although he makes astute remarks about the anxieties that plague metrosexual discourses – as his tagline to the 2002 article begins: "He's well dressed, narcissistic and obsessed with butts. But don't call him gay." – Simpson seems to want to taunt the metrosexual man with the spectre of three feminized and imbricated identities: the gay man, the woman and the dandy. First, Simpson allocates equal disgust towards the gay forbearers of metrosexuality, crediting "...the 'gay lifestyle' – the single man living in the metropolis and taking himself as his own love-object"<sup>22</sup> as the prototype of metrosexuality. Next, while he shies away from directly condemning the original victims of vanity and shopaholicism (ie., women), his articles rely on a misogynistic degradation of feminine beauty props such as cosmetics and designer clothes. The metrosexual, like Adam, has foolishly followed woman's lead to the disrepute of both sexes. And finally, while Simpson admits that working class boys are prone to clothes-fetishism, metrosexuality is associated with the decadence of wealthier classes. His condemnation of metrosexuality as "a trifle distasteful, not to say occasionally downright nauseating" piggy backs on an aversion towards the stereotypical behaviour and image of gays, women and upper-class men. And what's interesting is that Simpson's final condemnation is that it is not sexy to him. Vanity should apparently be instrumental.

### SELF-HELP

As Simpson relates, male "vanity" is out of the closet but is anxious about its claim to masculinity. With a tad more affection, I want to elaborate on Simpson's critique of metrosexuality by considering a new genre of self-help book: the style guide for men. I will differ from Simpson, who accuses the metrosexual man of having an intrinsic approach to male beauty, i.e. vanity for its own sake. Rather, I read these guides as complex attempts to negotiate an appreciation for male aesthetics with a compulsion towards gender performance.

The four books I consider form a part of the new millennium of metrosexuality: *Dressing in the Dark: Lessons in Men's Style from the Movies*<sup>23</sup>, *Off the Cuff: The Essential Guide For Men And The Women Who Love Them*<sup>24</sup>, *Men's Style: The Thinking Man's Guide To Dress*<sup>25</sup> and *The Handbook of Style: A Man's Guide To Looking Good*<sup>26</sup>. Each book offers a taxonomy of sartorial items, from the T-shirt to the tux, while providing advice on self-grooming techniques, from the removal of body hair to picking the perfect scent. My focus, however, is not on the style suggestions per se, but rather on two narrative strategies used to reassure the male reader that his masculinity has not been compromised by his interest in self-presentation. The first strategy is direct, through explicit rationalization of the instrumentality of dressing well. The second strategy is indirect, through an

invocation of Hollywood figures as manly men whom the reader can emulate.

Each book begins by rebutting the imagined accusation that a man interested in improving his look must be lacking in masculine credibility. On the first page of *Dressing in the Dark*, Maneker acknowledges cultural prejudice towards well-dressed men; they are "branded with an almost contemptuous word: 'dandy.'" It's as if caring about clothes makes a man other than a man.<sup>27</sup> In *Off The Cuff*, Kressley – fashion consultant on the hit television show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* – acknowledges that "A lot of straight men have been afraid to care too much about how they look, for fear that they'd be perceived as being gay."<sup>28</sup> Smith begins his guide by analyzing all the objections to a man putting effort into his appearance: such a man must be either gay, effeminate, a dandy, or all three. His rebuttal is particularly comprehensive, as he tackles the discourse from multiple positions, from the left-wing to the right-wing and from men to women. *Esquire's Handbook of Style* seems the least anxious about its project. Instead of beginning with an invocation of a feminized subject and then repudiating the association, it addresses the reader as a real man: "We hate to be told what to do. It's part of being a man."<sup>29</sup> The introduction proceeds to assure the reader that this book is not a set of rules, but a set of recommendations.

In response to the anticipated defensiveness of the male reader, each book offers instrumental reasons why a man should care about his style. In other words, there is an attempt to refute the notion that stylish men are indulging in vanity for vanity's sake (presumably the way gay men, women and dandies do). In *Dressing in the Dark*, proper male presentation is analogized to proper car maintenance: "clothes and cars aren't as far apart as one might think: both are utilitarian aspects of men's lives that are ultimately judged as means of self-expression."<sup>30</sup> Kressley analogizes male appearance with hygiene and health: "There's nothing wrong with caring about how you look and dress. It's not at all superficial. To me, that's like saying it's superficial to care about having clean underwear. Or taking care of your teeth. Or going to the doctor."<sup>31</sup> Smith is a bit more sardonic when reassuring his reader: "If you must feel altruistic about everything you do, think of your appearance as a gift to others... You are not a superficial man, you are making the world a more beautiful place. This is what art is about, and it is a serious thing to do. It will be, like art, at once pleasurable and intellectual."<sup>32</sup> *Esquire's Handbook* puts dressing in relational terms: "We share a belief that even a modicum of effort – in dressing, in interpersonal interaction, in being a good friend or colleague or lover – pays huge dividends."<sup>33</sup> What these dividends entail is not elaborated upon, but presumably it helps a man get ahead (whatever that means) in his personal and professional life.

These instrumental justifications attempt not just to refute the association with gay men, women or dandies, but also to counter the possibility of male objectification. Apparently, all of these style writers are aware of the distaste that some feel towards metrosexuality and male "narcissism". So they insist that dressing well will do something, it will be active; it won't just sit there and look pretty. Although Smith's comparison of a nicely dressed man to art strays dangerously close to self-objectification, this is attenuated by separating the man as artist – "serious" and "intellectual" – from the male body as canvas.

Less emphasized, but still present, is a concern for being attractive to women. For example, according to Smith, “large numbers of single women judge prospective male partners rapidly and solely by looking at their feet.”<sup>34</sup> Maneker warns that “When men come into contact with rivals and strangers – especially when the attention of women is at stake – they need to take extra care with the first impressions that they make. In other words, their clothes become exceptionally important.”<sup>35</sup> Kressley specifically acknowledges the heterosexual female interest in male appearance in his subtitle: “...for men and the women who love them.” This not only establishes that his guide is intended for heterosexuals, but also implies that men should consider the female gaze. These books then, seem to forward Kennedy’s agenda, at least a bit: a reversal in the gaze so that men exhibit and women look for the mutual pleasure of both. But what kinds of clothing will specifically attract a heterosexual woman?

### KENNEDY, MY SISTER AND COCKTAIL PARTIES

Let’s go back for a second. In terms of female sexy dress, Kennedy cites a practitioner who offers this pithy definition: “If you can’t see up it, down it or through it, I don’t want to wear it.”<sup>36</sup> Kennedy further nuances the semantics of female sexy dress by defining it in relative terms. It is sexy when a woman dresses sexier than the norm of the setting. He gives the example that a halter top would read as sexy at an office, but as conservative at a beach. Is there any commensurate criterion to determine male sexy dress?

If there is, it is not found in these style books. These guides do not explicitly offer advice on looking “sexy”. Dressing well, dressing appropriately, dressing stylishly, yes, but sexy? There seems to be a reticence in outright attempts to be sexy. And what would be sexy anyway?

I met my sister the other day. Over bento-box lunches, I presented her with a book I had recently acquired in relation to this research, *People Magazine: 20 Years Of Sexiest Man Alive*.<sup>37</sup> I showed her the front and back covers, which had various pictures of men who had been chosen by *People* magazine over the years to be the sexiest man alive. I asked her who she thought was sexy. On the front cover she scanned the images and chose a few actors. When I asked her how she based her decision, she replied that she liked the characters they played in the movies. On the back cover she picked a few whom she did not recognize. Aha! I thought. These men are being picked purely on looks. But when I asked why these guys, she replied, “They seem nice. They don’t seem like they’re full of themselves.”

In the last six months, at every social occasion I’ve attended which involved the imbibing of wine or cocktails, I ask women and men to define male sexy dressing. Almost invariably, the heterosexual women reply that women don’t think of male dress that way. His clothes should be clean and appropriate. But sexy? What’s sexy, some reply, is power: either in the form of brute strength or in the form of cold cash. Often for the alternative crowd “being really smart” or “doing something really well” is sexy. What’s not sexy? A man who fusses over his appearance. Ouch. No wonder the men’s guides have to begin with a throat-clearing exercise in reassuring the reader of the instrumental value of male style. After a few glasses of chianti, however, I name a couple of stars -- George Clooney or Will Smith for example -- and get

a few nods of the head: “Yeah, he dresses sexy.” But this is usually followed by a reference to a character the actor played. One of the most insightful things I heard was from a female friend who said, in response to Kennedy’s relativity theory of sexy dressing, that a man dresses sexy if he is more casual than the setting calls for, just a bit.<sup>38</sup> It conveys an insouciant confidence that is hard to resist.

When I have a private tête-à-tête with the guys, the two most frequent responses are either shy delight at being able to talk about male dress (and elicit my opinion), or suspicion that I’m making fun of them. The former conversations are a flirtatious way, I think, to reverse the gaze. The latter conversations are about a real resistance, I think, to this reversal.

### HOLLYWOOD

One way the style guides attempt to bypass this seeming distaste for men who make efforts to look sexy is to persuade men to emulate the “style” of Hollywood stars or other famous male icons – where style stands in for sexy. The best example is *Dressing in the Dark*, which takes the study of men’s style in the movies as its entire method of inspiration. As the introduction explains, “the lesson of this book is while watching movies to pay less attention to the acting and more to the way the clothes express character.”<sup>39</sup> This instruction reflects my sister’s gravitation towards actors who played characters she liked, and her inability or refusal to disaggregate character from looks. The *Esquire* handbook similarly uses “style icons” from Hollywood to punctuate its advice. Again, though, it becomes less about how the clothes look, and more about what the clothes convey: “informed, fearless, unapologetic, personal.”<sup>40</sup> That, apparently, is the attitude that you want your clothes to communicate. This need to encode male sexy dress as narrative, as role playing a character with particular personality traits, seems to be in tension with the simplicity of the female sexy dress formula: up it, through it or down it.

In my conversation with Kennedy, I brought up the cliché that women are narratively focussed (that’s why they like Harlequins) and men visual (that’s why they like nudey magazines), and asked how it might impact the conventions of sexy dress for each sex. Kennedy replied: “It seems a problem with the claim of man as visual and woman as narrative is that it’s something that is very hard to interpret, exactly what it means, because everybody is visual and narrative at the same time, and because it really seems to be true that for man the power of sexy dressing is connected to this combination between the visual and narrative. You’ve always got some element of both.”<sup>41</sup> Kennedy’s desire to problematize the simple binary of woman as narrative-driven and man as visual-driven reflects the analysis in his *Sexy Dressing* article, which traces the sexual scenes that are evoked by certain female dress costumes. While Kennedy acknowledges the direct visual pleasure of female dress that you can see up, through or down, he insists that this is tied to synchronic and diachronic narratives. By synchronic narratives, he refers to the ways that sexy dressing evokes a sexier setting than the one the woman currently inhabits. For example, a sheer top at the office might evoke the sexual charge of a nightclub. By diachronic narratives, Kennedy refers to a genealogy of dress that involves a “double movement”, where past narratives as well as other economic classes and subcultures

are paradoxically and simultaneously evoked. For example, an item of lingerie from a Victoria's Secret catalogue can evoke the animality of working class sexuality, the sexual decadence of old aristocracy and/or the seediness of street prostitution as conceived by the heterosexual middle-class white imaginary.

Taking my cue from this multi-vantage perspective, I have been researching and discussing the male undershirt, often referred to as the "wife-beater". The most obvious "synchronic" association would be the informality of underwear. A man in an undershirt in a public space invokes the intimacy of a private space – the bedroom most likely. He is dressing, as my previously cited friend suggested, more casually than the context suggests – and that is sexy. The diachronic associations are varied. The common name, of course, invokes male dominance and violence, particularly working class violence against women. I have not yet been able to pinpoint the origin of the term "wife-beater" as undershirt, but my guess is that it might be related to Marlon Brando's unbelievably sexy wife-beating (not to mention rapist) character, Stanley, in *Streetcar Named Desire*.



I mean, look at him! Look at those rippling biceps, triceps and deltoid muscles. Look at the sweat and the stains. But, STOP. Notice what I just did. I pointed out a direct physical attribute: the sculpted muscles. This seems visual. There is the sheer aesthetic beauty of the male form in its prime. Then I chased this with the blemishes on the undershirt, the sweat and grease stains: these seem textual. He must do hard physical labour to earn a living. Yet the separation of the visibility of muscles and the textuality of grease/sweat misleads. Can we admire beautiful developed muscles without thinking about what those muscles do: protect me from threats, defeat rivals for my hand, pin me down while I protest? And those stains. Can we really think of the stains on an undershirt without being reminded of, as Kennedy insisted in our conversation, the notion of "physical arousal", "fucking" and the "intense sweatiness of sex"? This now feels corporeal and direct. In other words, the visual display of sexy dressing and its narrative allusions are intertwined, inseparable. I want to suggest that it is very hard to have a visual text that is outside of narrative, or a narrative without visual invocations.<sup>43</sup> There is a back and forth to sexy dress that is in constant movement.

If we think about the style guides' use of male actors and characters as both visual artefacts of sexy dress and exemplars of coolness, we see this ambivalence manifest. On the one hand, the men fixate on narrative icons because they know women gravitate towards such performances. She'll see me in this tux and think of me as James Bond: his money, his strength, his power. On the other hand, this might be an example of how men are not solely visual-thinkers, that they

appreciate the narrative attributes and connotations of male objectification. Star-images as role models for style explain the phenomenon of metrosexuality: men can indulge in narrative fantasies of themselves. Look at me in this tux! I'm as stylish and cool as James Bond. This is not the same thing as vanity for vanity's sake. It is more about vanity for fantasy's sake.

## CONCLUSION

In this piece, I have tried to provide a glimpse into the semiotics of masculine dress and its relationship to sexiness and anxiety. Male interest in clothing and appearance is demeaned in a variety of cultural contexts. The notion of male pleasure in its own aesthetic is still taboo. "Metrosexual", for the most part, is a gendered epithet.

And yet the desire for masculine exhibitionism persists. In his famous collection of essays, *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger suggests that male presence is characterized by "the promise of power which he embodies...The promised power may be moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social, sexual –but its object is always exterior to the man."<sup>44</sup> In comparison, female social presence is "intrinsic": it comes from how she embodies and embellishes her physicality. Berger suggests succinctly: "men act and women appear."<sup>45</sup> This truism seems to have been internalized by men's style books as reflected in their reassurance to the male reader that there is instrumental value to paying attention to appearance. This message is further reinforced by harvesting the star-images of famous Hollywood male actors for sartorial guidance. And yet, there is recognition of the female gaze and the need to cater to it. While Berger posits that: "women watch themselves being looked at",<sup>46</sup> I believe the cultural iterations of male dress and style show that men too are watching themselves being looked at.

Like Kennedy, I believe in the power of resignification and of progressive appropriation. But, I also know that there are ideological forces that bind us. Simpson foregrounds the ways we are manipulated by a voracious capitalist machine that creates desires and then, for a price, offers to satisfy them. But is there room to manoeuvre, to turn indoctrination into a moment of self-expression and will? As Judith Butler suggests, gender is always "a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint."<sup>47</sup> This project is an improvised exploration of the heterogendered dynamics encoded in the costumes of sexy male dress. By interrogating the discourses that hinder and enable guys' appreciation of their own aesthetic significance, I seek to put masculine performance in the spotlight.

Why should feminine subjects be the only ones to indulge in the uneasiness and the gratification of being on display? I take pleasure in looking at masculinity qua masculinity. I take pleasure in reversing the gaze: "That shirt you wore today? I like it. So tell me why you wore it."

<sup>1</sup> Inspired by: Duncan Kennedy, "Sexual Abuse, Sexy Dressing, and the Eroticization of Domination" in *Sexy Dressing etc.: Essays on the Power and Politics of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993)

<sup>2</sup> The author would like to thank the numerous people who shared their thoughts and stories about sexy dressing, and



in particular Duncan Kennedy and Brian Smith.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbhGcKQoZb8&feature=related>.

<sup>4</sup> Duncan Kennedy, "Sexual Abuse, Sexy Dressing, and the Eroticization of Domination" in *Sexy Dressing etc.: Essays on the Power and Politics of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Janet Halley, *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) at 171; Duncan Kennedy, "Introduction" to the French translation of *Sexy Dressing* (Paris: Flammarion, 2008) at 16.

<sup>6</sup> Sadly, this fantasy has abated since I became a prof myself.

<sup>7</sup> *Sexy Dressing etc.*, supra note 4 at 208.

<sup>8</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.juliantrubin.com/biblejokes/adamevejokes.html>

<sup>10</sup> "Genesis, 2:25" in *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Cambridge, 1674).

<sup>12</sup> <http://img.artlebedev.ru/everything/illustrations/ogurcov/view/22317997855961644776.jpg>

<sup>13</sup> [http://media.80stees.com/images/products/Smurfs\\_Vanity\\_Smurf-Statue.jpg](http://media.80stees.com/images/products/Smurfs_Vanity_Smurf-Statue.jpg)

<sup>14</sup> See Laura Ross, *The Valley Girl Turns 40* (iUniverse, 2008) at 45.

<sup>15</sup> I'm following Ovid's version in *Metamorphoses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 61-66.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominionpost/blogs/lostboys/2008/07/03/machosexual/>

<sup>17</sup> See Laura Ross, *The Valley Girl Turns 40* (iUniverse, 2008) at 45.

<sup>18</sup> "Here Come the Mirror Men" in *The Independent*, 15 November 1994; [[http://www.marksimpson.com/pages/journalism/mirror\\_men.html](http://www.marksimpson.com/pages/journalism/mirror_men.html)]

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Simpson, "Here come the mirror men."

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Simpson, "Here come the mirror men."

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.salon.com/ent/feature/2002/07/22/metrosexual/print.html>

<sup>22</sup> Simpson, "Here come the mirror men"

<sup>23</sup> Marion Maneker, *Dressing in the Dark: Lessons in Men's Style from the Movies* (New York: Assouline Publishing Inc., 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Caron Kressley, *Off the Cuff: The Essential Guide For Men And The Women Who Love Them* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Russell Smith, *Men's Style: The Thinking Man's Guide To Dress* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Esquire, *The Handbook of Style: A Man's Guide To Looking Good* (New York: Hearst Books, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> *Dressing in the Dark*, 6.

<sup>28</sup> *Off the Cuff*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> *The Handbook of Style*, pg. 6. One has to wonder, is the implication that part of being a woman is that we like to be told what to do?

<sup>30</sup> *Dressing in the Dark*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Off the Cuff*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> *Men's Style*, 26.

<sup>33</sup> *Handbook of Style*, 6. Notice the semiotic implications of using the financial term "dividends" – as if proper dress were part of the competent man's investment portfolio.

<sup>34</sup> *Men's Style*, 27.

<sup>35</sup> *Dressing in the Dark*, 79.

<sup>36</sup> *Sexy Dressing, etc.*, 162.

<sup>37</sup> People Books, *People: 20 Years of Sexiest Man Alive* (New York: Time Inc. Home Entertainment, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> Colette Perold, conversation in the fall of 2008.

<sup>39</sup> *Dressing in the Dark*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> *Handbook of Style*, page number?(Ummni, check this when you get home).

<sup>41</sup> Transcript, conversation with Duncan Kennedy, January 26, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> *Streetcar Named Desire* (USA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1951).

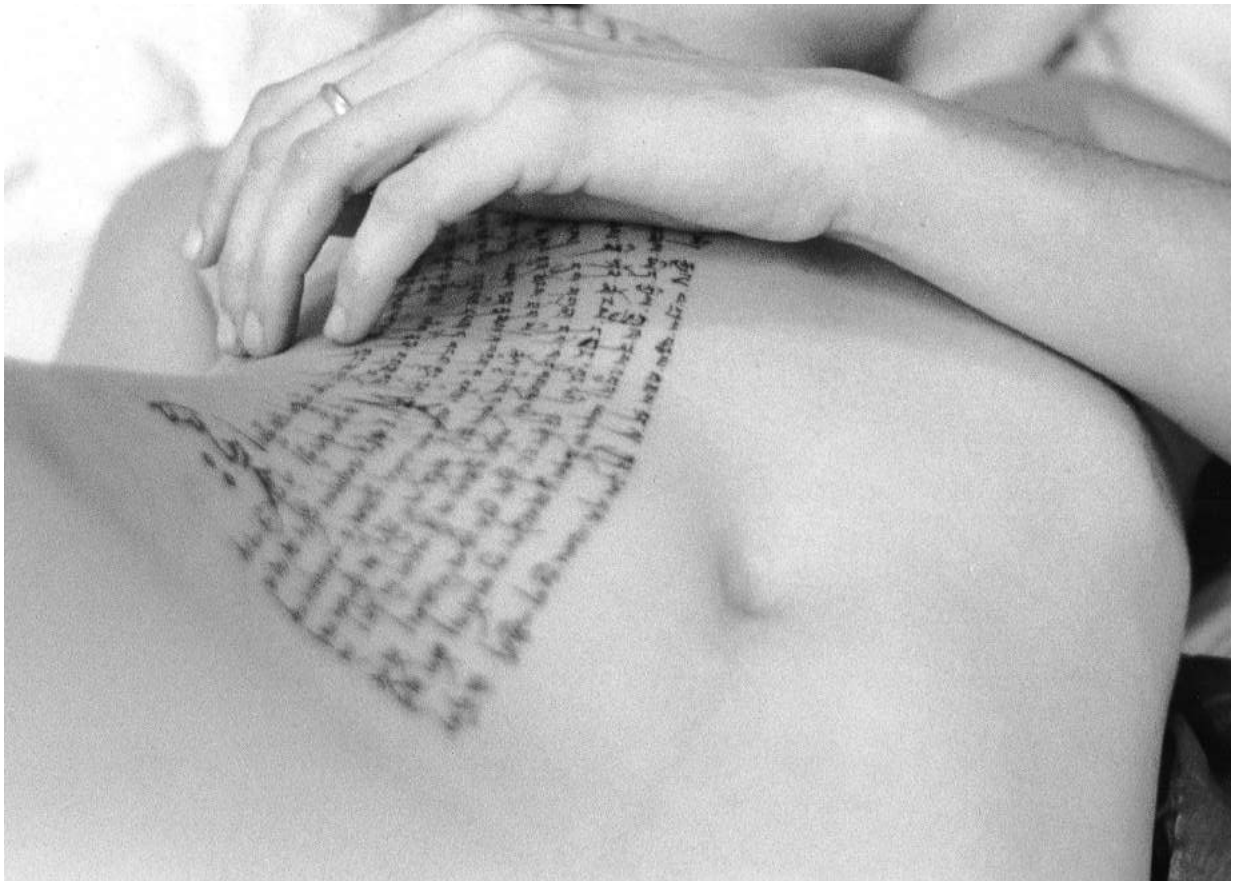
<sup>43</sup> What about visually impaired people? How would sexy dressing operate in such an imaginary?

<sup>44</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcast Corporation, 1972) at 45.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 47.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 47.

<sup>47</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 1.



Dominic di Zinno  
Untitled, Fall 2004  
Silver gelatin print  
11 x 17 inches

# REVOLUTIONARY LOVE:

## ON HOOKING UP, WAITING, AND THE BUDDHA'S MIDDLE WAY

UPASAKA JOSHUA EATON

To avoid all evil, to cultivate good,  
and to cleanse one's mind—  
this is the teaching of the  
Buddhas.  
—Dhammapada 14:183

Last March, The New York Times Magazine published an article about Harvard's abstinence group—True Love Revolution—showing two extremes of sexuality at Harvard. On one end was Janie Fredell, former president of True Love Revolution and a vocal advocate for abstinence. On the other was Lena Chen, author of the infamous Sex and the Ivy blog and an equally vocal advocate for—well, certainly not abstinence. The two faced off on October 25, 2007, in a debate The Harvard Crimson Magazine called, in a rather sexist and immature article, “chock-full of mutual respect” and “BORING!”

“To say that I have to care about every person I have sex with is an unreasonable expectation,” Chen explained to the Times Magazine, “It feels good!” While opposite in content, Fredell was strikingly similar in tone: “Why bond yourself so intensely when you’re not sure you’re going to spend the rest of your life with this person?” She went on to explain that there is nothing “unbalanced or irrational” about her relationships.

Before I go any further, I should say that I do not mean to critique Chen or Fredell, their lifestyles, or even their ideas; but rather, the radical poles that they have come to represent—fairly or not. And what is most striking about those poles is not their extremity or immodesty—as the Times Magazine suggested—but rather their self-absorption.

Chen is taken aback at the notion that it might be good to care about the people we sleep with—as if there is anyone, anywhere it would be bad for us to care about. What she



really seems to be saying is, “It feels good...for me.” She ignores the simple fact that pursuing instant gratification alone often makes us—let alone other people—miserable. As for Fredell, she totally ignores the destructive consequences of her abstinence ethic for those of us who either wish not to or simply cannot marry. Hers is an ethic designed exclusively for straight, white, upper-class Christians. What’s more, there is something cold in her arguments. “Why bond yourself so intensely,” she asks, as if another person might not be worth the risk, as if a balanced and rational love were possible—or even desirable. For Chen, emotional intimacy is unreasonable; and for Fridell, physical intimacy is. What both women fail to really consider is the other person.

These extreme views of sexuality aren’t just a problem at Harvard, either. I went to college at the University of West Georgia—a relatively small, rural, public university. Like at Harvard, there were certainly people who fell into the middle; but, the campus culture was strongly divided between socially conservative, evangelical Christians and promiscuous, alcohol-driven fraternities and sororities. Things were stuck between physical distance and emotional distance. I always felt like a complete misfit. On one hand, I was vice-president of the campus LGBTQ group, wasn’t Christian, wasn’t saving myself for marriage, and certainly had no objections to orgasming. On the other, I was a virgin, a teetotaler, and an utterly hopeless romantic. Neither extreme fit; and frankly, they both bored me to tears.

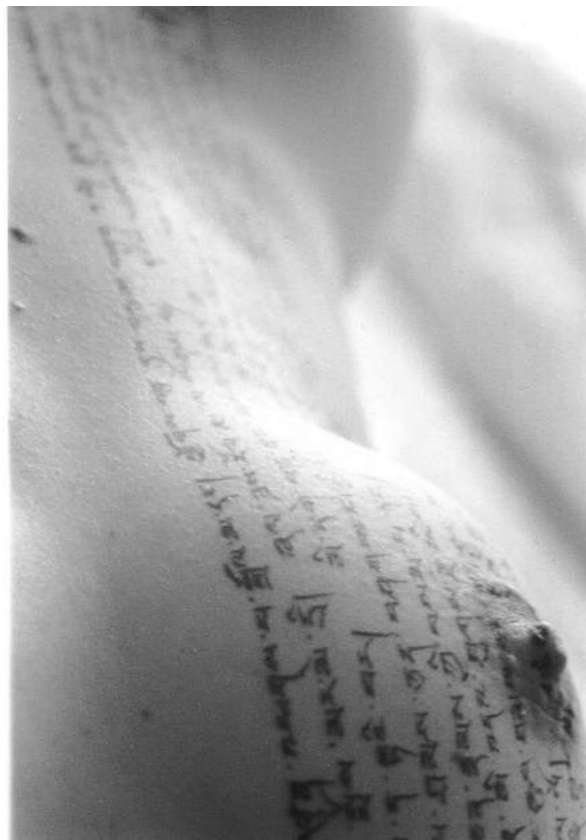
Of course, there aren’t many other options available to people my age and younger. The culture wars have polarized America—either Girls Gone Wild and Britney Spears, or abstinence only education and True Love Waits. Chen and Fredell represent extreme views of sexuality not just within the Harvard community, but within broader American culture. Wherever one looks there is hardly any middle ground to stand on. Instead there is just this thicket of extremes. How do we see our way out of it?

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Two summers ago I knelt on the floor of my Buddhist teachers’ house at their retreat center in upstate New York with two other students, trying to mumble after them as they chanted phrases in Tibetan. Though we did not understand the words, their meaning was clear. We were taking the Five Lay Precepts, the basic ethical guidelines for non-ordained Buddhists: to refrain from taking life, to refrain from taking what is not freely given, to refrain from sexual misconduct, to refrain from incorrect or harmful speech, and to refrain from intoxicants.

After we repeated the vows three times, my teachers chanted some prayers and snapped their fingers to indicate the precise instant at which we received the precepts. We responded with the Tibetan phrase *lexo*—how wonderful! I was now an *upasaka*, or “householder,” a lay follower of the Buddha. My teachers then gave us a brief teaching on each precept, one by one, until they got to the third: “Sexual misconduct means...sexual misconduct.” Then, quickly on to the fourth. Wait...what?

I don’t know what I expected from two Tibetan Buddhist



Photograph by Dominic di Zinno

teachers in their seventies who have both been monks since before puberty. I was curious to know what exactly that meant, “sexual misconduct.” Still, I was too afraid to ask. These are, after all, my spiritual mentors. I’m not certain I could even say the word sex to them without blushing a little—call it latent Catholic guilt or southern gentility. It didn’t really matter, anyway. At the time I was both a virgin and in a committed relationship; but, now that neither of those is an issue, I’ve found myself revisiting the question of sexual misconduct.

First, I did what any healthy young man would do when faced with a question about sexuality—I reviewed the literature. The closest I could find to a definition of sexual misconduct from the Buddha himself is in the Cunda Kammraputta Sutta, where he warns against pursuing “those who are protected by their mothers, their fathers, their brothers, their sisters, their relatives, or their Dhamma [religion]; those with husbands, those who entail punishments, or even those crowned with flowers by another [engaged].” The general idea seems to be not to take advantage of the vulnerable, the under aged, or those with prior commitments—all of which seems perfectly reasonable. Still, even Buddhism isn’t immune from Chen and Fredell’s extreme views on sexuality.

Later Indian commentators expanded the Buddha’s original definition of sexual misconduct to include activities like masturbation, anal and oral sex, sex during menstruation,

same-sex activity, and even sex on the day of the full moon. These lists make Fredell look like Dr. Ruth. Even His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama—who's locked in a mortal struggle to save traditional Tibetan culture and religion in the face of China's incessant cultural genocide—has signaled his willingness to re-examine them as outdated.

The savviest contemporary Buddhist teachers seem to agree that abandoning sexual misconduct simply means not harming oneself or others—physically or emotionally—through sexuality. What is most important, they say, is the attitude and motivation that we bring to our actions. Still, when it comes to sex it's easy to delude ourselves. Something that's obviously harmful might not seem like such a bad idea to me when a beautiful woman is unzipping my pants. Thankfully, beautiful women don't try to unzip my pants often; but, the question remains. How do we avoid slipping from "do no harm" into "it feels good (to me, for now)," especially in the heat of passion?

\*\*\*

In Akira Kurosawa's film *Rashomon*, three travelers—a priest and a woodcutter who've just come from testifying in a court case, and a commoner—take shelter from a storm in a ruined gatehouse. As they talk about the case, the movie flashes back through four mutually exclusive, eye-witness accounts of the rape and apparent murder—including that of the dead victim himself, given through a court medium. Suddenly, the priest and woodcutter's stories are interrupted by the sound of a crying baby who's been abandoned at the gatehouse.

By this point the priest's faith in humanity has been almost entirely shaken by the deception and selfishness he's witnessed. Resolution comes not in hearing what "really happened," however, but in a selfless act of compassion. The woodcutter picks up the crying baby and takes it home to raise as his own.

Before attaining enlightenment the Buddha was a prince. He lived in a palace surrounded by wonderful food, expensive objects, and beautiful courtesans, until suddenly he had a deep existential crises and decided to renounce his wealth to go looking for an end to suffering. For six years he practiced extreme self-denial. Finally, he realized that neither hedonism nor asceticism would bring him to contentment. Ever since his teachings have been known as the Middle Way; but, this isn't an Aristotelean mean. It is much more like the conclusion of *Rashomon*. What the Buddha discovered is not equal measures of hedonism and asceticism, but a third way transcending both—something sharp and quick, like a lightning bolt that pierces where ideology alone cannot.

So, how do we live our lives? Contemplating it, I often feel like the priest at the end of *Rashomon*. Chen and Fredell, sloppy liberalism and uptight conservatism—in the end, it's enough to make someone want to throw up their hands in frustration. This is why I think the Buddha was so compassionate about the precept against sexual misconduct. He'd already been to both extremes, so he knew what a thicket both idealism and nihilism were. He gave us the precept—don't commit sexual misconduct; but, instead of a list of do's and do not's he gave us practices to cultivate our courage, compassion, joy, and humility.

These are the very qualities that brought clarity to *Rashomon*'s despairing priest; and, they are the very ones lacking in Chen and Fredell's opposite, but equally self-absorbed, ideologies. As Lama Bruce Newman, a contemporary Buddhist teacher, says, "Anything done with a loving heart is virtuous. If you love your partner and give pleasure to him or her as an expression of your care, that is a virtuous act." May there be virtue.

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# IN THE KNOW

## HIV AND HARVARD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH IT

BRANDON PERKOVICH



Photographs by Kristen Jones, 2009

At least in my experience, a shameful many of us here don't act like the well-informed, sexually responsible, rad young adults we could and damn well should be. Particularly when it comes to sexual decision making with regards to HIV. Too many times have I gotten looks of confusion, dismay, or even offense when I ask a friend to go get an HIV test with me. Hell, I've even been in relationships here where my partner had never been tested and refused to let me take him. If you're thinking "Woah now. Everyone should be getting tested regularly, besides no one I know makes stupid sexual decisions", way to go, champ. But if you, like me, are among those whose sexual history may not be a beacon of grade-A good decision making, if your approach to STIs and safer sex may not exactly be what the doctor ordered, and if your experience at Harvard too suggests that as a community we need to reevaluate our relationship with HIV, then this article is for you. So let me then pose this question: Why can't we, the privileged members of the "Harvard community" (or the millennial generation for that matter), accept that we're at risk for HIV and act accordingly?

I first started asking that question after a conversation I



had with a Harvard administrator. We were having lunch and chatting about public health policy. HIV/AIDS came up. The administrator asked why HIV interested me so much. I rattled off statistics about the alarming spread of the virus among young people, especially within the queer community, and so on. You know, the type of thing you hear in a Harvard symposium on AIDS, a Life Sci 1a lecture, or the like. His response:

“But those people aren’t at Harvard.”

Wait...what?

I didn’t know what to say. I had no empirical evidence one way or the other. But you’d have to be deaf, dumb, and blind (or perhaps another smug resident of the ivory tower) to believe that HIV hasn’t been, isn’t, and won’t ever be here.<sup>1</sup> What’s scarier still is that the administrator is in good company when it comes to feeling that HIV isn’t their problem. Quite frankly, that type of thinking is so fucked. So what’s wrong with us?

Of course we’re at risk. Of course it’s totally unacceptable to still have a distant “oh-AIDS-is-such-a-shame-for-those-people-over-there” mentality, especially today, in the third decade of the epidemic. And even if you’re absolutely, without a doubt, unequivocally not at risk yourself, HIV is still everyone’s problem. The scale of the destruction HIV has wrought and the threat of it continuing means each of us has a responsibility to do something about HIV.

My initial reaction was to explain it the same way I answer my friends from back home when they ask “What’s the worst part about going to Harvard?” It’s simple: we’re all leaders. Or at least we strive to be. It’s what we pride ourselves on. It only takes one board meeting or group project to discover that we like to be in control. Now, it’s not my intention to paint every Harvard student as power-hungry and egotistical or for that matter those who seek positions of authority as necessarily selfish. I strive to lead. The people I admire most at this place are themselves, for lack of a better term, “leaders”. Undoubtedly, our commitment to leading is among our greatest strengths. Even if it’s unspoken, we operate under some degree of expectation (founded or not) of becoming the people who make, shake, or break tomorrow. And life on top may bring with it some protection from the worst of the world. For instance, we’re currently in one of the most severe international economic crises of recent history, but life at Harvard seems to have remained largely the same, in large part because the university does all it can to isolate us from the recession (even at the expense of Harvard’s staff, who may face job loss, early retirement, etc in the name of the Harvard student way of life.) The point is a byproduct of our culture of being insulated and groomed for authority may be a strong resistance to admitting that we’re not immune to this world’s horrors. So then it makes a sick kind of sense how we might feel justified in trying to stretch that sense of protection to HIV/AIDS. I mean, saying that Harvard students have issues fessing up to error or vulnerability is not news. But when it’s applied to HIV, we run the risk of fostering a sense of distance that is at best deeply elitist and at worst potentially very dangerous. We cannot allow ourselves (again) to think that we’re the people who cure AIDS, not the ones who contract it.

That speaks to an aspect of AIDS that’s been a part of

the epidemic from the beginning: the us that doesn’t get HIV, and the them that does. At first, straight people didn’t get AIDS, gay men did. As the epidemic grew, the “them” became the “4-H Club”, homosexuals (meaning gay men), hemophiliacs, heroin-users, and Haitians; the rest of “us” didn’t get AIDS. And as the epidemic rages particularly strongly within African-American communities,<sup>2</sup> the us-them paradigm of AIDS is increasingly divided along racial lines.

In his book *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir*, Paul Monette, acclaimed queer writer and activist, details his partner Roger Horwitz’s losing battle with HIV in the mid-1980s. As Monette describes,

Gay men in the high purlieu of West Hollywood—that nexus of arts and decoration, agency, publicity, fifteen minutes in a minispot—would imply with a quaff of Perrier that AIDS was for losers. Too much sleaze, too many late nights, very non-Westside...and still the aerobic crowd was playing us and them. I saw a split in gay men develop around that time, as people fled into themselves.<sup>3</sup>

It’s striking how distant the world Monette describes can seem, a time before effective therapies, before politicians would dare utter the word “AIDS”, before we could buy t-shirts and lattes to help fight HIV. But the elitism, undue sense of safety, and social polarization he senses even at the beginning of the epidemic, the pitting of “us” against “them”, is all too familiar today. Perhaps then the perception that Harvard students are outside the epidemic by virtue of our (perceived) social rank fits perfectly with the us-them paradigm, provided we are the “us”.

Obviously, part of this has to be generational, by which I mean that my generation can feel safer about HIV being at Harvard today because we ought to. With the advent of multi-drug therapy, “the cocktail”, HIV is no longer a death sentence. A generation of healthcare providers, researchers, academics, and activists fought and died for that to happen. Since the fateful Gottlieb report in 1981 that first described the epidemic, HIV has had an appetite for the marginalized and the underprivileged. And Harvard is a place of immense privilege, in its affiliates, its resources, etc. However those two observations do not mean that a Veritas-tic diploma shields us from HIV risk (I say this as a member of both the Harvard community and a “high-risk” population.) The immense progress of the last 3 decades and our own crimson privilege do not diminish the need for our vigilance about sexual health; they eliminate any excuse for us thinking that we’re not at risk, that we don’t need to get tested, that HIV isn’t our problem.

I contacted UHS while writing this article to see what insights they might have on Harvard College students and HIV.<sup>4</sup> HUHS was quick to point out that, at least from their perspective, students seem to them to be well informed about HIV. They report that in a recent UHS survey 30% respondents reported receiving information from HUHS on HIV/AIDS and that Harvard students tend to know their stuff when it comes to HIV. UHS reports that the national average HIV prevalence for men aged 18-28 is about 1 in 1000 and for women aged 18-28 is about 0.86 in 1000.<sup>5</sup> To put these numbers in perspective, UHS points to a 2007 American College Health Association that survey found that about 0.3% of college students self-reported being HIV positive.<sup>6</sup>

Given these statistics, there being zero HIV positive undergrads right now would not be statistically significantly different from the national average. But how prevalent or

not HIV is within the Harvard undergraduate population ultimately doesn't matter. Even if at this very moment there's not a single HIV positive undergraduate at Harvard, that in no way indicates that those who are HIV negative can practice unsafe sex and not have to worry about HIV (or any other STI for that matter). Even if we're assuming that there is no HIV positive undergraduate (we shouldn't), we surely cannot assume the same for all of our community's sexual contacts. We sleep with all sorts of people from both within and beyond our walls. I think that's sexy, and this point should not be read as suggesting that sleeping with someone who doesn't go to Harvard is a bad idea or somehow less safe. Personally, I'm a huge fan of sex with nonHarvardians, but the truth of the matter is no one really knows with certainty how prevalent HIV might be within the population of undergraduates and our sexual contacts. Given that the vast majority of HIV transmission in the US occurs through sexual contact, it's obvious that we need to be vigilant about HIV.

That same report that UHS referenced in explaining to me that in general Harvard undergrads were well-informed about HIV also indicates that only 28.4% of students have ever been tested for HIV.<sup>7</sup> When I talked to Professor Ian Lekus (who's teaching a course this semester on the history of HIV/AIDS in the WGS department called "AIDS: Politics, Culture, and Science"), he summed up this situation particularly well: believing that because Harvard students are well-informed about HIV they must not be putting themselves at risk is like believing that because Harvard students know the risks associated with drinking none of us are making unsafe decisions about alcohol. Information does not necessarily translate into action.

All of this extends well beyond the gates of Harvard too. Professor Lekus was also quick to point out that students in general often face similarly privileged and insular environments in a time when young people are starting to think that HIV may not be such a big deal for them. The fact is that HIV continues to be a crisis; recent news stories are a testament to that. Time recently reported that the HIV prevalence in Washington D.C. has reached an astonishing 3%, well above the 1% that would qualify the situation as a "generalized and severe" epidemic.<sup>8</sup> Last year, the New York Times covered a study that indicated that the CDC had been underreporting HIV cases; it turned out that HIV prevalence was 40% higher than had been previously estimated.<sup>9</sup> I mentioned that I believe everyone has a responsibility to do something about HIV, but that something can be as small and easy as getting yourself tested. 50% of all new HIV infections occur in people under the age of 25.<sup>10</sup> In such a reality, we, the millennial generation, have a responsibility to one another to be a part of ending this epidemic.

Paul Monette died of AIDS-related complications in 1995. As he saw the epidemic grow, he gave witness to the catastrophe but also to our ability to do something about it. As he put it, "[i]f everyone doesn't stop and face the calamity, hand in hand with the sick till it can't break through anymore, then it will claim the millennium for its own".<sup>11</sup> We're not going to let that happen.

<sup>1</sup> I don't mean to indict the administrator to whom I'm referring here, so the administrator will remain anonymous. This person does great work at Harvard and beyond, and is someone whom I respect immensely. But the naiveté in that statement, I felt, both needed to be talked about and typified a prevailing attitude about HIV among too many members of the "Harvard community."

<sup>2</sup> CDC 2006 HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/reports/2006report/default.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Monette, *Borrow Time: An AIDS Memoir* (Harvest Press, 1998), 19.

<sup>4</sup> I'm restricting this discussion to Harvard College for the sake of simplicity and because I have no information on HIV within the graduate schools.

<sup>5</sup> To highlight the racial disparity here, the national average of HIV prevalence among African American men of the same age group is 4.92 in 1000 versus an average of 0.22 in 1000 for non-African American men of the same age.

<sup>6</sup> The American College Health Association. American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment Spring 2007 Reference Group Data Report (Abridged). *Journal of American College Health* 56(5): 475. Available at: [http://www.acha-ncha.org/pubs\\_rpts.html](http://www.acha-ncha.org/pubs_rpts.html).

<sup>7</sup> The American College Health Association. American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment Spring 2007 Reference Group Data Report (Abridged). *Journal of American College Health* 56(5): 473.

<sup>8</sup> Altman, A. "HIV/AIDS: A Surging Epidemic in Washington, D.C.." *Time*, 3/17/2009. Available online at: <http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1885601,00.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Altman, K. "H.I.V. Study Finds Rate 40% Higher Than Estimated." *New York Times*, 8/3/2008. Available online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/03/health/03aids.html?5>.

<sup>10</sup> Hunter, S. *AIDS in America*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Monette, *Borrow Time: An AIDS Memoir* (Harvest Press, 1998), 45.

HBOMB has included with this article a list of major HIV test centers within the Boston area.

Boston HAPPENS Program  
Children's Hospital Boston  
Adolescent Medicine  
333 Longwood Avenue  
5th floor  
Boston, MA 02115  
T Accessible  
Confidential, free rapid testing available  
Call 617-355-8127 to set up an appointment

Cambridge City Hospital  
confidential, free, T accessible  
617-591-6767 - call first; by appointment only  
Not open on weekends  
125 Lowell St. Somerville  
Main Hospital: 617-498-1000  
Not right on a T line, about a 20 minute walk from Harvard

Boston Alliance for Gay and Lesbian Youth (BAGLY)  
800-888-8888  
anonymous and free for everyone under 23

South Boston Community Health Center  
617-464-7489  
409 W Broadway (at "F" street)  
anonymous, free

Sidney Borum Jr. Health Center  
617-457-8140  
130 Boylston Street, Boston  
confidential, free, T accessible  
(29 years old and younger)

Sexually Transmitted Disease Clinic in the Infectious  
Disease Dept. at Mass General Hospital  
Cox Building 5th floor  
55 Fruit Street, Boston MA  
617-726-2748  
anonymous, donation requested but not required.  
Confidential syphilis testing with your name is done as well.  
MGH Cox 5  
Mon, Tues, Wed, Thurs, Fri Mornings 8:30 - 11:00 am  
Monday and Wednesday Afternoons 1:00 - 3:00 pm

North Cambridge Health Center  
617-498-1119  
266 Rindge Ave, Cambridge  
anonymous, free, T accessible (alewife)  
only for patients of the Health Center

SPAL  
(617) 628-6065  
92 Union Square Somerville  
anonymous, free (contributions accepted)  
By appointment, Thursdays and Saturday mornings.

Boston Medical Center  
617-414-5936 STD  
617-414-4290 HIV  
confidential, free, T accessible





## BECOMING CONSCIOUS

IMAN JAMES

I remember Pilar, the very potent figure of my childhood. Either way she is grounded in my imagination, infinitely rooted in time. I wished to traverse all forms of being so I could be the subject of all her fetishes. Inside of her. Does she know I am still watching, although from a different place? Was she aware of my small body moving, doing, existing, and constantly responding to her? That it does these things even today? I cannot release her. Like the imprint of a fleeting lover, her memory is etched on my skin. She is my point of reference. Writing this now, I sit here touching myself, my body rolling in gentle convulsions, and Pilar manifests herself in every stroke, living out the past as it is this moment.

I am on my parents' farm, a bucolic haven and I am nine years old again. My arms spread out like the wings of a plane, I carelessly run into the vast expanse of earth, only to come upon this solitary body consumed by the breadth of being. I see her chest rising and descending, in unity with my heartbeat. Her body, neither still nor quiet, is relentlessly writhing, disappearing and reappearing beneath the tall blades of grass. I inch nearer to find her.

Her delicate spine is molded into the green sea of grass, her face confronting the morning sun, confronting me. Her body is mapped out in my mind. Her skin pulled taut against her frame. The hollow at the base of her neck. Her protruding breasts. The blemishes that lay flat against her skin. I trace her arms with my eyes all the way down to her right wrist, but I can't find her hand. It is completely hidden between her legs. Goosebumps emerge as dewdrops lick her skin. The

leaves of grass curl like tendrils around her body, enwrapping her, devouring her and as it undulates under the guidance of the wind, her body gently glides along as well. I hear her breath coming quicker; her sighs and moans crescendo. Her eyes wide, almost popping, her face is contorted in blissful agony. I see her dissolving as she brings herself closer to orgasm; she is disappearing.

The anxiety I feel in this moment, in this terrific moment in which I believe that I have lost her, compels me to action. I begin to rub my hands against my jeans, aiming to satisfy an urgency unbeknownst to me, hoping to be taken to the place where Pilar now is. Linked to some divine occurrence, my release comes early and Pilar climaxes back into existence. It feels like we're made whole. Did she perceive of me all the time?

I travel to my favorite banyan tree the next day, the one with the worn rubber tire on which I'd often swing. As I approach, the tree becomes a monstrous mass of roots and I feel small. Awed, the thoughts in my head blend with the quiet of the world. I am stopped abruptly when I see Pilar enveloped in the hollow trunk of my tree and my childhood sanctuary is arrested in this instance of flux.

The rich smell of fig fruits radiates from her body. She is smashing them under her feet and between her toes, massaging them into her hair, and filling every depression and opening on her body. It draws me in. She dances her back against the aerial, running her hands along her body and the tree so as to consume every surface with her fingertips.



Drawing by Kayla Escobedo, 2009

I feel a hand rest on my head and I'm startled. I look up to see a naked body move past me towards Pilar. Blair, my parents farmhand, who always seemed like an object for production is different to me now. I am not shocked to see the entire human sex inscribed on Blair's body, an erect clitoris peaking out of a soft fleshy vulva, just beneath a stiff penis and above two swinging testicles. The body is neither nondescript nor ambiguous, but wholly human. I draw nearer to my tree, climbing it, and then situating myself on my rubber tire to watch.

Now Blair is spread out and I can see her entire body is moist when Pilar's tongue first meets the inner folds of her vulva. Her mouth is hungry, salivating with anticipation. Her lips grow thick and heavy, puckered, like a fish gasping for oxygen. Blair's clitoris is erect, pulsating with its own heart, set within a mouth equally hungry and wet. The mouths meet in a passionate kiss, Pilar's sucking, and consuming Blair as a sprawling bush tickles her cheeks and chin. All the while her hands are creeping along Blair's body in frenzy, trying to pull, take, and extract.

Pilar pushes Blair against the tree. With her fingers she spreads apart the cheeks of Blair's backside and pushes herself in. She rubs her big clitoris against Blair's small hole, in moments actually achieving penetration. She presses Blair's

hips deeply into her own, their bodies heaving in unity. Pilar's nipples are pressed against Blair's back, and all I want is to fill the tiny spaces between their bodies. Pilar's hand flies to Blair's penis and is feeding it, massaging the glossy tip with her thumb, groping the shaft in fluid forward motions. The other hand dances all over Blair's body, squeezing the breasts, rubbing the stomach and hips, and massaging the testicles all the while placing robust licks, kisses, and bites along Blair's neck.

Their soft moans become harsh animalistic grunts. Blair looks up at me, our gazes steadfastly locked. I can see knowledge passing between their bodies, and even a little touches me. Their lungs compressed by the heaviness of now, they search for air, their mouths opening widely and then closing abruptly. They practically collapse, emitting a final shriek, and their bodies sink into utter relaxation, drowned by the cum that pours out of their bodies.

I now realize how heavily I am breathing. Something warm and pleasurable gushes to my gut, directing me to pay attention. Pay attention! Frustration fills my every fiber as I struggle to figure out what to do, overwhelming my every fiber. Pilar for the first time recognizes me. She chuckles as she watches me struggling.

I climb down from my refuge and confront her directly. I am terrified. I don't know the meaning of my actions but I am compelled. I cannot stop myself. I stubbornly grab Pilar's hand and place it between my legs, and with my hand I move her fingers in circles over my jeans. She knowingly smiles at me as she slowly withdraws her hand. The inappropriateness of my impulse suddenly dawns on me. She and Blair recognize my mounting insecurity and offer an encouraging smile. We sit down in a circle, my two companions naked but unbothered by their exposed condition. I feel discomfort as my clothes rub against my skin. As Pilar scrutinizes me, I examine her face, deep in concentration. It's like she wants to capture my face and body in mental photographs so that while she jerks off she can compose my history. She tells me to try again with my hand.

My instinct is to dive at her and press my lips against hers but I restrain myself. Instead I slip my hand beneath my pants. I find a place that I often glide over in the shower. I fondle all the layers of skin. Terrified I divert my attention to a throbbing little heart that I begin to move in circles. At first I just feel my spongy skin below my fingertips but as sensations rise and build, I feel a small palpitation and shock in my body that radiates through my stomach. I quickly withdraw my hand in astonishment and Blair and Pilar are laughing at me. My moment of embarrassment is quickly overtaken with my laughter as well.

I return from my daydream, my memory. I focus in on my current reality, the imprint of a warm body on my bed. The imprint of a stranger, who I now know through the experience of a few pleasurable hours. Exploration and discovery. Skin on skin is my chosen medium. Like Pilar, she is gone yet still with me.

## REPETITION, SUBCULTURE, AND RADAR: “GAY” FASHION AND PERFORMATIVE CONSTRUCTION

CHRISTIAN GARLAND

When I first came out to my mother, she said, “You’re going to need to dress more fashionably, or the gays will kick you out.” Tight clothes always struck me as rather gay. In the tutoring program I’m in, our students asked why two counselors, who happen to be gay, always wear tight pants. We decided that “Because they’re gay” was a bad answer. Somehow, we dodged answering.

-Stan F.

In 2005, William Lee Adams, a senior at Harvard College concentrating in psychology, finished his thesis – and it made quite a splash. As heterogeneous audiences watched *Brokeback Mountain* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (which was entering its third successful season) in droves, Adams argued that gay men and lesbians could tell if another person was gay – usually within two seconds. “Gaydar,” *Psychology Today*, the *New York Times*, and the *Advocate* reported, really did exist. And Adams, himself a self-identified gay man, attested to his own “finely-tuned” sixth sense: “My first year of college I suspected that half a dozen people were gay. By graduation they had all come out, and I had silenced my skeptics.”<sup>1</sup>

The idea that gays and lesbians are identifiable by visual signifiers isn’t especially new. Indeed, for whatever reason, the indicators of homosexuality have remained stable in the most basic sense: gay men have always been “effeminate,” lesbians have always been “masculine” – never mind that those very words have shifting definitions and signifiers themselves. It is an overt and unapologetic simplification, a denial of human complexity: an arbitrary construction that reduces men and women, of all types, into conveniently labeled boxes. In an outdated popular conception, homosexuals are inverted, reversed, men with souls of women and women with souls of men – and however that translates into visibility is self-affirming and beyond question.

But that construction, that conflation of gender and sexuality, is just that: a construction, built upon a foundation of presumed sexual and gender difference. To be an effeminate man is to reify, through negation, what it is to be a “masculine” – or “regular” – man; and to be a masculine woman is to reinscribe the notions of what it means to be a “feminine” – or “traditional” – woman. These popular conceptions – of what is “masculine” and what is “feminine” – aren’t at all tied to reality, to life as it is experienced or identity as it functions. The signifiers of “masculinity” and “femininity” connote whatever society deems appropriate. Thus, if we interact with these supposed inverts of the human form, we’re interacting with deviations from the standard, both visually and substantively: men acting and looking like



women (by desiring men) and women acting and looking like men (by desiring women).

Fortunately, popular conceptions of sexuality and its signifiers are no longer so monolithic, so static, so reductive. We can conceive of men who look – who “act” – like men and desire men; and we can do the same with women. It is no longer enough to cite a label or identity as an explanation for appearance, mannerisms, taste, or sensibility – sexual desire is much more complicated, and much more individual, than that careless association between an original “sexuality” that doesn’t exist and the signifiers that supposedly represent it. And if we are to question the validity of “sexuality” as it exists and its attendant labels, if we are to question the very notion of what it means to be “gay,” we must necessarily question what it means to look gay – for often, in dominant heterosexual culture, to look gay is enough to be gay.

The matter of “gaydar,” then, is an interesting one, for Adams’ thesis concludes that to look gay isn’t necessarily to dress gay: homosexual men and women can identify other homosexuals in a relatively short period of time, with relatively little visual information – participants in his study received head shots of the subjects, no more, no less. Such immediate responses to so few visual cues are inherently problematic in any construction of what it means to “look gay” or “look like a lesbian,” for certain facial structures are not inherently “gay” or “lesbian.” And to complicate matters, “of homosexuals, gay men were more easily recognized than lesbians...Gay women were more likely than men to be misclassified by both heterosexuals and homosexuals as straight.”<sup>2</sup> Adams explains this discrepancy by citing the gay male’s more visible niche in the entertainment world – a niche reified by and dependent upon the presumed existence of a vibrant gay sensibility. “Gaydar,” then, hardly functions independently from the cultural signifiers of homosexuality – it is, instead, an extension of the visual tropes long identified as “gay” or “lesbian.” To some, certain facial features may be inherently “gay” – but they’re only as “gay” as their surrounding environments, as their contextualizations, as their processes of social construction as “gay.”

It seems that fashion, then, is key to understanding modern gay existence, for its status as gatekeeper to the signification of gay sensibility emerges from both queer protagonists and their heterosexist antagonists. Part of the social construction of sexuality is its attendant visualization – we must see gay men in order to believe that they exist. And that attendant visualization necessarily extends from body language and mannerisms, from vestimentary codes and stylistic behaviors. If we can identify gay men from the neck up because of our conscious associations between facial characteristics and the entertainment industry – an industry in which the gay experience has been commodified and translated into a larger, identifiable sensibility, of which fashion is a part – it isn’t because there is anything inherently gay about entertaining. At the same time, there isn’t anything explicitly or functionally gay about many commonly identified “gay” fashions; nothing about tight jeans or chokers precisely signifies a man’s desire to fuck another. And yet we maintain that we can really see gay people, that we can tell them apart from the larger population, that we can pick them out in crowds like some sort of incredibly visible novelty.

But how, beyond the most shallow explanation, does fashion interact with the “gay” experience? Doubtlessly, it serves as a means of “identifying” that which is otherwise

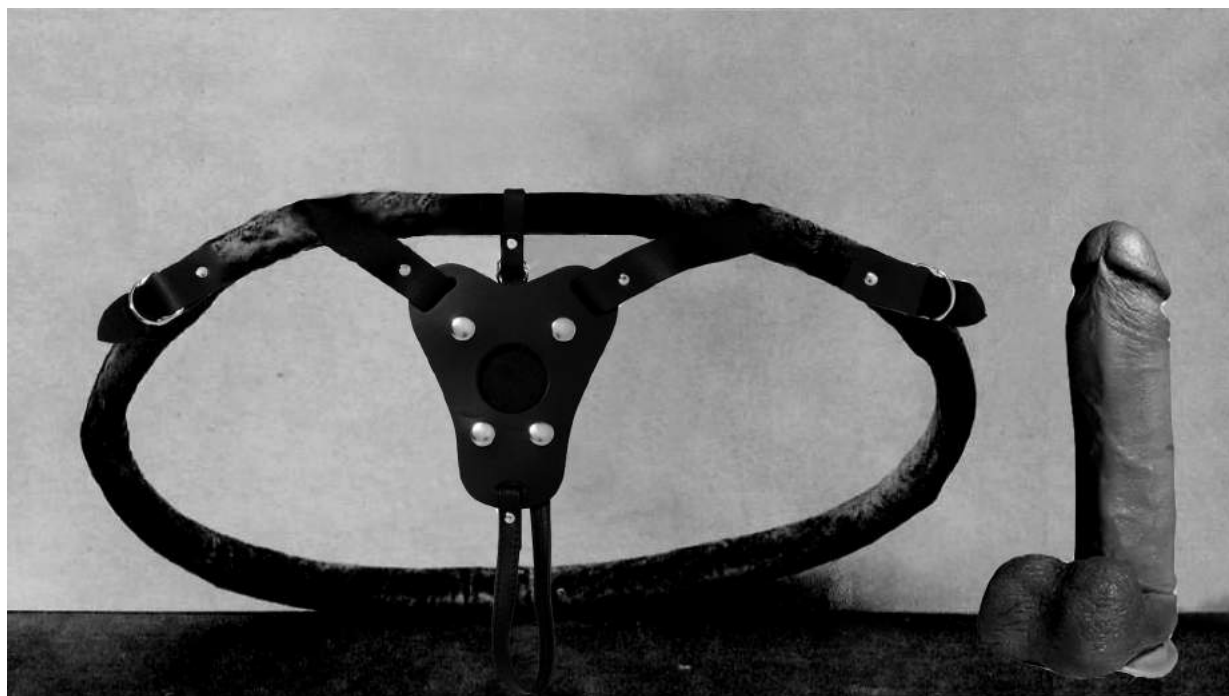
unidentifiable, even in the most revealing of spaces – a personal, fluid structure of desire is transformed into a public lifestyle, an easily recognizable and patently coded system of signs that discloses the appropriation of a highly unstable social construction. But does fashion serve only as a revelatory agent? Is it the unmasking of the highly tenuous, fluid, and hysterical organization of desire that matters most, or rather the construction of a discursive political force, a hostile gay subculture within the paranoid dominant culture, that systematizes the unmasking of that hysterical construction of desire? Even then, what is fashion’s place in that system of signs – that is, that hysterical construction of sexuality?

With these questions in mind, I interviewed fifteen gay men currently attending Harvard College. My reasons for selecting men only extend from a pursuit of achievable academic honesty: the gay male “community” – if one can even call it that – at Harvard is much better represented than the lesbian one, and thus offers a broader range of experiences, tastes, and backgrounds than Harvard’s small lesbian community could provide. At the same time, gay men have had, by virtue of patriarchal privilege, more access to individual inclinations than lesbians; historically, they’ve had more purchasing power and economic autonomy, and thus more money to pursue various lifestyles outside of the traditional or domestic sphere. And most importantly, gay men have been commodified by advertisers and retailers, resulting in the growth of a more visible gay sensibility; lesbians, on the other hand, have been largely ignored by the consumer economy and left to flounder in whatever base stereotypes that have achieved visibility in mainstream discourse.<sup>3</sup>

These interviews will inform my larger academic project: to examine the extent to which fashion is used as a means of constructing categories of performative gay sexuality. By looking at fashion’s influence in the creation of gay subcultures, we can provide a tangible link between the social construction – via repetition – of gay sexuality and the clothes gay men wear. And by analyzing the state of the gay community at Harvard College – perceived as an increasingly progressive and supportive space – we can determine the degree to which “gay” fashion operates as a unifying force in an increasingly invisible and unnecessary gay subculture.

“Being gay” is a performative self-construction. I think once people come out of the closet, they do generally settle on an average mien: more effeminate, more trendy, more campy, more flippant, more hyper-energized. The true answer, then, is yes, that you can often dial up your gaydar and spot the gays on campus with a good degree of accuracy.  
Logan D.

Harold’s arrival at Harvard College in the summer of 2006 was, by most standards, unexceptional: he was reserved, quiet, and adopted an air of seriousness. The son of a factory worker and a small tradesman – and the resident of a small town in the rural Midwest – he spoke softly and dressed modestly (he was usually trimmed in a neutral blazer, a solid oxford, and a pair of worn jeans). But that reservation and impersonal presentation masked an important distinguishing characteristic, one he wouldn’t reveal until he was asked (and even then, only after a few months of adjustment): Harold was attracted to men, and only men. A far cry from



13. Musée de CLUNY — Ceinture de chasteté, époque des Croisades G. B.  
**Medieval Chastity Belt**

the over-represented “Harvard man,” that illustrious and well-respected combination of privilege and good breeding, Harold thrived in a tenuous but fluid space, one marked not by the omniscient oppression of a small town, but rather the dynamic and largely accepting – but historically hostile – milieu of a large research university.

Small-town America, in all its idyllic conception, is nevertheless a constraining force: it is a space in which gay men and women can exist, sometimes openly but usually not, under the aegis of the dominant culture. Neil Miller successfully chronicled the state of gay subcultures – or, rather, the lack thereof – in small towns across the United States in *In Search of Gay America: Women and Men in a Time of Change*. Notably, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the visual cultures of the gay sensibility were largely absent; in repressive spaces, those that operate under the patronage of the binary conceptions of gender and sexuality, discursive representation – or even identifiable representation – as the “other” constitutes an infringement of propriety. (In Bunceton, Missouri, a rural town infamous for its continued support of an openly gay mayor, an “influx” of gay males (approximately three of them) yielded the paranoid and hysterical vandalism of one man’s house – which was apparently identifiable by its high-quality renovation.<sup>4</sup>)

Unsurprisingly, Harold – and millions of gay men like him – didn’t identify a visual subculture in his town of around 13,000. There was no “gay” fashion, for one’s quiet and stable existence was predicated on silence: to be openly (and visibly) gay was to admit one’s willing and conscience transgression of the ever-present binary. Of course, this fear of transgression depends upon a reductivist conception of

what homosexuals are and what they wear – men dressing (and desiring) like women!, women dressing (and desiring) like men! The paranoia of the restrictive space necessarily restricts the rebellions against it; by anticipating and discouraging dissent early, it solidifies its existence as one free from challenges to heteronormative constructs. “Gay fashion” has no room in a space so small and contained; its presence is too indicative of the larger threat beneath it.

Despite challenges to its authenticity, fashion is less shallow than its critics charge. Indeed, it is profound in scopes both wide and narrow: it is a central mechanism of socio-cultural formation, and it is instrumental in the social construction of gender and sexuality. The clothes one wears mark much more than taste or class; they are signifiers of identity, markers of gender, cogs in a complex machine of sexual acculturation. Fashion isn’t limited to merely providing a visual point of reference for gay men and lesbians – it is a means of social resistance, a mechanism of visible self-identification and definition, an apparatus of distinction. But most importantly, fashion is a means of repetition: it is the continuance of popular conceptions, the constant legitimization and reification of the “gay man” as he is conceived and as he is recognized.

If we are to understand fashion’s effect on the creation and replication of gay sexuality, we must understand its genesis from a codifier of sexuality to a mechanism of subcultural formation. And we must start at the origin; we must examine what sexuality is – how it forms, how it functions, how it exists. In its broadest definition, “sexuality” is a structure of sexual desires. But society’s more tailored definition isn’t quite so forgiving: it codifies those sexual desires into convenient



labels, reducing the scope of individual inclinations into universal themes. While any given person has any number of distinct sexual desires, society operates with just a few indexes of those desires: there is homosexuality, bisexuality, heterosexuality. (There are, of course, other labels – like “queer” – but they have hardly been accepted by mainstream discourse.) Even then, those constructs fail to legitimize the desires of an individual: it is only whom the subject desires that matters, not how or when or where. As “homosexuals,” gay men are defined not by their actual inclinations – that is, whom they want to fuck, and how, and when – but only by the most common, and least exciting, element among them: a sexual desire for other men.<sup>5</sup>

Doubtlessly, human desires have not always been structured into arbitrary codifications defined by subject/object relationships. Though Freud conceives of sexuality as an extension of sub- and unconscious desires, and while Foucault laboriously charts the history of sexuality as the germination and propagation of an institutionalized discourse, neither explanation adequately accounts for a desire distinct from society’s codification of that desire. And as appealing – that is, intellectually simple – as it is to point toward an anthropological analysis of kinship systems to represent the emergence of the earliest societies and the organization of the sex/gender system therein, such an analysis would be an overt simplification in itself. Kinship societies, while not yet fully “civilized” along modes of western thought, are nevertheless organizations that post-date the origin of humanity. As such, we cannot rely on Claude Lévi-Strauss’s anthropological research or Gayle Rubin’s application of still extant kinship societies (which reaffirms the social

construction of “obligatory heterosexuality”)<sup>6</sup>. Instead, we must go back further, to the “origin” of sexuality – an “origin” that just so happens to have never existed.

In her oft cited and groundbreaking essay *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*, philosopher and feminist theorist Judith Butler makes an arresting proposition: both gender and sexuality emerge from copies of an origin that doesn’t exist. Masculine/heterosexuality is the “origin,” and feminine/homosexuality is its derivative “imitation.” Butler theorizes that this “origin” is, in fact, performative heterosexuality: in the homophobic mind, “queens and butches and femmes are imitations of the heterosexual real,” where “imitation” connotes derivativeness, a secondary existence, one subservient to the dominant and real heterosexual “origin.”<sup>7</sup>

That “origin,” however, never truly existed, and thus relies upon its “inversion” and replication to maintain its status as the prototype, the heterosexual real: “the origin requires its derivations in order to affirm itself as an origin, for origins only make sense to the extent that they are differentiated from that which they produce as derivatives. Hence, if it were not for the notion of the homosexual as copy, there would be no construct of heterosexuality as origin.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, both heterosexuality and homosexuality are mutually dependent on the other to reproduce and re-legitimize the existence of each. Each is dependent on the other’s repetition to constitute itself as real: the masculine/heterosexual/“original” construct relies upon its feminine/homosexual/“imitational” derivative to emphasize its importance as the “original”; and the feminine/homosexual/“imitational” derivative sustains its repetition in order to exist in opposition to the “origin,” which nevertheless reifies the assumption of its derivativeness. But because



neither sexuality exists as the origin, we must necessarily conclude that sexuality is, indeed, socially constructed: both heterosexuality and homosexuality are nothing more than reductivist concepts manipulated to compress the expansive capabilities of individual sexual desires.

Nevertheless, constructs of sexuality as they exist necessitate our examination of them as they function. If we take this false construction further, we can extend the repetition of the homosexual “copy” – for, truly, dominant and mainstream discourse presumes that homosexuality is an aberration from the original and natural heterosexuality – to reproduce the attendant notions of the construction itself. In other words, the copies of the “origin” constantly reify the significations of that origin’s existence – and by examining the signifiers of the origin, we necessarily examine the signifiers of the copies. For it is through the repetition of the copies that the origin derives its purported legitimacy; if we identify the “straight male” as the origin, we mandate the construction of both the origin and his imitator, the “gay male”; and it is through the repeated visual tropes of the “gay male” that we identify the “straight male” and, thus, his imitator.

Butler, in her attempt to prove the repetition hypothesis, rests part of her argument on “gender stylization,” for gender – like sexuality – is performative to the extent that “it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express.” To be a “man” is to reify, and therefore inherently support, the signifiers of that “manliness” – for the idealized “man” is the origin, and modern “manliness” is its sustained repetition. Like sexuality, gender itself, as it exists and as it is perceived, predicates its existence on its having existed and its ability to exist; and it takes, as its sign and “origin,” the heterosexual standard. Indeed, “the naturalistic effects of heterosexualized genders are produced through imitative strategies; what they imitate is a phantasmatic ideal of heterosexual identity, one that is produced by the imitation as its effect.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, the “masculine heterosexual” is the original gender from which queer imitations, or copies, constantly reinforce, by oppositional negation, the “masculine heterosexual” as the origin. Those imitations carry the significations of secondary status, and therefore exist within the pejorative context of aberrational existence. Much like the psychiatric discourse surrounding homosexuality in the 1950s, these imitations are conceived of as inverses of the heterosexual ideal: “masculine heterosexuality” necessarily becomes “feminine homosexuality,” and the visual tropes of masculinity determine, through the same process of oppositional inversion, the signifiers of femininity. Thus, masculinity = heterosexuality and femininity = homosexuality. The binary’s repetition culminates in a visual “swap” of signifiers: that which once connoted “masculinity” codes female homosexuality, and the signification of “femininity” necessarily extends to male homosexuality. Gays look “effeminate,” and lesbians look “masculine.”

Those visual tropes are, indeed, visible signifiers that encompass numerous literal and figural gestures. Doubtlessly, part of our construction of gay male sexuality is our visualization of the gay male himself, and those tropes – whether mannerisms, body language, or vestimentary style – both offer an example of his “origin” and perpetuate its repetition over time. Thus, if we examine the fashion worn by gay men, we can better understand the gay male’s progression through history as a marked man, one

identified, ostracized and, eventually, supported by his self-representation and the conclusions drawn from it. For it is fashion that has, historically, helped shape gay communities and subcultures into visible, progressive sanctuaries apart from the threatening, heterosexist, dominant culture. Indeed, “the professionalization of gayness requires a certain performance and production of a ‘self’ which is the constituted effect of a discourse that nevertheless claims to ‘represent’ that self as a prior truth.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, “gayness” – a sensibility dependent upon gay sexuality – is nothing more than a performance that predicates its existence upon its ability to exist and its history of having existed. It presumes an origin, for it is from that original “gayness,” which is itself a derivative of original “straightness,” that modern “gayness” has produced a copy.

I think it's the type of community that has manifold little subcultures, and it seems difficult to speak about the thing as if it were totemic. Instead, I think there are a lot of little groups that sometimes overlap: the political gays, the BGLTSA gays, the theatre gays, the closeted gays, probably a bunch of other little subcultures I don't even realize. But as a whole, I'd say it's at the very least tolerant of others.  
Logan D.

I don't really think there is much of a gay “community” at Harvard, since so many of Harvard students come from such different backgrounds and walks of life, unlike other minority groups which are made up of people who come from similar experiences (I mean by socioeconomic, religious, or political backgrounds). Nowadays, these other “categories” have much more influence in defining one’s life experience and “community” than sexuality.  
Ashton P.

West Orange High School is located twelve miles west of Orlando, Florida, in a small, but growing, suburb once known for its citrus industry. My family moved to Winter Garden in late 1999, escaping the increasingly crowded Kissimmee/St. Cloud region of Osceola County for the more relaxed agricultural town situated on either side of State Road 50. By the time I reached West Orange, the community was quickly and expediently changing – the downtown district received a major renovation, more homes were being built, more young white professionals were moving in, and more Baptist churches were erected between the subdivisions. My friends and their parents were overwhelmingly white, overwhelmingly Protestant, and overwhelmingly conservative. Winter Garden was not my ideal place to be.

In fact, I didn't “come out” until the winter of my first semester at Harvard – but that’s hardly surprising – for I didn't see a glimpse of a real, live, gay community until I reached Harvard. One symptom of growing up in a conservative suburb that discourages homosexuality – or sinning, as most people call it – is the unfortunate belief, constructed out of resignation more than anything, that homosexuals don't really exist: that they're phantoms, ghosts on television or in movies, identified by their immaculate hair and high-pitched voices and limp wrists. (I am sure that, if one were to poll Winter Garden residents, this would be the most frequent

description given.) In my high school class of 556, exactly zero students were openly gay; I was suspected, but I enjoyed enough privilege – because of my extracurricular activities, grades, and general administrative support – to absolve me of any guilt. During my last year, a few juniors – with the support of a single faculty member – started a Gay/Straight Alliance. It was heavily discouraged and widely mocked. But for however many queer students attended West Orange, it was heaven. (I did not participate.)

My experience, as avoidable as it was, is nothing more than a repetition of the experiences millions of gay men. To live a life that is frowned upon (at best) and cause for violence (at worst) by mainstream culture is, to appropriate the dire and melodramatic taglines of countless 1950s pulp novels, to “live in the shadows.” Today, most gay men (myself included) wait until they arrive at college to “come out” and explore their sexuality further. The college campus has become a symbol of intellectual and sexual freedom, a liberating force, one that encourages openness, tolerance, and, in the safest of spaces, complete acceptance. But historically, homosocial intellectual institutions throughout the Western world, like Harvard, have functioned largely as they do today – the most substantive difference being the pervasive requirement of secrecy.<sup>11</sup> While men didn’t necessarily “come out,” they did have sex with other men, and often, that was enough. (In fact, in Harvard’s storied history, same-sex relationships – or even suggestions of same-sex relationships – were enough to warrant expulsion.) It wasn’t until the formation of vibrant gay subcultures in the post-Second World War gender malaise that gay sexuality was explored substantially and more than tangentially.

Indeed, the War’s intensity and duration necessitated the systematization of private homosocial spaces. Men from all across the United States, from disparate regions, with disparate backgrounds, and with disparate interests, met each other under the aegis of an intense war effort. More than 16 million men and women were enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces (most of whom were single), and 35% of whom were teenagers.<sup>12</sup> They lived in close and incredibly impersonal spaces; the nude male body was systematically publicized, for soldiers shared crowded quarters. Even more, “as these young people left home, they also left many social and sexual pressures and expectations behind” – and homosexuals comfortable with their sexuality found opportunities to transgress those expectations and live without those constricting social pressures. Unsurprisingly, homoerotic tensions flourished in such impersonal barracks; men who once identified as heterosexual often began to question their sexualities, for the homosocial space provided almost no outlet for preoccupation with women.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, the American public was more and more frequently exposed to images of the eroticized and heroicized male body. Photographs of members of the armed forces at ease, lounging semi-nude on beaches in the eastern front and in camps in the western front, came to dominate wartime coverage in popular magazines, like *Life* and *Look*.<sup>14</sup> Americans saw, for the first time, sexualized, muscular American bodies lying together in close quarters; some images even showed one man giving another a massage. While a pejorative homosexual subtext wasn’t necessarily the intention of the photographers – and while many of the men photographed weren’t sexually attracted to men – the male body was, nevertheless, contextualized within the sphere of

homosocial homoeroticism. Many men who discovered their desire for other men within the context of the war machine eschewed returning to their small hometowns; instead, they settled in “gay ghettos,” like Greenwich Village in New York, the North End and Beacon Hill in Boston, and the Tenderloin district and North Beach in San Francisco.<sup>15</sup> And those subcultures freed gay men and lesbians to dress however they wanted, without fear of overt stigmatization. Many of them recognized each other by adopting “gay” fashion: they wore gabardine slacks, knit sport shirts in pastels, tasseled loafers, bright sweater vests; or they wore tight pants, tight shirts, military boots, chokers; or they dressed like women. Whatever their chosen style, gay men could identify each other, and that was enough – they could form friendships, relationships, cliques and social circles. The veil of invisibility often inflicted by mandated domestic relationships with women, while still overwhelmingly common, was no longer the only recourse for young American men attracted to men.<sup>16</sup> Such a milieu was not restricted to the 1950s; over the course of the past six decades, the “gay sensibility” has only strengthened, increasing its visibility and influencing the modes of signification in the dominant culture. Paradoxically, the significations of “gayness” have both differentiated the subculture and sensibility from mainstream, dominant culture while being appropriated by that dominant culture. “Gayness,” to the extent that it exists as a performative manifestation of the feminine/homosexual “imitation” (and in opposition to the masculine/heterosexual “origin”), has muddled that binary by shifting the definitions of masculinity: the hypermasculine “bear,” for instance, thrives in a significant and visible sensibility within the gay subculture, while some “feminine” tropes of male homosexuality – described by Harvard student Adam K. as a “well-dressed, tight jean wearing” aesthetic – have been appropriated by the softening masculinity of male heterosexuals. In a word, the “gay sensibility” (and its attendant “gay fashion”) occupies a highly fluid space, one in which signifiers can be read and misread, understood and misunderstood.

The whole topic of gaydar has always been more of a joke than a topic of serious inquiry, but I have to admit that there are certain characteristics that raise a ‘gay’ flag in my mind when I’m meeting someone for the first time. Fashion is definitely a huge factor - generally, it seems that straight men are more concerned with the utility of their clothing (except, of course, when it comes to impressing women) and gay men are more concerned with the aesthetic style of their clothing. So, when I see an extremely well-dressed guy, it gives me the impression that he may be gay. If a guy associates primarily with women, that may also be an indicator, but beyond that I’m not sure I buy into the stereotypes about gay men.

Chris R.

Despite its loathsome history as a gatekeeper to aristocratic homophobia, Harvard College seems to have a disproportionate amount of gay students on campus; in the words of one student, “it’s the gayest place I’ve ever seen.” The College has tried to make up for its record of holding a secret court to purge gay students by fostering, at least theoretically, a progressive and safe space for its queer students. Whether Harvard is as progressive as it wants to

be, or as accepting as it perceives itself to be, is a matter for debate. But removed from debate is the existence of a thriving gay community within the College – even if that community isn't unified. The majority of students I interviewed perceived a profound polarization among gay students on campus – between the “BGLTSA (Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Transgender and Supporters' Alliance) gays,”<sup>17</sup> the “theatre gays,” the “political gays,” etc. Still, despite such disunity, gay students can easily identify others. Exceptions notwithstanding, body language, fashion, and posture are mostly reliable indicators of gay sexuality: flamboyant gestures, tight pants, and a rigid stance are often sufficient clues to make an accurate guess about a man's “gayness.” Even if the community is discordant, it is nevertheless extant by virtue of its ability to foster self- and other-identification among gay students.

It may seem a bit obvious to posit that gay subcultures are created, in part, by endless permutations of one gay man's ability to recognize another. Doubtlessly, fashion has served as an indicator of perceived sexuality. At Harvard, gay students recognize others by telling cues; tight pants, vests, decorative shirts, and accessories (especially scarves worn indoors) are often manipulated to both broadcast one's own sexual preference and incite a response by other gay men. While an identifiable gay sensibility does not always create a cohesive gay community, the two nevertheless work in tandem to prolong the existence of that gay identity by creating a space (the community) in which the replication of that “derivative” sexuality takes place – which necessarily reifies the signifiers of that sexuality.<sup>18</sup>

“Gaydar,” then, is much more complicated than its critics often allow. It's tempting to write it off, for sexuality and gender are performative and socially constructed. But it is for that very reason that “gaydar” is even possible. Because the subculture constitutes, as its origin, the construction of performative gay sexuality, it necessarily ensures the repetition of that construction, insofar as it creates a space in which the visual signifiers of gay sexuality are constantly reinscribed by their existence and the appropriation of gay subjects. In other words, the performative social construction of gay sexuality – as the feminine/homosexual/derivative “imitation” of the masculine/heterosexual/real “origin” – depends upon the gay subculture to foster a space for growth and repetition. At the same time, the creation of the subculture depends upon those very signifiers that constitute a visual repetition of gay sexuality: the tropes of gay male sexuality, like “gay fashion,” are a means of ensuring the constant transcription and re-transcription of “what it means to look like a homosexual,” which is thus employed by gay men to recognize each other. In short, “gaydar” is both a means of creating subculture and a mechanism in the process of repetition, both of which function interdependently to construct the signifiers of gay sexuality.

Originally, I intended to examine the extent to which fashion is a means of “performing” socially constructed gay sexuality and how it interacts with that construction after the subculture diminishes. Without a doubt, gay subcultures will not always exist, for capitalist society, if it progresses, will not require their construction. Quite conceivably, “gay” will appear “straight,” and “straight” will appear “gay.” Within the context of a highly progressive and capitalist society, the signifiers of gay sexuality are appropriated and commodified by the dominant culture in an act of political suppression. By commodifying the gay sensibility instead of equalizing it,

the dominant culture creates a perceived space of equality while reinscribing its own dominance. With the appearance and feel of equality, the subculture's necessity to exist is in doubt, for it no longer identifies a need to exist – a subculture is only as necessary as the dominant culture is threatening. After interviewing Harvard students, however, I learned that the perception of equalization doesn't exist. Students identify tolerance, acceptance, and even enthusiasm in the community's relationships with the gay minority; but that “enthusiasm” has yet to be translated into an appearance of equity. Perhaps other spaces, like New York City, would be more fruitful for investigation.

This is an enormous generalization, but I definitely feel like it's possible to identify as gay some men who display characteristics of the most stereotyped conception of what it means to be gay, that being those who are more effeminate than “normal.” That said, not all gay men fall into this stereotype and not all effeminate men are gay. Generally, if I see characteristics of myself in other men, I tend to think that they're gay.

Jacob W.

Because sexuality is a concept that repeats itself through copies of a non-existent origin, it is necessarily socially constructed and performative: “sexuality,” as it exists, is nothing more than a reductivist approach to highly diverse and individualized sexual attractions and desires. And those endlessly repeated copies of the “origin” – which never existed – reproduce themselves through the visual signifiers associated with that origin. Thus, fashion is a visual means of repeating the concept of the origin, and therefore the signifiers of sexuality. At the same time, fashion is a means of subcultural formation; it has the ability to help form a distinct and visible community, which depends upon and reinscribes the process of repetition that reinforces the social construction of sexuality in the first place. The visual signifiers of gay male sexuality, like fashion, produce a visual repetition of the derivative “imitation” and therefore create common tropes through which gay men can express their sexualities. The process of self- and other-identification, the foundation for the creation of gay communities, depends upon both the expression of that sexual identity and that identity's repetition, while simultaneously providing a space in which the process of repetition is sustained.

Ergo, “gaydar” isn't the result of identifying “gay” characteristics via selective headshots. It is both a producer and result of sexual and social acculturation, a tool for creating relationships and sustaining the ability to manipulate that tool. When gay students at Harvard feel isolated from the manifold subcultures within the gay community, they can transcend that isolation by identifying gay men independent of niche. The conglomeration of identifiable signifiers – the cohesive gay stereotype – is often sufficient to support the formation of relationships.

But if fashion has, historically, functioned as a producer of subcultural formation and its attendant identity replication, why does Harvard College lack a cohesive gay community? Unfortunately, answers remain purely speculative. Stan F. attributes the polarization to a breakdown in identity politics: “the majority of Harvard's gay community is dispersed amongst the student body, inactive in LGBT groups, who



view their sexual orientation as somehow ancillary to their identity.” And Jacob W. posits that the fragmentation is an extension of Harvard students’ generally accepting stance toward homosexuality – without stigmatization, there isn’t much need for a comprehensive minority community.

Whatever its cause, the fragmentation of any gay subculture anywhere is cause for alarm. Because “gaydar,” subcultural formation, and the replication of sexual identity depend, in some way, upon fashion, that fashion’s commodification into the larger dominant culture (which currently functions as a totalizing bourgeois aesthetic) necessarily reduces that subculture’s political agency. On the surface, the diminution of the gay subculture appears to be a positive development: without an overtly threatening dominant culture, it can cohabitate with and assimilate into the larger social structure, which, after reducing the available space for the replication of gay tropes, results in a direct challenge to the strict codification of sexuality. But the commodification of that “gay sensibility” functions as an appropriating force, not an equalizing one; the subservience and derivativeness of the gay sensibility, an “imitation” of the heterosexual real, reinscribes the dominance of that “origin.” Likewise, the commodification of that gay sensibility necessarily creates a new space in which the process of replication functions. Ultimately, a weakened and fragmented subculture is at profound risk of political castration, for its support of replication ensures a gay-slanted and pro-gay reification of “gayness”; the replication of tropes in the dominant culture gives the illusion of equalization and reifies the dominant culture as “origin,” but removes the apparent need for political agency within the gay subculture.



Radcliffe Union  
of Students

<sup>1</sup> Unattributed. “Studying Gaydar,” *The Advocate*, July 18, 2006. Stable URL: [http://www.advocate.com/issue\\_story\\_ektid33191.asp](http://www.advocate.com/issue_story_ektid33191.asp). Accessed December 24, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Lawson, Willow. “Queer Eyes: Blips on the Gaydar.” *Psychology Today*, Nov/Dec 2005. Stable URL: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/pto-20051018-000007.xml>. Accessed December 24, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> That isn’t to suggest that Harvard’s lesbian community is unimportant. Rather, it is far less visible and diverse on campus, and thus a more difficult community to examine. Another caveat: a “lesbian chic” sensibility has been emerging within the past few years, but successes have been fleeting; *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl*, for instance, lasted just one season – and even then, the “Gal Pals” consisted of three gay men and one lesbian. It would be interesting to examine the increasing commodification of the burgeoning lesbian subculture, but I have a feeling that it would show, more than anything, the truncation of an underdeveloped discursive force; the dominant culture’s early commodification of a tenuous subculture necessarily appropriates, but does not equalize, the subculture with the dominant culture, thereby reducing its political impact. For more information on the increasing commodification of the “lesbian sensibility,” see Danae Clark’s *Commodity Lesbianism* from the *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, David Halperin (Routledge, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Miller, Neil. *In Search of Gay America: Women and Men in Times of Change*. The Atlantic Monthly Press, New York: 1989. Pg 32.

<sup>5</sup> The same simplification of desire exists for lesbians and “heterosexual” men and women. Because bisexuals desire both men and women, society’s emphasis on bisexuality shifts to the context of the desire, not the subject of the desire itself.

<sup>6</sup> Rubin, Gayle. “The Traffic in Women,” *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. 183.

<sup>7</sup> Butler Judith. “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. Ed. Diana Fuss. Routledge, New York: 1991. Pg 21-22.

<sup>8</sup> Butler, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Butler, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Butler, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Paley, Amit. “The Secret Court of 1920,” *The Harvard Crimson*, November 22, 2002. Stable URL: <http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=255428>. Accessed December 26, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Bronski, Michael. *The Pleasure Principle: Sex, Backlash, and the Struggle for Gay Freedom*. St. Martin’s Press, New York: 1998. Pg 87.

<sup>13</sup> Bronski, 87.

<sup>14</sup> Bronski, 89.

<sup>15</sup> Bronski, 88.

<sup>16</sup> Lesbians, due to their much more marginal purchasing power, were not afforded the same abilities to form as vibrant subcultures as men. Women were, more than ever, pressured to start families after the war ended. Moreover, men reclaimed their jobs upon their return, necessitating the return of women to domestication.

<sup>17</sup> After these interviews were conducted, the Harvard-Radcliffe BGLTSA was renamed the Harvard College Queer Students and Allies (QSA).

<sup>18</sup> It is entirely possible for a gay sensibility to exist across multiple subcultures. Indeed, the “gay community” at Harvard College is splintered and hardly unified. Students recognize “little subcultures” within the larger community, which is nevertheless unified around a common sensibility.

# INTERVIEW: SUSAN STRYKER

IMAN JAMES AND KRISTEN JONES

Susan Stryker is known in nearly every LGBTQ circle as an accomplished activist, historian, and academic. In this interview, we hoped to illuminate how these three realms interact for Susan herself. We also asked her what advice she would give to others about how one can deploy an academic understanding about activism in the real world, while maintaining in sight the history of these movements.

As the so-called “trans movement” becomes increasingly more visible (e.g., the recent issues with the Human Rights Campaign’s disregard of trans rights), there is a greater need than ever for scholars, activists, and historians alike not only to diversify the examination of social justice issues, but to complicate and contextualize the trans movement as well.

*You are currently writing a book. Can you tell us more about it and how is it connected to your past work?*

I’m working on a book called “Sex Change City,” which is a history of transgender community formation in San Francisco. I’ve been researching trans history in SF for a long time--nearly 20 years--and bits and pieces of that research show up in different places. Some of it went into my intro text, *Transgender History* (Seal Press 2008), and some of it went into a film I made a few years ago, *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton’s Cafeteria* (ITVS/Frameline 2005). But I’ve never pulled together all that I know on this topic, all in one place. I’m trying to do that now. But it’s turning out to be a very slow process.

*What does the modern trans movement look like? Who and where are the people fighting for trans justice? What is the movement’s relationship with other social movements, particularly gay and lesbian rights?*

The trans movement, globally, is very diverse. What I’ve seen of the movement in places like Turkey and South America is a strong emphasis on challenging violence

against transgender women. In the EU, I’ve seen a lot more emphasis on securing rights to privacy for trans people who have had medical procedures done to support their gender identities. In the US, I’ve seen a lot more emphasis on trying to reform administrative and bureaucratic procedures, as well as state--and now federal--level civil rights law. I think it’s important for trans activism to be allied with lesbian and gay, and with feminist activism whenever possible. Organizations like the National Center for Lesbian Rights, Lambda Legal, and the Task Force have been tremendously helpful to trans communities. Sadly, however, there are parts of the gay/lesbian and feminist communities that are every bit as clueless and discriminatory as the Christian fundamentalist right. I personally don’t feel the need to try to persuade people with phobic attitudes toward trans people--but welcome anybody, regardless of their gender identity or expression, to work on trans issues. Likewise, I don’t think trans people are going to get very far by trying to advance a narrow “transgender rights” agenda. We have to be working as transgender people in broader movement, taking on things that affect us, as well as others: border control, identity documentation, surveillance, prisons, HIV, health care, access to public space and benefits regardless of physical dis/ability, environmental justice and green jobs--to name just a few!

*How has your gender identification informed your work both in the classroom and in the streets (i.e., theoretical and activism pursuits)?*

It's a really deep and complex relationship. When I was a kid, I felt very alienated from my body because it felt gender-discordant to me, and tended to live in my head a lot. And I was curious about why I felt like I was a girl instead of a boy, even though by all appearances I was male, and was socialized that way--so I had a lot to think about, and have been thinking about it for a long time. I started the Ph.D. program in US History at Berkeley back in 1983, and I didn't realize it at the time, but my dissertation (which looked at the Mormons as a way to understand the process through which historically novel categories of personal and collective identity emerge and become important ways of organizing cultural activity) was kind of a covert tranny project--I was working things out intellectually that I eventually realized I needed to work out through my body, and how I lived my life. I so transitioned male-to-female in 1991, just as I was finishing up graduate school, and decided to work on gender identity and sexuality instead of religious and ethnic identity. It was not easy to find work as an out trans person in the early 1990s, and so I did most of my work as a community-based scholar. And not having a regular academic job meant I could spend a lot more time doing politics, and making art. For about seven years I just completely immersed myself in queer cultural production and activism. I learned a heck of a lot doing that--I think of it as kind of like doing a participant-observer post-doc in trans studies. By the late 1990s, I was getting back into academia a bit more--though still running a nonprofit organization and filmmaking. For the last few years I've been teaching trans pretty much full time, at various colleges and universities, including Harvard. I've recently accepted an Associate Professorship, with tenure, in the Gender Studies department at Indiana University in Bloomington.

*Describe the intersection of your theoretical, historical, and activist perspectives. How have they informed each other? Has a situation arisen in which you had to sacrifice one for the sake of another?*

I enjoy working in theory, historical research, and political activism for very different reasons. Critical theory is for me like listening to experimental music; I just love the buzz and the new connections I see between things. Doing archival research, when you really sink down into it, feels revelatory: you can see the trace of a material process recorded primary documents, and even though you are usually cloistered away in some archive while doing the research, you feel connected to the workings of the world in deep ways. As for political activism, well, there's nothing like the feeling that you were able to change something about the way the world is organized, through actions you took. So I like to circulate between these three ways of working--as well as through media-making and arts practices--and bring things from one area into the others.

I think the biggest "sacrifice," if you want to look at it that way, is that when you work in several different areas, the progress you make in any one is slower than it would be otherwise. But over time, as I increasingly see, the energies you invest in each area start to build synergistic momentum, start to amplify. So

in that since, it's not a sacrifice--just a longer-term strategy.

I would also say that from one angle, another sacrifice has been financial. Because I didn't go straight from graduate school into a profession, I gave up (or was denied through employment discrimination) hundreds of thousands of dollars. But the truth of the matter is that I have supported myself and my kids, bought and sold a home. I have wound up in a very comfortable financial situation, and done work that I have loved doing. There are more important things than making money.

*What do you see as the biggest point of tension for you being an academic and an activist?* Sometimes people in the academy don't value the kinds of practical knowledge and insight you get from living your body in the world, and from figuring out how to negotiate your way through society based on the ways you're different from the dominant culture. And sometimes people outside the academy don't understand what's important about "theory," and feel alienated and divorced from what they perceive as useless, overly abstract knowledge. But I feel committed to bringing these two ways of knowing together.

*Can you tell us about your experiences here at Harvard and what you saw as the Harvard transgender community? How would you describe trans resources and visibility at Harvard? In Boston? How does it compare to California?*

I was really impressed with the level of knowledge that folks on campus had--not just the students, but some of the faculty and staff as well. And I was impressed that there was a very active Transgender Task Force, even though there wasn't a lot of transgender visibility on campus. Boston seems to have a very energized trans community--I wish I had more time to spend networking in it. It's hard for me to compare it to San Francisco, because I have such a deep grounding in San Francisco; maybe if I knew Boston as well it would seem equally complex. But from my perspective, San Francisco has a uniquely deep and well-connected trans community. It's possible here to have a quality of life due to sheer numbers, relations with the broader LGBT community, levels of political connectedness, opportunities for cultural expression, social and medical services, and so on, that you just don't find anywhere else.

*In 2009, what exactly does it mean to be transgender? I'm thinking about new technology, the ways in which we have deployed words such as "queer" and "genderqueer," and a powerful gay rights movement.*

Who knows? I think of it as being anything that challenges dominant cultural notions of gender, and as being inclusive of genderqueer, but definitions change, bodily practices change, legal definitions change--that's part of what makes it such an interesting thing to study. It feels like transgender is an evolving edge of human (or posthuman) experience in capitalist technoculture; we'll see what happens!

*Can you speak to the issues many*



*trans people face due to the intersection of marginalized identities, such as black and Latino trans people, poor trans people, trans people with HIV, and trans sex workers, and how that pushes them further to the fringes of society?*

First, I'd say that it's not really possible to simply add "trans" to the list of marginalizations, like it's its own discrete thing--what counts as "trans" is really context-dependent, and it plays differently in different communities. I was just looking at some archival material from the early 1990s the other day, about the debates about trans inclusion in the Stonewall 25 march in New York. The people of color caucus at the planning meetings was opposed to transgender inclusion, because they said "transgender" was a white term, that their communities had space in them for gender-variant members who went by names other than "transgender" (names like bulldagger or femme queen), that "drag" already covered what trans people wanted to include, and that white transgender people were all straight and didn't have a place in a gay march. Now, I could argue each of those points, but what I find fascinating is how impossible it is to say that trans means any one thing by itself, without taking into consideration who's using it, in reference to whom, and for what purpose. But maybe that's not really answering your question. I guess I would just say that because having a clearly identifiable gender is one of the most basic ways that we each, as individuals, become intelligible to the state and to society, anything that problematizes that adds a very serious obstacle to full citizenship, and compounds any other marginalizations.

*What work are trans scholars doing and how are they engaging with the transgender community? How is the work being done in academia concerning transpeople being co-opted by transgenders in their daily struggles? Essentially, is what we do at an institution like Harvard making a difference?*

One thing that elite institutions like Harvard can do is to redirect their resources to communities that need it, with few or no strings attached. After a couple of academic conferences this spring, I was talking with some Harvard students who were interested in organizing a transgender studies conference next year. I think that would be a great thing to do--use some Harvard money to bring together trans people, scholars, activists, who wouldn't ordinarily have a chance to talk, be informed by each other's work, learn. A well-organized conference can be a great resource for cultural change, to the extent that it helps the academy's resources flow out into the world, rather than gathering up knowledge from the world and hoarding it in the ivory tower.

*What do you see as the major obstacles facing the trans movement in terms of organizing, resources, and visibility of the movement? In what ways are they being addressed in academia and in the grassroots?*

It needs to be seen as a serious movement, not a frivolous one--not about guys in dresses wanting to pee standing up in the ladies' room. The movement needs to address the affective experience of non-trans people who are not used to encountering trans people. Because of the levels of poverty

in trans communities, individuals and groups who fund social change activism need to pump more money into the trans movement. Academia can be an important part of this work by doing the intellectual work that's needed to dismantle all the cultural processes and preconceptions that hold trans people back, or keep non-trans people from seeing trans folks clearly. One way that academia can do this is admit more trans kids to college, support them better while they are there, and to hire more trans faculty. It's like any other kind of affirmative action or diversity argument--people who live the experience of bodily and cultural differences from the dominant culture (like race or gender or ethnic/geography-based heritage) have a certain kind of expertise about their situation that nobody else has, and this knowledge is valuable and needs to be cultivated and disseminated.

*What is some advice that you would give to students, especially to students working for specifically trans activism, on how to balance one's activist life with an academic one? What advice would you give on how to improve the current state of youth trans activism?*

Trans issues touch on every issue in the humanities and social sciences; use your classes to develop a powerful analysis of trans issues. Educate your faculty and peers. Work to direct the institution's resources to the places where it will make the biggest impact. Take advantage of internship programs and travel programs to offer free labor to trans groups that can use some extra hands and a hungry, open mind.

*Who is your favorite trans activist, past or present? What makes them someone that you look up to? Are there any specific campaigns or instances of activism that you found particularly effective?*

There are so many amazing trans activists I couldn't really say. Well, OK, maybe Lou Sullivan. When I was first starting out as a community-based scholar, volunteering at the GLBT Historical Society, one of the very first things I did was to process the archival collection of the recently deceased FTM activist Lou Sullivan. I was really moved by Lou's journals, which he started keeping as a 10 year old girl in suburban Milwaukee, and which he kept until a few days before his death as a gay man in San Francisco, a victim of the AIDS crisis. Lou organized the first national organizations for trans men. He was tireless and effective in everything that he did. And he was a really humble guy. I appreciate that about him. Because I had a chance to make the records of Lou's life available to others, and because I felt close to him after reading his diaries, I've always had a soft spot for Lou.

Effective campaigns? I think "Peeing in Peace" is really effective. The handbook for activists can be downloaded from the Transgender Law Center website. The campaign is about gender-neutral public bathrooms, but it's organized in such a way that it brings trans issues together with disability, women's safety/sexual violence/rape, and the built environment. I just think it's a really well thought out campaign, and can help build grassroots connections for bigger-scale work, like the pending efforts to pass a gender-inclusive federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

# SEX, REAL ESTATE AND POWER

CHRISTIAN GARLAND



Photograph by Kristen Jones, 2009

There is a tendency among students at Harvard – and any institution of privilege, really – to invest spaces and names with power. That power is the product of history, of ambience, of “tradition.” At Harvard, where the Office of Residential Life focuses on maintaining the “traditional Harvard look” in its house common spaces and suites, “tradition” is often used as a blanket justification for the normative status quo – for an antiquated academic calendar, say, or even sex-segregated private clubs. Spaces at Harvard cultivate those airs of power, of the tradition of heterosexist male dominance: our libraries, dining halls, and classrooms are repositories of Harvard Men and the world they’ve helped shape.

One could argue, somewhat persuasively, that our generation is not that generation of Harvard Men. Harvard College doesn’t, after all, have smoking rooms designated for men and separate spaces for their sad, lonely wives. That sounds like progress. And we don’t (to my knowledge, anyway) have virulent secret courts to expel homosexuals, or quotas on Jews and Catholics, or private servants. That, too, sounds like progress. But to pat ourselves on the back for our liberalization of Harvard’s culture is to elide the fact that power still structures our social spaces and interactions; that Harvard’s “tradition” and its signifiers are still heterosexist, misogynistic, and racist; and that Harvard is still an institution that implicitly supports secretive, private organizations, their expensive, exclusive real estate, and the unnamed acts that occur within them.

Without a doubt, the spaces we inhabit are important. At Harvard, those spaces retain the vestiges of their history, of the (many) men (of color) and (very few) women (of color) who experienced the privilege of their residences. And the power invested in those spaces shifts when the spaces are made either open or closed – and the acts that occur within them, licit or illicit, necessarily reflect the spaces in which they occur. If sex is such a taboo on this campus – and there is no doubt that, for a sizable amount of the student population, it is –

how is it conceived of, and practiced, in traditional Harvard spaces? And what happens when those spaces are removed from campus life and injected with a privacy that Harvard’s cultural progression cannot touch?

The editors of HBOMB magazine are very much interested in sex and sexuality. (You could say that that’s kind of our thing.) We’re also very much interested in the powers that support the repression (or expression) of sexual acts, both normative and non-normative. If Harvard’s sense of “tradition” (and the power it invests) is those things for which we should feel a sense of connected (heterosexist) history, of common (normative) experience, how do we approach the sexual practices that both support and destabilize that power? More specifically, how is sex practiced, or un-practiced, in private institutions within the already private and exclusive institution that is Harvard? And what about institutions that maintain private property, independent from the University and its extensive reach?

With these conflicts in mind, HBOMB magazine and the Office of Sexual Assault, Prevention, and Response (OSAPR) held a panel discussion on the unique intersections between sex (that is, gender, sex, and sexuality), real estate, and power. Among other points of interest, we wanted to examine the role private real estate holdings plays in the censorship and non-censorship of marginalized groups, and the sexual acts they prefer or practice. Representatives of the Harvard Advocate literary magazine (21 South Street), the Harvard Crimson (14 Plympton Street), the Dudley Co-op (3 Sacramento Street, 1705 Massachusetts Avenue), the Fox Final Club (44 JFK Street), and the Spee Final Club (76 Mt. Auburn Street) were present. Millicent Younger ’10 and Sanders Bernstein ’10 represented the Advocate; Daniel Herz-Roiphe ’10 represented both the Crimson and the Fox; Paul Nauert ’09 represented the Dudley Co-op; and Johnny Bowman ’11 represented the Spee. (NB: The Advocate rents its real estate from Harvard University,

and the Dudley Co-op is officially affiliated with the University as an undergraduate residence.) Assistant Dean of Residential Life Judith Kidd and OSAPR Prevention Specialist Gordon Braxton also participated.

The questions for the panelists were written and submitted by audience members and the HBOMB editorial board. While they were encouraged to be direct and probing, the moderator, Colette Perold (HBOMB's Business Manager), issued just one requirement: questions could not specifically vilify final clubs or their representatives. When HBOMB conceived of the symposium, we had final clubs in mind – they are, for many Harvard students, paradigms of racial/social/gender/sexual inequality, and we wanted to examine the interactions between social practices and private spaces at an elite institution. But to say that we had only final clubs in mind would be disingenuous. At Harvard, privilege constitutes an always-already “there”; it is a presence that, while sometimes shrouded, exists by default. Any group or institution that segregates itself from the College community at large enjoys a distinct privilege – namely, the privilege of private space shaped by its residents or members. Put another way, any group or institution that wields a guest list is one predicated on the privilege of exclusivity. Simply put, the Co-op, the Advocate, and the Crimson are just as implicated in private spaces as final clubs.

The following are excerpts from HBOMB's and OSAPR's panel discussion.

*Colette Perold: What's the definition of a safe of space?*

Paul Nauert (Dudley Co-op): To me the heart of a safe space is, is this a space where you can fully be the human being that you are and have whatever that humanity is celebrated. I think what is absolutely vital to that vision of a safe space is a community of folks that share that vision of equality. If you're in a space and you feel unsafe, it's an unsafe space.

*CP: What does your average member look like?*

Millicent Younger (the Advocate): Well, I think that we're at a very different position from the Final Clubs in that we are a co-ed organization, so our average member is either a male or a female. Like the Co-op, the Advocate is a little less racially and ethnically diverse than some other organizations... not by any sort of intention, but again, it's a very sort of self-selective organization. I would say our average member wears pretty much what I'm wearing right now. But I would say in terms of the fact that the Advocate has the stereotype of being “wearing black and sitting in this building smoking cigarettes all day” is really not the case.

Daniel Herz-Roiphe (The Crimson, the Fox): People generally assume that final clubs are more homogenous than they actually are. I think that some final clubs defy the stereotypes less than others and I think the Fox does a good job of defying the stereotypes in some ways, maybe not so much in others. I think that one thing you could say about members of the Fox is that they are on average wealthier than the student body at large. I think there are a couple of reasons for this. Obviously, these clubs have expensive membership fees but I don't think that's the primary reason; most clubs offer financial aid. I don't think there is conscious discrimination based on socio-economic status. I think that coming from a certain socio-economic backgrounds puts you

in certain networks and allows you to know certain people before you arrive here and I think that's the sort of self-perpetuating cycle that exists among final clubs. I think there are other stereotypes that are not true, racially, in terms of interest, in terms of sexual orientation. I think those are things that are usually confounded by the final club.

Johnny Bowman (the Spee): Yeah I say, final clubs in general are heteronormative, and it is a shame, I wish it would change. And I don't know how to change if there are 60 heterosexual dudes in one place and what do you talk about, if you're a guy or a girl you talk about the people you are trying to hook up with or date. If you're a heterosexual guy that's girls, and if you're gay it's much harder to join in that conversation.

DHR: At the Fox I do agree there is a sort of heteronormative space that comes from having an all male space. When there are date events people bring girls. That's sort of what you're supposed to do. That said, there are gay members of the Fox and gay members of other final clubs. I don't know if there is more pressure for sexual prowess than other friend groups.

PN: So the Co-op again is one of the most queer friend spaces I've experienced in my life. And I want to emphasize the word queer and say this is not a gay straight dichotomy. Queer emphasizes that it is a not a community predicated on discussions about sexual prowess and how bold and upfront your sexuality can be articulated. That isn't the central motive-driving engine of our community. Of course it is infused into all things so far as we are human and so far as we are young. The coop is one of the most intellectually stimulating and intense communities I know on the Harvard campus, and I think that and the daily cooking and cleaning, plus the sharing of theses, drives the coop. Discussions of sex and sexuality are different in the coop, because the way we've been thinking of it as sex in the party setting, in the pursuit of sex, we have to think of a more comprehensive complex of social dynamics.

*CP: How does gender play a role in the way social spaces are controlled at Harvard?*

JB: So for the Spee, it's all male, so we talk about male things.

*CP: What are male things?*

JB: That's a good point. So, like, the Spee just talks about football all the time...Never sports, actually. Most people are straight at the Spee, are heterosexual, so the women we are dating get talked about a lot.

*Audience Member: When you're talking about “dating,” are you talking about hooking-up? Or courtship? Are you just talking about sex?*

JB: Sex does get talked about a ton. Not the specific graphic nature of it, but kind of “did you have sex or not?” It's usually a “yes” or “no” type conversation, and I guess as a male club that happens more in a male-based space than it does in any other kind of space.

DHR: At the Crimson I don't think gender plays a role in the way power is divided out. We have a lot of female leadership.



The stereotype of final clubs that hold most accurate is that they perpetuate an unequal gender power dynamic at this school. There are 8 all male final club that control pretty valuable real estate that play a crucial role in the social lives of a lot of people here at Harvard which consequently puts a lot of power in the hands of men. And women have to befriend these men if they want to go to these parties. I think there are a few interesting things that are happening or that could happen to change this. The first is the possibility of final clubs going coed, this happened to Princeton eating clubs and Yale secret societies, so it seems closed minded to think this could never happen to Harvard final clubs. In fact, in the past few years the Fox, the Fly, and the Spee have all voted to go coed at one point or another and have all been overturned by their graduate boards. In 30 years the people on the graduate boards will be the people who made that vote as undergrads. The second point is the rise of female final clubs, three of which now have their own space, and they will only grow and that will provide some sort of counterweight to male control.

*CP: I was surprised that none of you talk about sexual assault as a safety concern and what you groups do to prevent assaults from happening. As the primary locations providing a party venue what do your groups do officially and unofficially? What improvements in this policies and precautions do you see?*

JB: In terms of sexual assault at the Spee Club, to my knowledge hasn't been anything, at least since I've been there. It hasn't been a topic of much discussion for that reason. I think that's a shame, because that's not an excuse to not do anything about it because IT is all guys, it happened at other final clubs, and I don't see why the Spee Club is absolutely an exception. In terms of what measures I'm not aware of any. I think the biggest measure you can take is the type of people you choose to come into your club because some guys are are likely to take advantage of women.

Sanders Bernstein (the Advocate): As far as the Advocate is concerned, there's never been – or in the two and a half years, or since my freshman year – no sexual assault has gone on in the Advocate. We have instituted, either in the second semester of my freshman year, a policy, as well as an anti-hazing policy...a prevention of sexual assault policy, or a policy to create a positive atmosphere for everyone, regardless of gender or sexuality. There are institutional policies that create a safe space – each executive board briefs the next on our policies concerning sexual assault and sexual molestation, so we create an institutional memory. And we meet each semester with people from OSAPR and Mr. Braxton to go through anti-hazing policy and prevent sexual assaults from happening.

GB: I just want to reiterate I hope that the dialogue is multi-directional. You guys are certainly brave for coming out. I just want to say that this panel represents progress just that I've seen in my career year. I think the transparency is a step in the right direction. I think it's very easy to draw divisions between us when we're talking about cultural problem, and I think large segments of the population do pick out this organization or that organization as problematic, but we don't really have a lot of data to support a lot of the stereotypes. I hope we do recognize it as a cultural problem. As far as it

being multi-directional, a lot of times you don't know the way your organization is perceived unless someone tells you. So I really hope this dialogue continues.

JB: There's been a lot of talk what the issues are, but very little talk about what needs to happen. I've spoke to a lot of people about what needs to happen and their opinions about that, and I still don't know what needs to happen because there are so many different opinions and so many different alternatives. But please come and talk to me or anyone else you know in a final club.

To be sure, the panel discussion turned out better than we expected. Our panelists, brave as they were for appearing at an event that questioned the motives, practices, and privileges of their respective institutions, exhibited candidness and self-reflection to a degree we didn't fully anticipate. Audience members learned an unprecedented amount of information about private organizations that benefit from the aura of secrecy and the power that under girds them. Issues surrounding race, class, gender, and sexuality were discussed at length, and the interaction between the panelists and the audience illuminated a diverse range of opinions, biases, and thoughts on how to move forward.

Although this panel was originally conceived of as a response to final clubs, it was not intended to consider them alone. Sexual assault, silence, power, hierarchy and real estate are so intertwined, so interconnected, and so interdependent that an elision of other institutions would constitute a disingenuous, and ultimately counterproductive, gesture to progressive change. No matter how their members are sexed, gendered, or racialized, exclusive organizations predicate their power on the exclusivity of their spaces.

Nevertheless, our attempt to expand the conversation was met with an implicit resistance: the moderator's final questions, concerning sexual assault and institutional prevention, were understood as final club-specific. Those panelists who didn't represent final clubs were at a loss for their perceived relevance; and the audience, while respectful, focused almost exclusively on the Fox and the Spee. Because most of the questions submitted by the audience were geared toward the final clubs, the conversation necessarily focused on them. While it was not our intention, "Sex, Real Estate, and Power" became more about the practices of final clubs than it did the cultural mechanisms that structure social inequalities.

Gordon Braxton's and Johnny Bowman's call for a multi-directional conversation on the power that structures our society and culture should – and will – be heeded. While racial, class, sexual, and gender discrimination were discussed, the root causes of those biases – biases that structure a profoundly normative and heterosexist society – were not. The editors of HBOMB intend to host a second symposium that delves more deeply into the intersections of sex, power, and private spaces. Without a thorough examination of the cultural mechanisms that produce a heterosexist culture, we cannot fully confront the malignant ramifications experienced by women, people of color, the economically disadvantaged, and those that refuse to enact a heteronormative existence. "Sex, Real Estate and Power" was an important first step in instigating a multi-directional dialogue on the powers and tradition that structure our lives and our lived experiences. But it is only the first step, and one of many.

## HOW TO HAVE PREMARITAL SEX UNAPOLOGETICALLY: THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT AND ABSTINENCE POLICY

COLETTE PEROLD



In early October I was sauntering into the Coop, when a book on display caught my eye. The cover read, “SEX SEX SEX,” in red, white, and blue, and it was titled: *Sex in Crisis: The New Sexual Revolution and the Future of American Politics*. I soon discovered that the author, Dagmar Herzog, was on her way to Cambridge to promote her book right there in the Coop. As I’ve spent a lot of time pondering how diseased this country’s sexual culture is, (surprise surprise; H Bomb is a convenient home for me,) I immediately contacted her for an interview, and spent the weekend immersed in the world of *Sex in Crisis*. The book opened up a whole lens on US culture and politics that I hadn’t ever seen through. In it, Herzog takes us through a tour of the US’ Religious Right – the way it emerged, the way it morphed, the culture that bred it, and the culture it is currently creating, unfortunately all too pervasively. She characterizes the Religious Right as a sexual movement, tracing its grip on our sexual culture as a conscious political project.

The analysis in her book continually hit home for me. I

remember reading about the French elections in the media in 2007 and how the candidates’ sex lives weren’t coming into play; this served as an interesting comparison when less than a year later the Eliot Spitzer prostitute scandal came out, couched in a discourse of voyeurism and disdain. I have memories of dancing around to videos of Britney Spears in elementary school and internalizing the mixed message on the front cover of her first hit single: bare legs squeezed tightly shut in an innocent act of provocative seduction. It was those moments when I first internalized that it was “sexy” to be a “virgin” – that the male gaze’s association with my sexuality would be predicated on my not having anything to do with sex, while at the same time having everything to do with it. These examples are representative of the characters Herzog strings together into this carefully plotted narrative of the Religious Right. In her book, business executives in New York, pastors in Colorado, and truck drivers in Uganda all merge into an intricate web of the Religious Right’s political power-trip. In this article, I’d like to take you on a little spin

of Herzog's findings. I hope I can give you a taste of her research. But ultimately, I gotta pull the shameless plug: read her book. It is downright disgusting. Yet so, so beautiful.

## THE ORIGINS OF THE MOVEMENT, AND HOW WE GOT TO WHERE WE ARE TODAY

While conservative leaders like to point to opposition to *Roe v. Wade* as the Religious Right's birthplace, organization actually began in 1975 in opposition to anti-racist legislation. The Christian conservative Bob Jones University denied access to African Americans until 1971. After 1971, it admitted only married African American couples,<sup>1</sup> and when that move became too controversial, accepted single African Americans but forbade interracial dating. The IRS denied the University their tax-exempt status as a result. The activism around maintaining Bob Jones University's tax-exempt status gave rise to the networks of the Religious Right as we know them today.

Their organization solidified with Bush senior's reelection campaign in 1992. Campaign strategists openly admitted that a focus on homosexuality would be one of their main ways of appealing to southern Evangelical voters. At the same time, Christian right organizations began distributing thousands of copies of the homophobic video "The Gay Agenda" – one component of a mass of material presenting homosexuals as sex offenders and child abusers.<sup>2</sup> But when Clinton finally defeated Bush, the Religious Right took a step back to reevaluate. It is in this moment that their organizing escalated so rapidly.

In 1994, forty members of the nation's most powerful Evangelical lobbying groups met for a top-secret meeting in a castle near Colorado Springs. These groups make up the core of the Religious Right, including the likes of Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, Concerned Women for America, the Eagle Forum, and the American Family Association. Here they gave their politicized homophobia a bit of a make-over. While the intentions were to keep it on the down low, tapes were leaked, and a gay Evangelical passed them along to Herzog.

In analyzing the tactics of the meeting, she notes that these groups made an outspoken shift from promoting hatred to promoting "all-American and healthful common sense."<sup>3</sup> They aimed to secularize the movement's sexual messages.<sup>4</sup> John Eldredge from Focus on the Family suggested, "To the extent we can control our public image, we must never appear to be bigoted or mean-spirited...We must never appear to be attempting to rob anyone of their...constitutional rights."<sup>5</sup> He also suggested that they keep the "eight-hundred-pound gorilla" of Focus on the Family out of sight, and make homosexual resistance appear to emerge from "a genuine grassroots uprising."<sup>6</sup> Like all successful activist networks, they decided to take advantage of new technologies: fax machines, e-mail, and Internet forums.<sup>7</sup> It was even at this meeting that the idea of "ex-gays" began to take shape. One participant asked, "How can you be born gay if what you do causes diseases?"<sup>8</sup> Soon their base for a gentler, more palatable homophobia took root.

But a crucial shift occurred within the following few years. Off the bat, the Religious Right began to push for abstinence-only curricula in schools to teach the dangers of sodomy and other "abnormal" sexual activity.<sup>9</sup> And at the same time, homophobia in this country began to cool a bit. For Herzog,

a major factor was the way in which "gay sex had simply lost its power to repulse."<sup>10</sup> While in 1998, an anti-gay pamphlet answered the question, "What do homosexuals 'do'?" with the response, "They typically engage in oral or anal sodomy, or mutual masturbation,"<sup>11</sup> in 2007, heterosexual pop-culture has denounced the taboo of any of these sexual acts. *Cosmopolitan* announced, "These days, interest in backdoor booty is growing."<sup>12</sup> *Glamour* similarly stated, "You're not freakish for wanting anal sex."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, when missionary position no longer defined heterosexual sex, sexual orientation no longer described the acts two people did in bed, but rather the partners they chose to do those acts with. In this process that Herzog calls the "homosexualization of heterosexual sex,"<sup>14</sup> homophobia lost a bit of its staunch grip on US electoral politics.<sup>15</sup> Of course that's not the whole picture; LGBT activism was making leaps and bounds, with Act Up reaching its pinnacle only twenty-one years after the Stonewall riots and three years before Clinton was elected to office. Of course homophobia hasn't disappeared. Take for example, oh I don't know, Proposition 8. And the Religious Right's history of ex-gay promotion and reparative therapy residential programs has left a frightening legacy. (If you're interested, look up the video entitled "Ties That Bind," at [inthelife.org](http://inthelife.org). It tells the story of the first ex-gay survivor conference, where founders of the ex-gay promotion organization "Exodus" came together thirty-one years after its founding to make a public statement of apology.) But through this frightening history and the homophobia we see even on a daily basis, homophobia no longer serves as the rallying cry it once was, and the Religious Right has taken note. And here begins the shift into abstinence policy.

## THE SEXUAL CLIMATE THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT STEPPED INTO PART ONE: VIAGRA

Before continuing on with this mystifying saga, I want to paint the picture of US sexual culture that Herzog places in the very first pages of her book. She calls this chapter "Anxiety Nation," and discusses this culture through two lenses: Viagra and Porn. In 1998, Pfizer discovered Viagra when an experimental drug aimed to treat angina in men did little to alleviate chest pain, but instead caused excellent erections.<sup>16</sup> That's right, Viagra was discovered unintentionally. Conveniently enough, in 1997 the FDA lifted its prohibition on the direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicine, now allowing pharmaceutical companies to market right to consumers.<sup>17</sup> Pfizer capitalized on this new vehicle to advertise Viagra, and a mere five years later, Pfizer boasted that at every second, nine men around the world were consuming a Viagra pill.<sup>18</sup> Through this burst of Viagra sales and its accompanying media frenzy and medical studies, sexual dysfunction in males moved from something once perceived as psychological and emotional, to a physiological malfunction.<sup>19</sup>

Soon, Viagra was advertised to cure not only erectile dysfunction, (ED) but also "erectile dysphoria."<sup>20</sup> What is erectile dysphoria, you ask? According to Pfizer, it's "a vague sense of dissatisfaction."<sup>21</sup> Viagra became something to use just to "jazz things up."<sup>22</sup> Conceptions of male sexuality changed drastically: when male emotion was taken out of the picture, the emphasis switched from desire to performance.<sup>23</sup> The question began to arise: What exactly was turning the



man on--the drug or the woman?<sup>24</sup>

What did the world of pharmaceuticals do next? Why, what all successful corporations should. They looked for a way to capitalize on that second half of the population that wasn't being reached with the first incarnation of Viagra. Researchers began a whirlwind search to find some form of a "pink Viagra."<sup>25</sup> At first it may seem a valiant effort, and was in fact supported by many women's rights groups.<sup>26</sup> But the results have been ambiguous at best.<sup>27</sup> They simply never figured out what kind of a drug would turn women on, or through which of women's many anatomical channels. But the companies kept at it. They began by replacing the unfortunate term "frigidity" with something more politically correct and "scientific": FSD. Female sexual dysfunction.<sup>28</sup>

The disease has four components: a low level of desire; low levels of physiological arousal; difficulty achieving orgasms; and pain and discomfort during intercourse, including a dissatisfaction with the quality of the orgasm.<sup>29</sup> As Herzog put it during our interview, FSD was the name finally put on women's eternal complaints with heterosexuality. "You're not going to find some woman on the planet, lesbian, bisexual, or straight, who has not at some point experienced something that was a less-than-satisfying orgasm," she told me with a laugh. A similar shift that happened in the male world of sexual malfunction had happened in the female world. While in 1996 *Details* magazine was telling men to make love like a lesbian, ten years later they dropped that whole agenda. Men were no longer encouraged to be creative in bed, eliminating the attentiveness to emotion and sensation that should have been addressing the problem from the start.<sup>30</sup> Sex had become an act of mechanics.

The shift took sexuality away from desire, and put it into the realm of biological functionality. Which in turn has left us frustrated and insecure. Herzog explained to me:

Even people whose sex lives were perfectly adequate started to get confused. 'Maybe there's something wrong with me.' 'Maybe there's something wrong with my partner.' What we need to notice is the kind of re-making of human nature that's occurred through this discussion. No matter how incredibly ecstatic you are in your own sex life, you can't read this literature without it getting inside your psyche. Sex by its nature is imperfect! That's actually what makes it really cool.

This marketing of sexual conditions has created a state of anxiety, where public conversations about emotional excitement, innovation, and exploration don't dominate notions of pleasure. By 2003, reports started to come out suggesting that the US heterosexual population just wasn't pleased with their sex lives.<sup>31</sup> And the discourse around pornography has played an equally important role.

## THE SEXUAL CLIMATE THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT STEPPED INTO PART TWO: PORN

Herzog explains that while medicalizing sexuality was about the physiological aspects of sex, the mania around pornography was about systemic fears of the potential death of love.<sup>32</sup> She notes the pervasive media headlines like, "Not tonight, Honey. I'm Logging On."<sup>33</sup> "No longer is it women feigning headaches to avoid sex," she joked in the

interview. A large part of these societal fears of pornography have been given seeming scholarly legitimacy through the research of professionals in the medical world. After explaining how pornography is more physically addictive to the brain than cocaine, codirector of the Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program at University of Pennsylvania once noted, "a husband who uses porn is 'masturbating inside [his wife's] body while he is having sex with the women on the screen.'"<sup>34</sup> This "symptom" of porn-viewing began to develop a name around 2000. "Emotional infidelity."<sup>35</sup> That's right – it's worse than real life adultery!<sup>36</sup>

In case you didn't pick up on it, that last little bit was meant to be sarcastic. Just because every image that runs through your brain during sex isn't of your partner, does that mean you're committing adultery? Who can focus on one image without their brain wandering for every second of a sexual encounter? While there are many valid critiques of the current porn industry, the attack on fantasy is a sick twist. It's important to note that anti-porn activism has changed drastically since its inception. Early anti-porn activists and a few still today argue that porn encourages violence against women: "Pornography is the theory," they argued. "Rape is the practice."<sup>37</sup> But these arguments are carrying less and less weight these days: the largest and fastest-growing segment of the pornographic film industry is porn directed at women and couples.<sup>38</sup> While the 1990's were all about women coming into their sexuality by gaining comfort with "masturbation, fantasy, and self-acceptance,"<sup>39</sup> now fantasy is shunned and shamed, and sexual self-awareness is pushed to the back burner. When attacks on fantasy are rooted in attacks on pornography, this breed of anti-porn activism is in many ways a direct assault on positive female sexuality.

Let's take another look at fantasy. Best-selling author and psychologist Harriet Lerner responded in the 1990s to a writer concerned with her own fantasies: "Sexual fantasies are as far-ranging as the human imagination – and they may have little to do with what we desire in real life." She proceeds to describe a friend who envisions two red cars crashing head-on every time she orgasms.<sup>40</sup> Herzog explains this complexity and its surrounding panic:

Homophobic heterosexual men are aroused by gay male porn. Lesbian and straight women alike enjoy watching woman-on-woman action; many straight men swear by it as well. Some bisexual men are more aroused by gay porn, others by hetero scenes. But rather than marveling at the rich and complicated ways in which the human imagination is stimulated – or shrugging their shoulders at the utter banality and ridiculousness of most fantasies – self-styled experts are calling for moral panic.<sup>41</sup>

Instead of embracing the complexity bestowed upon us, we fear and reject it. It's one more example of how advertising companies create, commodify, and capitalize on our anxieties for their own profit. In our interview, Herzog connected these sexual anxieties to various branches of social hysteria that blossom oh-so-frequently in our age of hyper-consumerism:

Ten years ago none of my undergrads would have told me they suffer from social anxiety. Its now routine to say that. Because now Paxil can solve the problem for you. There's a huge blurry line between makes-you-dysfunctional social anxiety, and social anxiety everybody feels. But you can really expand on that if you just create this notion of a medical-clinical category.

When people start targeting anxieties the way they do in the Viagra and porn public discourse, they begin what Herzog described as “an ideological assault on something pretty fundamental: the most intimate and personal aspects of sex.”<sup>42</sup> Instead of helping people find grounding in the often-disconcerting world of sexuality, we capitalize on their fear and detach them from their desire. This is the environment in which the Religious Right flourished.

### CHRISTIAN SEX: THE MOST AMAZING SEX ON GOD’S GREEN EARTH<sup>43</sup>

The Religious Right saw abstinence as its new political tool. But it wasn’t about discipline, restraint and dry, cold, rigidity as most people believe. The Religious Right actually advertised its sex as the best kind there is. They began spreading a culture of sexuality based on promises of soul-expanding sexual experiences – but only, of course, in the name of Jesus, and within a neatly packaged, heterosexual, Christian marriage. Herzog jokingly synthesizes the Religious Right messaging: “An abstinence vow connects you to the promised land of bliss – have no sex before marriage and you will have outstanding sex after marriage.”<sup>44</sup> A set of Evangelical authors have actually coined the term “soulgasm”: “incredible orgasms plus intense emotional connection with your husband plus God’s spiritual presence.”<sup>45</sup>

The self-help literature is intensely pornographic, as many authors use their past “unhealthy” sexual experiences to show how they too have fallen victim to unwanted sexual desires, but how they’ve grown since. Take for example, Kevin, who met a fifteen year old girl while working in a youth group at church: “She’s a knockout...Sometimes I’d ask about boys she’s known and dated...we’d get to talking a little trashy...last week, when my wife and kids were out of town, I gave this girl a ride home...I bet her that she wouldn’t pull her pants down for me. She did. I lost my senses, and I drove her to a park and we had sex. I’m in real trouble!”<sup>46</sup> Or take Alex, who recounts the time he was watching TV with his sister-in-law while the rest of the family was at the mall: “She was lying flat on her stomach on the floor in front of me, wearing tight shorts, and she’d fallen asleep watching TV...I happened to look down and see her upper thigh and a trace of her underwear...I masturbated while she slept, right out in the open.”<sup>47</sup> The websites, the books, the pamphlets, the church groups – so much of Religious Right abstinence media is aimed at discouraging the very types of arousal that it narrates.

One sexual channel that the Religious Right advocates incessantly is the importance of the “quickie,” or “fast food sex” within a marriage.<sup>48</sup> While a self-help book notes that “frequently, only the husband will have an orgasm” during a quickie,<sup>49</sup> another book is sure to assuage women that these quickies are absolutely “okay with God.”<sup>50</sup> This emphasis fits right into the misogynistic, male-centered framework of Religious Right advocacy. A lot of the literature talks about purifying male sexuality by helping him stop using pornography, helping him stop staring at other women, and helping him stop masturbating. Yet the burden lies on the wife to help him with this process; because he is trying his hardest, she must have sex with him at his every whim in order to support his purity. Authors even talk of a supposed “seventy-two-hour-cycle,” where men must have their sperm

released that frequently for their health and sanity.

Women learn to grit their teeth and “soldier on.”<sup>51</sup> One testimonial from a wife in compliance notes: “Sometimes you just don’t have the time or energy for the full package, but if you care about his purity, you can find just enough energy to get him by.”<sup>52</sup> And another, strikingly similar: “Even if I’m tired or don’t feel good, I can appreciate his sexual needs, so I do my part to satisfy him.”<sup>53</sup> As Herzog describes, wives are instructed to be “sexual receptacles no matter how badly their husbands are treating them.”<sup>54</sup>

But the male ego-boosting isn’t even remotely hidden. Herzog writes that this type of self-help is actually so appealing to many because of the promise to make men “feel like real men.”<sup>55</sup> One book writes, “We must choose to be more than male. We must choose manhood.”<sup>56</sup> Author of a book entitled *Wild at Heart* writes that the past thirty years of US history have resulted in a “gender confusion never experienced at such a wide level in the history of the world.”<sup>57</sup> In fact, his expert sociological advice tells us that male “dedication to niceness is the reason there are so many tired and lonely women, so many fatherless children, and so few men around.”<sup>58</sup> An explicit recipe for exploitation, this ego-boosting also puts female sexuality right in the hands of males.

Sexuality for women in this Religious Right paradigm begins as the right of the father, until it becomes the right of the husband. To deter young girls from sexual activity, they are often reminded of daddy. One advocate writes, “Tell [young girls] they can go as far with their boyfriends as they are comfortable doing in front of their fathers.”<sup>59</sup> And of course, there is the purity ball, where young girls in white ball gowns pledge to their fathers that they will remain abstinent until marriage. In the tradition, the father will often give the girl a “purity ring,” only to be replaced one day with a wedding ring. In this Religious Right abstinence framework, men are in charge of the sexuality of both genders, and women are somehow charged with navigating this terrain in the process.

### SOME TACTICS TO WATCH OUT FOR

The Religious Right uses many tactics to sneak abstinence-only education into both our schools and our psyches. One method is their pseudo-scientific descriptions of the body. Abstinence advocate Unruh tells us that having secretion from multiple partners in the body messes up one’s bodily processes in such a way that prevents simultaneous orgasms. Yet if one decides to pledge a “secondary virginity,” meaning vow to abstain from more premarital sex after having already had sex, the bodily processes are restored, and mutual orgasms are again in one’s horizon.<sup>60</sup> Mutual orgasms the first time we ever have sex!! Mutual orgasms...ever? The evidence feels a little misleading. You don’t have to be a scientist to understand that a constructed social formula won’t create a mutual orgasm, let alone that not abiding by that formula undoes it all.

Another good tidbit of pseudo-science is the myths surrounding oxytocin. The Abstinence Clearinghouse and the Care Center both tell us that the chemical oxytocin that is released in the brain during sex creates bonds that permanently link two people together. If a young couple has sex and then breaks up, their lack of maturity leaves them doomed to depression and suicide.<sup>61</sup> While oxytocin is

certainly real, and breaking up with a partner is usually a sad occasion, a direct correlation between suicide risk and having sex with more than one partner is nothing less than absurd.

Another tactic is creating anxiety around the spread of disease. Premarital sex is made to be nothing but deadly.<sup>62</sup> Kids are shown only gruesome close-ups of STDs, and told statistics like the following: “In one single act of unprotected sex with an infected partner, a teenage woman has a 1 percent risk of acquiring HIV, a 30 percent risk of getting genital herpes, and a 50 percent chance of contracting gonorrhea.”<sup>63</sup> They are also told stories like that of John’s: According to a website on “Safe Sex and the Facts,” John had sex only once, pledged his secondary virginity, and only began having sex again after marrying his wife nine years later. Little did he know, he “had brought two STDs into his marriage.”<sup>64</sup>

But never do the kids that visit this website get to find out what would have happened if John had access to information on condoms. Or access to information about testing. Or if his wife’s problems may have even been treatable. Sex with condoms is treated like “playing Russian roulette with a revolver.”<sup>65</sup> In fact, a deputy assistant secretary in the Department of Health and Human Services in 2006 let us know that “premarital sex is really modern germ warfare.”<sup>66</sup> He was replaced in 2007 by a member of a right-wing Christian lobbying group who believed that contraceptives were a part of a “culture of death.”<sup>67</sup>

This pseudo-science and misrepresentation is often disseminated through straight-up lies. In a survey conducted by the office of Representative Henry Waxman, callers posing as seventeen-year-old pregnant girls called a variety of crisis pregnancy centers.<sup>68</sup> These girls were told “facts” like abortion raises the risk of breast cancer, affects fertility, and makes one’s likelihood of committing suicide increase seven-fold.<sup>69</sup> This emphasis on depression and suicide throughout all of the Religious Right rhetoric is downright eerie.

A central focus of Herzog’s book is the Religious Right’s linking of premarital sex with low self-esteem, which is primarily reserved for women and girls. We’ve all heard the argument before that the girl who sleeps around is doing it out of insecurity. We may have even used it ourselves. But let’s take a closer look at this notion, for while the Religious Right’s pseudo-science has been effective, no organizing tool has been more helpful for them than playing off of issues of self-esteem.

In a letter template suggested for parents when they’re approaching their children’s schools, the Abstinence Clearinghouse actually recommends that schools put sexually active teens through mental health screenings. They also state that “virgins invariably do better in their professional and personal lives (including financially) than nonvirgins.”<sup>70</sup> The Religious Right co-opts a lot of tools from The Women’s Liberation Movement, evoking notions of body image, female sexual pleasure, and male fascination with pornography, to present its very own messages as therapeutic.

In order to immerse young children in this culture of fear and shame, they use all sorts of games and activities in their abstinence education in schools. The cheese-snack game is probably the most captivating. Children munch on cheese-flavored snacks, sip some water, and spit into a cup. The students then mix their cups with others, and finally pour all cups into a pitcher labeled “multiple partners.” The kids are then asked to choose between this pitcher and a pitcher of fresh water labeled “pure fluids” to fill a cup. The labels on

the cup? “Future husband” and “future wife.”<sup>71</sup> Starting from before children are given access to information or have even explored sexually on their own, they begin to associate partners, sexual acts, and quite logically, their own body parts and bodily processes with chunky cheesy water and the collective spit of every one of their prepubescent classmates. Forget exploration or any of the merits of premarital sex. These children start pinning shame on sex before they even know how to unroll a condom.

## THE TANGIBLE RESULTS OF RELIGIOUS RIGHT SEXUAL POLITICS

So how much damage has the Religious Right actually done at this point? The short answer is a lot. Global proportions. Church-based abstinence advocates and state-backed public health policies had essentially merged into one force during Bush junior’s second term. In 2007, there was a huge spike in abstinence funding, largely backed by Democratic Representative David Obey under fear of losing leverage on other components of the bill.<sup>72</sup> There are three main channels through which abstinence funding is made accessible to states: Title V, Section (§) 510 of the Social Security Act, Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE), and the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA).<sup>73</sup> By the summer of 2008, \$1.5 billion had been spent on abstinence-only education.

The tide started turning in 2007-2008, but the Religious Right grip still hasn’t loosened in the way many have hoped. In 2004, only Pennsylvania, California, and Maine refused this federal funding.<sup>74</sup> In 2007, eleven more states joined in.<sup>75</sup> Now, finally, twenty-five states have refused federal funding.<sup>76</sup> Within his first few months in office, Obama not only repealed the ‘global gag rule’, but also signed the first ever cut to abstinence-only federal funding in the nation’s history, bringing the spending down from \$176 million to a still whopping \$160 million for the 2009 budget.<sup>77</sup> However, so much of the “comprehensive” sex education implemented now still starts with abstinence as the most laudable goal, with the “comprehensive” component as an apologetic supplement.<sup>78</sup> The current battle is the REAL (Responsible Education about Life) act, which will provide federal funding for comprehensive sex education. But Obama can’t do it alone – congress will need massive public pressure from citizens and activist groups before it will make that cultural shift. We’re not yet there, but fortunately we’re getting closer.

To demonstrate just how detrimental this abstinence-only education is, let’s look at Texas, the state that receives the most abstinence-only federal funding, (more than \$18 million in 2007), and has a rate of young people receiving comprehensive sex education at a total of 4%.<sup>79</sup> Texas has some of highest rates of “risky”<sup>80</sup> sexual behavior in the country: Where the U.S. national average of students who have ever had sexual intercourse in the U.S. is 47.8%, in Texas it’s 52.9%. U.S. national average of currently sexually active students in the U.S.: 35.0%. Texas: 38.7%. U.S. national average for students who have had intercourse with four or more persons during their lifetime: 14.9%. Texas: 17.1%. U.S. national average of students who did not use a condom during their last instance of sexual intercourse: 38.5%. Texas: 43.6%.<sup>81</sup> Texas is also home to the third highest teenage birthrate in the country.<sup>82</sup>



But in addition to its grip on our nation's resources, the Religious Right abstinence movement has forced its way into the global health world in a swift act of colonialist paternalism. You may have heard of PEPFAR, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, set up during Bush's first term in 2003. PEPFAR was "the largest commitment ever by a single nation toward an international health initiative,"<sup>83</sup> where fifteen of the world's most afflicted nations were chosen to receive a total of \$9 billion in funding. As you can imagine, condom use and comprehensive sex education were limited from the start, and only grew more and more restricted as time went on.

The PEPFAR main framework was the ABC approach: Abstinence, Be Faithful, and Condoms, with resources employed in that order. In fact, the Bush administration insisted that condoms be used only for groups they determined were "high risk – defined as truck drivers, sex workers, migrant workers, and occasionally substance abusers."<sup>84</sup> But in countries where the pandemic may have infected up to 25% of the population, who wasn't "high risk?"<sup>85</sup> Condoms were not considered an effective way to reduce the spread of HIV or stop unwanted pregnancies for any other sexually active member of PEPFAR countries – even those in heterosexual, Christian marriages. Melinda Gates of the Gates Foundation puts the absurdity of the situation best: the attack on condoms "is a serious obstacle to ending AIDS. In the fight against AIDS, condoms save lives. If you oppose the distribution of condoms, something is more important to you than saving lives."<sup>86</sup>

PEPFAR's actions began a process of stigmatizing a whole slew of healthy people and healthy sexual practices. A 2004 study in South Africa found that "boys ridiculed one another for both abstinence and condom use, and men often rejected condoms out of a combination of 'fatalism and machismo.'"<sup>87</sup> In Uganda, while millions of condoms deemed of poor quality were stalled in warehouses and the Ugandan government under the influence of the U.S. refused to make more, a news report shared that men were beginning to resort to using garbage bags as a replacement for condoms.<sup>88</sup>

While whole populations were brutally shamed by the disease and the PEPFAR response, women working as sex workers were conflated with sex slaves under PEPFAR funding agreements often called the "prostitution pledge." In discussing this conflation, the U.S. Representative behind this agreement often segued directly between stories of voluntary prostitution and eight-year-old victims of sex trafficking, making it infinitely harder to distribute condoms in brothels (not to mention defining and reducing involuntary trafficking and slavery!) As Herzog notes, "What PEPFAR's prevention division has done, in effect, is to finance some kinds of sex and defund other kinds. It has also made many kinds of sex more dangerous."<sup>89</sup>

As PEPFAR continued the spread of HIV, it operated behind a veil of racism. Andrew S. Natsios, administrator in charge of USAID – the organization through which PEPFAR's funds are distributed – actually said that antiretroviral drugs in Africa were a waste of money because they have to be administered on regular schedules, and Africans "don't know what Western time is."<sup>90</sup> The ignorance and paternalism have proven fatal. In a recent email exchange with Herzog, she presented me with the following summary:

In Uganda, which once had been the poster child for comprehensive

response to the disease, the rates of new infections have nearly doubled since adopting the US approach – and in fact 40 percent of the new infections were among married couples. In general, in sub-Saharan Africa, the majority of new infections have been among older female teens and young married women. Globally, 2.7 million people were newly infected in 2007.

Given the amount of money assigned to PEPFAR and the wide reach it had over NGOs, politicians, and health workers, movements working on HIV prevention around the globe have been subject to the work of one irresponsible sexual movement that began within the borders of the United States.<sup>91</sup>

## THE LIBERAL RESPONSE

When I was first reading Herzog's book, I had a really difficult time conceptualizing how the Religious Right took over so forcefully, even outside of U.S. borders, yet remained almost invisible. While it wasn't the purpose of Herzog's book to detail every legislative act and public conversation that put abstinence policy into our national consciousness, the book is in a lot of ways aimed at the overall liberal compliance in our rapidly shifting sexual culture. As she reminds us, liberal politicians and the rest of the liberal conscience are as victim to these national sexual anxieties as anyone else. As a result, strong critics of the abstinence movement have essentially "conceded the terms of the debate."<sup>92</sup>

The liberal response is that sex education should only be a supplement to abstinence education; while they'd like to be advocating abstinence, they must be "realistic" with their expectations about how teenagers behave.<sup>93</sup> In the 2007 bipartisan Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act, a group of Representatives actually stated that all they're asking for is "abstinence-plus" education.<sup>94</sup> As Herzog so beautifully puts it, "Experience is no longer seen as a resource."<sup>95</sup> Liberals have bought into the psychological ideas of damage to health and self-valuing that the Religious Right has so successfully pinned onto premarital sex. The Religious Right has made liberals as ashamed and insecure in their sex lives, reversing so much of the positive cognitive shifts on sexuality that ran throughout sexual politics from the 1960's up through the 1990's.

In our interview, Herzog described what is so upsetting to her about liberal inaction on sexual politics:

It's our moral responsibility to protect peoples' right to be promiscuous. One of the things that depressed me the most and motivated me to write this book was liberal tongue-tied-ness. Suddenly the only way to defend sex is if it's in a meaningful couple. And I thought: people go through different stages in their life. Some people sleep with hundreds of people and then fall deeply in love and stay with one person for decades. Or some people are happily married for decades and then their spouse leaves them and then they play around. At what moment did liberals lose their capacity to defend sex that's 'meaningless' or 'outside the romantic dyad?' We cannot find liberals who say that its okay for teenagers to experiment or to fall in love and to actually have sex. This is seemingly not publicly sayable anymore.

(I want to give a quick shout-out to Dennis Kucinich. HBOMB contributor Jenna Mellor interviewed him earlier this year at the New Hampshire Primaries about sexual politics.<sup>96</sup>

It's reassuring to see that some politicians still care; telling, however, that they're not the ones winning.)

### THE CULTURAL LEGACY OF THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT, AND WHAT WE MUST DO TO OVERCOME IT

One way the Religious Right has shifted our sexual culture is capitalizing on how uncomfortable sex can be at first. At one point in her book, Herzog takes on the narrative of a couple and how they react to their first time going "all the way." They had been together for a while, but after intercourse, the hatred, the frustration, and the guilt built up.<sup>97</sup> But as Herzog reminds us, "sex takes practice."<sup>98</sup> There could have been a number of different responses to this story. Maybe the couple needed a slower pace, different ways of touching, more sensitivity; maybe they were anxious and needed to talk more about it.<sup>99</sup> The Religious Right has skipped over the fact that we need ways to deal with that discomfort, and not necessarily run away from it.

While it pushes all sexual exploration back until marriage, it denies that premarital sex could actually help those moments of "emotional ambivalences and complexities...of alienation, longing, confusion, or incomplete satisfaction."<sup>100</sup> The Religious Right never once tells us that premarital sexual exploration might even strengthen us.<sup>101</sup> It tells us that premarital sex is grounds for danger and abuse.<sup>102</sup> And in doing so, it denies that marriages can be, and often are, filled with not only discomfort and emotional emptiness, but also violence.

The abstinence movement strips people, especially youth, of their sexual agency. Putting a "one-size-fits-all program"<sup>103</sup> onto consent, the abstinence movement leaves no room for people, especially women and girls, to negotiate practices and choose in the moment which sexual activities they are interested in and to what extent. It makes "female sexual agency once again seem dirty and suspect."<sup>104</sup> It denies women the opportunity to link an empowered sexual agency with other personal or professional goals, denying them the development of their own limits and their own fantasies.<sup>105</sup> Herzog actually cites this blurring of coercion and agency as the worst evils of the Religious Right. The very framework that should ground public debates on sexuality is one of self-determination and consent, not who deserves to be excluded from resources.<sup>106</sup> As Herzog explains, each time we erode the distance and the distinctions between prostitution and slavery, homosexuality and child abuse, promiscuity and sexual coercion, we ossify fear and violence as our cultural norm.<sup>107</sup>

I'm going to end this article on a comparison that Herzog ends her book with: European sexual culture. Keep in mind that Europe has its own problems, for example how it's currently coming face to face with its own sexual prejudices as it deals with a rising Islamic presence. However, there are generalizations to be made that reflect so poignantly what we seem to be doing wrong. The European Union recognizes same-sex unions across national borders, and holds anti-homophobia platforms as crucial to gaining offices in and accession to the EU. The mayors of Berlin and Paris are openly gay, but their sexual identity is "politically irrelevant."<sup>108</sup> While rates of teenage sexual activity remain relatively constant in both the U.S. and Europe, U.S. youth are five times as likely to have HIV as German youth and

have a 70% higher chance of contracting gonorrhea than Dutch or French youth. And finally, women in the U.S. are four times as likely as German women to become pregnant, five times as likely as French women to have a baby, and more than seven times as likely as Dutch women to have an abortion.<sup>109</sup> This supposed Religious Right link between premarital sex and danger just doesn't seem to match up.<sup>110</sup>

What accounts for the differences in these facts? Europeans consider teenage sexual exploration to be beautiful, natural, and healthy.<sup>111</sup> As a Swiss commentator put it, "The main difference is that in the States sexual activity is considered a risk. Here we consider it a pleasure."<sup>112</sup>

The framework we need to adopt is one where sexual rights are human rights, and sexual self-determination is our primary goal. I'll come to close with Herzog's last paragraph:

What remains missing from the general mix is a defense of sexual rights that does not privilege those who match the norm over those who do not, that does not lie about the complexities of human desire, that does need to pretend that sex is perfect every time (if only you follow the rules and/or buy this product), and that does not root sexual rights only in the negative imperative to reject sexual victimization but also affirms humans' rights to sexual expression, sexual pleasure, and the freely chosen formation of intimate relationships.

As we were finishing up our interview, these notions of self-determination and sexual agency were crystallizing for me, and I had that feeling of awe and admiration that settles in at the end of a great lecture or movie. But there was one missing puzzle piece I couldn't leave without asking. We folded up our notebooks and restored the table-setting to its original order, and I muttered, slightly embarrassed, "So, when is it okay to ever advocate abstinence?" Her response? Well I should have guessed. "Abstinence is appropriate when the individual wants it."

<sup>1</sup> "Bob Jones University." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. 3 April 2009. 16 April 2009. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob\\_Jones\\_University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Jones_University)>

<sup>2</sup> Herzog, Dagmar. *Sex in Crisis: The New Sexual Revolution and the Future of American Politics*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 83-4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 4, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 5, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 9.  
<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 10.  
<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 19-20.  
<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 10.  
<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 11.  
<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 11.  
<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 10.  
<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 11.  
<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 16.  
<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 14.  
<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 19.  
<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 20.  
<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 21.  
<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 26.  
<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 27.  
<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 23.  
<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 23.  
<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 25.  
<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 25-6.  
<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 29.  
<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 29.  
<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 30.  
<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 97.  
<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 42.  
<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 59.  
<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 34.  
<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 48.  
<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 48.  
<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 49.  
<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 54.  
<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 54.  
<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 54.  
<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 57.  
<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 55.  
<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 55.  
<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 56.  
<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 56.  
<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 97.  
<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 103.  
<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 188.  
<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 109.  
<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 110.  
<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 111.  
<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 109.  
<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 119.  
<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 120.  
<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 170.  
<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 171.  
<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 119.  
<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 109.  
<sup>72</sup> "House passes Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Spending Bill." July 2007. Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS). 16 April 2007. <<http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Feature.showFeature&featureid=938&pageid=525&parentid=523>>  
<sup>73</sup> "The History of Federal Abstinence-Only Funding." July 2007. Advocates for Youth. April 16, 2007. <<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/factsheet/fshistoryabonly.htm>>  
<sup>74</sup> Herzog, 178.  
<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 179.  
<sup>76</sup> Advocates For Youth. 18 April 2009. <[www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org)>  
<sup>77</sup> "Obama Should Trash Ab-Only Funds." 26 February 2009. Housing Works. 16 April 2007. <<http://www.housingworks.org/news-press/detail/obama-trash-ab-only-funds/>>  
<sup>78</sup> Advocates For Youth. 18 April 2009. <[www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org)>

<sup>79</sup> Wiley, David and Kelly Wilson. "Just Say Don't Know: Sexuality Education in Texas Public Schools." Texas Freedom Network Education Fund. 2.  
<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 1.  
<sup>81</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>82</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>83</sup> Herzog, 128.  
<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 129.  
<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 133.  
<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 144.  
<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 135.  
<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 136.  
<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 133.  
<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 158.  
<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 125.  
<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 124.  
<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 167.  
<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 167.  
<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 167.  
<sup>96</sup> "H BOMB at the New Hampshire Primaries." January 8, 2008. April 11, 2009. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oNII1Rwgnw>>  
<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 100.  
<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 100.  
<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 100.  
<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 124.  
<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 124.  
<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 103.  
<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 99.  
<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 99.  
<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 123.  
<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 181-2.  
<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 182.  
<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 173.  
<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 175.  
<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 175.  
<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 174.  
<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 175.



# HARVARD UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

## ROOM13

Web: [www.hcs.harvard.edu/~room13/](http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~room13/)

Phone: 617-495-4969

Hours: Every night, 7pm to 7am

Location: Thayer Basement B9

Room 13 is a confidential, peer counseling group staffed every night by both a male and female counselor. We are trained to discuss a range of issues, including general academic stress, sexuality questions, depression, eating concerns, relationships and sexual assault, and suicide. More importantly though, our counselors are available to listen and respond to any question or concern that a student might have. No reason is too big or too small to call or visit Room 13. You are always welcome for cookies, condoms, and conversation.

## PCC

### (PEER CONTRACEPTIVE COUNSELORS)

Web: [www.hcs.harvard.edu/~pcc/](http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~pcc/)

Phone: 617-495-9600

Hours: Every night, 7pm to 12am

Location: HUHS, 5th floor

PCC is a group of male and female undergraduates trained to counselor students on issues of sexuality, relationships, STIs, AIDS/HIV, safe sex and contraception. The PCC office is open for calls and drop-in visits, and provides free condoms, dental dams, lubricant and a library of sexual health literature.

## IN COMMON

Web: [www.digitas.harvard.edu/~incommon](http://www.digitas.harvard.edu/~incommon)

Phone: 617-384-TALK (8255)

Hours: Sunday through Thursday  
8pm-midnight

In Common is a confidential peer support and referral hotline serving Harvard Graduate and Professional school students. In Common is staffed by volunteer graduate and professional school students. They are supervised by clinical staff at the Bureau of Study Counsel and HUHS professional staff. Peer counselors respond to a range of issues that concern graduate students—from new student worries and academic pressures to relationships, depression, sexual assault, and suicide. All calls are confidential and there is no caller ID.

## PEER COUNSELING

Web: [contactpeercounseling.bravehost.com](http://contactpeercounseling.bravehost.com)

Phone: 617-495-8111

Hotline Hours: Wednesday-Sunday from 8pm-1am

Drop-in Hours: Thursday, Friday and Sunday nights  
8pm-1am

Location: Thayer Basement

Contact provides non-judgmental, non-directive, confidential peer counseling for Harvard undergraduates. Contact specializes in issues of sex, sexuality, sexual orientation, gender, and relationships, though its staff members are trained to handle a wide variety of issues. Contact also has a library of resources, fiction and non-fiction books and magazines, as well as a full stock of condoms, lubricant, and dental dams.

## ECHO

### (EATING CONCERNS OUTLINE AND OUTREACH)

Web: [www.hcs.harvard.edu/~echo](http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~echo)

Phone: 617-495-8200

Hotline Hours: Every night, 8pm to 8am

Drop-in Hours: Sunday through Wednesday,  
8pm to 11pm

Location: Quincy House, F-entry Basement

Eating Concerns Hotline and Outreach (ECHO) is committed to addressing the serious issue of problems with food, from anorexia and bulimia to body image. Echo recognizes how silence can contribute to isolation. The hotline is staffed every night. You can talk about anything you feel is relevant.

## RESPONSE

Phone: 617-495-9600

Hotline Hours: Every night, 9pm to 7am

Drop-in Hours: Sunday-Thursday, 9pm to midnight

Location: Lowell House Basement, E-013

Response is a group of undergraduate women concerned about physical and emotional violation. They are ready to listen, talk, and help on a variety of issues including rape, incest, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and difficult relationships. The Response lending library includes information on rape, incest, battering, harassment, and women's health and sexuality.

# HBOMB

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