

Spare Rib

INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST ZINE AT DARTMOUTH
VOLUME 1 | ISSUE 4 21X EDITION

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are you? pg. 28

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pg. 21

The Madonna-Whore
Complex and its origins
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and the personal realities of sexual assault

**PRESENTING
OUR SPECIAL
EDITION**

Anatomy of the Clitoris

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The Sex Edition



1992 spare rib mission statement:

“The dialogue here involves both men and women ... only when we can come together to recognize the distinct talents of Dartmouth women, as well as root out the conflicts that still lurk, that we can all share the community comfortably. The mythical Eve discovered and revered knowledge, and Spare Rib appreciates that small step of the first woman to educate herself and make space for herself in a world of men ... Spare Rib will recognize the achievements of women across the spectrum ... There is room here for creative works and investigative pieces; for art and sports stories as well as news; for humor and seriousness. We are multifaceted and multitalented, and [bringing] our talents together can only help us celebrate our difference and unite our strengths.”

2021 spare rib mission statement:

The *Spare Rib* newspaper was first published in 1992 to highlight women’s accomplishments and persisting problems in the two decades following co-education at Dartmouth. Unfortunately, the paper’s editorial staff and approach represented a narrow, one-dimensional slice of feminism, and the paper went out of print after only a few years. Twenty-five years later, our goal reflects a movement that has evolved considerably since 1995. We are re-establishing Spare Rib to discuss struggles, achievements, and history of people and places beyond the center, hindered (but not constrained) by racism, classism, sexism and further means of oppression, through analysis, humor, and critique. Our struggles deserve recognition, our perspectives deserve to be voiced, and our strengths deserve to be celebrated.

land acknowledgement

Today, many of the issues highlighted in the original Spare Rib publication persist. We have fought and will continue to fight battles for a more equitable and inclusive future by learning from the past. As we mentioned in our previous issues (and will continue to mention), Spare Rib itself was created by students at Dartmouth College, a school built on Abenaki land that to this day prospers off indigenous trauma.

editors' letter

When we brainstormed the theme for this term’s edition, we were still hunkered in the throes of uncertainty about COVID-19 and its lingering impacts. At the same time, we’d seen enough, heard enough, and read enough to know that we—students, the College, the world—would soon emerge, literally and figuratively.

Historical episodes of hardship, isolation, and loss have often preceded episodes of activity, liberation, and revelry. Moments of profound loss can herald moments of profound life. Our emergence from COVID-19 is no exception to this phenomenon: we’re finding our way back to family and back to friends, finding our way back to classrooms and back to gatherings.

One of the most striking realities of a post-COVID emergence has been the sudden proliferation of intimacy and touch that widespread vaccination has enabled. We may very well remember this summer as one of the long embraces, the interlaced fingers, the interlocked lips— and sex.

Our 21X theme of Sex has since evolved into a cornucopian collection of ideas, experiences, and discourses. As you’ll see, writing about sex about isn’t just writing about pleasure in bed; it’s also writing about psychoanalysis, porn, liberation, STIs, birth control, gender, sexual orientation, teacher-student portrayals, and sexual assault. The kaleidoscopic breadth of writing in our Sex Edition reflects what Spare Rib is all about: promoting intersectional discourse about topics pertinent to campus and society. The topic of sex has always been pertinent, but it has also suffered intense stigmatization, and as a result it has continually lacked the unflinching and honest scrutiny it deserves. By publishing this edition, we hope to contribute to the reversal of narrative and the upheaval of such stigmatization. We hope that as you flip through these pages, you’ll join the conversation, too.

the name “spare rib”

As written in the second chapter of Genesis, God took a rib from Adam, the first man, and from it fashioned Eve, the first woman, to serve as his companion. We propose a different origin story, in which **no one** is merely a piece of flesh, second-thought, servile, or spare.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in *Spare Rib* are those of individual authors and not necessarily reflective of the zine, writers, or staff as a whole, nor represented as wholly complete or correct information, nor intended to disparage any group or individual.

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HOT FOR TEACHER

by: Abigail Bordelon and Eliza Holmes

Art by: Ashley Xie



The portrayal of student-teacher relationships in fiction as *acceptable and desirable* needs to stop.

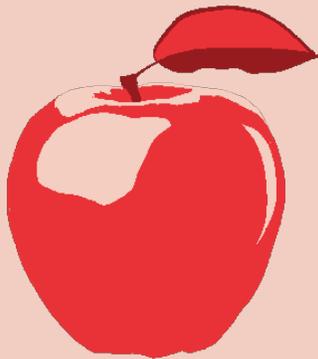
CW: discussion of sexual coercion and manipulation

You're sitting in your high school English class, waiting for the teacher to arrive. You're at a table in the back row, talking to your friends about what you all did over the summer.

Then, the teacher walks in.

He's a tall, well-built man. You notice his bright, expressive eyes as he scans the classroom looking at his students. As your eyes meet briefly, you feel your heart starting to beat faster. You blush and think to yourself, "He's kinda hot."

Maybe this has just happened to the two of us, but we don't think that's the case. The "hot for teacher" trope is present in many movies and TV shows we've seen throughout our lives. When we both were young, we can remember "shipping" Ezra and Aria — #Ezria — from the show *Pretty Little Liars*, but what we didn't realize was how horrible it was to want a predatory teacher and his student to end up together. Even now, rewatching the first episode of *Pretty Little Liars*, we find ourselves wanting Ezra and Aria to have a happy ending. I mean, he IS very attractive and sweet...wait, no! See, this is the issue with the portrayal of the hot for teacher trope in pop culture: we find ourselves in a perpetual contradiction, oscillating between discomfort from and support of student-teacher relationships.



Ultimately, this portrayal of student-teacher relationships is dangerous, as it romanticizes and normalizes the inappropriate aspects of such relationships. When young kids are exposed to these relationships in pop culture, they become desensitized to the possible danger of such situations. Because student-teacher relationships are so present in the media, young children may see these relationships as normal and start to imagine relationships with teachers. These crushes perhaps seem harmless at times, but they can morph into unsafe situations when teachers seek to abuse their power and take

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"These crushes perhaps seem harmless at times, but they can morph into unsafe situations when teachers seek to abuse their power and take advantage of students."
• • • • •

advantage of students. What is not addressed in Hollywood is how student-teacher relationships are often rooted in an imbalance of power dynamics, and if not addressed, may have serious consequences for developing healthy relationships going forward.

While Ezra and Aria's relationship in *Pretty Little Liars* is portrayed as blissfully romantic for the most part, this is not a realistic portrayal: student-teacher relationships are anything but. The Washington

Post revealed in a 2014 article that there were 781 cases that year of teachers in the United States convicted or accused of sexual relationships with students.¹ The Post article claims that the issue lies in social media and text messaging. "Nearly 80 percent of youth ages 12 to 17 own a cellphone, and 94 percent now have a Facebook account."² This makes unsupervised, inappropriate communication between students and teachers easier, which exacerbate the issue. This fact,

however, does not explain why the issue occurs in the first place. Why do teachers sexually assault their students and what factors contribute to putting students at such a high risk?

Teachers are already in an authoritative role over their students in a regular classroom setting. When a teacher wants to take advantage of students, they can use this power to their advantage and groom their students. Grooming is when a teacher makes a student feel spe-



cial, either by singling them out, buying them gifts, texting them, or showing any other form of unique affection.³ Their victims are oftentimes vulnerable and may not even know that they are being taken advantage of, partially due to the normalization of fictional student-teacher relationships.

For example, in 2008, Gabriel Huerta, a student of Bonita Vista High School, joined the school's band. Although new to the band, Huerta's teacher Jason Mangan-Magabilin, appointed him drum major the following year, a position usually given to more experienced seniors. In the following years, Mangan-Magabilin began to show Huerta even more special attention by giving Huerta his number and hugging him. He even began to give Huerta rides after school and invited him over to his house during Huerta's junior year. Huerta recalls that at the time he felt special and felt that Mangan-Magabilin would always be there for him, even in his darkest moments. Their relationship eventually became sexual during Huerta's senior year

of high school, and now looking back, Huerta feels he was robbed of many firsts, including his first kiss, boyfriend, and sexual encounter.⁴ While Huerta was led to believe his bond with Mangan-Magabilin was special, Mangan-Magabilin was using that bond to exploit Huerta and take advantage of him sexually. Huerta's story is unfortunately one among many.

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“[The student] feels he was robbed of many firsts, including his first kiss, first boyfriend, and first sexual encounter.”

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The portrayal of student-teacher relationships as acceptable and desirable in fiction needs to stop. If this idea is not as normalized in pop culture, maybe fewer teachers will take advantage of students. Teachers also need to be forcibly reminded that being in a position of power does not permit them to take advantage of their students. They do not get to use their power to manipulate students and take their autonomy away. We need to establish more definitive policies that set clear boundaries between students and teachers. We need to have more conversations as a society about how fictional couples such as Aria and Ezra proliferate misconceptions that romanticize student-teacher relationships. Hollywood needs to portray relationships in ways that do not normalize power imbalances. We need to better protect vulnerable students. We need to have some serious conversations about healthy relationships, and soon. 🍎

[1] Terry Abbott, "More Teachers are Having Sex with their Students," The Washington Post, Jan 20, 2015.

[2] Abbot, "Teachers having Sex."

[3] Kayla Jimenez, "Grooming is a Gateway to Sexual Abuse, But Schools Are Virtually Powerless to Stop it," Voice of San Diego, Jun 4, 2019.

[4] Jimenez, "Grooming is a Gateway."

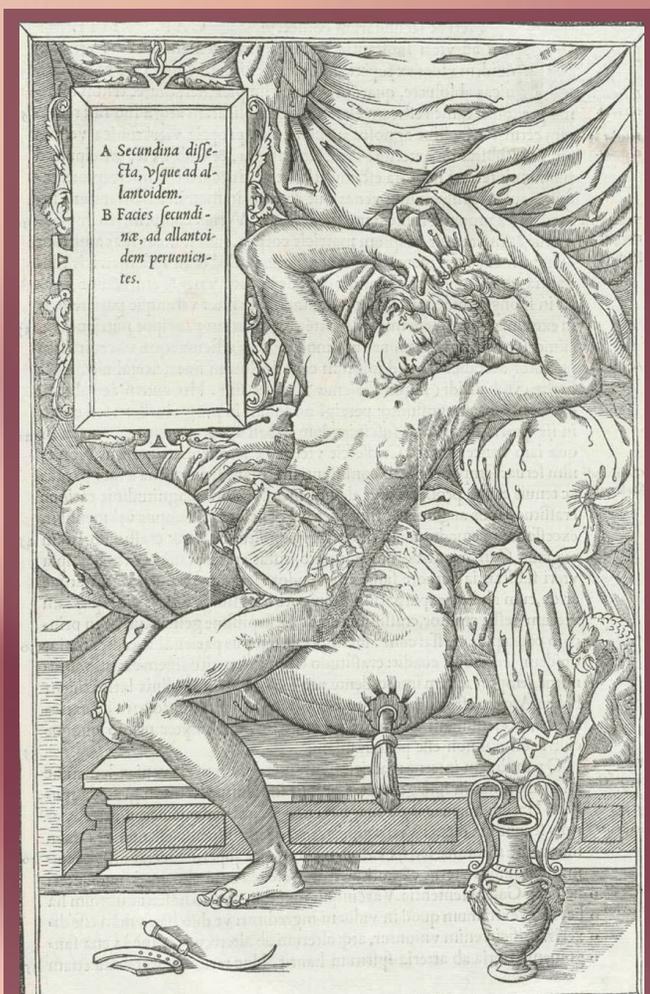


The clitoris was dissected for the first time in 1545 by Charles Estienne, who proclaimed that its only purpose was urination.[1] I'll be honest with you: for far too long, I thought he was right. And frankly, I don't blame myself. But the fact that my younger self knew just as much as a physician from the 16th century is worrisome. In sex education, the clitoris is barely mentioned. In the 1947 edition of Gray's Anatomy, a seminal medical text, the clitoris was erased by the editor.[2]

When he discovered it, Estienne named this brand new organ "the shameful member." [3] Many texts reference the clitoris as a failure of a penis, perhaps inverted or simply a "poor homologue." [4]

[5] Freud's claim that an orgasm reached by clitoral stimulation was "immature" became the widespread view of female sexuality. [6] Even today, the clitoris is viewed at best as unimportant and at worst as shameful. It's not hard to guess why: we now know that the sole purpose of the clitoris is not urination, it is orgasm. [7]

Female pleasure has never been a priority. Vaginal sex has always been seen as purely reproductive. We don't need to cum to reproduce, so why cum at all? As society moves towards sex-positivity, we're trying to equalize pleasure. But we've ignored the female orgasm for so long, it's become shrouded in myth, confusion, and shame. The problem may be complex, but the answer is simple: for most, orgasm requires stimulation of the clitoris. [8]



Source: Charles Estienne, www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historic-anatomies/estienne_home.html

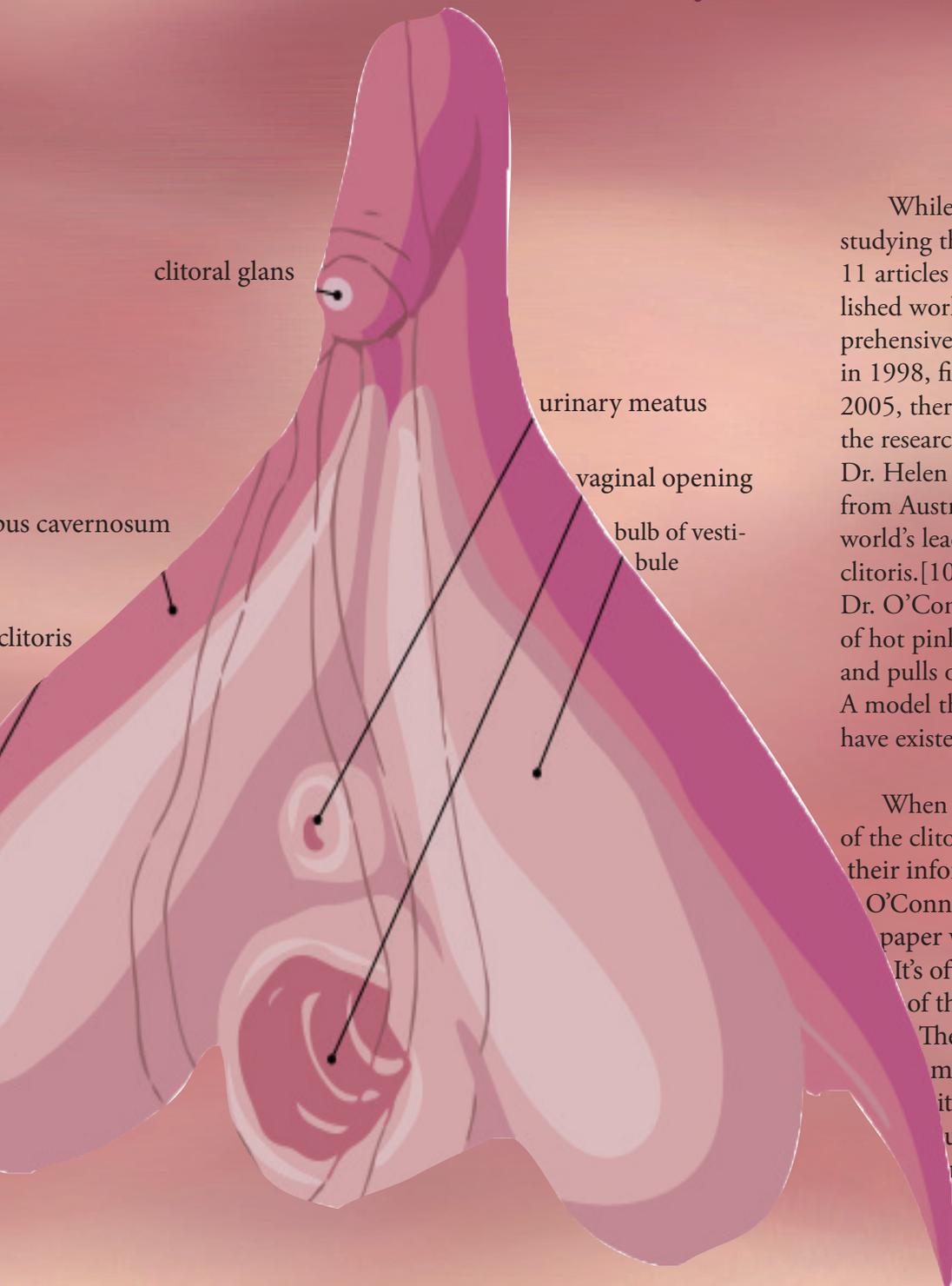
Female pleasure has never been a priority. Vaginal sex has always been seen as purely reproductive.

Spare Rib's first Sex Edition in 1993 published a half-page diagram of the vulva and clitoris. After all, how else would Dartmouth men learn where the clitoris is? Cluelessness about the clit is a good joke. I can relate: the learning curve is steep. Surely, some of this responsibility is on the partners of people with clits. If you are having sex with someone, it's the bare minimum to know the basics of how to satisfy them. But there is a systemic reason why people don't know where the clitoris is: for most of human history, no one cared to look for it.

The Clit,

Revisited

By: Anne Johnakin



While grand strides have been made in studying the clitoris, there have still only been 11 articles on its anatomical dissection published worldwide since 1947.[9] The first comprehensive study of the clitoris was published in 1998, five years after the first Sex Edition. In 2005, there was the first MRI study. Most of the research has been conducted by one woman, Dr. Helen O’Connell. A urologist and professor from Australia, O’Connell is thought of as the world’s leading scientist when it comes to the clitoris.[10] In her TEDx Talk, “Get Cliterate,” Dr. O’Connell smiles as she hoists a large box of hot pink 3D printed clitorises onto her lap, and pulls out one to show to the camera.[11] A model that without her scholarship wouldn’t have existed.

When Spare Rib published the diagram of the clitoris, they had no reason to suspect their information was only surface deep. Dr. O’Connell’s biggest finding in her 1998 paper was just how big the clitoris really is. It’s often described as a little nub, but 90% of the clitoris lies below the surface.[12] The glans clitoris is a wishbone shape made out of erectile tissue, meaning it gets larger with arousal. It is made up of 8,000 nerve endings, two times more than that of the penis.[13]

The clitoris is made up of three parts: the glans, the crura, and the bulbs. Rather than a distinct organ, the clitoris is more connected to the urethra and vagina than we previously thought. Its neurovascular system is complex and wide-reaching.[14]

Dr. O’Connell was propelled into the field because the medical textbooks she used in school devoted many pages to the anatomy of the penis, but only one to the clitoris.[15] Even today, OB GYNs do not learn the full extent of the clitoris’s nerves and vasculature.[16] A striking omission from OB GYN textbooks is the dorsal nerve, which supplies the thousands of nerve endings to make the clitoris so sensitive. A comprehensive study of the clitoris prevents damage of these nerves during surgery.[17]

Learning more about the clitoris also has a real effect on pleasure.

We now know that “vaginal orgasms” are not “mature” as Freud asserted, but simply mythical.[18] Recent studies suggest that what we think of as the G-spot in the vaginal canal is actually the internal structure of the clitoris.[19] Debate about this subject continues, but we



can be sure that the vagina and clitoris are not two distinct organs, and a holistic approach in both study and pleasure is worthwhile.

Dr. O’Connell concludes her paper “The Anatomy of the Clitoris” with: “The tale of the clitoris is a parable of culture, of how the body is forged into a shape valuable to civilization despite and not because of itself.” Scientists like Dr. O’Connell are doing incredible work, but it doesn’t change the fact that they are playing hundreds of years of catch-up. All bodies deserve the same care and treatment, and we should ask more than the historical record of minimizing clitoral orgasms and inventing biology to justify it. 🍎

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THIS IS NOT A SEX PLAYLIST (21XXX)



*Curated by: Abby Burrows,
Jen Capriola, Elaine Mei*

*Art by: Isabel Burke (@the-
flightlessartist).*

This is not a sex playlist; this is a playlist about sex. Lucky for us, there's no one way to write a song about "it." Like sex itself, the sonic landscape of this playlist is varied in tempo, in rhythm, dynamics, duration. Everyone's personal sex discography is varied, incongruous at times, and ever-evolving — our collection of songs will be no different.

The sex of Fiona Apple's "I Want You to Love Me" is obsessive and desperate as she demands that simple yet elusive thing — love. While Apple's plea is as unrequited as her love, Danny Brown's "I Will" and Doja Cat's "Go to Town" form a conversation about sex that is reciprocal: there is pleasure in giving as well as receiving. "Montero" is maybe the most complex conversation of all: a conversation within himself. For Lil Nas X, the interplay of queerness, masculinity, Blackness, and religion manifests in a relationship with sex that is equally as fraught as it is liberating.

The artistry contained in these songs reflects the idea that sex itself is a creative process — as an invitation for individuals and partners to reimagine pleasure as a space where the rules and regulations enforced by the outside world no longer apply.

So what do we do with this imagination, if our vocabulary around sex is so often inherited through violence and trauma? Maybe these artists can offer some solutions through lyrics that rewrites sex as ours: as messy, as awkward, as loving, as demeaning, as passionate, as outrageous, as lonely, as empowering, as all of the above. 🍎

Lyrics that rewrite sex as ours.

clouds

By: Anonymous
Art by: Sophie Williams

the way the cloud looked in the sky
floating like a gentle hand with fingers extending
to rub the back of my neck
the way your eyes met mine
a perfectly matched exhale
it reminded me of the crows that flew by my window,
a spiraling staircase of wings meeting the ground—
softly,
like a gentle kiss
or quietly
like the hum of pretty streetlights I listen to before I sleep.
trivial as though they are,
I hope they know I think they are wonderful
and that they can trust that the glow in my eyes
will not fade when the sun comes up
and will still be there to greet them
the moment the sun taps my mother's shoulder

birds land so elegantly
gently
a red one in the field reminds me of the cloud I saw that day,
the one that resembled a gentle hand
the fingers I'm envisioning are the only ones I've held long
enough
to know what floating feels like

and it's awfully strange
how floating and sinking
have the same type of wings
I wonder if birds know the distinction,
or if they want to be taken by the wind
as I do by your touch
as I do by the soft ridges of your warm hand
the man I saw stroking my neck,
he had fingers that resembled serrated feathers—
a pair of lips that taught me to acclimate to poison,
eyes that told me my wings were beautiful
when they looked the most free

the cloud was so far away
but the distance made me feel closer to you,
like the wind was wrapped around us both—
tightly as your set of arms
the night you showed me the way love bled

it went like this
like the legs wrapped around you never let go of your
chest
like the sheathed presents I gave and gave to you
never went unwrapped
like you never made my eyes flood with wood
splinters
as a roaring river would in its rage,
when told a drought would make her bare
and dull any semblance of grief
to make those narrow streams run dry

no, it would never stop flowing
knowing all the love I gave
would never be held tenderly
like the gift it was supposed to be
that my wrapping paper never prompted you enough
to unravel me
like I didn't belong to something distant,
and I wouldn't be carried away by the wind
that you claimed would always keep us together

the soft light illuminated the edges
it was soft, but intense
like the rims of your eyes when you held me
like the finch in your cheek when you told me
that broken birds don't fly

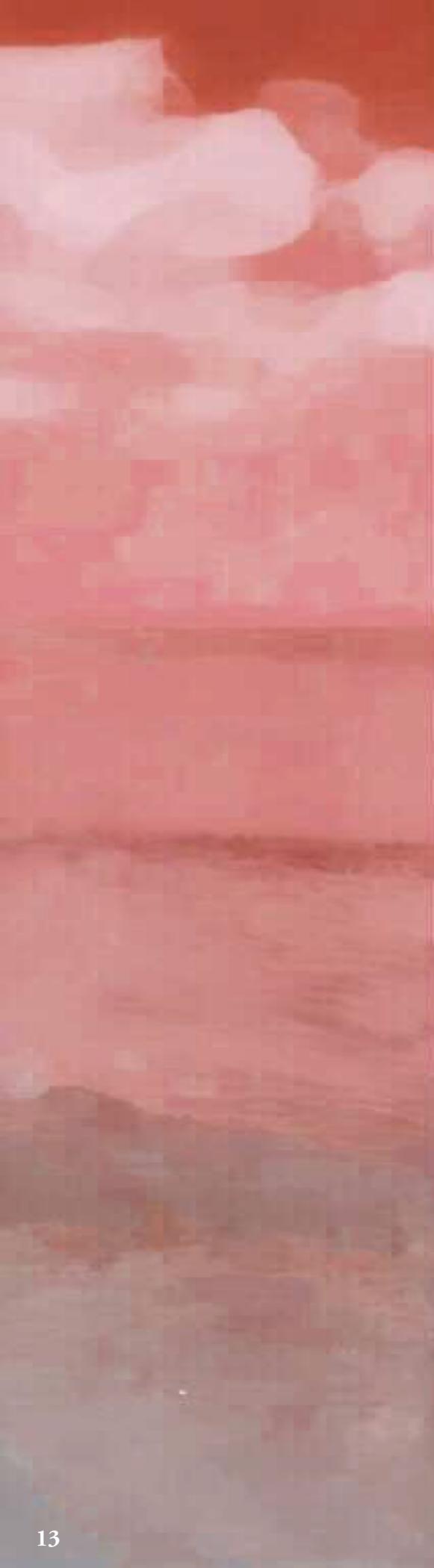


gentle but distant, I am only at your edges in thought
but the way your arms wrap me up
sweetly
softly
gently like the clouds I see
they are dispersing and I don't know which one is you
and sometimes I ask for rain
so a plethora of clouds can hover above me
and I can pretend that other faces in the sky
could swallow me tenderly as you do
you tell me stars are beautiful,
that you can see the reflection in my eyes when you're above me
hovering like that cloud I'm trying to find
you like to hide from the lights you see in my edges
I am a dusty attic that lets too much light in
I am more than your eyes can bear in my eternal semi-darkness
when you're pretending to sleep

I never thought that something so pure
so selfless
as starlight
could burn your fingers

the birds that flew by us whispered that *love doesn't entail flight*
but as I watch the clouds gather, I see more and more faces
and the crowd consumes me
so unlike the way you swept me away
you are the sea and the clouds all wrapped in one
your turbulence rocks me back and forth
and I mistake these waves for a deep love
they roll inside me with a gentle force
and when they crash I can feel them washing me
cleansing me
healing me





I know your ocean will never be deep enough to hold all of me
your arms limp branches that sway in the wind
you say my breeze is one you cannot handle
that a dandelion kiss would knock you to the ground,
as the wind would to a broken bird like me

there I would lay, patient
breathing
breathing for you
breathing for both of us
until our breaths are one
and my eyes remind you of something deep,
like an ocean
you've always been scared to go beneath

you say it's suffocating to be in love
but you keep me in your waters
close to the edge, by the shore
you could rescue me if you wanted
but you tend to keep me where the waves are breaking
I've learned to like breaking as the waves do,
and after a while, this back and forth dance feels like you're rocking me
gently,
as if you love me
hesitant—
as if you're afraid
but you twirl me about anyway,
your limp branches coiling my calloused fingers
and each time I come up for a breath
you're there to meet me
the deepness of your eyes brings me further into your depths
so I'm no longer in the shallows
and the water turns red, just like the way you taught me
how love is supposed to bleed

this is what it feels like to drown sweetly

now i'm looking up to the sun that hovers above your
surface
the way the ripples distort its shine reminds me of
something broken,
but beautiful
and I think of your love
and a body that was deep inside me, too
perhaps I hold you in an ocean of my own
but I'll never know the depths you sink to
and you can't be too far below the surface
for I would never let you drown
my water, it would be blue just for you
I would hold you above the surface with hands you say
scathe you
you twist starlight into something tangible,
or sickly
like red water that tries to seep into my sea
my love is warm but your water scathes my skin
with anything but the softness of stars
whose light you claim incites fire

the water you gave me
I'm learning to let it run over me
through me
like those pretty colors you showed me
that came in all sorts of shapes and sizes
you say you will only find in someone else

and my heart burns from the furnace you wept into
but I'm told that love can do that
and with greater depth there is more complexity
confusion
and sometimes you might need to
hold your breath before you surface,
to breathe as a lover would

you should feel the water filling up your nose,
so deeply it becomes you

and now I am your ocean
but I am still such a small part
I watch the fish around me and realize that they are in deep,
too
and you say I'm special
but I begin to wonder
what separates me from all of these other fish
these beautiful things
that have colors and shapes of all sorts
that you will never see in me

I tell you my ocean is deep enough to hold you
but you will never go beyond my surface
you tell me the turbulence of my waves is too intense
and yet I'm the only who is scraped by the sand
so I lessen my force for you
I can no longer dance when my waves are not rolling
I become a fragile lake,
a body of water that could never hurt you—
but has the capacity to eat away at a person
who lessens their depths for someone else

I suppose I would like to be a cloud
like the one I saw that reminded me of you
its edges are soft but its body is powerful,
like a bird determined to fly
even when its feathers are plucked off

it all just makes me wonder
whether drifting away as a cloud,
or taking flight as a crow would
from a love that could hurt me
is a better way to love
than drowning sweetly
in the depths of an ocean
I am sure to get lost in 🍏

DECEPTIVE

By: Caroline Balick



Art by: Kaitlyn Anderson

PERFECTIONS

TW: Sexual Assault, Coercion

I COULDN'T HELP BUT STARE AT HIM. He wasn't hot or handsome; he was beautiful. His cunning smile, thick hair, and broad shoulders were a recipe for disaster. When he spoke, he emulated confidence with a touch of cockiness. He wasn't loud or disruptive; he let his strong presence speak for him. Something about his shyness intrigued me; I wanted to get to know him, to understand him. Like every other man I had been interested in, I was certain he would ignore me. But he didn't.

He seemed to have endless positive qualities. I knew he was intelligent — we were both at computer science summer camp. During our first conversation, I asked him what his favorite type of music was, certain his answer would mirror that of the other teenage boys I knew from home. Instead, he named old school artists: The Beatles, Michael Jackson, NAS. Every guy I knew from home only cared about video games and partying. But he was curious about his surroundings. He wanted to understand how the world worked and deeply cared about social issues. I wondered if he could be more perfect.

That first conversation lasted five hours. I felt like I had always known him, like I had just discovered him. For him I didn't have to perform. He was everything I was looking for. But I wish it was actually possible to be flawless.

Of course, everyone has imperfections. I just wish I had known the extent of his faults and how they would end up harming me. My time with him was like a black hole: I didn't notice I was screwed until I was already in too deep.

At the time, my high school sex education covered the basics: using protection, STDs, and male and female sexual anatomy. We never covered the emotional intricacies of sex or how to navigate relationships. As a result, most of my knowledge on relationships came from the media, which consistently made them seem effortless. One classic example occurs in teen dramas, in which a couple makes out, followed by them suddenly lying naked in bed. How is any naive viewer possibly supposed to fill in what happens during the gap?

We were the same age when we met, but unlike him, I was unfamiliar with sexual relationships. I had never kissed a guy. Since I lacked so much knowledge, I heavily relied on his guidance. I gave him control, blissfully unaware of how he'd abuse this later on. During our initial encounters, he built up my trust. I asked him, "How would you react if a girl didn't want to do something with you, sex-

ually?" to which he replied, "That's her choice, of course. And I would respect that." His words lifted a weight off of my shoulders. I couldn't believe I found someone who both liked and respected me. I wish he actually meant it.

We took things slow during the first few months. For us, hooking up consisted of the same few activities that always left us feeling content. Eventually, however, he reached a point where this wasn't enough for him. He asked me to do more. I wasn't ready, but he was insistent. He kept the whole "I respect your choice" bullshit for a while, until he came to understand his needs were more important than mine. To gain leverage, he stopped touching me completely. "You won't do what I want, so I won't do what you want," he reasoned. Physical intimacy was currency to him. "Won't," he said, implying I chose not to. I never had a choice to begin with. I was hopelessly in love with him; I just wanted to make him happy. So I did.

He applied pressure onto my emotional weaknesses. He was fully aware that his happiness was my priority, that I would do anything for him, and that I didn't have any prior experience to assist my decision-making. He knew I hate disappointing people, especially those I love. For so long, partially because of him, I hated these aspects of myself. After giving every part of myself to others, I always ended up feeling broken. So why do it at all? After our relationship ended, I concluded it was best for me to not make myself vulnerable as a form of protection. Since then, I have reached compromise: I don't shut myself off completely, but I also don't expose every part of myself. Because of him, I still struggle to find this balance.



Sexual assault is not black and white; it is a gradient. Growing up, I equated sexual assault with the act of rape perpetuated by a stranger. Media and sex-ed have failed to teach youth about the different forms of sexual assault and their prevalence. Due to this, young people may dismiss forms of sexual assault other than rape because they seem less severe. However, these acts can be equally traumatizing for victims, and they occur often.

According to the 2015 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, approximately 1 in 6 women experience sexual coercion¹. Sadly, many who experience coercion never come to this realization. There is a fine line between having a mutual, healthy conversation with one's partner about experimentation in the bedroom and convincing someone to fulfill your desires at the other's expense. For months, I failed to comprehend this distinction and refused to accept what he did to me. His deceptive perfection as well as my lack of education on the extent of sexual assault shielded me from the possibility that it could happen to me.

Similar to sexual assault, consent is not clear-cut. I wish he and I comprehended this. Consent is not simply a verbal "yes" as opposed to a verbal "no." Consent is not screaming and kicking as opposed to begging for more. But yet again, this is what we are taught through media representation and sex-ed. He persuaded me to reluctantly agree, yet I thought this was consent because it was some form of "yes." But consent shouldn't take persistence or convincing; it should be an unequivocal, clear approval. Simple signals such as body language as well as facial

“Consent shouldn't take persistence or convincing; it should be an unequivocal, clear approval.”

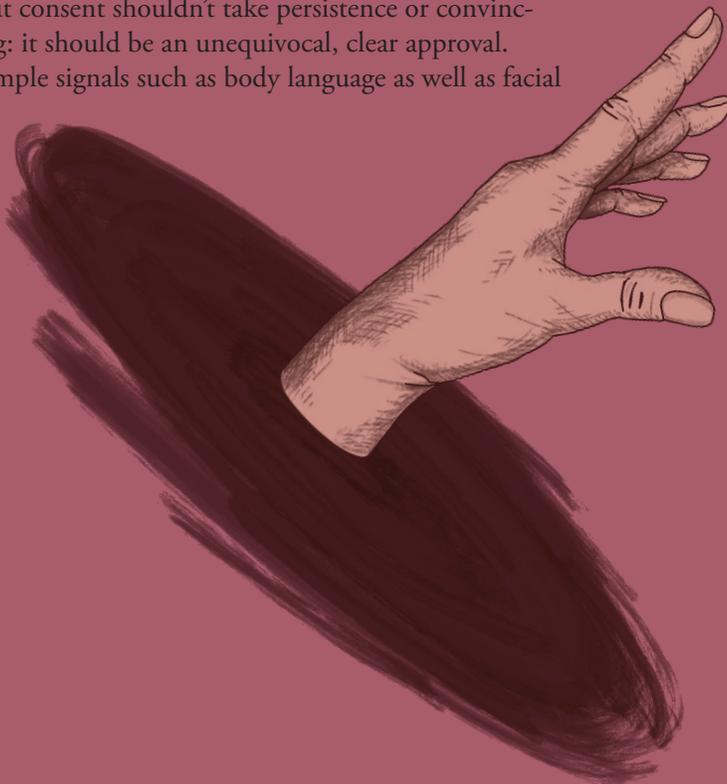
expressions give insight into one's excitement to take part in something. If someone is pulling away and clearly looks uncomfortable, that's a sign to stop. Just because someone doesn't say "no" doesn't mean they're implying "yes."

There is a dangerously false depiction of the stereotypical man who harms women. It is not only men who say they hate women who are capable of assault, but also those who claim to love and respect them. This is not to say that every man who claims to respect women is lying. However, every man, especially those that are cisgender, heterosexual, white, and of higher socioeconomic status, exist in a system of hegemonic masculinity that gives them power. All men know they hold this power: what differentiates them is their choice to exert it on women or not. Some always will, while some never will. But, there are other men who don't, but only until they reach their breaking point. These men are arguably the most dangerous because they deceive you into thinking they're safe.

My situation could have been avoided. Perhaps if he and I never met, this wouldn't have happened. But it might have happened to someone else. How many other girls have already experienced coercion, or other forms of assault? Reducing instances of assault can be accomplished by reforming America's sex education. It currently fails to teach students about the range of sexual assault, consent, and what a healthy relationship looks like. Even when these concepts are touched on, they are largely presented through a heteronormative lens. There must be a wider conversation about what healthy sex looks like for different types of people. Since the systems that provide men with power cannot be dismantled anytime soon, sex education must make men aware of the power they hold and their ability to use it negatively. Perhaps then, positive change can occur. 🍎

Works Cited

¹Sharon G. Smith et al., "National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2015 Data Brief - Updated Release" (national survey, Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018), 2.





Podcast Review:

birth control

Review by Sophie S. Williams.



HORMONAL: SEASON 2

Three Stars.

Hormonal is a podcast produced by Clue, the app “to track your period, and so much more.” And Season 2 is all about birth control.

A brief but good look into abortion, reproductive justice, sex, pregnancy, contraception, midwifery, and The Pill.

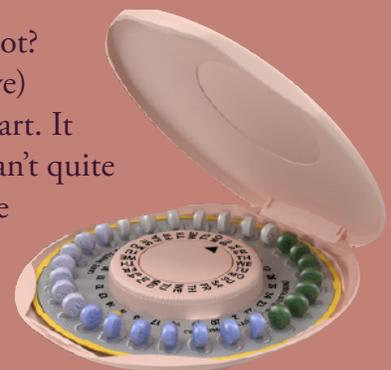
Like Season 1, Hormonal shares useful and often untold information, but suffers from awkward pacing and mixed messaging.

Episodes start with a new PSA — i.e., Clue recognizes that many women don't have periods and many non-women do, and asks listeners to bear with guests who use less accurate language — which is a nice, if slightly lackluster, improvement. I am always struck by the strangeness of using an irrelevant qualifier combined with a relevant description, e.g., “women and people with periods.” If you're going to say people with periods, why is it necessary to say women? I understand the intention, but still get a vaguely isolated feeling from this sort of language.

Hormonal: Season 2 is quite hit or miss. The half-hour episodes may feel short and disjointed to those accustomed to longer, more in-depth podcasts,

especially since the slow talking pace lends well to putting on 1.2x or 1.5x speed. Like the first season, Hormonal often changes the subject or ends the episode just as you are getting invested. This makes the slow-paced conversation and the repetitive intro, outro, interludes, and advertisements more prominent annoyances than they should be. The host is welcoming and delightful, but clearly not an expert, and the conversation pacing makes guests appear qualified but underutilized.

The first episode (Hot or Not? Birth Control and Sex Drive) is, in my opinion, a poor start. It annoyed me for reasons I can't quite place. Maybe it was that the guest, one of Clue's medical experts, advised listeners to track calorie intake





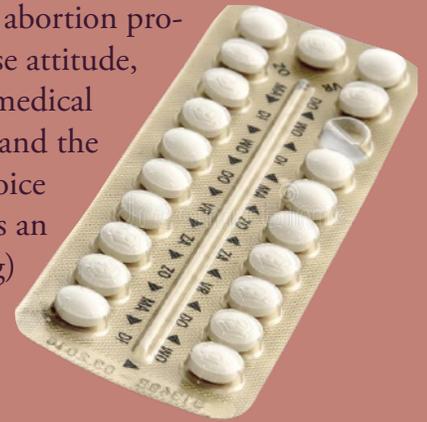
and weigh themselves if they felt they gained weight after starting The Pill (hormonal birth control), and gave no reason for potential weight gain besides “feeling depressed and eating more.” There was also no mention of the effects of changing cortisol and estrogen levels, or any other explanation. This is a fairly triggering, non-reassuring, and even medically misleading response. The Pill tricks the body into thinking it is pregnant; some weight gain may be expected and even healthy (See the book *Big Fat Lies* and many other resources), and shouldn’t always be positioned as the person’s responsibility to fear and prevent.



The fifth episode is also questionable, as the guest is a little too unapologetic when justifying the exploitation of women in occupied Puerto Rico in the process of development of the hormonal birth control pill. (He then refers to American slavery as, apparently, another example of a structure that was worth it in the name of progress, completely out of the blue. This suggestion is quite jarring and unprompted, and completely fucking arugable.) I appreciated the effort to re-cap The Pill’s tangled history, but the guest’s asides, inappropriate comparisons, and overall attitude dampened the listening experience significantly for me.

Despite these issues, the podcast has its gems. The sixth episode (*Bringing Sexy Back*) is excellent, fea-

turing two midwives from Germany and the United States respectively. They bring fresh, grounded insights on health care insufficiencies, birthing and infant-care, queer family structures, and profit-based medicine. The second episode (*The ABC: Abortion & Birth Control*) details abortion processes with a clear, concise attitude, reframing abortion in a medical rather than moral sense, and the fourth (*Reproductive choice & reproductive justice*) is an excellent (and infuriating) discussion on reproductive justice, and the lack of it.



Realizing I reached the final episode in this eight-part was a bit jarring, as I thought I’d have learned more. However, despite my whinging, *Hormonal* is worth a listen. It refreshed what I knew and piqued interest in what I did not, and I remember most of what I heard on the show — an impossible task with more highly detailed podcasts. It is a brief but good crash course on most things related to birth control, reproductive justice, sex, pregnancy, contraception, and The Pill, and the world would be a better place if everything discussed was general knowledge.

TL;DR — Clue is a wonderful and non-girl-boss period tracking app. Their podcast *Hormonal: Season 2* has an admirable goal of informing listeners about overlooked health topics that affect everyone with a body. It needs to work on pacing. 🍏

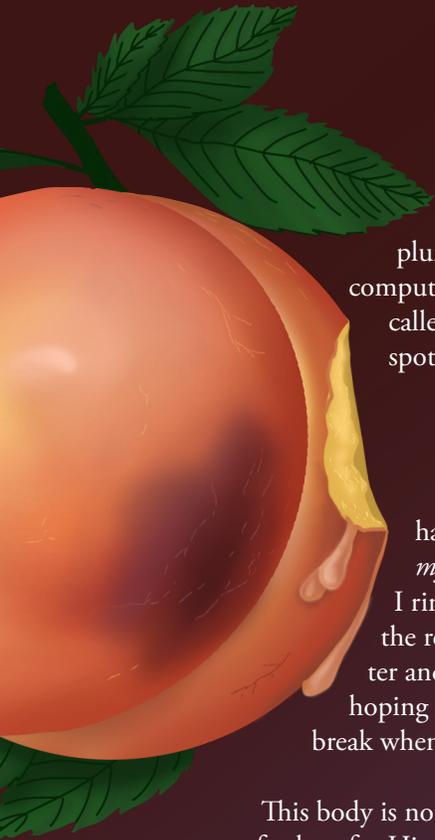
FAVORITE EPISODES: “The ABC: Abortion & Birth Control,” “Reproductive choice & reproductive justice,” “Bringing Sexy Back”



Devolve, then Disavow

By: Anonymous

Art By: Kaitlyn Anderson



I tried to imagine the taste of her skin in his mouth, him biting into a ripe plum. A thing to take and eat whole, so he did. Moments then minutes of Blackness on my computer screen. My face mirrored back at me. A warm but primal feeling between legs that I called mine. *No, no, no.* Pleasure is a sin reserved for those unbruised by Blackened spoiled spots — a consequence of being dropped to the viscid kitchen floor. I shut my laptop.

I've devolved many times since then.

Blue moonlight envelops me just as hundreds of moons had done before. I lift my hand from between the valley and examine the self-inflicted desecration. *This hand is not my hand this body is not my body. Where has my body gone?* I lug myself to the room where I rinse away my sins, praying that no congregant had witnessed my transgression. I avoid the reflection in the mirror who wears my face. I scrub my hands red and raw with holy water and watch the misdeed flow down the drain. I go back to bed and sink into my comforter, hoping shame will swallow me whole. Penance. I pray that He-who-sees-all was on a cigarette break when I had succumbed to temptation.

This body is not my body. I cannot find myself. It's too Black and bruised for me to see. I wish I was a soft plum for Him to gut. How else can I be of service? I cannot bear to look down there, but please, do your worst. Scoop out everything while I am still ripe. Syrupy red gore dripping down your fingers. Peel this skin off of me, stain your lips with sickly sweetness, douse your tongue with desire, drop me to the ground and bruise me Black, but please, for the love of God, do not force me to survive in this sinful skin any longer.

With each relapse I fall further from the tree from which I was bore. Forgive me, Father. 🍑





Pleasure is a Rebellion:

Ruminations for Healing

By: Kim Artham '23

The first woman I talked to openly about sex was my freshman year roommate, Mellie. In my eyes she was a liberated woman in every way and I really admired the way she tore up the social pressures put on women. One night when we were supposed to be working on chemistry problems, our discussion inevitably turned to more exciting topics. She winked at me when I mentioned the person I was seeing, “- So last night did you... Ya know?” I shook my head with a grimace, “No, well I mean, obviously we wanted to, but... I just couldn’t.”

“Well, why not?” she asked point blank. I didn’t have a good answer. I didn’t believe in virginity (as if dick* could define something as powerful as a woman!). I wasn’t especially scared of pain because it’s a common experience for many women. It’s not like anyone would find out now that I was so far away from home. Although sex seemed super vulnerable, I did want to do it and I was starting to feel pretty comfortable with my partner too...

But something was stopping me. Like an actual mental block. If anyone else had been discussing their concerns with losing their virginity, I would have given them the same advice: if you’re comfortable and ready, you should have fun! But I felt like that didn’t apply to me. Sex as an abstract concept, I could handle. But everytime I thought about actually having sex as a real possibility, I cringed.

My partner at the time wasn’t in a rush to do the deed so I hadn’t felt any pressure to sort out these feelings. But after talking to Mellie, I really started to question why I felt this way as a sex-positive feminist. I thought about my Christian upbringing and what it meant to be a woman of color, simultaneously sexualized by society and restricted by my culture. I thought about my feminist awakening, my desire for sexual liberation, and why I couldn’t act on it. And honestly, I’d been afraid to open that can of worms for way too long.

But I did. And eventually, I worked through things until I could actually start experimenting with pleasure. And I’m writing this to tell you, you beautifully confused human being, that I crossed the bridge and didn’t burn up. Or whatever I thought would happen.

Sexual liberation isn’t everything, nor should it be treated that way. But for the many of us who have grown up in an extremely sex-negative environment, I think having sex and getting to know our bodies in general can be very freeing (if that’s what you want!). You’re not alone in how you feel. And this, this is me handing you a can opener. Open that bitch and set the worms free.

YOUR BODY IS YOURS

About taking care of your body, loving your body, seeing pleasure as something you deserve, a birthright

For so long, I imagined the space between my legs as a black void
Not to be touched or even, really, wondered about
Beyond the passing discomfort of discharge
My understanding of my vagina was
A dark wetness, a notion of potential
That I did not seem to own.

Then there came a day when I realized I had never seen it
My own vagina
A whole part of my body
For eighteen years I stared at the showerhead when I cleaned it
Squeezed my eyes shut when inserting tampons
I never thought twice about why.

I heard some cry the first time they see it,
Stendhal's without
Michaelangelo.
And the curiosity of that, I couldn't resist.
I spread myself in front of a mirror
Hesitantly I pull apart the flaps and peer inside
To find confusing layers of pinkish-grey flesh,
Jutting ridges,
And, of course, something akin to
Depth.

Suddenly my eyes scale out and I see my whole
body
And with this vulnerable context, I feel awash with
a shame
And then anger because why should I feel anything
But relief for finally knowing all of myself?
My vagina is a physical legacy of my foremothers
It is powerful, a symbol of strength, of pleasure.

That day I looked into myself, I didn't dare to touch
Touch was something that occurred only half-asleep
When the guilt of the act could be swept into a dream.
Masturbating feels so different from
Moisturizing skin or brushing out hair
Or wrapping yourself in a warm scarf,
But touching yourself is also
Taking care of the vessel that holds your soul,
A form of self care



For many women, pleasure feels selfish
But who does that serve?
Certainly not not me or you...
The patriarchy swells when women put
others above themselves
It laughs because it knows
Pleasure is our birthright
Why else would God put 8,000 nerve
endings in the clitoris?

Your body is yours.
It exists to care for you
And for you to care for it.
It is yours to reclaim.

Out of this, I started to see my pleasure as a rebellion
As a way of breaking a generational cycle
Of saying no by moaning yes
I took one end of the strings knotted within me
And begun the long process of untangling
I lit a shitty, melon-scented candle
Filled a tub with hot water
And romanced myself into acceptance.

YOUR SHAME IS NOT AN HEIRLOOM

Digging deeper into inherited shame, guilt, stigmas and why you feel them

My depiction of my body was cultivated
By a diet of microaggressions and cultural protocol
A playbook, if you will
Of how to stay safe, and more importantly, valuable
From years of training, I learned this central tenant:
Feeling good was not something good girls did

And then there was this idea I had
That in my culture, nobody had sex for anything
But reproduction
I was never told this, it just seemed self-evident
That I was destined to be a mother
And that sex was only for fulfilling that prophecy

One night my mind wandered to
Arched backs and pressed lips, forbidden entrance
And then, suddenly
The white purity of my baptism ripped through the image
I saw myself standing at the Virgin Grotto
Stuffing flowers into cracks in the mosaic
My mother praying for my virginity, that American fool-
ishness wouldn't
Warp the ideals she'd raised me with
I jerked under the sheets, unsettled

The hymen is treated like a freshness seal.
We're taught that women are simply made
To be consumed
That it is only right to save ourselves
Because what we have to offer
Is something that can be used.
And the fact that this doesn't apply to men
Tells us that only we can become worthless.

When our worth is tied to our bodies,
We protect our body to protect our worth
And immigrant women in particular
Stop seeing their bodies as their own, but rather
The embodiment of our family's honor
Because immigrants are collectivists
We own each other, and somehow nothing at all.

Feminist calls to come into our being, embrace our
bodies,
Accept pleasure
Simultaneously make sense and breed anxiety
Because what if the feminists were wrong?
What if one decision could
Change everything?

And these are the chains of lace
They use to anchor you to the ground,
The fear that there is something valuable to lose
Rather than everything to gain
In embracing yourself as a sexual being
My world controls women by telling us
Our value is not ours to decide

Even after realizing this, I can't couldn't let go
I wished I could fuck myself
With the same finger I wore my promise ring on
Without the shame
Despite seeing virginity as a construct
I continued to carry the oppression of my ancestors
But I desperately wanted to be free of it.



**“My apprehension became baseless.
Just because you’ve inherited this guilt
Doesn’t mean you have to keep it
Your shame is not an heirloom.”**



Art by: Kaitlyn Anderson

Then I met a woman who was
The embodiment of everything taboo in our culture
A tattoo across her ribs reading “samskara”
Juul pen between her lips,
She spoke of sorority parties,
birth control, and dicks
And temple in the same breath.
I didn't know that people like her existed
I didn't know we had a choice to color outside the lines
and not abandon our heritage in the process.

And then my sister found condoms in our parents' bedroom
drawer
My understanding of acceptable warped and morphed
Into something unrecognizable,
My apprehension became baseless.
Just because you've inherited this guilt
Doesn't mean you have to keep it
Your shame is not an heirloom.

I've started thinking of this shame as
The ugly wrapping paper on the gift of my womanhood
Something to be carefully opened, acknowledged
And completely my choice to recycle or throw out
If I should have a daughter,
I would like to wrap this gift in glittery confidence
So she never has to doubt if the contents are truly a blessing.
Besides, receiving is not really about the packaging.

PLEASURE IS A REBELLION

Somewhere along the way
I decided I was going to be the cycle breaker
Me
The rule follower, the straight-A student
Was going to do all the forbidden things I desired
And very well be the first woman in my family to
step out of line.

Rebellion started small
I spent my paycheck on lingerie
I started exploring with my partner
My friends and I swapped vibrator recommendations
I watched myself cum in the mirror and told myself
I deserved to feel good

This rebellion is not about my ancestors
or my culture or my religion
It is about realizing I have real choices, not picking between
Being selfish or being submissive
It is about seeing myself as so much more than
Where I've come from
It is about changing the parts of my narrative
I thought were written in permanent ink
It is about hearing my voice for the first time
And thinking, *maybe I can be free.* 🍎

Why I Can't Watch Lesbian Porn

By: Anonymous
Art by: Sophie Williams

(As a Lesbian Woman)

Dear Pornhub:

it's not me, it's you.

MOST VIEWED CATEGORIES



Disclaimer/Note:

For the purpose of this article, I'm defining porn that "works" for me as anything that usually gets me to orgasm. I totally believe that orgasms are not the goal or point of sex, and we should absolutely decenter it in our conversations—but still. It's kind of dope.

According to Pornhub’s annual reports, lesbian porn consistently tops the list of most popular porn genres every year, especially for women. But listen—here’s my dirty little secret. As a lesbian woman, I’ve never been able to watch it. Enjoy it, I mean. There’s no shortage of possible explanations: internalized misogyny, internalized homophobia, an inability to watch any porn that I could even remotely imagine myself in—you name it. But to give you a fuller picture, it feels important that I share a little bit about me. I’m a cisgender woman who identifies as lesbian and/or queer, and I don’t have a preference for feminine or masculine partners. I’ve never had sex with a man and I don’t really plan on it, ever. In fact I couldn’t think of anything worse. And yet, lesbian porn has never “worked” for me the way it should.

Perhaps looking at Pornhub’s viewership data will help us put things in perspective. Pornhub’s 2019 Year in Review¹ includes a handy little map depicting the most popular porn genres by country. From the map, we can see that lesbian porn is the most popular genre in most of the Americas, Australia, and Northern Europe. But as much as I love seeing the word “LESBIAN” sprawled over the entirety of North America, it’s also slightly terrifying that so many people are getting off to lesbian porn—very possibly

“But we are real human bodies, playing out desire in the real world—not the Valley, not Hollywood, not fiction.”

more than the amount of queer people who even *live* in North America. Which means there’s no doubt that some—and probably most—of lesbian porn’s viewers are straight. To some extent, the reverse is true as well: In 2015, the indie magazine *Autostraddle* conducted a survey² of over 8,500 queer women, finding that 54% of bisexual women and 41% of lesbian women watch straight porn. And this isn’t because mainstream sites like Pornhub don’t offer enough lesbian content—clearly, people are demanding it. See above. Is it puzzling to you? Maybe it shouldn’t be. Though it sounds unintuitive at first, the fact that our porn fantasies often differ from our real life fantasies actually isn’t too big of a stretch. (No pun intended.)

After all, porn was never meant to accurately reflect our real life desires. Sex in porn is not meant to *feel* good; it’s meant to *look* good. But we are real human bodies, playing out desire in the real world—not the Valley, not Hollywood, not fiction. Contrary to lesbian porn’s depiction of queer sex, scissoring is fucking hard. And nails can hurt. And we don’t all look like Mila Kunis. Contrary to what straight porn would have you believe, only 20% of people with vaginas can orgasm from penetration alone. And oral isn’t just foreplay. And spending ten seconds on someone’s clit just won’t cut it.

So maybe it isn’t my fault that titles like “BUSTY Lesbian DOMINATES Hot Straight Friend With MASSIVE Strap On!!”³ don’t make me feel all warm down under. “Lesbian” porn, particularly the kind produced by the largest porn companies, is not created with queer people in mind, and it certainly isn’t



reference credit:
innocenttaboo

an accurate representation of what sex between two non-male people looks or feels like. Maybe that's the reason why straight porn tends to work for me in the same way lesbian porn often doesn't. Because straight porn never claimed me as its audience, and indulging in it feels a little scandalous, deliciously hypocritical. On the other hand, watching "lesbian" porn feels like indulging in a fantasy that should be mine but never was.

All this isn't to say that lesbian porn is bad, or that no queer person should watch lesbian porn, or that my reasons are the same reasons for other queer folks who are also unable to watch lesbian porn. All this is only to say that the porn industry needs to do better. In some ways, it already is: as alternatives to traditional porn, we're now offered more options for feminist and ethical porn that pays workers fairly and treats performers with respect. But regardless of our sexuality, we should all remain critical about what our viewership habits might be programming us to desire.



Porn may not always reflect our real life fantasies, but overexposure to content that espouses gender-based violence, imperialist ideas of dominance, and racialized power dynamics could eventually seep into our own sex lives if we're not vigilant.

So this is my declaration that I'm no longer accepting scenarios that are simply "good enough," or only approximating what I really want. If that means watching no porn, then so be it. This is also a collective declaration that we all deserve the kind of pleasure we can say an ecstatic yes to. And none of us should settle for anything less. 🍎

Footnotes:

1. "2019 Year in Review," Pornhub Insights, <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2019-year-in-review>.
2. "87% of Queer Women Are Into Porn or Erotica, But Not All Of It Is Lesbianic," Autostraddle, June 18, 2015, <https://www.autostraddle.com/87-of-queer-women-are-into-porn-smut-and-or-erotica-285552/>.
3. Hayley Macmillen, "An Awful Lot of People Are Watching a Lot of Awful 'Lesbian' Porn," Out, December 14, 2018, <https://www.out.com/entertainment/2018/12/14/awful-lot-people-are-watching-lot-awful-lesbian-porn>

Which of the Dartmouth 7 are you?

By: Sophie Williams
Art by: Cammy Lee

Pick a euphemistic-genital-esque object-fruit-in-a-Bustle-health-article.

- A. Lemon
- B. Banana
- C. Pear
- D. Clementine
- E. Papaya
- F. Cucumber
- G. Strawberry

Guiltiest pleasure?

- A. YA fiction and fan-fiction.
- B. Drama, gossip, slander, rumors, and scandals.
- C. 90's country.
- D. Long Island Medium (or other art forms of the genre).
- E. Lorry Hill's Celebrity Plastic Surgery Analysis Videos.
- F. Boy bands.
- G. Personality quizzes ;)

There's been a sighting of your favorite cryptid!

- A. Nessie, the Monster of Loch Ness.
- B. Sasquatch, Bigfoot, Squonk.
- C. The Kraken.
- D. Chupacabra.
- E. Mokele-Mbembe.
- F. Bat Boy.
- G. Michigan Dogman

Ideal place for your sexual debut:

- A. Nowhere
- B. Literally anywhere
- C. House party from an 80's film
- D. The Iron Throne
- E. Your bed
- F. Broadway catwalk
- G. A fairy ring and you're high

Choose a kink

- A. Domination.
- B. Inflation.
- C. Voyeurism.
- D. Cuckolding.
- E. Scene play.
- F. Bondage.
- G. Furry.

Which keeps you chronically online?

- A. Reddit.
- B. Instagram.
- C. Snapchat.
- D. Linked-In.
- E. Facebook.
- F. YouTube.
- G. Twitter.

Favorite club sport?

- A. Figure skating.
- B. Ultimate Frisbee.
- C. Powerlifting.
- D. Badminton.
- E. Water polo.
- F. Swim.
- G. Men's rugby.

Worst showy color name?

- A. Tiffany Blue.
- B. Chartreuse.
- C. Bastard-Amber.
- D. Coquelicot.
- E. Teal.
- F. Lusty Gallant.
- G. Glaucons.

Do a chore

- A. Dusting.
- B. Walking the dog.
- C. Cutting the grass.
- D. Homework.
- E. Cooking.
- F. Laundry.
- G. Organizing.

Pick your crush style

- A. Pining from afar.
- B. Many crushes of varying degrees.
- C. Crush at first sight.
- D. Crush to marry.
- E. Desperate.
- F. Crush once, crush forever.
- G. Love em and leave em.

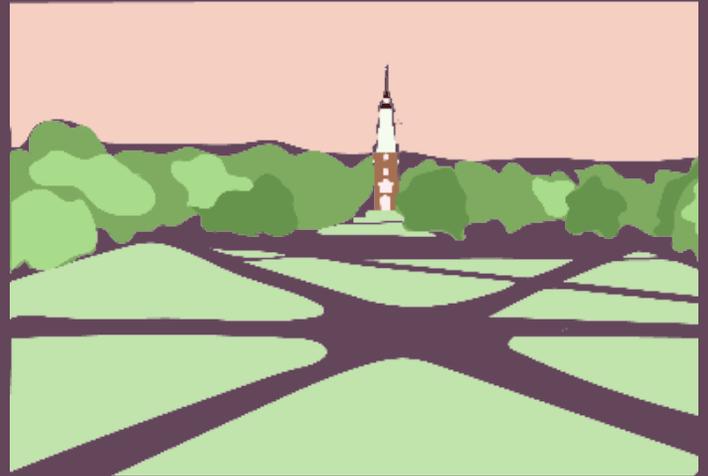
Does masturbating count as sex?

- A. Yes, I am my own person.
- B. No, that's just self care.
- C. No, it should be a team effort.
- D. No comment.
- E. Yes, but you can't do the 7 that way...
- F. Yes, and you can.
- G. If you do it together?



Mostly A's: THE STACKS

You like to be involved in the center. You often feel that you're too chatty or too quiet, but relax — people like hearing you talk whenever you do. You can get a little too into your period drama readings, iykwim.



Mostly B's: THE GREEN

You're honest and trusting and get along well with a lot of people. This makes you great to work with and easy to doublecross. You're cute. You probably thought that you won the midnight snowball fight.



Mostly C's: THE FIFTY YARD LINE

You have a strong smile. You're devoted to your obligations, sometimes at the expense of yourself and others. You sometimes let yourself down by feeling out of place, but it's okay — you're more smart and capable than you think.



Mostly D's: PRESIDENTIAL LAWN

You can be a little self-important, but don't think for one second that means you're stuffy. You're an impulsive risk-taker — and yet, you've probably had a fifty-year plan since elementary. You already knew the Baker-Berry clock face was lavender. (Nerd.)



Mostly E's: STEPS OF DARTMOUTH HALL

You're going places, but maybe not the places that you expect — keep confident in your ability to adapt and thrive. You're impatient, but often late (although you're trying to overcome it, with varying levels of success). You have a great radio voice!



Mostly F's: TOP OF THE HOP

You really, really like to get your way. (Luckily, you have good ideas and you're usually right.) Your presence is reassuring to friends and strangers alike, and you're a better dancer (but worse singer) than you think.



Mostly G's: THE BIG EMPTY MEETING AREA

You're cool, loyal, and up for anything. Weirdly, you miss sharing forks, bottles, blunts, pens, cigs, straws, mouthpieces, and other instruments of fun with your friends. Even if you haven't admitted it, you believe in ghosts. (As you should!) 🍏

Spare Thoughts

For the
SEX
Edition

Advice by: Caty Brown
Art by: Sophie Williams

Have a dilemma you want advice for? Fill out our form and read the next edition!





I want to buy a sex toy! What are your recommendations for sex toys for people with vaginas???

-Womanizer

A: Well, before I get to the recommendations, I feel obligated to tell you why sex toys can be so important! They're often treated as if they are taboo, and some people might even feel nervous or not good enough if you were to bring them out in the bedroom. It's sometimes a bit sticky (though your sex toys shouldn't be, more on that below), but the benefits of sex toys outweigh the potential discomfort you might feel upon buying them, or introducing them to a partner. Sex toys make orgasming much more consistent, which is very useful for people with vaginas, who often struggle with consistent orgasms. A vibrator doesn't flag like your fingers might, a dildo won't soften a few minutes in. There is no shame in bringing a sex toy into the bedroom to help extend sex, or make it less stressful. Sex toys open up a world of possibilities!

General Recommendations:

- 9 times out of 10, rechargeable toys without cords beat corded or battery powered toys.
- Medical grade silicone is a necessity in most of your toy purchases that are penetrative. (Glass and steel toys are an option for some types of toys.) Other silicones that are porous can allow for bacterial growth, which can give you an infection. How can you tell? First, check the listing. Second, medical grade silicone will not have a strong smell, will not develop a filmy sticky feeling, will not change color, and not struggle to get clean.
- Sex toys are not a great place to keep a tight budget. Cheap toys are cheap for a reason, and though there are certainly some great budget toys, anything that seems too good to be true is almost certainly.
- Be honest with yourself. I know, BadDragon does look pretty appealing, but I know the width of my cooch, and that is not happening for me. Don't try to make yourself be into something you aren't.



Check out specific recommendations here (with links!)



It's going to be awkward, but that's okay!



My S.O. likes dirty talk and I want to do it and make them happy, but I am so bad at it and it feels so awkward! How do I get better at it?

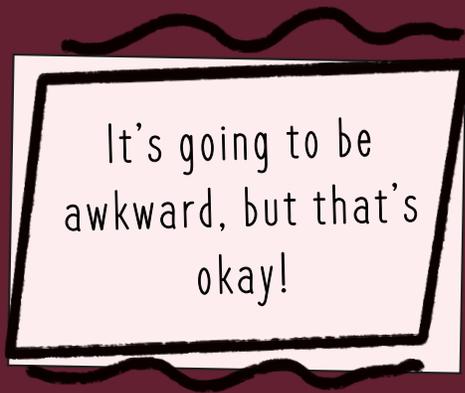
-Lilith

A: First of all, making dirty talk feel natural is really hard. It's going to be awkward, but that's okay! Sex isn't all mood lighting and gasping and simultaneous orgasms. You might struggle with it, and you might end up laughing at yourself with your partner a couple times. Don't worry about it. A good way to get into dirty talk is by thinking about what you actually want to say, instead of what you think your partner wants to hear. It will seem insincere if you don't want to say it at all. So, what are you into? Do you like being held down? Like being praised? Like the idea of being watched? Focus on dirty talk that you find sexy, like, for instance, asking your partner to hold you down or begging them to do something. The first step to getting better at dirty talking is knowing what you actually find sexy, and you won't feel silly saying. Once you get more confident, you'll be able to cater more to your partner without it feeling ingenuine.

Q: My friends invited me to a group sex situation. At first I thought it was just a joke, but now I realize they're being serious. I would be interested in trying things out, but I don't want to ruin the friend group's dynamic. Any advice on how I could approach this?

-Alexei

A: Well, if it makes you feel any more reassured, the fact that your friends asked you means that they're aware of a potential upset in the dynamic for a bit. They know that it might be odd figuring that out, but they're your friends! They wouldn't have brought it up if they thought it would only end poorly. So, if you're interested in it, then try it out! I can't promise it won't be a little weird, but if you're genuinely interested and they are too, then it's worth it to try it out. Ask what the group's dynamic is, and be as genuine as possible in your interest. Just be reassured that these people are your friends, and it's normal to feel a little out of your element.



Q: So every guide to lesbian safe sex is always like use a dental dam but do people actually use them and how bad is really it if you don't? I have met exactly 0 people who use dental dams but also I want to have safe sex.

-Maya

A: Dental dams rose to popularity during the AIDS pandemic, when gay women worried that, if gay men were falling prey to HIV, they might be next. But, sexually transmitting HIV between women is quite difficult. In the decades since the height of the AIDS pandemic, many realized dams aren't considered as necessary as originally thought. Nowadays, very few lesbians and other vagina-owners use dental dams. To be honest with you, the external part of female genitals don't transmit disease readily, like the vagina does. Cunnilingus, of all forms of sex, is not very likely to transmit disease, though it certainly can. So, should you use dental dams? If you want to. Is it as necessary as a condom is for safe sex? Likely not. It certainly won't hurt, but isn't likely to provide a significant amount of protection, and they can be cumbersome and detrimental to sensation for some people (though not everyone). So, if you feel comfortable using one, use one! If you (and your partner) don't want to use one, it isn't something you should feel badly over. It might make you uncomfortable not to use one, but they are not totally necessary.

Read more about HIV transmission between women here:



Q: Me and my girlfriend have been dating for about two months, and it's been really great! Our sex life is pretty good, but I'm interested in exploring more kinky stuff and I'm not sure how to ask to try other things out. I don't want to make her feel obligated to do what I want, but I also want to spice things up a little bit.

-Dick Von Kraft

A: The number one problem in any couple's sex life is communication. Have you ever thought about what your partner might feel like they're missing in your sex life? Chances are they're interested in making things more exciting, but also worry about how to bring it up. But, you're right, it's hard to bring up the idea of introducing anything new, especially kink. It might be a good idea to start by expanding on things you already enjoy together. For example, it's pretty vanilla to hold your partner's hands above their head as a very simple form of control, and you might already do it. Or, maybe you already have tried light choking, which is fairly common right now. Start with something you already do, or start introducing something light like hair pulling or trapping their hands or dirty talk. Once you see what your partner likes, it might be easier to do more. Ask them later what they thought of it, and use the opportunity to ask if they want to try anything else. If they didn't like the baby step, chances are you might want to pursue something different (ie: if they didn't like having their hands bound, chances are they aren't going to want to be your rope bunny). If you think it went well maybe do it a few more times, and then say something later like, "What did you think of ____? I thought it was pretty hot, would you want to try ____?" Don't jump in too fast, and remember that telling your partner what you want and being patient and aware of what they want is the most important thing.

Q:

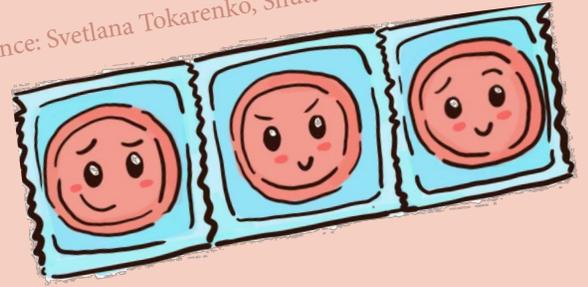
Over the course of the start of the pandemic, a close friend B and I realized we had some level of romantic feelings for each other. We were both in a weird place emotionally, so things stayed casual and just flirty for some time. Eventually, I felt that I was getting too invested without knowing if my feelings were real, and we took a month-ish break from talking frequently. Since then, I've realized that my feelings for B were/are real. We've talked a couple times about us and as far as those conversations have indicated, B isn't interested and/or doesn't want to try something. If B doesn't want something, I want to go back to being close friends, but I'm struggling to rebuild platonic intimacy when I know they had feelings for me in the past. Can you give me advice on how to rebuild our friendship and stop beating myself up over what could have been?

-Kalil

A: When you say "we took a month-ish break" was it truly mutual? Or did you make your friend feel unwanted and uncomfortable because you were struggling with your emotions? It's entirely valid for you to have been unsure how to sort through your feelings, but really think through how you treated your friend. It's also entirely valid for them to have moved on, after feeling like you treated them poorly as both a friend and potential romantic partner. Don't make that same mistake again, forgetting to consider how your friend is feeling. For example, your wording, when you said "when I know they had feelings for me in the past," it sounds like you're ignoring how they might be feeling now. Listen to them, and don't assume how they feel. But you're right, it's time to stop beating yourself up. It isn't your fault that you weren't ready to return their feelings at the time, and it isn't your fault that your friendship is a little uncertain now. Things happen! Life is messy. But, just as it isn't all your fault, it also isn't all your job to fix it. A friendship is a relationship like any other, and your friend is your partner. Treat them like an equal, recognizing their feelings, allowing them to express themselves. Have a conversation with them, asking them what makes them feel valued, because you recognize you haven't done a great job of ensuring they feel valued by you. It won't be perfect, and it might feel really awkward. But, trying to focus on making a better relationship for the future, and not trying to just get back what you had before, is more valuable than you think. You've made your mistakes, missed your opportunities, but we all do. It's time to think about how to be the best version of a friend you can be for the future, and try to learn from what you might have done wrong in the past. Just don't forget about how your friend might be feeling. 🍏



Reference: Svetlana Tokarenko, Shutterstock



HOT GIRL SUMMER GUIDE TO STIS

BY: KT GOYETTE
ART BY: MAANASI SHYNO

SO... TO START WITH, WHAT'S AN STI?

Good question, imaginary interlocutor! STI stands for Sexually Transmitted Infection. An STI is simply the entrance of a pathogen (bacterium, virus, parasite) entering into the body by sexual contact (genital-to-genital contact or genital-to-mouth contact).

HOW'S THAT DIFFERENT FROM AN STD?

STD stands for Sexually Transmitted Disease. If left untreated, an STI may (but not necessarily) develop into a disease. The pathogen begins to disrupt normal body processes, and one begins to show symptoms. "Disease" can sound a little pejorative at times, and one can have and pass on an infection without ever developing the disease, so public health experts often prefer the term "STI." In casual conversation, however, "STI" and "STD" are essentially synonyms.[1]

COOL. I LOVE TERMINOLOGY.

As do I, friend.

CAN YOU TELL ME SOME QUICK FACTS ABOUT THESE STIS, THEN? WHAT CAUSES THEM? WHAT ARE THEIR SYMPTOMS? HOW ARE THEY TREATED? HOW CAN I PREVENT THEM?

Absolutely! FYI: A general rule of thumb for prevention is proper condom usage (every time, vaginal, anal, and oral!). Beyond the standard penile condom, there are also internal condoms (which are inserted into the vagina or anus), finger cots (also known as finger condoms, they're exactly what you think from the name), and dental dams (placed between the mouth and vagina or anus). Another general rule of thumb: If you have multiple sexual partners, make sure both you and them are being regularly tested for STIs. These ideas are true for all STIs, so I won't be noting them for each one.

If you're concerned that you might have an STI, please see your doctor for further information. This document is a brief fact sheet, not comprehensive medical advice (which I am not qualified to give).

CHLAMYDIA

Cause: The bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*, spread by sexual contact with the penis, vagina, anus, or mouth of an infected partner. Contact with ejaculate is not necessary. The bacterium can also be spread from parent to baby during childbirth.

Symptoms: Many people (the data is uncertain, but perhaps up to 90%) who are infected with chlamydia do not show symptoms. Of those who do, some may notice a burning sensation during urination, unusual vaginal discharge, penile discharge, and/or pain and swelling in the testicles. If the infection is rectal, symptoms include rectal pain, bleeding, and discharge.

Testing and Treatment: The most common

ways to obtain a sample are vaginal swabs and urine collection. Chlamydia can be cured by antibiotics.[2]

GONORRHEA

Cause: The bacterium *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, spread by sexual contact with the penis, vagina, anus, or mouth of an infected partner. Contact with ejaculate is not necessary. The bacterium can also be spread from parent to baby during childbirth. The bacterium can infect mucous membranes in the cervix, uterus, fallopian tubes, urethra, as well as the mouth, throat, eyes, and rectum.

Symptoms: Many people who are infected with gonorrhea do not show symptoms. Of those who do, symptoms include a burning sensation

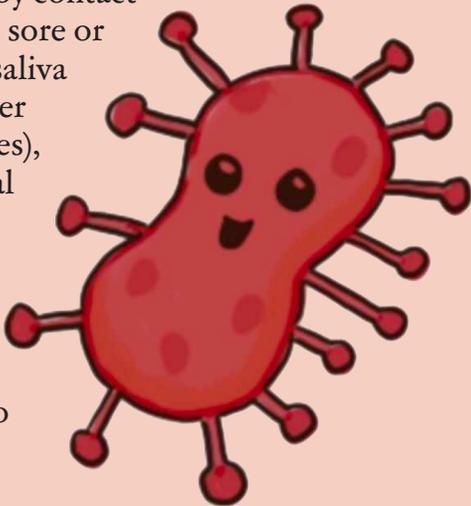


when urinating, increased vaginal discharge, bleeding between menstrual periods, white/yellow/green penile discharge, and/or pain or swelling in the testicles. If the infection is rectal, symptoms include anal discharge, itching, bleeding, and painful defecation. Infection in the throat may cause a sore throat.

Testing and Treatment: Samples for testing may be collected from urine, or swabs from the cervix, urethra, throat, or rectum. Gonorrhea can be cured with antibiotics. Resistant strains are emerging, however. If symptoms don't abate, tell your doctor!

GENITAL HERPES

Cause: Genital herpes are caused by herpes simplex virus type 1 and herpes simplex virus type 2. (HSV-1 can also cause oral herpes). The viruses spread by contact with a herpes sore or nearby skin, saliva (if your partner has oral herpes), and/or genital secretions. The viruses can still be transmitted even if there are no visible sores.



Symptoms: Many people who are infected with genital herpes have no symptoms, or may mistake mild symptoms for other skin conditions. The primary symptom is blisters on and around the genitals, rectum, and mouth. These sores come and go in outbreaks. During the first outbreak, one might experience a fever and muscle aches.

Testing and Treatment: A doctor may simply look at the sores to diagnose herpes, or they may take a sample from a sore or from your

blood. There is currently no cure for genital herpes. However, antiviral medications can decrease the intensity and frequency of outbreaks.

Prevention: If you have genital herpes, you can prevent (but not entirely eliminate!) the chance of passing the virus onto your partner by taking your antiviral medication and abstaining from sex during an outbreak.

HEPATITIS

Cause: Hepatitis is caused by the hepatitis B and hepatitis D viruses. (Other hepatitis viruses are not spread sexually). The virus can be spread by sexual contact with an infected partner, contact with infected blood (such as through needle-sharing or accidental needle-sticks), or from parent to baby during childbirth.

Symptoms: Only about 30-50% of those infected (over the age of 5) show symptoms. These symptoms can include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay-colored stool, joint pain, and jaundice.

Testing and Treatment: Hepatitis can be confirmed by a blood test. For those with acute hepatitis, the symptoms are treated, but not the viral itself. Antiviral medications are available for chronic hepatitis B (about 5% of adults who contract hepatitis will be chronically infected). There is no specific treatment for the hepatitis D virus.

Prevention: There is a vaccine against the hepatitis B virus.

HIV/AIDS

Cause: The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) can be spread by sexual contact with the genitals or rectum



BE SAFE BE SMART ALWAYS USE PROTECTION AND HAVE FUN

of an infected person; from parent to child during pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation; and contact with infected blood (such as through needle-sharing or accidental needle-sticks). If the initial viral infection is not treated, the virus targets and destroys immune cells, eventually leading to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Symptoms: During the acute phase of HIV infection, symptoms can include fever, chills, rash, night sweats, muscle aches, sore throat, fatigue, swollen lymph nodes, and mouth ulcers. Symptoms of AIDS vary greatly, as the weakened immune system is susceptible to a wide range of opportunistic infections.

Testing and Treatment: A doctor can test for the presence of HIV from a blood sample, or more rarely, a urine sample. At this time, there is no cure for HIV/AIDS. However, through antiretroviral medicines, you can decrease the level of HIV in your blood to undetectable levels. Once you start an antiretroviral medicine, it is imperative that you continue to take it for the rest of your life, or else the virus can rebound as a resistant strain! Opportunistic infections are treated on a case-by-case basis.

Prevention: If you are taking your antiretroviral medication regularly and your HIV levels are undetectable, there is almost no risk of passing the virus to a partner. If your partner has HIV and you do not, you can take a class of

medicine called Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis to greatly reduce your chance of infection. If you have been unexpectedly exposed to HIV, you can start Post-Exposure Prophylaxis to prevent infection.

HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS

Cause: Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is actually a wide range of genetically-related viruses. These viruses can be spread by vaginal, anal, or oral sex with an infected partner.

Symptoms: Most of the time, HPV does not cause any symptoms or health problems, and most types of HPV are harmless. A small number can cause genital warts, and another small set (the two do not interact) can lead to cancers of the cervix, vulva, vagina, penis, anus, and throat.

Testing and Treatment: Currently, there is no cure for HPV, nor any standard test. One might learn they have had HPV after an abnormal Pap smear.

Prevention: There is a vaccine against cancer-causing HPV viruses.

SYPHILIS

Cause: Syphilis is caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*, which is spread by contact with a syphilitic sore during vaginal, anal, and oral sex. The bacterium can also be transmitted from parent to child during pregnancy.

Symptoms: There are four stages of a syphilis infection, if left untreated. In the primary stage, sores arise where the bacterium initially entered the body. These sores are painless, and so often go unnoticed. In the secondary stage, symptoms include a rough, red, rash around the mouth, anus, or vagina, as well as fever, swollen lymph glands, sore throat, hair loss, headaches, weight loss, muscle aches, and fatigue. In the latent stage, symptoms disappear, sometimes for years. In the tertiary stage, the bacterium

can infect a number of different organ systems (neurological, ocular, cardiovascular, hepatic, and/or skeletal), and symptoms vary accordingly.

Testing and Treatment: Syphilis is typically diagnosed by a blood test. It can be cured by antibiotics.

TRICHOMONIASIS

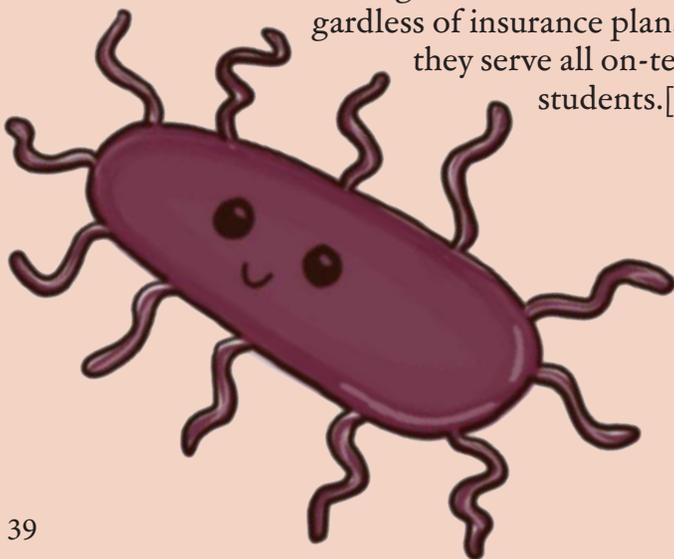
Cause: Trichomoniasis is caused by the protozoan parasite *Trichomonas vaginalis*. The parasite can be spread by vaginal-penile contact. It is unlikely to spread to the mouth or the anus.

Symptoms: About 70% of people with trichomoniasis are asymptomatic. Of those who do show symptoms, symptoms include painful urination; itching, burning, redness, and soreness of the vagina and vulva; unusual vaginal discharge; penile discharge; and irritation inside the penis.

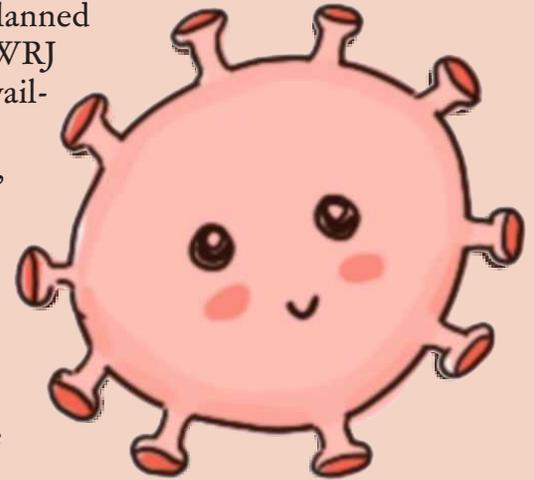
Testing and Treatment: A doctor can look for the parasite in a sample of urine or vaginal fluid. Trichomoniasis can be cured with antiparasitic medication.

AMAZING! I FEEL SO KNOWLEDGEABLE AND PREPARED. IF I'M ON CAMPUS, WHAT ARE SOME FURTHER RESOURCES I CAN ACCESS OR PLACES I CAN GO?

Dick's House is a great first start. Regardless of insurance plan, they serve all on-term students.[3]



There's also a Planned Parenthood in WRJ (conveniently available by AT, on the orange line), which accepts most insurance, and, if you don't have insurance, you may be eligible for sliding-scale payment.[4]



ANY LAST WORDS?

Be safe, be smart, always use protection, and have fun! 🍎

END NOTES

[1] "STI vs. STD: Key Differences & Resources for College Students," Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, accessed April 24, 2021, <https://publichealth.tulane.edu/blog/sti-vs-std/>.

[2] All information on STIs based upon "Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed April 24, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/std/>.

[3] "Reproductive & Sexual Health," Dartmouth College Health Service, accessed April 24, 2021, <https://students.dartmouth.edu/health-service/primary-care/health-wellness/health-information/reproductive-sexual-health>.

[4] "White River Junction Health Center of White River Junction, VT," Planned Parenthood, accessed April 24, 2021, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-center/vermont/white-river-junction/05001/white-river-junction-health-center-2745-91770>.

"I DON'T JUST WANT TO TAKE YOUR BREATH AWAY. I WANT TO RIP IT FROM YOUR MOUTH AND KEEP IT LOCKED AWAY BETWEEN MY TEETH. YOU CAN ONLY HAVE IT BACK IF YOU KISS ME AGAIN."

MEGGIE ROYER, LITERARY SEXTS

"TO HAVE HER HERE IN BED WITH ME, BREATHING ON ME, HER HAIR IN MY MOUTH—I COUNT THAT SOMETHING OF A MIRACLE."

HENRY MILLER, TROPIC OF CANCER

"IS SEX DIRTY? ONLY WHEN IT'S BEING DONE RIGHT."

WOODY ALLEN

"THE SUN IS SHINING, THE SKY IS A DEEP BLUE, THERE IS A LOVELY BREEZE AND I'M LONGING—SO LONGING—FOR EVERYTHING."

ANNE FRANK, THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL

"A GENTLEMAN HOLDS MY HAND. A MAN PULLS MY HAIR. A SOULMATE WILL DO BOTH."

ALESSANDRA TORRE

QUOT-

"I WANT YOU - AND MAY

I BE DAMNED FOR IT!"

AYN RAND

"MY SEXUALITY IS NOT AN INFERIOR TRAIT THAT NEEDS TO BE CHAPERONED BY EMOTIONALISM

OR MORALITY."

ALICE BAG

"MAKE LOVE TO HER MIND FIRST.

THERE ARE WORLDS TO BE DISCOVERED THAT HER BODY ALONE CAN'T TAKE YOU TO."

MAXWELL DIAWUO

ABLE

QUOTES

"NO WOMAN GETS AN ORGASM FROM SHINING THE KITCHEN FLOOR."

BETTY FRIEDAN

"WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT MAN FIRST WALKED UP-RIGHT TO FREE HIS HANDS FOR MASTURBATION."

LILY TOMLIN

"WOMEN! WHAT CAN YOU SAY? WHO MADE 'EM? GOD MUCH HAVE BEEN A FUCKING GENIUS."

LIEUTENANT COLONEL FRANK SLADE (AL PACINO), SCENT OF A WOMAN

"SICK AND PERVERTED ALWAYS APPEALS TO ME."

"AND YET ANOTHER MORAL OCCURS TO ME NOW: MAKE LOVE WHEN YOU CAN. IT'S GOOD FOR YOU."

KURT VONNEGUT, MOTHER NIGHT

MADONNA

RAW

By: Caty Brown

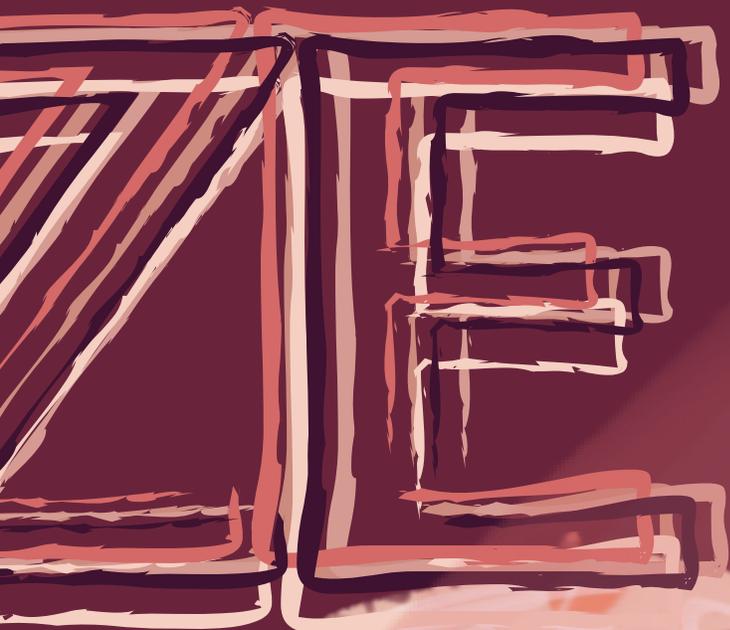
I think often of touch.

Often of heat, goosebumps, and the pressure that accompanies the path of a hand traveling down my thigh. What is more loving than warmth sinking into your skin? What is more human than a hand drifting across your shoulder blades? It feels as if I was made to be touched, my nerve endings tuned to the precise frequency of another's fingertips. I'm human, soft-skinned and warm-blooded, and I'm designed to be caressed. A part of me purrs when I'm stroked, and I cannot help but fall in love a little when I am held. If I could, maybe I would come to rest amongst the nerve endings just below your skin, and wait to feel the heat of palms and the sting of fingernails. If I could, maybe I would crawl inside the gaps of your silhouette, and live perpetually basking in your warmth.

A part of me purrs
when I'm stroked,
and I cannot help
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held.

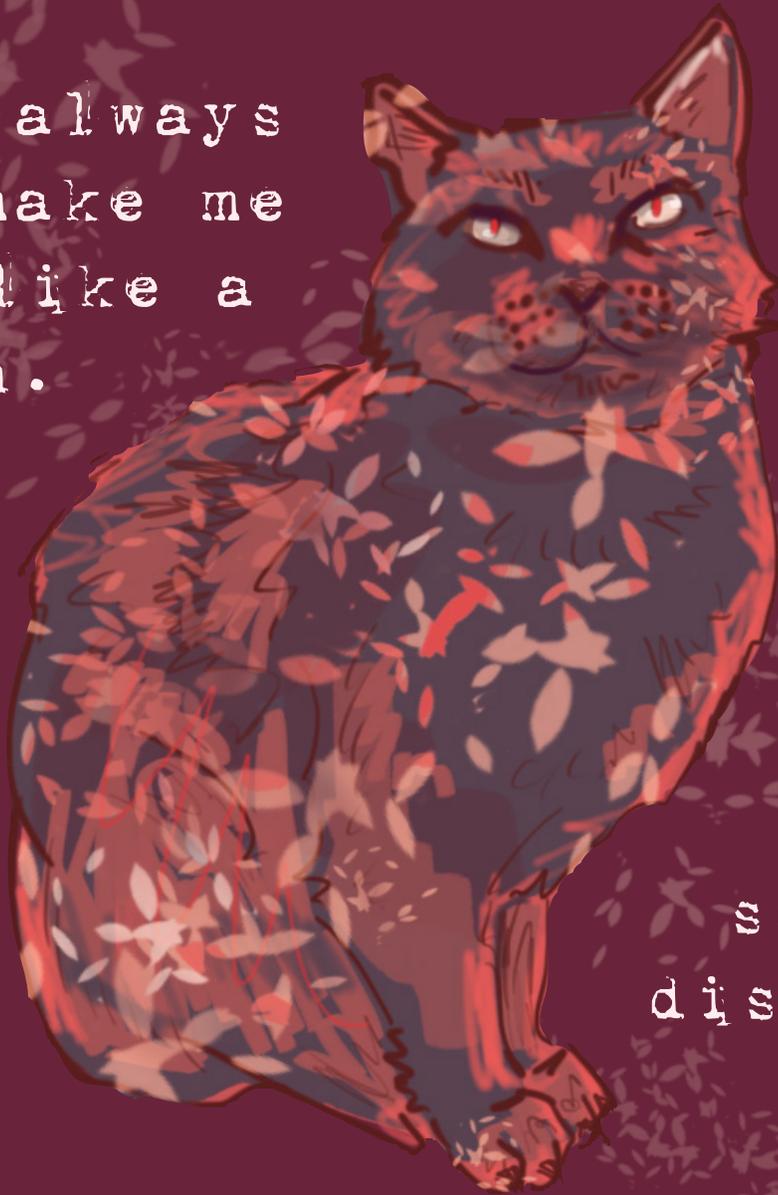
"I could teach you." I'd said, all those times ago, coming up to press the heat of my mouth to her neck. I was buzzing then, blood crashing and swelling against my eardrums like waves. Some part of my brain knows I'm not supposed to be an experiment, but the sounds she made lulled that knowledge to sleep, my thoughts a drowsy cat settled in a square of sunshine on hardwood floors. She asked me about it later, when she wasn't making such sweet sounds. Her hopeful tone rolled across my face, wondering if I'm only interested in women when I'm drunk. *Oh*. The cat, dreaming of warmer weather, awoke to a dim room's chill. I think about that, sometimes, when it feels as if my attention doesn't belong to me. My gaze ambles across the brightly colored belt cradling a woman's waist, and my thoughts swirl and scrape inside my head. The high of pressing her against a wall, the comedown of realizing she hadn't been quite what I had hoped for. Around it goes. When I return to myself, the cat comes to rest on the floorboards, beneath the floating dust of a freshly-swept skull.

Occasionally though, I manage to think about nothing. Or, perhaps, about everything. I think of the part of me inside your mouth, and it feels like the dust in my head finally settles into place. I think in reactions: the arch of my back at the first brush of fingers between my thighs, the gasp that slips from between your teeth when I wrap my legs around you. I bite and you choke, and I feel as if we are growing into a space between what's outside and what's inside, and I don't have to think about anything except for the calluses on your thumb.



Art by: Sophie Williams

He always
did make me
feel like a
woman.



Though
only
because
women are
so often
disappointed.

But it's not always that way, sometimes it's sticky and uncomfortable and I am both alone and lonely, within and without. My nerve endings are doing as they were created to do, but begrudgingly, as if they continue only out of love for me, and I continue out of desperation. Desperation for that floating in-between feeling, as I feel the pressure of sinking.

"Is there anything else I can do for you?" he'd asked me once, after many moments of frenetic movement and a few of discomfort. He always did make me feel like a woman, though only because women are so often disappointed. The answer, rattling against the back of my teeth, was *of course there fucking is*, but women have always been told to swallow those things. I responded to him kindly, irritation simmering in the pit of my stomach: yes, but only if he wanted to. After my words stilled in the air, he turned off the lamp, and kissed the top of my head.

The anger was expected, the relief a surprise. But maybe it wasn't. After all, in the past half hour I'd recognized the burn in my muscles, but it wasn't the kind that made my toes curl. I'd felt the slide of sweat, but it wasn't from anything I'd enjoyed. If I wanted to move, out from between arms that feel like a well-meaning trap, out from beneath a crumpled sheet that feels like a caring snare, out from a room that feels like a welcoming cage, then the easiest way out was in. So I learned. I learned where to push, where to curl, and now I know the strings of my body well, and I know how to make my marionette leap even when the audience isn't a very good one.



So yes, maybe I could teach you, girl who never really wanted me in the first place, boy who would have learned if I'd pressed the issue. But I am tired of writing to people who cannot read, performing for an audience who doesn't know the play. So, I want to say I love you to the first person willing to hurt for me.



I want to tell you
that it has always
only ever been about
you.

I want to tell you to
come back to bed, I
want to curl up in
the heat of your
lap, I want to
soothe you.

I want to learn
the notes of the
song you have
written in the skin
above your pulse.



With others I bite bruises and scratch symbols, but for you I'll come unarmed. I exist as a tribute to you, the woman who gave me myself. You will be the death of me. I want to give you all of my deaths, and lie resting at your feet. You are what I was designed for. 🍎

Comphet.

~ a memoir ~

By: Sabrina Eager
Art by: Sabrina Eager

I came out to my best friend Shivani three times. Not because she didn't believe that I was queer and I had to remind her, but because I was wrong the first two times.

The first time was in a Panera Bread. It was my freshman year of high school. I was in love with our friend Anna, but I knew I wasn't gay because ... how could I be? I had a boyfriend the year before. I'd had crushes on boys my whole life. I had never even thought of girls as an option.

That year, I stood in front of the full length mirror that hung over my mom's closet door for hours, concocting mental images of crushes on random boys as distractions. I imagined holding hands with the boy who sat next to me in biology, hugging the boy who I always high-fived when we passed each other in the cafeteria between classes.

That year, I spent hours researching sexualities on Tumblr to find something other than "gay" to define my feelings. "Quoiromantic" came up on my dashboard. A label for someone unable to distinguish between romantic and platonic attraction. I shed tears of relief and drew a picture in the colors of the quoiromantic pride flag to set as my phone's lock screen. *You don't like Anna. You simply think you do. She is your friend. You do love her. But platonically. There's nothing romantic.*

"I'm quoiromantic," I announced, Shivani sitting across from me in one of the red vinyl booths at the Panera at the Broadway Mall. I was at the same mall the year before when I heard that same-sex marriage was legal nationwide and somehow knew to file the memory. I explained the term, explained the confusion, and I asked her to name every boy that we were friends with. "Yes, I thought I had a crush on him for a week, or a day, or a moment in the lunchroom," I confessed after each name. Sean. Dan. Jacob. All just fleeting moments. Merely flirtations with men I'd never truly love.

I did not mention Anna.

In May of our sophomore year, I told Shivani I was bi. We were talking on FaceTime after school. The month before, a friend called me cute during a chemistry lab, and the moments in the mirror suddenly stopped working. I could no longer chalk the skip-and-a-jump of my heart up to an identity based in confusion. As I stood in my mom's room and analyzed my reflection in the full length mirror that hung over her closet door, my thoughts would settle on the series of inside jokes that we shared, the way her eyes would squint when she laughed, the skin on my arm where she grabbed me to drag me down the hallway.



“So I like someone,” I told Shivani. “But they’re not a guy.” The conversation is a blur in my mind, clouded behind nerves. Shivani remembers that I sounded nervous, but confident. She says that it seemed like I didn’t know how to form the words, but like I wasn’t worried about how she’d react. I do remember that she wasn’t surprised. She referenced the recent chop of my hair, the stereotypical “bi bob” I decorated myself with three months before. She recalls that it was sunny out, the May weather still warm outside our windows.

Once Shivani knew I liked girls, I would talk to her about girls’ hands. About how they are small and soft and fit perfectly in yours. About girls’ lips, how they seem so gentle and easy to kiss. I had yet to hold a girl’s hand, to kiss a girl’s lips, but I know that I never seemed to want to talk about boys in the same way. Never in the way that Shivani did. I cared more about cupping a woman’s cheek in my hand. About brushing a piece of hair behind a woman’s ear as she looked up at me from behind her lashes.

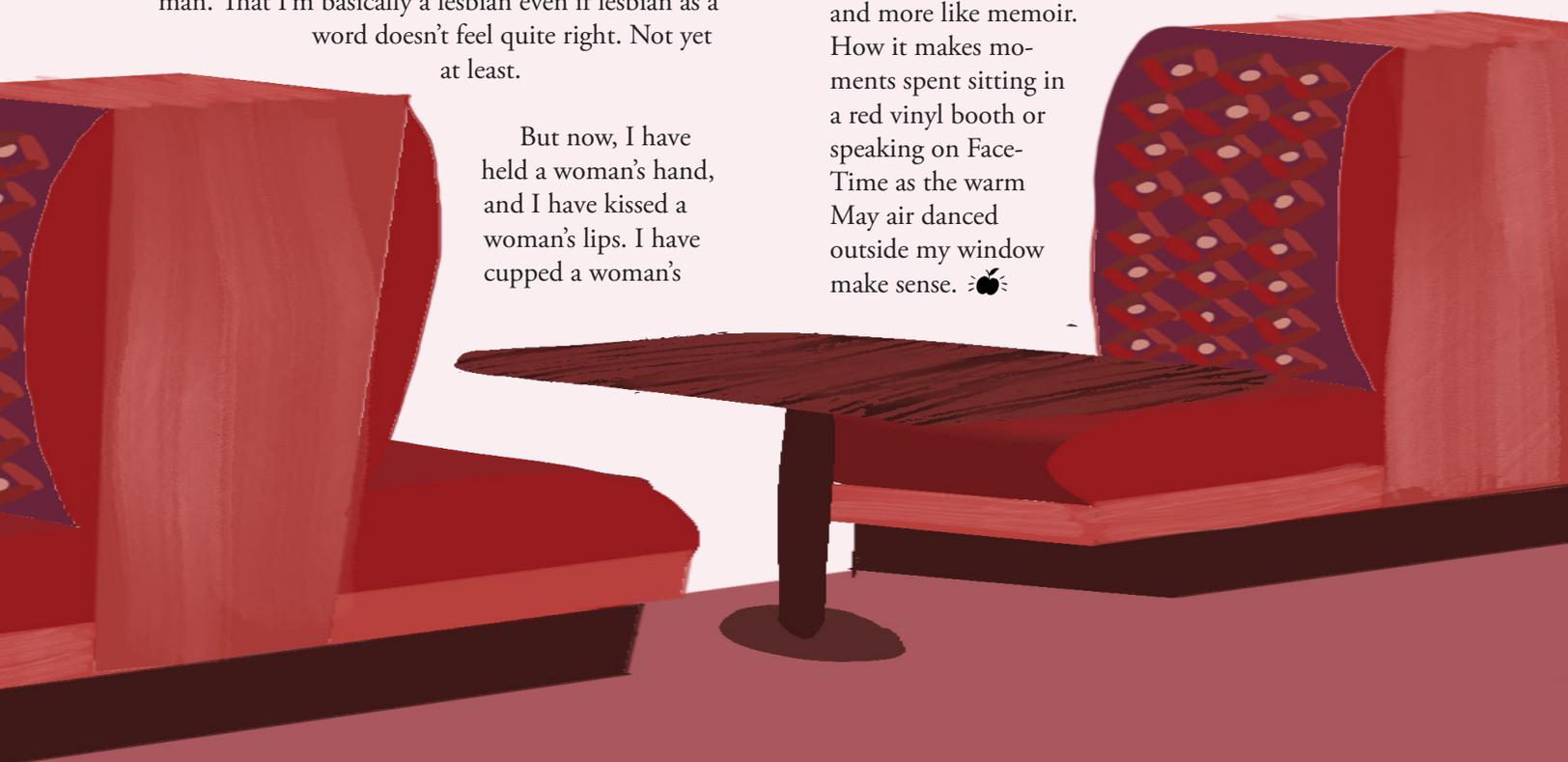
I more recently realized bisexual wasn’t accurate. Probably something to do scrolling on TikTok and watching the men on my for you page slowly disappear into oblivion. I don’t quite know when it clicked. I don’t quite know when I told Shivani. I know she knows that I like the word “queer” now. That I can’t imagine a world where I end up with a man. That I’m basically a lesbian even if lesbian as a word doesn’t feel quite right. Not yet at least.

But now, I have held a woman’s hand, and I have kissed a woman’s lips. I have cupped a woman’s

Gentle lips have made
Kissing feel so easy,
like it’s what humans
were meant to do.

cheek in my hand and brushed a piece of hair behind her ear as she looked up at me from behind her lashes. I was right all those years ago, talking with Shivani in the hallways of our suburban highschool. Small and soft hands have fit perfectly in mine. Gentle lips have made kissing feel so easy, like it’s what humans were meant to do.

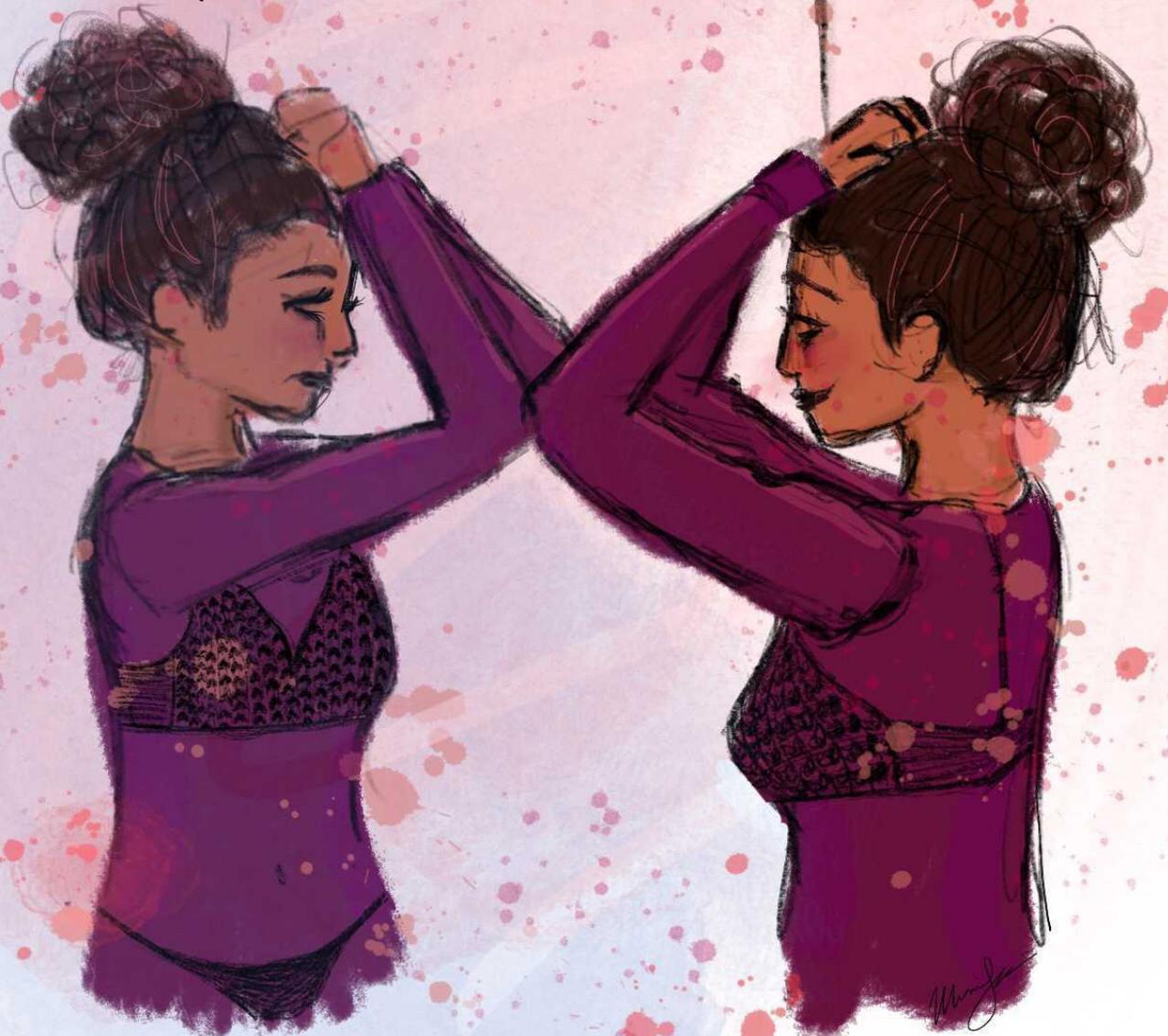
When I tell this story or some iteration of it, people often ask if I’ve heard of compulsory heterosexuality, or if I’ve read the “Am I a Lesbian Masterdoc.” I have. It’s eerily familiar. Picking random boys to crush on. Becoming anxious around men you once thought you liked. It’s strange how a theory can make you feel so seen. How an article you read during your first term as a college student can come back to haunt you once it starts to feel real. How it begins to feel less academic and more like memoir. How it makes moments spent sitting in a red vinyl booth or speaking on FaceTime as the warm May air danced outside my window make sense. 🍏



The Centering of Sex

By: Anonymous

Art by: Maanasi Shyno '23





When I think about my own personal brand of feminism, I can clearly draw its roots to two things: music and sex. Sex and music. In many ways, the two are one in the same. “CTRL” by SZA defined my vision of womanhood around my burgeoning sexuality. “Sexual liberation” was the center of my feminism: I believed that harnessing female sexuality was the ultimate feminist expression. My theory was baked in the adolescent angst of the fall of my junior year of high school: at the time, I was desperate to have my first kiss, grappling with the realization that I had been molested by a peer in the 8th grade, and in general scrambling to figure out who I was as a woman -- up until then, much of my identity had been defined by men like my father or my brother. Centering sex made sense: I thought that having sex, or more accurately, having sex with men, could cleanse me of my sexual trauma, heal me of my insecurity that I was undesirable, and bury my doubts about my sexuality.

I’m 19 now. I’ve had my first kiss. I’ve had sex. And I’ve never felt further from sexual liberation. As I’ve grown older and began to experience sex and sexuality more fully, I’ve become more and more acutely aware of my 16 year old naïveté. What is “sexual liberation” when you center the acceptance and approval of men? What is “sexual liberation” when sex is tainted by trauma? What is “sexual liberation” in the face of internalized homophobia? And this is coming from a wealthy white woman — what is “sexual liberation” for those who have been fetishized due to their race, gender, or sexual identity? What is “sexual liberation” for the religious? But even with all of the layers of societal shit obscuring and distorting the theoretical purity of sexual liberation, I cannot help but cling to it.

So let this be a personal journey through the evolution of my “sex-positive” feminism as I’ve realized the lasting burdens of sexual trauma and heteronormativity on my own ability to be “sex-positive.” There’s an ideal and then there’s reality, and here I’m going to try to bridge the divide: if we decided to stand by the centering of sexuality in our definition of feminism, how do we reframe it to make it accessible and valid, and not just a double agent whose only real master is and always will be patriarchy?

I usually try to be funny in articles, but for fear of making you cringe as I try to pass off some rather traumatic events as funny blips in my comedic character development, I’ll abstain. My ability to ever easily achieve a free, easy sexuality was voided in June of 2015. I was freshly fourteen, young for my grade not only in age but in experience. I was painfully aware of how undesirable I was: awkward and ugly, I had never kissed a boy, never

held hands with a boy, never even gotten close. In other words, I didn’t know what it felt like for someone to flirt with me. I wouldn’t have known what it felt like to be desired if it had slapped me in the face.

So when (name changed) Alex told me he was gay but then proceeded to untie my bathing suit top at the public pool and stare, I knew I didn’t like what he had done but I didn’t read into it any further. When he held my hand as we walked back to our friends’ house, I took it as an apology for his dumb joke. A week later, when we hung out alone in his bedroom and wrestled on his bed, it wasn’t threatening, it was just something that kids did. Even when he asked me point blank if he could touch my boobs because he was gay and he would never have the chance again, even when he kept going further than I told him he could, even when he cried when I asked him to stop and wouldn’t stop crying until I said yes, I didn’t know what to think. My private school sex education with its textbook definitions of brutal molestation or sexual assault at the hands of a creepy gymnastics coach or weird uncle couldn’t have been further from the slippery emotional coercion at the hands of my little 100-lb dopey-looking classmate. So I left that day in June of 2015. I scrubbed myself raw. I cried in the shower not because I had been assaulted but because I was embarrassed that for my first sexual experience, I’d let a gay guy, and not a cute one at that, touch my boobs. I put myself to bed. And I woke up the next day a changed woman, whether or not I knew it yet.

I’m the best avoider you’ve ever met — I can look at someone and look straight through them. I can make someone feel like they don’t exist while looking completely nonchalant. Every time I looked through Alex in the hallway for the next two years, even though my face didn’t betray my emotions, I was hit with the sharpest fear that, god forbid, he would tell someone about what happened. He had power over me. It seems so silly from the outside. If you could see this kid, see how small, how unassuming he looks, it’s hard to believe that as I blossomed from this awkward, insecure pre-teen into a rather beautiful young woman that this boy could ruin my day by walking past my locker as I put my books away. But he could. And he did. And everytime he passed me, I was no longer the beautiful young woman I was becoming, but I was right back as the awkward, ugly, self-hatred ridden fourteen year old lying in his bed just wishing he would stop crying.

It wasn’t until my junior year of high school that I realized that what had happened was not just some embarrassing run-in, but actually the first of many sexual assaults performed at the hands of a serial sexual assaulter.



been weaponized against me. It was “liberation,” it was revenge — revenge which only served to bolster my association between sex and guilt and shame. This is a narrative that I think runs rampant in Millennial/Gen-Z social-media and pop-culture today. In 2021, having an OnlyFans or a sugar-daddy is a key experience on your radical-feminist resumé. It’s this message of, “Ask not what you can do for the patriarchy, but what the patriarchy can do for you.” As someone for whom that narrative very much does not work, it scares me.

“Why had I so centered sex in my vision for feminism?”



Alex would go on to hurt classmate after classmate, with none of us being any the wiser. It was the single most liberating moment of my life. My head literally rushed as the knowledge hit me. I ran to confess to my brother. As the words poured out of me, I sobbed with secret emotions that even I did not know lay hidden below those memories. In my first re-telling, I actually realized that the molesting had occurred on a second occasion that I had blocked from my memory — after the first day, I tried to convince myself that everything was fine by going over to his house again. Needless to say, everything was not fine. And for a while, I thought that there, the issue was solved. I knew the truth now! I could throw off my shame, throw off my guilt, kiss as many guys as I wanted, have sex with whoever, and be totally fine!

But then I tried that. The first time I hooked up with someone from my high school, I found that I couldn’t make eye contact with them in the hallway. I found that my heartbeat raised when they approached me. I found myself looking straight through them. Avoiding. Afraid. As I began to have more sexual experiences, I realized that the way in which I was introduced to sex had completely stunted my ability to deal with sex, even if it was mature, adult, and consenting.

So where did that leave me on my feminist journey? Well, it made me rethink. Why had I so centered sex in my vision for feminism? While I may have used words like “harnessing the power of women’s sexuality,” I meant that I wanted to weaponize sex, just like it had



That's not to say that it cannot work for anyone: if the 21st century media's vision of a "sex-positive" woman makes you feel strong, seen, and valid, all power to you. I'm the last person to judge a woman for her sexual expression. But that feminism which is so empowering to some is so damaging to others. And when it's reported that, at the very least, 20% of women internationally will experience some sort of sexual violence in their lives, I have to wonder whether or not centering mainstream feminism on sex really makes any sense at all.

Again, not everyone would respond how I did; every person responds to sexual trauma differently. However, I think the broader message is that the way that we have put weaponized sex at the center of 21st century feminism, something I am guilty of too, may only serve to center men and their harm, thus triggering women and furthering patriarchy.

I don't have the answers. All I know is that my very own framing of feminism is personally unattainable -- I have shut myself out of my own vision of liberation. My ideal of womanhood is simply that: an ideal. It's an ideal shaped by my clawing desire to overcome and to be stronger than something that happened to me when I was just a kid. But that's no path to liberation — refusing to validate my own hurt, my own injury, my own affection is no way to become a truer, freer woman. If anything, I need to sit down and do the opposite. I need to acknowledge that for me, sex with men is hard. It's hard and it will always be hard. For me, sex requires that I trust my partner with my life. It requires that I open up and share my story and ask for a partner in healing, not just a partner in sex. It requires that I not rush. It requires that I forgive myself. Maybe sex doesn't need to be removed from the equation, maybe it just needs to be reframed. 🍏



OF MADONNAS AND WHORES

by: Alexandra Salyer

Art by Sabrina Eager



We humans love our categories.

Whether it be highly-detailed scientific categorization like taxonomy, or even the simple puzzle games whose whole premise centers on moving and grouping objects with shapes and/or colors, humans have a proclivity to sort things into categories. We live to label! However, this proclivity is linked to more than just enjoyment of group-ing like with like. According to famous cognitive psychologist Jean Piaget, categories are how we understand the world around us. We construct little categories of information called schemas and then sort our observations and experiences into these schemas, making adjustments to the schemas and adding new ones when needed. ^[1]

Beyond broad groupings, humans often take categorization one-step further, streamlining understanding of what can be a wide array of information by employing the far simpler one-two binaries. These binaries proliferate our societies whether we consciously recognize them or not. Common ones include good/evil, female/male, black/white, abled/disabled, gay/straight, neurotypical/neurodivergent, and mentally-ill/normal. ^[2] Though very few things actually exist in such strict binaries, they are still used to conceptualize and comprehend the world, particularly other people.

But binaries aren't the only thing humankind is obsessed with. There is another concept that has long entranced our minds: sex. Sex (focusing specifically on the physical experience of inter-course) holds vast importance in society and grave-ly affects how people navigate relationships with one another. For many people, sex is something they want and will have in their lifetimes. Holding such significance, sex interacts with and under-lines some of these binaries. We see this intersect clearly demonstrated in the famous binary that has shaped and continues to shape the percep-tion of women in societies influenced by Western, Judeo-Christian principles: the Madonna-Whore dichotomy.

Officially recognized and named by the infa-mous Sigmund Freud, the Madonna-Whore di-chotomy is a binary, sex-based framework through which both men and women identity women as either the Madonna or the Whore. Freud identified that society has long conflated female sexuality with immorality and thus have also conflated female sexual purity with moral goodness. Freud believed that this conflation is rooted in men's fears

over feminine desires, specifically feminine sexual desires. In order to navigate this fear and their biological desire to copulate and procreate, men have created these two roles so that they can understand the foreign and scary entity of women.

The Madonna is the figure associated with sexual purity. Men do not associate her with the immoral act of sex and thus deem her as being worthy of respect and admiration. Due to her high moral standing, the Madonna is also further linked with motherhood, as men can only truly trust pure (and thus good) women with the preservation of their bloodline. It is this participation in extending man's lineage that designates the Madonna as worthy of respect. By comparison, the Whore is identified primarily by her desirability; men regard her as a sexual object. However, in the same breath in which men lust after the Whore, they also condemn her. Because female sexuality is associated with moral depravity, the Whore becomes an evil figure or, at the very least, a figure worthy of disrespect and degradation due to her sexual impurity. These two figures exist in direct opposition, with a woman's sexuality serving as the primary marker of distinction. Within this dichotomy, not only are women's identities reduced to their sex lives (or lack thereof) but their moral worth as well as the only two positions women can occupy are the good virginal mother or the evil temptress. [3]

However, while Freud gave name to the dichotomy, the Madonna-Whore complex has its foundations in the Bible and has appeared in art far before the 1900s. The archetypes that compose this binary are rooted in the biblical figures of the Virgin Mary (as known as the Madonna) and Eve, the first woman. Able to fulfill woman's ultimate purpose of reproduction without ever tainting her sexual purity, the Virgin Mary is the ultimate woman according to Judeo-Christian standards. The Christian Bible rewards Mary for this impossible feat by granting her the most esteemed female position

in Christian society: the mother of God himself. Embodying both the virginal and the maternal, Mary represents the ideal for women, and with her popularity, she serves as a basal figure for the dichotomy and a standard to which women are impossibly held. [4]

On the other hand, Eve, the first woman, serves as the foundational character for the Whore figure. Though the Bible mentions very little about sex in regards to Eve, the common interpretation of Eve as the figure responsible for tempting and successfully luring Adam, the first man, towards sin, has led to her depiction as a hypersexualized temptress. Being the first woman of all time, Eve cannot be separated from her biological sex and her femininity, and in seeing the first female as the most culpable party in dooming mankind, some members of Christian society have demonized this femininity and given Eve's act of temptation a female-driven sexual undertone that has connected female sexual desires to this damning act. Thus, female agency — particularly sexual agency — has been regarded as a great evil, and Eve with her reputation as a temptress is the basis for the immoral, female archetype of the Whore.

Leaving the pages of the Bible, this early version of the Madonna-Whore complex further appears in historical Western art such as Olivuccio di Ciccarello's famous painting *The Madonna of Humility with the Temptation of Eve*. [5] In this painting, the Virgin Mary, completely clothed and surrounded by gold and angels, occupies the center of the work. With a halo over her head, she holds Jesus Christ. Contrastingly, Eve lies at the bottom of the painting, surrounded by the color black. With a serpent wrapped around her body, Eve is entirely naked with her breasts fully-displayed, and she stares up at Mary with their greatly diverging depictions, di Ciccarello clearly intended to draw a dichotomy between the two women.

“In order to navigate this fear and their biological desire to copulate and procreate, men have created these two roles so that they can understand the scary entity of women.”

What is most notable about this juxtaposition is the maternal air of Mary and the sexual air of Eve. Fully clothed and holding a baby, Mary embodies every bit of her virginal motherhood. Laying naked and prostrate with the serpent tangled promiscuously around her body, Eve is displayed in a sexual nature, and with the further inclusion of the apple, the fruit of Adam's tempta-tion, she embodies her archetype of the damning, temptress Whore. Painting the women with such different airs, di Ciccarello pits them against one another. In surrounding Mary with divine markers like angels, gold, and a halo, he decrees Mary and her archetype's triumph over Eve's. A celebration of the pure maternal and condemnation of the sexual, *The Madonna of Humility with the Temptation of Eve* serves as a great visual demonstration of the Madonna-Whore dichotomy.

Beyond renaissance paintings, this dichotomy has continued into modern media, though updated with the shiny new coat of paint of name changes. A particularly popular re-naming that emerged in the 1960s was the Jackie-Marilyn binary, which associated the blonde bombshell sex symbol Marilyn Monroe with the figure of the Whore and the respectable and well-dressed yet sexually boring wife, mother, and First Lady Jackie Kennedy with the Madonna. With this update, women can either "take on the identity of happy homemaker and mother (like the First Lady) or a sexy seductress without children (like the blonde bombshell)." [6] Monroe's tragic death is not separate from this dichotomy, and further adds to the condemnation of the Whore, while Jackie Kennedy's positive and respected enduring public image contributes to the moralizing of the Madonna position. Like the Virgin Mary and Eve, Jackie Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe were pitted against one another and held up as representatives of the two roles in which so-ciety recognizes women: a one-night-stands or the wife and mother of man's children.

This rebrand can be found referenced in the 2000s masterpiece *Legally Blonde*. [7] Though the movie takes a feminist perspective in rejecting the rigid binary of the Madonna-Whore complex, it demonstrates how the dichotomy, specifically the Jackie-Marilyn renaming, affects the main charac-ter Elle Woods. Ultra-feminine, pink-loving sorori-ty girl, Elle appears to embody the Marilyn/Whore archetype at the film's beginning. She is very pretty and dresses in outfits that highlight her attractive figure. With her mastery of the "bend and snap,"

Elle knows how to move to attract male attention and frequently attempts to use her sexual desirability to win back her ex-boyfriend (dressing in a revealing outfit and positioning herself near him while he plays football, flirting with him while in a provocative bunny costume, etc.)

However, Elle's desirability backfires on her. While men want Marilyn, they cannot respect Marilyn. The opening sequence of the movie shows Elle's boyfriend Warner breaking up with her because he is about to attend Harvard Law School and needs a serious, respectable wife if he wants to achieve political success. Warner explicitly states that "if he wants to be a senator... [he] need[s] to marry a Jackie. Not a Marilyn." Warner cannot see Elle as anything more than an object of sexual desire and knows (or believes) that society won't either, so he trades her for a Jackie.

Legally Blonde's "Jackie" comes in the form of Vivian Kensington. Whereas Elle is fun and flirty, Vivian is demure and serious. She dresses modestly and downplays her sexual desirability as to be seen as smart and worthy of respect. Initially, she and Elle clash quite violently. Judging Elle's more feminine, pretty appearance, Vivian simultaneously underestimates Elle's intelligence and regards Elle as a threat to her own relationship with Warner.

Between these two characters, we perfectly see the clash of the Jackie and the Marilyn and the mistreatment both roles receive from men.



While the Marilynns are alright for fooling around, they cannot be considered as viable options for wives/ mothers and must be dumped when men want to pursue more serious life endeavors, just as Warner dumps Elle. And while Jackie may ultimately end up in long-term relationships with the men, they are constantly aware of the allure of the Marilyn and fear infidelity (thinking back to JFK, oftentimes with great validity) just as Vivian fears Elle. However, *Legally Blonde* subverts this binary and competition by allowing its Marilyn and Jackie to befriend one another, and by giving both happy endings, not just the Jackie. The movie's final decision to allow Elle to achieve a relationship in which she is valued and respected for her abilities while also being appreciated for her attractiveness and femininity, is particularly notable.

Furthermore, beyond just surface-level renamings, the Madonna-Whore dichotomy has also evolved over the years to reflect new cultural trends and contexts. Looking at classic teen movies and media in the last forty years, we find that this popular genre has its own version of this dichotomy: the Popular Girl and the shy, unpopular protagonist. The villain of many a female-led high school movie, the Popular Girl is a well-known staple of the genre. She is traditionally very pretty and dresses provocatively. Usually, the Popular Girl is a cheerleader or occupies another social position traditionally associated with attractiveness, and she is often portrayed in a relationship (or relationships), frequently confirmed to be sexual in nature. Her sex appeal is recognized as a large factor for her social success. Comparatively, the shy, unpopular protagonist is a Good Girl who is also traditionally pretty (or even *stunningly* pretty), but she dresses with clothing typically more modest than the popular girl and acts in a way that suggests she does not know it. This Good Girl tends to be quieter and fills her time with artistic or studious endeavors, and she often does not have a relationship and has not yet experienced sex.

These two characters are often placed in direct juxtaposition or antagonisms with one another, typically with the cheerleader/Popular Girl emerging as the more villainous of the pair. They compete for a similar goal or, most frequently, a common man. Notably, when a Male Love Interest is involved with this cliché, the Good Girl protagonist tends to end the movie "winning" the Male Love Interest. Her non-sexual ways win his affection over the shallow sexual advances and cruelty of the Popular Girl.



Though modernized, the same ideals that define the Madonna and the Whore led to the creation of these two opposing characters and the customary ultimate triumph of the Good Girl protagonist over the Popular Girl.

While this version of the dichotomy appears quite frequently in teen movies and literature, another easily-recognizable utilization of the binary appears in Taylor Swift's "You Belong with Me" music video.^[8] The song's premise is that the singer is in love with her best friend, and she believes that she would make a better girlfriend than his current more feminine, popular girl-friend. In the song alone, there are traces of the Madonna-Whore complex and the Good Girl vs. the popular cheerleader, but the music video amplifies these pieces until the complex becomes blatantly obvious.

In the "You Belong with Me" video, Taylor doubles casts herself to play the quiet, bookish band geek (blonde Taylor) who is crushing on her male best friend as well as the male best friend's hyperfeminine, cheerleader girlfriend (brunette Taylor). The characters' outfits further emphasize the Madonna-Whore dichotomy as blonde Taylor wears loose-fitting, modest t-shirts while brunette Taylor wears tighter-fitting, more revealing short skirts outfits. Beyond character design,

the video's visuals further establish the binary as it portrays brunette Taylor flirting with other guys while blonde Taylor looks on with disapproval, establishing brunette Taylor as not only sexually-desirably but promiscuous. Once again, the popular cheerleader figure is linked to adultery and betrayal aka the vices of the Whore.

Ultimately, the music video ends with a “victory” for good girl Taylor and a reinforcement of the binary. Wearing a virginal white dress, blonde Taylor enters the prom, and upon seeing her, the male best friend realizes blonde's Taylor's superiority as a potential girlfriend and abandons brunette Taylor who is quite noticeably wearing a skimpier, red, more sexual dress. In depicting the fight between the Popular Girl and the Good Girl, “You Belong with Me” demonstrates this updated version of the Madonna-Whore dichotomy. Although the language and visual coding has changed, the core theme of the dichotomy in praising modest, non-sexual women as better, romantic partners over their more sexually-desirable, feminine counterparts endures even in this 2009 woman-created work.

Though renamed and evolved, the Madonna-Whore dichotomy has remained prevalent in art, and this prevalence does not exist in a bubble. Beyond paintings, movies, and songs, the Madonna-Whore dichotomy has been observed to directly affect female perception here in the twenty-first century. In 2017, a study interviewed 15 young female New Zealanders aged 19–25 living about their thoughts on topics surrounding sexuality, and the study found that these girls held beliefs supported by the Madonna-Whore Complex. Though general consensus did emerge over believing casual sex to be “pleasurable and acceptable for women to engage in” and condemning “the notion that society judges women harshly, holding them up to a different standard of sexual behavior to men” as unjust and sexist, the women still supported other

ideas that reflected the Madonna-Whore complex.^[9] In their interviews, the women “worked hard to convince the interviewer that they themselves did not have a sexual reputation,” which suggests a belief in the immorality of casual sex and or at least a behavior-affecting awareness that society negatively perceives casual sex.^[10] The women further condemned specific types of sexual actions, outlining acceptable methods for pursuing sex and unacceptable methods. The unacceptable actions included frequent sex, giving a man sex too easily, or having sex with someone not already known to you.^[11] Even though these women claimed to believe and uphold general ideas antithetical to the Madonna-Whore di-chotomy, when they spoke about their specific experiences and beliefs, the dichotomy seeped into their responses, affecting how they present-ed themselves and judged other women on the matter of sex.

Expanding the gender and nationality limitations of its participants, a 2019 study surveyed heterosexual Israeli, American, and German men and women about their thoughts on topics relating to sex and found both similar results and greater negative implications caused by a belief in the Madonna-Whore dichotomy. This international survey examined the participants' belief in the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy as well as their beliefs in other patriarchal ideologies and their relationship satisfaction. The survey found that there was a positive correlation between belief in the ideas of the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy and a variety of sexist and derogatory ideologies like “social dominance orientation, gender-specific system justification, benevolent sexism, and hostile sexism” in both men and women.^[12] However, men specifically were found to believe in the dichotomy to a greater extent than women.^[13] In men that did agree with the ideas of the Madonna-Whore complex, there was

“... even those who hold general progressive beliefs about female sexuality can still subconsciously find themselves projecting the dichotomy onto themselves and others.”

positive correlation with “ideologies that reinforce gender inequality; that is, social dominance orientation, gender-specific system justification, benevolent sexism, hostile sexism, and the sexual objectification of women” as well. [14] Furthermore, beyond a subscription to problematic ideologies, belief in the Madonna-Whore Complex also was found to correlate negatively with relationship satisfaction in men. [15] Not only was the Madonna-Whore dichotomy found present in some men and women, it was also found to be associated with problematic, sexist ideologies that negatively affect society as well as less contentment with heterosexual romantic relationships.

Though it may have its origins in a book written a couple thousand years ago, the Madonna-Whore dichotomy is very much alive and well. It proliferates our media and affects how both men and women

perceive women. As shown by the 2017 survey, even those who hold general progressive beliefs about female sexuality can still subconsciously find themselves projecting the dichotomy onto themselves and others. Personally, I know that I have not been able to escape this effect myself. Though I firmly believe that as long as sex is consensual and enjoyed by all participants, it is perfectly fine and should have no effect on how you perceive someone’s morality, I still find myself holding myself to different standards. I fear the possible attachment of “whore” or “slut” to my name one day. The believed immorality of female sexuality affects us all, and as long as art, movies, songs, and society continue to encourage its condemnation, the Madonna-Whore dichotomy will keep on ensnaring women in its binary of the impossible virginal mother and the evil slut. 🍎



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Only a year ago, we set out to retell a memory and a movement, and are now truly coming into our own, thanks to the work and sacrifice of this wonderful group of people. Through an eventful and challenging year, our journey has rallied together a hardworking community of voices, support, and love to produce works that are meaningful and communicative. Even after political tensions, social isolation, and the tragic loss of our peers, we are still thriving and creating.

All the growth we've achieved throughout this year, as well as the challenges that accompanied it, has helped us get to where we are today. We are fortunate, proud, and glad to be able to publish this special edition with the support of our staff and peers this term. After weeks of drafting, frantic late-night edits, zoom meetings, scouring google docs, and minor design disasters, we've made a magazine to be proud of. This magazine has brought together a wonderful group of people, and we're so grateful to have gotten to work alongside you.

Thanks for making this edition so groundbreaking.

-Anisia Tiplea and Kaitlyn Anderson, 21X Edition Design Heads

Note:

Content: Article authors

Editing: Editors who gave peer writing feedback and reviewed final articles

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