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OBSESSIONS

BARBARA EHRENREICH BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM PAGAN KENNEDY DAME DARCY GIRL CULTURE

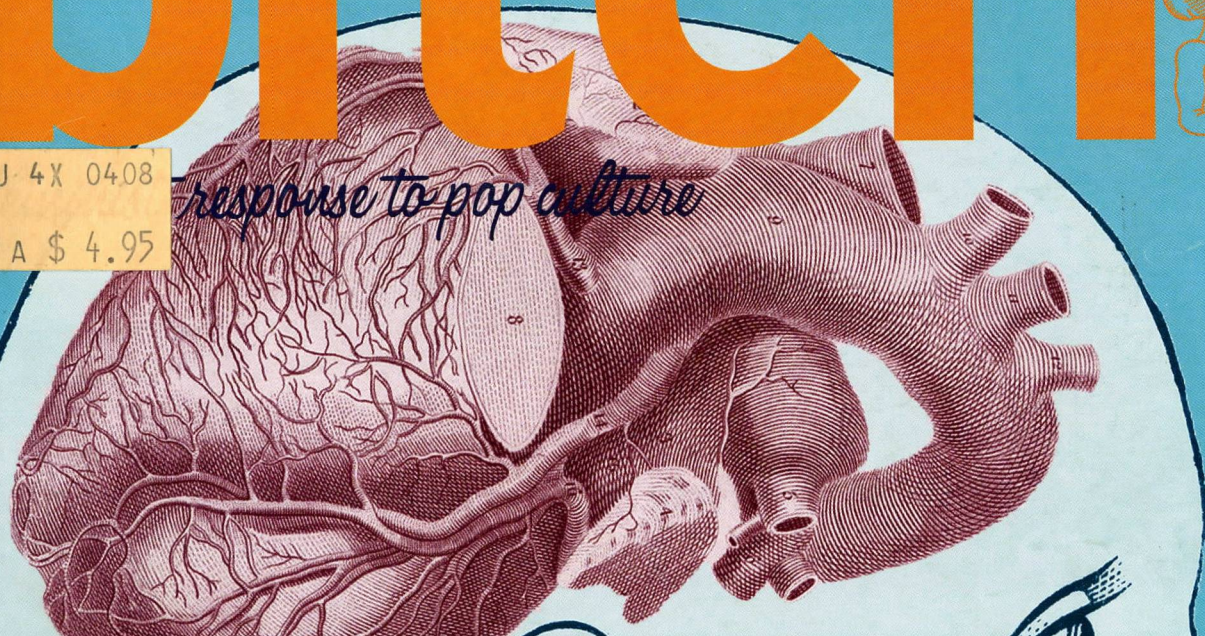
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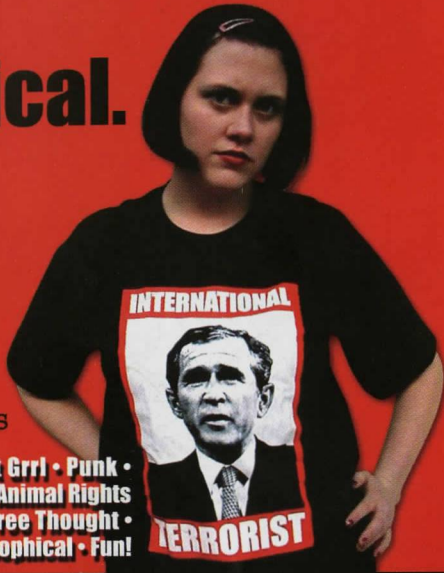
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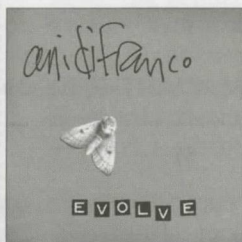
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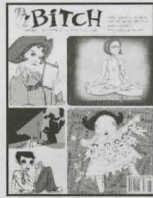
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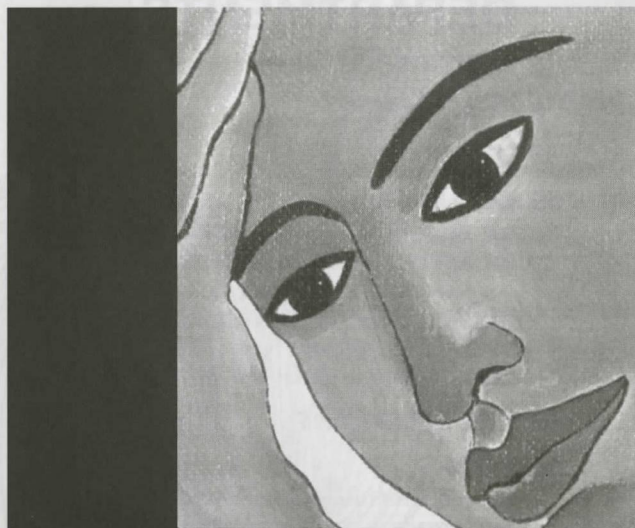
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THANKS Stanley Berkowitz, Kristen Freeland, Miles T. Levit, and the good folks at Sabuy Sabuy Jr.



editors' letter

The fact that a woman decides to take dirty pictures and...

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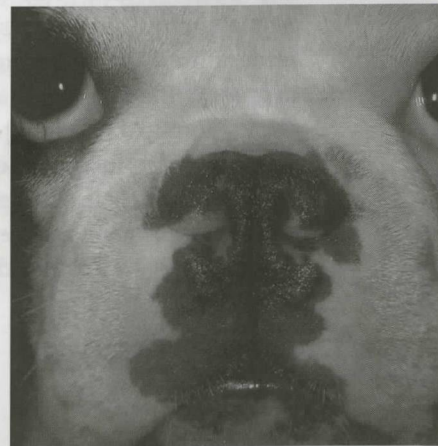
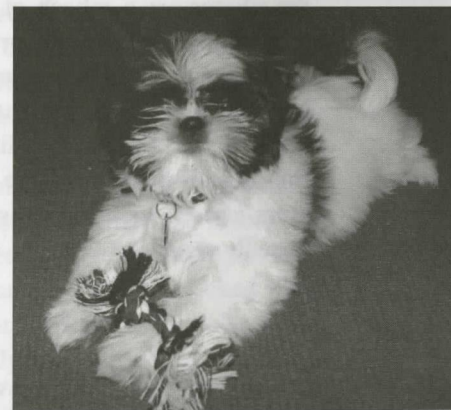
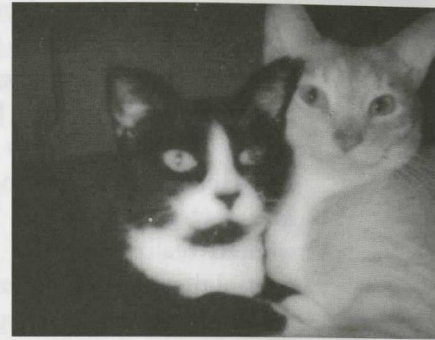
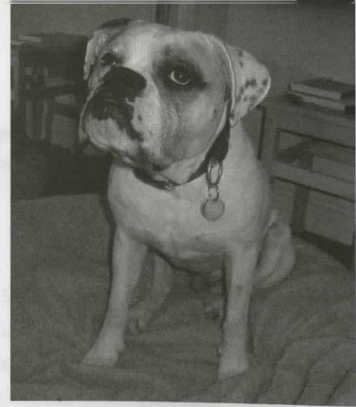
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what's another word for obsession?

When we first discussed doing an obsession-themed issue, we worried that it might be redundant. After all, we already focus on pop culture with an attention that could be called obsessive (and has been, not always charitably). So what would make this issue of *Bitch* more obsession-filled than any other?

Well, nothing, necessarily—except that pop culture itself is born of, or at the very least midwived by, obsessions: of creators, of fans, of markets, of a dogged human nature that chomps onto pop themes of love, sex, family feuds, vengeance, and who's wearing what to which awards show like so many chew toys. Creating and maintaining serial and simultaneous obsessions is arguably what mass culture does best, and interrogating those obsessions—and the impulses behind them—is what we like to think we do best.

So here we delve into obsessions specific (Trina Robbins and Dame Darcy on dolls, murder ballads, and fringes, page 27), general (cultural hybridity, page 34, and record collecting, page 46), political (our interview with Barbara Ehrenreich, page 60; our government's momentary and oh-so-convenient concern for women's rights in Afghanistan, page 19), and everything in between (see "Obsession Confession," page 52). And we've spared you from most of our own obsessions, past and present (Peeps, knitting, Pilates, Paul Rudd, *Bring It On*, sock monkeys, Steve Buscemi, pad ke mow from the Thai place around the corner, and our pets), even if we couldn't resist the temptation to slip a few of them in (see pictures at right). An obsession that we hope to leave behind for now is typefaces. The process of choosing our lovely new logo and display type made things pretty font-tastic around the HQ for the past several months. We're damn happy with our final choice and hope you will be too. —Eds.



dear bitch

Suicide notes

I find it interesting that Suicide Girls hopes to be “cute and naughty instead of dirty and sleazy” (“Sex, Dreads, and Rock ‘n’ Roll,” no. 19). A majority of people involved in the sex industry are under the impression that they control how their behavior is interpreted, but people I know who spend time at porn sites or in strip clubs interpret these women in whatever way gets them off. When will women realize that the power and control they are looking for may lie in the decision not to [display] themselves for money? I’ve been asking this question for a long time, and as long as the only way for a woman to make good money fast is through sexual exploitation, I’m not sure I’ll get an answer.

*Erica Greene
Portland, Ore.*

I ENJOY *BITCH*’S ONGOING EXAMINATION OF THE politics of sex work, but couldn’t author Annie Tomlin have been less reluctant to criticize? The fact that a woman decides to take dirty pictures and is in charge of her styling doesn’t have any bearing on whether or not the photos are a rehash of boring, boycentric porn. As more and more women produce their own porn, what emerges as the most relevant question is not who’s behind the camera but what the results are. And I was really disturbed that Tomlin didn’t even try to address the fucked-up name of the site—why did the site’s creators choose to associate suicide with something supposedly sexy?

*A.E. Berkowitz
Oakland, Calif.*

I WAS SURPRISED AT HOW MUCH OF “SEX, DREADS, and Rock ‘n’ Roll” was devoted to digging for faults. Accusing the Suicide Girls website of dressing up cheerleaders in Hot Topic makeovers was offensive and untrue. While I’m sure that a few of the girls shop at Hot Topic, Tomlin’s comment struck me as elitist and flip-pant: an unfair judgment of the many women on the site who consider their physical form to be a canvas for self-expression. Having met several of the models in person, I also disagree with your description of weight and body



type. While it’s true that the models tend to fall into a Western standard of beauty, the site still achieves a fair balance of healthy body types. As far as the race of the models, the site chooses models from the pool of whoever applies. Very few, if any, nonwhite girls ever apply to be models. This question is even answered by the site’s FAQ.

Finally, I disagree that SG is simply “a different-looking version of traditional pornography.” At the very least, the message is clear that members who do not respect women who choose to expose themselves in flesh

and otherwise are unwelcome.

*Steve Simitzis
San Francisco, Calif.*

The editors respond: Annie Tomlin did not, in fact, accuse the staff of Suicide Girls of dressing cheerleaders (or anyone else) in Hot Topic outfits. What she did write was this: “Despite their tattoos, hair coloring, and creative piercings, they fall neatly within the confines of mainstream beauty standards. Imagine giving the varsity cheerleading squad makeovers at Hot Topic, and you wouldn’t be too far off.” We call that kind of thing a description. About the lack of racial and body-type diversity, just because they note their awareness of the phenomenon doesn’t make the problem go away.

More comments on sex work in general

I found Audrey Brashich’s commentary on female chauvinist pigs (“Stale Cake,” no. 18) thoughtful, eye-opening, and intriguing, but your magazine is starting to deserve the motto “a female chauvinist pig sex worker’s response to pop culture.” Your apparent obsession with strippers as feminists seems to support the idea that women have an innately different approach to achieving empowerment. Not to burst anyone’s Annie Sprinkle bubble, but you can’t take something originally considered misogynist (such as porn or burlesque) and make it feminist by either claiming that women enjoy it or adding women of different ethnicities or body shapes to the stage. (A similar scenario took place when blacks in the 1990s felt that ebonics would enhance their racial pride and culture, when really it would have lowered their chances of graduating from school and taking control of their own

The fact that a woman decides to take dirty pictures and is in charge of her styling doesn't have any bearing on whether or not the photos are a rehash of boring, boycentric porn.

lives—this is exactly what racist white America wanted. In the same way, the media wants women to believe they'll be confident and strong if they strap on a black bustier and strut their stuff for a male—or female—audience.) I understand the good intentions of pro-sex work feminists, but in order to really challenge gender roles, we must either switch them around or satirize sexist images. Kristina Sheryl Wong ("The Princess and the Prankster," no. 18) did an excellent job with the Miss Chinatown photograph, which lashed back at the traditional image of Asian women as passive, pretty flowers. But Gennifer Hirano's pathetic attempt at fighting against racism and sexism by perpetuating sexist and racist stereotypes herself completely defeated the purpose and wasted her effort.

Lara Ayad
Ashburn, Va.

Flip Wilson

I found the article on screenwriter Erin Cressida Wilson ("The Interior of *Secretary*," no. 19) to be shocking in its criticism of feminists, in what is supposed to be a feminist magazine. Wilson's comments are ignorant and extremely unfair. As far as having "a feminist decide what you're allowed to desire" being "sick," I can say that I myself have been very angered by the advertisements for *Secretary* posted around my neighborhood.

I know, people like me don't "get" it. When feminists criticize this film (whether they've seen it or not), it is not censorship or dictatorship—it is free speech. I have a real problem with sadomasochist culture, because if you look beneath the surface you see that every act being depicted in fantasy is actually happening to a woman somewhere in reality. I think it would behoove many "feminists" to embrace art in which women are in control of their actions and decisions, rather than wallowing in (self) destruction.

Charlotte
New York, N.Y.

SECRETARY CREEPED ME OUT IN THE EXTREME, NOT because s/m is somehow unfeminist (it's not), but because the film suggests that Lee and Mr. Grey were able to magically divine each others' deepest desires without ever discussing a thing about their relationship. I had hoped that your interview with Wilson would shed

some light on this. Alas, it seems she'd rather display her ignorance about feminism and lack of insight about sexuality. Between her and Princess Superstar, I just have to say: There must be more talented, articulate, thoughtful women in media you could be spotlighting in your pages. Sheesh.

Hester Gallinule
Chicago, Ill.

On a roll

Thanks for Sharon Wachsler's incisive "Access Some Areas" (no. 19). I agree that the 54 million Americans with disabilities are largely airbrushed out of the tv landscape. But I disagree on a few issues.

Faulting Mitch Longley's aggressive lawyer on *Judging Amy* because he appears in inaccessible buildings misses the reality of his own experience as a disabled actor who has worked half his life in a wheelchair. Sometimes people in wheelchairs do find ways around inaccessibility because they've been doing it so damn long.

CSI deserves so much more than a tiny mention. First, there is Robert David Hall's double-amputee coroner. Equally important is star/producer William Petersen, who has been casting disabled characters in his work for the last 15 years. Petersen's own character on the show has a disability—a degenerative hearing disorder—that has let us witness how a professional deals with the onset of disability.

Wachsler doesn't mention any of the organizations working to change the status of disabled actors in Hollywood. The Media Access Office, for example, is a state-funded program that for 20 years has worked with tv shows to get disabled actors onscreen. They also work as script consultants so Hollywood writers don't always make ridiculous mistakes.

The piece also overlooks extras with disabilities. Yes, these are small, wordless parts, but they still greatly shift how viewers perceive the world around them.

What about Marlee Matlin? And what of Christopher Reeve's postparalysis contribution to tv? Wachsler's piece was a nice starting point, but I wish she'd had more space to develop the history of disability in Hollywood as well.

Diane Anderson-Minshall
Woodside, Calif.

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dear bitch

MAGAZINES ARE AMONG THE MEDIA IN WHICH DISABILITY IS RARELY COVERED, so I hope you continue to recognize the intersections between feminism, perceptions of the body, and disability. I read Wachsler's article after watching an episode of *Survivor: The Amazon*, in which a deaf character faced a cast of Darwinists who repeatedly ignored her simple request to look at her when speaking so that she might read their lips. It is terrific proof of how culture's attitudes against the disabled are reflected in and perpetuated by the media. Since, as Wachsler writes, culture encourages the disabled to express constant positivity and gratitude and suppress anger, I'm guessing even Wachsler's straightforward delineation of media bigotry will cause a defensive backlash. Please continue to allow disabled writers an honest voice about their experience in society and publish more pieces like this one.

Peggy Munson
Providence, R.I.

Sharon Wachsler responds: Diane Anderson-Minshall mentions some extremely important issues that I, too, wish I'd had space to cover in my piece. Unfortunately, the necessity of keeping my article a certain length and within a narrow focus—representation of disabled characters on prime-time dramas in the 2001–2002 network season—meant that I was unable to cover some of the excellent material she highlights, including the ramifications of nondisabled actors playing disabled characters, plot developments from later seasons, guest characters with disabilities, and more about Robert David Hall's role on *CSI*.

To clarify: I do not fault actor Mitch Longley for *Judging Amy's* flaws; I fault the writers, set designers, and directors, whose failure to dress a scene with accessible features supports public ignorance about the access needs of wheelchair users. Unfortunately, people do believe what they see on tv. A public that is accustomed to wheelchair users appearing in rooms up a flight of stairs sees little need for ramps or elevators.

My reason for excluding Marlee Matlin from the article is that she is a culturally deaf person. People who are culturally deaf do not identify as disabled; they identify as members of a linguistic minority who use American Sign Language as their primary language. The scope of my article could not have allowed this complex, important issue the attention it deserves. I hope that a deaf writer will tackle this in a future *Bitch*; with the *CSI* hearing-loss plotline, Matlin's role on *The West Wing*, and the deaf *Survivor* contestant, this is certainly a ripe topic.

Finally, Christopher Reeve has made every effort to dis-

tance himself from the disability community, even going so far as to state publicly that he is not in favor of disability rights! Reeve's vehement stance that disability is something only to be tolerated while being overcome—cemented by the infamous commercial in which he “walks” with the aid of biotech equipment—has entrenched existing disability stereotypes. Reeve has done everything he can to encourage media stereotyping of himself as an über-Supercrip/Poster Child, fairly basting himself in the media's syrupy outpouring of support for him as “courageous,” “inspiring,” “tragic,” and “afflicted.” For more on the disappointment and damage Reeve has brought to the disability-rights movement, check out *Ragged Edge* (www.raggededgemagazine.com).

I'm grateful to Anderson-Minshall for raising the bar on this underexamined area of discourse. I hope this is the beginning of a rich dialogue in *Bitch* on disability representation in pop culture.

It all comes back to biology, doesn't it?

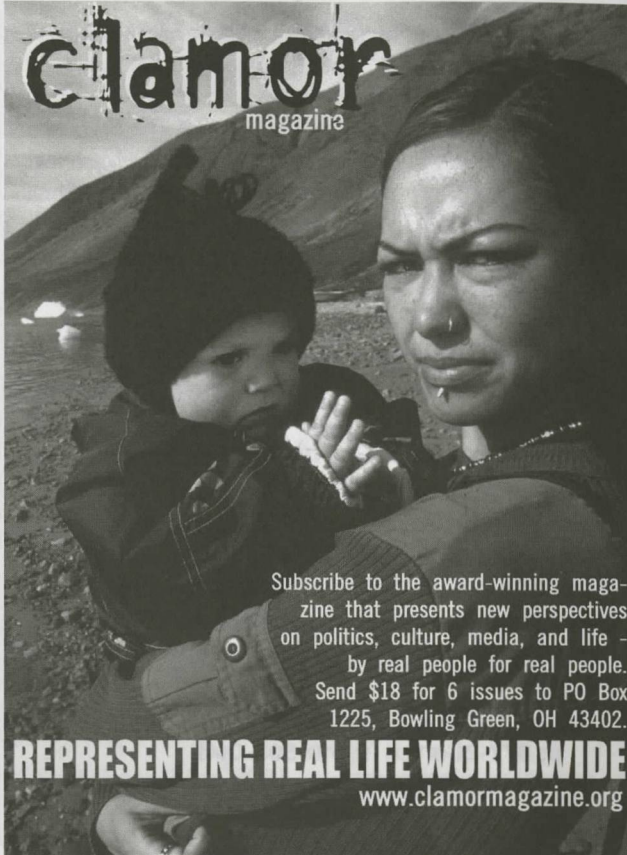
I would like to offer an alternative explanation for why the media reports the number of women and children that are victims of tragedy (“Women and Children First!” no. 19). Melissa Morrison posits that it is because women, along with children and the elderly, are viewed as weak and therefore in need of protection. As a biologist, I tend to evaluate human behavior in terms of evolutionary history. Eggs are energetically more expensive than sperm. Female mammals also carry their young in their bodies, give birth, and then feed [them] for a number of years. Compared to males' reproductive contribution—which, at its minimum, lasts for moments—the female is clearly the more valuable sex. This is not to say that the male's role is not important. However, it is in the entire population's interest to protect females, since the number of reproductive females has a large role in determining the population's growth rate and survival. I, for one, find this conclusion rather empowering.

Dana Haggarty
Victoria, B.C.

Honor guard

I was disappointed by Julie Ehlers's dismissal of *Women Who Rock* (“Magazines That Bite,” Love It/Shove It, no. 19). I'm here to defend *WWR*'s honor! *WWR* is not a puppet of the music industry but a feisty magazine struggling to establish a voice of its own while reaching out to a mainstream audience.

Ehlers might have noted that in an interview in the Fall 2002 issue pictured in *Bitch*, Tori Amos irately recounted the “capitalist greed” she experienced as, more or less, an



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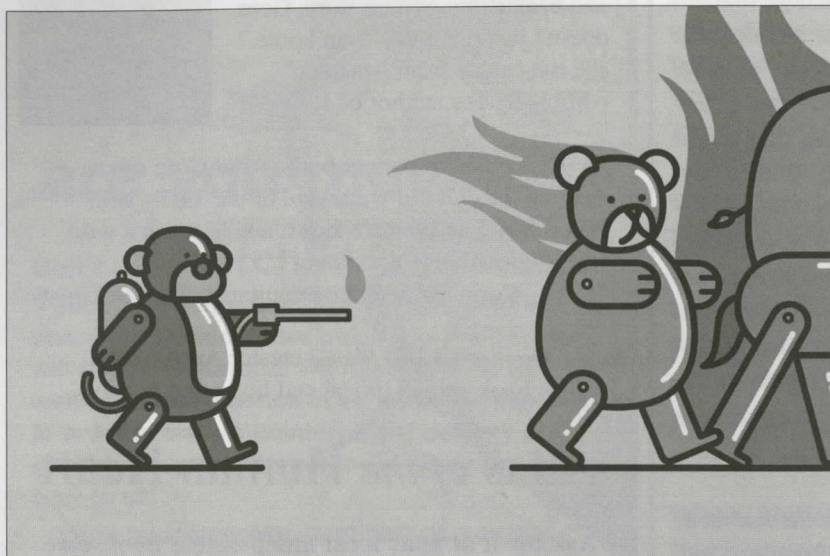
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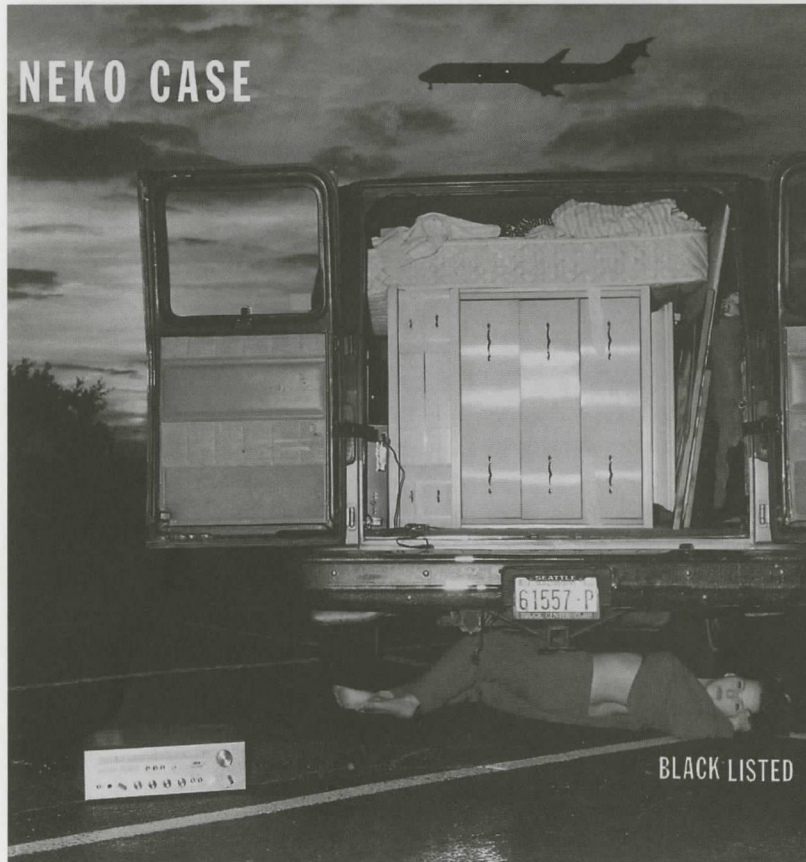
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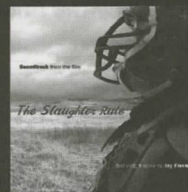


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you make me feel like a natural pacifist

The following e-mail recently showed up in my inbox: "Listen to the women.... As mothers, sisters, daughters, grandmothers, and aunts, we want national leadership that reflects the values we women hold dear: peace, compassion, generosity, and recognition of the interconnectedness of the whole human family."

Then I got one addressed to women and women's groups, calling for women to speak out in a unified voice against war. Then another. And another.

The idea that women are uniquely aligned with peace, peacefulness, peacemaking, and pacifism is most often explained in relation to women's role as mothers. Because mothers are concerned with the protection and preservation of the lives of their children, the story goes, they tend to concern themselves, by extension, with the protection and preservation of life on a broader scale. Thus, women, as mothers and caretakers, have an inherent interest in peace and a natural capacity to encourage, create, and sustain it. These messages are coming from and heading to feminists and non-feminists alike. The sentiments may be pretty—and prettiness may be tempting—but I say we dig deeper.

The problem with the innately peaceful woman is that from some angles she looks a lot like the angel in the house, her beliefs based only on a desire to protect her loved ones, not on any principles of her own. (And, of course, she invites a few obvious questions: What of women who aren't mothers? What of mothers who are primarily concerned with something other than the protection and preservation of their children? And what about fathers' desire to protect and preserve their children's lives—don't they feel it too?)

But the line that keeps ringing in my head is the one about "the values we women hold dear." Ah, yes, we women and our shared, homogeneous values.

We know this game, don't we? Generalizations about women as a category reinforce biological determinism and would stamp all women from the same mold. When generalizations make women saintly and superior and spin lovely yarns about lovely peacefulness in the face of ugly militarism and brutality, no matter how flattering they are, they're pretty much always wrong. Take a look at the realities of many women and many conflicts. For instance: 20 to 30 percent of Zapatistas are women,

fighting in what many would argue is a just war of resistance against an oppressive regime. Look at the early-20th-century female missionaries who traveled the globe, spreading Western imperialism, arguably the root of modern militarism. Look at Condoleeza Rice.

Women and peace means men and war means binary thinking means essential differences and samenesses rooted in sex means innate inclinations explain all.

Not helpful.

Now, for all you truly peace-inclined women out there: Why belittle yourselves and your pacifism by naming it a biological inevitability? As bell hooks points out in her essay "Feminism and Militarism," this "natural" and/or "unique" alignment of women and peace/peacemaking writes women as passive objects in the war-and-peace story, rather than as active agents capable of consciously choosing a political stance. The values we women hold dear are varied. This *self-identified* feminist pacifist thinks it's important to remember hers is only one voice, and though she hopes others will join her, she gets worried when nice folks start suggesting that women have a single, unified one. —**Jessica Hoffman**

Jane Petty Criticism Corner

So, Jane Pratt had her baby and, somewhat unsurprisingly, named it Charlotte Jane after herself. Yes, we know men do it all the time. And it's ass-y then, too. Two words: therapy fund. Since this may be the first time any woman, any-

gram printout! Most amazing of all, Pratt announces that she has a boundary that kept her from printing any photos of the baby emerging from her vagina. (Said boundary does not, however, stop her from sharing an anecdote wherein fiancé Andrew asks their obstetrician if he can masturbate during one of Jane's pelvic exams.)

While Jane's been busy contemplating her mucous plug, the *Jane* staff has apparently mounted some kind of competition to see who can surpass the Pratt-caliber levels of self-obsessed, grating mindlessness we've come to depend on every month. The hands-down winner for March is Stephanie Trong, who, in the fairly self-explanatory "Steph Is a Real Asshole as a Guy," gets a drag-king makeover and ventures out to sample hookers, Hooters, video parlors, and strip clubs in an effort to see "what the hell turns [guys] on." She says rude things to a Hooters waitress ("You're just supposed to look good so we can check out your chest") and finds that she only gets excited when giving a stripper "the look that only idiots like Fred Durst try to pull off—you know, the stupid, stoic stare that says, 'I own you, bitch.'"

Mmm. And even though Trong herself admits the persona she adopted was intentionally sleazy, she's clearly chosen to cross-dress more for the opportunity to be just that, rather than for any real insight into what it's like to be a man (many of whom don't, in fact, spend their evenings taking in xxx loops in a sticky video booth). Asserting her own sexism from behind the stubble of the appropriate gender may be fun for Trong, but it makes for reading that's about as scintillating as...hmm, let's see, what else is in this issue? Well, there's the very sensitive fashion spread titled "Asylum," featuring a model styled as a mental patient. But a pretty one! Like Frances Farmer! Who was lobotomized! But still very fashionable! Oh, and Pam Anderson, thanks awfully for telling us that it's very bad to be mean to our women friends. We didn't learn that in kindergarten, or ever. Okay, Stephanie Trong, you win. You are the most scintillating thing in this issue. But that's really not saying much. —Eds.

Halle, Renée, Nicole, Ben: pics their publicists want burned

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reveals how she dethroned
Britney, p. 124

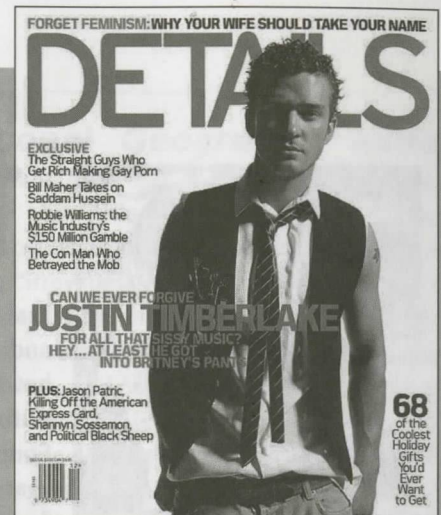
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where, has accomplished a feat of this sort, the March issue's Jane's Diary is naturally designed as a scrapbook of new-mom minutiae: baby's footprints! A scrap of paper bearing a scribbled list of contractions and the times at which they occurred! A sono-

I can't help it—it's like poking an open wound. When I saw a skinny Justin Timberlake attempting to effect an "I'm a sexy grown-up" vibe beneath the cover line "Forget Feminism: Why Your Wife Should Take Your Name," I couldn't resist picking up the December 2002 issue of *Details*. Of course, the cover boy is not the subject of the article they're talking about. Interestingly, neither is feminism. In fact, the author of the brief copy that merits this teaser mainly just has a beef with the exponential growth of surnames brought on by multigenerational hyphenation. Under the incredibly hostile headline "The Name Game: She'll Take Your Bachelorhood and Your Savings. So Why's She Choking on Your Last Name?," the writer even notes that "in fact, there are more reasons for a wife to

hold onto her name than there are letters in the alphabet." In other words, having nothing new to add to a topic that's been endlessly hashed over for more than a quarter-century, *Details* took the opportunity to bash feminism on its cover merely for the purpose of bashing feminism on the cover and perpetuating a typical lad-mag, puerile, and creepy battle-of-the-sexes view of relationships. That's real mature. —Julie Craig



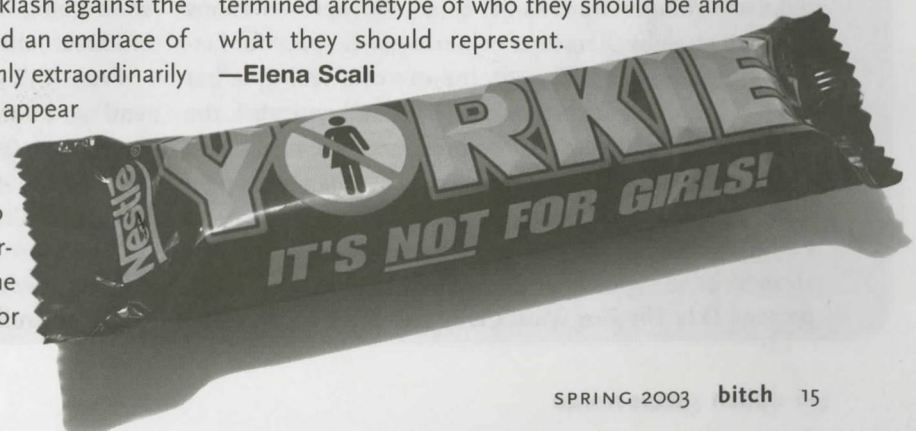
Having long admired the British penchant for sweets, I was thoroughly annoyed to learn that I, along with the rest of my sex, have been excluded from eating a particular U.K. chocolate bar. Last April, Nestlé launched a £3 million (about \$4.8 million) ad campaign to revitalize its 26-year-old Yorkie. A new slogan, "Yorkie, it's not for girls," accompanies a revamped package design, in which the "O" of Yorkie consists of the universal bathroom-door symbol for woman with a red circle and line cutting through it. Billboards and TV ads feature such slogans as "Don't feed the birds," "Not available in pink," and "King size, not queen size."

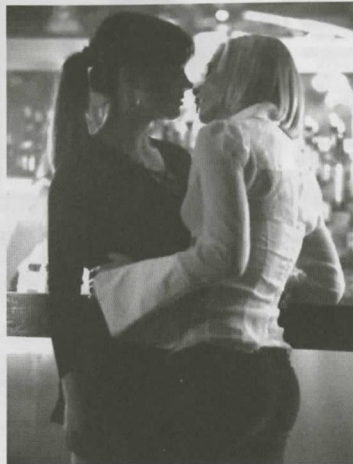
Should we simply dismiss this campaign as being lamebrained and forget about it? Or should it be taken more seriously as a symptom of backlash against the gains of the women's movement and an embrace of retrograde notions of masculinity? Only extraordinarily macho, big, bearded, and gruff men appear in the ad campaign. Moreover, the words and images clearly define manhood in hostile opposition to femininity, which is disparagingly portrayed as weak and undesirable. In the words of Nestlé marketing director

Andrew Harrison, "We felt that we needed to take a stand for the British bloke and reclaim some things in his life, starting with his chocolate. Most men these days feel as if the world is changing around them and it [has] become less politically correct to have anything that is only for males. It used to be that men had some areas of their life that were just for them and that was OK.... Yorkie feels that this is an important element of men's happiness and is starting the reclaiming process of making a particular chocolate just for men."

Wow, all that from a 70-gram bar of milk chocolate! Although Yorkie's new image may, in the minds of those who created it, act as a haven for men, it does so only through forcing them to conform to a predetermined archetype of who they should be and what they should represent.

—Elena Scali





life in the fastlane

Fast cars, flying bullets, and naked women. In hot tubs. Making out. With each other. Sounds like every 24-year-old dude's porn fantasy, but, in the case of a recent episode of Fox's high-concept cop/action show *Fastlane*, women were the ones orchestrating the frank depiction of lesbian sexuality. Lesbian writer Kim Newton penned "Strap On," the episode in which Lieutenant Wilhelmina "Billie" Chambers (Tiffani Thiessen) goes undercover to infiltrate a lesbian crime ring. (The title's double entendre so enraged fundamentalists that Fox had to backpedal, announcing that "Strap On" meant "take your gun." Uh-huh.) Though teasers for "Strap On" hyped the hell out of the kisses between Billie and Sara (the suspected ring-leader, played by Jaime Pressly), Newton chose not to play this one up for the guys. Well, not as much as you'd expect from a show dubbed by its creator as "the embodiment of *Maxim* magazine."

Billie's visit to a lesbian nightclub under the auspices of a criminal investigation "keep[s] us spatially bounded and locatable," says Kelly Hankin, author of *The Girls in the Back Room*, a study of lesbian space on film. However, because it's filmed at an actual lesbian-run bar (Los Angeles's Girl Bar) and seems to be populated with, well, actual (if femmey) lesbians, the scene already makes for quite an evolution from earlier cinematic representations in which straight characters colonize queer space for heterocentric pleasures. Though the use of a real dyke bar might, according to Hankin, help "authenticate" the space for straight viewers, the producers seem to do so out of a desire for aesthetic realism rather than to emphasize heterosexuality's dominance. Moreover, there is no ethnographic arrival scene where the (presumably) straight Billie signals her dissimilarity to the lesbian bar patrons (à la *The First Wives Club*), and there are no other

straight women in the scene to offer audiences their usual safe means of engaging in (and denying) lesbian fantasy scenarios.

Further positive notes: Billie is comfortable with women hitting on her in a way that's played for neither the ipso facto male gaze nor comic relief. "And she made no effort to identify herself as heterosexual to Van and Deaq, the men who work for her, [which] also makes it clear that she doesn't really care if people think she's gay, which is a great message," adds Sarah Warn, editor of the media watchdog site AfterEllen.com.

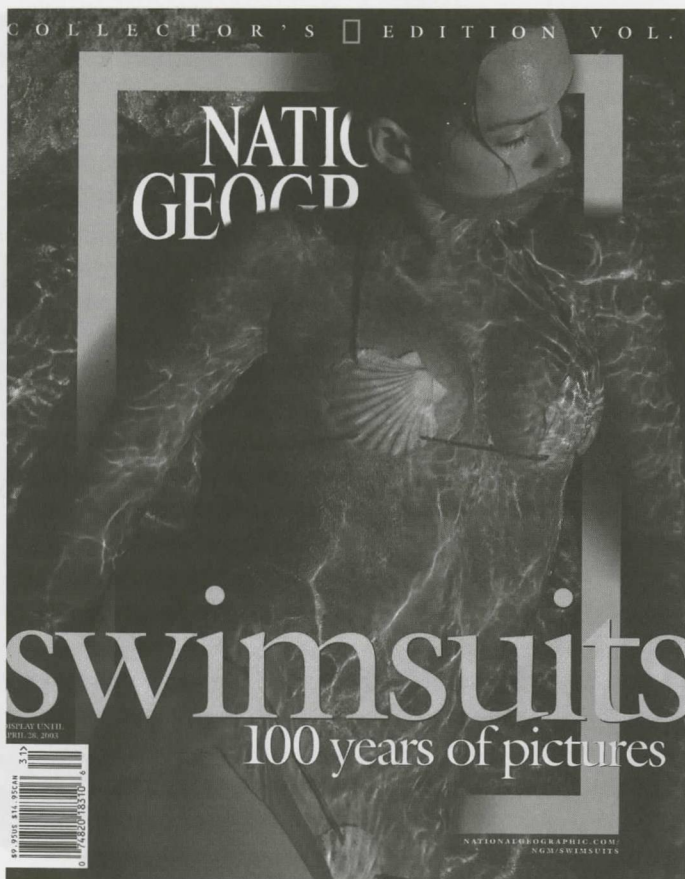
There are no fits of giggles or backhanded mouth wipes after the kiss (remember when Mariel Hemingway planted one on Roseanne?), and, in a prime-time network first, the phrase "bi-curious" made it on the air.

But what really sets *Fastlane's* lesbo episode apart from all the other shows in which high-octane hotties get it on is the context. Most of Sara and Billie's interactions are more intimate than sexual: They talk, touch hips, look into each other's eyes. It's clear that even though their relationship was formed under duplicitous circumstances, Billie has developed authentic feelings for Sara. And there's no man written in to conveniently reaffirm her heterosexuality.

Later, Van and Deaq try to muster the courage to ask Billie if she's gay. They chicken out and ask instead if she misses being undercover. There's a quick flashback to her dancing with Sara, and, as if to answer the real (albeit implied) question, she says, "Yes." "We want to hint at something in Billie's character—is she bisexual because she's doing her job or is she a lesbian?" said executive producer John McNamara.

Even if Billie stays in this ambiguous lesbo-limbo land and never breaks ground as an out dyke with unprecedented prime-time screen time, *Fastlane* offers a delightful vision of a TV landscape where lesbian imagery isn't strictly for men's pleasure. Bonus points for Thiessen, who, after the show aired, commented, "I didn't see what the big deal was all about."

—Diane Anderson-Minshall



National Geographic editor William Allen has quite the disingenuous take on this spring's special issue, "Swimsuits: 100 Years of Pictures," insisting that he wanted to be "irreverent" and "bring out...a sense of fun and wonder." Gee, Bill, are you sure you weren't looking to snare some newsstand dollars from buyers of the infamous and alarmingly profitable *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue (whose size, shape, and newsstand timing you've conveniently mimicked)? The funny thing is, it's only *Geographic's* cover that bears any resemblance to *SI's* hypercommercial T&A. Allen should've skipped the model wearing three strategically placed shells held together with leather laces. It cheapens what's inside: a thoughtful collection of vibrant photographs that sketch out a decade-by-decade evolution of bathing culture. It's a shame the *Geographic* decision makers didn't have the integrity to let substance take precedence over skin. —Lisa Jervis

making over the makeover

I'd never had a fantasy of being totally dominated by someone until I started watching *What Not to Wear* on BBC America. Episodes follow a strict makeover formula. We're first introduced to a woman who has been nominated by friends for a fashion overhaul. We see hidden-camera footage of her doing errands in saggy sweatpants, dancing in leopard-print spandex dresses, and going to work in frumpy suits. Then hosts Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine accost her in some public place and inform her that her friends think her style needs some work, but if she'll listen to their advice, they'll give her a check for £2,000 (about \$3,200) to spend on a new wardrobe. The next day they assess the current sad state of her closet and give her some tips on flattering outfits, and she gets to go spend the money.

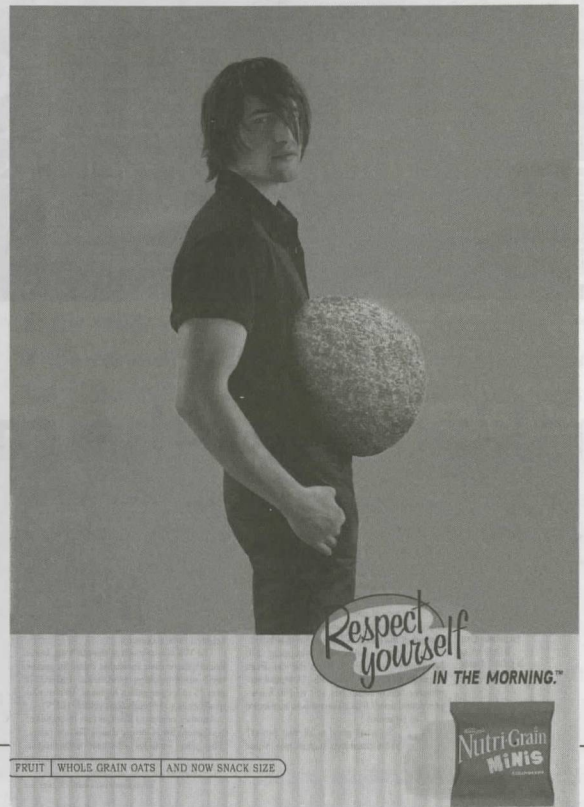
I expected *WNTW* to be a guilty pleasure along the same lines of *A Dating Story* or *7th Heaven*, but it's turned out to be much more meaningful. It's not just Trinny and

Susannah's gleeful bossiness and the way they talk constantly about each other's boobs in an unaffected, girl-friendly way that I can relate to. It's the way the show defies makeover expectations: Rather than vaguely unfashionable women with the kinds of bodies that make shopping easy being transformed into cookie-cutter fashion plates with none of their own personal style, *What Not to Wear* features ladies of all sizes and makes them all look good—and yet still completely like themselves. TLC has already produced an American version that will no doubt be lacking in the British original's self-awareness. I only wish that Trinny and Susannah would pay me a visit and ween me off the one pair of jeans I wear to work every day. —Marisa Meltzer



From the **Little Things Mean a Lot Files:** After decades of couching all menstrual talk in euphemism and demonstrating absorbency with blue fluid (or even blue computer-illustrated fluid), one pad and tampon maker has finally embraced the color red and the word "period." Kotex is now keepin' it real with ads and packages sporting a big, playful red dot. Yes, it's a

baby step (and one that was likely focus-grouped to death before being taken), but it still makes me feel all giddy. —L.J.



Nutri-Grain's new "respect yourself in the morning" ad campaign wears its offensiveness on its sleeve. But they'd prefer you to imagine wearing your morning cinnamon roll on your arms or ass. The idea of respecting yourself over what you were able to eat for breakfast is repulsive enough even without the suggestion that something you did the night before warrants

guilt. Don't worry, though, ladies, 'cause Nutri-Grain's an equal-opportunity insulter: There are also spots featuring a guy with a big ol' Hostess Sno Ball on his gut. Write to the Nutri-Grain folks and tell them what you think of their not-so-subtle judgmental linking of eating and sexual appetite: Kellogg's Consumer Affairs, P.O. Box CAMB, Battle Creek, MI 49016. —M.M.



veiled intentions

the u.s. media's hug-and-run affair with afghan women

To my dismay, the movie theater closest to my apartment relentlessly offered the most pitiful of Hollywood's already-pitiful fare—that is, until September 11, 2001, after which *Kandahar*, a story of an exiled woman's return to Afghanistan, popped up on the dusty marquee. As the usual supply of teen schlock came and went, *Kandahar* hung steadfastly on for months—proof that the plight of Afghan women was becoming a distinctly mainstream concern.

The road of post-9/11 pop culture and news media is littered with as many nods to Afghan women as a typical Bush speech is with refer-

ences to “the evildoers.” To wit: As reported in *USA Today* in February 2002, the website for the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan received such heavy traffic after a mention on *Oprah* that it crashed. As of this writing, a total of seven books on Afghan women have been released by major publishers since September 2001. Just weeks before the United States invaded Afghanistan, CNN re-ran *Beneath the Veil*, a documentary on the topic. Meanwhile, the word “burka” became ubiquitous: It showed up on the American Dialect Society's 2001 Words of the Year list, and the editors of the *American*

Heritage College Dictionary rushed to include it in their latest edition. Even the *New York Post* jumped on the burka bandwagon (albeit in a completely bizarre way), using the word to describe the shroud with which Michael Jackson covers his children.

Finally, it seemed, the U.S. was paying attention to what many feminists had known since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 1996: The fundamentalist regime was committing countless human rights abuses every day. Before 9/11, campaigns by the Feminist Majority Foundation and others to call attention to the obstacles faced by Afghan women, to raise funds for Afghan

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If Afghan women were to gain freedom, it would not be because our government deemed their lives important, but because their oppression was **justification** for the U.S. bombing of their country.



women to be educated in refugee and underground schools, and to pressure the U.S. government to increase aid went largely ignored. Politicians in both parties paid lip service to Afghan women's plight, but this recognition didn't lead to any significant action. Even with support from Hillary Clinton and Mavis Leno, wife of Jay, efforts to raise international awareness heralded little mainstream attention.

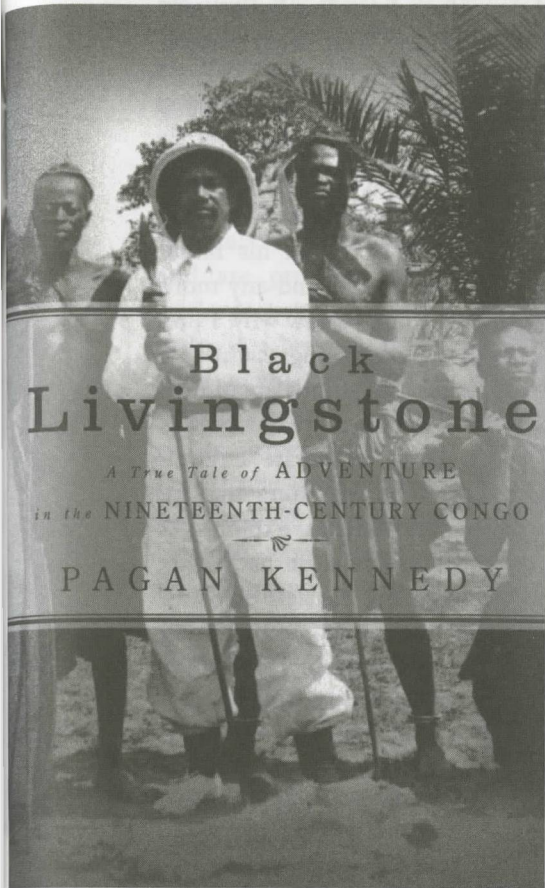
Once Al Qaeda emerged as the force behind the 9/11 atrocities, however, the Bush administration started sounding rather, well, feminist in its stance toward the Taliban. But Bush, hardly renowned for

championing the rights of women in America, let alone those in the Third World, was not demanding liberation for the women of Afghanistan out of principle or even compassion. If Afghan women were to gain freedom, it would not be because our government deemed their lives important, but because their oppression was justification for the U.S. bombing of their country.

While George rallied the troops with sweeping generalizations about good and evil, Laura was brought in, most likely to make his sudden concern for women's rights seem a bit less faux. In November 2001, she stepped out of her usual smiling,

placid place just behind her husband's shoulder to deliver the weekly radio address usually given by her husband, on the topic of Afghan women. In her address, she claimed that "the brutal oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists" and that "the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women." (One could also apply such sentiments to violent protesters outside abortion clinics, but the religious right is not the particular face of terrorism with which either Bush is concerned.) In a May 2002 speech to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, she declared: "Prosperity cannot follow peace without educated women and children.... When women are educated, people's lives improve in significant other ways as well." While her phrases ring with feminist tones, Mrs. Bush's words seem to have little to do with a sincere desire to improve conditions for women in Afghanistan. In the typically illogical black-and-white terms of propaganda, supporting the welfare of the world's women means supporting the war on terrorism—and, more insidious, supporting the war on terrorism means supporting the world's women, with no further action required.

As rhetoric in support of Third World women flourished, aid programs for those same women remained in constant jeopardy. In November 2001, the State Department issued its "Report on the Taliban's War Against Women," a large portion of which was devoted to the need for improved healthcare. But last summer, in direct opposition to the report's recommendations, Bush withheld \$34 million in funding from the United Nations Population Fund, which provides global aid (Continued on page 90)



pagan's progress

an interview with zine queen-turned-cultural historian pagan kennedy

Pagan Kennedy's prolific writing career has often seemed split into several distinct parts. As the creator of the late-'80s zine *Pagan's Head*, she was a wacky chronicler of publishing gossip, group-house dynamics, underground Americana, and her own evolving hairstyles. (All eight issues were eventually collected, along with additional material about her life as one of the earliest fomenters of what came to be known as the zine revolution, in *'Zine: How I Spent Six Years of My Life in the Underground and Finally...Found Myself...I Think.*)

As a fiction writer, she's turned out mannered, character-driven works such as *Stripping and Other Stories* (1994), *Spinsters* (1995), and *The Exes* (1998). And as a cultural critic, she's tackled everything from '70s pop culture (in her exhaustively researched 1994 survey *Platforms: A Microwaved Cultural Critique of the 1970s*) to '90s post-slackerdom (in 1997's *Pagan Kennedy's Living: A Handbook for Maturing Hipsters*, an irreverent primer on living urban, creatively unfettered, and outside "the program" into the thirtysomething years).

Most recently, Kennedy has added another dimension to her multifaceted literary personality by venturing into the realm of biography. *Black Livingstone*, published last year, is the story of William Sheppard, a black man born in Virginia who traveled to Africa as a missionary and stayed on to become an explorer and civil rights pioneer in the Belgian Congo.

Kennedy has always brought a political edge to lighthearted topics and a trenchant wit to serious ones (in *Living*, she combines the two especially well, advocating for the environmental and economic bene-

the *New York Times Magazine* where I'm allowed to follow somebody around for days. For most magazines, when you do this it has to be some celebrity-type person, but I would love to follow anyone around for days. That's like a writer's dream. And then not to have any repercussions—to be able to write about them honestly and not get in trouble for it.

You've said that you hope to be "the Noam Chomsky of lifestyle writing," which I take to mean that you'd like to inspire people to consider the social and political impact of their lifestyles. I'm thinking in particular of the article you wrote for *Ms.* on the "Boston marriage" of you and your roommate ("So...Are You Two Together?," June/July 2001).

I wrote that in my early 30s, when I had more energy to devote to telling people how they should live. [Laughs.] Now I've got a little more of a live-and-let-live attitude. *Pagan Kennedy's Living*, which I kind of think is my weakest book, was great for me because it helped me figure out how I wanted to live my life. That was my little field project; I went around interviewing people about how they'd constructed their lives, and trying to figure out, How do I want to do it?

Men don't have to decide so definitively whether they're going to marry and have kids; it can just kind of happen to them. [Women are] so defined by that, and having kids is so much more of a big decision for us, because we're going to do a lot more of the work. So when I decided not to get married and not to have kids, it was a long struggle, and now I've come out on the other side. It still interests me, but it's not like I'm grappling with it in the same way. Then, I was struggling with the

question of, Well, if I don't get married and I don't have kids, what is the narrative of life? It opens up incredible freedom, but that freedom is scary. Children give a story to your life, and if you don't have that, then you're responsible for making up the story to a larger degree. That scared me. And now it doesn't really scare me anymore.

Your early writing was obsessed with pop culture—mostly of the '70s, and mostly family-themed shows like *The Brady Bunch* and *The Partridge Family*. Is there anything you find obsession-worthy, in either a good way or a bad way, about pop culture today?

I've kind of turned away from it. I can't even remember why I was so fascinated with it, frankly. [Laughs.] I think it was great that I got to indulge that passion for a while, because I've certainly worked through it. I'm in sort of a Thoreau period now—we don't have a tv set in the house, we go out to the country a lot, stuff like that. It's been interesting experimenting with pop culture deprivation, and I find a lot opens up when I do that. I like being thrown back on myself.

When you're younger, you define yourself through pop culture. And [when you] decide not to marry or have kids, you have to kind of find your own way to do it, and I think not watching tv helps. But my boyfriend has a tv, and he's got the *New York Times* coming in, so it's kind of hard not to dip into it when I'm at his house. But I also have a friend in western Massachusetts who I go and hang out with a lot, and there's no tv anywhere around, the radio barely works. It's like being on a ship in the middle of the ocean in the 19th century.

Pop culture analysis is like being in a hall of mirrors; it's an endless

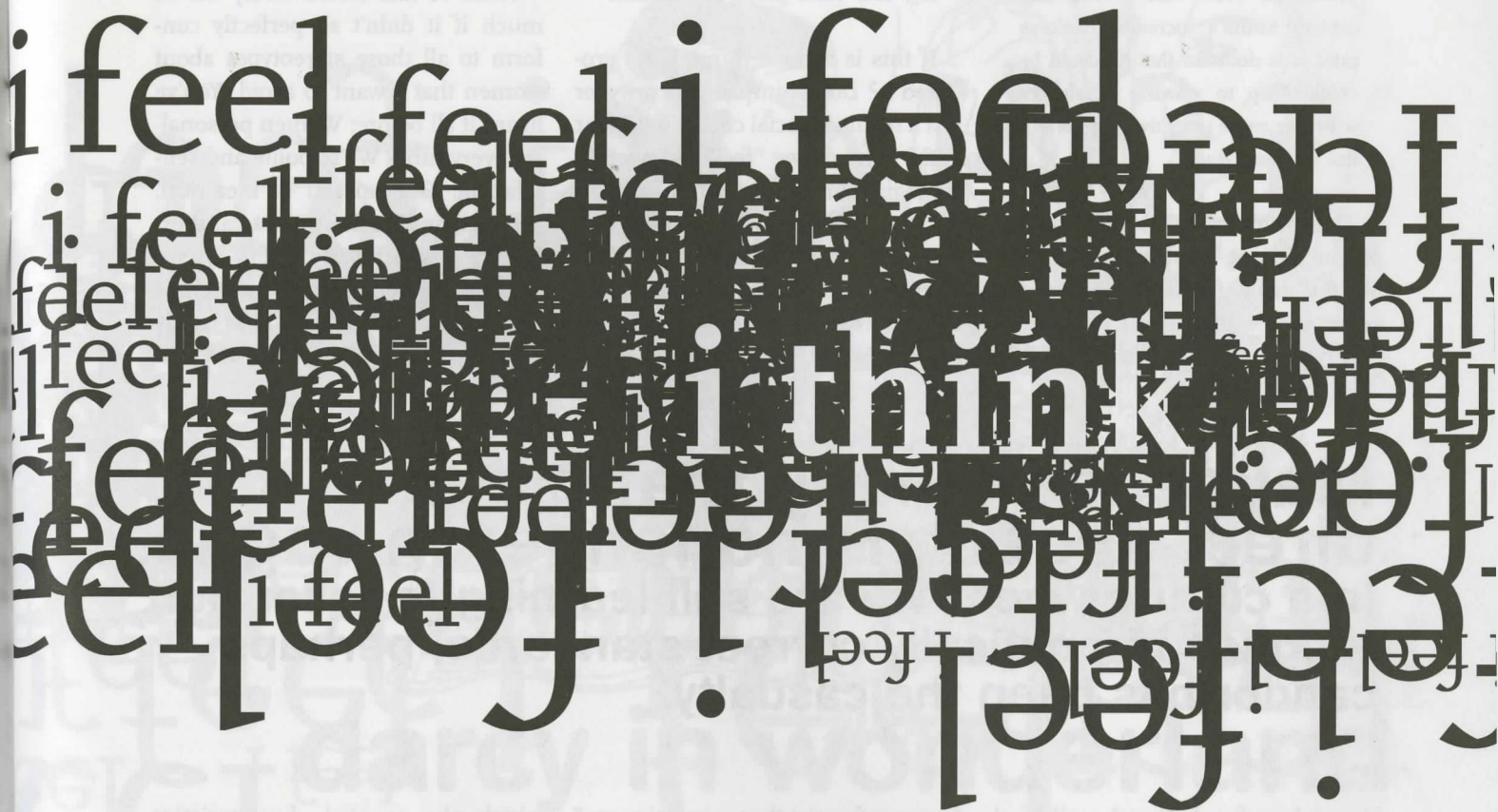
reflection of what people think about what people think about what people think. And it can feel very ungrounded to me. I wrote this rant in *Living* as part of my moment where I was turning away from the media. Watching and reading the news was really interfering with my ability to be an activist. That was before the web really existed; now I think it's a lot easier to read the media and be an activist. But there is a kind of tone to the newspapers that keeps you passive—there's never any information given about how to write your congressman, or about what bill is pending. It's not set up for acting.

Didn't you at one point write for *Seventeen*?

I did; I had friends who were editors there. One time they asked me to do a piece about summer love. And I ended up writing about having this best friend at 15 and chasing these boys, but how the real summer love was between me and my best friend. And, amazingly, they printed it. And I did a piece about zines, and they printed part of my novel. I had a nice relationship with them.

And, oh my god, I judged their fiction contest. It was overwhelming. It was so weird, too, because I was judging it in the middle of the '90s—'94 or '95, I think. And the first year I judged, there were almost no gay characters in the stories. But the second year, after *Melrose Place* had introduced a gay character, I'd say about 10 percent of the stories had a gay character. That was when I thought, Wow, pop culture is really, really powerful. At least with teenagers.

Is there something shared by the different topics you've covered, one specific thing that's drawn you to them? (Continued on page 91)



In my second year as an undergraduate at Smith College, I was witness to an epidemic. It wasn't a disease, but it was contagious; it wasn't deadly, but it was very, very annoying. It infected every woman in sight and struck at the student body's most prized talent: our articulacy. Fearful that we would inadvertently offend one another, we stopped speculating, conjecturing, contradicting. We stopped thinking. We "felt."

It struck first in the dorms.

"But I feel like that's just absurd, you know what I mean?"

"Oh, totally. And I also feel like..."

I watched, powerless, as it invaded all my classes, forming a soporific haze that thickened every time the phrase was uttered, dulling the intellect and turning discussions into Miss Congeniality contests, with opinions no sooner expressed than

they were withdrawn in deference to others' "experiences."

It wasn't happening only in Women's Studies 101, which was notorious for devolving into theatrical consciousness-raising sessions, and it wasn't just "I feel like." It was "like," "I mean," "you know?," and various other colloquial throat-clearings. Truth be told, the problem had festered unchecked for years.

It gained new prominence when our college president, Ruth Simmons, took her private beef with what she termed "mall-speak" to the national media. On the front page of the *Boston Globe*, Simmons was quoted as saying, "It's minimalist, it's reductionist, it's repetitive, it's imprecise, it's inarticulate, it's vernacular. It drives me crazy." Slanguage had become substance, and conversational tics became a staple of dinner-time debate.

To calm her nerves, Simmons established a new series of speaking-intensive course requirements for incoming students and encouraged professors to place more emphasis on oral presentations. The "Speaking Across the Curriculum" program touched a national nerve, and the school was featured on ABC's *Good Morning America* and *Fox News*. In the meantime, other colleges, including Wesleyan, Stanford, MIT, and the University of Pennsylvania, implemented similar programs.

At the height of the hoo-ha, the staff of the Smith newspaper, the last bastion of coherence on campus, published an editorial advising everyone to chill out.

We daresay that Smith women, in most cases, can control their mouths and change their pattern of speech depending upon the situation with

practice.... How else would one explain Smith's incredible success rate? It is doubtful that [it] could be chalked up to wowing employers with ever more inventive ways to utilize the word 'dude.'

The hubbub subsided, but the plague did not. I knew I was in trouble the day I found myself in disagreement with another student. "I totally see where you're coming

say," and "some people might think."

If this is a chick thing, what provoked it? Does it imply insecurity, or is it a result of social conditioning, or both? Why do we "feel" the need to apologize for our convictions?

In a 1981 essay on men's and women's speech patterns, Gloria Steinem argued that the popularity of assertiveness training for women in the 1970s, which she deemed

None of this would worry me as much if it didn't so perfectly conform to all those stereotypes about women that I want to avoid. You've heard it all before: Women personalize everything. We're polite and self-effacing. Our speech is theatrical, indirect, and badly suited to authority. The first scholarly text to assemble all these notions in one place was linguist Robin Lakoff's 1975 study *Language and Women's Place*, in

Maybe it's simply that clear, direct speech is no longer in vogue. In a culture where we are still learning to tailor our tongues to politically correct standards, perhaps candor has been the casualty.

from," I prefaced, "but I really feel like you could make the opposite argument. You know?"

Such locutions are ubiquitous among younger women. In response to a query I posted on the message boards at Chicklit, a website populated by women who revere correct grammar and eloquence (www.chicklit.com), one woman wrote:

I do think that in some ways it may be a sign of insecurity to preface statements with "I feel..." instead of "I think..." I've noticed that a lot of women do this, even correcting themselves mid-stream.

Another weighed in on her own experience with indirect speech:

As a person who was often considered pushy and rude because I said what I thought, I am now careful to affect a passive tone of voice, avoid direct eye contact and preface what I say with things like "I think," and "one might

"more reformist than revolutionary," was partly responsible for a communication model that sought to assimilate women into traditional "male" communication styles. (She also noted that female politicians who appear "too abrasive or aggressive" are frequently ridiculed.) Far from condemning the victims of this gendered social training, Steinem encouraged women to take pride in their "emotional expressiveness" and warned against imitating the "male 'adult' style."

Maybe it's simply that clear, direct speech is no longer in vogue. In a culture where we are still learning to tailor our tongues to politically correct standards, perhaps candor has been the casualty. One man on the Chicklit boards had a similar thought but couldn't quite be sure. "I've always seen it as a symptom of society's undervaluing of thinking and intelligence," he wrote. "Of course, that could be just me."

which she equated characteristics she observed in women's speech (hesitation, passive tones) with weakness and, in turn, femininity and deference. Although the work has since been subject to heavy criticism (not least for the fact that it lacks any empirical basis for its claims), Lakoff's ideas had the effect of validating and naturalizing many conclusions about women and were incorporated into other academic studies and pop culture.

Such ideas also reinforced assumptions about supposed uniquely feminine talents and limitations; nowhere has the effect been more pronounced than in the workplace. Many a book has been written about women's leadership styles, and most of them read like how-to guides for the average working woman burdened with insensitive or recalcitrant male subordinates. These trite little manuals analyze the inevitable misunderstandings, (Continued on page 91)



darcy in wonderland

meet the first lady of goth comics

One day in 1990, cartoonist Dylan Williams told me, "Here's something you'll like," and handed me a comic book called *Meatcake*, by somebody named Dame Darcy. He was right. I couldn't believe this woman's style: a marriage of gothic and girly, with just a soupçon of Edward Gorey and a fine peppering of wit. Cavorting through the pages were bizarre and boozy characters—mostly female—with names like Richard T. Dirt and Strega Pez. There were mermaids and a pair of Siamese twins named Hindrence and Perfidia, and all of them (except the mermaids) shared a propensity for wearing striped stockings, as, I was soon to learn, did their creatrix.

Twelve years later, by then hopelessly addicted to *Meatcake*, I took a doll-making workshop with the

Dame at Ladyfest Bay Area. Looking very much like Alice in Wonderland, Darcy let her magic fingers fly over the modeling clay, fashioning slim arms and legs, long, delicate bodies, and fairy faces. The klutzy class attempted to copy her graceful figures, with varying degrees of success. When the workshop ended, I had completed four sausage-shaped limbs and a deformed trunk. The pathetic body parts lay in a basket in my back room for months before I admitted failure and tossed them. Darcy's dolls, I realized, are Darcy herself, so nobody else can really make them. Finally, I bought a doll from her. Now it sits on my shelf, a tiny Darcy doppelgänger.

I've since learned that Darcy makes more than comics and dolls. She tours around the world with her bands Planet Filly and Aye Aye

Captain and apparently plays every stringed instrument in the known world. She writes, models, makes animated films, and stars in her own cable tv show, *Turn of the Century*, clips of which were recently turned into a movie. Last winter, Ten Speed Press released her first book, a collection of stories illustrated in characteristic Darcy style. *Frightful Fairytales* is what the brothers Grimm might have written if they had been sisters, and a little loopy at that. I simply had to interview this Renaissance Dame, but when I first phoned Darcy, she was about to leave on a trip to Japan and Australia. I finally reached her back home in Los Angeles, six weeks later. Despite suffering from the mother of all jet lags, she cheerfully discussed murder ballads, septuagenarian dolls, and the friendships shared by stringed instruments.

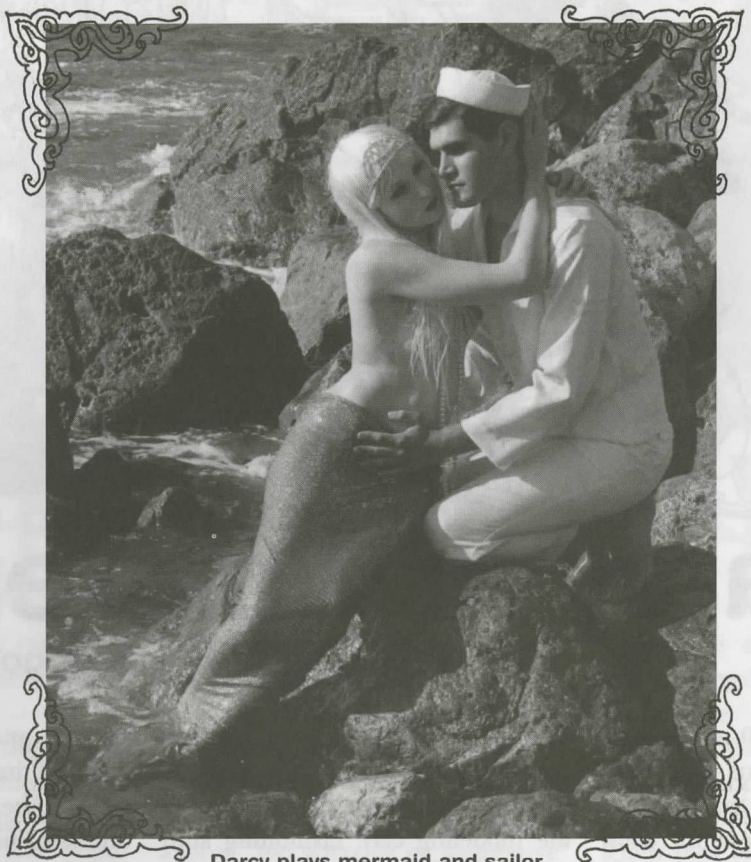
Okay, so first of all, tell me what you were doing in Australia.

I was in Australia and Japan promoting and signing *Frightful Fairytales*, but I also just released a CD called *My Eyes Have Seen the Glory*. And I was touring and performing as well as doing book signings.

All right, listen, I'm going to start at the very beginning, okay? What made you decide to do comics?

I've always done sequential art. The first book I wrote was when I was 2. It was a little series of pictures about cats being in love. I wrote a ton of books after that; my mom has a lot of them. Since I was 8, I really wanted to be an animator. When I was in high school, I got a *Love and Rockets* comic, and it made me realize that you can be an underground cartoonist for a living. I mean, I had seen Robert Crumb's books, and *Heavy Metal* magazine. I knew that comics didn't just have to be like the ones in the paper; I knew they could be weird. But it didn't become a reality to me, that I could write my own comic and have it published, until I saw *Love and Rockets*, and I realized this book was about these punk-rock girls, kind of like I was, and that it was about, you know, the daily life of these girls. I started making more comics with that idea in mind. Starting to draw comics was a good way to begin the process of being an animator without the expense and time of animating. I went to San

Francisco Art Institute and majored in film and studied animation, but I still do comics because they're very inexpensive to produce. It's just ink and paper.



Darcy plays mermaid and sailor.

When did the first *Meatcake* come out?

I started self-publishing *Meatcake* in 1989. I'm currently drawing no. 13 for Fantagraphics. I love being a cartoonist and I'll always make comics, but I've always intended to be a filmmaker and an animator and make a TV series, and I just did comics in the meanwhile because I wanted to be productive and make something while I was waiting. And as soon as my comics came out, I went around to, you know, Viacom and MTV and Nickelodeon and anyone I could think of and asked them to hire me as an animator and

asked them to produce my TV show. This was when I was like 22. And none of them produced my TV show, but they hired me as an animator, and I got to work with a bunch of different companies. I was in New York City for seven years and I never got my TV show produced; everybody kept saying, You should move to Hollywood. And I was like, Oh, it's going to suck. Is it worth it? You know, following this dream around. I feel like that Chaka Khan song—"He's moving to Hollywood." I've lived here for a year and a half and it really did suck, but now everything's fine.

Let's talk about your book, because I love your book. I'm sure other people have talked about your similarity to Edward Gorey. In

this book especially, it's the combination of, as you say, frightful and just darling Victorian, sweet fairy-ness. *The Queen of Spades* is one of my favorites, where she has the "fringe holder" for whenever she needs to add fringe to something. It makes so much sense.

Yeah, well, I really love Gorey, but I think what happened is more that I really like illustrators from the late 19th century, and so did Gorey. So I sort of started emulating that style before I saw his work, and then when I saw it, I was happy that there was somebody else who had a similar style. My parents were hippies,

but we had an antique home, with a lot of antique stuff, and my mom was really crafty, and she made her own clothes and liked to embroider and stuff. And my dad was a folk musician and painter. I used to perform with him all the time. And he taught me to paint and draw and stuff. And even though we were living in the '70s, it was very much not like living in the '70s, partly because I was a child and partly because [we lived in] Idaho [and it] wasn't really up to date as far as what was going on at the moment. The community we lived in, it was like living in one of those train-set towns—a little church, a little store, a little playground, a little school. It was a timeless place. When I go back to Idaho Falls now, everything's still the same.

I really loved *A Child's Garden of Verses*, by Robert Louis Stevenson. It had illustrations that looked very Pre-Raphaelite. And I had a lot of the *Alice in Wonderland* stuff with the John Tenniel illustrations. [Alice] was a big deal to me. I had a really good book—it was the unabridged *Alice in Wonderland* and it also had other poetry works by Lewis Carroll. And I started reading that when I

magical, giant Victorian house in Pasadena, California. And her backyard had all these blooming flowers, and a big statue of Mary, and I'd go out in the backyard and listen to the wind chimes, and I could see the fairies flying around and hear them singing. And I used to just stand there looking at them and listening to them singing. I believe in fairies and ghosts, and I love mermaids, and I believe in witchcraft.

Back to the dolls—have you read *Women Who Run with the Wolves*? The author, who is a Jungian psychoanalyst, deconstructs fairy tales and fables. And there's this one story of Vasilisa and Baba Yaga....

Oh, I'm really, really into that story! She's got a little doll, and the doll talks to her.

That made me think of the drawing in *Frightful Fairytales*, of the poor little girl whose father is a gambler, and in her pocket there's a little doll who also has a broom.

Yeah, I really love that story. Dolls have a really big significance in most

now she takes it easy. I think of her as being kind of my alter ego; she's been there for me. She's even got her own little room. I live in this beautiful Victorian house in Echo Park. It's like a dollhouse, and my room looks like a doll ship. And in my room is a smaller room, and that's Isabelle's room. She has a little bed and a little trunk, and she used to have a little piano, but it got left in New York when I moved. And she has hundreds of cabaret costumes because we used to perform every week in New York. And she still performs, because that's the one thing she's really good at. She has a little banjo and a little tambourine, and I play those instruments, too.

What else do you play?

I play banjo, tambourine, singing saw, autoharp, and I started playing mandolin, but it broke. So I can't really officially say I play that. I also play electric bass. My dad plays guitar, banjo, bass, mandolin, and autoharp too. Once you learn a stringed instrument, it's

“I think that banjos and ukuleles are friends.”

was probably 8 or 9, and I just went crazy and memorized a lot of the poetry—I was really into writing poetry at the time. Long stories that rhymed. Some of the books that I wrote when I was 8 or 9 were these long stories that rhymed, with little pictures.

What about your dolls? I love your dolls. There's a magic to your dolls. I see your dolls all as little Darcys.

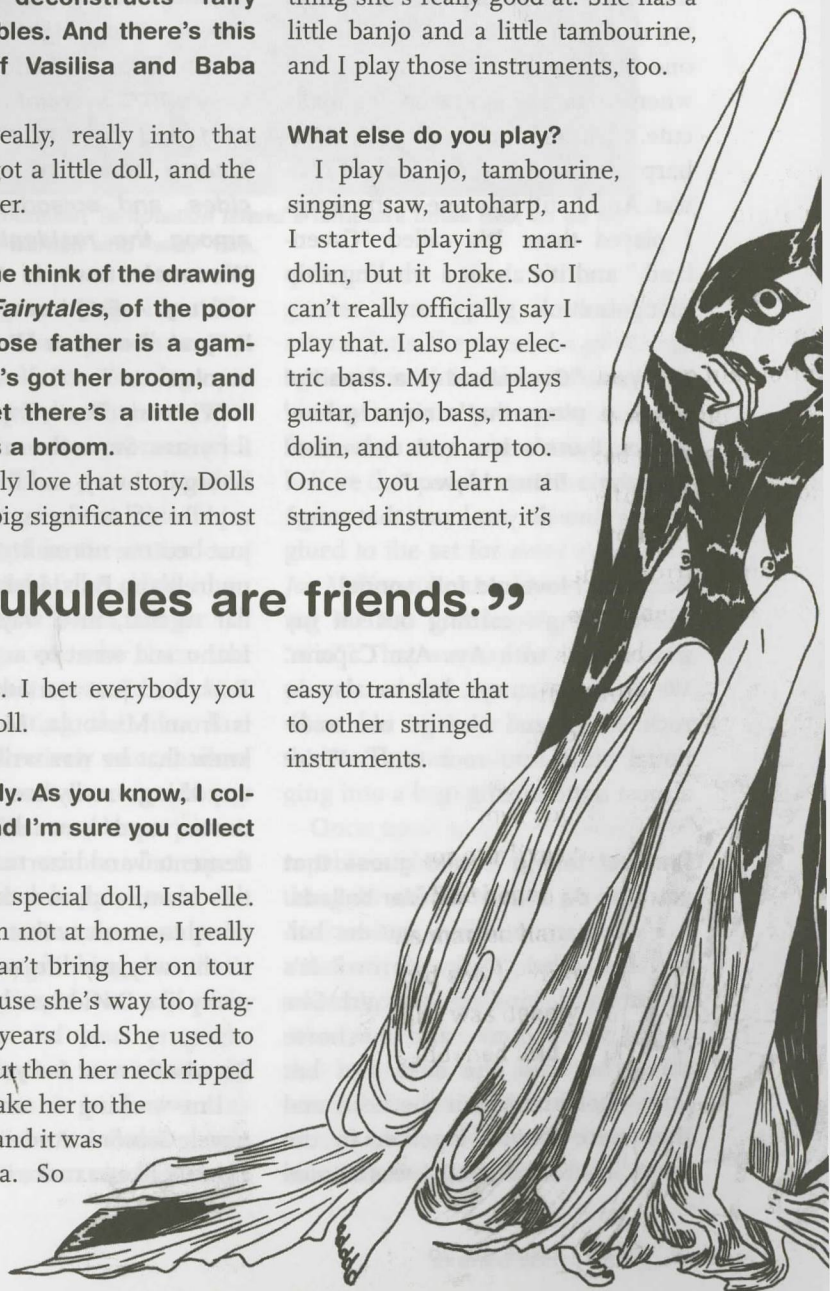
I'm trying to make fairies. My mother's godmother had nine children, and she lived in this amazingly

people's lives. I bet everybody you know has a doll.

Oh, absolutely. As you know, I collect them. And I'm sure you collect them, right?

I have one special doll, Isabelle. Whenever I'm not at home, I really miss her; I can't bring her on tour with me because she's way too fragile. She's 76 years old. She used to party more, but then her neck ripped and I had to take her to the doll hospital, and it was a big trauma. So

easy to translate that to other stringed instruments.



I've just started taking ukulele lessons.

Ukuleles are adorable. I've been booked with ukulele players a lot at shows, and I think that banjos and ukuleles are friends. They kind of come from the same place. It's like this jazz-baby thing; ukulele really took off in the '20s. It's a good instrument to start with because you can learn a few chords on it and come up with a song pretty easily.

I have a bluegrass album that was just released on a Seattle label called Bop Tart Records. And then *Dame Darcy's Greatest Hits* has all banjo, all the time—just a banjo bonanza. And my dad's on there, singing. There's one little track of me and my dad when I was 7 or 8, maybe. It's really cute. I learned how to play the autoharp when I was 5, for a talent contest. And I still play one of the songs I played then. It's called "Greenland," and it's about a whaling ship that gets sunk.

Oh, yes. "Greenland is a dreadful place, a place that's never green/ Where there's ice and snow and the whale fishes blow..."

Yes! How do you know that song?

Because I love old folk songs!

That song's coming out on my next record with Aye Aye Captain. We do sea chanteys, but we also do rock songs and change old traditional stuff into rock stuff. We're almost done mixing it.

I'm just taking a wild guess that you also do a lot of murder ballads.

I was named after a murder ballad. It's called "Darcy Farrow." It's about a girl, kind of a cowgirl. She had a white horse, and the horse threw her and she died, and her lover shot himself in the head and they were buried together in the snow. That's the song I was named

after. My parents were predetermining my fate. My dad taught me "Greenland" for a talent show at my school. And it's a really morbid song with swearing in it and sailors dying. It was pretty heavy for my dad to think to teach me that one when I was 5. He didn't start out with something cute.

A lot of the stories in *Meatcake* are based around fairy tales and around murder ballads because they're so romantic and beautiful but so tragic. Same as life.

And you also took some of your stories from the book *Wisconsin Death Trip*, right? [Wisconsin Death Trip is historian Michael Lesy's 1973 account of the depression and poverty that led to a bizarre series of murders, suicides, and episodes of insanity among the residents of a rural Wisconsin town in the late 19th century. —Ed.] I saw the movie of it just because I'd read your comics.

Wisconsin Death Trip was my bible for years. Since the entire town was acting that way, and they were in the middle of nowhere, the weirdness just became normality. And growing up in Idaho Falls, Idaho, is very similar to that, in a way. When I left Idaho and went to art school, *Twin Peaks* had just started. David Lynch is from Missoula, Montana, and I knew that he was writing about the way things really are in small rural towns, and how things get that demented and bizarre. I had just left this town, and now there was a fictional town on tv that was so similar to the way my life was in Idaho. I really like David Lynch.

So what's next for you?

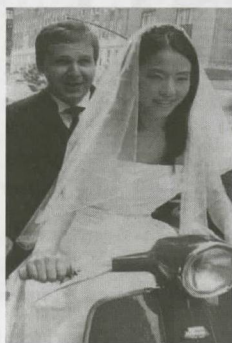
I'm working on another graphic novel, *Gasoline*. And simultaneously, I would like to make it into a screen-

play so that it can become a movie, and try to get it produced here. It's a postapocalyptic action-romance-adventure.

This whole trying-to-get-into-the-movies business is such a boys' club. Everything I do is this weird boys' club—except the doll making. Comics is a boys' club, film is a boys' club, and rock bands and the music industry is a boys' club. And my take on all this stuff is really feminine, but the fields I want to work in are very male dominated. I work with other women filmmakers and animators all the time, but what happened a lot when I was working with [*Turn of the Century* director, producer, and editor] Lisa Hammer—she shot and edited everything herself, and I know how to edit, too, and would be with her there for the editing process. And [guys] would be like, "Oh, these are your movies? Who helped you make them?"

Fuck you! What do you mean, who helped us make them? For people to be saying this in the '90s made me so mad. And these guys were filmmakers. Any monkey who goes to film school can learn how to push an editing button.

Grab your dolly and head on down to your local independent bookstore for a copy of *Frightful Fairytales*, and keep your eyes peeled for the June 2003 release of *Dame Darcy's Meatcake Compilation*. And, oh, keep up with *Dame Darcy's* many different doings at www.damedarcy.com. Retired cartoonist **Trina Robbins turned her talents to feminist pop culture more than 10 years ago, when she wrote her first book on women cartoonists, the now out-of-print *A Century of Women Cartoonists*. Since then, she's written 10 more books, including one about dark goddesses (*Eternally Bad*) and her latest, *Tender Murderers: Women Who Kill*. Aside from writing about women who kill, she still likes to write about killer women cartoonists.**



Clockwise from top left: a bridezilla and her groomsmen; *Temptation Island*'s tempters times two; an ad for *Married by America*; Joe Millionaire and Zora, the woman who "won" him.

Dear Fox,

Thanks, Fox. I mean, I hate you, Fox. I mean...when does *Temptation Island 3* start, again?

This is what it's come to. When *Who Wants to Marry a Multimillionaire?* premiered back in 2000, it was undoubtedly the most jaw-droppingly tacky television concept since...well, ever. A bunch of women in wedding gowns competing to marry some guy whose only known feature was that he had money? What could be more symptomatic of pop culture's disdain for gender equality than a show determined to portray women as soulless, marriage-obsessed gold diggers and men as silicone-breast-addled Neanderthals?

Temptation Islands 1 and 2?
Who Wants to Be a Princess?
Love Cruise?
Joe Millionaire?

Maybe you'd like to be remembered for incredibly witty, culturally

relevant programming like *The Simpsons* and *That '70s Show*. But don't kid yourself, Fox. Your legacy is reality tv. Cheesy reality tv. Your legacy is all-American women with pre-leathery faces and tanned breasts straining against bikini tops, and men coated in the entire contents of a bottle of L.A. Looks hair gel. Your legacy is Darva Conger.

There are people who claim that the problem with you, Fox, is that you're perpetuating the idea that women are collectively vain, shallow, manipulative, and moneygrubbing. I don't agree. You may be perpetuating the idea that women who expect to find love and happiness in the reality tv circus are vain, manipulative, and moneygrubbing, but that's really another issue. No, my problem with you and your programming is simply that, as sickeningly, giddily sleazy as it is, you've succeeded. You've overruled the people who know better, the ones who decry

gender stereotyping in their daily interactions, the ones who campaign against institutional instances of the kind of sexism your programs put forth, the ones who really want to believe that people aren't as dumb or mean as they act. Those people glued to the set for every episode of *Joe Millionaire*, torn between despising Melissa and hoping she would "win"? That was us. You can't wring your hands at the horror of it all when one of those hands is hitting the "on" button and the other is digging into a bag of kettle corn.

Once upon a time, we were still capable of being shocked by something like *Who Wants to Marry a Multimillionaire?* Now you've got us numbed by the ever-escalating insanity. Your latest entry, *Married by America*, takes as its premise the fact that marriages and divorces can be entered into and shaken off as lightly as dandruff, with about the same emotional weight. *Bridezillas*, your

one-off special about nuptial insanity, packed a reception-hall's worth of misogynist stereotypes—women are vacuous! obsessed with weddings! capable of violent rages when not treated like princesses and given very expensive jewelry!—into an hour-long special, but the only public protest was mounted by a Boston-based group called the Bridal Survival Club, who just wanted people to understand that being a bride can be very stressful. The rest of us were thinking, Okay, but when does *Man vs. Beast* come on? I want to see that Olympic sprinter try to outrun a giraffe! That, Fox, is the extent to which you've made us your bitch.

And maybe the worst thing about it is that you've convinced the other networks that you've got the right idea. ABC, for instance, probably used to laugh up its Brooks Brothers sleeve at your tawdry efforts to become a prime-time contender. Now it's broadcasting *Are You Hot?* and enticing viewers to listen to *Bachelorette* Trista Rehn discuss her inability to have what she insisted on calling an "O." With competition for ratings and ad dollars increasing all the time, what could possibly be next in the reality sweepstakes? *Who's Got the Shiniest Cervix?* *Who Died and Left the Best-Looking Corpse?*

Television analysts seem to think that the proliferation of reality shows has increased in direct proportion to people's fear about the world, that they function as necessary escapism in a climate of constant anxiety. But is it our own growing misanthropy that's responsible for the creation of reality programming, or is the programming itself making us increasingly misanthropic? You didn't invent reality tv, of course. But you've certainly gone further than anyone in hijacking what "reality" actually means.

Maybe I've got you all wrong. Maybe you're on our side. Maybe all these dating-and-mating shows are part of some grand evil-genius plan to rid the world of the shallow, the sexist, and the greedy by pairing them up and hoping that the rules of Darwinism will ensure that they eventually dumb themselves out of existence. But I suspect that in your own cynicism you think these people *are* the fittest, at least for your purposes. That the ones who believe love can be won, or bought, or dialed in by the viewing audience are a lot more useful than those of us who don't, and we're the ones who will, in the end, quietly go away.

I love you, Fox. Shut up, Fox. And, Fox, please pass the kettle corn.

Xo Audi Z.

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► We'd like to introduce you to DANIEL "Rummy" CLOWES, the famed cartoonist behind *Ghost World* and the recent *Twentieth Century Eightball*, both available from Fantagraphics Books. As you may already know, Mr. Clowes is at the vanguard of a new literary movement in comics. This movement, often referred to in unwieldy terms like "graphic novels" and "picture stories with word balloons", is the most exciting thing to happen in literature since *Readers Digest*, and if you don't believe us, visit WWW.FANTAGRAPHICS.COM to receive a FREE full-color catalog featuring our award-winning line of books by Mr. Clowes, CHRIS WARE, JOE SACCO, LOS BROS HERNANDEZ, R. CRUMB and many others.



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MEDIA DEMOCRACY

From the first printing press to the dawn of the digital age, media has been essential to a well-functioning democracy, providing a forum for public discourse and a diversity of ideas. But these days, the helpful aspects of the media are increasingly undermined by corporate oligopolies, pressure groups, advertiser influence, and government agendas. The average person absorbs thousands of advertisements each day, media industry lobbyists are pressing the Federal Communications Commission to loosen multiple-ownership restrictions, and broadband suppliers are setting the stage to control web content as well as access. In this increasingly commodified culture, journalists with dissenting viewpoints and hard-hitting stories are being silenced. The media democracy movement aims to challenge commercial media practices and

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Established in 1986 as a national watchdog group, **Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting** (112 W. 27th St., New York, NY 10001; www.fair.org) disseminates regular action alerts to more than 100,000 activists and conducts special research on sexism and racism in the media. FAIR provides trenchant criticism of the dominant media in its newsletter *the Extra!* and on the weekly program *CounterSpin*.

...ng suvs—most of which are in the mountains—the burgeoning industry is making a profound political statement about global warming. Bio-fuels and hydrogen, solar, geothermal, and wind-based economy and its dire consequences. Moreover, most alternative energy sources are a real thorn in the side of cor-

Policy Project (1612 K St. NW, Washington, DC 20006; www.policyproject.org), an organization that

...es and expedites the use of renewable energy. The REPP site features discussion forums and archived papers on a variety of energy-related topics.

► **Con.WEB: Pacific Northwest Energy Newsletter** (www.newsdata.com/enernet/conweb) provides updates on sustainable-energy projects throughout

► An innovative activist collective with a pirate past, **Prometheus Radio Project** (P.O. Box 42158, Philadelphia, PA 19101; www.prometheusradio.org) provides legal and technical support to noncommercial broadcasters. Current Prometheus projects include an “unpledge” campaign in response to NPR’s opposition to low-power radio and a “Big Station/Little Station” program linking fledgling community radio stations to established mentors.

► Once dubbed the savior of democracy and free thinking, the Internet-like other forms of mass media—is now subject to corporate consolidation and advertiser influence. The **Center for Digital Democracy** (2120 L St. NW Ste. 200, Washington, DC 20037; www.democraticmedia.org) advocates for non-commercial public-interest content on the web and seeks to educate the next generation of media creators with tons of info on open access, the FCC, ownership issues, and the First Amendment.

the nation. Reportage is dry and dense, but the monthly briefs make it easy to stay abreast of green-power affairs.

► With 17 labs across the country, the **Environmental Protection Agency** (Ariel Rios Building, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Mail Code 3213A, Washington, DC 20460; www.epa.gov), while not an activist organization, is a great source for information you can use for activist purposes: regulations, public records, and more. Plus, you can stay on top of what the government is doing in the world of alternative energy sources.

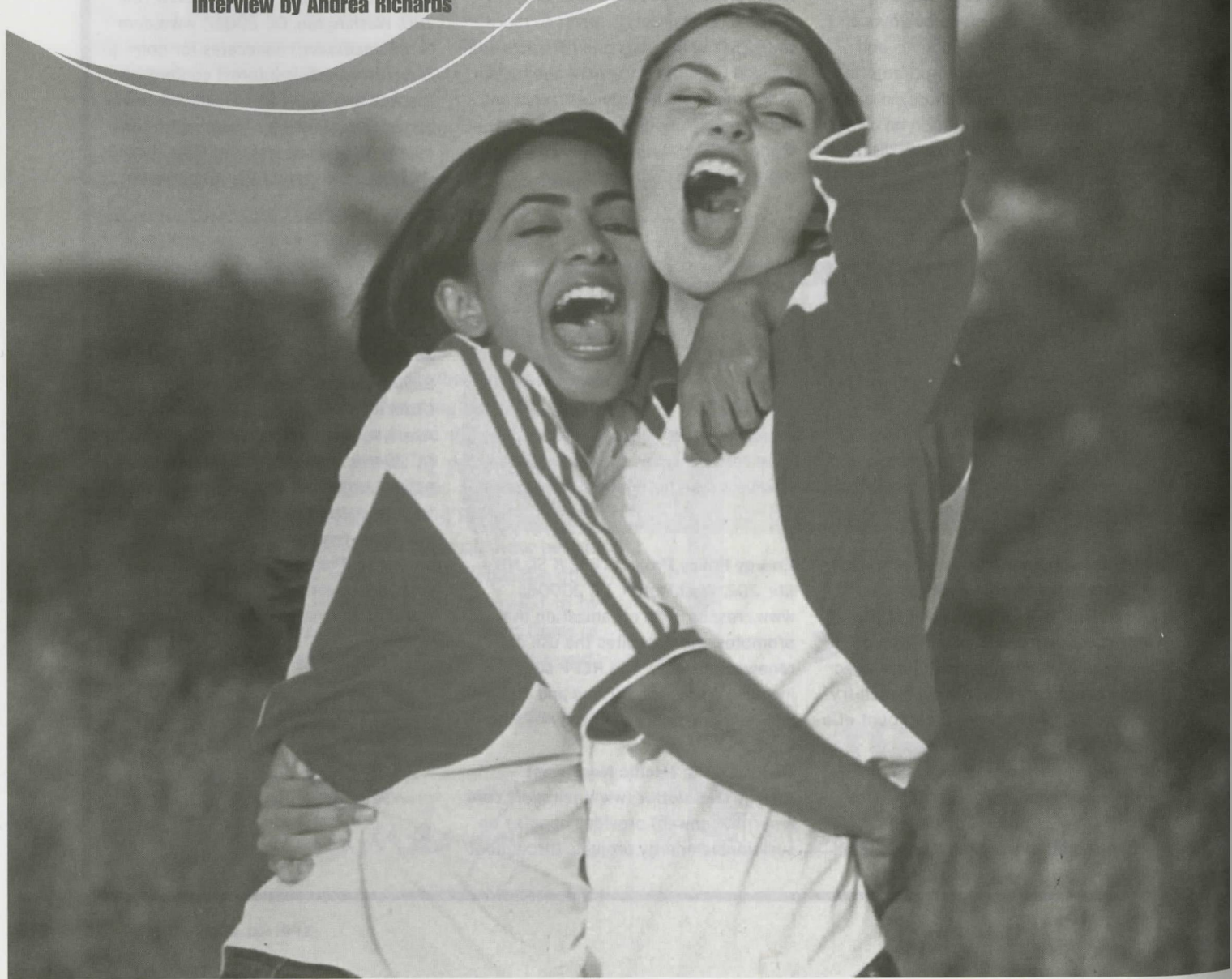


test case, info on biofuel resources around the nation, and photos.

► Biomass, geothermal, photovoltaic, solar, hydro-, and wind power all fall within the purview of the **Renewable**

balls out

Gurinder Chadha talks about her big fat footie film, *Bend It Like Beckham*
Interview by Andrea Richards



GURINDER CHADHA'S CINEMATIC LANDSCAPE

bursts with the sort of cultural cross-pollination that we encounter all the time in the real world, but to which Hollywood seems oddly, willfully oblivious. In exploring the experiences of first- and second-generation immigrants, she makes a point of showing characters audiences aren't used to seeing onscreen. Her debut feature, the critically acclaimed *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), follows a group of British-South Asian women on a day trip to the seashore and poignantly illuminates the varied conflicts of their lives. *What's Cooking?* (2000) portrays four ethnically diverse yet similarly dysfunctional Los Angeles families as they each prepare Thanksgiving dinner. The entertaining film opened the 2000 Sundance Film Festival and earned Chadha a London Film Critics Award for best British director.

As a Kenyan-born Anglo-Indian, Chadha, who began her career as a BBC reporter and documentarian, is at home with hybridity. And her artistic choices celebrate, without simplifying, the complexity of hyphenated identities. In all her films, individuals struggle to balance their personal desires with the pressures they feel from various parts of their lives, and families attempt to achieve some sort of unity while avoiding conformity or uniformity. History and tradition may go head-to-head with modernity and social change, but, she suggests, we can still have our chapatis and eat them too.

These themes converge once again in Chadha's latest film, *Bend It Like Beckham*, which poses an interesting question: What if David Beckham—star Manchester United football player and tabloid-staple husband of Victoria Adams (a.k.a. Posh Spice)—had been a girl? More specifically, a London-dwelling Sikh girl whose football playing is limited to pickup games in the local park—which is too much for her traditional parents, who think she'd be better off learning to cook aloo gobi and marrying a nice Indian boy.

Jess, the 18-year-old heroine of *Bend It Like Beckham* (played by charismatic newcomer Parminder Nagra), pursues her dream of becoming a professional football player and along the way learns to bend a lot more than the path of a soccer ball. This coming-of-age story explores the confines of femininity and cultural identity with humor and understanding. It's a feel-good comedy with enough action-packed footie-pitch sequences to knock your cleats off, as Jess and her best friend, Jules, find camaraderie and confidence on the field; confront basic female-athlete issues such as taunting from guys, accusations of lesbianism, and interference from disapproving parents; sort out the love triangle that arises

with their coach; and balance family demands with their own ambitions (pivotal plot point: Jess's big sister's wedding is on the same day as an all-important match).

Even reviewers who've criticized the film for being formulaic can't resist its charm. As Australian critic Paul Byrnes notes, "Much of the script, cowritten by Chadha, is predictable, but films are like other people: if they make you laugh, you warm to them." Yes, it's got a utopian ending, but happy endings are what some movies are all about. As for me, I'm darn happy to see a couple of smart and talented girls actually win, and to see ethnic diversity portrayed as a given in everyday life. So are filmgoers: *Beckham* scored the seventh-highest-ever opening-weekend grosses in the U.K., and girls in India were so inspired by the film that they started the country's first girls' football league. Plus, it's been a favorite at festivals around the globe, winning the audience vote for best film at the Sydney Film Festival and the Prix du Public audience award at Switzerland's Locarno Film Festival. (The film opened stateside on March 12.)

Bitch caught up with Chadha by telephone as she was on location in India, mixing the music for her latest film, a suitably expectation-defying Bollywood-style musical version of *Pride and Prejudice*. It might seem like an unlikely match, but it isn't so odd when you consider that Chadha and Jane Austen share an obvious affection for their characters, and both love to point out, with punchy irreverence, the absurdity in the social mores of

**WHAT IF DAVID BECKHAM—
star Manchester United football
player and tabloid-staple husband
of Victoria Adams (a.k.a. Posh
Spice)—HAD BEEN A GIRL?
More specifically, a London-
dwelling Sikh girl?**

their respective eras. It's another perfect project for a director who's bent the rules with some fancy footwork of her own.

What inspired you to make a film about girls who want to be professional football players?

Seeing how much football takes over life in Europe and Britain during the World Cup. It's a national phenomenon. Anytime England plays, especially against



STILLS FROM *BECKHAM*

Germany or Argentina, the whole country stands still. No one is on the streets—everyone is at the pubs, or at home glued to the television. I thought, My god, this game has taken over the national psyche. Wouldn't it be great to take all this energy, this world of football, and make it a woman's world? An Indian woman's world, at that.

I needed something to balance this fervor around football as a national pastime, and I thought, marriage—

especially from the Indian family's point of view. So I took these two national obsessions and combined them.

How have reactions to the film varied in different countries?

The response in India has been particularly interesting. The success here has been enormous, and it's taken everyone by surprise, particularly because the indigenous Bollywood film industry is in a terrible state at the moment. There have been very few hit films over the last

year in India, and when *Beckham* came out, the whole country, including the film industry, took to it. Given that the film is in English and not your usual singing-and-dancing affair, the fact that the public in India liked it so much was very surprising.

I live in England and am considered what they call here in India an NRI, nonresident Indian. I was brought up in Britain, and I've never lived in India—in fact, my grandparents left India in the late 1800s and moved to East Africa, which is where I was born. But one of the really sweet things that occurred with the film's popularity is that when I walked down the street in India, people would come up and tell me how much they liked it. Of

community. And then when I walked into the theater, [the audience] was completely white. In fact, the tabloids in Britain don't discuss it as an Indian film; they consider it fairly and squarely a British comedy.

Do you think that's a reflection of how much the concept of what it is to be British has opened to multiculturalism?

Totally and utterly. When I made *I'm British But...* [a 30-minute documentary exploring second-generation British–South Asian identity and acid bhangra music] in 1989, it was a different world. And now it makes me proud to come from England, because the whole debate about cultural identity has opened up. Now it's not just

YOU CAN BE ONE THING AND ANOTHER THING TOO—THAT'S WHAT THE FILM IS SAYING.

course, filmmakers get that everywhere, but here they said, "We're really proud of you—you've made India proud." It's a bit weird, since I'm not from India, but it's also wonderful to be embraced like that.

I set out to make a film that was going to be popular with audiences in England, particularly girls. I wanted to tell the story from a girl's point of view, about the idea of who decides and defines what femininity is. Of course, in *Beckham* the girls have their own ideas; Jess is pushing the boundaries of what it means to be a girl and Indian, in a typical kind of way, and Jules is pushing them in a very contemporary, tomboyish, assertive type of way. And the girls' parents all have different ideas of what it means to be feminine, too. Basically, the whole film is a discourse on femininity, so I knew that women and girls would enjoy it, but I wasn't expecting it to reach so many people of different age groups. The box office numbers we had in Britain [suggest] that nearly everyone in the country who goes to the cinema went to see *Beckham*. That means old pensioners, grandparents, and really young kids—5- and 6-year-olds. I didn't expect the film to have such wide appeal.

I went out to Manchester to do a Q&A, and they told me it was on three screens in the multiplex and they were all sold out. And I thought, Well, they must have a big Asian

writers, artists, and intellectuals—such as the work of Salman Rushdie or films like *My Beautiful Laundrette*—who have pushed those boundaries; it's politicians and all sorts of other people who have said, Fair's fair—I'm a part of British culture, so accept it. It's extremely diverse. I love that, and I'm not sure it's like that in other countries. Certainly the rest of Europe isn't acknowledging and accepting diversity in such a thorough way.

I actually got a letter from Tony Blair saying how much he loved the film and that it confirmed for him how wonderful Britain's multiculturalism is. It had a bit of a politician's spin on it, but it was still nice.

Gender expectations are just one of the traditional values Jess runs up against. She falls in love with her Irish soccer coach, and that creates a whole host of other racial and cultural clashes.

I hate the word "clash," as in "culture clashes." I don't think of those encounters as clashes at all. I come from a very privileged position: Those of us who are bilingual and plural culturally, who have access to so many cultures that make up who we are, see the world very differently than people who only speak one language and have only experienced one culture. Those people are generally more fearful of difference, whereas we're comfortable with it and [see it as] something to be enjoyed.



THE FILMMAKER AT REST

MY MOM'S WHOLE MISSION

when I was growing up was getting me to cook perfect Indian food—it didn't matter what I was interested in. I never wanted to play football specifically, but I DID ALWAYS WANT TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY.

Why did you choose David Beckham as Jess's idol?

In a film that was about girls redefining femininity, I needed to make sure the hero was a man who was worthy of Jess's attention. Beckham is a fantastic man—a great athlete, devoted husband, loving father. He pushes the boundaries of what is considered masculine—he's not afraid of his feminine side. He wears a sarong, has his nails done, wears nice clothes, and likes to get his hair done. He's a huge gay icon, and he doesn't shun that—he's quite happy about it. More than that, he's a man who's not afraid to admit he was wrong and goes on TV to apologize for being immature. He has single-handedly changed the way football players are seen in Britain. He's a fantastic role model.

The conflict between the football match and Jess's sister's wedding is interesting, especially because the marriage ceremony isn't portrayed as just a stifling bore. Though Jess clearly wants to be at the game, that space of tradition and family isn't a place of oppression. Beckham seems to both highlight and question the importance of family and tradition.

The point is that these things aren't mutually exclusive. You can be one thing and another thing too—that's what the film is saying. The intercutting of football and the marriage—Jess changing from a pink sari to a Hounslow Harriers football uniform and going from the

dance floor to the football field in a two-minute montage—shows that these are both parts of her. It seems extreme, but it makes perfect sense that this is how it might be for an Indian girl to play football.

How did your personal life inform the film?

It's autobiographical in that it's set where I grew up, in a house similar to the one I grew up in, and Jess's parents are much like my own. For instance, my mom's whole mission when I was growing up was getting me to cook perfect Indian food—it didn't matter what I was interested in. I never wanted to play football specifically, but I did always want to do things differently. And I was lucky enough to have a father who liked that I didn't want to do the expected. So, in that sense, the film's narrative follows my own story.

Certainly, the idea of not wanting to follow the typical model of what everyone expects you to be—I always did that growing up, and I try to now as a director. I try to do films and take on subject matters that people don't expect or don't believe a film could [capture]. But then I do it, and it's all very logical and makes sense.

Like a comedy about female football players?

Exactly. If you'd told me 10 years ago I'd be directing a movie about football that would be a huge success, I

would have thought you were mad. I didn't even watch football.

Do you now?

I do, I love it. If I'd been into football in such a big way before I made the movie, I don't think I would have ever made it. I would have been too intimidated about making the football look great. Whereas when I made *Beckham*, I was interested in making the girls look strong and powerful when they played, not necessarily in the specific moves of a football game.

A few years ago, in Los Angeles, I went to the Women's World Cup finals at the Rose Bowl and saw the U.S. play China. That blew me away. The players looked fantastic, and the stadium was filled with 90,000 people—the vast majority of whom were young girls and their fathers. The girls were just jumping up and down, supporting these women athletes, and their dads were right there, into it as well. It was the most exciting thing I'd seen in a long time and a real emotional moment for me. It was then that I thought about capturing that excitement—of all these girls supporting other girls—in a film. And I think the film caught that level of excitement, where it sucks you into the action and doesn't let you go.

Were there any specific challenges to making this film that differed from your other features?

I'd done comedy and dramas before, but not this kind of action, so the football sequences were new to me. Everyone told me that football films don't work, so I was determined to make the football look good. We choreographed lots of the sequences, and I worked with my cameraman, Jong Lin, to make sure we never shot the football sequences the way it's done on TV—the way most people are used to seeing it. I was as interested in what the players were doing with their faces as what they were doing with their feet. I made sure that I combined the drama of the faces with the skills on the field.

You made some daring casting decisions. For the captain of the Hounslow Harriers team, you cast pop star Shaznay Lewis (former singer for All Saints) in her first screen role. And for Jess's father, Mr. Bhamra, you chose Bollywood star Anupam Kher, in his first-ever English-language role. Were you nervous about either of these choices?

No, I'm never nervous once I make a decision. And those were instinctive. Shaz is a big football fan and she used to play. I wanted to make sure the teams were really mixed racially as well, and I wanted good music from girls for the film. So it made sense to talk to Shaz.

And she didn't want a big part; she just wanted to experience what filming is like. I think she found it quite hard, playing football in the hot sun every morning. But she was great—she's so believable as a young girl from Hounslow, buying her clothes in the market, when in reality she's a multimillionaire pop star.

With Anupam, well, there are Indian actors in Britain, of course, but they were either too young or too old. So my thoughts went to India, and I thought it would be exciting to cast Anupam. We met, and I liked the way he conducted himself. He really understood the stillness of the character, and it was interesting to watch his Bollywood style mix with the British acting tradition, which is more naturalistic. He brought his Bollywood tradition and calmed it down, but still kept the emotionality.

Tell me about your next film.

Basically, three words describe this project: cheeky, irreverent, and affectionate—both to Jane Austen and to Bollywood cinema. We've adapted the Bennets to the Bakshis, who live in northern India. Darcy is an American who comes to India for the wedding of one of his college mates. When he arrives in India, he meets the Lizzie Bennet character, Lolita Bakshi. Of course, the two of them don't hit it off; he's very pompous and thinks America has everything, and she's the opposite and thinks India is where it's at. So the two of them come into conflict, in that romantic-comedy kind of way.

It's a musical, right?

Yes, I'm here doing the songs now. I just did one yesterday that was like a reggae-ska show tune, with a big horn section. Again, I can't quite describe it culturally, but it fits, coming from me. It's a combo of all the things I am. Darcy's American—and so is my husband, so I've gotten to know a specific type of American person and part of American culture. This film will be British, Indian, and American.

As a writer, director, and producer, are there any parts of the film-making process you particularly obsess over?

I love the editing process. You realize that things you shot one way can work in different ways, and you can combine scenes and actions and music and juxtapose things and get more meaning out of what you originally set out to do. For me, that's where it all happens and the magic starts coming together.

Catch *Bend It Like Beckham* at your local theater. Andrea Richards is the author of *Girl Director: A How-To Guide for the First-Time, Flat-Broke Film and Video Director*.

Fantastic voyage

Noy Thrupkaew journeys into the wide, wild world of slash fiction

The kiss was not at all like Kirk had expected...

"Spock, wait... wait," he whispered desperately... "I can't... We can't... You... God, Spock... I want you. Don't you understand? I want you so much!" Kirk still couldn't believe that the Vulcan knew what he was getting himself into. But Spock was pressed tightly against him and Kirk could feel the hardness. Spock's cock was pushing into his hip, hard as rock and insistent... Spock smiled then, only a short, ghostly smile, but it was there.

"Jim."

"Yes?"

"You talk excessively."

—from "Christmas Gifts...or Blue Seduction," by kira-nerys

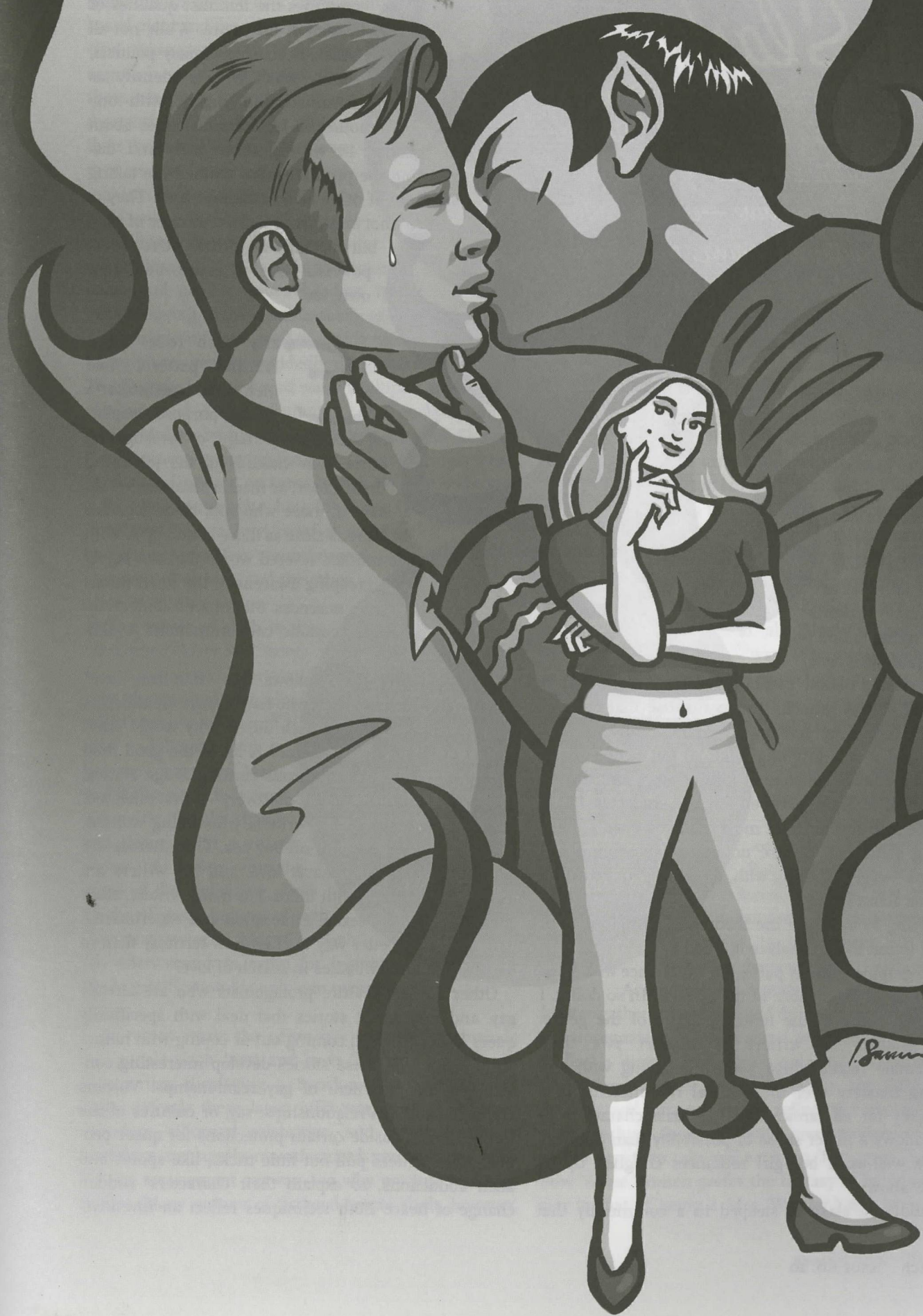
Don't worry, *Star Trek* fans—you didn't miss an episode. But if you haven't been poring over fanzines or trolling the web, you might not have come across the juicy encounters, gender play, and fiercely feminist theorizing found in the world of slash fiction.

Named after the punctuation mark between the names of its lover-heroes (e.g., Kirk/Spock), slash fan fiction was born at the end of the '60s, when inventive viewers started penning steamy rendezvous between Captain

Kirk and Mr. Spock in fanzines. But it wasn't until the '90s that slash fiction truly flourished, with the advent of the Internet and its discussion groups, where a growing subculture of writers, editors, and readers could share and critique each other's work. As the number of stories increased, so too did the range of potential pairings. Intrepid slash writers—primarily women writing for other women—gleefully found the love that dare not speak its name between just about everyone: Starsky and Hutch, Luke Skywalker and Han Solo, even Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy. (HP/DM authors hasten to assure readers that their stories feature the characters in their late teens.) Slash attends to female/female pairings, too, but the vast majority of it focuses on men.

The relationship dynamics in slash have become just as varied as the couples. Initially steeped in first-time male love between two comrades-in-arms, slash has developed into a free-for-all, exploring s/m complexities, male pregnancy, and other flights of writerly fancy. Slash also attracts critical attention from social theorists, many of whom ponder one of the more interesting questions about the genre: Why do slash writers, who are predominantly straight women writing for other women, create fiction that focuses on male/male

illustration by Isabel Samaras



Slash goes one step further than most fanfic by openly interrogating static pop culture notions of masculine and feminine—experimenting with, discarding, or reinventing ideas about gender.

romantic relationships? Although theories abound—male relationships are truly egalitarian, women characters are too boring to write about—slash has become so diverse that it easily thwarts anyone trying to find one generalizing principle.

With slash's steamy combination of gender-bending plots and playful raunch, it's no surprise that cultural theorists, feminists, and everyday pop culture mavens have found it so intriguing. Like all fan fiction, slash turns pop culture consumers into creators and thrives on a sort of dialogue between fan and character. But it goes one step further than most fanfic by openly interrogating static pop culture notions of masculine and feminine—experimenting with, discarding, or reinventing ideas about gender.

In trying to untangle the theoretical complexities of slash, I found that to analyze it, I had to try to write it—I had to grapple with my particular experience with slash before I could get a sense of the general. In so doing, I discovered some of the feminist allure of the genre: Slash enables its writers to subvert tv's tired male/female relationships while interacting with and showing mastery over the original raw material of a show (key for all fanfic). Writing male characters as lovers allows a richer sense of possibility than duplicating the well-worn boy/girl romances coughed up by most tv shows.

In addition, slash is steeped in a community that

amplifies the feminist qualities of much of the genre. While not all slash is self-consciously political, many slash writers identify as feminists and engage with one another in vigorous dialogues about gender. In writing about men and discussing the process, many women are taking that room of one's own to another level. They're not only laying claim to images of men but reconfiguring male behavior—a powerful way to make men their own, too.

Early slash relies on a familiar pattern. Two men serve together for a greater purpose—exploring the galaxy, perhaps, or investigating crime. The hazards of the job bring them closer; as macho discourse would have it, those who spill blood together become as close as those bound by it. With danger comes conflict, fevered words that can barely mask the slowly creeping awareness, the flush across the face at the other's nearness. Stammered confession, blissful reciprocation, ecstatic consummation! A delicious formula.

Much of early slash follows this "first-time love" schema, in which two men who have always identified as straight fall in love with each other. Why would slash writers dwell on such a theme? A lot of the good first-time pieces read like rapturous coming-of-age stories, with equal parts lust and self-discovery—a first time, too, perhaps, for many of the writers, who, being women, have likely never had boy-on-boy sex. Their heroes are just discovering their manly love, and the writers are learning right along with them. For many writers, slash is also a venue for sexual exploration and experimentation, and what better way to chart new territory than to use two unfamiliar bodies in search of love?

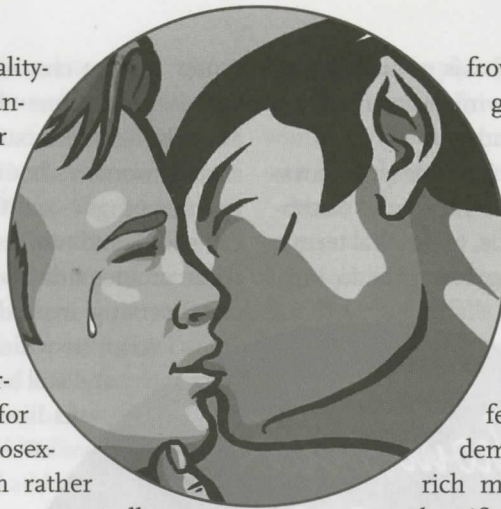
Other authors feature protagonists who are already gay, and they script stories that deal with specifically queer issues, such as coming out or coping with homophobia. Some of these stories develop interesting contexts for the treatment of gay relationships: Vulcans embrace same-sex relationships, say, or cultures of the future have set aside certain protections for queer people. Other writers pull out little tricks, like spores and alien abductions, to explain their characters' sudden change of heart. Both techniques reflect an inventive-

ness, one in service of a more reality-based piece and the other a more fanciful, whimsical story. With either approach, slash writers often show themselves to be much more thoughtful about gender issues than the run-of-the-mill tv shows they use as fodder—not surprising in a niche genre that’s free from moneymaking and sponsor-appealing concerns. Slash makes for a refreshing change, tackling homosexuality and gender issues head-on rather than referring to them subtextually or not at all.

Slash doesn’t limit itself to vanilla man-love, however: Many pieces explore decidedly unegalitarian dynamics. The first slash piece I read was a multipart account of a very unusual *X-Files* relationship: the enslavement of Agent Mulder by his boss, Assistant Director Skinner. Graphics accompanying the story showed Skinner’s bald head superimposed on some leather daddy’s body, with a groveling Mulder clutching his boots. Other slash is infused with a hurt/comfort element: one character suffers some unspeakable pain or torture, and the other offers nurturing solace.

One subset of slash is the oft-scorned “Mary Sue” story, where the writer inserts a new player, often a thinly veiled version of herself, into a dalliance with a favorite character. Mary Sue fiction tends to feature simpering female characters flirting with a manly object of desire, missing many of the tantalizing possibilities of slash. Instead of reenvisioning tv stories, Mary Sue slash too often seems to settle for instant libido gratification for only one person—the writer.

In recent years, the genre has expanded to include real-people slash (RPS) and even boy-band slash (BBS). One writer, displaying a Spock-worthy command of logic, defends these latest offshoots, arguing that pro wrestlers, siliconed celebrities, and prefab boy-band members are largely manufactured personas designed for our amusement anyway—so why not just run with them? (Many writers of fictional-people slash, however,



frown on the morally dubious RPS genre.)

When they’re not experimenting with the genre, slash authors—a very self-aware, self-analyzing community—are discussing gender, queerness, and feminism in all their different forms. Add this to a lively academic debate on slash, and you have a rich mélange that makes the idea of a grand unified theory of slash seem laughable.

One critic may posit that slash is a space where female writers can create the “ideal” human in a misogynistic world: male body, male power, female ways of relating. Another will argue that slash provides a space for women to work out their gender issues, a place where they can dump the unwanted restrictions of “femininity.” Slash is gay. Slash isn’t gay. Slash is neither, or a little of both. Slash lets women assert power over men

the way the patriarchy asserts power over women. Slash lets women humanize and redraft masculinity. Slash is about nooky. Slash isn’t about sex at all. Slash allows women ways of writing (collaborative, participatory) that subvert male ways of writing (copyrighted, absolute, and closed).

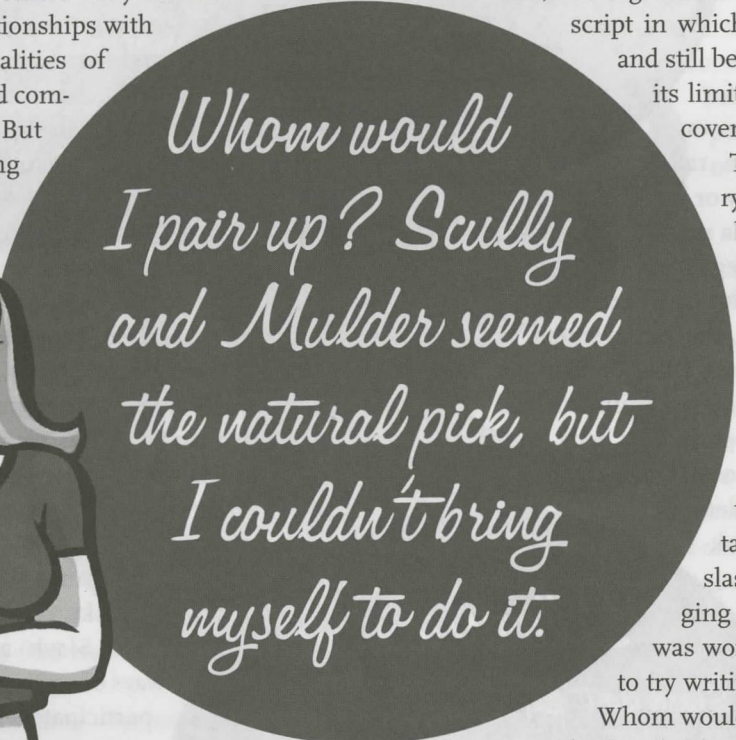
Evolutionary psychologists Catherine Salmon and Donald Symons, coauthors of *Warrior Lovers: Erotic Fiction, Evolution, and Female Sexuality*, argue that the predominantly female-written genre speaks to differences in mating behavior between men and women.

According to Darwinian psychology, our hunter-gatherer forebears had different needs—the men to impregnate as many women as possible; the women to find a nice, stable, dependable man to provide for them. Porn reflects the male desire, say Salmon and Symons, and romance novels reflect the female. As for slash, perhaps the erotic fanfic gives modern women a way to have their cake and eat it too. The genre illustrates how “some women prefer the fantasy of being a cowardrior to that of being a Mrs. Warrior,” say Salmon and

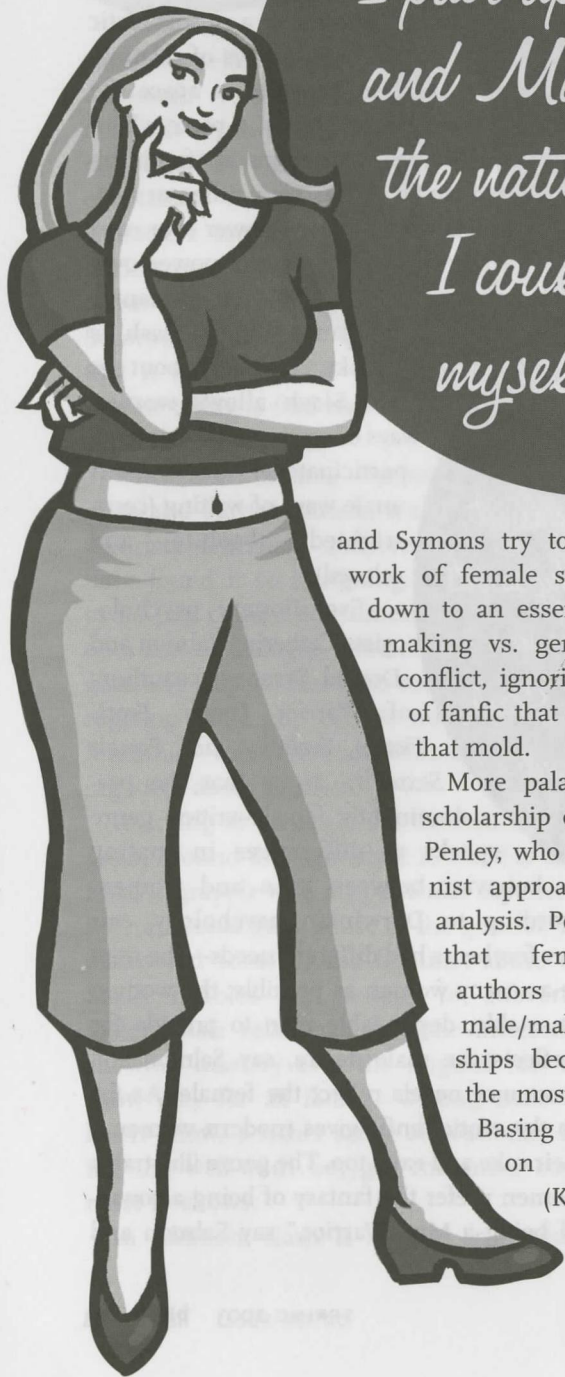
*Slash is gay.
Slash isn't gay. Slash is neither, or
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power over men the way the patriarchy asserts
power over women. Slash lets women
humanize and redraft masculinity. Slash
is about nooky. Slash isn't about
sex at all.*

Symons, but the relationships' emphasis on friendship, loyalty, and fidelity also reflect Darwinian desires for a responsible guy who will stick around.

To a feminist reader, this analysis has some clear flaws, especially the way it strains to explain the gender unconventionality of slash in such retrograde, traditional terms. Certainly some women prefer being cowarrior to Mrs. Warrior. And others may imbue their slash relationships with "womanly" qualities of loyalty and good communication. But it's frustrating that Salmon



Whom would I pair up? Scully and Mulder seemed the natural pick, but I couldn't bring myself to do it.



and Symons try to reduce the work of female slash writers down to an essentialist baby-making vs. gender-equality conflict, ignoring examples of fanfic that don't fit into that mold.

More palatable is the scholarship of Constance Penley, who takes a feminist approach to slash analysis. Penley argues that female slash authors focus on male/male relationships because they're the most egalitarian.

Basing her theories on Kirk/Spock (K/S) slash, Penley cri-

tiques the flat characterization of female tv characters and the limitations of what tv and media culture depict as male/female relationships. But in real life, she also argues, women's bodies are too often layered with negative meanings—and therefore become the site for political, social, and moral struggle. K/S slash is a rejection of those problematic bodies and of tv's flat female characters, serving instead as a subversive rewriting of the script in which lovers can share love and work and still be equal. Penley's analysis does have its limitations, however, in that it doesn't cover slash other than K/S.

The more slash—and slash theory—I read, the more convinced I became that no one analysis could explain the varieties of slash, the bent of all slash writers, the political leanings, the gender fuckings, the story rogerings that happen on a daily basis on the Internet.

By now, I had a keen appreciation for the time and dedication it takes both to write and to analyze slash. And I was developing a nagging little desire to read it, even when I was working on other things. It was time to try writing it.

Whom would I pair up? What show did I know enough about? *The X-Files*, perhaps—it would be the perfect opportunity to right all of creator Chris Carter's wrongs. Which couple? Should I try a straight one? It wouldn't be slash, strictly speaking, but it could be fun. Scully and Mulder seemed the natural pick, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. When *The X-Files* was on the air, I was always hoping the pair would avoid the inevitable *Moonlighting* downfall of sexual denouement, and I was annoyed that, after all the near-kisses, Carter brought them together in an orgy of cheesiness in the series finale. I could attempt to redraft the past, but the idea of writing an alternate-universe story didn't appeal. What I wanted was to craft something original within the strictures and plot lines of the show. Was there anything new to explore with these two?

Mulder and his boss Skinner could be good, as my s/m slash reading had proved. Mulder and former nemesis Krycek could also be exciting—love overcoming hate. Or Scully's second partner, Doggett, paired with Mulder, their tussling over Scully a mere surrogate for the lust blooming within them....

And suddenly I had my own explanation for why

slash-loving straight women might write male/male relationships: The relationships between male characters allow a writer to strike a harmonious balance between working within the framework of a show and spinning a tale of her own imagination. The best slash I've read captures the rhythm of the characters' speech, probes their psychology, and shows a mastery of complicated plots, all while taking the characters in new directions. And although a similar sense of possibility could await a writer delving into unexpected male/female pairings (Scully and Skinner, for instance) or trysts between two female characters (say, Buffy and Willow on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), male/male pairings add an extra dimension—the opportunity to recraft masculinity itself. And for women—straight or queer—who write slash fiction, this certainly seems to add an extra-enticing challenge, a sense of going where no woman has gone before.

Inherent in this sense of possibility with male characters is an embedded critique of the female ones. On *The X-Files*, for instance, Scully was a fascinating, complex woman, but she was just about the only steady female character on the show. Another female agent, Monica Reyes, was introduced in the last two seasons, but her character was far less complex—plus, she was irritating and unworthy of locking lips with Scully. Fleshing her out would take too darn long, and it might be seen as excessive rewriting by slash fans, who are sticklers for precedents. Creating a whole new female character, meanwhile, seemed too Mary Sue. I thought briefly about trying a different show, but, like Penley points out, the female characters in most shows are underdeveloped, and the dynamic of the female/male relationship is tired—I didn't want my story to wind up sounding like a bad Harlequin. The boy/girl text felt done—thoroughly chewed and worried over for years by sweaty TV writers.

But writing a tale of men's love made the possibilities sizzle. It would be like crafting a sonnet, a villanelle, something with meter, method, and my own madness. There was also the satisfaction of teasing out a subtext. Those long glances and the tense, fraught moments could all mean something quite different if I looked at them in the right way. Finding that subtext between men and women was no fun—it was a given. In any case, a male/female relationship didn't feel as if it could be mine. Male/male relationships provided just the right balance: the room for both allegiance to and independence from the original material.

It is precisely that quality of ordered freedom that explains why science fiction has become such fertile ground for slash. Science fiction is deeply concerned with utopias, dystopias, possibilities, alternatives, and fantasies,

but it is also deeply bound to the order and logic of science (however fancifully constructed it may be). For all its whimsy and strangeness, science fiction also mirrors our own reality. And slash seems to reflect that combination.

Many slash writers are compelled to redraft male characters so they are a bit more communicative and tender—qualities stereotypically associated with women. But there are pitfalls if one goes too far. Some slash stories have lantern-jawed guys coming home with flowers every day, tying on pink aprons, weeping over lost football games. These stereotypes, “feminine” or no, are boring despite the genders involved. But more than that, these tales are not sexy. There is just too much sameness to the characters—both men so soft and squishy—that one has no sense of how their differences could be complementary, or how they are different characters at all.

And there's another reason not to push a masculine character into unbelievable heights of femininity—it violates that delicate balance in fanfic between precedent and imagination. A writer who frills up a butch male character may earn the wrath of someone like Jane at the website Citizens Against Bad Slash, who writes:

There seems to be an overwhelming tendency in the slash community to make masculine characters so feminine that you could change one of the names to “Mary” and it wouldn't make a difference.... Even if we're writing stories about an alternate universe, it's always more interesting when the dialogue and actions of the character are somewhat true to life. The neat thing about slash is that you get to see characters act out what you don't see onscreen, but it loses its appeal when the character is so “feminized” that you can't recognize him.

While Jane does seem to buy into static masculine and feminine codes of behavior, in the world of stereotypical TV gender roles, her critique makes sense. For this reason, exaggerated feminine characteristics stick out just as much as masculine ones. Sometimes slash writers err in the other direction, writing reams about stoic, uncommunicative hot men having sex. And while that can be fun for a while, the stories that have received the most acclaim in the slash world are ones that show why these men are with each other and what's behind the sex. They also flesh out their heroes with qualities that are a combination of traditionally male behaviors (assertive, confident) and female characteristics (nurturing, communicative). In other words, the best pieces feature players who are more like real people than the characters you find on TV.

Interestingly, unexplored female/female TV relationships seem to hold a similar (Continued on page 92)



lost in the grooves

searching for signs of female life amid the record bins by layla cooper

Picture the person whose life revolves around dusty record shops, credit-card debt, and vinyl-packed floor-to-ceiling shelves that would undoubtedly spell big trouble in an earthquake. The person who reorganizes records in times of stress or boredom. The person who comes to your apartment and with one look sizes up your CD collection, knows *Goldmine* front to back, and sees the sun only when venturing out to a flea market to rifle through boxes of worn Herb Alpert LPs in the hope of unearthing some pristine Fairport Convention. It's a guy, right?

Though any woman who has spent hours sifting through the vinyl racks in search of that elusive gem knows that a life of obsessing over rare import-only singles and limited-edition pressings isn't exclusive to men, it's all but impossible to talk about female record collectors without referencing their male counterparts

or responding to the sexist assumptions stemming from the male-as-record-collector model. Most music-loving women, collectors or not, have a veritable anthology of tales about being ignored by male clerks in record shops or having guys attribute their taste in music to the influence of boyfriends. ("He sure did a good job with you," a male bandmate once said to me, referring to my older boyfriend—as if the guy found me one day at the mall listening to Tiffany singles and proceeded to steal me away and fill my head with the sounds of Television and Kraftwerk.) Maybe I have been turned on to a band or two by a male friend or boyfriend. But when two male friends share musical knowledge, such power hierarchies are rarely assumed. And nobody ever surmises that the person most instrumental in shaping my early interest in music could have been a woman.

illustrations by keren richter





Longtime record collector Jen Matson, who catalogs her collection of more than 3,000 45s (consisting mainly of “independently produced arty punk and pop from 1978 onward”) on her website, www.cyclespersecond.com, comments, “It’s still quite an anomaly to be female and a record collector, as I see every time I go to a record fair and find myself one of the only women in line, out of 75 or so waiting to get in for early admission—the hard-core collectors.” While Matson has gotten used to being in the record-geek minority, she reports that some of her peers haven’t acclimated as well to the often rude, smarmy, or condescending treatment heaped upon female patrons by “record clerks or other music know-it-alls, the kind who take great pleasure in letting you know how much more important minutiae they know about this band’s lineup changes or that label’s catalog-numbering system than you do.” And yes, she continues, “Men are also hit with that kind of snobbery, but women are by default assumed to not know anything.”

Lee Ann Fullington’s four-year tenure at a New York

City record store had such a profound impact on her that she decided to research independent record shops for her doctoral dissertation at England’s Institute of Popular Music at the University of Liverpool. Fullington reports that at her workplace, staff members were generally respectful regardless of gender, but that male customers would often ask her to “get him’ (meaning one of my male coworkers), because as a woman, I couldn’t possibly know anything.”

Geekin’ Out on the Silver Screen

Since serious record collectors are a small subset of the population, mass media hasn’t exactly overflowed with stories devoted to the pastime. But when record collecting does make it into an article, film, or book, it’s nearly always portrayed as a singularly

straight-white-male pathology. Most recently, the book-turned-films *High Fidelity* and *Ghost World* have solidified popular opinion of vinyl aficionados as lonely, anal-retentive, socially awkward guys who nevertheless feel superior to those who don’t share their obsession. (*High Fidelity*’s sad-sack protagonist Rob, for example, maintains that “you can’t be a serious person” if you have fewer than 500 records.)

Vinyl, Canadian filmmaker Alan Zweig’s 2000 documentary on record collecting, may be the definitive portrayal of the assumed divide between the collecting behavior of the sexes. (*Vinyl* shows collecting in its most ludicrous and neurotic forms; one guy in the movie claims he is trying to collect every record ever made—but never listens to any of them.) Though a handful of women are among the film’s subjects, Zweig’s attitude toward them differs so much from his treatment of his male subjects that one wonders why he bothered to include them at all. Most of Zweig’s male subjects are filmed in front of record collections that extend beyond the limits of the frame (presumably for great dis-

tances), for instance, while his female subjects hold one or two records from a small stack in front of them.

In his essay "Sizing Up Record Collections" in the 1997 anthology *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*,

author and collector Will Straw recalls being interviewed by Zweig, and adds that while more than 100 record collectors were interviewed for *Vinyl*, only five were women. "[Zweig] had tried (he claimed, convincingly) to find more female collectors, following up on every lead and making sure that his search was well publicized, but had met with no success," reports Straw. Good intentions aside, *Vinyl* reveals how little Zweig knows about women—and how little he assumes women know about music. Over the course of his film, the 50ish Zweig repeatedly blames his lack of romantic attachments on his obsession with collecting records. In one of his many monologues, he claims that were he to meet the right woman, he would get rid of all his records—"except the ones she likes, you know [*making a sour face*], the Joni Mitchell." Later in the film, Zweig invites a woman he meets on the street into his house to be interviewed. He tells her she looks exactly like his imaginary, ideal mate and asks her to pick out some records that she'd like to hear, mentioning in the same breath that he has a (limited) mental list of the music he thinks all women like. She glares at him and explains that her tastes don't stop at Mitchell and Bob Marley.

Had Zweig truly expected to find a few obsessed female record collectors, he would have located them. However, he makes it clear through the treatment of his case studies and the tone of his commentary that he thinks record collecting is exclusively the domain of socially maladjusted men.

In fact, from the way record collecting is framed in *Vinyl*, and in *High Fidelity* and *Ghost World*, there doesn't seem to be much to recommend it to women or men. The crux of record-collector identity is limned most tellingly in *High Fidelity*'s record-shop scenes, in which the male employees make top-10 lists of favorite tunes but seem to relish the lists most for the opportunity they provide to insult and mock one another's tastes. It's

From the way record collecting is framed in *Vinyl*, and in *High Fidelity* and *Ghost World*, there doesn't seem to be much to recommend it to women or men.

worth noting that women aren't scorned as know-nothings in *High Fidelity*—at worst, they're simply not interested in the culture of collecting, as with Rob's estranged girlfriend, Laura; at best, they're eager customers offering a chance for Rob's colleagues to show off their boundless knowledge. The fact that the shop guys reserve their sharpest vitriol for fellow (male) collectors—witness the scene where a spectacled indiephile in search of a rare Captain Beefheart pressing wanders in—reveals the self-hatred behind the bluster and the voluminous lists. Perhaps male collectors like Zweig and the men of *High Fidelity* simply don't want women to share their status because they can't stand to see their conflicted selves reflected in their romantic counterparts.

You Spin Me Right 'Round

So with record collectors cemented in popular culture as pasty, insecure, self-obsessed guys using their thousands of albums as emotional insurance against having meaningful relationships, why would women even want to join the club to begin with? For collectors of any gender, myself included, it's usually not a choice.

In junior high, I ate lunch with my science teacher because I didn't have any friends to sit with. Kids routinely threw spitballs, gum, and even paint at me during school. But then I found out about alternative music and riot grrrl. Once I discovered the thrill of sorting through albums at the local punk shop, I was hooked. Collecting vinyl helped me feel okay about being ostracized by my peers; I finally had something they didn't.

Sometimes I would skip school and take the commuter bus that ran twice daily between my parents' house and downtown to look for new records I had read about in the music magazines and mail-order catalogs I toted around. Eventually, I made friends with some comic book-loving boys at school who listened raptly as I filled their ears with useless punk-rock trivia. I had an

older female pen pal who opened my eyes to amazing independent music scenes all over the country. She wrote me letters detailing her newest musical purchases, which I immediately ran out and bought, too.

Musician, music journalist, deejay, and record collector Meredith Ochs had a similar introduction to collecting. "Growing up, I felt like a big freak," she explains. "Music was a language that I understood. It was my private sanctuary, a salvation for me. A record saves my day, every day."

Ochs, now a contributing editor at *Guitar World* who moonlights as a singer and guitarist for the pop/country-rock combo the Damn Lovelys, began her love affair with vinyl at the tender age of 8. ("I begged my dad to take me to the Colony Record Shop in Times Square, and I bought *Something New* by the Beatles.") She recalls that

her interest in music sprouted during a bout of insomnia. "My parents gave me a little radio that I would listen to at night, and I had this compulsion to write down all the names of the songs and bands." Growing up just outside of New York City in the late '70s and early '80s, Ochs was exposed to the punk and new-wave songs played on stations like WLIR and WFMU. (She has hosted a radio show on the latter for the past 12 years.) She professes to being "way into" bands like the Jam, the Clash, and X as a teenager and cites the first Pretenders album as critical for her. She attributes her collection of a whopping 25,000 LPs and CDs in part to the promos she receives as a record reviewer, but mostly to many afternoons spent rummaging through piles of used records in out-of-the-way stores.

For someone with so many records, Ochs's connection to each one is impressively palpable. "Records are like reading a book," she enthuses, explaining that Michael Stipe once mentioned Alex Chilton, which turned her on to Big Star, which turned her on to Jim Dickinson and country music ("something I never thought I'd like").

Jen Matson's collecting proclivities also surfaced early. A self-described completist who owns multiple pressings of many records, she recalls, "While the collecting bug didn't hit full force for me until the middle of high school, there were signs early on. It wasn't enough for me to get all of Duran Duran's albums; I needed the import-only 7-inch single with the poster sleeve, or the Canadian single version of 'Skin Trade' with the banned sleeve." Once Matson discovered her local music scene, it was full steam ahead: "I was going into Boston to see shows whenever I could, taping each station's local radio show each week and making mix tapes from that, looking up band members' names in the phone book to call them and request an interview or a review copy of their record. Sometimes I can't believe how persistent I was—I was only 15 or 16 when I started doing this." Matson says that while she did have female friends with whom



**Vinyl helped me
feel okay about being
ostracized by my peers.**

she attended shows in high school, "it was the guys I worked with at a record store who were really into the collecting thing."

Blinding Us with Science

It's not just the fellas who are telling the world that only men can amass the vinyl with truly proper zeal. Music

a window. There is something super left-brained and male about obsessive record collecting that is not attractive to women."

While St. Clair's theory that women are biologically driven to be more interested in collecting Beanie Babies (or foreskins, whatever that means) than rare jazz LPs is insultingly reductive, she's not alone in her thinking. But

Kramer theorizes that obsession with a band or an artist is at its core an emotional experience with elements of attraction and desire.

critic Katy St. Clair recently penned a column for Bay Area weekly the *East Bay Express* titled "Happiness Is a Slab of Vinyl." Therein, she informed readers that:

Record geeks are a lot of things: obsessive, semi-broke, pedantic, and prone to fits of matching secondhand flannel shirts with argyle sweater-vests. But one thing they ain't is female. No one has ever come up with a good explanation for this. After all, women collect stuff like the bejesus—Beanie Babies, *Gone With the Wind* decorative plates, foreskins—and we also apparently like music, or Fiona Apple wouldn't have a career. But most gals don't have that curious record-collector mentality.

Now, we've already established that record collecting is generally perceived to be a male-dominated pastime. But why would a woman who makes her living writing about music strike such a low blow to women's musical taste (or lack thereof)? Over dinner one night, I told St. Clair that I interpreted her Fiona Apple comment as meaning that women like only music that's emotional, accessible, melodic—in short, an *Oprah* book in sonic form. "They do," she replied. "It was hyperbole, but overall, I do think I was right."

St. Clair, who credits her mom for turning her on to music, chalks up the lack of female record geeks ("I have never seen a woman buy a [Charles] Mingus record") to simple biology. "I tend to have an old-fashioned view on the whole boy/girl thing," she says. "If you give a baby girl a brick, she's going to put a dress on it and make it into a baby. If you give it to a boy, he'll throw it through

for those of us who believe that whatever biological differences exist between men and women are amplified and upheld by social conditioning, the comments of Michael Kramer make a lot more sense.

Kramer is a graduate student and cofounder of University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Music in Context, a series of lectures and discussions on the relationship between music and history. He explains that he sees the socially imposed gender conventions behind the men-can't-talk-about-their-feelings stereotype as being a major contributor to completist record-collecting patterns. Kramer theorizes that obsession with a band or an artist is at its core an emotional experience with elements of attraction and desire. And if all things emotional are associated with femininity and weakness, and are therefore to be avoided—as men have historically been socialized to believe—men must make their connection to music less demonstrative. "It's emasculating to be a fan," he clarifies. "Forces are limiting, so that the male experience is more about having authority. Collecting is sublimation: an attempt to repress and redirect socially unacceptable feelings."

Kitty English's experience bears out the idea that the material features of collecting are generally what's most valued—on the surface, at least—among her male counterparts. English, a deejay who has hosted a show at the University of California at Berkeley's KALX for years and estimates that she owns about 2,000 LPs, says that her male peers don't consider her a bona fide collector because she owns a disproportionate number of compilation albums as opposed

(Continued on page 93)

obsession confession

TALKING ABOUT OBSESSION IS TRICKY. Much like humor, it means different things to different people. The word is often used to denote the point at which devotion takes a sinister turn—there's a reason, for instance, why the phrase “obsessed fan” has a very different ring from “adoring fan.” But obsessions aren't always a bad thing. An obsession with, say, constructing the perfect lemon meringue pie is likely to yield delicious results over and over again. Die-hard activists generally can be described as obsessed. In daily life, we often use the term more casually than seriously, and we assume people know that when we say we're obsessed with *Joe Millionaire*, it doesn't mean we're, you know, *obsessed with Joe Millionaire*.

So maybe we should ask, When does enjoyment or desire become obsession? And when does obsession stop being absorbingly fun and start being scary? Obsessions come in all flavors, all sizes, and all intensities. When we conceived this issue, we knew it would be a good chance to air our own obsessions—colorful, laughable, and even, well, shameful as they are. But are we *obsessed*—or just, you know, *obsessed*? You'll have to decide for yourselves.



MY MOTHER SAYS I was born with a worried look on my face. In a picture taken a few hours after my birth, my eyes stare straight ahead in a familiar expression that often gets mistaken for worry. I see it as proof of my early recognition of the gigantic, confusing world I had just entered.

This recognition led to a childhood spent pondering life's questions (albeit in a random, kidlike way) and, when the answers proved impossible to come by, to an uncharacteristically optimistic halfhearted belief in fate. I've never been religious in the traditional sense, but in an attempt to give my life a greater sense of certainty, I devised a complicated, romantic set of superstitions, little rituals guaranteed to bring me good luck—or at least tell my future. Would I have to go to a drafty, musty boarding school like my storybook heroines? Not if I avoided breaking a spider's web. Would my best friend love me forever? Yes, if I blew all the fluff off a dandelion. Would I pass tomorrow's math test? It depended on what object I found on my walk home from school.

The search for the perfect object began as a way to pass the time. When I was in second grade, my parents built a house way out in the country at the end of a half-mile of gravel road. In order to catch the school bus each morning, I had to hike to the end of the road and wait by the highway. I'd often complain about the walk, but I actually enjoyed it, and as I made my way home each afternoon, I'd scan the familiar path for a significant object, a totem—a crow's feather, a smooth stone—that just might hold a clue to my future.

As I got older, my childhood superstitions faded until I was left with just one—the search for the object that

fortune hunter

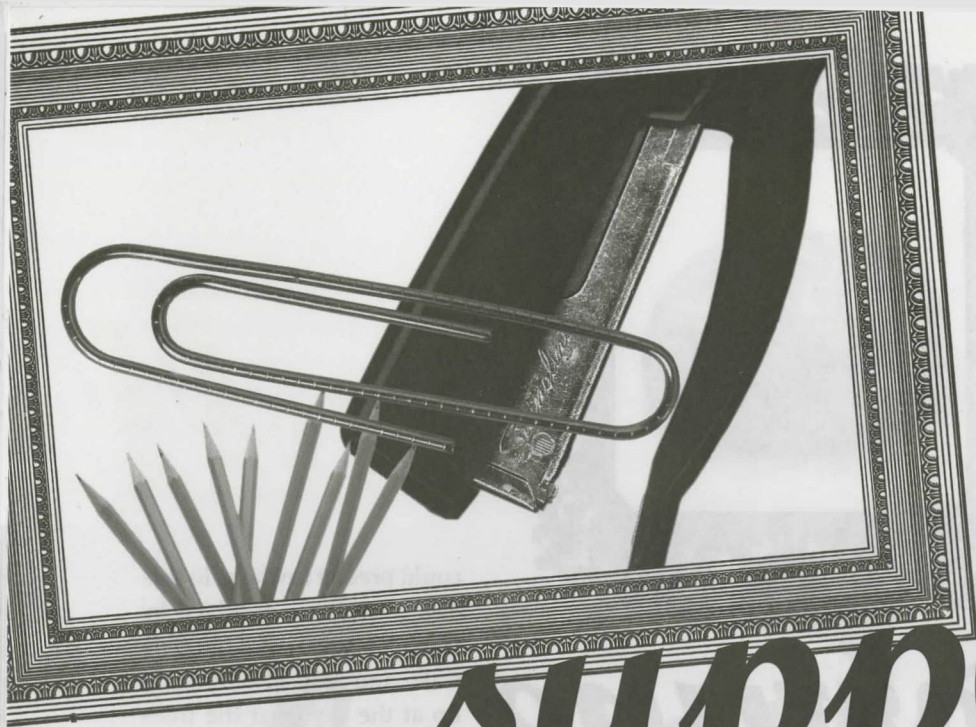
could predict my fate. To this day, when I am troubled by something, I'll head out on a walk, and instead of looking up at the sky or at the trees or the faces of the people I pass, I'll keep my eyes fixed on the ground, searching for the thing that jumps out at me, yelling, "Look here!" When I hear an object call, I pick it up and then wait to

understand what it is trying to tell me. In my basement I keep a musty cardboard box stuffed with the treasures I find. It is my obsession, and until now it has been a mostly private one.

A little over four years ago, my husband and I decided that it was time to have a baby. But instead of conceiving in the first month of trying, as I'd always expected to, my body rebelled. As winter turned into spring, I grew more and more despairing. Then one weekend, when we were away in the country at my family's house, I took off for a walk alone, heading up a hill to the edge of a bluff that looks over the adjacent valley. As I walked, I thought about the future, about what might happen if I actually did have a child, if I was even suited to be a mother.

When I reached the top of the bluff, I sat on a rock to rest and looked at my shoes. Stuck in my left lace was a feather, blue-black and glossy with a bright red tip. I wasn't sure what the feather meant, but I knew from years of looking for meaning in little things that it was significant. I stuck the feather in my pocket and brought it home, where I put it in a small box that I stashed in a drawer in my bedside table. Like magic, my worries about conceiving faded. A month later I was pregnant, and nine months after that, I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl with red hair as bright as the tip of my feather.

—ANDY STEINER



supply demand

I WAS NEVER A VERY INDEPENDENT CHILD. In public, I needed the sense of security that came from clinging to my parents—with one exception. After a half-hour of being wedged into and out of school clothes at Kmart, I would beg to be left alone to indulge my love of school supplies.

A day could disappear while I stood in that aisle, just looking at perfectly new stuff. There were the usual beauties—shiny staplers and hole punches, boxes full of unsharpened, unchewed pencils with pristine, virgin erasers on top, the “adult” scissors we still couldn’t have in class. Compasses, protractors, and those weird rulers that had three sides’ worth of measurement. (What the heck were those for, anyway? They seemed like something only Mike Brady would need.)

My favorite items were ones you hardly ever see anymore, and which even then weren’t of much use to me. Nobody’s life demands a single pencil that’s red on one end and blue on the other, though it came in pretty handy during the 1976 wave of bicentennial-related coloring assignments. And I was crazy about the typewriter erasers, from the pencil-style ones you had to sharpen to the pizza-cutter wheel eraser, both of which had little brushes on the end for sweeping away your eraser dust. So tiny! So tidy! So clearly at the root of my future fascination with Sanrio micro-goodies.

I wrote as a child, and erased as a child (with tiny erasers that smelled of vanilla). But as I became a

woman, I put childish things behind me. (Except for tiny pencil sharpeners shaped like coffeepots or the heads of various Powerpuff girls. I may be grown, but I’m not dead.) I left school behind for crummy office-temp jobs. And from school supplies I graduated to the hard stuff: office supplies. Hanging folders, paper by the ream, desk blotters, and Parker pen refills as far as the eye could see. All brand-new, unlike my wardrobe, and unsusceptible to fickle changes in fashion. All useful but many unnecessary—like Chanel earrings without the buyer’s remorse.

The fact that I need at least some of these things and use them daily hasn’t diminished the pleasure I take in buying them. It’s not like working in a chocolate factory and losing your taste for candy. Rather, they bring a taste of childhood delight to occasionally mundane work and remain among my favorite things, as well as a link to my first taste of independence.

P.S. My favorite stationers’ closed five years ago to make way for yet another coffee shop on a street already full of them. While writing this I was distressed to find my second-favorite going out of business, most likely the victim of neighboring big-box retailers whom I can’t in good conscience support. If you have a local stationers’ or small office-supply store in your area, for heaven’s sake, use it. OfficeMax doesn’t care when you run out of sealing wax, and that’s a damned shame.

—HEATHER SEGCEL

it's a disney world *after all*

SOME MAKE PILGRIMAGES to the final resting place of Elvis or Jim Morrison. I visited Walt Disney's grave. And judging from the cards and flowers I saw there, I'm not the only one who's been inspired by his accomplishments.

I've been a Disney fan for as long as I can remember. My mother started me out young with a Golden Books series, and put decals of Mickey and Minnie on my bedroom wall. As I grew older, it became my life's goal to visit Disneyland. When I first met the man who's now my husband, he was surprised by my glee at his admission that he was once a Jungle Cruise skipper. After he got over his bad memories of cruising its stench-filled waters on the hottest of summer days, we took several trips to the park together; now we have an annual pass. We go to all the animated features the night they open and buy up the accompanying DVDs and toys like crazy.

Disney has always signified something to me that brands like Barbie don't. The fantasy of a happy ending is a form of escapism from the everyday, and that's something Disney stories have in droves. Bizarre as it sounds, when I was at the appropriate age to play with her, Barbie seemed too real-life to me: She was a doctor, she was a mother, she played tennis and sang in nightclubs. And even when she was a princess, it seemed contrived, like she was trying too hard. Disney never had any kind of realism problem.

Despite my fixation on Disney offerings—and the jokes from my friends and family—I never saw myself as obsessed. Sure, maybe it's a little odd for a 27-year-old woman to insist on sleeping with a Disney plush toy, but am I really the only one?

I'm not. In fact, some people have taken their interest in the world of Disney and turned it into a career. David Koenig, for instance, began researching his first book on Disneyland in 1987, and since then has published two more, along with countless articles. He's a columnist for the web-based theme-park guide MousePlanet, and is

regularly used as a source on all things Disney by the *L.A. Times*, *USA Today*, all four major tv networks, and many nationally syndicated radio programs.

Koenig doesn't see his Disney-based career as an obsession, either—especially since he's heard so many stories of Disney fans taking their devotion much further than he or I ever would. There's the guy who sports more than a thousand Disney-related tattoos, including all 101 of the dalmatians, or the park's visitors who demand dates with female characters like Alice in Wonderland. Disney lore even includes the tale of a group of online friends who used to meet regularly at Walt Disney World for breakfast, until an argument about princesses escalated into a full-fledged war that included death threats and eventually demanded FBI involvement. Let's just say that there's something about Disney that can bring out people's strongest feelings.

Given current events, Walt's world sounds increasingly idealistic and appealing to me, which is precisely why I continue to collect my princess dolls and make my twice-monthly visits to Disneyland. Call it obsession if you will, but I prefer to think of it as fascination and inspiration.

Just don't tell my boss, 'cause he might think it's kinda weird. —CARLY MILNE

SONGS (AND OTHER THINGS) IN THE KEY OF OBSESSION

Movies

Adaptation

Fatal Attraction

Amélie

Pi

The King of Comedy

Cherish

Abre los Ojos

Blow Out

Pink Floyd's the Wall

All the President's Men

Conspiracy Theory

Mo' Better Blues

Harold and Maude

Dead Ringers

Rear Window

The Piano

Insomnia

Muriel's Wedding

Taxi Driver

Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control

brohemian rhapsody

ONE PART BOHEMIAN
(stylish shoes, excellent record
collection, meaningful books on the
nightstand) and ONE PART BRO
(emotional detachment, enthusiasm for
lad-mags, a penchant for fart jokes)

I AM, AND HAVE ALWAYS BEEN, A GIRL'S GIRL. Friends call me after breakups. I have strong opinions on matters from low-rise jeans to formulations of the Pill. And despite it all, I have a secret obsession with a certain kind of boy: the kind who's in bands—or who looks like he could be—who makes me feel left out yet also sucked in, whose allure lies in an utter indifference to my devotion. Standing outside a club one night, I tried to explain to my friend George my simultaneous fascination with and repulsion by the postmodern-rattail-adorned guys inside playing a hipster version of white-boy funk. "Oh, yeah," he said. "It's because they're brohemian." Finally, my obsession had a name.

Recent obsessional activity includes standing at the local newsstand devouring a Strokes cover story in *Spin* and, less than a week later, taping Interpol's performance on *Letterman*. As of this writing, I've watched it three times. With each viewing, I get a sort of contact high off of their cute boyness, followed by a serious bout of self-loathing stemming from the notion that I'm doing something that, while not flat-out self-destructive, is probably not so good for me.

One part bohemian (stylish shoes, excellent record collection, and meaningful books on the nightstand) and one part bro (emotional detachment, enthusiasm for lad-mags, a penchant for fart jokes), the brohemian arose to fill the archetype gap between macho asshole and sensitive girly-man that appeared along with the mainstreaming of underground culture in the early '90s. He wears

his particular brand of smug cool like a tight sweatshirt. He is most at ease in the company of other guys, which is maybe why he is so often in a band. While girls aren't wholly absent from the brohemian lifestyle, their presence is secondary to the male bonding (which brohos would never refer to as such). I suspect this is why many of them date models and actresses.

His boho attributes bring him cute clothes, good haircuts, hip girls, and all the right cultural references, but his bro side allows for an easy camaraderie with the average Joe and a natural affinity for PlayStation. He has a manly aloofness that gives the appearance of sensitivity without actually breaking any cultural norms: the love-child of Ira Glass and a member of Korn.

Celebrity brohemians abound. The Strokes, the Hives, and any group lumped into that nouveau rock thing MTV's so in love with right now—all brohemian. So are Jason Lee, Jimmy Fallon, Dave Eggers, A Tribe Called Quest—era Q-Tip, the Naked Chef, Jason Schwartzman, the staff of long-defunct *Dirt* magazine, and anyone who has ever dated Winona Ryder. Not brohemian, on grounds that they are either overtly bro or genuinely menschy: Henry Rollins, Beck, Ralph Nader, the staff of *Vice* magazine, and any member of 'N Sync.

The Beastie Boys are a particularly good example of the evolution from bro to brohemian: Their *Licensed to Ill*—era attitude was totally bro. Yet their midcareer offerings—*Paul's Boutique*, *Grand Royal* magazine, a celebration of vintage sneakers and Levi's cords—laid a crucial foundation for the aesthetic of brohemia. (And the Free Tibet concert—headlining, feminist-dating Beastie Boys of today offer an even newer variant: the post-brohemian.)

The other night, I walked into a bar and was told that I'd just missed spotting one of the Strokes. Instead of feeling disappointed, like I'd lost my opportunity to charm the very tight pants off one of my many fantasy boyfriends, I felt almost relieved. For all my love of brohemians, I'm not really their type. But, more important, I probably wouldn't like them, either. —MARISA MELTZER

MY OBSESSION WITH PRISON-DRAMA *OZ* started as a lazy afterthought of Sunday-night HBO viewing. Sprawled on the sofa in a post-*Sopranos* stupor, I flipped through magazines while *Oz* flickered in the background, nothing more than ambient noise: heated discussions, clanging of cell bars, ominous music that signaled scene changes. When it sounded like a character was about to get stabbed, raped, or otherwise menaced, I shut off the set.

But over time, I found my ears pricking up when certain figures appeared onscreen—Machiavellian lifer Ryan O'Reilly, for example, or beleaguered prison M.D. Gloria Nathan, the object of O'Reilly's psychotic yet strangely endearing affection. I suddenly knew the definition of the word "shiv," and knew also that it was interchangeably used with "shank" to describe a homemade knife.

Kiss my *OZ*



And I found myself looking forward to each new episode with a delicious, almost illicit glee.

As HBO's first original dramatic series (it premiered in 1997, two years before Tony Soprano made the scene), *Oz* was the prototype for the network's dark-drama format. Set in an experimental correctional unit of a state penitentiary, *Oz* cast prison as a soap opera with no ingenue and an overflow of villains. The racially divided inmates plotted against one another, the liberal unit director slept with his employees, a female guard demanded sexual favors from prisoners, the warden covered up health hazards that threatened the lives of inmates, and even prison psychologist Sister Peter Marie found herself attracted to a particularly charming killer. In a word, yuck. Yet also, somehow, addictive.

My love for *Oz* snuck up on me, and I still can't fully explain it. The show is far from flawless: Its short-attention-span pacing and abundance of characters make for episodes clumsy with exposition. And it's impossible to watch the show without noticing the extensive plot holes: Doesn't the state get suspicious when inmates are murdered on what seems like a daily

basis? What's up with prisoners having access to Internet porn? And why is cafeteria work duty clearly unsupervised when it's obvious that a vendetta meal containing ground glass is going to be dished out sooner or later?

Yes, *Oz* is graphically, scorchingly brutal. Physically, of course—the series has showcased burnings, beatings, blindings, rapes, and offings too monstrous to recount—and psychologically as well. It's also politically depressing—it perpetuates racial stereotypes and paints prison bureaucrats as no more moral than their incarcerated charges. So really, what's to love?

Why, the inverted power dynamics, of course. And I don't mean full-frontal male nudity—there are some fine-looking felons in this clink, but I don't happen to think there's anything sexy about a naked man when he's being hurled onto the cold cement floor of solitary

or on the verge of being violated with a piece of flatware. It's more that *Oz* offers female viewers a fictional world unlike any other on TV—one where, on the inside at least, they're for once not the ones victimized. In *Oz*, it's the men who suffer the indignities—objectification, harassment, even breast cancer—that on the outside are usually reserved for women. This may explain why, according to a recent *New York Times* article, 49 percent of the show's viewers are female, and why so many active, female-driven *Oz* forums and fan-fiction sites abound on the web. (Or maybe that's the full-frontal talking.)

Oz, for all its bleakness, just does what all good drama does: It visits the struggle between sin and redemption, humanity and degradation, on each of its players with harsh, visceral results. I admit to being embarrassed to have sobbed through a recent episode in which an inmate with the mental age of a child unwittingly prepares for his trip to the electric chair—but I'd be far more mortified had my reaction been any less emotional. And I'm looking forward to obsessing for years to come, as soon as I get my DVD player working.

—ANDI ZEISLER

anne on my mind

WHEN I WAS 12, MY GROWN-UP SISTER loaned me her copy of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Before she let me read it, she cautioned, "There's some stuff she does with her girlfriends...well, I certainly never did anything like that. You can just skip over those parts."

My prurient interests awakened, the diary immediately became my favorite flashlight reading. Anne's writing positively radiated sensuality: "Sometimes when I lie in bed at night I feel a terrible urge to touch my breasts and listen to the quiet, steady beating of my heart."

I'm not the only one who thinks the diary is steamy: In 1982, one Virginia county tried to ban it from schools for its "sexually offensive" material.

At its original publication in 1952, however, most of Anne's erotic musings slipped under the radar of censors. Because the diary was presented and marketed as a war journal, almost all her passages about sex remained intact.

Adults seemed to be in denial about Anne's sexuality, but her diary was hot stuff. Her romance with Peter, for example, is treated in film versions—and remembered by most people—as a demure, chaste teen crush.



Actually, Anne was just horny. When she decides to seduce Peter—and it isn't the other way around—it takes her only a few short months to go from discussions of male anatomy to first kiss to passionate embrace. Soon afterward, she comes to the realization that, although he makes a nice wartime diversion, he has "too little character, too little willpower, too little courage and strength." Anne knows the difference between sex and love: "I miss the real thing, and yet I know it exists!" I was delighted by her proactive stance regarding sexual fulfillment, but I was even more impressed by the fact that she didn't let sex cloud her judgment.

Growing up in a small town in the 1970s, I didn't have access to feminist sex tracts, let alone ones that were considered appropriate reading for young girls. The best the genre had to offer was *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, which made me gag. Judy Blume's "typical" (read: insecure) girl spends the whole book praying she'll get her period because it will help her fit in with her friends: "Oh please, God. I just want to be normal." Compare that with Anne's genuine excitement about menses: "I can hardly wait. It's such a momentous event." After the big day arrives, she writes: "I feel as though...I'm carrying around a sweet secret." Anne celebrated her body, her sexuality, and her womanhood. I identified with her completely.

In addition to Anne's descriptions of her trysts with Peter and the romantic dreams she had about a boy she knew before she went into hiding, she writes longingly about girls. Of her friend Jacques: "I asked her whether... we could touch each other's breasts.... I also had a terrible desire to kiss her, which I did. Every time I see a female nude, such as the Venus in my art history book, I go into ecstasy. Sometimes I find them so exquisite." That this kind of reading passed as a school assignment offered a bizarrely public stamp of approval: Apparently, lots of girls make out with their female friends; everyone knows it, and nobody minds.

If Anne's writing on sexuality did nothing more than titillate, she couldn't have held my fascination this long. But her eroticism flourished unexpurgated in a world in which women's voices continue to be stifled—and her voice gave rise to mine. —JANET MILLER

punchin' judy

"WANT JUSTICE?" intones the voiceover. And who doesn't, right? You'd sure like your neighbor to pay for the damage to your fence, or for your cheating ex-fiancé to return the stereo system he appropriated on his way out the door. But civil discussions quickly lead to late-night phone calling, heckling, and egg throwing. Six months later, you're tired, the fence is still broken, your stereo's still missing, and you're all out of eggs. You finally summon a higher power, one that will exact revenge and maybe scrape off a pound of flesh from that son of a bitch in the process. "Want justice? Call 1-888-800-Judy." The name's Judy. Judge Judy.

The good judge presides over small-claims court cases on the widely syndicated *Judge Judy*, which premiered in 1996 and perennially leads the ratings pack of imitators (and also trounces the genre's originator, *The People's Court*, which hit the air in 1981). Within her small-potatoes jurisdiction, Judge Judy wields total and absolute power. Repeated close watchings have revealed Judith Scheindlin to be not merely a judge but a special brand of salt-of-the-earth vengeance demon operating in a chaotic and often unfair world. Vested with indisputable authority, Judge Judy takes wicked delight in righting the petty wrongs of everyday life; she can ensure the return of your stereo and shame the jerk on national television, too. Justice doesn't get much sweeter than that.

Like the Greek goddess Hera, Judge Judy is the most powerful gal in her abbreviated realm. The opening voiceover warns the viewer that "her rulings are final—this is her courtroom," which basically means that Judge Judy is the final arbiter of what is true. "I wasn't paid," a housekeeper complains of her relationship with her employer. "Yes, you were!" the judge shoots back. Whether the housekeeper was indeed paid is impossible to discern. But the good judge has decided the woman is fibbing, so the ambiguity of what might actually have happened is accordingly rendered irrelevant. Judge Judy's presumptions of truth are (Continued on page 92)

MORE SONGS (AND OTHER THINGS) IN THE KEY OF OBSESSION

more *Movies*

The Crush
Chuck & Buck
Pee-Wee's Big Adventure
The House of Yes

Songs

I Want You—*Elvis Costello*
Hero Worship—*the B-52's*
Rid of Me—*P.J. Harvey*
Galway to Graceland—*Richard Thompson*
Changed the Locks—*Lucinda Williams*
Anything by *Philip Glass*
Anything by *Radiohead*
Glory Box—*Portishead*
Sally Simpson—*the Who*
Debaser—*the Pixies*
Just Like Heaven—*the Cure*
Intruder—*Peter Gabriel*
He Needed—*King Missile*
867-5309-JENNY—*Tommy Tutone*
I Must Not Think Bad Thoughts—*X*
Stan—*Eminem*
Every Breath You Take—*the Police*
The Gift—*Velvet Underground*
Nothing Compares 2 U—*Prince*

Books

The Bluest Eye—*Toni Morrison*
Rebecca—*Daphne Du Maurier*
The Mezzanine—*Nicholson Baker*
I Love Dick—*Chris Kraus*
Go Ask Alice—*Anonymous*
Sophie's Choice—*William Styron*
High Fidelity—*Nick Hornby*
Moby-Dick—*Herman Melville*
The Rachel Papers—*Martin Amis*
Autobiography of a Face—*Lucy Grealy*
The Blindfold—*Siri Hustvedt*
Vision Quest—*Terry Davis*
Anything by *Edgar Allen Poe*
Anything by *David Foster Wallace*

Stories about obsession that also inspire it

The Lord of the Rings
Buffy the Vampire Slayer
The X-Files
The Best Little Girl in the World
The Rocky Horror Picture Show

Barbara EHRENREICH

JULIA SCOTT TALKS TO ONE OF OUR FAVORITE FEMINIST JOURNALISTS



BARBARA EHRENREICH IS a NATIONAL treasure. Raised in a Montana mining family, she is pro-union, a socialist, a feminist, and a religious skeptic. She also happens to be a talented and influential essayist and a true patriot, dissenting and raising hell in the interests of the impoverished, abused, and silenced.

Ehrenreich's books are historical mirrors that extend beyond their subjects to reflect the culture and politics of a generation of Americans at any given time. She has tackled such topics as the sexism of psychology and medicine (1978's *For Her Own Good:*

150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women, coauthored with Deirdre English), the effects of rigid gender roles on men (1983's *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*), the paranoia of the privileged (1989's *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class*), the historical anthropology of war (1997's *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War*), and women's labor migrations (her latest book, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, coedited with Arlie Russell Hochschild). Her 2001 investigation, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*—in which Ehrenreich went undercover as a low-wage worker to ascertain whether it's possible to survive on the minimum wage in the U.S.—was a national bestseller, has been adapted for the stage, and provided the basis for a documentary on A&E.

Antiporn crusades, presidential philandering, the First Daughters' run-ins with the law—Ehrenreich takes on her topics with conviction and more than a

small measure of wit. She'll jump into a debate regardless of its terms, usually when her position is least welcome. She reserves special attention for politicians who presume to speak for those women whose lives their policies have rendered unmanageable. In her capacity as a *Harper's* contributor, a columnist for the *Progressive*, and one of the few feminist voices to appear regularly in the pages of *Time*, Ehrenreich has been a tireless critic of welfare reform and the racist stereotypes it perpetuates, and she has never missed a chance to stand up to the religious right and its claims on women's bodies, families, and lifestyles.

As for her enduring effect on the feminist movement, one comment in her 1993 essay "Coming of Age" says it all: "To have lived for women's human rights, knowing that they contain a whole new idea of what 'human' might become, and then to grow older watching the fresh young faces come along, saying what I might have said, or smarter versions of the same—that is about as close to immortality as I would ever want to be."

In your introduction to *Nickel and Dimed*, you say that when you came up with the idea of going undercover as a low-wage worker, you never intended to be the one to do it. What changed your mind?

Oh, I was chatting with [*Harper's* editor] Lewis Lapham and said, "Someone should do this. Someone should do some old-fashioned journalism here." I wasn't

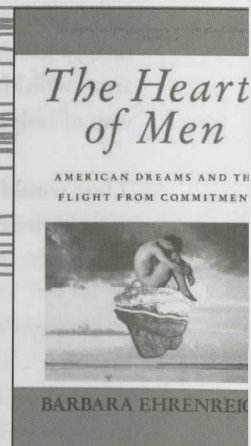
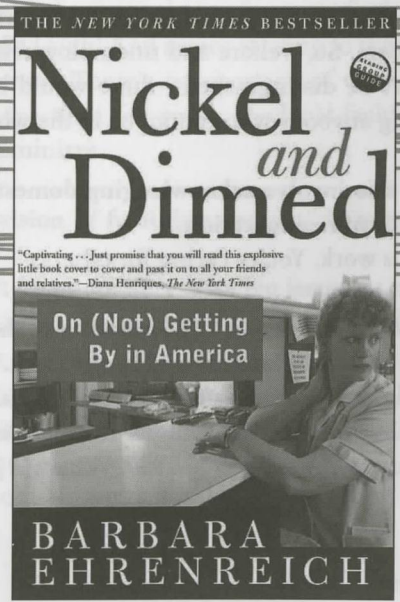
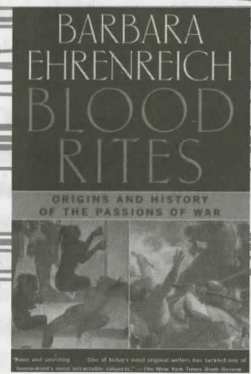
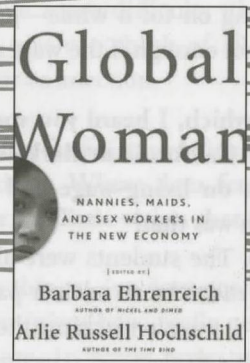
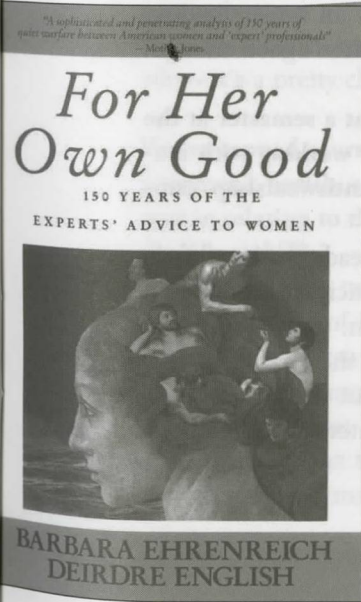
expecting him to say, "You." I was thinking of somebody younger and with a bigger time budget. And it was initially just a magazine assignment, for one place. But then it turned into a book.

You have a Ph.D. in biology. How did you come to be a feminist journalist instead of a scientist?

I had no intention of being anything, actually. I was getting radicalized. And science was too slow for me—I mean, I love to read about it, but I don't want to do the work. I graduated and ended up working with a group of health activists and did a lot of writing there. I didn't really consider myself a writer until it came time to declare an occupation on my income tax form. So it was born out of [working with that] group. I found I was pretty proficient at it, and I kind of enjoyed it—I liked the research. It wasn't a matter of saying, "Okay, how do I start a career as a feminist journalist?"

In the past two years, at least two major sex-discrimination class-action lawsuits have been filed against Wal-Mart. Did you experience any forms of sex discrimination while working undercover for *Nickel and Dimed*? How do you think your experience in the low-wage economy would have differed if you were a man?

Well, I was in the context of jobs that tend to be for women, but the fact is that the kinds of jobs that working-class men used to be able to get that paid them much



more—the industrial jobs, the mining, the logging—have been disappearing extremely rapidly. So, you find more and more men also in these very low-paying kinds of service jobs now.

Given the economic climate and the Bush administration's plan for massive tax cuts, what can we expect from the new Congress in terms of unemployment and welfare funding, and what would you like to see happen?

Well, nothing I would like to see happen is going to happen. [Laughs.] First of all, unemployment insurance is a very paltry program. It's different for every state, and it's aimed more at the better-paid workers. In some states, if you don't earn enough, if your pay is too low, you don't qualify for unemployment insurance. And, of course, you have to have been in a job for a certain length of time, which leaves out, for example, female workers whose employment may be irregular, partly because of child-care issues. So, only about 30 percent of people who get laid off and who need it actually end up with unemployment insurance. And that's just the background. I think one of the ideal things would be to have a program of cash supports for people who have been laid off because of the economy, or who have a very good reason why they shouldn't be holding jobs—such as they're taking care of small children, or taking care of elderly or chronically ill family members. So, welfare and unemployment insurance wouldn't be distinguished—there would be some way of helping anybody who cannot be in the workforce.

That would also involve acknowledging domestic work as work worthy of remuneration.

Exactly. It is work. You're caring for others.

In *Fear of Falling*, you wrote: "The existence of the 'working poor'...is seldom acknowledged by the right. Indeed, nothing could be more destructive to 'traditional values' than the realization that, for millions of Americans, hard work does not pay." That was in 1989. What's it going to

**70% OF
WOMEN WORKERS
IN AMERICA ARE NOT PROFESSIONALS.
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take to alter existing class-consciousness paradigms in this country?

Well, I think there is more awareness now of the inadequacy of wages—that, say, 25 to 33 percent of the workforce works for less money than they need to live on, even at a very basic level. Maybe *Nickel and Dimed* has made a little contribution to that awareness, but I think it's even more the fact that the living-wage movement has been going on for a while—just an understanding that work is not enough if the wages aren't good enough.

Speaking of which, I heard you spent a semester at the University of California at Berkeley working with student activists on living-wage and antisweatshop campaigns. When was that?

A year ago. The students were already working on it. They wanted me to be an adviser-participant, and so that was my job. I wasn't teaching them; we were all just working on this project—discussing the interviews, discussing what we were learning about the power structure of the university. They were interviewing campus workers to make a big report.

Do you think these new student movements have the potential to last—and to have a serious effect in curtailing labor abuses?

Oh, yeah. Student movements are mostly focused on the university as an employer. But the universities are big employers, so it's not a side issue or anything. I think it's amazing how so many places have a student alliance that is trying to improve conditions for the working people on campus. It just seems to have spread so quickly. At first, it seemed like it was only the more elite places—Harvard, Yale—but Towson University in Maryland also has a very big student-labor alliance.

What's the connection between the living-wage movement and the so-called antiglobalization movement?

In a very practical sense, on many campuses the student-labor alliances grew out of the antisweatshop activism, so that's one kind of connection. The personnel is very similar, and I think there's an understanding that [in] this time of corporate banditry—whether we're seeing it in this country or in other countries—it's the same actors at the top.

You've been tracking the effects of the recession on welfare recipients, especially people who lost their jobs after September 11. Can you predict any long-term effects?

Frances Fox Piven and I wrote an article for *Mother Jones* based on our interviews with people who had gone from welfare to work to unemployment. And it was pretty sad. There's no safety net at all for so many of these people. The long-term effects? Well, more of the same. Children growing up without adequate food among the really poor—those, say, [who meet] the federal definition of poverty, which is about 12 percent of the population now. Not living in a stable place, which really disrupts education. And there's a study showing that the lower parents' wages are, the more difficulty [their] children have in school. And you can think of all the reasons why—it's a pretty clear connection.

You've termed yourself a feminist ever since your days as a women's health activist. Where does feminism stand now in relation to the idealistic vision that inspired it in the '60s and '70s?

Well, there are two things: one very good, one not so good. The ideas of feminism have really permeated our culture. It's everywhere. In some ways, we succeeded very well. For example, in the women's health movement, which I was a part of in the '70s, one of our big problems was just to get out health-related information to women. Information about anatomy, about the life

cycle—you know, just basic things, because you couldn't get that information. It was quite subversive to put out information about the menstrual cycle. [Laughs.] And now we've taken away that medical monopoly on information about our own bodies—I mean, it's been a huge change since the '70s in that respect. And [it's] similar for feminism as a whole—the idea that it's degrading to be called “honey” and asked to serve the coffee was a sort of radical idea 25 years ago. Everyone feels that way now. So, that's great success.

The downside is that the radical conception of feminism in the '70s was as a collective movement, and I think we've lost a lot of that. It's much more individual today: “Well, I won't put up with this or that.” [There's] very little sense of, How do we act together?

Specifically, what sort of collective actions could feminists be taking right now that aren't happening?

By far, the single most urgent thing is protecting abortion rights. I mean, it's maddening. Of course, if you're a woman of means, you'll never have to worry about having access to one, but so many women aren't in that position. There are just so many things we should be jumping up and down about. We should be permanently camped out in front of the Department of Health and Human Services. This business of removing information from their website, information that said there was no connection between breast cancer and abortion. [Last year, Health and Human Services' National Cancer Institute altered its breast cancer fact sheet to label evidence for a link between breast cancer and abortion “inconclusive” rather than nonexistent. Many see the move as driven by the Bush administration's anti-choice stance, especially since the American Cancer Society, the New England Journal of Medicine, the American Gynecological and Obstetrical Society, and others consider there to be no link. At press time, HHS had just sponsored a conference to further explore the issue. —Ed.] Ugh! And issues relating to the treatment of poor women. There's no shortage of work to be done. Now is the time for some good old-fashioned in-the-streets feminism.

Is your vision of feminism compatible with a capitalist society?

I don't know for sure. The big issue for me has been that feminism did very well for women with some education or a middle-class background. And for that group, which includes myself, we opened up the professions. Forty percent of law students and medical students today are women; maybe it's the same for M.B.A. students, I don't know. No woman today will face the kind of really

ridiculous barriers that my generation faced—like being queried at a graduate-school interview about whether you intended to get married and have children. Which would mean you couldn't be, in my case, a scientist.

So, we broke those barriers, and that's great. But 70 percent of women workers in America are not professionals. They're retail or service or assembly-line workers, and their lives have not been changed enough, or very much, by feminism, except in protections from sexual harassment. Which is big, but it's just one thing. Now could you, within capitalism, bring greater opportunities to those women? Well, that would mean such a shift in our class society that maybe coming out the other end, you wouldn't be so capitalist.

Although the Bush administration's plans for war against Iraq don't have a lot of support from the American public, troops have already been deployed. What are the possibilities for a national peace movement powerful enough to have an effect on Congress?

Very good, I would say. Here, too, I am really amazed at the amount of activism going on. In the fall, I was all over the country doing speaking engagements, and there was something going on everywhere. In La Crosse, Wisconsin, people had formed a Women in Black group that was paying attention to the Palestinian question as well as the possible war with Iraq. Bend, Oregon, had about 150 people demonstrating on the weekend in October when the events were going on in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco. So, my god, I haven't seen anything like this.

Are there any circumstances under which you would support U.S. intervention?

Oh, yes. I think the United States should have intervened in Rwanda. There was a need to intervene in Kosovo, although I strongly disapproved of the way that was done, with the bombing of Serbia. We could play a very good role in the world, and I don't understand why sometimes people think that the position of the left is always no intervention. There are forms of intervention that are good and useful, so it's a moral issue with every one. And the failure to intervene in Rwanda, I think, has got to weigh as heavily on our conscience as the often very negative and imperialist kinds of interventions in Latin America over the years, for example.

I'm always impressed by how you've remained faithful to your ideological convictions for two decades in the face of so many social, political, and economic dilemmas. Do you ever become disillusioned?

I become sad, and anxious, and depressed. But nothing has happened to shake my basic ideas—my feminist, egalitarian, and antiwar ideas. I mean, I don't anticipate pulling a Christopher Hitchens anytime soon, although it has occurred to me. [Laughs.] My joke is always that my retirement plan is to write a book called *How Feminism Ruined My Life*. And then I'll be on all the talk shows [and] have a six-figure salary from the Heritage Foundation. They love somebody who goes from the left to the right. I'm not sure Hitchens has gone to the right on all the issues—but it's one way to get a lot of attention.

What's the most revolutionary act our government could commit?

Our *present* government? You mean, the *Bush* administration in Washington? Revolutionary?

Uh-huh.

I have no idea. The most revolutionary act I saw from any government recently was the president of Brazil canceling the order for a bunch of fighter planes and saying, "We've got hungry people in this country." I thought, Wow! [Laughs.]

But for our government, there's no hope? I was hoping you would say that it could disband.

Well, there's that. But you know, the right is extremely two-faced on the issue of government. They're always saying how bad big government is, while they increase the size of the military. And also, over the years, [they've built up] the repressive domestic functions—law enforcement, war on drugs, incarceration of everybody. So, when they say they don't want big government, they mean they just don't want government that actually helps people.

Are you working on any major projects right now?

The book that just appeared on my front doorstep is called *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. It's a collection of articles, including one by myself and one by my coeditor, Arlie Hochschild, about the growing migration of women from poor countries to rich countries to do the domestic work—to raise the children and take care of the home. And it often overlaps with being forced into prostitution, being lured with the idea that you're getting a job as a maid or a nanny and ending up as a prostitute—that's how [many] sex workers come in. And it's fascinating. This is a new trend, women coming from Mexico to clean American homes, women going from Sri Lanka to work in the Middle East, or from the Philippines to work in Hong

Kong and Taiwan. All these flows of immigration have developed around the world.

I think it's a good anthology. We worked very hard to make all the articles readable. And they're not all by academics—I think it's pretty lively.

Anything else we can look forward to?

Well, I'm back to working on the book that has been on the back burner throughout the *Nickel and Dimed* stuff. I don't know what the title is going to be, but it's about the politics of festivities and ecstatic rituals. It grew out of *Blood Rites*—those questions about collective

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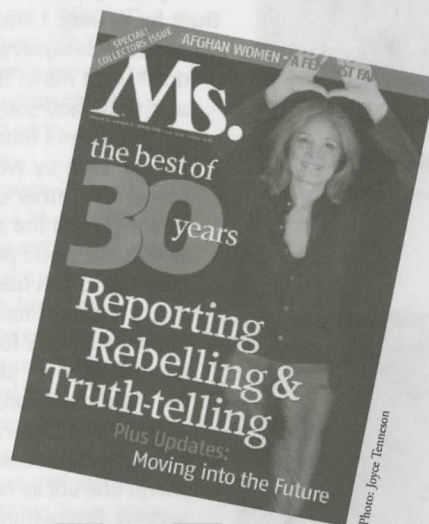


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the bitch list



an annotated guide to some of our favorite things



Built by Wendy

Big Moves. The prospect of dance class—the big mirror, the perfectly sculpted bodies, the people with a natural sense of rhythm—can be scary, so it's good to know that someone out there is trying to make dancing a little more approachable. Big Moves sponsors a variety of inexpensive dance classes around the Bay Area based on the principle of increasing diversity of size in dance. If you can't go to a class, Bodies in Motion, their multicompany showcase for larger dancers, will be touring the U.S. soon. —MARISA MELTZER

Buffay, Phoebe. Even if she weren't hanging out with five neurotic underemployed thirty-somethings, she'd still stand out as a self-sufficient, self-loving, sassy, savvy, street-wise woman who's in joyful control of her sexuality. When her more earthbound *Friends* reach high pitches of anxiety, she cuts through the screeching with words of wisdom that can be gained only by hard living and good karma. —KATHLEEN COLLINS

Built by Wendy. I always like to support independent designers, but sometimes they don't want me in their clothes; most top out at size 10, and some even at 8. Imagine my delight when I found out that couturier-to-the-hip Built by Wendy is expanding its size range to a rather generously cut 12: I can finally buy all the pink cords, dog-appliquéd sweatshirts, and plaid-accented denim my credit card can handle. It would be great if every designer had an even wider array of sizes—especially for the vastly underserved size-14-and-over set—but Wendy's is a step in the right direction, one few designers are willing even to consider. —M.M.

Child, Julia. She makes mistakes and embraces them. She sticks her fingers in sauces, licks spoons, drops things. She's been known to demonstrate cuts of meat using her own body. She improvises. Most important, she's honest and real; she brought sophisticated French cooking down to where the 1960s middle class could grab onto it, and her message was clear: If I can do this, so can you. Child is still on TV celebrating butter, cream, and pleasure as she turns 91 this year. —K.C.

Chocolate: The Consuming Passion (Workman Publishing Company). I cringe whenever

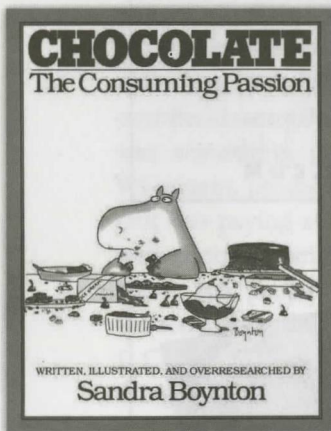
someone refers to herself or another person as a "chocoholic," but Sandra Boynton's tongue-in-cheek 1982 treatise on chocolate obsession—narrated partially by birds, hippos, cats, and bunnies that illustrate chapters and sidebars like "Handling Chocolate" and "Avoiding Non-Chocolate Situations"—never fails to crack me up. —ANDI ZEISLER

Diamon Deb nail file. It's enough that the Diamon Deb is a quality nail file that manages to keep one's manicure clean and orderly without excessive grinding. But find yourself unable to start your car one morning, and it becomes the Amazing Thing that Cleaned the Cap and Rotor. Yep, that light touch takes off rust and corrosion but leaves the metal intact, freeing you to show off your nails wherever the wind and your wheels take you. —HEATHER SEGGERL

Feminist Classics series. Dismayed that young women in search of feminist thought's recent history have had to troll flea markets and thrift shops, *Manifesta* coauthor Jennifer Baumgardner has enlisted publisher Farrar, Straus & Giroux in her plan to restore second-wave classics to bookstore shelves. So far, Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* have been brought back from the dustbin of out-of-print books, with a new work due out every spring. —LISA JERVIS

Globetrekker (www.globetrekker.co.uk). One perk of being an incurable insomniac is discovering little-watched programs on obscure public TV stations. I recently discovered this travel show, produced in the U.K., that features down-to-earth, fresh-faced presenters from various countries leading teletours to destinations like Beijing, Calcutta, and Cuzco, Peru, with backpack and camera crew in tow. What a fantastic job! The show, which offers upbeat humor, practicality, and adventurous spirit (in Beijing, the presenter gamely eats a scorpion-on-a-stick and succumbs to the painful bodywork treatment known as cupping), is refreshingly unironic, keeping my career envy in check. —KAREN ENG

Goddess in the Kitchen (Conari Press). A few years back, seemingly every room in the house had a corresponding book of goddesses. The bedroom, the bathroom, the breakfast



Chocolate: The Consuming Passion



Diamon Deb

nook...those goddesses were worse than termites! So I was slow to pick up Margie Lapanja's collection of recipes, stories, and "saucy secrets" for fear of yet more goddess infestation. I never should have hesitated. The book is so much fun, the recipes so delicious—her salad dressing recipe alone is worth a chant or two to Inanna. —H.S.

Lady Grey. I had no idea that this blend of black tea, citrus peel, and a bit of bergamot—described on the box as "classic, yet delicate"—even existed until I bought a Twinings tea assortment. Since then, I've decided to forgo the overly florid Earl Grey for his more subtle counterpart. And I love the robin's-egg blue sachet it comes in, too. —M.M.

L-lysine. Thanks to an unfortunate combination of genetics and high sugar consumption, I've struggled most of my life with chronic canker sores so painful they make me feverish and unable to eat or talk properly. But all that changed when a friend with herpes hipped me to the healing wonders of L-lysine, an amino acid that helps support the body's natural immune system. Now, when I feel one of those suckers coming on, I pop a capsule with every meal, and within a day or two I can eat, talk, and kiss pain-free. —A.Z.

Lush (www.lush.com). I found out about this international chain of all-natural cosmetics shops while on vacation in Canada and was thrilled to see that the company has started expanding its stores to the U.S. For skin-care devotees, Lush is *the* place to find insanely fresh scrubs and masks handmade with a minimum of preservatives (as a bonus, many are vegan). They also offer a vast range of soaps, massage bars, and body washes with yummy scents and clever names (Buffy the Backside Slayer, anyone?). —B. HELEN CARNHOOPS

Pound (www.poundy.com). This online journal is sort of about body image, but the writing makes every topic relevant and funny. The Dec. 17, 2001, entry, which is written Christmas pageant-style and features guest "appearances" by Carnie Wilson, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Ludacris ("as the voice of rigatoni"), is a work of sheer comic genius. —M.M.

Rock Manager (Dreamcatcher Games). You're an aspiring rock manager trying to break into the biz—so you pick a band, record a song for them, book and promote them, and make them into stars. The nominal goal of this computer game is to work your way through various "missions," but really, the coolest thing is that you get to choose and mix songs yourself. The uniformly excellent choices include not only the standard treacle-sweet midtempo ballads and teen pop, but

also faux-snarly punk rock, troublingly authentic jingle-jangle indie rock, and—in a true flash of brilliance—Stonehenge-heavy heavy metal. I spent hours perfecting the lyrics to my metal anthem—"Heart of stone, soul of metal/Soul of metal, heart of stone."

—RITA HAO

Single Mothers by Choice (www.singlemothersbychoice.org). Founded by therapist Jane Mattes, SMC is for women who either are tired of waiting for Mr./Ms. Right to procreate or prefer to go it solo. If you're thinking about it but your friends say you're crazy, get thee to a local chapter with like-minded women who know that single motherhood need not be relegated to Plan B. Members include single mothers, "thinkers," and those in the process of trying to have a child (via donor insemination or adoption). Without judgment, they will help you grapple with your most difficult questions. They're so encouraging, you may want to stop at the sperm bank on your way home. —K.C.

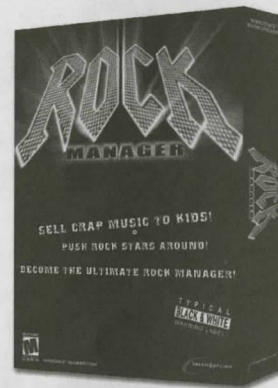
Sound Collector (P.O. Box 2056, New York, NY 10013; www.soundcollector.com). Lately, whenever I feel particularly jaded, I pick up my copy of music zine *Sound Collector* and stare at the photo essay of the Rock and Roll Camp for Girls. Besides bringing back summer-camp nostalgia, seeing Shayla Hason's Polaroids of bands consisting entirely of 8-year-old girls makes me feel like the world isn't such a bad place. More to love about *Sound Collector* no. 8: the bubblegum-pink cover, the fuschia-on-white design, and the accompanying free CD—and the fact that it's just refreshing to see a music magazine published by a boy that doesn't ignore girls. —M.M.

Tiny Lights (P.O. Box 928, Petaluma, CA 94953; www.tiny-lights.com). Subtitled "A Journal of Personal Essay," this lean newsletter delivers just what it promises, in a multitude of styles and voices. It's a little like the *New Yorker*, if you took out all the ads, pretentious reviews, and listings of New York-only happenings and were left with just those occasionally brilliant pieces on something you never thought could be so fascinating. —H.S.

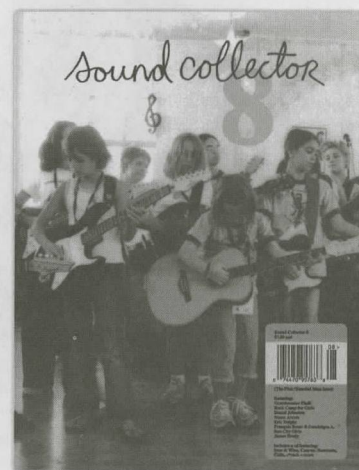
Vienne, Veronique. The pithy and delightfully nonobvious axioms on everything from wine tasting to power napping from this doyenne of style and charm—collected in her best-selling series of books, including *The Art of Doing Nothing* and *The Art of Imperfection*—are written with a languorous formality reminiscent of tea parties on drowsy summer afternoons. Vienne transforms the simple pleasures into elaborate rituals that make one's eyelids heavy with the hedonism of it all. —NIRMALA NATARAJ



Lady Grey



Rock Manager

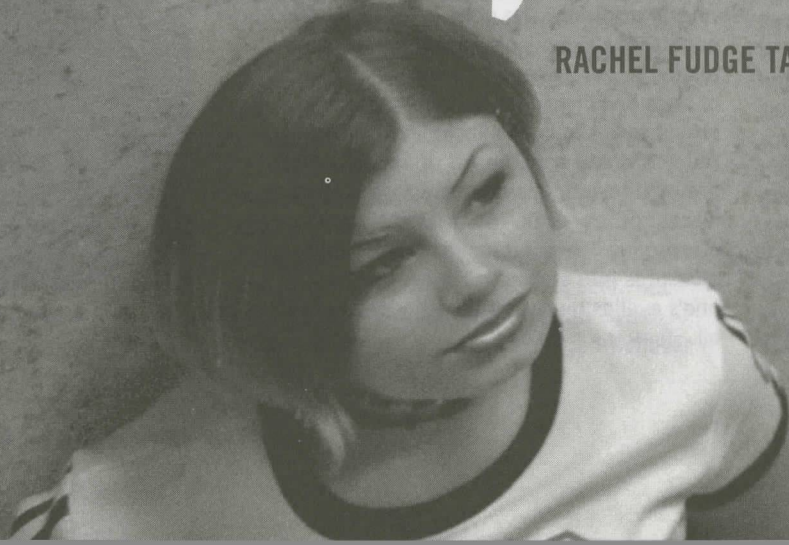


Sound Collector



P. Pink blues

RACHEL FUDGE TALKS TO THE AUTHOR OF *GIRL CULTURE*





ALL PHOTOS ©LAUREN GREENFIELD / VII. FROM THE BOOK *GIRL CULTURE*, CHRONICLE BOOKS 2002.



Fitness America contestants wave hello

Published in 2002 by Chronicle Books, *Girl Culture* consists of a series of photographs accompanied by Greenfield's inter-

Even though I should know better, the oversize cover of Lauren Greenfield's new book of photographs gets me every time I glance at it: The juxtaposition of the teenage girl squeezing her cleavage into a tiny top—almost snarling at herself in an unseen mirror—with the bubble gum-pink script and foil-stamped lettering claiming this image as “girl culture” is visually arresting, and deeply disturbing. This is not the “girl culture” of youthful insouciance and pre-adolescent self-confidence that riot grrrl reclaimed, or even the “girls can be anything” posturing of the Girl Scouts and Barbie. It is instead a painfully sharp-eyed look at one fundamental aspect of girl culture—what Joan Jacobs Brumberg, in her introduction, calls the “body projects that currently absorb the attention of girls,” the intense self-scrutiny and painful attention to physical detail that occupy every girl's thoughts at least some of the time.

views of her subjects, who range from a 4-year-old beauty-pageant hopeful to a 19-year-old stripper and star athlete to tennis great Serena Williams. The interviews are striking complements to the often unsettling images, giving the body-obsessed subjects a much-needed voice.

As she compiled the images and interviews that would become *Girl Culture*, Greenfield also worked with the University of Arizona's Center for Creative Photography, devising an educational curriculum to accompany the traveling exhibition of the book's photos. The exhibition includes the interviews; commentary by Greenfield, Brumberg, and exhibition curator Trudy Wilner Stack; and an extensive teacher's guide for stimulating student discussion. “Girl Culture” has been displayed to large audiences at colleges, galleries, and museums; one show, at Notre Dame University in Indiana, attracted a crowd of 600 on Super Bowl Sunday.

The first printing of *Girl Culture* has already sold out; more copies will be available this spring. Greenfield's work has appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, *Time*, *National Geographic*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Elle*, among others. She talked to *Bitch* from her studio in Venice, California, as her 2-year-old son waited patiently for her attention.

How did *Girl Culture* come together?

It kind of grew naturally out of my first book, which was called *Fast Forward: Growing Up in the Shadow of Hollywood*. It was about how kids were growing up quickly in a media-saturated environment, and specifically about how they're influenced by the values of Hollywood and the culture of materialism, the cult of celebrity, and the importance of image. I worked on the book for several years, and during the course of it, I started to get interested in girls and how their emotional and social development was affected by popular culture.

I did a story about strippers and showgirls in 1995, and I didn't think that that experience was about mainstream girls at all—I thought I was doing a story about a very marginal lifestyle. But some of the pictures I made for that ended up saying something to me about the exhibitionist nature of girl culture, of all girls. Specifically, there was one picture, which is at the back of *Girl Culture*, that I call "I approve of myself." It's a picture of a showgirl, Anne-Margaret, who's looking at her mirror. She has written a note that says "I approve of myself" and has cut out pictures of models she admires and put them on her mirror. And this picture became a metaphor to me for how girls construct their identities.

That was kind of where the idea started, and also why from the beginning the project wasn't just about teenage girls. It was really about the culture of femininity and the way that it develops. It always mixed adults with kids.

As I got into it, I could relate to a lot of the material—I definitely felt a lot of these pressures myself when I was growing up. It was a rich source for me, and I just kept making pictures for it. A lot of times, even before I knew there was [a book], I would be on assignment for something else, and I would end up making pictures of girl culture because it was just on my mind.

When I first picked up the book, I was expecting some-

thing quite different from what it is. It's only your essay at the end of the book that gives the context: *Girl Culture* isn't intended as a look at the range of girl culture, but, rather, a specific aspect of it.

I wanted a general, evocative title, even though it's kind of misleading in that [the book doesn't cover] all of girl culture. But [the body project] is a part of girl culture that is ubiquitous. And while it may not influence all of us all of the time, it does influence all of us some of the time.

I guess to call it something like *Deconstructing Femininity* wouldn't have been as user-friendly.

I recently did a talk at Notre Dame University, and a girl said, "I just saw this in a bookstore, and it was pink and girly so I picked it up. I had no idea what was inside, and then I was really moved by it." People pick it up for all different reasons. And I've kind of taken advantage of the glitzy colors and enticing visuals and the language of popular culture—sexy girls—and then used that language [to bring] people into something that I hope is deeper and more critical. I hope that by the end of it they've had an experience that they might not have been expecting to have.

Throughout the book, it's clear that the sexualization of girls by mass media and mass culture is a huge influence on their lives and the way they're growing up. Do you ever worry about contributing to that effect with your photographs?

I talk a little bit about that in my essay in the book, and I definitely realize that I walk a fine line. I make pictures for mainstream magazines, and sometimes fashion magazines, and I am definitely part of the media that the book is critiquing. For myself, I think that's a very interesting and stimulating role to be in, because I can have an insider's point of view, and I can have access to parts of popular culture that you can't always get access to. I mean, you can't photograph Jennifer Lopez unless you're photographing her for a magazine that she wants to be in. So in a way, the only way to speak about some of these things is to be on the inside. I want to reach a mainstream audience, and by using some of the elements and aesthetics of popular culture imagery, the book can cross a lot of worlds and get reviewed in women's magazines, as well as in more political magazines like yours.

The best example of that for me is [when] the show was at the Center for Creative Photography at the



4-year-old Allegra strikes a pose

University of Arizona. Students were coming through all day and looking at the work and then writing about it for their classes. This one frat boy came, and when [he] walked in, the picture that he saw was the big picture of Kristine, the model pictured unhooking her bra in front of the ocean. He looked at the male docent who was in the museum and was like, "Right on, this is gonna be great," and gave the docent this look like, "Wow, she's hot—I'm into this. Then he went around and looked at the show, and came back 15 minutes later and said, "Hey dude, I'm sorry—I had no idea what the show was really about."

I try to do stuff that's slightly subversive—[to get] that double reaction. There'll be a picture of a 13-year-old who looks very sexy, for example, and I imagine that a man's reaction to that picture might be attraction, and then repulsion at himself when he realizes her age. And I think that is, in a way, a normal reaction, because that girl looks like the models that we're [used to] looking at.

What have the reactions of your subjects been to the book and the gallery show?

Well, I haven't heard from all of them, but people have been pretty excited. Like Erin, who's anorexic and was photographed for the book as she was getting blind-weighted. It's a painful experience, what she was going through, and her interview was very personal. I thought she might feel self-conscious about being so exposed. But she was really excited about the fact that

not the most flattering. She's someone who uses her body to make money. But in her interview, she's smart and she comes off well. I didn't know [beforehand] how she'd feel about the greater context, but she was into it.

What I find is that subjects' reactions usually depend on how they feel they look in the book—whether they feel like they look attractive. When I was on NPR, the sister of one of the subjects from Edina, Minnesota, called in and said she didn't think [the girls] were depicted in a fair way. But that's the only complaint I've heard. And I've gotten a lot of really good feedback. Some people feel self-conscious about the way they or their kids are portrayed, but they also believe in the book.

I was intrigued by the interview with Ashlee, the 18-year-old girl from Tennessee who doesn't like to shave, is a vegan, and thinks the debutante scene is lame. From her interview, she sounds the most like girls I know and grew up with. Yet there's no photo of her.

She was a very beautiful, down-to-earth girl. She didn't wear any makeup. If I had had the right picture of her, I would have used it, but there are 100 pictures in the book from more than five years of shooting thousands of rolls. There's a lot that ended up on the cutting-room floor.

Often, interviews got eliminated because there were no [good] pictures. In Ashlee's case, though, I felt the interview really had some important elements that

THE BOOK is not a full picture of girls growing up today. It's a really slanted view, because I'm focusing on the way the body has become the primary expression of identity.

her women's studies teacher was using the book. I think for her, awareness about some of these issues is kind of part of her recovery.

Several subjects came to the show in Los Angeles, which was very exciting. Cindy Margolis—the most downloaded woman on the Internet—came, which I was thrilled about. The way you interpret her depends on where you're coming from, but certainly some people are going to think my portrait of her is maybe

weren't in any of the other interviews. I liked Ashlee's rebellious spirit, and the contrast between her and Sheena [a 15-year-old from California who aspires to be a topless dancer and who was photographed shaving her arms]. In our society, which is supposed to be a lot freer than, for instance, the Victorian era—where people had to wear corsets and there were all these rules about what you had to do—there are sometimes as many restraints and unspoken rules about what we

Someone from another generation will say, "IS THIS REALLY HOW IT IS? Where are the girls who don't care about this? Isn't this an extreme picture?" And the girls are like, "No, this is our life."

need to do. And Sheena was kind of the extreme version of that, 'cause she shaves her entire body.

One might read your work as the antithesis of rah-rah, Spice Girls-style girl power; in fact, a reviewer for the *Los Angeles Times* suggested that your work is perhaps the more realistic of the two angles.

[*Girl Culture*] is mostly about girls being disempowered. The thing about girl culture is that it's not really easy to pull apart and say, Men are doing this to us, or, Society is doing this to us. It's this complex chain of events where boys are complicit, girls are complicit, the media is complicit, we're all complicit.

The book is not a full picture of girls growing up today. It's a really slanted view, because I'm focusing on the way the body has become the primary expression of identity. But I think it's important to focus on that, because popular culture [is] so everywhere that we don't see it. You have to look at these moments that distill the culture, even though they're not [always] representations of daily life.

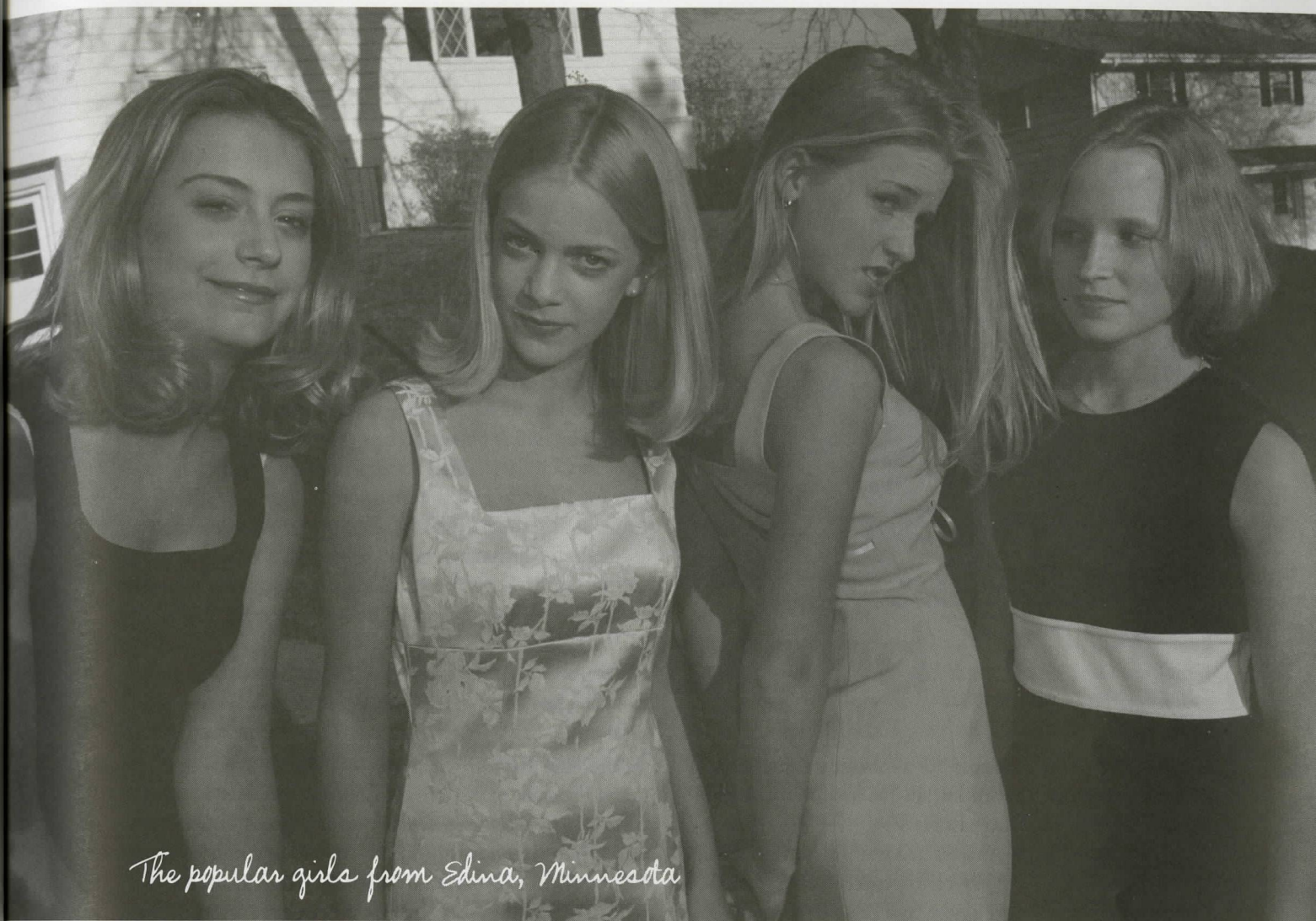
There are some uplifting moments, and there are times where you can see girls' strengths and their bonding and their friendships, but I think on the whole it's about the disempowerment of girls, and how much more they could be if they weren't swimming upstream on so many of these issues. I think Ashlee had a really good point when she said, "Girls can have such a bond and talk forever, but it's sad we have to do this through clothes and makeup and stuff like that." That's the way we make friends with each other.

The role of men in the book is interesting. There are a few shots of boys, or photos where men are in the frame but are not the subjects. A reviewer for *Philadelphia Weekly* wrote, "Although there are almost no guys in these pictures[,] the duties her subjects attend to are all men-centric. Greenfield is a woman, but men are the real 'watchers' here." But I actually thought it was the other way around, that women are primarily the watchers, whether it's looking at themselves in the mirror or looking for the approval of other girls.

There are definitely some pictures in there about the male eye. But we have seen that before. What we haven't seen so much is how women look at each other, how women look at themselves. And how at this point a lot of what we criticize has been internalized, so we're doing it to ourselves.

At Notre Dame, we had this whole discussion with a class, and somehow we got on the topic of the slut, and the girls at Notre Dame were saying how the sluts are the girls from St. Mary's College, which is an adjacent girls' school. And then the following day I was doing a discussion at St. Mary's, and they were saying how horrible it is to be labeled the slut. One of the teachers said this has been going on for generations—it's been institutionalized because they're not allowed to have their own parties [at St. Mary's]. There's a bus that takes the girls over to Notre Dame, and the Notre Dame girls call it "the sluttle bus." By the time we were done, the girls at St. Mary's were like, "We should have a discussion with the girls from Notre Dame!"

It's like good old-fashioned consciousness-raising.



The popular girls from Edina, Minnesota

I know! That's what's been so fun about going to universities with this work. The girls just want to talk about it. And, actually, the guys want to talk about it too. When I was at the University of Arizona, one guy said he went through the show and felt nauseous because he was thinking about all the terrible things he did to girls in high school, and how boys knew what girls were doing for them, and they kind of encouraged it.

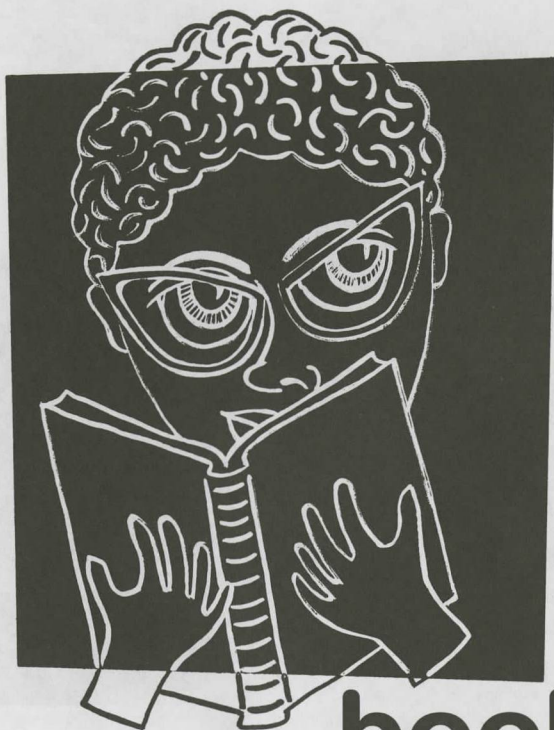
In Indiana, a lot of girls were showing me art that they'd made in response to *Girl Culture* or along similar themes. Girls in university now are really knowledgeable about this subject, but they don't necessarily have a forum [in which] to talk about it. Often there'll be someone from another generation who says, "Is this really how it is? Where are the girls who don't care about this; where are the girls who are involved in other things? Isn't this an extreme picture?" And the girls are like, "No, this is our life."

Has being a parent changed the way you view adolescence, or what you think you might be able to do to combat any of the negative pop cultural imagery?

I don't think so. I'm not an activist—I don't have a political agenda when I do any of my work. With *Girl Culture*, I just went out and tried to show what I saw. But by the end of it, when I looked at what I was presenting, I saw that it was feminist work. Once I saw that, I thought it was important to have there be some kind of practical use for it. So I did the show with a museum that had an educational component. There's a positive use built into the work, in that teachers can use it in their classrooms—so it's not just something that lives in a gallery or a museum.

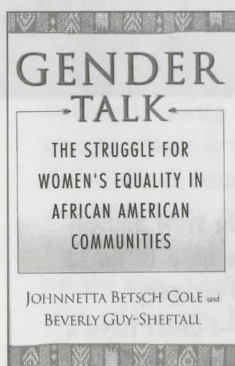
What do you think about the recent spate of books about mean girls—*Queen Bees and Wannabes*, *Odd Girl Out*, and so on?

The pictures from Edina, (Continued on page 94)



books

Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities *Johnnetta B. Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall* {BALLANTINE}



As a black American writer-activist, I try to approach issues like race, religion, and class in ways that put a reverse spin on the accepted norm, but I rarely take on the topic of gender. I generally operate on the assumption that race and class are the greatest challenges we face as a society, and I like to believe that once we eliminate racism and classism and all their evil manifestations, sexism will systematically fall away.

It is precisely for people like me that Johnnetta B. Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall penned their collaborative effort *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities*. In the introduction, they write:

Rarely, except among a small group of feminists and other gender-progressives, is there serious consideration of the importance of moving beyond a race-only analysis in understanding the complexities of African American communities and the challenges we face. While we are certain that institutionalized racism and the persistence of economic injustices are responsible for our contemporary plight as second-class citizens, we boldly assert that gender matters too.

Cole, the former president of Spelman College and current president of Bennett College, and Guy-Sheftall, a professor of women's studies and English at Spelman, claim that the enduring racism of white America is not the root cause of black America's current troubles. Yes, race matters, they say, but as a collective group, black people keep themselves oppressed, repressed, and in jeopardy of extinction with their own sexist and homophobic behavior. Suffice it to say one should not expect a lot of hoorays from black communities in response to the authors' statements.

Cole and Guy-Sheftall agree that the African-American community is in dire straits, and lay out statistics that back them up: The majority of black children live in single-parent households. Blacks are less likely to marry than either whites or Hispanics. Blacks account for 47 percent of the prison population. More than 60 percent of black children have been abandoned by their fathers. With the bad news out in the open, the authors comb through centuries of black culture—from slavery to hip-hop music—in order to pinpoint the roots of intraracial gender issues that not only keep black women oppressed and subjugated, but also keep black men in narrowly defined roles of manhood.

With an almost regretful, this-is-going-to-hurt-us-more-than-you tone, the authors expose black America's sexual secrets and social taboos. They dissect under-reported truths, like the fact that "domestic conflicts

between Black men and women lead to a greater frequency of assault and murder of females than among any other racial/ethnic group in the United States.” And they divulge what they term “our biggest ‘race secret’”—incest. Citing several examples of incest involving young black girls and boys, Cole and Guy-Sheftall link such abuse to the “dysfunctional behavior” seen in the troubled black adult population: virulent homophobia, ministers as sexual predators, and domestic violence. Finally, in a chapter titled “No Respect: Gender Politics and Hip-Hop,” the authors denounce the vicious anti-woman messages in this ubiquitous art form, noting that much of rap music is “effective at communicating a dangerous message: that the enemy of Black urban youth is not just the police or poverty...but Black women and girls as well.”

Cole and Guy-Sheftall deserve credit for being brave enough to denounce some of the most revered pillars of the African-American community. (Martin Luther King Jr., for instance, is charged with “rampant womanizing” and “relentless infidelity.”) And they do an admirable job of including firsthand accounts—both their own and those of other noted thinkers—of life on the gender divide. *Gender Talk* is terribly depressing at times, but it presents a fresh perspective on familiar problems, and the authors end the book with a literal to-do list of suggestions for black women and men to dismantle the status quo. Women, for example, are urged to “raise feminist sons and daughters who regard one another as equals rather than as enemies”; men can “challenge other Black men who exhibit sexist behaviors.” *Gender Talk* is not a miracle cure for the ills that plague black America, but with any luck, it will get people talking. —

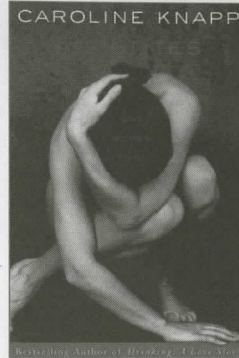
LORI L. THARPS

Appetites: Why Women Want *Caroline Knapp*

{COUNTERPOINT PRESS}

Ten years ago, most self-help literature on eating disorders combined pop psychology and the “cult of victimhood,” using all the staples of melodrama: an affluent protagonist, a dysfunctional family, and a dystopic vision of female sexuality. Granted, it’s easy to get engrossed in the story of a girl who spars with her parents or ballet instructor over issues of diet and control, but these stock narratives tended to oversimplify the cultural forces that shape female appetites. Over the past decade, women have begun to extricate themselves from New Age quack-

ery, but for many, Oprah-esque inner-child tweaking is still prescribed for myriad addictions, from alcoholism to binge shopping.



Fast-forward to 2003: The question of what women want has taken on bolder political hues, departing from the psycho-babble of yesteryear and moving toward a more circumspect social critique. Despite its deceptively generic title, Caroline Knapp’s *Appetites: Why Women Want* is the natural follow-up to classics like Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* and Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth*. The author of *Drinking: A Love Story* and *Pack of Two: The Intimate Bond Between Dogs and Humans*, Knapp has already explored her personal territory of desire and regeneration. In her last book—published a year after her early death from lung cancer—Knapp reframes the female appetite as a response to the numerous cultural pressures on women, from the starvation-chic bodies promoted in fashion magazines to patriotic consumerism that reorients “the pursuit of happiness” to “the pursuit of stuff.” Relying on neither jargon nor navelgazing, Knapp’s criticism remains hefty, thought-provoking, and thoroughly engaging.

Using personal experience as a lens through which to examine how society shapes female desire, Knapp describes culturally sanctioned female appetites as straddling a fine line between voracity and chastity—the kind of balancing act that she says led her, as an adolescent, to dampen sexuality with self-scrutiny. These days, sexual guilt becomes displaced as a general sense of depletion: We might fill ourselves with magazine tips on how to please a lover, consumer items like lipstick or floor polish—a “handy repository for hungers”—or exorbitant “body positive” luxuries like the \$1,650 retreat at Canyon Ranch Spa. Knapp contends that in our commodity-oriented culture, appetite always seems to come with a price tag.

She peppers her cutting social commentary with descriptions of her own family dramas; in one of the book’s more excruciating moments, Knapp recounts how, after months of apple-slice and cheese-smidgen dinners, she finally confessed the “vice grip” of her eating disorder to her ill-prepared parents. The gist of this

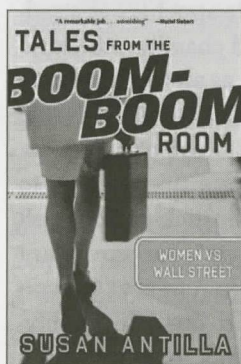
reminiscence is less to vilify Mom and Dad than to point out a serious and significant generational rift that is largely attributable to the shifting nature of societal pressures.

But *Appetites* isn't just about digesting personal experiences and disgorging them for her readers. Instead, Knapp is seeking the right balm for the modern woman who has been taught that fertility is the stuff of a Renoir painting, that second-wave feminism is passé, and that the way to avoid the sordid tempest of female sexuality is to preserve a preadolescent, ironing-board figure. For Knapp, learning how to row was the best antidote to two decades of anorexia: steering a boat into the dock, building up sinewy muscles, replacing the pleasure of binge shopping with the pleasure of watching the sun rise over a lake. Nothing compared with the challenge of starvation, rowing presents for Knapp a different kind of physical challenge that is far more fulfilling. In the end, she describes it as one of many ways to get a sense of gratification that's disconnected from food or sex. Once we escape our culturally driven cravings and the popular notion that fulfillment amounts to being "stuffed," Knapp's example assures us, we'll be able to find and savor other pleasures in life, and "eat them up like pie."

—RACHEL SWAN

Tales from the Boom-Boom Room: Women vs. Wall Street Susan Antilla {BLOOMBERG PRESS}

Imagine working in a place where female employees are nicknamed "tits and slits," bluntly told that they'll never make as much money as their male coworkers, and relegated to the lower floor (called the Boom-Boom Room, thanks to its rowdy boy's-club vibe). According to Susan Antilla, that is exactly what the female brokers at Smith Barney's Shearson/American Express in Garden City, Long Island, had to deal with every day.



Bloomberg News columnist

Antilla's description of the sexist practices and attitudes of Wall Street's most prestigious firms (she focuses primarily on Smith Barney, but also includes others) is captivating yet matter-of-fact. Though she relates several different women's experiences with sexism on Wall Street, the book's narrative substance hangs on the story of Pamela Martens. A broker at Smith Barney in Long

Island, Martens endured years of sexual harassment and discrimination before finally suing her employers in 1996. Her many complaints to her (male) boss fell on deaf ears—which isn't surprising, given that he was often a harassment ringleader—and her report to the company CEO was no more effective. In fact, Antilla declares, when female brokers did enter formal complaints about their hostile work environments, they were most often told by their male superiors to take it easy, get along better with men, and learn how to take a joke.

When Martens broke the silence with her lawsuit, other women followed her lead. In time, the media coverage of these suits was enough to embarrass Smith Barney and the others into adopting formal sexual harassment awareness programs. But Antilla points out that although today's brokerage firms have dutifully adopted those policies, Wall Street's attitude toward women hasn't changed since the Boom-Boom Room's heyday in the '80s and '90s. Nick Cuneo, a former Smith Barney branch manager accused of numerous acts of sexual harassment, was never disciplined. Many suits (including Martens's) that were filed in the late '90s are still dragging on. And though some firms settled their cases quietly, Antilla stresses that many male Wall Street brokers still view their female peers as politically correct "hold-up artists."

Her not-so-rosy conclusion is that the macho culture of Wall Street ensures that firms will never take sexual harassment—or the threat of legal action—too seriously. (How could they, when to this day many rookie brokers are made to sign forms relinquishing the right to sue their employers?)

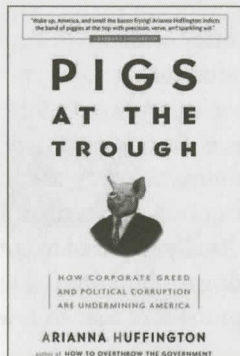
It's not easy to read accounts of women being physically molested, verbally abused, and even raped by their coworkers and superiors. Yet despite the repugnancy at its core, Antilla's blunt exposé of institutionalized misogyny manages to be a compelling, educational read. And if it raises the consciousness of even one of Wall Street's boom-boom boys, it will be a triumph. —SONIA PEREIRA

Pigs at the Trough: How Corporate Greed and Political Corruption Are Undermining America

Arianna Huffington {CROWN}

We know by now that the folks at the top of companies like Enron, WorldCom, and ImClone did some shady business to ensure their success. But in the midst of all the misreported earnings, scuttled audits, and shredded

documents of the past year or so, many of us are suffering from what syndicated columnist Arianna Huffington calls "scandal fatigue." But Huffington wants us to remember every name and number that's played a part in the disintegration of America's corporate responsibility and consumer trust, and with *Pigs at the Trough* she opens the door on a chamber of capitalist horrors expressly to shove us through it.



We get the scoop on the inflated egos and overblown entitlement of CEOs such as Enron's Ken Lay, WorldCom's Bernie Ebbers, and Tyco's Dennis Kozlowski, and their attendant criminal activities, ranging from tax evasion on art purchases to straight-up embezzlement. We learn how the irrational exuberance of the dot-com '90s turned stock analysts

into shills for up-and-coming IPOs, and how a certain drug manufacturer let AIDS continue to ravage the population of Africa because the patent holder didn't want to lose money when generic versions of the drug became available.

Like her column, Huffington's book is conversational and blunt, and offers some bonus snark in the form of sidebars ("Top 10 Stupidest Things Said About the New Economy") and quizzes ("Match the CEO to the Mansion"). Though her prose can be repetitive—and she occasionally takes the barnyard metaphors to silly lengths—she puts slippery financial realities in terms that benefit both the jargon-challenged and the pop culture-damaged. (She clarifies the practice of CEOs receiving loans from their corporate boards as akin to Tony Soprano getting a loan approval from Paulie Walnuts.)

Pigs lacks anything resembling subtlety—and in many ways, that's just fine. With all the doublespeak emanating from Wall Street and Washington, D.C., it's nice to have someone as abrasively entertaining as Huffington lay the specifics of big-business avarice on the table for average working folks. But though there's no doubt that the rampant irresponsibility, blatant book-cooking, and general hubris of big corporations played a part in what's currently a chilly state of financial insecurity, Huffington doesn't expand her analysis of American capitalism beyond the most egregious corporate offenders and their specific activities. Those who lived and worked through

the bombastic, stock-options-for-everybody late '90s know that the bubble was burst not only by the greed of CEOs and special-interest lobbyists, but by a more basic sense of entitlement coupled with get-rich-quick fervor. Laying all the blame at the Gucci-shod feet of the fat rats at the top creates a simplistic equation of big business with immorality, rather than charging everyone to understand and live by the terms of both corporate and consumer responsibility.

It's not that Huffington advocates socialism—that would be a bit much for an ex-Republican ex-socialite whose divorce settlement from her billionaire former husband is more than comfortable. But though Huffington lives large, she's proven herself an activist who's less concerned with what others think of her than with what she can put her weight behind. (She was one of the first pundits to speak out against SUVs, and her column was subsequently dumped by the *Oregonian* after she publicly stated her support of the Detroit Project, an ad campaign that links the gas-guzzling behemoths to terrorism.) The book ends by listing companies and political organizations devoted to socially responsible business, from Ralph Nader's venerable Public Citizen to Working Assets. Hopefully, *Pigs* will prove that a lot can happen when people's blood hits a rolling boil. —ANDI ZEISLER

Liberty for Women: Freedom and Feminism in the Twenty-First Century Wendy McElroy, ed.

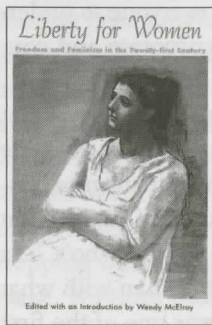
{IVAN R. DEE IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE}

I'd better just state this right off the bat: Libertarians make me nervous, with their overweening faith in the free market and an obsession with individual rights that almost always translates into some individuals being more equal than others. So I approached this volume of individualist feminist essays with suspicion.

I was pleasantly surprised. One of the book's great strengths is that, as Wendy Kammerer writes in her foreword, "the contributors probably disagree fairly often with each other." The women's movement has always had to fight against outsiders' visions of it as an ideological monolith—*Liberty for Women* serves proudly as exhibit kajillion and one.

Liberty's best chapters are those with the narrowest focus: On pornography, prostitution, gun ownership, abortion, and midwifery, authors make their cases

strongly for as little government interference as possible. (I'm not changing my position on automatic weapons—or rushing out to buy a handgun—but anyone who thinks that guns are a universally bad self-defense option should take a gander at Richard W. Stevens, Hugo Teufel III, and Matthew Y. Biscan's "Disarming Women: Comparing



'Gun Control' to Self-Defense.") While these essays will surely raise the ire of those who disagree, they are well researched, thoughtful, and capable of sparking intelligent debate on all sides of the issues.

The same cannot be said of the rest of the book, unfortunately. A major exception to the specific-yields-a-tight-argument rule is "Fetal Protection and Freedom of Contract," by Ellen Frankel Paul. Paul argues that companies should be free to exclude women of childbearing age from jobs that might place their hypothetical fetuses in danger, because forbidding such policies interferes with rational hiring decisions. "If women are at a competitive disadvantage as a result of biological differences, then their brief should be against God or Nature," she writes. Bizarrely, Paul places more importance on the "individual" rights of corporations than those of real individuals; shouldn't it be up to each woman to decide whether the mere possibility of future pregnancy is enough to deter her from a job?

Other essays suffer from overbreadth and a reluctance to consider any kind of social context. Kaminer's intro admonishes, "While libertarians focus on legal restrictions, liberals (those fractious, left-of-center feminists) are apt to focus additionally on restrictive social and cultural norms." Well, yes, we fractious gals sure do like to look beyond one fairly narrow aspect of life. I fail to see how this is a bad thing, and the hostility of many of *Liberty's* authors to cultural analysis greatly weakens their work. "Biology matters too much for...social responses to neutralize sex differences," declares Richard A. Epstein, by way of explaining how strict individualism is the answer to absolutely everything, in "Liberty and Feminism." The reason that women often leave work to care for children (and suffer the economic consequences) is simply that "desires and functions align...so that relative to men, women have a greater desire to remain at home for extended periods."

In "What Does Affirmative Action Affirm?" editor

McElroy calls affirmative-action policies "institutionalized discrimination" while simultaneously denying that institutionalized sexism and racism are much of a problem at all. But she brooks no such dismissiveness for a white male friend of hers who had recently been denied tenure by his Ivy League employer: In spite of being "immensely popular...with a book and several journal articles to his credit...doors are slammed in his face because he is a white male."

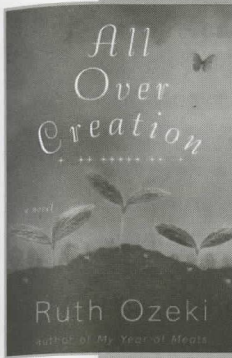
Epstein, McElroy, and Paul don't offer evidence to support their conclusions so much as refuse to consider anything that might contradict—or even complicate—their arguments. More troubling, though, is that dreaded government intervention is the only alternative they see to living with a discriminatory status quo. No feminists I know would suggest that fathers be legally required to cut their work hours to provide childcare—but does that mean we should sit back and accept the fact that so few are willing to?

The frosting on this underbaked cake is made up of two essays that don't even try to put together a coherent argument. Camille Paglia spouts her usual sound and fury, signifying nothing more than self-aggrandizement and name-calling ("my wing of pro-sex feminism [has] made a stunning resurgence," Susan Faludi is a "bourgeois intellectual...propagandist," and the like). I didn't think anyone could top Paglia for misrepresentation and disregard for actual facts. But now I've read what Janis Cortese has to say. "The Third WWave: Who We Are, What We See" is a repetitive, rambling rant that purports to speak for young women but is really just a lashing out at what even Cortese admits is an erroneous characterization of old-school feminists as antisex victimologists.

Most of you [second wavers] will read this while jumping up and down and wanting to yell, "That's not what it was!" No, it is not. But in many ways it is what it has become—for us. When you were doing far more sane politics twenty years ago, we were not even part of it. We were running around skinning our knees or drooling, if we were even alive at the time.

It's unfortunate that such drivel is included, because it both distracts and detracts: For those inclined to write off individualist feminists as simplistic tunnel-vision dogmatists, it provides ample justification. For those who approach with a genuine desire for intellectual exchange, it lowers the level of debate considerably. —LISA JERVIS

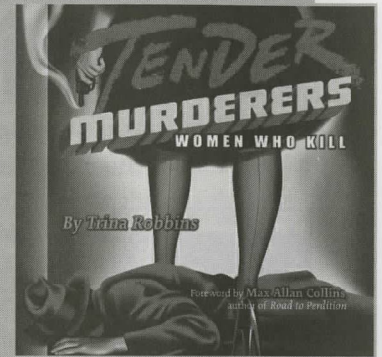
AND THEN THERE'S...



All Over Creation {VIKING}, the second novel from the socially conscious and compulsively readable Ruth Ozeki (author of *My Year of Meats*), is the prodigal-daughter story of Yumi Fuller, a once-rebellious teen who returns as a thirty-something to her family's Idaho potato farm only to find herself at the inadvertent center of environmental activism, genetic engineering, romantic chaos, and family dysfunction. Both humbly reverent and viscerally conflicted in the face of nature and the humans who seek to control it, *All Over Creation* is an unforgettable read...Also beautifully written and intensely compelling is Suki Kim's debut novel, **The Interpreter**

{FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX}, an immigrant family drama cum thriller cum social critique. As 29-year-old Suzy Park, a Korean-American interpreter for the New York City court system, stumbles upon new information about her parents' murder, she unravels the mystery behind their brutal deaths—and the secrets long buried within her family...**Atlas of the Human Heart** {SEAL PRESS}, by *Hip Mama* founder Ariel Gore, is billed as both a novel ("meaning it's about 76% true") and a memoir ("meaning it's about 76% made up"). It doesn't matter which parts of Gore's teenage travelogue actually happened and which are only metaphorically true; you'll marvel and be moved regardless...Now more than ever, the work of groundbreaking feminist and postcolonial theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty is indispensable. Her new book, **Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity** {DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS}, is a collection of essays that interrogate notions of home, sisterhood, work, scholarship, and first-world feminism...The delightfully prolific Trina Robbins is back with another entry for the archives of femmoralabilia. In **Tender Murderers: Women Who Kill** {CONARI PRESS}, she sings the ballads of 20 notorious killers, from the 1800s to the 1990s, all of whom were considered in their time to be the baddest ladies of the century. While deliciously fascinating, *Tender Murderers* is not merely a romanticized survey of

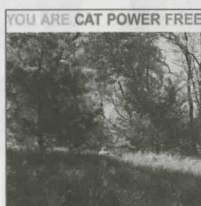
killer gals, but rather an attempt to answer the question of why women kill...By trying to cover too many bases, Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller's **Unmarried to Each Other: The Essential Guide to Living Together as an Unmarried Couple** {MARLOWE & CO.} suffers from a touch of identity disorder. It's really two books in one: a thoughtful, no-nonsense resource for unwed partners both gay and straight—who face a host of social, cultural, and legal challenges to their unmarried status—and a touchy-feely relationship guide for couples who are considering taking the plunge and moving in together. Both have merit, but it's the wealth of strategies for combating legal and social discrimination that makes *Unmarried* a unique and invaluable resource for the happily unwed...Unlike the depressingly white and male *Fortune* 500, the 25 leaders and activists profiled



in the **Future 500** {SUBWAY & ELEVATED PRESS} are young and truly diverse. Compiled by the Active Element Foundation, *Future 500* is also a directory of 500 organizations that are dedicated to grassroots, youth-based organizing. Each entry includes contact information, year founded, budget, age of constituency, issues addressed, predominant race of those involved, and a brief description of activities. Whether you're looking to join the fight for environmental justice or seeking comrades to take a stand on corporate accountability, there's a youth-led group here for you...**The Bent Lens: A World Guide to Gay and Lesbian Film** {ALYSON BOOKS}, by Lisa Daniel and Claire Jackson, is an A-to-Z romp through the world of queer film, and a fabulous resource for any film buff. This exhaustive directory includes not just the usual suspects (*Personal Best*, *Priscilla*) but also homoerotic classics like *Ben Hur*, short films, and documentaries, as well as appendices listing films by genre (lesbian, gay, transgender, documentary, etc.), country, and director. Whew.



music



You Are Free Cat Power
{MATADOR RECORDS}

If you're expecting Chan Marshall's new album to stray from her signature artsy-drowsy-folksy rock style, well, you'd be right and wrong. While Cat Power's previous efforts have centered on the kind of off-kilter love ballads that would make Michael Bolton fall out of his chair, *You Are Free* offers a bit of hard-edged rock to balance the sheen of acute sadness. The opening track, "I Don't Blame You," is a leisurely letter to a shy musician; "Good Woman," with its dawdling guitar behind Marshall's distressing mumbles, sounds like a lonely appeal to a lover; and "Keep on Runnin'" serves up enough gin-soaked angst to get even Tom Waits plastered on grief.

But the tunes that make *You Are*

Free a truly remarkable effort from perhaps the most melancholy of crooners are the ones you didn't think she could write. On "Free," Marshall's trademark drawl morphs into a fast-paced stutter that wouldn't be out of place in a hip-hop club; you may not know whether to dance along or let your jaw drop in disbelief. Not to mention that the song's lyrics are equally conducive to joyful spirits: "Everybody come together/Everybody get together," for example, and "A true romance/When you dance/Don't be in love with the autograph/Just be in love when you scream that song all night long." Similarly, in the speedy, supercatchy "He War," Marshall transcends the song's initial anger with an exuberant, whistling electric guitar.

And though there's something good to say about nearly every song on this album (the near-comatose "Werewolf" might be the only exception), it's Marshall's "Names" that really gets me where it hurts. I admit I cried for a good 10 minutes

the first time I listened to this disturbing tune about troubled kids. If what Dorothy Parker called the "upheaval of the soul" is the experience you get from listening to a song, then either I'm one hell of a sap or Chan Marshall is one hell of a soul tosser. Either way, the CD's a keeper.

—SONIA PEREIRA



So Much Shouting, So Much Laughter Ani DiFranco

{RIGHTEOUS BABE RECORDS} She's a feminist, a folksinger, a free thinker, an independent voice. Possibly also a candy mint and a breath mint. So it can be strange to hear Ani DiFranco's studio recordings, which surely display her brilliance as a guitarist but just as often mute the passion of her live performances.

It's yet another reason why this double-disc set of live material is such a treat.

Spontaneous, sometimes funny, and occasionally bordering on sloppy, these recordings cover a few years on the road and around the globe, featuring material dating back to 1995 (the title of this set is drawn from *Not a Pretty Girl's* "Lullaby"). There are a few on-the-spot improvisations as well, and a spoken-word volley against the president and the politics of this post-9/11 era. When DiFranco calls George W. a "prep-school punk," you can just feel the spittle flying.

Her first live recording since 1997's *Living in Clip*, this album also showcases the way funk and world music have colored DiFranco's tunes in the past few years. *Clip* captured the artist as a folk punk, but here her folk-funk side is on display, with rippling bass lines and horns in tow. More than most of her peers, DiFranco is a touring performer, constantly changing arrangements and letting her songs grow and breathe. One minute she's a highly structured bandleader giving the players room to create a free-jazz take on a tune; next you'll find her solo, pulling incredible sounds from her guitar and voice, spinning lyrics so the meaning catches you off guard, hushing audience members with her delivery and then turning them loose to scream.

To see DiFranco live is to engage in a dialogue of sorts; *So Much Shouting, So Much Laughter* captures that dynamic and reminds listeners what a genuine talent she is. If you can't get to a show, play it loud and cheer at home.

—HEATHER SEGCEL



Return to Planet Earth

Kim Fox {OGLIO RECORDS}

Like Sam Phillips, Kim Fox crafts bright, taut pop that sounds sweetly breezy on an initial listen; it's only after you hear it a few times that you start to appreciate the sophistication within the sugar. After her underheard 1997 release *Moon Hut*, the New York-based musician took some time off to travel; on her return, she hooked up with singer-songwriter and producer Linus of Hollywood, and the result is an album of positively hooktastic orchestral pop. *Return to Planet Earth's* 13 tracks skip through pop songwriting's back pages, snatching only the tastiest bits—harking back to the smooth swing and muted horns of Burt Bacharach for "Something Just as Good" and "Feel Like Crying," throwing the synth switch for the glittering ABBA-esque dance grooves of "Love x 10" and "Baby I Want You Back," and strolling down girl-group lane with "Lazy."

Fox worries in one song about being "a piece of kitsch/An artifact of hip," and she probably does have cause for concern—*Return to Planet Earth's* heady, floridly retro arrangements and Fox's sexy, enchanted voice unabashedly flout all current rules of musical cool. She may, like sonic sister Phillips, prove too pop for the critics and too smart for the mainstream. But it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world if she joined Phillips for a little time on the *Gilmore Girls* soundtrack: I can

definitely see Rory (and, more likely, her mom, Lorelei) twirling prom night away to "I've Got Music," and I just know they would find *Return to Planet Earth* as addictive as I do.

—ANDI ZEISLER



Shown Actual Size

I Am Spoonbender

{GOLD STANDARD LABS}

San Francisco indie darling I Am Spoonbender produces spooky dance/trance music that might best be described as dystopian socialist electroclash—like incidental music in a 1930s German-expressionist sci-fi movie or the dark parapsychic underbelly of '80s new wave.

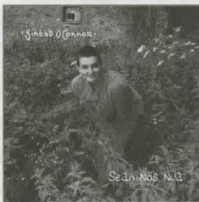
Shown Actual Size, a three-track EP, is the band's first release in two years. Arty, uncompromising, and aggressively human under the forbidding technological exterior (I Am Spoonbender does not sample; all sounds featured on the album were organically created by the musicians), it's wary dance music for the new millennium. One song is nominally about the artifice of beauty ("I Went and Had My Knives Sharp-ened"), one is about the remoteness of technology ("Re-Dial Meant 'Remember'"), and, well, I'm not sure what the other song is about, but I Am Spoonbender's primary focus is really more on sonic experimentation than anything else, and the results sound great.

The band's three core members—Cup, the former drummer for beloved Canadian cuddlecore

suggested LISTENING

trio Cub; Dustin Donaldson, late of Pansy Division; and Marc Kate—are semicelebrities in San Francisco's tightly knit Valencia Street art and music community. Cup recommends records at neighborhood indie shop Aquarius Records, and Marc sometimes comes to my yoga class, where folks in the know greet him like a god. (He's about as flexible as you'd expect of a man whose band is named in tribute to Uri Geller.) They're always willing to play a gallery opening or help score the music for a dance performance, and on certain city blocks, their telepathic-man-bending-a-fork logo is as ubiquitous as it is mysterious (a sign at Aquarius says, "Please don't ask us why the logo is a fork"). It's nice when a band sees itself as part of an artistic community—and gives that community such unique sounds.

—RITA HAO



Sean-Nos Nua Sinead O'Connor
{VANGUARD RECORDS}

The striking blend of folk tunes, chants, and ballads on *Sean-Nos Nua* is the music that Sinead O'Connor's distinctive lilt was made for. With lyrics in both English and Gaelic, the album captures both a sense of Ireland and a trace of the polemical woman who ripped up a picture of the pope on a 1992 episode of *Saturday Night Live* (and left the stage shocked—just *shocked*—when she didn't receive a standing ovation for her bold protest).

Although the album's lyrics aren't

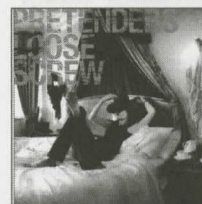
overtly political, they touch on the same themes of imperialism and Irish sociopolitics that O'Connor addressed more openly in earlier songs, such as "Famine," from *Universal Mother*. Most of *Sean-Nos Nua*'s tracks skillfully blend traditional elements, employing just enough studio effects to accent the music without overpowering the songs or giving them the New Age candy coating that renders so many modern remakes of traditional tunes unlistenable.

O'Connor does, however, reveal a penchant for liner-note sermonizing. The elaborate metaphors and myths she constructs to explain her songs are laid out in mesmerizing—and occasionally irritating—detail. One plain, pretty tune about birds chirping in the trees "acknowledges the greatness of Jah above all greatness and the power of Jah above all powers." "Paddy's Lament," which brims with wrenching emotion, can't be just a story of an Irish immigrant—it has to be "the best antiwar song ever made," about an Irishman "conscripted under General Lincoln in the American Civil War." (In her enthusiasm to condemn America, she apparently forgot to notice that during the war Lincoln was a president, not a general.) She points out no fewer than three times that she considers her rendition of the traditional ballad "Peggy Gordon" to be an homage to homosexual love (as if we couldn't infer for ourselves the girl-on-girl connotation of Sinead singing, "You are my darling" to the mythical Peggy).

Still, after the preaching, what's left is a forceful album that showcases the range and potency of O'Connor's vocal talent while keeping the history

and struggles of the Irish alive in the minds of all who hear her music.

—JULIE CRAIG



Loose Screw The Pretenders
{ARTEMIS RECORDS}

While bands like the Rolling Stones keep touring well into their adult-diaper years, few women who rocked us through the formative '80s are still performing today. But Pretenders frontwoman Chrissie Hynde has never strayed too far from the stage, and her voice has aged to a perfection that carries both energy and maturity.

Pain surely isn't new to Hynde (who lost a band member to drugs in the early days of the Pretenders), and to hear her sing, it's as if she's known every single heartbreak since Eve bailed on the garden of Eden. (Indeed, the harshly emotive songs of *Loose Screw* are rumored to be inspired by Hynde's breakup with her husband shortly before recording the album.) The album puts a punk-rock twist on a recovery program: The songs travel through grief, vulnerability, anger, denial, hope, wariness, self-indulgence, sarcasm, bitterness, and revenge before returning to the strut-your-stuff swagger that sets Hynde apart from the average love-lorn crooner.

The raw sonic quality of *Loose Screw* occasionally crosses the line between refreshingly relaxed and just sloppy, with some songs feeling slightly unfinished. Though "Complex Person" contains a surprising

reference to confronting street harassment with the point of a gun, it's bogged down in grating repetition. And some lyrics make less sense than R.E.M. on a Tori Amos jag. ("They say that loyalty is just for those who've earned it/Is that why they stole the sofa from your parking space/And burned it?") But the Pretenders' real power has never been their unique lyrics anyway; it's Hynde's belting voice, which hasn't lost a decibel of its throaty command in the 23 years since the band's debut album. I can't think of any other singer who could salvage the line "I wasn't this shook in the L.A. earthquake/How much can one heart break?"

Interestingly, the one track that might best reflect Hynde's persona as she rocks into her 50s is a cover—of Jarvis Cocker's "Walk Like a Panther." Far from cowering at the subject of her advancing age, she embraces its power. And when she sings, "To keep up with me you've got to walk like a panther tonight," you're not gonna doubt it.

—J.C.



Sex Sells Stiffed
{COOL KUNTER}

Are EPs the new demos? Maybe it's just that our workdays are long and our attention spans are short—but as a buzz creator, the short format has worked for the Strokes, the Kills, and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, among others. Still, sometimes it's hard to tell from an EP whether a band truly

Santi White's ingratiating hiccups are like a resounding "Yes!" in the face of lifeless, unadventurous, tedious rock.

embodies the rock-saving and life-affirming qualities usually attributed to long-standing, prolific outfits. A five-song debut with three great tunes can easily turn into tomorrow's insufferable 18-track concept album—but fortunately that isn't likely to be the case with Stiffed. On *Sex Sells's* six-pack of tracks, vocalist Santi White's ingratiating hiccups (Cyndi Lauper, anyone?) are like a resounding "Yes!" in the face of lifeless, unadventurous, tedious rock. Stiffed makes bright-red-lipstick music, bouncy and crystalline—pop for the end times, the good times, and the times in between.

Sex Sells is a percolating pot of sugary pop and good-for-you guitar goo, courtesy of would-be show-stealer Matt Schleck, aided and abetted by drummer Chuck Treece. White's voice renders Gwen Stefani-esque and Debbie Harry-level pop smarts commonplace, and recalls Claire Grogan from late, great bubblegum new-wavers Altered Images. Vibrant production from Daryl Jenifer (of fusion-punk pioneers Bad Brains) seems no coincidence either, though, productionwise, *Sex Sells* has more in common with the Cars or Devo than

with Jenifer's hardcore roots.

If opening track "What You Gon' Do" is Stiffed's calling card, they've got a permanent place in my Rolodex. It takes guts to sing, "I don't want to go out like a woman who has nothing but all these ideas...done nothing but complain of all the hardships.../and how she's lonely, and how could that be?/Is she old, is she ugly, maybe they don't see me clearly/Are they dumb?"—especially when what sounds like the happiest, hardest pop song ever is playing behind her. White's versatile vocal vamping will make you believe Claire Grogan was right—maybe you, too, could be happy. Here's to more than 19 minutes next time.

—CYNDI ELLIOTT



Almost You: The Songs of Elvis Costello
Various Artists

{BAR NONE RECORDS}

An album honoring the work of Elvis Costello—arguably one of

suggested LISTENING

pop's best and most enduring songwriters—has been a long time coming. But the beauty of this 15-track collection is that it breezes by most of the man's hits to showcase his lesser-known treasures instead. The musicians behind *Almost You* hail mainly from the realm of alt-country, with standout contributions from the Damnations (the Austin sister

act that turns out a bar-ballad version of "Still Too Soon to Know") and Kev Russell's Junker (which offers a fiddle-fortified take on "Indoor Fireworks"). It's also a delight to hear a captivating female voice croon a Costello classic, as on Hem's slow, feathery adaptation of "(The Angels Wanna Wear My) Red Shoes."

Almost You has its share of high-

energy rock tracks too, like Fastball's one-two power-pop punch on "Busy Bodies," the Deathray Davies' organ-heavy "Men Called Uncle," and Grand Champeen's punky "No Action." For curious music lovers and Costello fans open to a spin on some oldies, *Almost You* is a great collection builder.

—ERICA GALLAGHER

FURTHERMORE...

The sunny, snuggly, wiggly punk-pop contents of 2, the second album from Portland, Oregon's **All Girl Summer Fun Band** {K RECORDS}, are as straightforward as its title. Songs about feeling like a grizzly bear, crushing out on Jason Lee, and road tripping with the girls are among the fuzzed-out, guitar-heavy, and just plain adorable offerings here...Singer-songwriter **Lizzie West** sounds a lot like Natalie Merchant. I mean, uncannily so. And on her debut album *Holy Road...Freedom Songs* {WARNER BROTHERS}, she steps into the same folky-jangly-poppy niche that Merchant once ruled, while adding a dash of Lucinda Williams-ish roots and country on songs like "Sometime" and "Monkey Back Blues"

...On *Country for True Lovers* {ZEDTONE}, prolific chanteuse

Eleni Mandell has her way with songs written and made famous by the likes of Merle Haggard and Etta James. Mellow than Mandell's past few offerings, *Country* lets all that's timeless about her voice really shine, whether she's

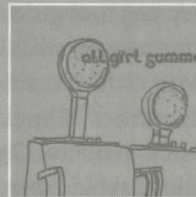
covering Haggard's wistful "I've Got a Tender Heart" or blazing her way through an original like "Tell Me

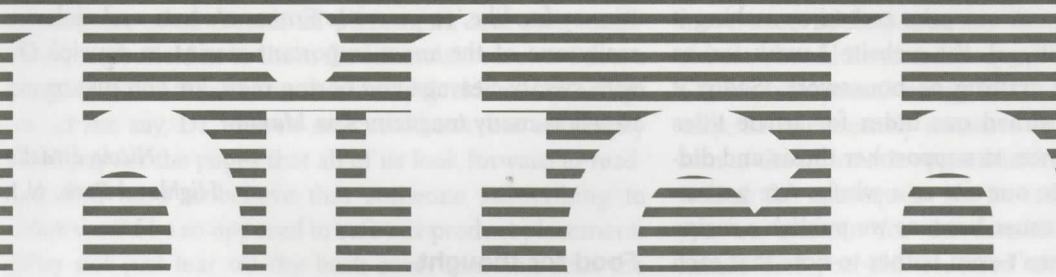
Twice"...As lore has it, the ladies of **Mr. Airplane Man** were discovered playing on a Boston sidewalk by late Morphine frontman Mark Sandman. And listening to *Moanin'* {SYMPATHY FOR THE RECORD INDUSTRY}, it's easy to understand how the duo caught his ear—their stripped-down sound is like a ghostly dispatch from the crossroads of Delta blues and garage rock. With two Howlin' Wolf

covers, one reworking of Mississippi Fred McDowell's "Sun Sinking Low," and the traditional "Jesus on the Mainline," Mr. Airplane Man (whose

name also comes from the title of a Howlin' Wolf song) makes *Moanin'* a reverent slice of history but turns in some striking originals too...**Via Tania** is the nom de disc of Tania May-

Bowers, whose debut album *Under a Different Sky* {CHOCOLATE INDUSTRIES} is full of lush, dreamy electronica and atmospheric pop. If you were going to tuck into a pot of mushroom tea with your best girlfriends, you'd want to have this album handy, along with Morcheeba and Tortoise; it's complex yet implacably calm.





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dear bitch

(Continued from page 11) SHARROCK SEEMS TO BE saying that we can't eat our cake and enjoy making it too. She points to Craftygal, the website I work for, as promoting an idea of crafting as housework. Sadly, it seems she simply skimmed our index for article titles that appear, at first glance, to support her thesis and didn't bother to investigate our site as a whole. Are we setting back the feminist cause because we publish a recipe in each issue? She doesn't even bother to note that each issue also includes a profile of a woman who makes her living in some creative fashion (including, I might add, *Bitch's* own Lisa Jervis). I don't understand why we, as feminists, are expected to be angry or miserable about taking care of our homes, or why we should be ashamed to make crafts that aren't "subversive." I, for one, enjoy cooking and crafting, and I've made peace with housekeeping. If this disqualifies me from being a feminist, I'll be glad to turn in my membership card.

Jan Mater-Cavagnaro
Rochester, N.Y.

Justine Sharrock responds: As a fan of the crafty life, I have read Craftygal extensively. The reembracing of crafting as a valued form of art and lifestyle is important—especially because of its prior rejection due to feminine associations. However, the article specifically examines places in which the crafting world delves into housekeeping and cleaning.

I am not criticizing those who keep house or the pleasures that can be derived from cleaning—but I do take issue with the framing of housecleaning as a feminist action. With feminism comes freedom to do what you want—but that doesn't make every action a political and feminist act in and of itself. There's a strand of contemporary feminism that focuses largely upon the celebration of girly culture, and I am wary of its confusion between activities for men and women alike to enjoy and what should be put forth as political and feminist actions. When feminism focuses on reembracing typically feminine activities to the exclusion of a more complex and thoughtful reworking of gender values and rights, we have a problem.

Vanity, yes; fair, no

I, too, noticed the pimp-daddy theme of the cover of *Vanity Fair's* music issue (Love It/Shove It, no. 19). But I also noticed that, although nine women grace the cover and all except J. Lo make good music, the musicians mentioned in the cover lines are men. So, VF, the women of music are pretty to look at, but the music worth writing about is made by men? Hasn't the music the Hives are

"bringing back" been made by females such as Sleater-Kinney for, like, 10 years? Is Eminem's hate and violence really one of the most important stories in music? Or, with sweaty cleavage and boring men, are you just trying to sell as many magazines as *Maxim*?

Nicole diMella
Highland Park, N.J.

Food for thought

I was so thrilled to read "Double Life" (no. 18). All through my pregnancy this year I was very excited to breastfeed my baby. When the task came to be necessary in front of anyone other than my partner, I found that I really didn't enjoy nursing her while people watched. That complex surprise left me totally confused and feeling guilty—had I failed as a feminist? I had never even thought about the bigger picture—that familiar societal boxing match of our bodies vs. our market value. I feel sufficiently armed with awareness now, and am ready to reclaim my right to enjoy providing for my baby. Keep rockin' the mommy demographic!

Jen St. Cyr
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Letters about letters

I think it's wonderful that David J. Weissberg of *XLR8R* could only be upset over the lack of captioning in the vicious and violent pictures that you printed (Dear Bitch, no. 19). It speaks volumes that he missed the whole point of Laura Compton's blurb on the spread. The same goes for Gene Bae—yes, Gene, even women can be misogynists. The pictures are of models in designer clothes who are portrayed as dead, and instead of being saddened or shocked by their deaths, we're supposed to wonder where they bought their underwear?

Daela Gibson
Reno, Nev.

Letters about letters about dildos

After reading the letters about the Toys in Babeland ad on the back cover of no. 18 (Dear Bitch, no. 19), I had to send in a response of my own. I felt very sorry for the women who felt they could not read the magazine in public. These attitudes reinforce the notion that masturbation, especially for women, is dirty and should not be discussed. As for the post office calling the ad "obscene" and "lewd," I would be more inclined to respect that opinion if the masturbation fodder provided by the cover of *Sports Illustrated's* swimsuit issue were seen in a similar light.

Mary Leal
Plymouth, Mass.

WHAT A LOT OF READERS DON'T REALIZE IS THAT advertisers often dictate ad placement, and that magazines are beholden to them for financial reasons. Sure, a magazine like *Bitch* can consciously decide not to accept an ad for, say, Dr. Laura's new cookbook, but ad money does pay for the pages that all of us look forward to reading. It's hard to believe that someone subscribing to *Bitch* would be so opposed to safe-sex product placement. Why not just tear off the back cover and still read the good stuff?

Natalie Hope McDonald
Philadelphia, Penn.

I WAS GRATIFIED TO SEE THAT OTHER READERS WERE also disturbed by the Toys in Babeland ad. Concerns about their kids, etc., are all good. But what if a men's social speak-up mag (is there such a thing?) featured a leather-clad man about to put a see-through purple vagina into his pants? I think *Bitch* would get a little ticked off about such a thing, in fact.

Low-class sex ads are not my flavor of feminism. Myriad ads for sex toys, suggestive underclothes, raunchy lip balm, sex magazines, and the like make feminists seem obsessed with toys and trappings, ignoring men altogether. I acknowledge that you feature a lot of other ads for some amazing magazines and music. But something seems off here. Am I mistaken in my notion that real sex is a good thing? Self-sex is safe; I'll grant that. But self-sex as a lifestyle? Not progressive.

Heather McGee
Los Angeles, Calif.

YOU MADE A MISTAKE WHEN YOU BACKED DOWN TO the reactionary demands that you not advertise sex toys on the back cover. Sexuality and sex toys are an appropriate and liberating message for you to bring to a society of self-limiting women who still find shame in sexual pleasure. Shame on you, *Bitch*. You should know better.

Who cares what the post office thinks! Who cares what people on the bus think! A sexually mature person would just remove the back cover if she felt uncomfortable about it in public. When you show a more feminist, rather than Christian-right, response to criticism, I will subscribe.

Marilyn Spivey
Hermosa Beach, Calif.

WHILE I WAS APPROVING OF YOUR DECISION TO PULL the giant purple dildo ad, imagine my surprise and disgust at the offensive and shocking 4by6.com ad that replaced it! As anyone remotely versed in psychoanalysis

can tell you, the pencil is a phallic symbol and, furthermore, a tool of the patriarchy. What am I to tell my 8-year-old cat, should he stumble upon such brazen images? As a tom whose sexual energy was curtailed by the vet's cruel snip, he is extremely sensitive to all things that remind him of the traumatic event that defined his kittenhood, as well as the subsequent sex he can no longer have. Have you no concern for the sensitive and impressionable minds of 8-year-old neutered tomcats? Shame on you, *Bitch*! Shame!

Lisa Swanstrom
Los Angeles, Calif.

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(Continued from page 20) for women's and reproductive healthcare. Supporting the fund does more to help the world's women than supporting the war on terrorism, but neither the Bush administration nor the mainstream media seem to see the contradiction in Bush's policy.

To position women's rights as a rallying point for war paints politicians and the public at large into a corner—particularly those of us who have long fought for the welfare of women. It's a calculated exploitation of leftist concerns in order to suppress dissenting thought: If supporting the war on terrorism means ensuring the freedom of some of the world's most oppressed women, by all means, we should support the war.

Furthermore, it's unclear in all this rhetoric exactly what "freedom" signifies for Afghanistan. If the mainstream press is to be believed, freedom in post-Taliban Afghanistan is merely about the right to look as one chooses, to shave one's beard or shed one's burka. When the *New York Times* reported the start of entrance exams at Kabul University on December 23, 2001, journalist John F. Burns described the event as "a day for earrings and makeup and handbags and other casual flauntings.... In the hallways, the burka... was now a fashion statement, tossed backward from the candidates' heads as if to say, 'Take a hike, Mr. Mullah.'" Granted, these changes in dress are certainly symbols of greater freedoms gained. However, the reportorial fixation on such victories assumes that what women desire most is the right to freely decorate ourselves, and trivializes the more complex and important issues

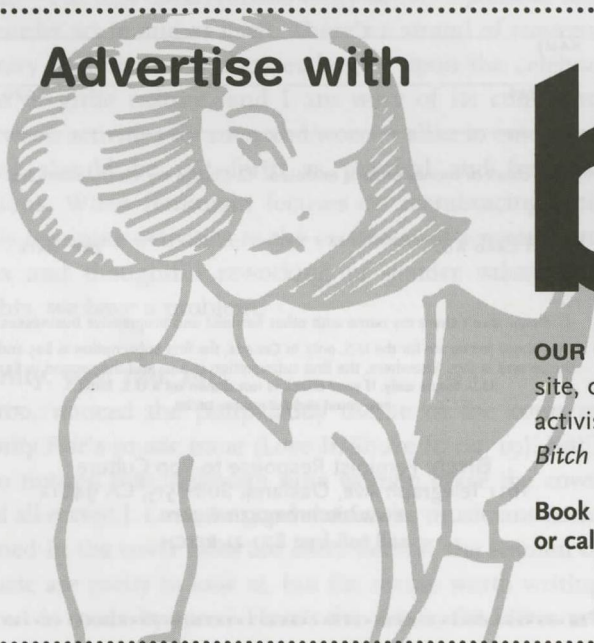
Afghanistan faces, such as unemployment and widespread illiteracy, not to mention conservative backlash in the form of physical violence. Intentionally or not, the media reinforced Bush's uninformed rhetoric with an instant "happy ending"—one the public can interpret as a success for both the U.S. and for Afghanistan, and one the administration can use to garner support for the next military action.

As the United States turns its attention from war in Afghanistan to war in Iraq, the struggle of Afghan women has faded from Bush's speeches (even as he recently allotted \$3.5 billion in aid) and from the mainstream media (aside from the occasional feel-good piece celebrating such milestones as the first granting of driver's licenses to Afghan women). As they throw back their veils—which have come to encapsulate their oppression—Afghan women step into a new invisibility. In a media culture where silence equals nonexistence, the disappearance of Afghan women from the political stage defines the problem as "fixed" in the eyes of the public.

Against a backdrop of aggressive antifeminist and imperialist actions, administrative efforts in both warfare and healthcare prove that behind an utterly transparent "feminist" veil, we're still dealing with the same old cowboys.

Maria Raha is a writer and feminist living in New York. She spends most of her spare time cursing the Bush administration.

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(Continued from page 24) Well, at the time I got interested in the '70s, nobody was talking about it. It was a maligned decade that we'd just come out of, that everybody was embarrassed about. But there was huge social change in the '70s, and nobody was looking at it or thinking about it except for a few oddballs. There's always something interesting in the back closets of the culture that nobody wants to look in right then—and why is it that they don't want to look there? So that's part of what made me passionate about it—that nobody else was. And it was the time when I grew up, so obviously that also made me want to look back at it.

In *Platforms*, you wrote, "The events of the seventies may not have been trivial, but our concerns were." You could probably say the same thing about any decade. I grew up in the '80s, and now that ads and other commercial media are made by people who also grew up in the '80s, the decade is being cast in much the same way that the '70s once were—embarrassing politically, sartorially, and whatever else.

I heard a piece on NPR about how people in China are using images from Maoist China in the same way—ads that use clips of, like, a thousand people doing eye exercises with pounding rave music cut in over them. There's this weird nostalgia for Maoist China, which was so horrible at the time. But there's something fascinating, too, about nostalgia. No matter what happens, there's something about the way we remember that's interesting; the past always feels sort of safe to us.

There's sort of an opposite effect, often further back in history, that I found during my research on William Sheppard. And I knew this was a faulty way of thinking, but I couldn't stop myself—I was thinking, Oh, it was so horrible, the way the Belgians would encourage the Africans to mutilate each other. The cutting off of hands, the slave labor—isn't that terrible, and it's so good that that's over! But while I was working on the book, a civil war in Sierra Leone broke out, and we started hearing about people cutting off each other's hands. That brought me right back into reality. There's a way in which people are always the same, and things just never change. But we want to believe there's something locked away back there, for good or for evil, that we can't have anymore.

Keep up with **Pagan Kennedy** at her website, *The Recycled Pagan Kennedy* (www.channel1.com/users/pagan), and look for **Black Livingstone** at fine independent bookstores in your area. **Andi Zeisler** is *Bitch's* editorial/creative director.

(Continued from page 26) confusions, and quarrels that result from such disaster-prone arrangements, offering tips on how to adapt one's own speech to (naturally competitive and domineering) men's.

But books devoted to mixed-gender interactions tell only part of the story. Even if these rules contain a kernel of truth, they simply don't apply within a group of women or in an all-female environment like Smith. More recent feminist sociolinguistic studies, based on empirical evidence, have taken a fresh look. The first order of business has been to separate women's language—which can still be characterized as subordinate to men's in most mixed groups—from a language of submission. Feminist linguist Jennifer Coates, of London's University of Surrey Roehampton, has commented that it's "typical of all-women groups that they discuss people and feelings, while men are more likely to discuss things." Far from being disempowering, however, this tendency is what Coates calls a cooperative model that women use to invite others to speak their minds, approach sensitive topics, and provide a space for multiple points of view between equals.

So-called indirect speech can also be more of a boon than a hindrance. According to Deborah Tannen, professor of linguistics at Georgetown University and author of many books on gendered conversation styles, including the bestselling *You Just Don't Understand*, indirect speech can be a paradoxically powerful means of getting one's way. Although she has documented many workplace scenarios in which female managers choose to downplay authority when issuing orders to men, she shows how using a more indirect command ("Could we try to...?") is often more effective than barking orders.

"I always resist the literal interpretation of ways of speaking," Tannen told me. Seen in different contexts, silence, taciturnity, and "tag questions" ("you know?") can all become tools of dominance. In her opinion, "I feel like" is "no more literally about feelings than asking 'How are you?' when you greet someone is a request for a medical report."

But that doesn't change the fact that some women "feel" we're still in thrall to a dominant discursive standard. I'm embarrassed to have internalized such a message, which is so prevalent that we've learned to censor ourselves voluntarily or use evasive language. Whether "I feel" is a coping strategy or a covert power mechanism, it shouldn't need to exist at all. We live in a culture where we are legally sanctioned to think and say what we please. I'd like to live in a world where that's true.

Julia Scott is a San Francisco-based journalist.

(Continued from page 45) sense of possibility and limitation. The acknowledged lesbian relationship of *Buffy's* Willow and Tara, like the overt and obvious male/female relationships, did nothing for me, and indeed there doesn't seem to be as much slash about that couple as there is about other pairings left subtextual by the show (like *Buffy/Willow*). With a relationship that airs in real TV time, there's just not enough negative space for a writer's imagination to fill in. The tension between two women who aren't already in a relationship is much more promising, however—*Star Trek Voyager's* Seven of Nine and Captain Janeway, for example, have proved quite enticing to many slash writers.

Sadly, despite the rich promise of Sapphic slash, there isn't much of it out there. Few TV shows have more than one strong, sharply drawn female character, which may be one reason why female/female slash is still relatively limited. But there may be another. Straight female slash writers, who are used to desiring male bodies, may feel that women's pairings lack a necessary sexual frisson.

For many, slash has become a potent way to personalize interactions with a show, to lay claim to it by infusing it with sexual fantasy, gender role-playing, and power dynamics. And for those who are politically inclined, writing slash is a creative endeavor with feminist overtones—one that allows people to ponder gender issues in a creative, supportive environment. The world of slash, after all, is populated predominantly by women who are not mere consumers of culture but who have become producers in their own right. Slash writers, along with authors of other fanfic, have changed TV- and movie-watching from a passive act into one that is participatory, allowing the deciphering and creation of meaning. That a slash writer can grapple with gender and power issues adds extra richness to the already subversive practice of writing fanfic.

Luckily, there's no shortage of material. Television leaves a lot to be desired—which means more room for slash writers to fill with their imaginations. Even if TV changes dramatically for the better—with more programs that highlight deep, complex characters and show a broader range of social issues, loves, and sexual orientations—I'm sure that slash writers will find their space. They're too ornery, too independent, and too ingenious to let even the best TV prevent them from finding ways to improve it.

Noy Thrupkaew is a freelance writer who lives near Washington, D.C. She never did wind up writing any slash—once she had her epiphany, she stopped trying, mostly out of fear that the results would be horrible.

(Continued from page 59) highly debatable, but the strong-willed Hera wasn't known for splitting the difference either. And so it is decreed, in case after case. Judge Judy is well aware of her superpowers. "Don't try to put one over on me," she'll tease a voluble defendant. "You forget—I'm much smarter than you." With a single bang of her gavel, Scheindlin hands down her decisions, often turning her back on a hapless litigant futilely trying to make a point.

But Judge Judy can also be a champion of the wronged woman—much like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* vengeance demon Anyanka—correcting injustices and terrorizing evildoers with righteous wrath. She will often comfort a woman suing her ex with a best-girlfriend declaration that he's a loser and she's better off without him—before awarding a generous settlement. "Do you think you behaved in a respectful manner?" she'll query the man in question. Should he shrug or smirk, he gets an assaultive diatribe on responsibility and manhood, which is a guilty pleasure to behold.

Like any respectable female godhead, Judge Judy can be capricious and emotional. She loathes potheads, smart alecks, and slouchers; she adores children and dogs. Once, while adjudicating a pet-ownership dispute, Judge Judy left the bench and returned cradling her own pooch, a Shar-pei sporting tiny pink barrettes.

Judge Judy epitomizes the fierce, maternal wrath of an enraged female deity, roaring and spitting in the face of stupidity, arrogance, meanness, and greed. She imposes order onto a world of fuzzy truths and small, irrational, ordinary hurts; she orders us to sit up straight and teaches us whom to avoid, what to get in writing, and when not to throw the first punch. She is the non-sense, kick-ass mother/protector I never had. All hail Judge Judy. Her decisions are final. This is her courtroom. —MARGARET WEIGEL

SONGS (AND OTHER THINGS) IN THE KEY OF OBSESSION

Famous obsessives (fictional)

Walter Mitty
Bridget Jones
Any Woody Allen character
Humbert Humbert
Everyone on *Seinfeld*
Jay Gatsby
Dr. Strangelove

(actual)

Howard Hughes
Cindy Sherman
Woody Allen
Martha Stewart
R. Crumb
Malcolm X
The Coen Brothers
Oliver Stone
Andy Goldsworthy

lost in the grooves

(Continued from page 51) to original 7-inch pressings. (Seven-inches are the preferred format for deejaying because the grooves aren't as condensed as they are on an LP, making the sound quality better.) "I'm not in their club because I don't log onto Ebay every day and search for stuff I can't afford. I'd rather have the music than the artifact," she says.

English adds that she's often expected to relate to music on a material rather than personal level when

Sometimes guys will bring over a stack of records to listen to, but they can't even play a full song. As soon as I'm getting into one, they're like, "Ba-bam! Here's the next one."

hanging out with fellow deejays and record enthusiasts. "Sometimes guys will bring over a big stack of records to listen to, but they can't even play me a full song. As soon as I'm getting into one, they're like, 'Ba-bam! Here's the next one.' They just want to bombard me with as many songs as possible, but I don't just want to hear the beginning of a song—I also want to hear the middle and the end."

Of course, in every collecting practice there exists an element of fetish that deepens as the collection grows. But it's problematic to view only those people who relate to music in a fetishistic and "masculine" way as card-carrying, authoritative collectors. "It's all about the record as a desirable object, but that desire to own each musical artifact is driven first and foremost by the music," states Matson firmly. "I always thought how depressing it would be to be a big fan of the Beatles or Rolling Stones—you'd never be able to get all of their records."

Girls Get Busy

What male record collectors have had, historically, that female collectors haven't is a community of equally devout enthusiasts. Now, of course, female record collectors can hook up in seconds over the Internet, but find-

ing each other wasn't always so easy—another reason why the male myth persists.

The scene in *Ghost World* where Steve Buscemi's Seymour, Enid's shuffling, awkward, old-before-his-time paramour, hosts a party for his fellow record collectors—all of whom are men as shuffling and awkward as he—is instructive. They compare recent acquisitions and happily talk shop until the party is interrupted by Enid and Rebecca, at which point the attendees become all but frozen. The implication is that the business of collecting is a moose lodge of sorts, subject to its own governing rules and free from the social mores imposed by the presence of women.

Record-store veteran Fullerton feels this lack of community even within the world of music fans. "I have female friends who enjoy music as much as I do and who I go record shopping and to gigs with, but they don't collect vinyl," she says. "Records aren't important to them—but the music is."

Ochs didn't have female record-collecting peers or role models growing up, but her years of involvement in various music scenes have afforded her a growing community of female music writers, collectors, deejays, and musicians. "Anyone who says that women don't collect music just isn't looking in the right place," she proclaims.

Maybe it's not such a bad thing that female record collectors have yet to reach archetype status—after all, *High Fidelity*, *Vinyl*, and *Ghost World* were all fine movies, but their most lasting effect might be that they rendered male vinyl fetishists even more ripe for ridicule than before. (You know you've reached some sort of mockery pinnacle when the satirical newspaper the *Onion* takes a swipe, as it did with an April 2002 headline that read "37 Record-Store Clerks Feared Dead in Yo La Tengo Concert Disaster.") It's time for a new record-collector paradigm, one that does away with all the conflicted emotions and self-loathing and embraces the obsession for all the reasons it doesn't jibe with the stereotypical profile. And if men want to join in, that's just fine—there's nothing wrong with a bit of pissing-contest one-upmanship when you're talking about who's got the more valuable Syd Barrett rarity. We'll even let them borrow our Joni Mitchell LPs—if they promise not to scratch them.

Layla Cooper is a writer and musician living in Oakland, Calif.

pink blues

(Continued from page 75) Minnesota, were part of a series I did in 1998 for the *New York Times Magazine* about being 13. One of the moms talked about how [school] was the tyranny of the popular kids and how they were actually known as Tier One, Tier Two, and Tier Three, and the kids knew which tier they were in, and the parents knew which tier their kids were in. It was kind of incredible.

It's so well structured!

Today's high school and university students have read *Reviving Ophelia*; they're very well-read on the subject. I felt like I wasn't saying anything that was new; I was just looking at it from a visual viewpoint. Instead of saying, Okay, girls do body projects, I was trying to ask, What do [those projects] look like? Visually, we can see stuff and imply stuff that we couldn't in an academic or scientific context. You can see the picture of [4-year-old] Allegra with her gold shoes and see visual relationships between that and the porn star wearing a gold dress. One would never say—I would never say—that Allegra's experience is anything like that of a porn star. She's an innocent

look like. It's taking it to a whole other level. And then you pierce your navel, and then you're decorating your navel, drawing attention to your navel. You wear a thong bikini, and then you have to have a bikini wax. It's just a whole set of things you have to do that I didn't think about at that age.

I was doing a story about Beverly Hills for *National Geographic*, and I was photographing Anastasia, who is the go-to person for eyebrow waxing. And then I went to photograph these 13-year-olds in Beverly Hills—in *Girl Culture*, they're the ones doing Tae-Bo—and they said, "What else have you been shooting in Beverly Hills?" And I said, "I went to Anastasia," and I started to explain, and they go, "Oh, we know—we go to her." They're 13.

Where do you think we're heading now? I mean, the pants can't go any lower—where do we go from here?

I don't know where we're going. A lot of people have told me, "It's kind of a dark book, it's kind of depressing at the end—is that how you're supposed to feel?" I don't want to be the one putting a depressing [book] out into the world. But I think it is a toxic environment for girls

ONE OF THE SAD THINGS is that the girls speak very articulately about the pressures and problems, but unfortunately that doesn't seem to give them any immunity.

girl. But you can see in her gesture that she's mimicking things that she sees out in the world. And so you can make these connections in a subtle way that gets people thinking about them. When parents buy their girls clothes that are influenced by Britney Spears, they're just trying to make their kids happy, but they're not thinking about the messages in these clothes.

Do you think that girl culture has changed significantly since you grew up, or is it just being expressed differently?

I think it's gotten more intense and more extreme. When I was a teenager, you had to have fashionable clothes, you had to have brand names, and you had to be thin. But we weren't wearing midriff shirts. And when you're wearing a midriff, you actually have to have a six-pack, you have to care what your abdominal muscles

in a lot of ways, and I don't think it's really getting any better. One of the sad things in the book is that the girls speak very articulately about the pressures and about the problems, [but] unfortunately that doesn't seem to give them any immunity. And I think that's kind of surprising—if you're aware of the problem, why does it still affect you? That's something a lot of us go through, especially in the more educated and feminist set.

The biggest complaint that I get—and this is usually from girls buying the book—is, "Why am I not in the book?" [They say,] "I'm an athletic lesbian, why am I not in the book?" And, you know, they should be. I couldn't cover all the ground. There were a lot of things I wanted to photograph but didn't get access to or didn't have time to do. And I hope some of these girls go out and finish the story.

When you do a photo book, you don't necessarily expect people outside the photography community to read it. For a \$40 coffee-table book, that's just not the reality sometimes. It has been really nice to have it go beyond that and go to a lot of the people who are on the front lines of what's going on.

Has it been received differently within the photography community?

It's been received really well in the photography community. It's been a big breakthrough, too, [since] I'm kind of a newbie in the art world. Pictures were acquired by the Los Angeles County Museum, it's going to a lot of museums, and it was shown in New York in a very prestigious gallery. That's been exciting, that it can be in the art world and also in the mainstream.


Speaking of the art world, right now there are a number of female photographers doing work on girlhood and adolescence: Justine Kurland, whose work focuses on a sort of mythical girlhood, Rineke Djekstra, Pamela Hanson—

do you think this a moment in photography, or is it just coincidence?

Well, I think it's a good time for women in photography—it's a time in the art world where point of view and perspective are really celebrated. The female perspective is not something we saw that much of in prior generations. Women are talking about their own experiences, and [adolescence] is a big one. I definitely see it when I go to campuses and people are showing me their art, and a lot of it is about stuff girls are dealing with.


I feel lucky that I'm even being shown and acknowledged in that world. I don't understand it that well, it's not where I come from, but I'm really glad to be there. Because I see that when my work is in a museum, it reaches such a wide audience and it becomes part of history—which, as a documentary photographer, is the highest thing you can aspire to.

The tour schedule for "Girl Culture" is available online at www.laurengreenfield.com. **Rachel Fudge** is the senior editor of *Bitch*.



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Issue 9 | Fall 2003: Yoko Ono, Melt Banana,
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How to Write a Protest Letter

by Jennifer L. Pozner

You flip to your local Clear Channel radio station to find a shock jock “joking” about where kidnappers can most easily buy nylon rope, tarps, and lye for tying up, hiding, and dissolving the bodies of little girls. Reuters runs an important news brief about a Nigerian woman sentenced to death by stoning for an alleged sexual infraction—in its “Oddly Enough” section, where typical headlines include “Unruly Taxi Drivers Sent to Charm School.” When California Democrats Loretta and Linda Sanchez become the first sisters ever to serve together in Congress, the *Washington Post* devotes 1,766 words in its style section to inform readers about the representatives’ preferences regarding housekeep-

ing, hairstyles, and “hootchy shoes.” (Number of paragraphs focusing on the congresswomen’s political viewpoints: one.) Nearly a million demonstrators gather in cities across the country to protest impending war on Iraq; America’s top print and broadcast news outlets significantly undercount protestors’ numbers...again.

So, what else is new? Sexist and biased fare is business as usual for all too many media outlets—but what do you do when hurling household objects at Dan Rather’s head just isn’t enough? These tips from Women In Media & News (WIMN), a New York-based media-monitoring, training, and advocacy group, can help you make the leap from righteous indignation to effective critique.

Be firm but polite

Make your case sans insults, rants, and vulgarity. Nothing makes it easier for editors and producers to dismiss your argument than name-calling. Good idea: “Your discussion of the rape survivor’s clothing and makeup was irrelevant, irresponsible, and inappropriate. Including those details blames the victim and reinforces dangerous myths about sexual assault.” Bad idea: “Your reporter is a woman-hating incarnate of satan!”

Be realistic but optimistic

Calling for the *New York Times* to transform itself into a socialist newspaper will get you nowhere; suggesting that quotes from industry executives be balanced by input from labor and public-interest groups is more likely to be taken seriously.

Correct the record

For example, remind media outlets discussing “partial-birth abortion” that this imprecise and inflammatory term doesn’t refer to an actual medical procedure but is, rather, a political concept fabricated by conservative groups to decrease public support for abortion rights. Focusing on facts is more persuasive than simply

expressing outrage: “Christina Hoff Sommers’s quote contained the following inaccuracies...” is better than “Antifeminists like Christina Hoff Sommers should not be quoted in your newspaper.”

Choose your battles

While we’d all like to see fewer female bods used to sell beer, asking the networks to reject such ads is a waste of time. (A letter-writing campaign to the companies that produce those ads is another matter.) However, it’s worth the effort to pressure telecom and cable giant Comcast to air the antiwar ads it censored during Bush’s State of the Union speech.

Avoid overgeneralization

Don’t complain that your local paper “never” reports on women’s issues or “always” ignores poor people. Even if stories on topics like workfare are infrequent or inaccurate, their very existence will serve as “proof” to editors that your complaint doesn’t apply to their publication.

Expose biased or distorted framing

Look at whose viewpoint is shaping the story. In light of the Bush administration’s assault on affirmative action, for example, Peter Jennings asked on *World News*

Tonight: “President Bush and race: Does he have a strategy to win black support?” Let ABC producers know that you’d rather they investigate the economic, academic, and political implications of the president’s agenda for African-Americans than the effects of race policy on Bush’s approval rating.

Keep it concise and informative

If your goal is publication on the letters page, a couple of well-documented paragraphs will always be better received than an emotional three-page manifesto. Sticking to one or two main points will get a busy editor to read through to the end.

Address the appropriate person

Letters about reportorial objectivity sent to editorial columnists or opinion-page editors will be tossed in the circular file.

Proofread!

Nothing peeves an editor faster than typos or bad grammar.

Finally, give ’em credit

Positive reinforcement can be as effective as protest. Be constructive whenever possible, and commend media outlets when they produce in-depth, bias-free coverage.

Jennifer L. Pozner is WIMN’s founder and executive director.



How to find your G-spot

The G-spot is often portrayed as a mysterious location on a woman's body that plays hide-and-seek with those who look for it. In fact, every woman has a G-spot – and it's always in the same place.

The G-spot is about two inches inside the vagina towards the belly, right behind the pubic bone. It's composed of spongy tissue that is wrapped around the urethra. When a woman is aroused, it becomes thicker as it fills with fluid and can be felt through the vaginal wall. Angle your penetration or select a curved sex toy and apply firm rhythmic pressure to pleasure the G-spot. Some women find this sensation highly sexual and some women expel a clear fluid called female ejaculate (it's not urine) from G-spot stimulation. Not every woman loves having it pressed, rubbed, or otherwise stimulated. You'll just have to try it for yourself.



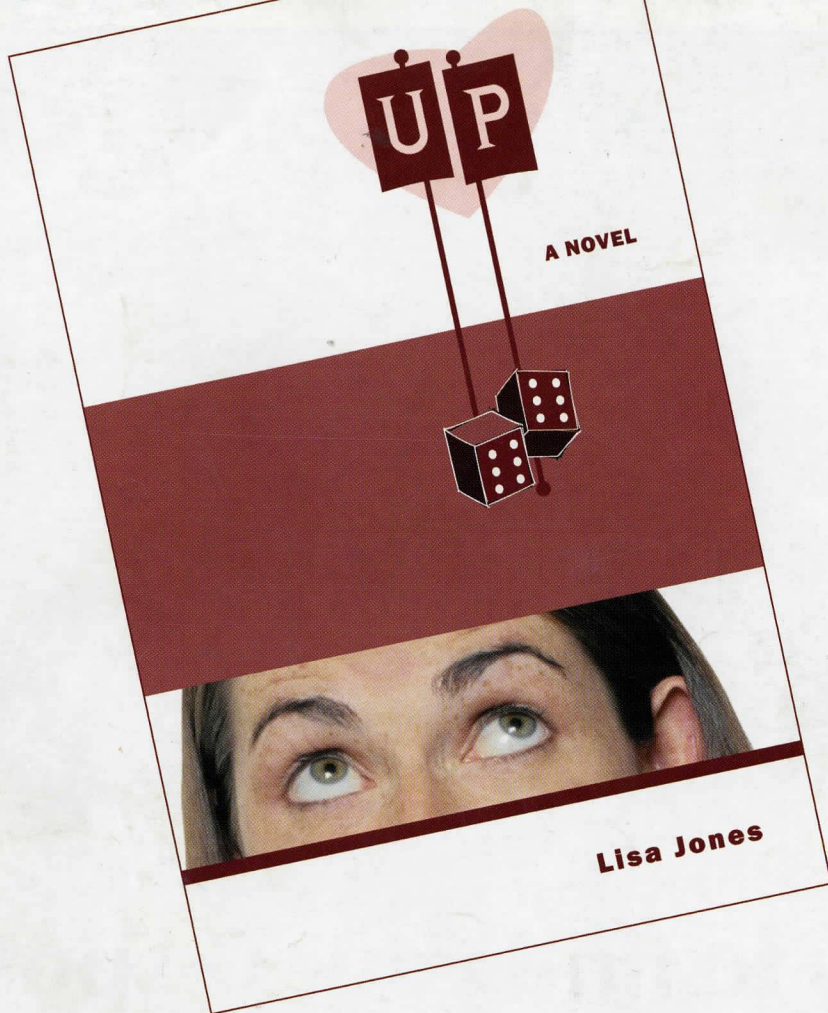
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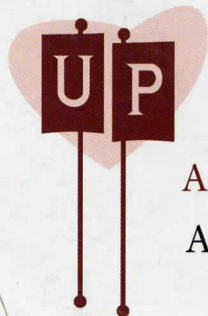
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