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HIGHLIGHTS

Crossing Over
Robin Ringleka

Six months before I became pregnant, I marched the streets of Washington, D.C. Every January 22nd, the anniversary of Roe V. Wade, thousands of 'pro-lifers' from all over the country pour into the streets to protest. The year I turned eighteen, I was one of them. How could I have known that in less than a year I would become one of "those women" against whom we were marching?
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FCC: Federal Censorship Commission
Kimberly Springer

By now, there are as many outraged or bored perspectives on the Timberlake-Jackson Super Bowl incident as there are nipple shields in the whole of New York and Los Angeles. Short of speaking as Janet's breast itself ("What is everyone looking at? My pretty silver hat?"), the gender, race, celebrity politics are clear, if debatable: the vilification of Jackson as temptress Jezebel to Justin's good Southern boy led astray; the implications for sexual assault; the shortening cycle of our insatiable desire to build up celebrities and tear them down; and the cool pose of "so what?"
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Wedding Day
Elizabeth Smith
"We're not advocates and we don't march" Jenn

Our Choices, Our Lives: Unapologetic Writings on Abortion

Edited by
Krista Jacob

[Recent Review](#)

Our Choices, Our Lives: Unapologetic Writings on Abortion is a first of its kind. Based on five years of research by feminist Krista Jacob, this anthology is a collection of essays, poems, and prose that takes on one of the most controversial issues of our time: a woman's right to choose abortion. Revealing, with honesty and courage, the diversity of individuals behind the political hype, this powerful collection of writings takes the issue of reproductive

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tells me. Dana clarifies, "Well, we can't say we don't. We didn't. We do now." A 26-year-old college English instructor and 28-year-old aspiring chef, Jenn Smits and Dana Wegener would be more likely to be called professionals than activists. They never expected to join an emerging political movement. Yet, when they signed up as one of the first same sex couples to have their marriages solemnized in the highly publicized recent ceremonies performed by the mayor of New Paltz, NY, they found themselves sudden spokespeople for the growing national equal rights movement for same-sex couples.

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Little Longings

Lauren K. Alleyne
Poetry.

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FEATURES

La Migra

Adela C. Licona
Poetry.

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The Personal Quests of Saira Shah

Zubeda Jalalzai

As the U.S. occupation of Iraq continues along its violent course along side the similarly tenuous nation building efforts in Afghanistan, Americans need only look to the very recent past for how the Bush administration has justified war in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite the possibility that public opinion may not have been able to resist the administration's plans, in each case public opinion had to be employed (to varying degrees) on the side of invasion. Two documentaries on

Afghanistan, *Beneath the Veil* and *Unholy War*, by

Saira Shah, the Afghani-British journalist and winner of the Courage Under Fire Award have presented highly validated accounts of Afghanistan under Taliban rule and during the early days of the U.S. bombing campaign. Both documentaries, which present gorgeous views of the Afghan landscape and intimate and often painful portraits of Afghanistan's people, had been in frequent rotation on CNN as part of its "CNN Presents" line-up after September 11. Shah's films not only reveal much about how to win the "hearts and minds" of the American people in going to war but also more complicated issues of building an international feminist movement that is not coincident with western interests.

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Muddled in the Middle

Elizabeth Wheatfield

In recent years, feminists have worked to be more inclusive—to recognize that the needs and life situations of all women are not the

freedom to a deeper, richer level.

Comprised of abortion testimonies, insights from abortion clinic workers, and political essays, this important anthology reveals the liberating and sometimes poignant reality of the abortion experience.

From the women who survived the days of illegal abortion to the women who have come of age during the backlash against abortion rights, the writers in *Our Choices, Our Lives: Unapologetic Writings on Abortion* demand that people on all sides rethink this varied, complex and personal issue.

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Sexing the Political: A Journal of Third Wave Feminists on Sexuality

[Editor and Publisher:](#)

[Krista Jacob](#)

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**Volume Three
Number Two
May 2004**

same. While these efforts have been successful in many ways, there is one area where, at least in my experience, multiple voices have not seemed welcome: the abortion debate.

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[A Letter To the Old Fart Who Thought A Grab Would Cure My Feminism](#)

Lauren K. Alleyne

I am here, sitting at home, and trying to make sense of the last two hours. What a day. It's amazing, the way life goes, you can be sitting with old friends, arguing politics and religion over wine, you go to bed, you wake up next morning from a good night's sleep and then 3-4 hours later, your world is a different place. Sounds like it should be an earthquake, a war, some disaster (natural or Bush made) – who knows that a hand in the wrong place, a single moment in time can change you forever. A grab.

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Salimah Valiani

Poetry.

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[Turn, Turn, Turn: Thoughts on the Sexual \(Counter\) Revolution](#) **Lise Shapiro Sanders and Patricia Miller**

How do sex and sexuality figure in contemporary feminism? If we take the lessons and struggles of the Sexual Revolution to heart, women now have the freedom to practice sexual independence like never before. But if feminism today is all about choices, why does it lately seem that motherhood is more of a mandate than a choice? Patricia Miller and Lise Sanders work it out...

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Poetry.

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[Say "NO" to Dowry](#)

Parvez Babul

Lucky Begum (18), of a village in Nilphamari, committed suicide due to the abject poverty of her father. Ill-fated, Lucky remained unmarried due to her father's inability to pay dowry for her marriage. Whenever any marriage proposal came, prospective grooms demanded dowry, which Lucky's 50-year-old poor father failed to meet. Being tremendously frustrated, Lucky committed suicide by taking poison. In fact, we cannot imagine reading a newspaper without any news on dowry, torture or death of women because of dowry or for any other causes even for a single day! Many types of incidents such as suicide of women/brides, summary divorce, burning wives with fire or acid by their husbands or in-laws are very common in our country.

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Christiana Langenberg

Fiction

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THIRD WAVE COLUMNISTS

[White Privilege Means Never Having to Walk Across the Bridge](#) **Elizabeth Wheatfield**

Here's the thing about being white that most middle class white people don't appreciate: We don't have to know. We don't have to know what it's like on the other side of the tracks or the river, we don't have to know what it is like to live in a neighborhood nowhere near a grocery, we don't have to explore every single area of the city in order to find a place to live where people will just leave us in peace. We pretty much don't have to know about anything we don't want to know about. And really, why should we want to know? The life of those without our privileges does not always paint a pleasing picture. Hearing about the minute day in and day out tiresomeness of economic disadvantage, racial disadvantage, ignorance, and outright hostility is simply not glamorous.

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[An Eye For the Ladies](#) [Breaking out of the Bubble: Life Outside of the Slope](#) **Alia Levine**

We had decided to spend seven months traveling from the United States to my home country, New Zealand. Liberating ourselves from our jobs and homes auspiciously (for some) on July Fourth, my girlfriend and I began with a road trip through the southwest. The first days were nauseatingly fabulous; we camped and hiked, sang along to country radio, and generally honeymooned our way through the friendly mountainsides of Colorado.

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[You, Too, Can Be A Sexy Mommy](#) **Dorrie Williams-Wheeler**

After having two children in 15 months my body had went through a serious double whammy. Prior to having children I was a sharp dressing vivacious twenty-something woman in her prime. Somewhere between changing diapers and fixing bottles and searching for Barney books I lost myself.

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[Sex Talk](#) [Teen Oral Sex: It's Sensationalized!](#) **Rhonda Chittenden**

As a teen in the early-80s, I was very naïve about oral sex. I thought oral sex meant talking about sex with one's partner in a very sexy way. A friend and I, trying to practice the mechanics, would move our mouths in silent mock-talk as we suggestively switched our hips from left to right and flirted with our best bedroom eyes. We wondered aloud how anyone could engage in oral sex without breaking into hysterical laughter. In our naïveté, oral sex was not only hilarious, it was just plain stupid.

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[Hair](#) [Wednesday, December 31, 2003](#) **Lauri Wollner**

It is New Year's Eve and I am 35 year's old for another couple of hours. I had to go get my driver's license today. I was nervous to get it

done and basically avoided it until the last day. Because of what I look like, I have extra anxiety when venturing out into the public for any reason. But particularly when I have to interact directly with someone and trust that they will treat me with enough respect to accomplish whatever my goal is. I am not a "pretty girl" anymore by normal standards.

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[Boomerang: Some Thoughts from the Baby Boomer Generation How Do You Want Your Abortion?](#)

Margaret R. Johnston and Claire Keyes

In the future, we may be asking how we want to experience abortion.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women

Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels

Free Press, 2004

Reviewed by Krista Jacob

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Bearing Life: Women's Writings on Childlessness

Rochelle Ratner, Ed.

The Feminist Press, 2000

Reviewed by Rhonda Chittenden

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The Chinese Garden

Rosemary Manning

The Feminist Press, 2000

Reviewed by Alia Levine.

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Mother Shock: Loving Every (Other) Minute of It

Andrea J. Buchanan

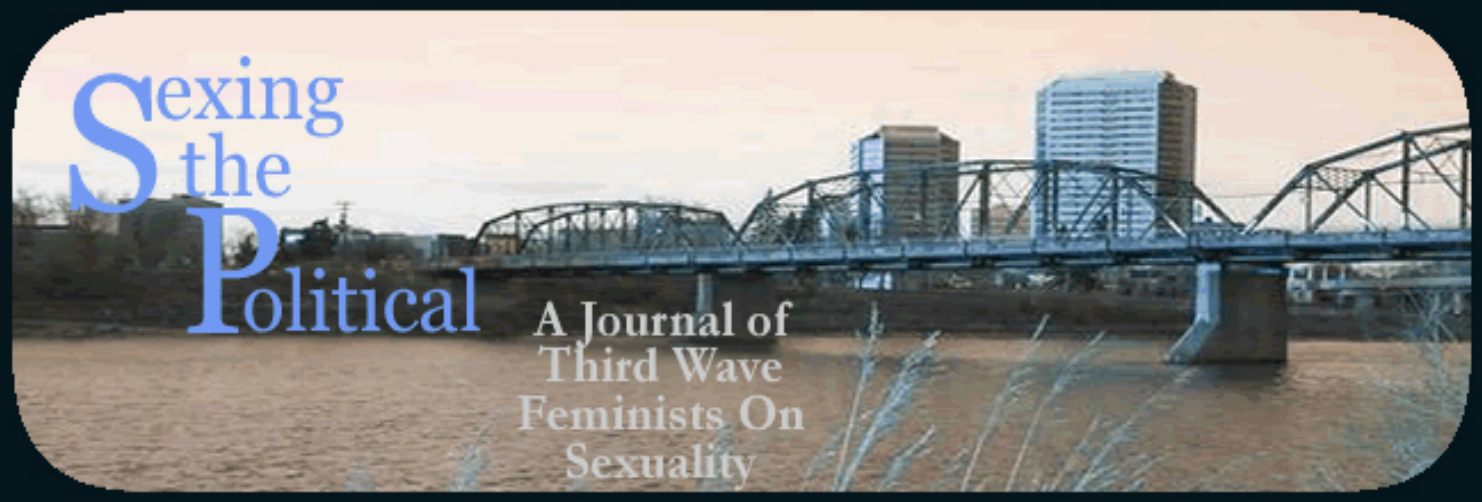
Seal Press, 2003

Reviewed by Krista Jacob

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Turning the Tide: A Letter from the Editor
Making History: The March for Women's Lives
Krista Jacob

My 7-month-old son and I just returned from the [March for Women's Lives](#) where we joined over a million pro-choice Americans to march for reproductive choice and reproductive healthcare.

Waiting for my connecting flight to Ronald Regan Airport (such sweet irony), I was surrounded by pro-choice signs, shirts, and buttons. A pregnant woman wore a t-shirt that said "Choice Baby," a man wore a button that read "Another Pro-Choice Man," a group of college students carried hangers, a symbolic reminder of the days before legal abortion when many used wire hangers to terminate their unwanted pregnancies. It seemed as if everywhere I looked I saw a pro-choice message, and it made me long for a world in which people were more vocal about their pro-choice beliefs. It also reminded me that I am not alone in the fight for choice, but rather that I am part of a majority group, over a million of whom felt passionately enough about this issue to leave their everyday lives and march in our nation's capitol.

Pushing my stroller through the streets of D.C. I was only one of tens of thousands of families participating in the march. I met college students who had piled into buses and slept on floors of churches and community centers to cut costs. I met individuals, couples and families who had come from as far as Los Angeles, Portland, Miami and Juneau. I briefly spoke with an older couple, possibly in their early eighties, who had come from Seattle "to help make this world better before (they) leave it." Meeting the people I did renewed the hope I've lost since George W. Bush took office.

The most notable aspect of this march was the degree of diversity represented, especially considering that our movement has been criticized for having a white, middle class bias. Marchers spanned races, economic classes, ages, and sexual orientations. It seemed as if the entire political spectrum was represented, from [pro-choice religious groups](#) to [republicans for choice](#) (don't ask) to pro-choice artist collectives (selling t-shirts that said, "Stop Bitching. Start a Revolution!").

Marchers chanted *Keep Your Rosaries Off My Ovaries; Pro-Life Your*

and it made me long for a world in which people were more vocal about their pro-choice beliefs

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Name's A Lie, You Don't Care If Women Die; and My Body, My Choice.

The most common political slogans were:

Pro-Child Pro-Choice Against Abortion?

Then Don't Have One

I'm Pro-Choice and I Pray

George Bush, There's No Oil in My Uterus

Bush, Stay Out of Mine

One man carried a sign that said "Impregnate Jerry Falwell," to which I challenged, "Do we really want him to pro-create?"

"But he wouldn't have the baby," he responded. "He'd have an abortion because he's a lying hypocrite." I couldn't argue with that one.

The anti-authority, anti-establishment tactics of the (primarily) younger generations blended with the work-within-the-establishment strategies of the older generations to create a passionate, decidedly pro-choice message about reproductive choice, family planning, medical research and privacy.

to create a passionate, decidedly pro-choice message

No pro-choice event would be complete, however, without the anti-choice "crazed and saved" protestors (mainly concentrated on a short block of Pennsylvania Ave) extolling the virtues of coerced pregnancy, forced motherhood, and the "sanctity" of life/children—children, incidentally, that they dragged to this event and forced to carry giant posters of dismembered, bloodied fetuses. My more compassionate side hopes their anti-choice work brings in a healthy income because their children are going to need a butt-load of therapy. If life is indeed as precious and fragile as they argue, it makes me wonder why they exploit their own children in this way.

But the anti-choice groups' impact was as small as their minds. On April 25, 2004, we made history and proved to the conservative, anti-feminist naysayers that our movement is as alive and relevant as ever. Indeed, the political tide against reproductive freedom has turned. Our current challenge is to harness this energy and carry our pro-choice message(s) into the next election and beyond.

Krista Jacob, Editor and Founder
Sexing the Political

To get involved and stay updated visit:

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Krista Jacob, MS, is editor-in-chief and founder of *Sexing the Political: A journal of third wave feminists on sexuality*. She has a long history of involvement in women's issues, including domestic violence, sexual assault, reproductive freedom, and women's health and sexuality. She presents at state and national conferences on issues related to violence against women, third wave feminism, motherhood, images of women in the media, abortion, and adolescent women's issues. At present, she is a writer and lecturer.



Ms. Jacob's written work has appeared in *Just Sex: Students Rewrite the Rules on Sex, Violence, Activism, and Equality*, (Rowman & Littlefield), *The Minnesota Women's Press*, and numerous feminist journals. She is the editor of *Our Choices, Our Lives: Unapologetic Writings on Abortion*.

Recently, Ms. Jacob was given the Humanitarian Award for Outstanding Alumni from Minnesota State University, Mankato.

If you would like to inquire about bringing Ms. Jacob to speak in your community or to set up an interview, please contact sexingthepolitical@msn.com.

Sexing the Political: A Journal of Third Wave Feminists on Sexuality

Editor and Publisher:

Krista Jacob

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Our Choices, Our Lives
Krista Jacob



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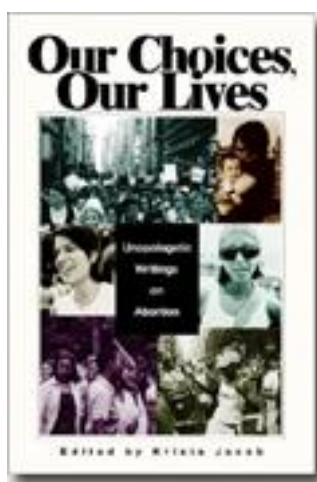
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Our Choices, Our Lives: Unapologetic Writings on Abortion
Krista Jacob, ed.
Writers Advantage
Paperback
268 pages
August 2002



A vicious mountain lion attack bares the empty truth of Kathleen Cooper's marriage. Fleeing to the Swiss Alps for a fresh start, she discovers a dark family secret - and that her new friends harbor mysteries of their own. [Click here for more on *Break Free* and other *Autumn Rose Publishing* books.](#)



The demand for abortion has existed since time immemorial, although the absence of safe medical procedures meant that many women lost their lives or sustained permanent injury. In the United States alone, one in four women lost their lives due to botched procedures before the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* case legalized abortion. However, despite legalization, the controversy between the pro- and anti- abortion groups has raged on. Indeed, it has turned out to be one of the most challenging and divisive issues in America today. In this debate, the pro-choice group which supports a reproductive choice for women and, therefore, legalized abortion is pitted against the pro-lifers who equate abortion with murder and demand limiting access to abortion as well as introducing legislation that makes the procedure illegal.

Among the numerous questions raised by the two sides are: does life begin with conception, or is it only a potential life? Should the rights of a fetus be so all-encompassing that it comes at the cost of controlling women's lives and destiny? Both sides have campaigned in their own ways. While pro-lifers show brutal pictures of aborted babies, the pro-choice contingency asks us to show compassion for women that request these services. In recent times, this issue has



turned into a political power struggle in the United States, rather than being a woman's individual decision to give birth to and mother a child. The killing of abortion doctors and violence towards clinics has been somewhat matched by restrictive legislation and reduction in the number of abortion providers in several states. In future this could go even further. As Kate Michelman, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America, says, "If the Republicans keep control of Congress, American women will lose the right to choose by 2008."

Our Choices, Our Lives examines the abortion issue in a refreshingly different manner. This collection of personal stories shows abortion from various angles: the situations and minds of individual women who seek these services, the practical problems that providers and doctors of those services encounter, and activists who speak out about the danger that any anti-abortion legislation would have on the lives of thousands of women. These writings make us aware that, although abortion is increasingly being viewed in a political context, it is hardly a political act or statement that women make in their lives. In one story after another, women talk about how they had no recourse as they found themselves pregnant at a time when they were too young or incapable of facing the responsibilities of motherhood or when bringing another child would strain the resources of the existing family. More often than not the fathers-to-be were not around or, in some cases, not to be found; more often than not the women experienced immense guilt, trauma and grief -- some points that pro-lifers somehow always forget to talk about.

The section written by the healthcare professionals is an eye-opener. Apart from the continuous demonstrations outside abortion clinics and the incidents of violence against doctors that we often hear about, these people also face situations where women who have just completed their safe abortions return to protest outside the same clinics. We are also told that many conservative, white male-dominated institutions and medical facilities are unwilling to talk about pregnancy options or other drastic methods to prevent conception such as the morning-after pill. Open discussions on such matters would be enough to trigger letters and marches of protest on several medical campuses across the country.

The last section is written by pro-choice activists. These writings delve into our earlier religious and social beliefs and show how the campaign against abortion is a form of

extension of patriarchal control of women's reproductive choices. To that end, religion is also being employed today to own, master and control the very crux of creation. Women also talk about the basic premise of the much-misunderstood pro-choice movement: that the choices women make are those that ought to be honored by society, and that pro-choice need not always imply pro-abortion. Irrespective of whether she chooses the abortion experience or decides on pregnancy and parenthood, the state should not and cannot withhold medical services.

A compelling read, *Our Choices, Our Lives* shows that instead of limiting the focus to abortion as an issue, society should look at the diversity of women and their situations, and decision-making issues related to pregnancy should largely be controlled by women themselves. For if women are to get social or economic equity, they must have control over their own reproductive choices.

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Crossing Over
Robin Ringleka

Six months before I became pregnant, I marched the streets of Washington, D.C. Every January 22nd, the anniversary of Roe V. Wade, thousands of 'pro-lifers' from all over the country pour into the streets to protest. The year I turned eighteen, I was one of them. How could I have known that in less than a year I would become one of "those women" against whom we were marching?

I will never forget the night before the march. The vigil. The one that ends with Catholic Mass in the Basilica. I was in awe, very aware of the "privilege" to share in the occasion with bishops and cardinals from all over the world. The splendor of this church alone. And there were so many men—indeed, most of them were.

During a moment of silence, from several rows behind came the blood-curdling screams, those of a woman. She screamed with her whole being, in protest of the church, the gathering of all these men, and against our efforts to end legalized abortion. Right then it seemed to me that all of the bodies present should have been able to absorb or buffer the screams of one lone woman. But her voice, *her message*, resounded throughout the Basilica, and went right to my very core.

I never actually saw her. As this woman was wrestled down and led out, the Mass continued as if nothing had happened. *Nothing*. Wait a minute. I can't even begin to describe the way her screams tore through me. I did not see one person turn around. I had been standing next to a priest who grabbed hold of me, physically keeping me from turning and acknowledging her. But it was too late. I *recognized* something in this woman's voice. And while I had no idea what it was, I'd never felt so afraid as I did that moment. My tears came and wouldn't stop. Another young woman nearby was as affected, and she and I clung together, sobbing and rocking into one another, waiting for the Mass to end.

The next day's march was filled with people toting all kinds of pictures of mutilated fetuses. We were excited to take pictures of the most

How could I have known that in less than a year I would become one of 'those women' against whom we were marching?

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grotesque, most "convincing" signs we found. Many people brought their young children and babies to the march. My friends and I decided to pose with one for a picture because we thought it made a statement. I'm sure I still have it somewhere, the picture of me and Jessica and Laura with some smiling baby among swarms of huge, blown up photos of bloody fetuses. For me, it was all about the babies. Saving them. Sending them into good, *Christian* families who weren't able to have their own. It seemed so obvious to me, especially with the baby shortage they talked so much about in religion class. Individual couples were waiting years to adopt while so many women aborted their babies.

So imagine my excitement, following the initial shock and shame of an unintended pregnancy, to be able to do the "right thing." My plan was to tell my parents once arrangements had been made. With ease, I found a program out east, Circle of Love or something like that. The woman with whom I spoke was great. She was delighted to tell me about their program, and even more delighted to receive answers to the questions about my background: White, upper-middle class,

She screamed with her whole being, in protest of the church, the gathering of all these men, and against our efforts to end legalized abortion.

excellent health and education, and college-bound. She commended me for my bravery, and empathized with my situation. I had just graduated from high school the month before, and in the fall I was to go away to the University of Tennessee, where I had accepted a cheerleading scholarship. Really, we surmised, if this had to happen, there wasn't a better time in my life. Rather than go away to school, I would go out east for a year. The agency was ready to pay for my housing, any counseling I might need, even college courses while I waited to have the baby. I would even be allowed to aide in choosing the adoptive family, and was assured the child

would be placed in an affluent one, where they would have endless opportunities. She helped me envision my return to Tennessee the following fall, where I could just pick up the poms again and nobody would ever have to be the wiser. It all seemed very romantic.

But then came the questions about the "father," my then-boyfriend Dennis. She should have been delighted to know that he, too, came from a "good" background, one nearly identical to mine. As I told her about him and his plans for college in the fall, something was happening on the other end of the line. Something was terribly wrong, the fading connection seemed almost tangible. Her breathing, her tone, everything had changed. With these words, it was all over: "Oh. Well, I'm really very sorry, but we just don't have a *demand* for bi-racial children. Our program won't be able to help you."

Dennis was black.

So. It wasn't about babies after all, but about white babies. They didn't tell us that in religion class, nor did they mention it at the march. But wait! Open any newspaper and you can find couples advertising, selling themselves as loving parents who wish to complete their lives with your baby. Yes. Your white baby.

When I began dating Dennis, my mother warned me. She said that while it was okay with her, I should remember the social context in

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Sexing the Political: A Journal of Third Wave Feminists on Sexuality

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which we lived, especially in Memphis. Some white boys might not want to date me once they knew that I had dated a black one. This, for me, was a non-issue because *I* would never date someone who held those opinions anyway. I never dreamed that racism extended beyond that. Surely not amongst the more liberal and educated. Surely not into the northern or eastern borders. And *certainly* not into the pro-life movement.

It appears that little has been written about the pro-life movement and it's rhetoric as ideas based on notions of white supremacy. This needs to be discussed. I wonder how many other women have found themselves in similar situations. How can people justify talking about baby shortages when there are over 500,000 children in the United States waiting for homes? And how about worldwide? How many of these children are non-white? And for that matter, how can they talk about babies in economic terms anyway?

Demand. Supply. Market.

I recently looked up the agency that I had dealt with on the Internet. I wanted to find and read their mission statement, curious to see if anything has changed since 1992. I found the agency in Massachusetts. According to their web page, they do not discriminate based on age, religion, class or race. Against whom, though, is not clear. The adoptive parents? The girl "in trouble"? Their offspring? Maybe, I hoped, they had just added this anti-discrimination clause in the past seven years.

For me, it was all about the babies. Saving them. Sending them into good, Christian families who weren't able to have their own.

I wish I could say I believe it. Let's just leave it at this: I'll believe it when I see it. When the couples in the paper start seeking not white babies, or even babies, but *any* child. When there are not five-hundred thousand, one thousand, or even one child left awaiting adoption. When there are programs like the one out east available to *all* women, not just middle or upper class white women carrying white babies.

In other words, I won't be crossing back over anytime soon.

Epilogue: For the first seven years that followed my abortion, I did not talk about it. The impact of the shame I felt around it was tremendous. And It thrived NOT because I had made the wrong decision, but because of the fertile soil such silence provides. I needed to talk about what happened to me, but I was certain that if others knew this one piece of information, it would change everything. So I came to feel like a fraud, doubting my goodness and dedication to anti-racism work. Because when it came down to it, hadn't my decision been based on race?

Then I took a course in Women's Studies, then another, and I was hooked. Soon after I participated in my community's production of Eve Ensler's Vagina Monologues, I wrote my story. I shared it, and nobody disappeared. In fact, I found that I knew several other women who have had an abortion, it was just something we never talked about.

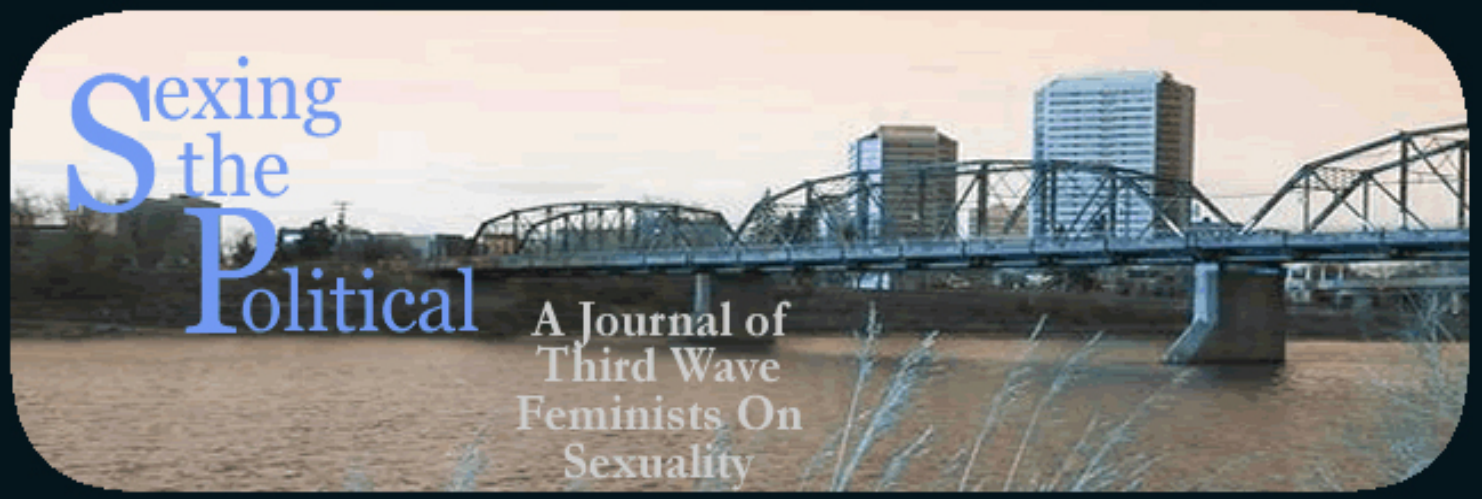
Robin Ringleka is a long-time believer in the power of small scale, and asserts that we should never underestimate the power of One. She earned a degree in Women Studies and Education from Michigan State University, and has lent much energy to ensuring reproductive rights for all women. She has enjoyed working on both the personal and political ends of the spectrum, and appreciates



how each has informed the other. Her latest project, a collaborative on-line storytelling project, was designed to debunk dangerous myths around abortion and the women who seek them, while providing support for those who have or will face unintended or problematic pregnancies. Robin currently resides in Chicago, where she works for an international women's leadership organization.

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[Kimberly Springer](#)

By now, there are as many outraged or bored perspectives on the Timberlake-Jackson Super Bowl incident as there are nipple shields in the whole of New York and Los Angeles. Short of speaking as Janet's breast itself ("What is everyone looking at? My pretty silver hat?"), the gender, race, celebrity politics are clear, if debatable: the vilification of Jackson as temptress Jezebel to Justin's good Southern boy led astray; the implications for sexual assault; the shortening cycle of our insatiable desire to build up celebrities and tear them down; and the cool pose of "so what?"

Carla Williams, co-editor of the fabulous [The Black Female Body: a Photographic History](#), concisely contextualized the over-the-top responses to the Super Bowl incident in an article for [New York Newsday](#), noting the issues of the historical exploitative photography of African-Americans and the modern-day ramifications for control over black women's bodies. In addition to this historical use and abuse of the black body, we might also consider the role of the state and regulation in deciding which representations of black bodies are acceptable. Two cases come to mind. Both are mired in the inappropriate religious interference in the affairs of the state, the historical silencing of black women's sexual subjectivity, willful ignorance of political-social-cultural contexts, and, capitalism's continued imperialist trek.

In 1999, community-run radio station [KBOO Portland](#) played Russian DJ Vadim's remix of Sarah Jones' poem "[Your Revolution](#)." The poem, an homage to Gil Scot Heron's 1974 poem/rap "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," voices the frustrations of many young, black women coming to contemporary feminist consciousness who've often found themselves driven from the dance floor by hateful lyrics, but still head-bobbin' on the sidelines. In the evolution of the emerging hip-hop feminist movement, Jones's poem is an early anthem. Imagine Jones and KBOO's surprise when, in 2001, the FCC fined the station \$7000 for indecency in her song. Jones' song is an anti-misogynistic song that masterfully uses the words of rappers against them to assert a forceful black female sexuality undetermined by male objectification and accountable only to her female desire. The nature of the alleged indecency would not be revealed until later, when the FCC repealed their indecency verdict in 2003---after Jones filed her own lawsuit against the FCC for impinging on her first amendment right to freedom

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of expression and after ignoring Jones' FCC appeal well past the FCC's own self-imposed deadline for considering such matters.

Of primary importance are changes in the FCC that are currently speeding along media consolidation---thereby homogenizing what we hear on the radio, see on television, and read in newspapers---but also bowing to the religious right's influence in the higher echelons of US government. Key to this shift is the ascension of a George W. Bush-appointed head to the FCC. While the initial complaint against Jones & KBOO languished from 1999 to 2001, Michael C. Powell (yep, Colin's boy) became FCC chair and investigations into indecency stepped up considerably. The problem with Powell, aside from everything, is his arrogant attitude toward his post, what that means for independent media, and the progressive expressions of sexuality that may be found there. Established by the 1934 Communications Act to regulate the media and protect the public interest, Powell is noted for publicly stating that "[My religion is the market](#)," disclaiming any knowledge of the meaning of the term "[public interest](#)" (though it appears in the FCC's remit 103 times), and after watching the Super Bowl halftime show lord knows how many times, stating, "TIVO is god's machine." Powell' continual merging of religion and commerce indicates his not-so-hidden agenda of using his FCC position as merely a stepping stone to other desirable posts within conservative Washington, DC machinery.

Similarly, in the murky pre-9/11 past, many seem to have forgotten then-New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's rampage against what he considered indecency in art. Anything that dared represent a cross or Christ that didn't have "™ Vatican" was deemed anti-Catholic and, therefore, unworthy of taxpayers' money. Rudy launched his attack first, in 1999, against the Brooklyn Museum of Art's (BAM) display of Chris Ofili's rendering of the Virgin Mary, partially in elephant dung. His outrage was so great that he froze about a third of the museum's budget and launched a state lawsuit to have the museum evicted from its space. By the time BAM launched an exhibit of black photography that featured Cox's photo "[Yo Mama's Last Supper](#)" one can only imagine the frenzy Rudy worked himself into at the site of, not only the disciplines being black men, but a stunningly nude Cox as Christ. Having been sent to his room by the courts in the Ofili case, this time the Crazy G made noise about appointing a city-wide "decency commission." Care for a side salad of McCarthyism with that hysteria entrée? Nothing came of this threat and along came a couple of planes across the New York skyline to transform Rudy from mayor to father-martyr.

Attempts by the state to clamp down on Jones' and Cox's expressions of an independent black female sexuality highlights capitalism's interest in only those representations that are within the bounds of the Queen/Ho paradigm and profitable. Thus, when Jones and Cox defined themselves they are labeled indecent. It is perhaps in the failure of these attempts at censorship that we can take hope that the next time Janet Jackson or anyone else decides to express their sexuality, that they can do so in ways that actually move black women from objectified silence to an incredibly sexy, badmamajamma affirmation of "yes."

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Kimberly Springer teaches American Studies at King's College in London. Kimberly Springer is the author of [Still Lifting, Still Climbing: African American Women's Contemporary Activism](#).



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Wedding Day

Elizabeth Smith

"We're not advocates and we don't march" Jenn tells me. Dana clarifies, "Well, we can't say we don't. We didn't. We do now." A 26-year-old college English instructor and 28-year-old aspiring chef, Jenn Smits and Dana Wegener would be more likely to be called professionals than activists. They never expected to join an emerging political movement. Yet, when they signed up as one of the first same sex couples to have their marriages solemnized in the highly publicized recent ceremonies performed by the mayor of New Paltz, NY, they found themselves sudden spokespeople for the growing national equal rights movement for same-sex couples.

The twenty-something couple had been living together as committed life partners for the past 8 years, and "engaged" for several, although "that was just for us" Jenn tells me, since there were few outlets to legalize it. While they'd talked about a possible trip to Vermont (where they could legally get married), they had no firm plans or a date set, and with uncertainties about the legal status of their marriage when they returned, hadn't been in a rush. They also didn't know what to call it. "We didn't want to call it a 'civil union,'" Dana says with disdain. "And we couldn't call it a marriage." Jenn adds, "We didn't want to call it a 'commitment ceremony' because we've been committed forever."

A month ago, the dilemma was resolved for them. While watching the 11:00 news one night, they learned that their 26-year old mayor intended to marry a handful of couples the next morning, and that the ceremonies would be broadcast live. Jenn tells me, "I saw they were going to do weddings and I thought what if tomorrow is the only day this is going to happen? Let's go down there!"

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Still in their pajamas, the two rushed down to the town hall where television vans were already parked. They were in the process of trying to convince those at the front desk to add them to the list when Dana saw the mayor walking by. She called out and thanked him for what he was doing and told him they were a local couple who had been together 8 years and were grateful for his courage. He added them to the list and told them to be back at 10am.

Back at home, now well after midnight, they called their family, friends, and colleagues, most of whom actually made the last minute trek on virtually no notice to be there for their ceremony. With nothing formal to wear and no rings, they were one of 25 couples to be married the next morning without any of the traditional ceremonial hoopla – but with more media attention than most weddings ever receive. Pictured in all of the major papers, they became inadvertent spokespeople, besieged by the media for months and even targeted by extremist right-wing conservative groups.

But although they seized the sudden opportunity to get married, their marriage wasn't a mere impulse. In fact, they tell me they wouldn't have done it earlier, even if the same opportunity had afforded itself. But on that particular day the timing just happened to be right. After having been together for 8 years, they were "out" to their families, friends, and jobs. They had found the beginning of their career paths, and worked through major early relationship issues. Now, they had the chance to affirm their relationship legally – and in their hometown. "It was perfect timing. I didn't have to think about it. I knew I wanted to do it." Dana maintains. "We didn't even discuss it" Jenn adds. "It was like let's go down there!"

Because they've been in a committed, cohabitating relationship for so long, the new marriage hasn't altered their relationship much from the inside. What it has changed is the legitimacy and respect with which external parties now regard their union. "Before we were just living our lives, it was our own business, although we kind of felt invalidated when people didn't take our relationships seriously. Now they saw us get married on tv. So [they know] yes we really are." Jenn cites instances of men propositioning each of them in front of the other, even those who knew of their status as a long-term couple, which most men would never do in front of a girl with her boyfriend. But because they were two women in a relationship, men would subconsciously presume it was temporary. "They acted like 'it's just for now.'" Dana explains. "It was never respected. But when you tell someone you're married, there's more of a line of respect– a universal symbol of I'm taken." Before, some people treated them almost like roommates – although in retrospect they admit this was partially their fault. Earlier in their relationship, they had always bought two bedroom apartments, dressing a fake room for when family visited, although all their friends knew it was fake. "But we made sure it looked like 2 separate bedrooms lived there for years" they laugh.

But although they seized the sudden opportunity to get married, their marriage wasn't a mere impulse.

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But because they were two women in a relationship, men would subconsciously presume it was temporary.

Although they've ditched the decoy bedroom, they still want things that they couldn't have without a marriage – essentially the same things most married couples want – a home, kids, the right to adopt, healthcare without extra paperwork or costs, the right to see their next of kin in the hospital, the right to own joint property and not face legal wranglings with unsupportive family members in the case of one of their deaths, and benefits as simple as multi-car auto insurance discounts. They don't want to have to give a complicated explanation to realtors and mortgage lenders when they go to buy a house together. They don't want to have to disprove the

same attitude from creditors as male suitors – that their relationship might be temporary or a phase. While their auto insurance agent knows their situation, he still can't put them on one policy, but luckily, they have found a realtor – who happens to be one member of the first couples to be married alongside them.

Though their marriage hasn't changed their personal life dramatically, it has increased the extent of their involvement in politics. Dana agrees, "Now I understand there is power in numbers and we need everybody out there waving their flags. We have become more involved." Although while they now feel like part of the larger movement, their approach is very personal. For Dana, "the biggest thing for me is that I'm 27 years old and I've never been registered to vote until this past weekend. I've always thought that my vote doesn't count anyways, but now I know I need to vote." Jenn tells me "I think that we would like to be more activists, but we still have a life. We don't have the energy to be out there every day – I'm not that kind of a person - but when I have the opportunity I can use myself as the example. It's personal to people that I talk to now."

But she wants me to understand, "what was so neat about that day was that it wasn't about politics the day we got married. It wasn't about activism. It wasn't about any of that - It was about me and Dana and our family and oh my god we have the opportunity to get married – quick let's go do it."

Liz Smith is a third generation feminist writer with repeated credits in notable feminist venues including *Fierce*, *Moxie*, *Fabula*, *Herspace*, and *Riot Grrl* on subjects ranging from Cunnilingus, The Cost of Birth Control, Her First Dildo, Body Image, and Soccer Moms in Outer Space. Other highlights include interviewing female athletes who've posed nude and why, the proprietors of feminist sex toy shops on what it's like to be an empowering force within the mostly misogynistic sex industry, and former Agent 99 from Get Smart on the joys of being single.



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Turning the Tide: A Letter from the Editor **Day Care**

Lauren K. Alleyne

Broad shouldered,
thick-waisted and stocky –
my bones thick, heavy
as the smell of sweaty socks –
I decided since I'd never be skinny,
I would at least be strong.

But for a girl fed
on fairytale princesses,
bred on the slight and wilting
heroines' plight,
that tremendous need
to feel tiny persisted –

led me to places
like my father's 20-foot
scaffold in the backyard,
or airplanes swaddled in cirrus,
the world stretched to nothing
beyond their steely wings.

Once I found myself seated
atop a Brooklyn building,
legs dangling over the edge
of the rooftop – six stories closer
to the stars – looking skyward
and earthward

and inward;
imagined myself a speck,
small and insignificant
as any other
in the blue-black bounty
of that summer night.

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Lauren K. Alleyne hails from the twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. She is currently pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing, and a minor in Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies, at Cornell University. She is amused by how closely campus resembles Hogwarts and is on a mission to conjure up better weather for the upstate NY area.



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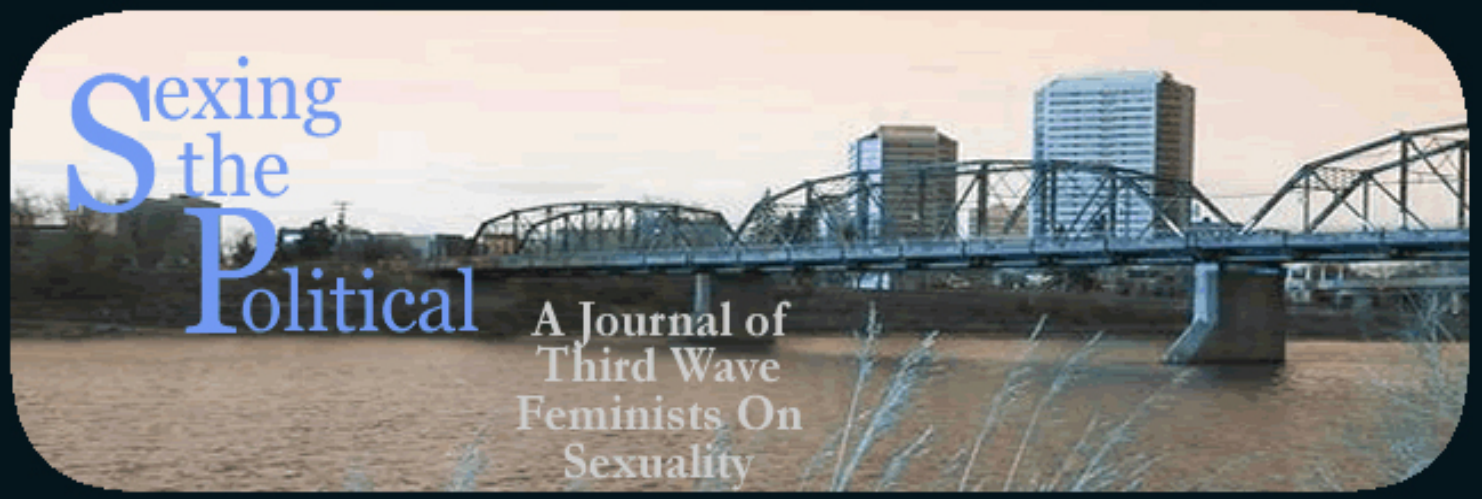
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La Migra

Adela C. Licona

Mija, he says to me in an accent I no longer hear,
no somos Chicanos.

Why do you say that he asks.

I look at him, the migra, patrolling my borders,
keeping me an alien from within.

What do you mean, I ask?

Didn't you grow up in el barrio Daddy, wearing zoot suits and calling
yourself Pachuco?

And didn't they call you Chile when you worked in the bowels of the
government ships during WWII to prove your loyalty and citizenship to
a country that was suspicious of both?

I remember las viejitas en la iglesia and pedos do monja at the
bakery. I remember your chanclas, and your bata, and the Spanglish
we sometimes spoke in our home.

And wasn't that Josefina who lit candles on your belly para purificarate?

Why do you police my borders?

One brother says to me, with an authority I no longer hear,
you aren't Chicana, you didn't see violence growing up.

I look at him, the migra, patrolling my history now,
keeping me an alien from within.

What do you mean, I ask?

Violence alone does not define me. But I did see violence. I saw it
residing as rage behind your eyes, erupting from your throat, and
exploding at the end of your fists.

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Didn't they change your name when you got here? You were not Memo, he was not Miguel, you were William and Michael. We didn't know you, and you didn't recognize yourselves. Someone else was policing (y)our borders then, you were only in training.

And don't you remember they locked our doors before you came home at night to keep the violence on the other side, so that the hermanas didn't get hurt by it?

Why do you police my borders?

Mija, he says to me in an accent I no longer hear, No eres lesbiana. No digas eso. Just say you're a feminist like you used to, that covers a lot of ground.

I look at him, the migra again, patrolling my sexuality now, keeping me an alien from within.

What do you mean, I ask?

Adela C. Licona is interested in the practices, politics, and poetics of representation. She is at work exploring and exposing (B)Orderlands' Rhetorics and their representational potentials. The forthcoming work from which her work here is excerpted is entitled: *Third-space Sites and Subjectivities: Agency, Authority, and (Re)Presentation (Re)Imagined and (Re)Considered*.

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THE PERSONAL QUESTS OF SAIRA SHAH

Zubeda Jalalzai

As the U.S. occupation of Iraq continues along its violent course along side the similarly tenuous nation building efforts in Afghanistan, Americans need only look to the very recent past for how the Bush administration has justified war in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite the possibility that public opinion may not have been able to resist the administration's plans, in each case public opinion had to be employed (to varying degrees) on the side of invasion. Two documentaries on Afghanistan, *Beneath the Veil* and *Unholy War*, by Saira Shah, the Afghani-British journalist and winner of the Courage Under Fire Award have presented highly validated accounts of Afghanistan under Taliban rule and during the early days of the U.S. bombing campaign(1). Both documentaries, which present gorgeous views of the Afghan landscape and intimate and often painful portraits of Afghanistan's people, had been in frequent rotation on CNN as part of its "CNN Presents" line-up after September 11. Shah's films not only reveal much about how to win the "hearts and minds" of the American people in going to war but also more complicated issues of building an international feminist movement that is not coincident with western interests.

While the films emphasize the political turmoil in Afghanistan, their appeal to the West lies more in the subjective and emotional connections Shah makes to her Afghani roots and the connections she builds to her father's homeland. In fact, the documentaries take as their *raison d'être* not only the project of unmasking Taliban brutality but of fulfilling two specific personal quests for Shah that frame each of her films. Raised and educated in England, Shah first went to Afghanistan between 1986 and 1988 to cover the war against the Soviet Union. As Shah searches for the images her father impressed on her, the film juxtaposes the devastation of Afghanistan under Taliban rule with the lost grandeur of her father's pleasure gardens. In her second film, *Unholy War*, Shah again employs this format, but this time she multiplies her quests. First, Shah seeks to cross the then-sealed border between Afghanistan and Pakistan in October of 2001. She then searches for a young Northern Alliance soldier, Usman, whom she met while producing *Beneath the Veil*. Lastly, she searches for the three Afghani girls (Amina, Fairuza, and Farzanah) whose sorrow haunts the conclusion of her first film.

Shah's journeys appeal to western audiences in their perception of the danger she encountered as a woman in the strange and unknown Pashtun lands. Her interactions with Northern Alliance soldiers, however, are not tinged with any apparent discomfort, graphically

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presented by Shah's casual dress of pants, jacket, and boots, with no scarf or other head coverings. Shah's strategy in adopting this western and perhaps genderless style of dress is a good one, in that by marking herself distinct from local women, she might also avoid local restrictions. But her choice of dress also signifies a degree of safety and gender equality in the midst of this particular group of men. Shah, like most westerners, is particularly fascinated with the veil, a curiosity that has a long history in the contact between western and eastern cultures. In the orientalist tradition, the veil is a sign of both romantic exoticism and gender inequality. Though Shah must don the veil at certain points in her journeys (and underneath which she shoots some of her footage), she is never seen completely veiled in either of her films.

Shah's intentions are noble: to expose the plight of women under unfathomable oppression. Still, in the glimpse she gives the viewers of the perspective underneath the veil, Shah also replays an old western fantasy of unveiling the Muslim woman. More importantly, her criticism of gender inequality and the destruction of Afghanistan is focused only on Taliban rule and never truly engages the historical context of their rise to power or the dangers experienced by Afghani women under other equally brutal regimes, namely the period of warlordism and conflict between the groups later called the Northern Alliance between 1992-1996. In the course of Shah's trail to Paghman, her father's hometown, the film presents the Northern Alliance in a kind of soft focus. The cruelty of their past, including ethnic violence, torture, and rape, does not enter the narratives of either film. Though in her travels Shah uncovers mass graves attributed by locals to the Taliban as evidence of their endemic violence, Amnesty International has also reported the existence of mass graves (near Shebarghan) in Afghanistan, but attributed them to specific Northern Alliance factions.

The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), who aided Shah in *Beneath the Veil*, swiftly expressed great opposition to the U.S. bombing campaign and to the installation of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan (2). Some of the most compelling footage of *Beneath the Veil*, in fact, belongs not to Shah but to RAWA, who captured the execution of a woman in the soccer stadium turned execution grounds. Since the West does have access to such graphic footage and to the stories offered by Afghani women, we must ask what Shah's films offer us that the undigested footage of RAWA cannot. Shah guides us not only in viewing the conditions in Afghanistan but in registering how we are to feel about the conflict and the major actors. While Shah devotes a significant portion of *Beneath the Veil* to RAWA when they were pointedly and quite single-mindedly opposed to the Taliban, she makes no mention of RAWA in the second film when they had developed equally acerbic criticism of the Northern Alliance. By the end of 2001, on the occasion of International Human Rights Day (Dec. 10, 2001), RAWA turned its criticisms directly to the Northern Alliance identifying its own bloody history(3). Such criticism sits uncomfortably alongside the generous depiction of the Northern Alliance in both *Beneath the Veil* and *Unholy War*.

This example of Shah's selective opprobrium reveals the rhetorical role women's rights has played within Afghanistan's recent history and the degree to which such appeals do more to serve the interests of the articulators rather than Afghani women in general. We need only scratch the surface to find evidence of this bilateral violence, variously attributed to the "heroes" or "enemies." Rape, in particular, has played a fundamental role in the politics of Afghanistan. Literally, rape as a

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Sexing the Political: A Journal of Third Wave Feminists on Sexuality

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ritual of warfare taints the purity of female bodies and so despoils their value as Muslims as well as the property of other men. Rape also played a mythical a role in the Taliban's very coming into power. According to Ahmed Rashid, the "most credible story" of the Taliban's originary moment was widely circulated about Mullah Omar's consolidation of Taliban forces to retaliate against the abduction and rape of two teenage girls(4).

Saira Shah turns the specter of sexual violence back onto the Taliban and rape becomes the great unspoken terror of the three girls at the heart of *Unholy War*. Implicitly, Shah fills in the blank space of their terror and conjures up for the viewer images of two days of violence and rape. Because of other accounts of rape by Taliban soldiers, Shah's speculations are certainly not outside the realm of possibility, but the documentary answers definitively for the girls who, once again, become casualties of political rhetoric as well as whatever violence may or may not have occurred after the murder of their mother(5). I do not want to erase the possibility of sexual violence in that instance, but I caution against appropriating the silence of the three young girls, especially within a narrative that supports - to use Shah's own term - "the west's war," and this war's attendant political and economic agendas. For all our well-meaning intentions, western feminists must keep in mind the cautions that postcolonial critics like Gayatri Spivak have been considering for many years. In her 1988 essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak," Spivak critiques imperial motivations inherent in the liberation of third-world women by first-world subjects, male or female. In our rush to save these silenced women, first world feminists, including Shah, need to perform fundamental critiques of our own motivations and the effects of what we require of these women— including the necessity of opening their worlds to western styles and markets, as well as proper gender roles.

In *Beneath the Veil* and *Unholy War* Shah does not allow the girls' silence to stand without interpretation. While Shah never says the word "rape" in this context, their silence is given dramatic resonance and made to perform an indictment against the sexual crimes of the Taliban, even though the crime the girls seem most clearly fixated on is the brutal murder of their mother. The role their silence plays is indicative of the general dynamic in these films between the filmed subjects' relationships to the journalist. Shah's powerful narrative voice accompanied by the haunting sound-track place clear emphasis on certain information, on particular stories, and on selected moments of terror. The camera, itself, records critiques of the Northern Alliance and the U.S. to which Shah remains silent. For example, in *Unholy War* the Northern Alliance guide, Usman, takes Shah aside to express his concerns about what might happen when the Northern Alliance takes Kabul. In an intriguing reference to veiling and unveiling, Usman worries about the future when the Northern Alliance's "veils will fall off." He explains that they will only reluctantly give up war, since they know no other means of livelihood. Shah does not engage or contextualize Usman's critique. Instead, the camera cuts to a magnificent sun-set and images of these Northern Alliance soldiers bravely looking off into the future(6).

Compare these moments of Shah's own silence with others of specified emotional content. When Shah covers the anti-American demonstrations in Pakistan shortly after the first bombs were dropped by the United States, the camera focuses on a relatively small crowd, and in particular on a boy within this crowd whose voice is amplified by the film-makers to emphasize his cry of, "Osama bin Ladin!" Shah says

of this group, "I find their anger terrifying." There is an unmistakable imbalance here in what we as viewers should question and what we should fear(7).

If we are committed to combing through the complications of Afghanistan's history and the West's intimate role in that history, if we are willing to trust the challenging voices issuing from the Afghani people, critical of the Taliban, the Northern Alliance, and the West, our reporting and our art need to somehow engage those complexities. Although complete objectivity is not possible, more even handed reporting must not allow for the easy appropriation of those images and voices we encounter along the way, either by powerful actors in the political arena or by our own narratives of loss and desire.

Footnotes:

(1) *Beneath the Veil* was produced by Cassian Harrison, Channel 4, and Hardcash Productions in 2001. *Unholy War* was made six months later at the beginning of the U.S./British war in Afghanistan by the parties involved in the first film as well as CNN and CNN International.

(2) A RAWA activist named "Fatima" who was interviewed by Janelle Brown after the United States's formal collaboration with Northern Alliance forces remarked that "the Northern Alliance are the second taliban." "Fatima" also asserts that "seventy-year-old grandmothers were raped during their rule, thousands of girls were raped, thousands were killed and tortured. They are the first government that started this tragedy in Afghanistan."

(3) RAWA's statement reads: "The 'Northern Alliance' need to remember the years 1992 to 1996 when they were in power; when the execrable Golbodin Hekmatyar gang (Hezb-I-Islami) turned Kabul to rubble with their daily indiscriminate bombardment and rocketing; when the infamous Mazari-Khalili gang (Wahdat-I-Islami) were gouging out the eyes of non-Hazaras; when the vile Saryaf gang (Ittehad-I-Islami) were driving 6-inch nails into the heads of Hazaras and broiling them alive in metal containers; when the perfidious Rabbani-Massoud gangs (Jamiat-I-Islami and Shorai Nazar) slaughtered the inhabitants of Afshar and other residential areas in Kabul and whitewashed the faces of all murderers, rapists and looters in history in terms of the barbarity and infamy they perpetrated against countless innocent and defenceless women, girls, and boys. . . . Such posturing and talk of 'democracy' and 'women's rights' cannot wash away or hide their innate fundamentalist-terrorist nature. . . . The people of the world need to know that long before the Taliban, it was Mr. Mullah Younis Khalis (a confederate of the victorious jihadis) who 'executed' the Buddha statues [sic] at Bamiyan by firing volleys of artillery against it. The people of the world need to know that in terms of widespread raping of girls and women from ages seven to seventy, the track record of the Taliban can in no way stand up against that of these very same 'Northern Alliance' associates."

(4) Rashid writes: "In the spring of 1994 Singesar neighbours came to tell him that a Commander had abducted two teenage girls, their heads had been shaved and they had been taken to a military camp and repeatedly raped. Omar enlisted some 30 Talibs who had only 16 rifles between them and attacked the base, freeing the girls and hanging the commander from the barrel of a tank. They captured quantities of arms and ammunition. 'We were fighting against Muslims who had gone wrong. How could we remain quiet when we could see crimes being committed against women and the poor?' Omar said later" (25).

(5) The presentation of their experience is surprisingly similar to a rape recorded by Amnesty International, this time charged against the United Front (Northern Alliance) According to Amnesty: "In March 1994 a 15-year-old girl was repeatedly raped in her house in Kabul's Chei Sotton district after armed guards entered the house and killed her father for allowing her to go to school. 'They shot my father right in front of me. He was a shopkeeper. It was nine o'clock at night. They came to our house and told him they had orders to kill him because he allowed me to go to school. The Mujahideen had already stopped me from going to school, but that was not enough. They then came and killed my father. I cannot describe what they did to me after killing my father'" (Amnesty Women in Afghanistan).

(6) When Shah interviews the three girls, Amina, Fairuza, and Farzanah, in the second documentary, she asks if they are afraid of Northern Alliance soldiers. One sister responds in the affirmative, but the viewer is not sure about the emphasis in her statement, which seems to focus on their general hardships from war and drought. "We've lived through a revolution and war--that's why we're afraid. We're afraid of the Taliban. . . . Yes, we're afraid of [the Northern Alliance] as well. . . . Who can be comfortable around foreigners? . . . There's nothing in this barren terrain. . . . We will just suffer in silence." When Shah interviews a refugee family in Pakistan, the patriarch comments on how the Taliban are inseparable from the general Afghani populace. Therefore, he says, the American bombs cannot distinguish between their enemies and the Afghani civilians: "The Americans say they are only against the Taliban, but they are wrong." Again, Shah does not provide comment or context. Instead the camera focuses on the sorrow etched in individual family member's faces and then cuts to an image of a distant mountain range. Another refugee tells Shah that the first American food drops were appropriated by Northern Alliance soldiers. Shah provides no voiced-over concern. If these documentaries, like Peter Davis's 1974 Vietnam War documentary *Hearts and Minds*, simply, but deliberately, juxtaposed images, sounds, and texts with little narrative explanation, these moments of silence would not stand out. *Beneath the Veil* and *Unholy War* are not, however, constructed in that kind of documentary style.

(7) Just as these documentaries place their subjects in particular places, they also present Shah as a kind of character. I need, therefore, to distinguish between the Saira Shah of these documentaries and the journalist who, in interviews about her work, is more reflective than these filmic narratives allow. In *Unholy War*, Shah's failure to persuade the father of the three Afghan girls to allow them to go to a local school is presented as her running against the brick wall of patriarchy and the inertia inspired by loss (the father says that after his wife's murder he is unable to consider the implications of educating his daughters and leaving his home). But, in the interview with Janelle Brown, Shah reads her failure to save the girls as resulting from misguided western assumptions. She says, "That was a real revelation for me. I rather arrogantly, in a very Western way, assumed that I could solve their problems because I had good will and money. It taught me that their problems are more complex." Unfortunately, these documentaries do not lend themselves to complicated interpretations of the crisis in Afghanistan, or to reflective critiques of western reporting or good will.

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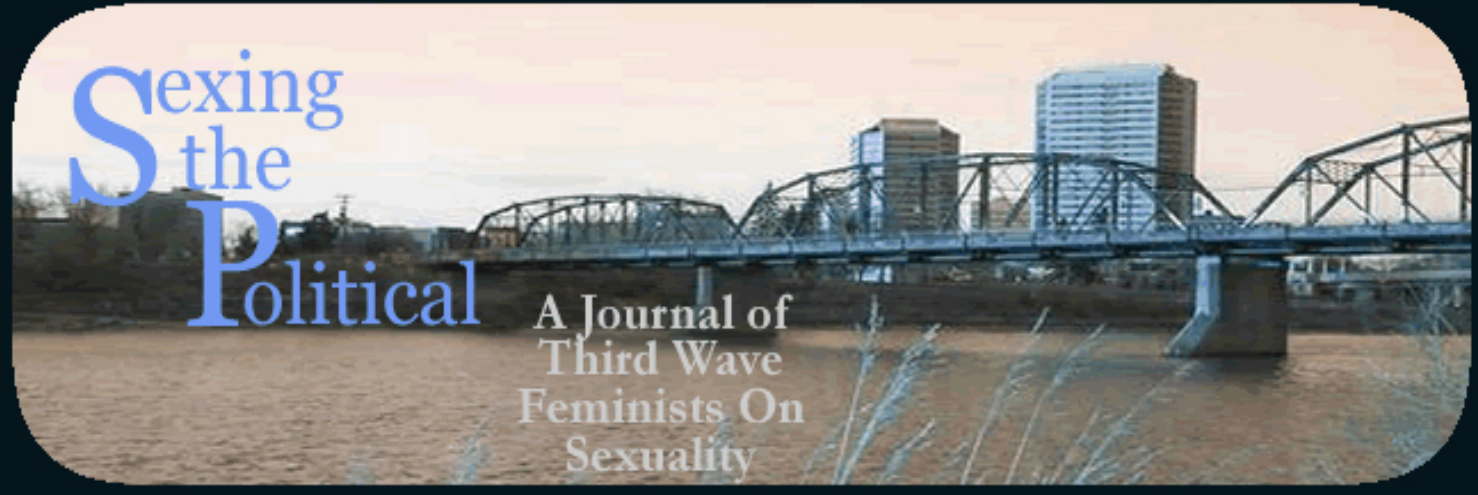
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Muddled in the Middle

Elizabeth Wheatfield (pseudonym)

In recent years, feminists have worked to be more inclusive—to recognize that the needs and life situations of all women are not the same. While these efforts have been successful in many ways, there is one area where, at least in my experience, multiple voices have not seemed welcome: the abortion debate. Every self-labeled feminist I met until recently expected me to be adamantly, unequivocally, unambiguously, unapologetically pro-choice. And I wasn't. In fact, for a long time, I wasn't even in what NARAL Pro-Choice America calls the "muddled middle." For a very long time I was in the pro-life camp. Not just theoretically in it, but really in it. I went to protests, and meetings—even one Operation Rescue meeting. And that is the big secret I was never allowed to tell, mention, or even think around other feminists. The two were unmoveably opposed, and were I to mention my past or even my confused and ambivalent present, I felt I would be quickly cast out. I went to two National Organization for Women (NOW) meetings when I was 22, meetings where I really wanted to be, but I had to stop going because there was no room there for dialogue about abortion. I was on the wrong side of the clearly drawn lines and being at the meetings and being silent made me feel like a fraud.

... my former
certainty about
abortion had
completely
deserted me.

But recently (almost ten years after those NOW meetings) I went to a local grassroots house meeting on reproductive politics sponsored by NARAL Pro-Choice America. There I was shocked and pleased to find that the conversation, the real dialogue, was allowed to include women like me who have traveled from the right on this issue to what NARAL so aptly named the muddled middle. I was relieved to find there were good, strong feminists in the room who were muddled with me. I breathed a sigh of relief and vowed to myself to write down the story of my journey from the radical right to the muddled middle. Because maybe I am not alone. And if I want to see feminists consider multiple voices on this issue, maybe I need to be brave enough to be part of the dialogue.

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In the house and church I grew up in, there was no question about where I would stand on abortion.

A fetus was a life.

We opposed taking life.

Case closed.

... certain
images still
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stay with me.

What conversation can be had when only one question is considered pertinent? I was a chaste, Christian, small-town, pro-life teenager from a happy home with two parents. My most exciting experiences were church camping trips. At sixteen, I hadn't even kissed a boy. Nothing had ever happened to me to suggest other questions were relevant in the abortion debate. I was sure of my views and sure that my experiences provided enough information from which to make

an informed decision about what was right for all women everywhere. Thus, I goaded my girlfriends into attending protests and meetings and starting teenage pro-life groups. No one questioned me. Where we came from, my girlfriends where in the wrong not to have thought of going to the meetings before I did. They admired my staunch, unquestioning sense of what was right and wrong. Frankly, I was pompous, self-righteous, and unbearably certain of myself. I had the total peace of mind that can only come from a world view with no room for gray.

My certainty and peace of mind were not to last, however. College showed me that life is full of gray.

In college I discovered that some people have sex without feeling they have done something dirty, that women get pregnant who are in no position to take care of a child, and that the scariest thing in the world for an 18-year-old from a pro-life Christian fundamentalist family would be to have to tell her parents she was pregnant. If I had become pregnant and I had told my parents, I knew exactly where I would have gone: straight to a home for pregnant teenage mothers (where my mother was once a social worker), to be physically well-cared for and proselytized to for nine months, after which time my child would have been adopted by a good white fundamentalist family dying for a healthy new (preferably white) baby. I would have been shamed. My parents' biggest concern would have been how to hide my pregnancy their friends. And my situation was not nearly as dire as the situations many of my friends would have faced.

I started to understand why parental consent laws might be a bad idea.

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In my women's studies classes I learned about poverty and racism, about misogyny, about the history of birth control (or rather, control of birth control). I learned that for many women there are several important questions that come before whether a fetus is a life, questions such as, "Will this pregnancy cost me my life? Who will feed this child? Where is one person—anyone—who will provide me with some support if I have this child?"

I claim the right, as a feminist, to be pro-choice with an anti-choice past.

I let go of a few more of my carefully held certainties.

After my world view took on a few more shades of gray, my friends started telling me about their abortions, and I had to come to terms with the fact that the women I had so emphatically protested against in high school were good people, people I knew, people I would want for my friends. What to do with that? Love the sinner, hate the sin? Fairly easy to say in Christian theory, but my friends didn't seem like sinners. They seemed like girls who had fallen in love or been taken advantage of or even raped. I started to wonder about sin, and why so much sin in the Christian tradition falls on women, centers around women's bodies.

By the end of college, my former certainty about abortion had completely deserted me.

I knew I couldn't be pro-life anymore. But I didn't identify with anyone I met who called herself pro-choice. I had doubts and uncertainties, not to mention a shady past. So you can probably imagine how I ended up smack dab in the muddled middle.

Or maybe not. Maybe you are wondering how, after all that I had learned, I still was unable to stand with certainty for pro-choice. Older women, women who witnessed or experienced illegal abortions and all the terror caused by them, don't seem to have any trouble being certain. Maybe that is my problem—while abortion wasn't an easy decision for any of my friends, they could wrestle with it alone and, having made their decision, quietly have a safe legal abortion and go on with their lives. They never had to talk about it or work for it beyond their own inner struggle. They were free to be emotionally ambivalent because there was no physical or legal danger. Maybe my generation feels the complacency of choice. But what I feel isn't complacent. It's really the opposite of complacent. I feel deeply torn, pulled in opposite directions.

On the one hand, I am certain I cannot tell other women what to do. I am sure that there are times when abortion is the only feasible option. I am sure that I don't want men's laws to control what I can and cannot do with my body. And I'm damn sure women shouldn't be dying because of botched illegal abortions.

On the other hand, certain images still haunt me, and certain beliefs stay with me. The pictures of supposedly aborted fetuses that I used to put in the papers I forced my high school English teachers to read haunt me even after all this time and after all I know about how those pictures were probably taken and why that particular rhetorical

strategy is an appeal to *pathos* I don't condone. But I just can't let go of the visual. To me, a fetus at a certain point does look like a baby. I don't know how to get around that. And, for whatever reason, I strongly doubt I could have an abortion and ever be alright with it. I imagine this is my upbringing. And the fact that at bottom, my answer to the only question I used to think was worth asking is "yes." Yes, I do think a fetus is a life.

So there I am. Muddled up and tied up in the middle. Torn between my feminist beliefs in women and their right to make good, right choices for themselves about every issue and my belief that a fetus is a life. Where do I belong? What am I?

Recently, I have started to feel like I have the right—and maybe even the responsibility—to call myself pro-choice. Because, I reason, I *am* for choice and laws that allow for choice. At bottom, the one thing I believe in is personal responsibility and choice. Each woman must decide what is right for her and what she can live with. And, given all her options and enough support, each woman can and will make the best choice. I know what my choice would probably be if I had to make it. And I also know that my choice is the only one I need—or have the right—to make.

So I claim the right, as a feminist, to be pro-choice with an anti-choice past. Muddled in the middle, conflicted and torn.

What is the place within the feminist movement for women like me? I can, with certainty, lobby for sex education and better access to birth control. And I can be open about my doubts and my past because maybe there are people I can talk to that my more certain pro-choice sisters can't.

This is where I am now, and that is going to have to be enough.

Originally appeared in *Our Choices, Our Lives: Unapologetic Writings on Abortion*, edited by Krista Jacob (iUniverse Star, 2004).

Elizabeth Wheatfield (pseudonym) who is 31 and just began her first tenure-track position teaching writing, uses a pseudonym in order to give herself the courage she needs to write about the issues she struggles with and to allow her to write about issues that involve her friends and family.

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Lauren K. Alleyne

Dear Paul:

I am here, sitting at home, and trying to make sense of the last two hours. What a day. It's amazing, the way life goes, you can be sitting with old friends, arguing politics and religion over wine, you go to bed, you wake up next morning from a good night's sleep and then 3-4 hours later, your world is a different place. Sounds like it should be an earthquake, a war, some disaster (natural or Bush made) – who knows that a hand in the wrong place, a single moment in time can change you forever. A grab.

You want to know what I am doing with my work here, what this feminism business is all about. Today, you answered your own question. This is why I am a feminist. This is why I care about gender. You tell me that it is all about institutions and power relations within the framework of "The Structure"; you are right. And I can affirm, especially after today, that being born a woman in "The Structure" as it exists, and as we must survive in it means that we have no power, less power at best. It means that when you are alone in a room with a man, you are in a position of less power. It means that when you articulate a political or philosophical position to that man, he will assume that a pat on the ass, or a grab of thigh will drive all that stuff out of your pretty little head. It means, Paul, that one moment can prove to you that everything you thought was wrong with the world, *is* wrong with the world.

You disagree when I tell you that power is gendered, but let me ask you this, would you have done what you did if William was sitting there? Another male? Let me ask you this, what recourse do I have to deal with the mental disturbance this experience has created? Do I tell someone? No point really, so you made a pass at me, so what? Happens every day. Let me ask you this, have you ever been a woman in an empty house, in the middle of nowhere, with an uninvited hand up your thigh? Can you even understand the threat of that? The terror, no matter how fleeting?

Do you understand that this is not the first time, and no matter how much I hope and pray and will the world differently, that it will probably not be the last?

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Do you understand the loss? That every hand withdrawn, slapped away, is no better than the hand that ties you down because it operates on the same principle? That it takes with it another layer of faith that "The Structure" is as benign as coffee and chatter between friends?

Do you understand what it means to always be a potential victim by virtue of your body, and in a way no man can understand?

You disagree when I tell you that our perceptions and actions are mediated; that the way we construct and make sense of experience is through a process of theorization of which we are unaware, and that is indubitably masculinist? From the point of view of privilege, and power, and the goddamn "Structure," it's all natural, instinctive, the way it works with women and men; as a woman who exists in such a structure, my instinct is to overlook what was clearly a violation of my personal space, a blatant disrespect of my intelligence and disregard of the boundaries of propriety and not to mention a breach of trust. Not mediated? Not gendered? Why then, does it cross my mind, that perhaps I had placed myself in such a position, that somehow I deserved it, or asked for it, that its very occurrence is somehow my fault? Why have I learned to distrust the sickness in my stomach, the indignation that someone felt he had rights to *my* body in that manner – this, even as my enlightened, academic side resists such imposition of masculinist structure on my experience.

Of course you didn't/couldn't have/wouldn't have hurt me/ forced me/ taken further liberties – when did I learn to be grateful for minimal violence?

And yet, it makes things that much more difficult. Who really wants to discover that their deepest fears are real, their worst suspicions well founded? There is no satisfaction in knowing for sure that the gender we're 'stuck with' will always mean we are not safe; that it leaves us open to lecherous advances and humiliation at best, abuse and violence at worst. On the contrary, it is disheartening; it just tells me that no matter how much theory I have, no matter how many ways I am given, or seek to understand the world, that when it comes down to it, as long as things do not change, these incidents will still happen, and I am as vulnerable to them whether I am fourteen, or sixteen or twenty four... Perhaps that was your point.

Perhaps you were trying to do me a favor, provide the thing you thought I needed to make me happy in my place in "The Structure" – after all every feminist just needs a good fuck. Perhaps I should be flattered.

Perhaps that was your way of showing me where my place in "The Structure" is, how futile resistance is/would be. Perhaps you are right.

But as long I have to live in this world and in this body, it is critical that I continue to work to challenge and reform the structure, and to redefine my value within it. I refuse to accept a position of no agency. I refuse to be acted upon by structures, in any form or manifestation (i. e. 'Grabs') that objectify, disrespect, or that simply disregard me. I choose not to be silent, (even after the fact) but to respond in the best way I know how. And hell, if I have to deal with it, you should too.

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Lauren

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Toronto, March 2004

They taught us
volunteers
running Suicide Action Montreal
That a caller's
"I want to kill myself"
should always be taken seriously
And followed-up
with the question
"How do you plan on doing it?"
If an answer
full of methodic steps
were to come-up
we were there to rate the call
on the urgent side of the numeric scale
and act accordingly.
The failing I felt
every time
as an anonymous stranger
on the other end of the line:
I wasn't permitted to find and meet the caller
I had to have the call traced
Maintain the anonymous distance
Send a ticket to a mental health ward
instead of unconditional support
to another human being
crying out for help.

Dear Reetika Vazirani,
I never spoke anonymously with you.
You were averse to suicide hotlines
to the ambulances they'd send
and the hospitals they'd send you to.
In any case we weren't in the same cities
Not even the same country, for the most part
Still,
somehow

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somewhere
as a poet
as a woman
as a reader of the first Press to publish you [\[1\]](#)
as a South Asian in North America
as an anonymous stranger
I know you.

Dear Reetika Vazirani,
This isn't a poem for you
You are long gone
Stabbed to death
along with your son
by a kitchen knife in your hand.
Eight months after your death,
following an inexplicably long Feature [\[2\]](#)
What are we to make of your story?
Dear Reetika Vazirani
This is not an homage to you.
This is a letter to us
To better understand ourselves
To better understand the place that you left.

You picked poetry as your trade
(different from poetry as hobby)
A near-impossible choice
for the daughter of professional Indian immigrants
driven by the pursuits of both
Knowledge and Social Acknowledgment
(your father, an Assistant Dean and oral surgeon concurrently).
A near-impossible choice
because much like the insightful
short films
I went to see the other day
offered by the Art Film House
for absolutely free
Next to nobody wants poetry.
And the supply is so much greater than the demand
And those who acknowledge it are so few and far between
"those who have been forced
to a knowledge that has
severed knowing
into the smallest pieces"
as Susan Griffin puts it,
"fragments flying into
the far corners of a fractured world." [\[3\]](#)

Dear Reetika Vazirani,
You fell in deep love
with a poet you didn't know for long.
For fragments flying in a fractured world
this makes sense.
As a poet he was in touch
with a touch
you could also touch
This came through

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in the dancing rhythm you shared
in the creative child laid bare
by the fruit of your love
which rotted.
Dear Reetika Vazirani
All this makes perfect sense
to the far corners of fractured worlds
My deepest fall
in love
was with the mystery of a face
which had never locked eyes with another-
A poet
I knew briefly
but overlapped with intensely
and then had to leave
for our joint safety.

Dear Reetika Vazirani,
Your lover was a black male poet
of no uncertain acclaim.
Of course, such acclaim
was more possible for him:
Male in a Black and White Nation
whose poetic vision
would be that much more accessible
because his male and black history
is that much more familiar
than female and red
or female and brown
or female and blue.
But when your poet-lover's acclaim
transferred some concrete recognition
to you
It all became too real,
the reality of your place:
a lesser-known poet
(published, yes. award-winning, yes)
who bore the child of a better-known poet
and through this gained
the long-sought
acknowledgement-cum-opportunity
of a financially significant 'poetry-job'
(with the potential of becoming permanent)
A Lesser-Known Female Poet
gaining some significant social space
which was not significant enough
because it wasn't all that significant
as the carry-on of Black Male Acclaim.

And you had so very much to give,
Dear Reetika Vazirani.
words
ideas
gests
and other things appropriate.

Agile as you were
you could easily fit-in
but always as a white elephant
roaming world hotels
And so, it was not easy
to know you fully.
Your colleagues and friends
saw your joy and flair of giving
and believed this to be happiness.
What you didn't have
perhaps
was the sufficient presence of others
within which to give all you had to give.
It wasn't sensed,
all that you had to offer
And so, much remained un-taken
And in this way we didn't accept you
Dear Reetika Vazirani
And that is where you were alone.
And that is where we didn't look beneath
the surfaces
we didn't look close enough
And so we didn't do enough
And that is where we can always do better.

Dear Reetika Vazirani,
You took your toddler son with you.
An affront to National Family Values
In a nation where suicide
takes more deaths than homicide
And some 1000 traced cases
of mothers killing their children
in the past US 10 years
show mothers usually killing themselves as well.
"purposeful filicide"
There is purpose there
Where women don't want to abandon their children
don't want their children to grow-up without Mum
And for you, Reetika Vazirani
first alone in your isolation,
then alone in your isolation x2
It followed for you and your son
to go together.
Alone together
Dead together.

And then there were
the anti-depressants and therapists
that your loved ones knew of
Dear Reetika Vazirani.
Some internal imbalance
chemical or otherwise
rendered or genetic
(there was also your father's suicide)
Or all of the above

Who knows?

Maybe the final trials you endured:

Love Motherhood Success

pushed you past the threshold

Suicide and Filicide flowing

from an Internal Imbalance gone-out-of-whack.

Dear Reetika Vazirani,

There were chronic callers

at Suicide Action Montreal.

Mostly sufferers of internal imbalances

with no one else to reach for.

They called often

contemplated suicide often

and attempted suicide more than once.

Sometimes with success

These chronic cases

we were told

were calls not to waste long with

Because time is short

and hotline volunteers are few

and the suicides are many

and there is no way to know for sure

when a chronic caller

is about to self-kill

and there was a lack of statistics on this

And for all these reasons these cases

were worth less

in the non-profit business

of suicide hotlines

But you made chronic calls for help

to friendsDear Reetika Vazirani:

-the 12 page list of detailed instructions

to be followed after your death

(left among a friend's files)

-the emergency need to flee an unsafe place

in your lover's house

(group-emailed to friends)

-several statements to friends about feeling

unsafe

-"Sometimes I think it would be easier

to do what my father did and just go to sleep"

to a friend on the phone

-the July 16, 7:15am call to a friend

Announcing your decision to hurt yourself and your son

who told you to call a suicide hotline [\[4\]](#) -

Dear Reetika Vazirani

In a society of people

keeping distances

from all but those

immediately involved in their lives

An entire Suicide Action Industry

(even publicly-funded therapy)
can do little
to unbind
our alienation from each other
(even in Canada we have plenty of suicides).
Dear Reetika Vazirani
Here
Now
I commit
to not keeping
polite
or safe distances.

Dear Reetika Vazirani,
It's late in the city
and your are asleep. [\[5\]](#)
This isn't a message for you
Just a stranger's attempt to enter
-without romance-
a familiar map of homelessness
To pick-up the receiver
And try to make something
of the key you left.

[\[1\]](#) Copper Canyon Press - a 31 year old, non-profit, unique publisher of poetry - published Reetika Vazirani's second collection of poems, **World Hotel**, in 2002. (See www.coppercanyonpress.org) Her first collection, **White Elephants**, was awarded the Barnard New Women Poets Prize in 1996 and was published as part of the award.

[\[2\]](#) See "[The Failing Light](#)", by Paula Span, Washington Post Magazine, February 15, 2004.

[\[3\]](#) From Susan Griffin's poem, "To the Far Corners of Fractured Worlds", in her **Collected Poems**, Copper Canyon Press, 1997.

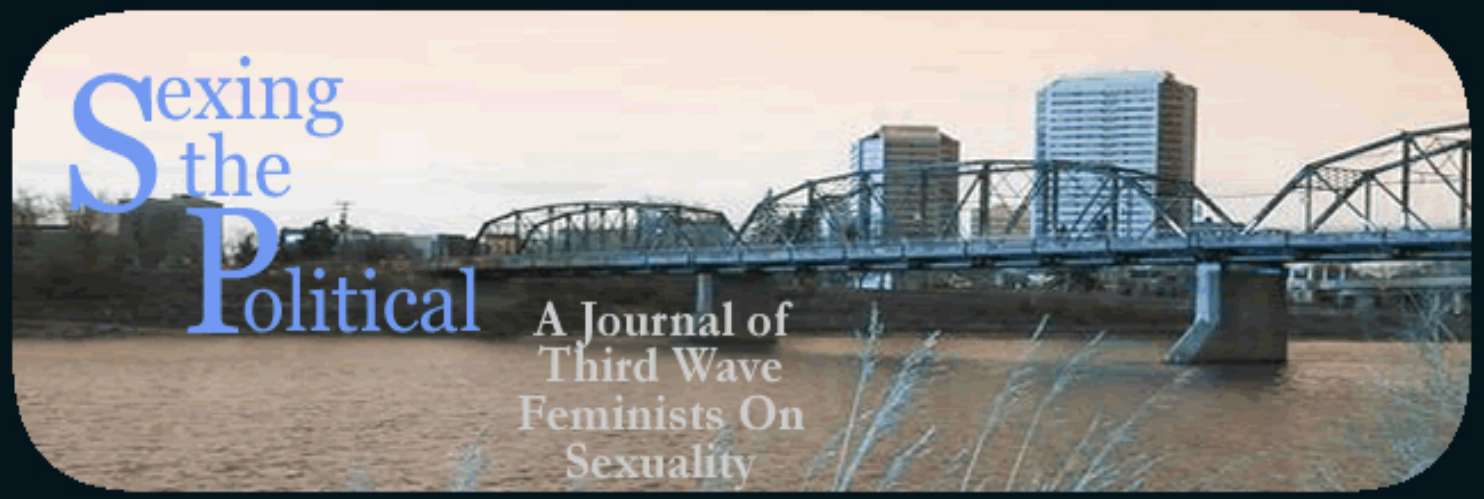
[\[4\]](#) Reetika Vazirani and her son, Jehan Vazirani Komunyakaa, were found dead in the afternoon of July 16, 2003.

[\[5\]](#) This stanza echoes Reetika Vazirani's poem "It's Me, I'm Not Home", from **World Hotel**.

Salimah Valiani is a Canadian poet, activist and researcher. She has lived in Canada, England and the USA, and has traveled to various parts of Asia as part of her work in international development policy advocacy. Through all of this, she has participated in feminist projects, international solidarity building, and intellectual discussion. She believes in the power of poetry to address some of humanity's deepest aching.

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Turn, Turn, Turn: Thoughts on The Sexual (Counter) Revolution

Lise Shapiro Sanders and Patricia Miller

How do sex and sexuality figure in contemporary feminism? If we take the lessons and struggles of the Sexual Revolution to heart, women now have the freedom to practice sexual independence like never before. But if feminism today is all about choices, why does it lately seem that motherhood is more of a mandate than a choice? **Patricia Miller** and **Lise Sanders** work it out below...

LS: First things first. How do third wave feminists view sexuality? Does this perspective differ from that of previous generations (especially feminists of the second wave)? And does all this "wave" business make any sense, anyway? Is it possible to generalize according to age, generation, affiliation, or for that matter, according to race, class, sexual preference, lipstick or shoe choice?

PM: Sexuality seems very central for third wave feminism, although I also think that women's sexuality has been a significant topic and motivating force of feminism for a long time -- for second wavers, in terms of "the sexual revolution" itself, as well as discussions of motherhood and the objectification of women, and also for some pre-second wave feminists like Margaret Sanger and Emma Goldman and their efforts to provide access to contraception. Plus, women's sexuality always seems to come up in any discussion of Women, whether it's about maternity leave, women in the military, prostitution, promiscuity, marriage, women executives, women's television, etc., etc.

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LS: True, true. But isn't the force different now? The first and second wave projects around sexuality seemed to fight, first and foremost, for the mere acknowledgement of women as sexual beings. Don't third wavers take this as a given? Also, would you agree that second-wave feminists focused more explicitly on politics and policy, while for their third wave daughters, the emphasis has fallen more on culture?

women's sexuality has been a significant topic and motivating force of feminism for a long time

PM: I totally agree, on both accounts. But since your initial question is actually a little different, I'd also add this: My own investment in feminism also has a lot to do with sexuality. My own experiences with the hypersexualization of women's bodies, the sexual double standard, and negotiating sexual intimacy in relationships remain significant questions for me and my understanding of feminism. I mean, I think that feminism has a lot to offer and a lot of work to do around these issues. Of course, my feminism is not just a personal issue; I'm interested in feminism for more than a model on which to base my personal life, but also as a way to transform the cultural attitudes and institutions that create and sustain sexism, double standards, and equate women's worth with their sexual behavior.

LS: Right. The personal is political...

PM: Plus, the discussion of sex and sexuality in contemporary feminism definitely seems different from previous feminist discussions of sex/sexuality. I mean, just as an example, it seems that many feminists today say "fuck" in a positive way and without the sense of violation or even violence that the word connotes for, say, second wave feminists like Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. This lightheartedness with sexual language also seems less of an indication of being "duped" by the patriarchy than a way of taming and reclaiming those words and the desire that they connote. Although maybe "fuck" is a little tricky of an example to use when you're talking about desire. The point, though, is that these kinds of words -- like fuck, or cunt, or pussy -- seem to have a different meaning for (some) contemporary feminists and feature prominently in certain contemporary feminist projects to reclaim language and articulate women's sexual desire and agency.

LS: Yes, and the very practice of "taming and reclaiming" grew out of sex-positive movements like Queer Nation and the HIV/AIDS activism of the 80s and 90s. This legacy of appropriative re-use also seems to connect to the parodic approach to language evidenced by Girlie feminism, which has lately been associated with young women who self-identify as urban, hip, consumers of fashion, make-up, and all things "girl." Yet one could argue that Girlie's parodic approach to girl culture can, and perhaps has, become commodified by a mass culture industry concerned only with marketing goods to this newly identified market of young

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female consumers. Is Girlie over? And what does this imply for female agency?

PM: I don't think that Girlie is over, but I do think that parody is more difficult in an era of commercialized parody and irony. Certain objects that were once subversive, like t-shirts proclaiming "Girl Power," have now been successfully reappropriated by the mainstream and divorced from their rebellious roots. However, a mixture of fierceness and femininity (in appearance and/or personality) still seems like a powerful affront to the persistent notion that women should be nice, quiet, and malleable.

you're facing
a tough road:
discrimination
if you choose
the mommy
track over
your career,
or a lingering
pity if you
choose not to
have children

LS: This tactic of mixing-it-up also seems to engage the productive possibilities of risk and its place in the claiming of pleasure for feminism. A certain measure of toughness combined with the aspects of femininity formerly associated with ornamentation -- everything from lipstick to knitting -- has a paradoxical appeal that seems to speak to young women, ourselves included, who have grown up in this culture of parody.

But then there's the appropriation of aspects of sexual culture formerly seen as degrading to women, such as porn, stripping, and Playboy: hence the emergence of lesbian and feminist porn, women (straight, lesbian and bi) choosing to become strippers, trendy pro-sex parties like those hosted by Cake and Throb, and the unauthorized use of the Playboy Bunny logo on t-shirts by Stella McCartney for her Chloe line (and subsequently by Playboy Enterprises). Do you see this as exploitative or empowering?

PM: I personally do not like the Playboy Bunny logo, especially on something that is mass-marketed or made by the Playboy empire. The Bunny seems too closely related to an overt objectification of women's bodies as a way to construct an image of the Playboy himself -- a type of wealthy and sexually over-active masculinity that views women as objects to consume like fine cigars, liquor, and expensive cars. And I don't really want to be a part of that.

LS: Me neither -- though when I was interviewed for the *Ms.* article "Rabbit Redux" (Audrey D. Brashich, August/September 2000), my mother bought me a t-shirt, bright red, with the Bunny logo in sparkly silver on the front. I wear it to clean the house (a task which, I should note, my husband and I share equally). What does that say?

PM: I think it depends on what your husband wears! [laughs] But, seriously, I think it highlights the fact that while some things are more easily reappropriated, like sexual language, other items are more difficult to separate from their history -- with the Playboy Bunny as one example of that difficulty. For instance, I

do think that there is some value in lesbian and feminist pornography as well as "trendy pro-sex parties" like Cake and Throb as a way to make women's desire more public and visible. But why is pornography as a genre easier to reclaim than the Bunny? Who decides what's "worthy" and what isn't? This still seems like a pretty significant contradiction.

LS: Speaking of contradiction: is feminism in crisis? And if it is, is it because of these very rifts over sexuality, identity and agency? Are there other issues we should account for? Are pluralism and diversity -- of acts, practices, identities -- the answer to feminism's contemporary conundrum?

PM: Hmmmm. I think sexuality, identity, and agency are very contentious topics for feminism right now. How to interpret or act on certain notions of identity and the meaning and place of sexuality seem to be significant struggles for feminists today. I mean, all of the talk about the "Baby Panic" in the media recently seems to speak to these questions and highlights a real contradiction in the messages that women receive about careers, marriage, singlehood, and sexuality. This whole "forget about your career and start thinking about babies" line (popularized by Sylvia Ann Hewlett in her recent book *Creating a Life: Professional Women and the Quest for Children*) seems pretty anti-feminist at best. I just think there's a lot left unsaid about this idea that women still have to choose between a career and a child and why that is still the case. It also seems like a pretty blatant conservative backlash against the subversive implications of a large group of unmarried, professional, childless women supported by feminist goals and discourse. The whole thing just reeks of "family values" and paranoia, if you ask me.

LS: But Hewlett views herself as making a strong feminist intervention, calling for increased child care and parity for women in the workplace. Of course, she herself has five children, so her feminism would have to be more family-focused.

PM: OK, but I'm wondering, "But what if you don't want to have kids AT ALL?" Of course, while I think that everyone who wants to have kids should be able to decide when and how to have them, I'm also really disappointed that the discussion must always presume a maternal desire for all women. Not only that, but it also seems that the message is that somehow women who don't have children are really missing out on what's important in life and should be pitied for their barrenness or something. What's wrong with deciding not to have kids and enjoying the children of your siblings and friends? Or just working with kids but not necessarily living with them?

LS: My thoughts exactly!

Maybe
feminists need
to respond to
the Baby
Panic with a
counter-attack

PM: I mean, maybe we can choose NOT to have kids in our teens and twenties, but it seems like there's an expectation that at some point we WILL have kids. I always say that I'm not planning to have kids, if I have kids, for another decade (I'm 22, by the way), so this doesn't seem like quite as much of a pressing personal issue. However, this baby stuff also relates to marriage and "looking for a soul mate" and all of that, which seems a little more pertinent to me. I definitely feel a tension between not wanting to "settle down" too early while also continuing to look for that "soul mate" and worrying that maybe I'll never find that perfect person. What do you think about all of this baby stuff?

LS: Well, I feel like lately it's become even more pertinent than I want it to be. In my late teens/early twenties I thought I might have kids, might not, but certainly didn't have to make any decisions about it for quite a while; now, the closer I come to the twilight of my childbearing years, the LESS I want to have children. Spending time with friends who have kids always feels like a nice little vacation -- but then I get to go home, to my real life. Reading the recent media coverage, though, my first thought was, "Well, I can't put this off forever -- at some point soon (I'm 32), I'll have to make the conscious choice that I won't have children." And that does induce a degree of panic: how can I make a choice I'm just not ready for?

PM: Do your friends or other professional women that you know feel this burning desire for children?

LS: My friends take up a whole range of positions. Kate has always said she feels meant to be a mother, but now she's starting to consider the possibility that she may not find her "soul mate" in time to have a child of her own, barring adoption or its alternatives. Meg, by contrast, told me five years ago that she NEVER wanted children, and we commiserated on how children could change your life for the worse (how do you ever even finish reading a book in the first five years of your child's life??) -- and then she just gave birth to a baby girl last fall. She and her husband have decided to only have one child, though, and then she'll have to answer the nosy questions about why: was it because she couldn't? And why wouldn't she want to? Others seemed destined to be mothers from the start, the kind who actually "glow" during pregnancy; and their very absorption produces this incredibly ambivalent reaction in me (how can they find this so easy? So all-consuming?).

PM: So does it seem like there's support for women who choose to have kids or who decide to stay childless? Do young women still have to choose between careers and families?

LS: I do think having children is terribly difficult, at least for women who want to stay on any kind of professional "track." So far, my work has been my top priority: writing as progeny. But I think this does imply a choice, or a choice that isn't actually one; the American model of corporate success still doesn't seem to

allow room for childbearing and child-raising in any real way, despite rhetoric to the contrary. Which is to say, in answer to your question, the support structure doesn't seem to be in place to truly accommodate the diversity of women's desire and relationships to the prospect of having, or not having, children. Either way, you're facing a tough road: discrimination if you choose the mommy track over your career, or a lingering pity if you choose not to have children (since I still think the perception dominates that if you don't have children, it's because you couldn't, not because you didn't want to). At best, in the popular imagination, women who choose not to have children are an anomaly, at worst, an aberration.

PM: So does the image of the swinging single girl no longer resonate for young women? Or is the mainstream turn away from the "single and fabulous" trend just a backlash to reinforce "family values, monogamy, and a notion of women's naturally domestic aspirations?

LS: I'm sure the image of the swinging single girl still holds some pretty interesting possibilities -- I don't think women are about to give up all of the perks of single adulthood overnight or anything. And it's not as though the demographics have changed: that body of unmarried/childless professional women still exists, with ready money to invest in their own goals and desires. What really does trouble me is the potential effect such a backlash could have on women's self-perception. Doesn't this have significant implications for our ability to make informed choices? What "truth" do we have to go on, even when it comes to our own bodies? Lately I feel like we're just being told, once again, to distrust our bodies and minds and place our confidence (and our futures) in the hands of the medical establishment. And that's disconcerting.

PM: Maybe feminists need to respond to the Baby Panic with a counter-attack. Like, analyze the actual medical data, get the facts straight, and work to provide women with reliable information. We also need to make sure that women's experiences are not overshadowed by a publisher's scheme to move units. We can't let the media hype undermine the significance of women's sexual and social empowerment.

LS: And isn't that exactly what feminism has been working toward all along? Knowledge, freedom of choice, and equality. Maybe it's just that simple.

Patricia Miller recently finished her undergraduate thesis on Girlie feminism in popular culture. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Literature at Duke University.

Lise Sanders teaches gender and cultural studies at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts.



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Her white body draped
around the shaft
of silver dulled
from nights of work,
her feet encased in pointed
come-fuck-me shoes,
she creates her own
brand of illusion.

Pebbled nipples perked
in the smoky air-conditioned
haze, the smooth whiteness
of her buttocks
a whirling blur,
she entrances her audience –
semi-somnambulates lost
in the language of her limbs.

Rolling to the beat
of blues or bass,
her surging hips hypnotize,
and she smiles
a coy smile as the drooling gent
beside me waves her over, strokes
her thigh, and tucks a dollar into her
black lacy garter.

Her eyebrows arch
over glittering mascara
as her piercing eyes catch
and challenge my unconscious
shiver at the thought of such
public intimacy. *And you, Poet,*
she asks, *wrapped around your pen*
and page, are you less naked than I?

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Lauren K. Alleyne hails from the twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. She is currently pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing, and a minor in Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies, at Cornell University. She is amused by how closely campus resembles Hogwarts and is on a mission to conjure up better weather for the upstate NY area.



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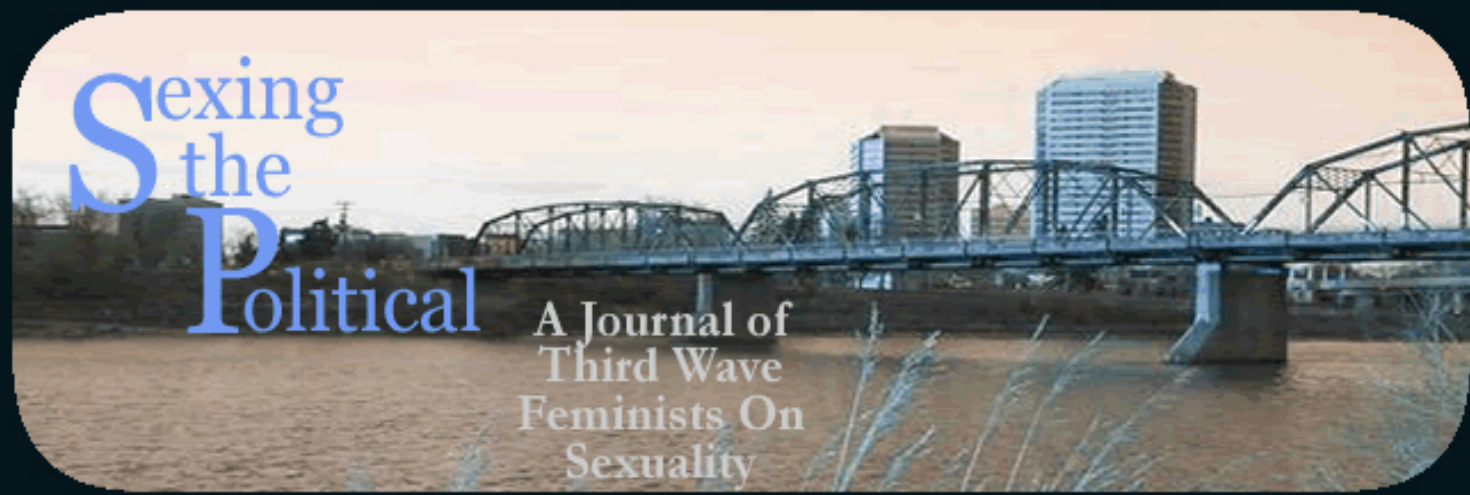
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Say "NO" to Dowry
Parvez Babul

Lucky Begum (18), of a village in Nilphamari, committed suicide due to the abject poverty of her father. Ill-fated, Lucky remained unmarried due to her father's inability to pay dowry for her marriage. Whenever any marriage proposal came, prospective grooms demanded dowry, which Lucky's 50-year-old poor father failed to meet. Being tremendously frustrated, Lucky committed suicide by taking poison (The Daily Star, August 31, 2003). In fact, we cannot imagine reading a newspaper without any news of dowry, torture or death of women because of dowry or for other causes even for a single day! Many types of incidents such as suicide of women/brides, summary divorce, burning wives with fire or acid by their husbands or in-laws are very common in our country.

In Bangladesh 200 women are murdered each year by having sulphuric acid thrown on them, and dowry is one of the main causes. The BNWLA (Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association) mentioned in its report that 203 women were killed (some of them were burnt with fire or acid, some of them were cut into pieces with sharp knives) and 34 tortured for dowry by their husbands and in-laws in the year 2000. Actual data is hard to get because most of the cases of women's death are not made public for many reasons. Some of the murders are disguised by the husbands and in-laws as suicides and the dead bodies of murdered women are instantly buried. UNICEF described in its 21 studies of violence against women in South Asia that over 70% of wives in Bangladesh reported that their husbands physically abused them. Nearly 50% of all murders of girls/women in Bangladesh can be attributed to domestic violence.

In Dinajpur district, 2,500 marriages ended in divorce in 1999 because of dowry-related feuds. Even an educated girl finds it difficult to get a groom who is as well qualified as she is for the lack of dowry.

"Dowry is really a curse, both in the lives of married and unmarried girls," says Pushpa (24), an educated, unmarried girl of Manikganj who is also a coordinator of SEBA (a local NGO) and 'uzzibok' of the Hunger

... suicide of women/brides, summary divorce, burning wives with fire or acid by their husbands or in-laws are very common in our country.

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Project. She added that though poverty is one of the causes of the demand for dowry and non-marriage of girls, the greed for dowry is certainly more dangerous than poverty, and is also observed among some of the rich or so-called educated people. It is a fact that some of the parents/guardians fix a price for their sons/grooms, i.e. how much money they will demand and take as dowry from the families of brides.

Advocate Salma Khan, chairperson of the Coalition and Beijing Plus Five, said the present rate of violence against women is an "outcome of heinous social crime" and criticised the delay in the trials of the criminals. Women's rights activist Dr. Hamida Hossain says that the criminals are not punished because of political support and protection. Ayesa Khanom, general secretary of the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, opined that one of the main reasons for the increase in incidents of killing wives for dowry or violence against women is the criminalization of politics or sheltering of the killers/criminals by the political leaders/parties.

To save the lives of our daughters/sisters, let us take the necessary initiatives:

- Say "NO" to dowry and stop taking or giving it from now on.
- Let us marry without dowry to create examples, make happy families for ourselves as well as our children because they are the future of our nation. Our great Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) discouraged wife-beating for any reason and said, "How do you pass the night with your wife after beating her? Don't you feel shame for your misconduct or cruelty, which has been done to her by you?"
- Come forward to change the attitudes of taking or giving dowry.
- Start and participate actively in the social revolution to prevent/resist dowry and to stop it permanently. Each of us should be a part of the solution instead of being part of the problem.
- Punish those who demand dowry and give death sentence to the killers of wives/girls/women.

Some of the murders are disguised by the husbands and in-laws as suicides and the dead bodies of murdered women are instantly buried.

- Eliminate poverty and create employment for unemployed girls/ women and men.
- Stop selling acid publicly and give exemplary punishment to those who throw acid on anyone.
- Educate, empower and make women aware of their human/legal rights.
- Let the law-enforcement authority work independently to prevent violence against girls/women/wives as well as to punish the violators/killers.

·Avoid smoking and taking drugs. Addiction to anything creates misunderstanding, increases demand for money or dowry, rate of violence, breaking up of relationship/divorce, etc.

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·Implement and follow actively the CEDAW Convention.

·Emphasize registration of all marriages and prevent early marriage.

·The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and the Ministry of Social Welfare should pay marriage expenses of disabled, poor or destitute women. In this case the recommendations of Union Council Chairmen/ Members, Ward Commissioners will be needed. This would be a milestone in the welfare/rehabilitation of the disabled/destitute women in our country, and also a remarkable help to the parents/guardians who are burdened with the responsibility of departing from very young daughters prematurely. This process should provide the wives a copy of their marriage registration certificate, which will be useful as evidence to show the court if they face any violence for dowry or any other causes.

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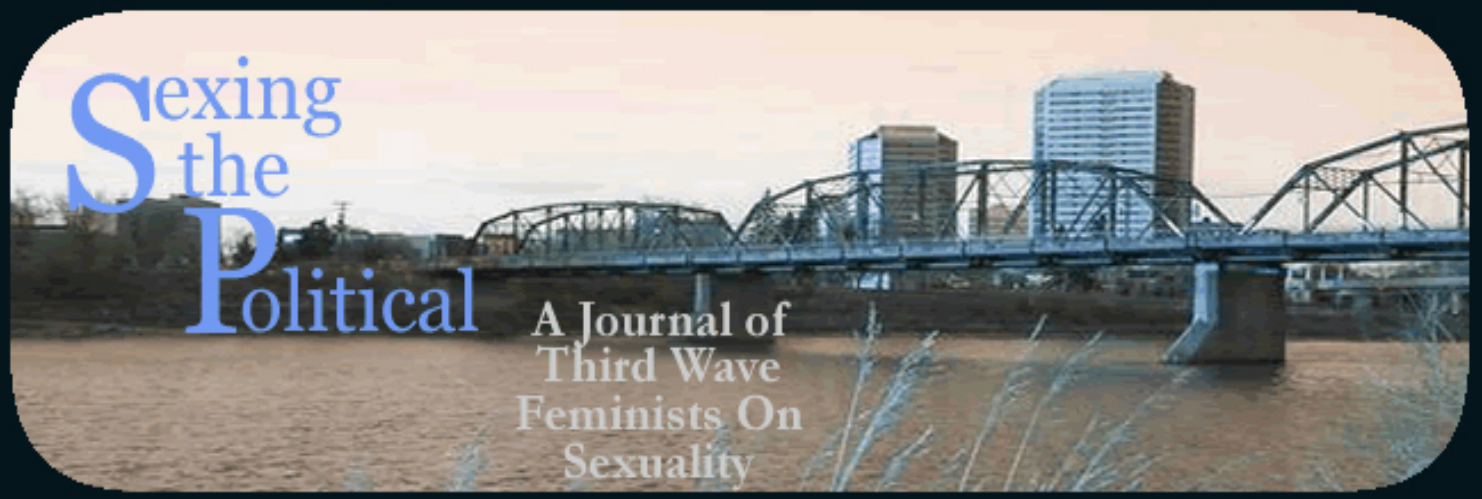
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Spiraling

Christiana Langenberg

It is years ago.

We are driving in your car through a night black as wet velvet. We are heading toward town. Our favorite folk singer reaches us from the stereo and because we are a little bit giddy, we say she is delicious, that we could not live without her. She tilts her songs toward us, deliberately, it seems, until we spill into each other and remember everything as fast as it is happening.

This is what I see.

You pulling your key out of the ignition. Me searching your face with my eyes like this is some kind of new Braille. This moment right here, I mean right then, is how I have come to define forever. And there you are. In the midst of something as ordinary as glancing at your purple watch band, your wrist turned up, the face, the numbers, showing you that it is already 9:05 p.m.. The evening is hurling itself into the future.

And too soon we are parked, believe it or not, directly in front of the theatre. We try on idle chit chat. I remind you that I have parking luck. You smile your smile. The one that is my favorite and you know it.

The snow continues to settle on the sidewalk, like dust. A thin layer over the footprints of those who have already gone in. This is how we can pretend that no one has been here. That we are the only two people in the world. The wind has also stopped. I look through the windshield at the bright light chasing itself around the marquis: U-N-F-O-R-G-I-V-E-N. I pivot, shift in the seat so I can look straight into your eyes, but you point them out the window to watch the snow falling. It is still fine and straight. Like a curtain of gauze around us.

And it is all I can do to not think of last night. The oval at your temple, just the size of my mouth, and where I started, slid my tongue down. Slowly, over your eyelid. I remember lingering, circling, lingering, savoring. I wanted to stop without stopping, to move as slowly as it is possible to move and still keep going. Then I found my way home to your bottom lip in my mouth. There was your murmur and hum. There was my undoing. The sound of your back melting. My nipple like a gumdrop in your mouth.

"Come on," you say. "I want to see it. It won Best Picture." You toss the keys between your hands, slightly larger than mine. I remember

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the thing you told me about energy leaving the body through the right hand, and entering through the left. I hold my palm up and feel your pulse through the air between us.

"But this is our last night. Don't you want it to be special?" I feel submerged, somehow, as if my voice has to travel up just to get out.

"No I don't," you say softly. " I want it to be easy, easier than this. I want it to be just like all the others. This was your idea. You are the one who said 'Something simple. Just a movie.' " You reach for the door handle.

I know it is not a threat, still my mind storms as if it is.

"Please!" I beg and feel my lungs seize as the word escapes. My fingers reach to cover yours before you can pull the door open. My memory pitches and rolls in sudden desperation. God help me. The darkness weighs on me, and I open my eyes wider to keep myself from sinking. My heart unhitches itself and floats loosely in my chest.

You say my name aloud and hold it in your mouth, unable to get past it.

I say yours slowly. It descends the length of my tongue as if it can. I wind my fingers easily through yours and reckless abandon presses on the back of my throat. I loot my breath for words. "It seems crazy," I hear myself telling you, "to sit in a dark theatre, next to you and stare at a screen for two hours when all I want to do right now --," and at this point we watch my other hand fold itself around your knee "--is make love to you. God, I don't know when I'll be with you again."

"Or if you will." You stroke my index finger with your thumb, survey my other hand. Stroke that too.

"And that." I wait, grip the insides of my shoes with my toes. "Look... please. I'll go anywhere else. Just not a movie, not tonight. I'm sorry. I want to be with you." "You are with me." You smile and turn down the radio. Look over the dashboard at how the silence and snow falls unevenly. Briefly, you consider that this whole thing should never have happened. You should not have gone out with me the first time I asked. This was supposed to be simple. A friend. Someone to talk to. Just a couple of months.

Now everything matters. The damage reaches beyond you. You think of Alex at home folding shirts next to yours. But this doesn't change how you feel. I am still right here and you are still accountable. Your right hand, or is it your left, flutters on your breast for a second. I see it, watch it, as a flightless bird, and I am flailing wildly in the stillness of my desire, and I know you are tapping out the cadence of your heart, assured and yet dismayed by its quickening in my presence.

You will still feel this way when you think of this moment years from now. You will be somewhere, anywhere, it doesn't matter where, and something, anything, let's say maybe a fragrance wafts past you and then suddenly you remember waking up into the talcummy spirit of my body loitering on the collar of your shirt, and you will breathe in and displace yourself, hold yourself hostage there with your collar in your hands and your face in your collar, swimming in some kind of luscious cove of memory, for what seems like hours but will truly only be minutes though you'll feel as weak immediately following as if you'd been clubbed. And you will look down to see your hand, again, flutter on your chest. Exactly as it does now. You can feel the moment

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forming already somewhere in your marrow. It will happen.

You look at me watching you and listen to my eyes ask you for your touch. You can feel my longing in your skin, singing. "Don't look at me with that tone of voice," you joke, but your voice limps and you fight yourself for some resolve. You won't write me, you remind yourself. It will be for the best. You expect, eventually, that you'll become distracted, caught up in the current, and drift along on the ordinary habits of living.

Then I brush the back of my wrist across your jaw, move my scent closer to your remembering and you close your eyes. I follow you in there and hook myself into your scalp from within. I inhale the powdery scent of your hair so slowly that I can almost believe it is traveling my bloodstream. And I exhale in bare, imperceptible wisps, as if it is possible, to let nothing go.

You loosen your fingers from mine and reach up to touch my hair but stop. This has gotten out of hand. You tell yourself you will simply have to remember the feel of it. I tell myself remember this. All of it. You. Tonight. The last few months. Create a space in forever that will always be full of you.

You catch my hand in spite of yourself, hold it long enough, barely long enough, maybe just one second past the moment before your throat might close up, and then you put it back in my lap, where there are other things you remember. Things you will be unable to forget.

I can see you telling yourself to remember to breathe.

I want to whet the world to a single, consumable thing. I want to pause, indefinitely. And then I want to back up through every moment I've ever spent with you. In slow motion.

I know this cannot happen and I cannot keep myself from trying to make it happen. I even want to stop the way your hair falls across your shoulders. See again how you smooth back the strands when they fall forward in long commas. The way you drop your head and smile at the sidewalk. The way you walk right up to me, slide your hand behind my neck and in one smooth motion pull my face into your lips. The way I can't keep myself from whispering your name when I'm alone, in the dark, torn between imagining you and waiting for sleep to save me. The way I want to feel your voice go wordless, tiny gasps over my shoulder, floating, roaming, when my mouth finds your neck. The way I know your heart beats. In places you didn't know existed.

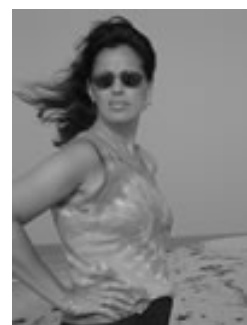
You clear your throat twice and whisper without meaning to, "Look, it's just a movie. Two hours." You are doing your best. You are treading water and trying to keep from going under. Yet your mind panics, and slips back, grasps the first thing it sees: the sun on my hair that one scorching day last summer in the woods just outside of town. You close your eyes and you are right there, feel the heat buckle your knees. You swear you can still taste me on your tongue. Or is it my tongue that's tripping, traveling where it must go, must know all those places where your pulse has been?

"No. " I tell you, and I am brimming with urgency. "I want to be alone with you." That and everything else. All of you. My heart throbs. Somewhere. I have heard that people who are drowning, already under, have been known to fight off their rescuers because the drowning feels too good.

You tap your long fingers on the steering wheel. "All right, " you say. "We'll think of something else." And you are searingly beautiful. And I am not as strong as I thought I was. And my bravery needs shoring up. I cannot possibly bear it. But I do. I look out at the lights on the theatre. I think of how isolated I feel sometimes, in the midst of such white light, like being in a bright room at night, looking through the window and not being able to make out a single thing.

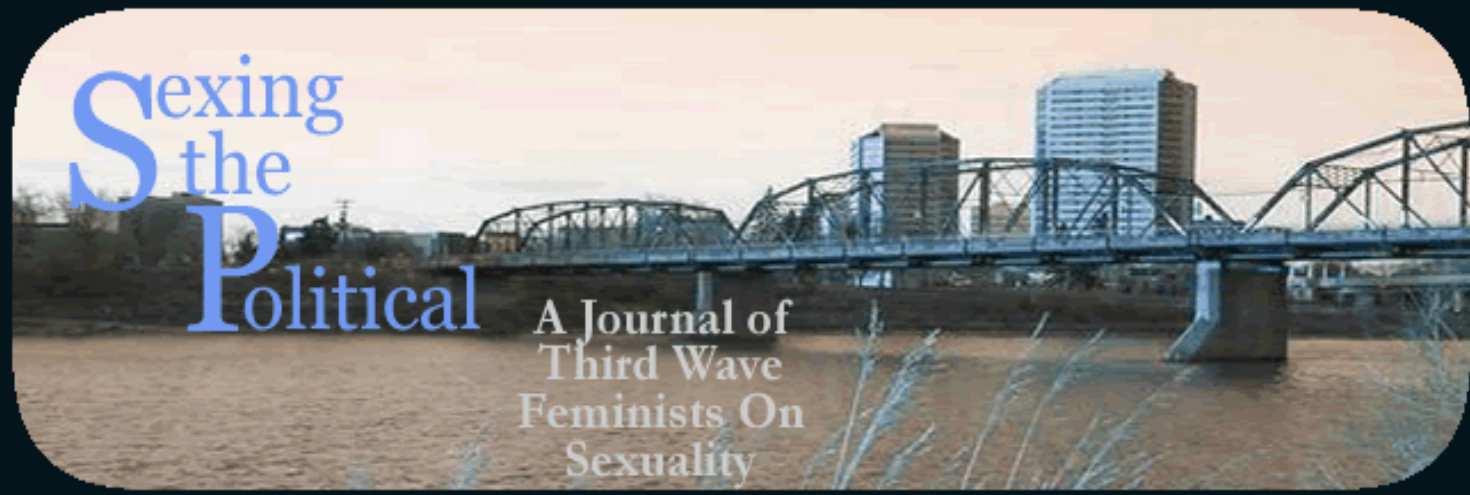
The snow has nearly stopped. I remember this and everything else. I do. I see it now. The flakes turn to unbalanced clumps too heavy for the sky. Spiraling, falling indirectly. They are long in coming, the distances growing between the one that just passed and the next.

Christiana L. Langenberg teaches in the English and Women's Studies departments at Iowa State University, where she is also an academic advisor and advisor for the student-run literary journal, Sketch. She was born in the Netherlands and immigrated to the U.S with her Dutch father and Italian mother. Raised trilingually in rural Nebraska, she was naturalized when she was 17. She now lives and works in rural Iowa with her four children. She is the winner of the 2003 Chelsea Award for Short Fiction, and her stories have been published or are forthcoming in *Chelsea*, *Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly*, *Green Mountains Review*, *American Literary Review*, *Lullwater Review*, *The Blue Moon Review*, and a variety of literary formats.



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White Privilege Means Never Having to Walk Across the Bridge

Elizabeth Wheatfield (pseudonym)

Here's the thing about being white that most middle class white people don't appreciate: We don't have to know. We don't have to know what it's like on the other side of the tracks or the river, we don't have to know what it is like to live in a neighborhood nowhere near a grocery, we don't have to explore every single area of the city in order to find a place to live where people will just leave us in peace. We pretty much don't have to know about anything we don't want to know about. And really, why should we want to know? The life of those without our privileges does not always paint a pleasing picture. Hearing about the minute day in and day out tiresomeness of economic disadvantage, racial disadvantage, ignorance, and outright hostility is simply not glamorous. For nice middle class and upper class white folks, liberal white folks at that, it is a lot easier to smile nicely at a passing person of color than it is to hear about the daily hurdles and tribulations of walking around in that body. It's a hell of a lot more comfortable to speak in clichés such as "Things are really improving here" or "Things aren't that bad, don't believe the hype" or "We're really working on diversity here at X place of employment" than it is to actually go out and see the racial divide, the economic divide, and the sheer tiresomeness of living in a society where the rules are made to benefit other people and trap you at every turn.

Harsh, you might say. Yeah, maybe, but I'm talking to myself here, too, so bear with me. I'm white. My husband's black. That's a story I've told before: the way people look at us, the stereotypes of us, etc. But frankly, the sort of treatment we've had during our past four years in Iowa is downright tame, downright pleasant, in fact, compared to what we just had to go through on a trip to a new city, a city in a different midwestern state closer to the south, a state pretty notorious for looking northern and acting southern.

...a new city, a city in a different midwestern state closer to the south, a state pretty notorious for looking northern and acting southern.

Our task was a deceptively simple one. Visit for 5 days, find a place to live. That would have been easier if we'd both been white and middle class. This city is so segregated a river actually divides white from black, rich from poor. Unless we rent a houseboat

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and sleep out there in the river, we have yet to figure out how to find a place where we'd both fit in. We tried the neighborhood suggested by my new colleagues first. These were, of course, the whitest, richest neighborhoods. No go for two reasons: Too expensive and way too white. By way too white I mean all white, totally white. White as the driven snow. Stories abound of black folks getting pulled over for driving in those neighborhoods at night. Even a white philosophy professor from the university kept getting pulled over for walking there at night because he always wore a scraggly beard and shorts. This was not our kind of neighborhood, though every well meaning liberal colleague I met was absolutely sure we would LOVE it there. Possibly, I realized later, they'd never been anywhere else in the city. Possibly they never HAD to go anywhere else in the city. This neighborhood had the best schools and the best stores; why venture out needlessly? Well, the same privileged option did not exist for us, so we kept looking.

The next day we tried the other side of the river. That was depressing for an entirely different reason. Most of the areas we drove around in were downright scary: Boarded up storefronts and houses, graffiti, trash. Lots of seemingly unemployed people wandering around. We found a few beautiful neighborhoods tucked in there between the pockets of deteriorated houses and apartments. But there appeared to be no commerce, no places of employment, no grocery stores—certainly no coffee shops or chic bars. We would have had to be completely blind not to see the economic divide that happened halfway across the bridge. White people get malls and coffee shops, grocery stores and delis, and numerous possibilities for employment. Black people get nothing except a clear message to stay on their side of the river.

We did nothing, as white people, to deserve this privilege that people of color don't have.

Don't get the wrong impression. We ate out on the white side and people were perfectly civil. We looked at apartments on the white side and people were nice and polite, even friendly. We walked down the streets on the white side and no one screamed at us. No, the divide was much more insidious than that. White people, the message appeared to be, get the best jobs or, in bad economic times, the only jobs. Black people can spend their money wherever they like, assuming they can figure out a legal way to get money when no one is hiring them. Assuming they don't get raped and killed in their run down neighborhoods where lots of people are out of work. Assuming they can get to the white side of the river on the crappy city transit system if they don't have their own car.

So there we were. Trying to find a place to live that would be safe and comfortable for us both (not to mention affordable). And trying to avoid the gnawing message that, should we go ahead and move to this city for my job (which is already a go), my husband may never get a job. Or if he does, he'll be a damn sight luckier than most of the black folks we saw during our visit.

I have to say, the most tiresome aspect of our trip (aside from having to forcefully and abruptly see the obvious economic divide along racial lines) was having to listen to well meaning but completely clueless white liberals spouting off about how X area was the ONLY place worth

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Sexing the Political: A Journal of Third Wave Feminists on Sexuality

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living and how X area was so nice and safe and wonderful. And how this city is really great and doing so well. Tiresome, tiresome, tiresome. Because X area is not even a place my husband COULD live (a thought that apparently crossed no white liberal person's mind the entire time we were there) and, in fact, would not be nice or safe or wonderful for him. And any fool willing to drive across the river could see that the city is not great and not doing well—or, at least, it's not great for people of color, most of whom are clearly not doing well in it.

The beautiful privilege, however, of being white middle class liberals is that we never have to drive across the bridge. We don't, in fact, even have to consider the bridge at all. In our corner of the world everything is coming up roses--and since we never have to leave our corner of the world, we have no need to wonder how things are for other people. If we do recognize that things are not so hot for other people, we have small speeches prepared for the occasion, to show how socially aware we are. We say things like, "The white flight of the 70s and 80s was truly abhorrent" to show we are totally up on current events. If, by some miracle, a person of color comes into our social circle, we include them in whatever we are doing. In fact, it's even chic in some circles to do so.

But let's face it, people. Unless we get up off our well meaning liberal asses and do some not so glamorous behind the scenes, grunt work to improve neighborhoods where we don't live, to change economic policies that don't benefit us, then we are no better than anybody else. Worse, in fact, because all our chatter just boils down to hypocrisy.

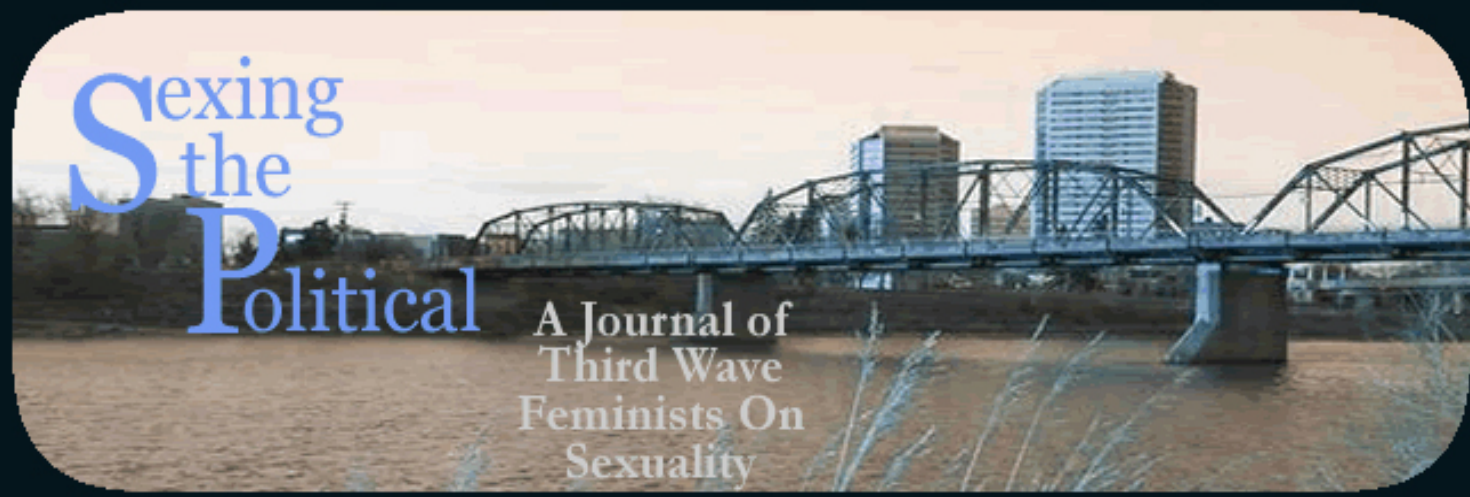
I bring it up now because for the first time in my life I am completely and utterly worn down and out by the loss of my white privilege. Despite all my well meaning liberal talk, despite my black husband, I have been really sheltered by my white privilege. For the first time I realize that not having white privilege means that every single damn mundane daily event can turn into a mountain of trouble--that even a minor event can turn into trauma. My head is killing me, my shoulders have knots the size of baseballs, my jaw feels like it's dislocated. All simply from trying to find a place to live. And really, I'm a whiner to even complain about it. At any time I could gain every ounce of my privilege back by deciding to go it alone. At most times during the day I have most of my white privilege back because my husband's at work and I look like any other middle class white woman. So this week of overwhelming, sickening stress about where a black man can living safely with his white wife in a segregated city is nothing compared to what people of color go through on a daily basis.

I see why we don't want to know what it's like without our privilege. I truly do. I am so tired and worn out I can hardly stand it and I'm sure, absolutely positive, that ignorance and privilege bring with them a serious amount of bliss. But there are two important things to remember: We did nothing, as white people, to deserve this privilege that people of color don't have. And, as good liberals, as long as we keep flapping our mouths about awareness and justice, we have no right to ignore the lives and economic well being of people who don't share the same privilege. It's time for us to get educated about economics, it's time to get educated about who white flight and gentrification and bussing hurt and help. It's time to get on the city council and agitate for more humane policies. It's time to talk to our coworkers about better hiring policies. It's time to stop talking and walk across the bridge.

Elizabeth Wheatfield (pseudonym) and her husband now live in a working class white neighborhood of this segregated city. She teaches writing at a local university and is quite certain she'll have a lot more to say about race, economics, and privilege over the next few months.

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After having two children in 15 months my body had went through a serious double whammy. Prior to having children I was a sharp dressing vivacious twenty-something woman in her prime. I took joy in shopping and made a point to always have my hair and nails done. Every time I walked out of the house I had on make-up of some kind, at least lipstick. I was confident and took pride in my appearance and looked forward to shopping and buying clothes.

Somewhere between changing diapers and fixing bottles and searching for Barney books I lost myself. I was lucky if I did my hair twice a month. New clothes—forget about it. I was too fat to even enjoy getting dressed every day let alone shopping for new clothes. On top of that, shopping depressed me. I had gotten so big I could only shop at plus size stores or in the plus size department of my favorite stores. Wouldn't you know that the tops that you like are never available in plus sizes.

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I really took an "I can careless" attitude toward my appearance. I would make sure the kids were as cute as a button and I would load up the double stroller and hit the road. As long as people noticed that my kids looked nice, who cared how I looked. Surely, every young woman who noticed my shabby appearance could understand that I was taking care of two small children and didn't have the time or energy to put forth effort into my personal appearance.

The turning point came in late 2002. One of my best friends from college came to visit me. As friends, shopping at the mall was something that we had always enjoyed. I accompanied her on a shopping trip and we went to The Gap among other stores. As she was trying on jeans I was envious. At 205 pounds and just a little over 5 feet tall, I had out grown The Gap. I couldn't fit any of the women's clothes in the stores—unless you count the over

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sized manly looking tee shirts.

I am content being a size 12, although I know some people would freak at being in the double digits...

The weight was really bothering me. Although my husband assured me he loved me at every size, I just didn't have the confidence that I once had. And with my confidence shattered, so was my desire to even put forth effort into my personal appearance. I felt fat. Even when I did get my hair done and felt cute, once I saw a picture of myself or caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror, I often felt down. I hated how my butt was so big it was like another person following behind me.

I tried to make peace with the big me. I would say to myself, "Now is my time to concentrate on being a mother. When the kids get older, I'll focus on me again." Or I would think, "Most of the women in my family are big this is how I am supposed to be. Black men like their women big, I shouldn't trip off of the weight."

The major thing that was getting to me was the clothes I would see on television or magazines. I would see the most adorable tops and low rider jeans and I knew that I could never wear things like that. At one point, I was almost up to a size 20 although I hate to admit it.

After the shopping incident at The Gap, I gradually started an exercise plan and I lost 10 pounds. Down to 195—not much to rejoice about in my book. I just stayed at 195 for a whole 10 months. Then came the TRUE turning point.

At 28 years old I had a tooth shatter in my mouth. Just shatter, break in half. Not a small tooth, we are talking about a molar. I went to the dentist and he suggested a crown, but the tooth was literally cracked in half. I told him to pull the tooth. What was I thinking. That was the most excruciating pain that I have experienced in my entire life. I felt like my soul was being ripped from my body and this was from a woman who had given birth to two kids and survived pancreatitis.

Just because you have kids doesn't mean you can't take pride in your appearance and feel sexy.

The week following my trip to the dentist, I couldn't eat anything but soup and take Darvocet for the pain. Not that I am suggesting soup and Darvocet as a weight loss plan, by weeks end I noticed I had lost 5 pounds. Encouraged, I decided to put my fat behind me once and for all.

I had to change my eating habits. For years and years macaroni and cheese was a staple in my diet. Kit Kat bars, Jolly Joes, Gummy Bears and candy could always be found in my home. Not

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to mention I always had a 24 case of Coca Cola in my cabinet.

I traded in the candy for lightly sweetened rice cakes and starting baking or grilling my food verses frying everything. I started to purchase Diet Coke, and I even limited those to 1 or 2 a day and started drinking more water. I added exercise to my life, I would exercise on my glider or my air bike almost everyday. Seven months later I was 40 pounds lighter and was wearing a size 12 again.

Whereas the old me would leave the house looking frumpy and use my two kids as an excuse for my poor appearance, the new me always looks sharp as a tack when I leave the house. I make sure that I wear nice clothes and that my hair and make up is done. I even take the time to accessorize, wearing cute earrings and necklaces.

It really was a life style change. I am content being a size 12, although I know some people would freak at being in the double digits but I feel confident and sexy again. I am experiencing a feeling of rebirth. I can once again shop at the mall. I can take pride in how I look. Now that I have a true exercise program in my life and am eating right for the first time in my life, I look and feel better than I did 10 years ago.

Now when I am at the mall or play group I hope I can be an inspiration to the other moms. Just because you have kids doesn't mean you can't take pride in your appearance and feel sexy. I know I do. My husband loves the new me and so do I.

Addendum: This is not a piece to condemn plus size women who are comfortable with their size. However, if you are not happy please take my story as an inspirational one that you can change your life without crash diets, pills, or surgery. This is about one woman's life style change to feel better about HERSELF. I do feel that adopting a healthy lifestyle with healthy eating habits and exercise can boost morale and esteem, but if you are happy the way that you are, you can be sexy at any size.

Dorrie Williams-Wheeler spends too much time trying to do too many things. She is an author, educator and web designer. She completed her Masters of Science in Education from Southern Illinois University in 1999. She completed her Bachelors of Science degree from SIU also in 1999. She is the author of *The Unplanned Pregnancy Handbook- Real Life Stories, Resources and Information To Help YOU!* *The Unplanned Pregnancy Handbook* features a wealth of resources about pregnancy, abortion and adoption. Women of all walks of life also share their real life stories in *The Unplanned Pregnancy Handbook*. She is also the author of *Sparkledoll Always Into Something*, *Be My Sorority Sister-Under Pressure*, and she writes for the Teen and Rap Music section of the popular women's site



Bellaonline.com. Dorrie is a stay at home military spouse and the mother of two young boys. You can visit Dorrie on the web at www.dorrieinteractive.com

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[Alia Levine](#)

We had decided to spend seven months traveling from the United States to my home country, New Zealand. Liberating ourselves from our jobs and homes auspiciously (for some) on July Fourth, my girlfriend and I began with a road trip through the southwest. The first days were nauseatingly fabulous; we camped and hiked, sang along to country radio, and generally honeymooned our way through the friendly mountainsides of Colorado.

We rolled into Utah and the demographic changed, along with our reception. As we visited Utah's biblically-referenced national parks, entire families—with hair the color of corn silk and high-collared denim—couldn't take their eyes off us as we edged our way into stores to pick up supplies. The hand-holding honeymooning ground to a halt, exchanged for quick kisses in our well-zipped tent. Out of Utah and into Arizona, where, fortunately for us at 5:30am, it turned out that the Grand Canyon couldn't have cared less for our particular proclivities. Las Vegas, similarly, had its eyes on the slot machines rather than us, and San Francisco was just a big Park Slope with more gay boys and better burritos.

Out west, I was more wary of packs of wandering guys than of bears, and the creepy awareness that my girlfriend and I were seen as sinning sexual deviants (or worse, plain titillating), insinuated itself into our consciousness, affecting both our interaction with each other as well as with the locals. You can't be gay and not hear about the not-so-random hate crimes, but it's hard to imagine them happening to you

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when you live in a city with an active gay scene. Living in Park Slope, a neighborhood where being queer was often the (pleasant) norm rather than the exception; I forgot what life in a bubble could do to one's sense of security and perception of the outside world. I've seen *Boys Don't Cry*, but I still have to remind myself that the film documents something that occurred less than 10 years ago, and that there are still places where heterosexuals actually spend time getting all worked up in response to our very existence. There really are more interesting things to think about.

After living in Park Slope, a neighborhood where being queer was often the (pleasant) norm rather than the exception, I had forgotten how nice life in a bubble was for one's sense of security.

Fortunately, in Guatemala and Mexico, despite curiosity surrounding the actual gender of my partner (tall, flat-chested, short hair, but alas, too pretty to pass) we were at least able to hold hands like all the other girls did without any scrutiny beyond the "you're a funny looking tourist" level. Secret victory. We studied Spanish in Guatemala, where Catholicism is so strong that "love-the-sinner-hate-the-sin" isn't even an option. Blind faith came in handy, though. One such loophole was the very strict *no boys allowed* policy in the house where I was staying (we had separated to study). Heh heh. Being a tortillera in this town had its advantages.

We had read that in India, public affection between men and women wasn't really kosher; I've never seen so much male/male intimacy in my life; we were thrilled. We knew they were just straight and affectionate, but we thought maybe this would exempt us from their attentions. However, amidst the beautiful temples, rice paddies, and mountains—even on the banks of holiest of rivers, the Ganges—we encountered the world's largest male sleaze factor. I discovered that I actually had the capacity to unflinchingly closet myself with comments like, "My husband is sleeping in our hotel, and did I tell you I'm four months pregnant?" (It didn't work.)

During our last month in India, I made friends with a woman in her mid-twenties. Inarguably gorgeous, complete with Indian classical dance moves that would make your grandmother swoon, she was the subject of the crushes of at least four men working at the ashram. However, no one knew she had a girlfriend of two years tucked away at college. While she considered herself lucky to be both working and in college, upon graduation her parents were waiting to arrange her marriage. "So, what will you do?" I asked, caught up in the suspense and tragic romance of the story. "Oh, just get married, I suppose" was her resigned but surprisingly casual reply.

I couldn't let it happen. What about her political science degree? What about leaving home, moving to the capital and becoming a revolutionary politician, fighting for gay rights in India? I ran off to the nearest Internet café, looked up "lesbian" and "India," and jotted down some numbers and web sites. She wasn't impressed with my efforts. What about me not being so stupid, I thought, as I realized I was more anxious about this than she was. After another week of well-intentioned (and largely ignored) western good-karma hunting, I finally let it go.

After almost six years in New York, and seven months traveling (it really was an incredible trip, despite my lesbionic kvetching), we finally

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made it home to New Zealand. It's a relief to be in a country that acknowledges any relationship—queer or heterosexual—over two years long as valid (I hear gay marriage is on the way), has laws that protect same-sex couples who have children, and an annual lesbian fair at our local primary school. It really is nice to be somewhere where most of the local heterosexuals really do have something better to think about.

A staunch lesbian/feminist/antipodean, **Alia Levine** moved from Aotearoa/New Zealand to her family's native New York in 1997. A Women's Studies/English Literature graduate from Victoria University, NZ, Alia worked in New York in the fields of publishing, education, and women's human rights. In 2003, after five fabulous years living in Brooklyn, New York, Alia realized that it was time to go home. As of March 2004, you'll find her back in the Southern Hemisphere's peaceful, green gateway to the world, plotting her vegetable garden and figuring out how to get around without the New York City subway.



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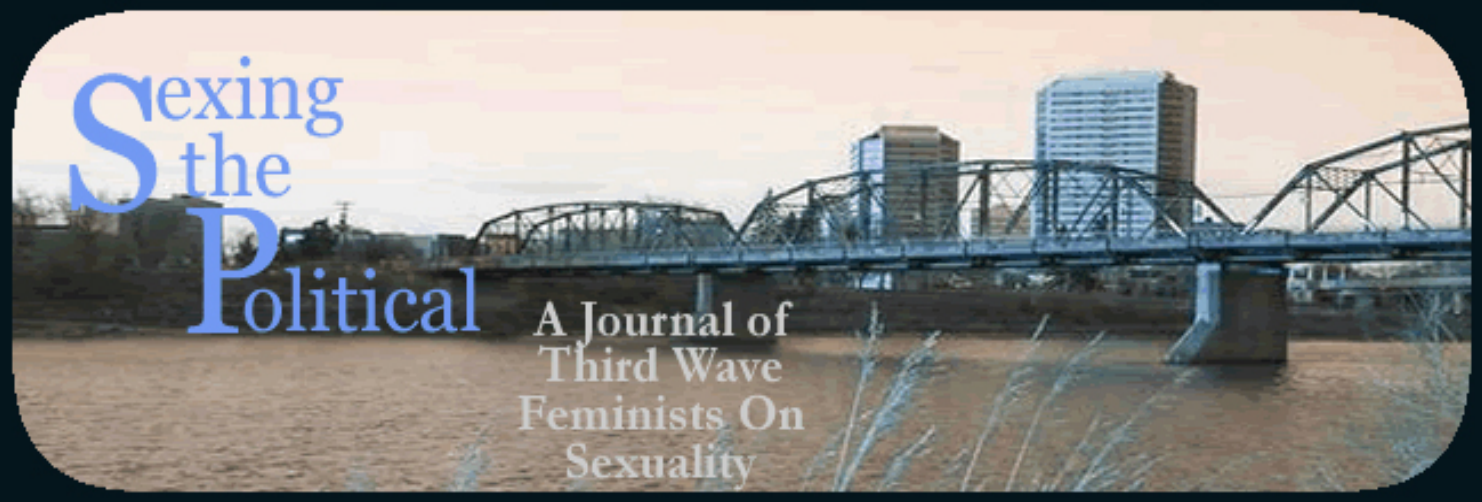
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Sex Talk

Bringing Gen X feminist sensibilities to the practice of sexuality education.

Teen Oral Sex: It's Sensationalized!

Rhonda Chittenden

As a teen in the early-80s, I was very naïve about oral sex. I thought oral sex meant talking about sex with one's partner in a very sexy way. A friend and I, trying to practice the mechanics, would move our mouths in silent mock-talk as we suggestively switched our hips from left to right and flirted with our best bedroom eyes. We wondered aloud how anyone could engage in oral sex without breaking into hysterical laughter. In our naïveté, oral sex was not only hilarious, it was just plain stupid.

Twenty years later, I doubt most teens are as naïve as my friend and I were. Although the prevalence of oral sex among adolescents has yet to be comprehensively addressed by researchers, any adult who interacts with teens will quickly learn that, far from being stupid or hilarious - oral sex is a popular activity in some adolescent crowds.

Some teens claim, as teens have always claimed about sex, that "everyone is doing it." They tell of parties—which they may or may not have attended—where oral sex is openly available. They describe using oral sex as a way to relieve the pressure to be sexual with a partner yet avoid the risk of pregnancy. Some believe oral sex is an altogether risk-free behavior that eliminates the worry of sexually transmitted infections. There is a casualness in many teens' attitudes towards oral sex revealed in the term "friends with benefits" to describe a non-dating relationship that includes oral sex. In fact, many teens argue that oral sex really isn't sex at all, logic that, try as we might, defies many adults. Most pointedly, teens' anecdotal experiences of oral sex reveal the continuing imbalance of power prevalent in heterosexual relationships where the boys receive most of the pleasure and the girls, predictably, give most of the pleasure.

Some believe oral sex is an altogether risk-free behavior that eliminates the worry of sexually transmitted infections.

Young people long for [honest conversations](#) about the complexities of human sexuality, including the practice of oral sex. Even so, the topic

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of [teen oral sex](#) is sensationalized in the media—and in the minds of many adults—making it difficult to talk about in meaningful ways. Using a sex-positive approach, these ten messages will supply adults with practical messages about oral sex that may encourage teens towards greater sexual knowledge, improved sexual health, and increased mutuality in current and future sexual relationships.

1. Oral sex *is* sex.

Regardless of how casual the behavior is for some young people, giving and receiving oral sex are both sexual behaviors. Oral sex is the stimulation of a person's genitals by another person's mouth to create sexual pleasure and, usually, orgasm for at least one of the partners. It's that straightforward.

Even so, many young people—and even some adults—believe that oral sex is not “real sex.” Real sex, they say, is penis-vagina intercourse only. Any other sexual behavior is something “other” and certainly not *real* sex. This narrow definition of sex, rooted in heterosexist attitudes, is problematic for several reasons.

First, such a narrow definition is ahistorical. Art and literature reveal human beings, across human history and culture, consensually engaging their bodies in loving, pleasurable acts of sex beyond penis-vagina intercourse. In Western culture, our notions of sex are still shackled by religious teachings that say the only acceptable sex—in society and the eyes of God—is procreative sex. Of course, the wide accessibility of contraceptives, among other influences, has dramatically shifted our understanding of this definition. Still, many people are unaware that across centuries and continents, human beings have enjoyed many kinds of sex and understood those acts to be sex whether or not they involved a penis and a vagina.

Next, by defining sex in such narrow terms, we perpetuate a dangerous ignorance that places people at risk for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. Many people, including teens, who define sex in such narrow terms incorrectly reason that they are safe from HIV if they avoid penis-vagina intercourse. Because saliva tends to inhibit HIV, it's true that one's chances of contracting HIV through oral sex with an infected partner are considerably small, compared to the risk of unprotected vaginal or anal sex. Of course, this varies with the presence of other body fluids as well as the oral health of the giver. However, if one chooses to avoid “real sex” and instead has anal sex, the risk for HIV transmission increases. In reality, regardless of what orifice the penis penetrates, all of these sex acts are real sex. In this regard, the narrow definition of sex is troubling because it ignores critical sexual health information that all people deserve, especially those who are sexually active or intend to be in the future.

Finally, this narrow definition of sex invalidates the sexual practices of many people who, for whatever reasons, do not engage in penis-vagina intercourse. These people include those who partner with lovers of the same sex. They also include people who, regardless of the sex of their partners, are physically challenged due to illness, accident, or birth anomaly. To suggest to these individuals that oral sex—or any other primary mode of shared sexual expression—is not real sex invalidates the range of accessible and sensual ways they can and do share their bodies with their partners.

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Clearly, we must educate young people that there are many ways to enjoy sex, including the sensual placement of one's mouth on another person's genitals. Oral sex may be practiced in casual, emotionally indifferent ways, but this does not disqualify it as a legitimate sex act. Oral sex *is* sex—and, in most states, the law agrees.

2. Without consent, oral sex may be considered sexual assault.

Some teens report that oral sex takes place at parties where alcohol and other drugs are consumed. It's imperative, then, that adults confront the legal realities of such situations with teens. Of course, drinking and drug use are illegal for adolescents. According to Iowa law, if alcohol or drugs are used by either partner of any age, consent for oral sex (or any sex) cannot be given.

3. Practice safer oral sex to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections.

Aside from abstaining from oral sex, young people can protect themselves and their partners from the inconvenience, embarrassment, treatment costs, and health consequences of sexually transmitted infections by practicing safer oral sex. The [correct and consistent use of latex condoms](#) for fellatio (oral sex on a penis) and [latex dental dams](#) for cunnilingus (oral sex on a vulva) and anal rimming (licking the anus) should be taught and encouraged.

4. Oral sex is a deeply intimate and sensual way to give sexual pleasure to a partner.

Unlike some other sex acts, oral sex acutely engages all five senses of the giver. For the giver of oral sex, the sense of taste is clearly engaged. If safer sex supplies are not used, the giver experiences the tastes of human body fluids—perhaps semen, vaginal fluids, and/or perspiration. The tongue and lips feel the varied textures and movements of the partner's genitals. With the face so close to their partner's genitals, the giver's nose can easily smell intimate odors while the eyes, if opened, get a very cozy view of the partner's body. Finally, during oral sex the ears hear the delicate sounds of caressing another's body with one's mouth.

5. Boys do not have to accept oral sex (or any sex) just because it is offered.

In some adolescent circles, young men report that oral sex is offered freely by some young women. Even if they do not desire oral sex from a certain young woman, some guys are hard pressed to refuse her. After all, our culture teaches that real men are sexually ready and willing at all times. Real men certainly do not turn down sex! Even so, adults must give young men explicit permission to turn down oral sex—and any sex—they do not want. We must teach them that, despite the distorted messages they receive, authentic manhood and masculinity are not hinged on the number of sex partners one accrues.

...teens' anecdotal experiences of oral sex reveal the continuing imbalance of power prevalent in heterosexual relationships where the boys receive most of the pleasure and the girls, predictably, give most of the pleasure.

6. Making informed decisions that respect others and one's self is a true mark of manhood.

By making girls the responsible party for saying no to oral sex, we fail young men in developing [skills that truly define manhood](#): healthy sexual decision making, setting and respecting personal boundaries, and being accountable for one's actions. We also leave them at risk for contracting sexually transmitted infections. In addition, although our culture rarely communicates this, young men who accept oral sex whenever it is offered risk losing the respect of the many adults and young people who do not admire or appreciate men who have indiscriminate sex with large numbers of partners.

7. Giving oral sex is not an effective route to lasting respect, popularity or love.

For many young women, giving oral sex is weighted with hopes of further attention, increased likeability, and perhaps a loving relationship. For them, giving oral sex becomes a deceptively easy, if not short-term, way to feel worthy and loved. Adults who care about girls must empower them to see beyond the present social situation and find other routes to a sense of belonging and love.

8. Girls can refuse to give oral sex.

Adults must go beyond simply telling young women to avoid giving oral sex for reasons of reputation and health. We must empower girls, through encouragement, role plays, and repeated rehearsals, to establish and maintain healthy boundaries for loving touch in their friendships and dating relationships. We must create safe spaces where girls can encourage and support each other in refusing to give boys oral sex, thus shifting the perceived norm that "everyone is doing it."

9. Young women may explore their own capacities for sexual pleasure rather than spending their energies pleasuring others.

It is developmentally normal for adolescent girls to experience sexual desire. Although our cultural script of adolescent sexuality contradicts this, it may be that some girls authentically desire the kind of sensual and sexual intimacy oral sex affords. If this is the case, it is essential that adults do not shame girls away from these emergent desires. Instead, they should explore the ways oral sex may increase one's physical and emotional vulnerabilities and strategize ways that girls can stay healthy and safe while acknowledging their own sexual desires.

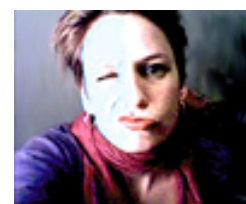
Adults can suggest to young women that their growing sexual curiosity and desires may be fulfilled by learning, alone in the privacy of one's room, about one's own body—what touch is pleasing, what is not, how sexual energy builds, and how it is released through their own female bodies. If girls could regard themselves as the [sexual subjects of their own lives](#) rather than spending vast energies on being desirable

objects of others, they may make healthier, firmer, more deliberate decisions about the sexual experiences they want as adolescents and adults.

10. Seek the support and guidance of adults who have your best interests at heart.

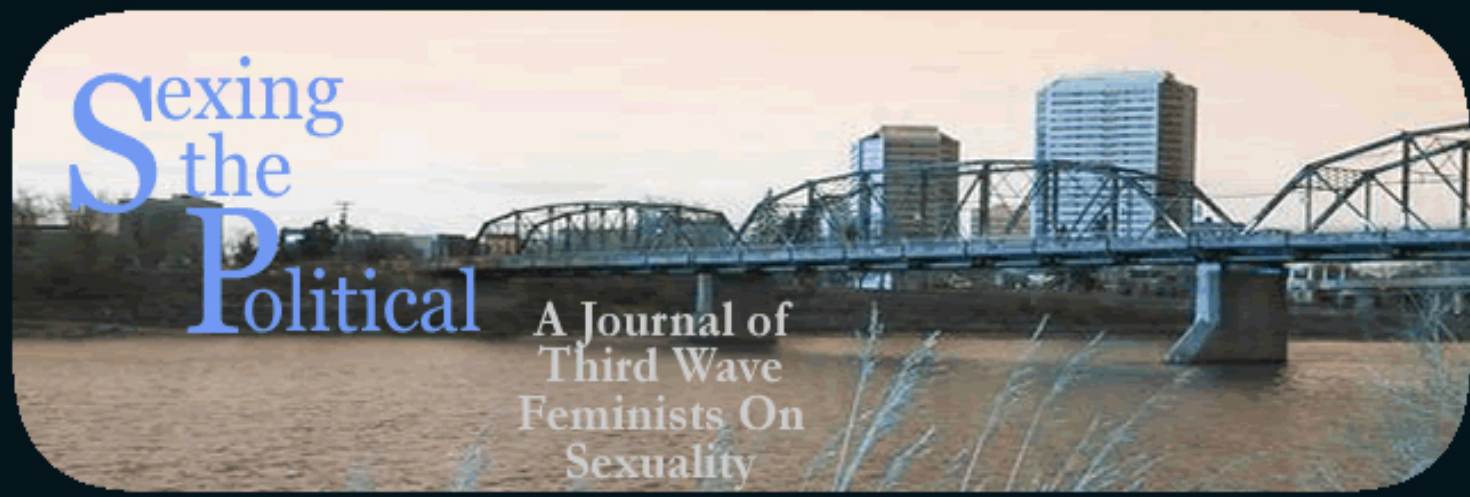
Adults can let young people know we are willing to listen to their concerns around issues of oral sex. We can offer young people support and guidance in their struggles to decide what's right for their lives. We can become skilled and comfortable in addressing risk-reduction and the enhancement of sexual pleasure together, as companion topics. And, finally, adults can use the topic of oral sex as a catalyst to dispel myths, discuss gender roles, and communicate values that affirm the importance of mutuality, personal boundaries, and safety in the context of healthy relationships.

Rhonda Chittenden, MS, has worked in the field of women's reproductive health for 14 years and has been a sexuality educator for eight. Persistently inspired to make feminism visible in her Midwestern city, she has organized local feminist conferences, film festivals, fundraisers and, most recently, a shameless variety show, with more in the mix. Her teaching interests include female sexual subjectivity, LGBT cultural competency, and abortion. She loves Indian food, big trees, and listening to old school rap with her cute ass partner.



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Hair

Wednesday, December 31, 2003

Lauri Wollner

It is New Year's Eve and I am 35 year's old for another couple of hours. I had to go get my driver's license today. I was nervous to get it done and basically avoided it until the last day. Because of what I look like, I have extra anxiety when venturing out into the public for any reason. But particularly when I have to interact directly with someone and trust that they will treat me with enough respect to accomplish whatever my goal is.

I am not a "pretty girl" anymore by normal standards. I have a really great body for a woman but I dress for the weather and for practical reasons and therefore most of my curves happen to be hidden. I am capable of wearing make-up and wearing it well. But why bother? I don't have time for this nor the reactions I would get if I were to do it, anymore. My hair is longer now than it has been in over a decade I am sure. It hasn't been cut since August 9th and that is simply too long no matter how good of a cut I got and how well it has been growing out. But I am in that scary phase of needing to find a new hair person. I have been rather devoted to Angela who began doing my hair for the better part of the last 15 years. She moved to Indiana that day and I suppose it is not beyond me to fly down there and have her do my hair still. But we had a bit of a falling out and so we are done. I have not found a new person yet, although I have been spying on all of the staff at the Hair Police working on finding who has the honor of touching my head next.

Because of
what I look
like...

So my hair is longer. And this makes me look more like a girl than when I have it short. It doesn't matter though. I have been mistakenly called a boy more often than not in my life. Even during those phases of hard femme work on my part.

The facial hair is the biggest 'problem' if you will. I have had it since I was a teenager but been plucking away since then. Waxing went on for a while too. I stopped worrying about it or dealing with it in September of 1998. So I boldly walk down the streets "looking like a man".

Without even trying.

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I am more and more 'over' people's reactions, insults, questioning, and advice. I am more and more OK, proud and even grateful for what I look like. But I deal with being treated differently everyday. Because of what I look like. Because of what perceptions people have when they see me. What assumptions they make about how I deserve to be treated or fear of what I will do to them. In many ways, I am a freak show. I am a monster. I am to be killed or run away from. With a longer haircut, I am treated a little bit better.

I had my head shaved when I got my license four years ago.

Today I have bad hair.

But at least it looks sort of normal enough. Less threatening.

...because this
isn't Kansas
anymore
Dorothy

Nonetheless, I began to have an anxiety attack on the way there. I was having difficulty paying attention so as not to get lost. I was having a hard time breathing. I had to smoke a cigarette to stay in my body. The panic attack passed, as I knew it would. I drove around forever, it seemed, looking for parking.

I walked in to the Motor Vehicle place and noted the changes since the last time I was there. It was mostly the same though. The walls are dingy and used to be white, I suppose. There was a center island of workers behind a desk that allowed them to work on three sides if they wanted to. Signs everywhere "Please turn off all cell phones". One big sign pointing to the line. As if one couldn't see it. But I was confused and thought about asking if it was the right place. I remember before, that you had to be in one line if you were taking the test and another one if you were just renewing your license. Not the case this time. One line and one line only. And it wound all around, up and down aisles.

It was a little bit after noon and I got into the line right away then and prayed that I would be done in time for my massage at 2 PM. I was behind a black man who, I guess, was about my age or a bit older. He was short and nice looking. I liked his style. He wore clothes that I would wear and kept his stocking cap on. It fit him well. I could tell he takes pride in his clothes and in having his own look. I wanted to say hello to him and tell him I liked his hat but "this isn't Kansas anymore Dorothy" and so I don't talk to strangers much. It is too risky. No need to draw attention to myself anymore than my appearance in and of itself already does. He could be just fine and my radar would be functioning correctly as to whether or not this man was safe. Or he could be the kind of guy that would freak out in some way to have a white girl, or a dyke, or a tranny, or whatever he may assume I am talking to him. He could be annoyed, enraged, or bored with me. He could say something that would hurt my feelings, embarrass me or piss me off. None of which I wanted to deal with in line to get my license. I was there for a reason and letting my nice, innocent Iowa girl side show was not in the plans. That usually backfired.

But something told me that he and I were more alike than different in this crowd and that he knew this as well. He stepped up near the desk, waited for the dude working to finish up and catch him before the next person stepped up.

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Sexing the Political: A Journal of Third Wave Feminists on Sexuality

[Editor and Publisher:](#)

Krista Jacob

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**Volume Three
Number Two
May 2004**

“Excuse me, I only need to renew my license, do I need to wait in this line?”

“Yes, everyone waits in line” dude said in a dull but stern voice, certainly having repeated this line throughout the day.

The black man, whom I will call my friend as he was the most comforting being in that building for me, got back in line in front of me and said “Just wanted to make sure I was in the right line”

“OKayyy” I said, letting him know I knew what he meant and wasn’t all that happy about how long the line was either.

“I was hoping this was the wrong line actually”

“Right,” I added. And we settled into our positions. Moving forward about a foot per 12 minutes it seemed. He and I paid attention and moved forward when space opened up in front of us. He kept a respectable distance between himself and the white chic in front of him.

Apparently she can’t read since she was on her mobile phone. I was both annoyed and entertained by her. My friend appeared to be feeling the same way. He was paying as much attention as I was and yet I felt the bristles up the back of his neck at her high pitched voice when she squealed with excitement into her phone. It was hard to eaves drop on any other conversation since none of it was English. So her discussion was all my friend and I had to pay attention to for a while.

What kind of a world do we live in where a girl like me is treated poorly for simply not playing the game and looking like a girl?

“Yeah, I’m in line to get my driver’s license renewed. Can you stand it?” she had that sort of Valley girl tone to her voice. “Like” is one of her favorite words. I couldn’t hear the other person she was talking to but I could still gather the gist of the conversation. I get a lot of practice listening to one-sided conversations in my current job as a manager of a phone line. I gathered that she hadn’t talked to this friend in quite a while. They were catching up. “Yeah, and like since December 9th I have flown 21 times! I know, like, ridiculous isn’t it?!”

She was very excited, talking to her friend. And clearly didn’t care to communicate or exist in the same universe as anyone else in that building. She barely moved. She would be twisting and turning and playing with her hair while she talked on and on and on for well over a half an hour. I think my friend was annoyed whenever she paused instead of picking up the slack in the line.

She was boring me after a while too. I started looking around the room and checking out the situation at the desk to prepare myself for being next in line at some point.

I really, really liked this one dude’s hair who was in front of white chic. He and his buddy were in line together. His hair was shaved close around the bottom, the back of his head up pretty high actually, and around his ears. Then the hair on top was longer and completely slicked back. Again, I wanted to say something about how much I liked his hair. But didn’t think that would go over too well either.

White girl was not the only person who couldn’t read the sign or didn’t care about breaking the rules. At least 10 more people were on the

phone. Probably more. One nasty couple kept making out. Seriously. They were groping each other and she was giggling like a little girl. They were probably both in their 40's or something. How frickin rude? We are all crammed in this hot stuffy place. Nobody wants to be there. Everyone is more or less trapped unless you want to leave and come back for the same crap another day. And here they are sucking face in front of all of us.

In the past I only remember older women, mostly overweight, who seem really, really bitter working behind the counter. And how could they not be? Day after day the never-ending line and pattern of people not being able to, or not caring enough to, read and follow the rules. So the new set-up was to have these two guys handling the front end of the process. They each faced the line and took one person at a time. I began my normal routine of determining who I wanted to help me and praying for the right outcome. In this case, I could handle either guy so I didn't waste a prayer. Both seemed to treat everyone equally. They both seemed to have never ending, although hard worked for, patience spewing off of them. They both seemed to actually like their jobs. They were both fairly pleasant and never rude. However, you could see it was getting to dude on the right and had been for a while. He was sweating. He was edgy underneath everything.

I had been in line almost an hour when I got called up to the sweating man. I handed him my driver's license and told him I needed to renew it. "Fill out the highlighted sections and wait over there" he said and pointed to a tall, skinny counter people were crammed up against filling out forms. Wait over where? I would have to pass the making out couple to get to the corner I was directed to.

I filled out my form, not knowing if I should sign the signature line or not. Deciding to do so. Only to hear one of the women working on that end of the counter tell people to fill out the highlighted sections but don't sign.

The energy was different over in that area. Much more crammed. And the overhead lights must have been burnt out or something – none of them were on. There was really only a small area, more like a hallway between the counter where we were supposed to stand and the line that was winding back and forth up the beginning phase. Not more than five feet 'through the hallway' if you will, started the rows of seats where people are actually taking the written test. And all along the testing area and that side of the desk – were the bitter ladies I remembered from previous trips. There were only three of them I think but I honestly couldn't keep track. They were much more militant than the men working there. They were shouting out the rules regularly and with authority. "No cell phones."

"You, you can't be in the testing area if you are not testing" white girl had been busted sitting on the edge of a testing row. "You all, make more room. Move over there. We will call your name."

I walked behind and past the original line again towards the front of the building. I sat on a pew like bench along the wall. There were kids running around all over the place. And people everywhere. Some stared at me but I ignored the whole lot as much as possible.

I was paranoid I would not hear my name called. I did not see my friend or white chic anywhere. Did I miss my chance? Employee dude on the right must have been watching the clock like a hawk. All of a sudden, he set his pen down, said something to Dude on the left,

walked around the opening in the desk, through the crowd and into a door marked "personnel only". He could not have been more focused than the 45 seconds it took him to get through that door and back out to leave the building altogether by 1:01 PM on the wall clock.

Lunch time I am sure.

I would have to run out of there on my breaks too if that were my job.

I moved over to another section that was less populated and gave me a better view of the happenings behind the desk. I watched two small children running around and screaming at each other – playing, not fighting, but loud as ever. I figured one of the ladies would have something to say about that pretty soon. I was impressed though, that she walked over and calmly handed a coloring book and two colors to the kids and asked them to sit down on the benches. I have witnessed pure yelling at kids by the ladies behind that counter in the past so this was easier to handle.

I had watched long enough to realize I would be better off over in the dark. From that corner I could see the ladies and figure out the last phases of the process. I walked past the line, down the skinny 'hall-way' area again, past the testers and into the dark section of the building. Along the back wall there, was my friend near the end of a row of chairs. I walked down and sat next to him. White girl was sitting across from us, writing out Christmas cards or thank you cards or something. I again pay attention, seeing who I will have to deal with. It appeared as though there was no way of avoiding one of the three bitter ladies. They were taking turns calling people up or hollering out to the crowd to follow one rule or another.

But at the very end of the process was a new girl working. She was in charge of taking the pictures. She was a trip. She was all exceptionally nice to everyone compared to her three female peers. She was about 100 pounds lighter than them too. She laughed and talked with everyone. It was almost as if she were intentionally planted as the spell on one's memory. End the experience on a good note and people won't think this is as bad as it truly is. People left her section with a smile on their face whether it was how she treated them or simply that they were done.

"There is no order to any of this," said my friend in frustration as someone else got called up to the desk.

White girl got called. And returned a few minutes later.

Two more people get called. We were behind white girl in line. They were taking the people who were taking their tests as they finished. We were in fact having to wait much longer than necessary as the test takers were budging right and left.

And they called me. "Oh, sorry dude, you were ahead of me," I said to my friend earnestly.

He laughed.

I walked up to one of the trio of bitter ladies who was staring at me.

"\$17.50 cash or check," she asks.

"Cash" I handed her a 20.

"\$2.50 is your change. Look into the viewer and read the top line"

Stern she was. She isn't playin'. I panicked, not wanting to flunk at this point, but took deep breathes and squinted to see the top line and read it out loud.

"Do you see lights blinking?"

"Yes, on both sides."

"Now which side?"

"Left" And I was done.

"Sit down" and at this her voice softens and she says it clear and calm
"for a COUPLE more minutes, we will call your name."

They all got that softer tone when informing people of the last sit and wait game.

I sat back by my friend. He got called a little bit after that.

White girl got called up by skinny photo taking girl who laughed and talked to her and waited while white girl fixed her hair. White girl even got to look at the photo and took an additional shot.

I was relieved to have survived this far. I was assuming the way skinny photo girl had been acting with everyone, that it might even be a pleasant finish to this stressful hoop one has to jump through to be able to drive legally.

I got called next in her bubbly voice "Lauri Wollner," giggle giggle.

She did not laugh or talk nicely to me like everyone else I had observed.

She glared at me as I approached her area.

She snapped "look at the camera" and snapped the picture at the same time.

She huffed "Oh, we'll have to re-take that one." I don't even know why we had to take it over. I assume I wasn't looking in the right direction. "Look at the camera," even more sternly.

Snap.

She stapled the papers and said it would be in the mail in 8 to ten days.

She stepped away to ensure that I would not talk to her.

Whatever.

Instantly, I enter the anger and rage and shame spiral that is my life. Why would she be so nice and clearly enjoy working with people from all walks of life and then instantly so rude to me with one glance?

What kind of a world do we live in where a girl like me is treated poorly for simply not playing the game and looking like a girl?

And I am certain that the photo will not be good. Forget about the fact that the skinny used-to-be-nice-until-she-saw-me-but-now-she-is-a-bitch girl had me so flustered and taken off guard that I could hardly breathe. Forget about no instructions on where to look other than the ones I had overheard her telling everyone else before me. Forget about not having time to adjust my extra layers of winter clothes. Forget about it all.

I know the photo won't be one to show off simply because my hair is a mess. It will be my reminder, too, of Angela for the next four years, whether I want one or not.

Who will cut my hair next?

Excerpted from a forthcoming book by Lauri Wollner

Lauri Wollner has become well educated in her 35 years. She lives in the Mid-West with her other half, four cats and a snake. She grew up Catholic and currently has a rosary with her at all times. You can call her religious if you want, or anything else for that matter. She has survived more labels than she can remember. "Daughter" and "sister" are about the only ones she will claim. She is a work in progress.



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[The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women](#)

Susan Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels
Free Press, 2004

Reviewed by Krista Jacob

Debunking the Mommy Myth

Thank Goddess that somebody else is as fed up with the barrage of "how to be the perfect mother" propaganda as I am.

The argument that the media inundates women with messages dictating that they must "do it all" (with success only a commercial product away) and sets unattainable standards for womanhood, motherhood, and beauty that keep women running in the proverbial hamster wheel, going nowhere while working their butts off, is not new. What is new, however, is the new ways in which these perceptions and expectations of motherhood are packaged by the media.

Douglas and Michaels coin the term "new momism," the daughter to Friedan's "feminine mystique" which represents the new liberation-tradition hybrid that defines many modern day women's experiences (for both mothers and non-mothers alike).

The 'new momism' is a set of ideals, norms, and practices, most frequently and powerfully represented in the media, that seem on the surface to celebrate motherhood, but which in reality promulgate standards of perfection that are beyond your reach...The new momism seems (their emphasis) to be much more hip and progressive than the feminine mystique, because now, of course, mothers can and do work outside the home, have their own ambitions and money, raise kids on their own, or freely choose to stay at home with their kids rather than being forced to. And unlike the feminine mystique, the notion that women should be subservient to men is not an accepted tenet of the new momism. Central to the new momism, in fact, is the feminist insistence that women have choices, that they are active agents in control of their own destiny, that they have autonomy.

The authors caution, however, that despite whatever new freedoms women may have, the juggling act between selfless motherhood and self determined professionalism inherent to the "new momism" is a no win situation that can only be achieved through "the cross cloning of

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Mother Teresa and Donna Shalala." These unreasonable demands leave mothers feeling guilty and incompetent, and pits mother against mother in a contest over who's the best. A familiar dynamic, in the 1800s Friedrich Engels called it "divide and conquer," it is the new and improved brand of women's oppression.

Douglas and Michaels critically examine thirty-years of media, including the evening news, magazines, advertisements, and so on, and analyze the everyday impact these images have on women's lives, their perceptions of themselves and each other. Their research is meticulous and comprehensive, but the aspect of their book that sets it apart from other similarly theoretical books is its accessibility and insistence on fighting back. Though this reader would have liked a "how to" chapter on being an activist while the baby is napping or during the commute to work, I suspect they felt it would have perpetuated the "do-it-all-all-the-time" dynamic they are opposing.

Krista Jacob, MS, is editor-in-chief and founder of *Sexing the Political: A journal of third wave feminists on sexuality*. She has a long history of involvement in women's issues, including domestic violence, sexual assault, reproductive freedom, and women's health and sexuality. She presents at state and national conferences on issues related to violence against women, third wave feminism, motherhood, images of women in the media, abortion, and adolescent women's issues. At present, she is a writer and lecturer.



Ms. Jacob's written work has appeared in *Just Sex: Students Rewrite the Rules on Sex, Violence, Activism, and Equality*, (Rowman & Littlefield), *The Minnesota Women's Press*, and numerous feminist journals. She is the editor of *Our Choices, Our Lives: Unapologetic Writings on Abortion*.

Recently, Ms. Jacob was given the Humanitarian Award for Outstanding Alumni from Minnesota State University, Mankato.

If you would like to inquire about bringing Ms. Jacob to speak in your community or to set up an interview, please contact sexingthepolitical@msn.com.

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Bearing Life: Women's Writings on Childlessness
The Feminist Press, 2000
Rochelle Ratner, Ed.
Reviewed by Rhonda Chittenden

For any woman who has considered the prospect of remaining childless, for those who think such women are fundamentally flawed, and for women who remain ambivalent about the issue, the anthology *Bearing Life: Women's Writings on Childlessness* is recommended reading. Editor Rochelle Ratner has collected an array of voices, spoken through essay, memoir, poetry, and fiction, to reflect—and ultimately affirm—the complex and often contradictory experiences of women who, by choice or circumstance, are childless. Delivered with aching regret, fierce self-assurance, biting sarcasm or casual acceptance, the writers confront compulsory motherhood with the often-ignored truth that many women's lives are complete without children.

Although competing for attention with a decisive diversity of successful writers—including Margaret Atwood, Rita Mae Brown, Sandra Cisneros, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Linda Hogan, Irena Klepfisz, Joy Kogawa, and Amy Tan—Joy Williams' "The Case Against Babies" delivers historical perspective, trend analysis, and pop cultural criticism in a tight acerbic diatribe reminiscent of the cynical sassiness that many so-called third wave feminists have perfected in venues such as *Bust* and *Bitch*. Arguing that the planet will soon face its demise due to human overpopulation, she especially attacks Western women who struggle with infertility, but through the services of "hot-shot fertility doctors" achieve pregnancies that manifest in twins, triplets, even quintuplets and beyond. "When you see twins or triplets do you think *awahhh* or *owhoo* or *that's sort of cool, that's unusual*, or do you think *that woman dropped a wad on in vitro fertilization, twenty-five, thirty thousand dollars at least . . .?*" Possibly the most offensive piece to more sensitive readers, Williams also communicates the absurdity of unlimited and unquestioned human reproduction at the cost of environmental integrity.

As for other contributors, in "The Deferred Dream," Tory Dent writes with tenderness and guts about the impact of her HIV infection on the possibility of pregnancy and motherhood. In "Tie Me Up, Tie Me Off," Jodi Sh. Doff describes how years of hard living led her to the gift of tubal ligation for her own 30th birthday. Mary Mackey, while armed with the response, "This is a Question I Do Not Answer," lists the series

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of interrogations with which she had to deal for being a woman without child. And, in "From Black Woman Artist Becoming," bell hooks tells of her choice to commit to her full potential as an artist rather than risk its stagnation by becoming a mother.

Cumulatively, these stories of infertility, abortion, disinterest, custody loss, and miscarriage combine to illuminate the often-invisible circumstances of childless women, women whose lives, when addressed, are at most despised and at least cause for suspicion in a culture that, despite the advances of feminism, still equates womanhood with motherhood. As evident by the list of further reading provided in the book's closing pages, many women are challenging that equation; *Bearing Life* adds to their testament.

Rhonda Chittenden, MS, has worked in the field of women's reproductive health for 14 years and has been a sexuality educator for eight. Persistently inspired to make feminism visible in her Midwestern city, she has organized local feminist conferences, film festivals, fundraisers and, most recently, a shameless variety show, with more in the mix. Her teaching interests include female sexual subjectivity, LGBT cultural competency, and abortion. She loves Indian food, big trees, and listening to old school rap with her cute ass partner.



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*Sexing the
Political: A Journal
of Third Wave
Feminists on
Sexuality*

**[Editor and
Publisher:](#)**

[Krista Jacob](#)

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The Chinese Garden

by Rosemary Manning

Published by The Feminist Press, \$12.95 (pback).

Published in 2000 (first pub'd in 1962).

Reviewed by Alia Levine

Set in the U.K., 1920s, this is a quietly provocative story of Sapphic desire and restraint in a girls' boarding school. While - disappointingly for some - there is no 'action,' every aspect of this book is loaded with heady metaphors of adolescent sexual tension.

Told in the first and second person narrative from the perspective of schoolgirl Rachel Curgenvin, we witness the manifestations of desire through her friends, her teachers, the headmistresses, and lastly - and most latently - her own.

The book reaches its climax right before its close, when two girls are discovered in bed together and are expelled, despite the headmistresses indulgence in those same 'sins.' The thinly veiled implications of the primary characters are hot; at their most provocative when they are at their most sinister - like the mannish headmistress known as "Chief," and her sadistic counterpart, Miss Lucas, the gleeful disciplinarian.

One of the catalysts within the drama is the secret circulation of Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness*, reconfiguring and honoring this groundbreaking work. The heroine of **The Chinese Garden**, Rachel, astutely identifies the hypocrisy of her headmistresses, as the affair (with its subsequent scandal) concludes this tale of boarding school homoeroticism.

The imagery within the text teems with alternately disturbing and innocent sexual metaphors. Take the garden of the book's title (come on girls, where are our 'secret gardens?'), for example. A sanctuary for Rachel, and a clandestine meeting place for her friends Margaret and Rena (the later expelled 'deviants'), the garden is a sensual, lush place of "secrecy and strangeness," an "exotic world," inhabited by serpents. The final metaphor surfaces when the garden is exposed as Margaret and Rena's rendezvous; the garden is flayed open and razed to the ground, marking the end of innocence for Margaret, Rena, and Rachel.

A feminist angle? Sexualizing women is big business, and the issues in

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this book tenaciously connect sexuality with (dis)empowerment. Isolated from society, the characters exist in a matriarchal environment, liberated in many ways from the prescribed limitations of their gender, yet also stiflingly entangled in draconian rules of conduct.

Manning exposes rather than exploits damaging notions of girlhood sexuality. While containing all the trappings of a girl's boarding school fantasy, the book is saved from being just another trashy, tawdry tale, by virtue of Manning's careful eloquence, as she tells a story of ethics, integrity, and the (beautifully portrayed) covert longings of adolescence.

A staunch lesbian/feminist/antipodean, **Alia Levine** moved from Aotearoa/New Zealand to her family's native New York in 1997. A Women's Studies/English Literature graduate from Victoria University, NZ, Alia worked in New York in the fields of publishing, education, and women's human rights. In 2003, after five fabulous years living in Brooklyn, New York, Alia realized that it was time to go home. As of March 2004, you'll find her back in the Southern Hemisphere's peaceful, green gateway to the world, plotting her vegetable garden and figuring out how to get around without the New York City subway.



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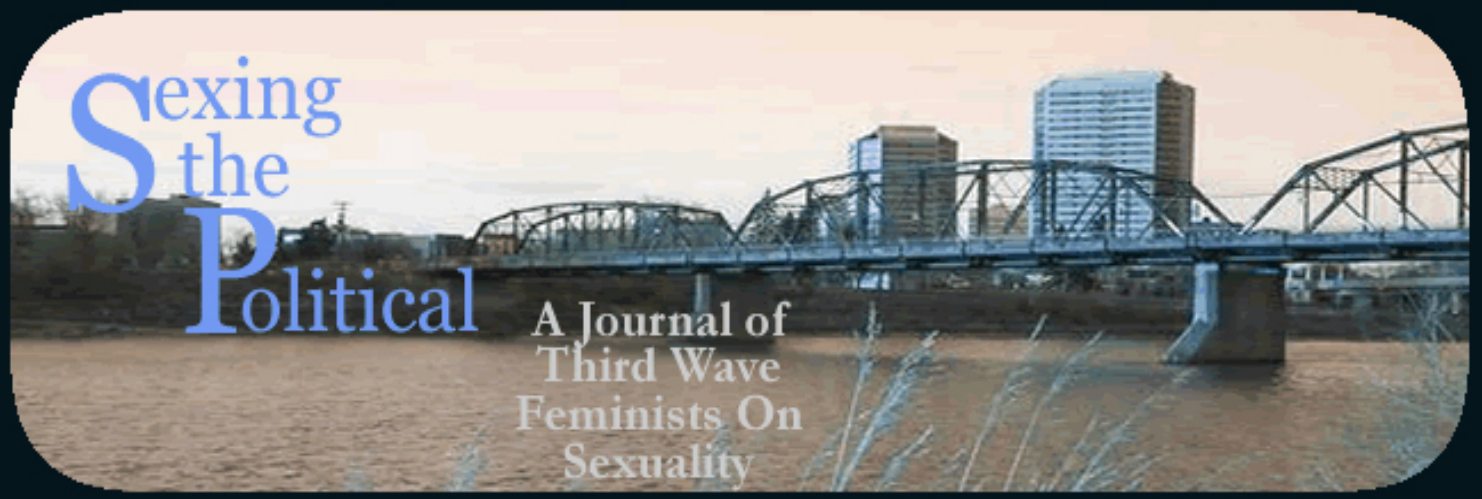
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letters to the editor

Dear Krista,
Your article on daycare guilt touched my heart deeply. I share all of the feelings you wrote about, both the struggle and the happiness of carving out an independent life outside of motherhood. The early years are especially challenging. Thank you for your intelligent and honest analysis of the dreaded daycare issue.
Jennifer Mitchell, A Third Wave Mama
NYC

Dear Krista,
What a FANTASTIC zine you right-on women have put together. I couldn't be more proud and impressed. It's wonderful to see the teachings and work of my generation take hold. We couldn't have envisioned a smarter, more dedicated group of women in our most optimistic dreams. Keep up the good work.
Nicole Freese, A Proud Baby Boomer
Traverse City, MI

Dear Krista,
Every time I get a notice about a new issue of STP, I first look for Kimberly Springer, Alia Levine, and Melissa Gelula. They are my favorite columnists, which is saying a lot for this terrific zine. Thank you and them!
Sarah Bush (not related!)
Iowa City, IA

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Dear Krista,

As someone who has been diagnosed with mental illness, I really related to Emari Dimagiba's column about her struggle with Bipolar Disorder and her desire to have a child. I myself had this same struggle several years ago. Though I'm fairly certain that I will not have children (who knows for sure what the future holds), her article resonated with my own experience and challenges with this issue. Thank you, Emari, for helping to de-stigmatize mental illness.

Monica Cicero
Ithaca (area), NY

Dear Krista

Thank you for the diverse perspectives and experiences you have in your zine. As a Black/Chicana woman, it does my mind good to read the words of other Black feminists. When I hear feminism criticized for being too White, I first agree but then point them in your direction as an example of what is being done to change it. Dorrie, Lauren and Kimberly are outstanding!

Maria Williams
Austin, TX

Dear Krista,

Oh, Boy! Elizabeth's brave admission about her secret love affair with romance books is one of her best columns. As a closet, partly proud/party ashamed romance reader myself, I could totally relate. Clearly the books haven't warped her mind! There is hope for me yet.

Latisha (last name withheld)
Lansing, MI

Dear Krista,

Thank you for you book, Our Choices, Our Lives, and your zine. As a woman who chose abortion, your work supports my choice. You are forging an important path in third wave feminism. I have no doubt that you and all of your writers are paving the way for future generations. Also, Lauren Alleyne is a wonderful, beautiful poet.

Anonymous
Cincinnati, OH

Dear Krista,

Thanks for your book. It's about time that someone included religion in the pro-choice dialogue. God Bless!

Betty O'Brien
Syracuse, NY

Dear Krista,

I'm a long time reader of Sexing the Political. My new favorite section is the book/website reviews. I don't have a lot of time to read but when I do, I want to here what others think about them before I even pick them up. Keep up the great work!

Christa Davison
Montana

Dear Krista,

As a man, I find your insights very useful in thinking about gender and race in our society. I often forget to consider how these factors influence my opinions and life experiences. You are not off putting, like some feminists are. I feel challenged without being attacked. This is no easy task!

Jeremy Wilkins
St. Louis, MO

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Dear Krista,

I'm a father of three daughters. I'm glad to know that work like this is being done to make their lives better. Surprisingly, I also connected with your article on day care guilt. I remember those days well. It's heartbreaking to separate from your children, for both parents. You did the topic justice!

David Wilson
La Crosse, WI

Dear Krista,

Alia Levine and Dorrie Williams-Wheeler do a great job of including humor in your zine. Whether it's sex toys or mullets, we must find a way to lighten things up and find the humor in the insanity of current American politics! Thanks for making me laugh.

Nancy Brown
Brainerd, MN

Dear Krista,

I was disappointed to read Kathryn Sokolowski's review of COYOTE (Call Off Your Tired Old Ethics). If ending the sexual exploitation of women (which is what prostitution is) then count me in. Like so many feminists, she misses the mark. Prostitution is exploitation of the most economically vulnerable women. I see you as a leader in the feminist movement and I expect more from you. If you don't challenge the sexual exploitation of women, who will?

Kara Jacobson
San Francisco, CA

Dear Krista,

Elizabeth couldn't possibly be smarter. I'm so glad you added her to the list of STP writers. Also, Hanne Blank once again outdid herself. As a non-procreator, with occasional urges to pro-create, I related very much to her essay, "Oh Baby."

Amora Vasquez
Austin, TX

Dear Krista,

As a female skateboarder in the UK I was very impressed by Shauna Pomerantz article "Grinding the concrete wave". I'm currently creating a webzine to try and gain a little more coverage for the very small UK girl skate scene.

Sophy Millington

Dear Krista, Wow. Your website is fabulous; rich with content, purpose, diversity -- and the colors are amazing. It's one of the best sites I've seen on the Internet.

Chandra Silva
Washington

[sign up for our free e-newsletter](#)

Would you like to be notified whenever there is a new issue of STP? We'll send you a periodic newsletter with information about what's coming up in the next issue of Sexing the Political, late-breaking news and important action alerts.



[Just send us an email to sign up](#)

letters to the editor

We want to hear from you! Please send us your questions, comments, criticisms and compliments to sexingthepolitical@msn.com. If you want to refer to a specific contribution, please include the title, date, and author's name.

Each month the writers and editor of Sexing the Political will publish responses to a select group of letters.



[Email your letter to us](#)

third wave sexuality moderated discussion group

Third Wave Sexuality is an email discussion group for 20 and 30 something feminists to exchange ideas and information pertaining to young women's sexuality. We share thoughts, beliefs, personal experiences, political action alerts and anything else that helps us to network with other young feminists, and contribute to progressive social change. Staying true to the much used slogan: "The personal is political," we connect personal experiences to the larger social, political, and cultural context.

Space on the list is limited. If you would like to become a member, please submit the following information: *your e-mail, your name, your age, the state where you currently reside, and six to ten sentences describing yourself and why you would like to become a member.* We'll forward your request to the list moderator.



[Interested joining in the list?](#)

contact us

If you have any questions about **Sexing the Political: A Journal of Third Wave Feminists on Sexuality**, just drop us a line:



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gender violence

[Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence](#) seeks to end family violence and to strengthen Asian families and communities. Founded in 1987, the Task Force represents a group of diverse Asian community leaders concerned about the incidence of domestic violence in Asian communities.

[National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#) is dedicated to the empowerment of battered women and their children and therefore is committed to the elimination of personal and societal violence in the lives of battered women and their children.

[National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) links individuals to help in their area. One call summons immediate help, in English or Spanish, 24 hours a day, seven days each week. We also have interpreters available to translate an additional 139 languages. The Hotline may be reached toll-free by phone from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. **1-800-799-SAFE**

[RAINN: Rape Abuse & Incest National Network](#) provides support resources for victims of sexual violence through a referral number which connects callers to free and confidential services in their area. **1-800-656-HOPE**

[Sexual Assault Information Page \(SAIP\)](#) is a not-for-profit information and referral service. SAIP provides information concerning acquaintance rape, child sexual abuse/assault, incest, rape, ritual

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abuse, sexual assault, and sexual harassment.

mamahood

Hip Mama is a magazine bursting with political commentary and ribald tales from the front lines of motherhood. The brain child of Ariel Gore, the 30 year old mother of a grade-schooler, Hip Mama began as Gore's senior project, a 500 copy publication created from a \$1000 student loan. The print zine quickly gained national renown and a large audience of fans.

MOTHERS (Mothers Ought To Have Equal Rights)

MOTHERS is a grassroots coalition. Their mission is to improve the economic well-being of mothers and other family caregivers.

Brain, Child: the magazine for thinking mothers

Brain, Child was founded in 1999 by Jennifer Niesslein and Stephanie Wilkinson, two friends who had babies under a year old. The pair, both with backgrounds in journalism, were itching for writing about motherhood that spoke to them. There were plenty of outlets for child-rearing tips and expert advice, but not a source of smart writing that delved into the meatier issues of that life-altering experience: motherhood. Brain, Child is the only literary magazine dedicated to motherhood.

menstruation

The Blood Sisters Project: when the private becomes public An exciting launching pad girl base fueling action to combat the silence surrounding our female bodies. We are girls using our own feminine protection to work against the corporate and cultural constructions of menstruation.

networking and organizations

Feminist.com is a grassroots, interactive community by, for and about women. We aim to facilitate information-sharing among women and encourage mobilization around political issues.

Feminist Majority and The Feminist Majority Foundation are committed to empowering women and winning equality through research, the sharing of information of value to feminists everywhere, and effective action. Their website contains: daily news updates relevant to feminists, opportunities for feminist political action, and a comprehensive collection of feminist/progressive websites. Some of the key sections include: reproductive rights, global feminism, and student activism.

Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center addresses pertinent issues of health, education, land and water rights, and economic development of Native American people.

Third Wave Foundation is the only national organization created by and for young women between the ages of 15 and 30. As an activist philanthropic organization, Third Wave networks, informs, and financially supports young women around the country and the projects that serve them. The goal of Third Wave is to harness the energy of young feminists nationwide by sharing information and resources, thereby creating a community in which members can coalesce,

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[Krista Jacob](#)

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network, strategize, and ultimately take action around issues that affect us all.

polyamory

[Loving More: New Models for Relationships](#) is a national organization and resource for people who wish to move beyond traditional monogamy. We see no reason to end a good relationship in order to begin another, and we believe that this can be done responsibly, intimately, and in integrity. We call it polyamory or Loving More.

presses and publishers

[Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture](#) is a print magazine devoted to incisive commentary on our media-driven world. We feature critiques of TV, movies, magazines, advertising, and more—plus interviews with and profiles of cool, smart women in all areas of pop culture.

[BUST](#) is the magazine of choice for today's sassy girls who know that Vogue is vapid, Glamour is garbage, and Cosmo is clueless. Fierce, funny, and too smart to be anything but feminist, BUST is "the Voice of the New Girl Order"—and the only magazine for women with something to get off their chests.



[ColorLines](#) is the first national, multi-racial magazine devoted to covering the politics and creations of communities of color. ColorLines Magazine is published quarterly by the Applied Research Center (ARC) and the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO).

[Minnesota Women's Press](#) is a communications business whose mission is to promote communication by, about and among women in ways that create community and are grounded in a transforming feminist worldview.

[Ms](#) is the pre-eminent feminist publication in the United States and the world. The depth and range of information Ms. delivers—special issues addressing the politics of breast cancer and sex at work; investigative reports on sex tourism, the fertility industry, the glass ceiling; a department dedicated to highlighting women's organizing worldwide; arts updates, poetry, fiction, etc.—is unmatched in the field of women's magazines.

[Seal Press](#) is an independent publisher specializing in quality fiction and non-fiction by women writers.

[Women of Color Web](#) is dedicated to providing access to writings by and about women of color in the U.S. We focus specifically on issues related to feminisms, sexualities, and reproductive health and rights, although we envision adding new sections as interests arise.

queer resources

[Lesbian.org](#) promotes lesbian visibility on the internet.

LesbianSexToys.com is the sex toy site exclusively for lesbians.

[National Gay and Lesbian Task Force](http://NationalGayandLesbianTaskForce.org) is the national progressive organization working for the civil rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. NGLTF's vision and commitment to social change is building a powerful political movement in the fifty states and the District of Columbia

[Transgender Warrior](http://TransgenderWarrior.com) is the home page of Leslie Feinberg, transgender writer and activist. It contains information about Leslie's upcoming speaking engagements and projects, excerpts from speeches, book information, and political struggles.

reproductive freedom

BirdsAndBees.org Where to get the buzz on sex...

This website, created by Pro Choices Resources in Minneapolis, acknowledges that sex happens, that sex can be a positive experience, and that decisions about sex and sexual health are big ones. This website is dedicated to all those who seek information needed to make informed decisions about sexual health, emotional well-being, and lifetime goals. We have included information on birth control, sexually transmitted infections and discussions on the realities of abortion, adoption and parenting to reach our goal of providing full information.

[Feminist Women's Health Center](http://FeministWomen'sHealthCenter.org) Established in 1980, FWHC is a nonprofit organization that promotes and protects a woman's right to choose and receive reproductive health care. Today, FWHC employs more than 70 women and men, serves over 5500 women annually, and operates three clinics ([Yakima](http://Yakima.org), [Renton](http://Renton.org) and [Tacoma](http://Tacoma.org)). The people who work at FWHC are a diverse and committed team who share a passion for women's reproductive freedom and self determination. FWHC believes in all women's sexual and reproductive freedom. We are leaders and teachers helping move the pro-choice movement toward a day when all women receive abortion in an empowering way.

[Global Reproductive Health Forum](http://GlobalReproductiveHealthForum.org) is an internet networking project that aims to encourage the proliferation of critical discussions about reproductive health and gender on the net. GRHF provides interactive electronic forums, global discussions, distributes reproductive health and rights materials from a variety of perspectives through our clearinghouse as well as maintains an extensive, up-to-date research library

[Indigenous Women's Reproductive Rights and Pro-Choice Page](http://IndigenousWomen'sReproductiveRightsandPro-ChoicePage.org) provides information concerning Indigenous women's reproductive health and their perspectives on pro-choice issues.

[National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League \(NARAL\)](http://NationalAbortionandReproductiveRightsActionLeague.org) is the political arm of the pro-choice movement and a strong advocate of reproductive freedom and choice. NARAL's mission is to protect and preserve the right to choose while promoting policies and programs that improve women's health and make abortion less necessary.

[Planned Parenthood](http://PlannedParenthood.org) is the world's largest and oldest voluntary family planning organization. Planned Parenthood is dedicated to the

principles that every individual has a fundamental right to decide when or whether to have a child, and that every child should be wanted and loved.

[Pro-Choice Public Education Project](#) is the first collaborative effort of its kind in the pro-choice community. Launched in 1996, PEP has been committed to conducting research on a diverse population of pro-choice supporters. Through focus groups and a national poll, PEP's research on young women ages 16-25 is the most extensive ever conducted at one time on young women's attitudes toward choice.

[Responsible Choices Action Network](#) mobilizes people committed to defending and increasing access to family planning services, abortion, and sexuality education.

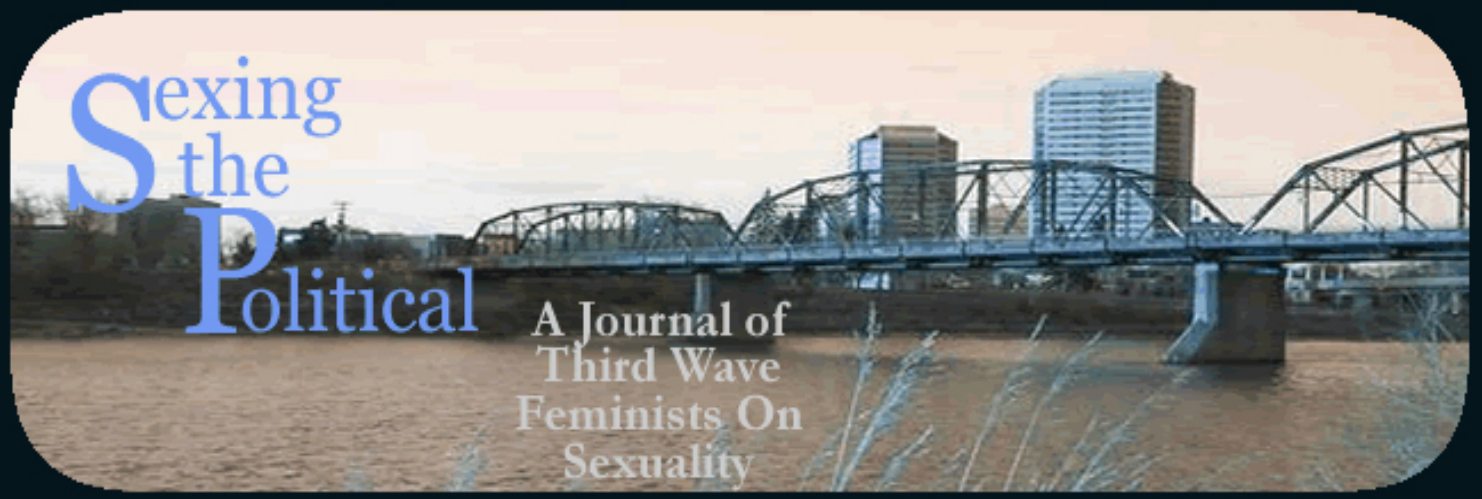
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Our Vision

A new generation of women and men, those born between the years of 1965 and 1982, are redefining what it means to be a feminist in our society. While some view them simply as part of Generation X, they see themselves as part of a burgeoning feminist movement called third wave feminism.

Third wave feminists are active in a variety of social issues. However, increasingly the topic of women's sexual lives and choices has become a signature of third wave feminism. Drawing from the lessons of their feminist foremothers, and redefining it on their own generational terms, third wave feminists are exploring the many facets of women's sexuality.

Sexing the Political: A Journal of Third Wave Feminists on Sexuality is an on-line journal for third wave feminists to theorize, satirize, politicize and organize about issues related to sexuality. It is intended to serve as a forum for the creative and radical political expression of third wave feminists from diverse cultural, sexual, and economic perspectives.

New issues of Sexing the Political are uploaded whenever the zine's editor, a busy writer and mother, has the time to do it.

Editor's Bio

Krista Jacob, MS, is editor-in-chief and founder of *Sexing the Political: A journal of third wave feminists on sexuality*. She has a long history of involvement in women's issues, including domestic violence, sexual assault, reproductive freedom, and women's health and sexuality. She presents at state and national conferences on issues related to violence against women, third wave feminism, motherhood, images of women in the media, abortion, and adolescent women's issues. At present, she is a writer and lecturer.



Ms. Jacob's written work has appeared in *Just Sex: Students Rewrite the Rules on Sex, Violence, Activism, and Equality*, (Rowman & Littlefield), *The Minnesota Women's Press*, and numerous feminist journals. She is the editor of *Our Choices, Our Lives: Unapologetic Writings on Abortion*.

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Recently, Ms. Jacob was given the Humanitarian Award for Outstanding Alumni from Minnesota State University, Mankato.

If you would like to inquire about bringing Ms. Jacob to speak in your community or to set up an interview, please contact sexingthepolitical@msn.com.

call for contributions

Sexing the Political features the writings and visual work of third wave feminists. Pieces explore a variety of topics such as: third wave activism, race and class issues, queer identity, the feminism of everyday life, pregnancy and motherhood, and so on. All topics are examined within the context of women's sexuality.

We are seeking contributions in the form of editorials, short essays (fiction and nonfiction), book and music reviews, artwork, and photographs from third wave feminists.

Submissions are due as soon as you write them and should be sent as e-mail attachments. The sooner you write them the sooner they can be published. Written work should not exceed 700 words, however, occasionally exceptions will be made. We'll notify you by e-mail if your contribution is selected for publication. The small, volunteer staff at STP will make every effort to respond to all inquiries and submissions, however, due to time and staffing constraints this is not always possible. Most likely, no news is bad news.

With the exception of the Baby Boomer column, contributors must be 20- or 30-something feminists.

We are interested in your thoughts on any of these topics as well as any other topics related to third wave feminism and sexuality that you may be thinking about.

Gay/ les/ bi/ trans (Queer) issues
Gender Expression
Motherhood
Pregnancy
Breastfeeding
Abortion
Adoption
Birth Control
Reproductive Technology
Artificial Insemination
Sexual and Reproductive Health
Childlessness
Same Sex Marriage

Violence Against Women and Sexual Exploitation
Erotica and Pornography
Sex Industry
Prostitution
Sexual Empowerment
Masturbation
Female Sexual Pleasure
Sexuality and Popular Culture
Reclaiming Women's

Spirituality and Sexuality
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Krista Jacob

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Contributors

Lauren K. Alleyne is currently a graduate student in creative writing. She is originally from the twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and currently resides in the Midwest. Recently, her writing was selected for reading and publication in the Des Moines National Poetry Festival. Professionally, Ms. Alleyne is interested in literature and gender studies and, in her (very little) free time, is a dedicated watcher of the WB's Charmed.

Rhonda Chittenden, MS, has worked in the field of women's reproductive health for 14 years and has been a sexuality educator for eight. Persistently inspired to make feminism visible in her Midwestern city, she has organized local feminist conferences, film festivals, fundraisers and, most recently, a shameless variety show, with more in the mix. Her teaching interests include female sexual subjectivity, LGBT cultural competency, and abortion. She loves Indian food, big trees, and listening to old school rap with her cute ass partner.

Krista Jacob, MS, is editor-in-chief and founder of *Sexing the Political: A journal of third wave feminists on sexuality*. She has a long history of involvement in women's issues, including domestic violence, sexual assault, reproductive freedom, and women's health and sexuality. She presents at state and national conferences on issues related to violence against women, third wave feminism, motherhood, images of women in the media, abortion, and adolescent women's issues. At present, she is a writer and lecturer.

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Recently, Ms. Jacob was given the Humanitarian Award for Outstanding Alumni from Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Zubeda Jalalzai is an assistant professor of English at Rhode Island College in Providence, Rhode Island specializing in early American Literature and postcolonial theory. She is completing a manuscript entitled "Embodying the Covenant," which deals with Native American

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conversion in 17th century New England. She is also the author of articles on Native American literature, as well as early America and postcolonial literature and theory.

Christiana L. Langenberg teaches in the English and Women's Studies departments at Iowa State University, where she is also an academic advisor and advisor for the student-run literary journal, Sketch. She was born in the Netherlands and immigrated to the U.S with her Dutch father and Italian mother. Raised trilingually in rural Nebraska, she was naturalized when she was 17. She now lives and works in rural Iowa with her four children. She is the winner of the 2003 Chelsea Award for Short Fiction, and her stories have been published or are forthcoming in Chelsea, Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly, Green Mountains Review, American Literary Review, Lullwater Review, The Blue Moon Review, and a variety of literary formats.

A staunch lesbian/feminist/antipodean, **Alia Levine** moved from Aotearoa/New Zealand to her family's native New York in 1997. A Women's Studies/English Literature graduate from Victoria University, NZ, Alia worked in New York in the fields of publishing, education, and women's human rights. In 2003, after five fabulous years living in Brooklyn, New York, Alia realized that it was time to go home. As of March 2004, you'll find her back in the Southern Hemisphere's peaceful, green gateway to the world, plotting her vegetable garden and figuring out how to get around without the New York City subway.

Adela C. Licon is interested in the practices and politics of representation. She is currently exploring (B)Orderlands' Rhetorics and their representational potentials. The forthcoming work from which this narrative poem is excerpted is entitled: Third-space Sites and Subjectivities: Agency, Authority, and (Re)Presentation (Re)Imagined and (Re)Considered.

Patricia Miller recently finished her undergraduate thesis on Girlie feminism in popular culture. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Literature at Duke University.

Robin Ringleka is a long-time believer in the power of small scale, and asserts that we should never underestimate the power of one. She earned a degree in Women Studies and Education from Michigan State University, and has lent much energy to ensuring reproductive rights for all women. She has enjoyed working on both the personal and political ends of the spectrum, and appreciates how each has informed the other. Her latest project, a collaborative on-line storytelling project, was designed to debunk dangerous myths around abortion and the women who seek them, while providing support for those who have or will face unintended or problematic pregnancies. Robin currently resides in Chicago, where she works for an international women's leadership organization.

Lise Sanders teaches gender and cultural studies at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Liz Smith is a third generation feminist writer with repeated credits in notable feminist venues including Fierce, Moxie, Fabula, Herspace, and Riot Grrl on subjects ranging from Cunnilingus, The Cost of Birth Control, Her First Dildo, Body Image, and Soccer Moms in Outer Space.

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Other highlights include interviewing female athletes who've posed nude and why, the proprietors of feminist sex toy shops on what it's like to be an empowering force within the mostly misogynistic sex industry, and former Agent 99 from Get Smart on the joys of being single.

Kim Springer teaches American Studies at King's College in London.

Salimah Valiani is a Canadian poet, activist and researcher. She has lived in Canada, England and the USA, and has traveled to various parts of Asia as part of her work in international development policy advocacy. Through all of this, she has participated in feminist projects, international solidarity building, and intellectual discussion. She believes in the power of poetry to address some of humanity's deepest aching.

Elizabeth Wheatfield (pseudonym) and her husband now live in a working class white neighborhood of this segregated city. She teaches writing at a local university and is quite certain she'll have a lot more to say about race, economics, and privilege over the next few months.

Dorrie Williams-Wheeler spends too much time trying to do too many things. She is an author, educator and web designer. She completed her Masters of Science of Education degree from Southern Illinois University in 1999. She completed her Bachelors of Science degree from SIU also in 1999. She is the author of *The Unplanned Pregnancy Handbook- Real Life Stories, Resources and Information To Help YOU! The Unplanned Pregnancy Handbook* features a wealth of resources about pregnancy, abortion and adoption. Women of all walks of life also share their real life stories in *The Unplanned Pregnancy Handbook*. She is also the author of the fiction book *Sparkledoll Always Into Something*, and she writes for the Teen and Rap Music section of the popular women's site Bellaonline.com. Dorrie is a stay at home military spouse and the mother of two young boys. You can visit Dorrie on the web at www.dorrieinteractive.com

Lauri Wollner has become well educated in her 35 years. She lives in the Mid-West with her other half, four cats and a snake. She grew up Catholic and currently has a rosary with her at all times. You can call her religious if you want, or anything else for that matter. She has survived more labels than she can remember. "Daughter" and "sister" are about the only ones she will claim. She is a work in progress.

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