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Gay Men, Lesbians, and Sex: Doing It Together

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I have sex with faggots. And I'm a lesbian. You think *you're* confused? How did this happen to a woman who maintained a spotless record as a militant lesbian separatist for eight years, a woman who had sex with only three men (once apiece) before coming out, a woman who gets called a dyke on the street at least once a week, a woman who has slept (and not stayed to sleep) with hundreds of other women?

To explain, I need to go back to 1977. Those of you who aren't ready for this have my permission to leave the room. But don't slam the door on your way out. Who knows who will be sitting on *your* face in 1984?

In 1977 when I bought my first dog collar, there was no such thing as a lesbian S/M community. There probably were a few isolated dykes who owned rope they never intended to string up for clothesline – but I couldn't find them. So when I heard about a women's S/M support group, I joined it even though most of the members were straight or bisexual. I was surprised to discover that most of them were honest, intelligent perverts – and feminists! One of them, a professional dominatrix, became my lover.

My lover found the straight S/M scene pretty joyless, so she hung out with a small group of gay men who were into fisting and S/M. She was especially attached to Steve McEachern, who ran private handballing parties in his extremely well-equipped basement. This club was called The Catacombs. The Christmas after we became lovers, she took me to a party at his house. About fifteen men were present. She and I were the only women. After a huge dinner, everybody just started taking off his clothes. I found myself sitting alone in a corner, wondering if I was going to spend the entire orgy feeling sorry for myself (my girlfriend had wandered off with Steve). A tall, handsome man (albeit a little skinny) sat down beside me and said, 'Hi, my name's Joe. How would you like to fist me?'

I took a deep breath and said, 'I'd like that, but you'll have to show me what to do.' That was fine with him. He got me an emery board and some nail clippers and showed me how to perform the very severe manicure handballing requires. He took for granted that a novice had to receive

detailed instructions, and he didn't expect me to dazzle him with a magic show of sexual expertise. This attitude was very reassuring and completely different from the way anybody else I'd met had approached sex. When Joe approved my hands, we went downstairs, located some towels and Crisco, and climbed onto the waterbed.

Joe lay on his back. He wrapped his arms around his thighs and held them apart. My first handful of grease melted right into his ass. It was like feeding a hungry animal – an animal that talked back. He gave me such careful instructions about when to push and when to pull back that I got into him easily, I can't remember how deep. It seemed like miles. I came to at one point and realized just how vulnerable he was, this big man clutching his thighs and groaning uncontrollably because I was so far into him. The walls of his gut hugged my hand and forearm, smoother and softer and more fragile than anything I'd ever touched before. I think I cried. I know I got wet.

Well, that's how it started. I've lost track of exactly how many men I've put my hand(s) into, and it still puts me in a trance. It's awesome to be that close to another human being. In between cans of Crisco, I've thought a lot about why it's possible to cross the 'gender line' in the context of this kind of sex. First of all, in fisting the emphasis is not on the genitals. Men at handballing parties don't usually cruise each other's dicks. They cruise each other's hands and forearms. It is not unusual for fisters to go all night without a hard-on. Tops with small hands are in demand, and my glove size is a popular one. Gay men who are into handballing usually think of themselves as sexually different from other gay men. They get a lot of attitude about being sick, kinky, and excessive. Hence some of them are willing to break a gay taboo and do it with a woman.

As I acquired more experience in the S/M community, I realized this, too, was a sexuality that allowed people to step outside the usually rigid boundaries of sexual orientation. I met lesbians who topped straight men for money (and did that myself for a while). I met straight men who would go down on other men or be fucked by them if their mistresses ordered them to do it. Since the acts took place under the authority of women, they thought of them as heterosexual behaviour. (I also met a lot of bisexuals who didn't need any excuses.)

These combined experiences have resulted in a lifestyle that doesn't fit the homosexual stereotype. I live with my woman lover of five years. I have lots of casual sex with women. Once in a while, I have casual sex with gay men. I have a three-year relationship with a homosexual man who doesn't use the term *gay*. And I call myself a lesbian.

Of course, I've modified my sexual pattern in the face of the AIDS crisis. I've become much more conscious of the need to maintain good general health by getting enough sleep, eating a nutritious diet, and reducing stress and recreational drug use. I've also quit having sex with strangers. I have the

same amount of sex but with fewer people – and none of them are taking excessive risks with their health, either. I have not dropped fisting from my repertoire, I am simply more selective about whom I do it with. I have yet to be convinced that fisting exposes me or my partners to more danger than other kinds of sexual contact.

Why not identify as bi? That's a complicated question. For a while, I thought I was simply being biphobic. There's a lot of that going around in the gay community. Most of us had to struggle so hard to be exclusively homosexual that we resent people who don't make a similar commitment. A self-identified bisexual is saying, 'Men and women are of equal importance to me.' That's simply not true of me. I'm a Kinsey Five, and when I turn on to a man it's because he shares some aspect of my sexuality (like S/M or fisting) that turns me on *despite* his biological sex.

There's yet another twist. I have eroticized queerness, gayness, homosexuality – in men and women. The leatherman and the drag queen are sexy to me, along with the diesel dyke with greased-back hair, and the femme stalking across the bar in her miniskirt and high-heeled shoes. I'm a fag hag.

The gay community's attitude toward fag hags and dyke daddies has been pretty nasty and unkind. Fag hags are supposed to be frustrated, traditionally feminine, heterosexual women who never have sex with their handsome, slightly effeminate escorts – but desperately want to. Consequently, their nails tend to be long and sharp, and their lipstick runs to the bloodier shades of carmine. And They Drink. Dyke daddies are supposed to be beer-bellied rednecks who hang out at lesbian bars to sexually harass the female patrons. The nicer ones are suckers who get taken for drinks or loans that will never be repaid.

These stereotypes don't do justice to the complete range of modern faghaggotry and dyke daddydom. Today fag hags and dyke daddies are as likely to be gay themselves as the objects of their admiration.

I call myself a fag hag because sex with men outside the context of the gay community doesn't interest me at all. In a funny way, when two gay people of opposite sexes make it, it's still gay sex. No heterosexual couple brings the same experiences and attitudes to bed that we do. These generalizations aren't perfectly true, but more often than straight sex, gay sex assumes that the use of hands or the mouth is as important as genital-to-genital contact. Penetration is not assumed to be the only goal of a sexual encounter. When penetration does happen, dildos and fingers are as acceptable as (maybe even preferable to) cocks. During gay sex, more often than during straight sex, people think about things like lubrication and 'fit'. There's no such thing as 'foreplay'. There's good sex, which includes lots of touching, and there's bad sex, which is nonsensual. Sex roles are more flexible, so nobody is automatically on the top or the bottom. There's no stigma attached to

masturbation, and gay people are much more accepting of porn, fantasies, and fetishes.

And, most importantly, there is no intention to 'cure' anybody. I know that a gay man who has sex with me is making an exception and that he's still gay after we come and clean up. In return I can make an exception for him because I know he isn't trying to convert me to heterosexuality.

I have no way of knowing how many lesbians and gay men are less than exclusively homosexual. But I do know I'm not the only one. Our actual behaviour (as opposed to the ideology that says homosexuality means being sexual only with members of the same sex) leads me to ask questions about the nature of sexual orientation, how people (especially gay people) define it, and how they choose to let those definitions control and limit their lives.

During one of our interminable discussions in Samoa about whether or not to keep the group open to bi women, Gayle Rubin pointed out that a new, movement-oriented definition of lesbianism was in conflict with an older, bar-oriented definition. Membership in the old gay culture consisted of managing to locate a gay bar and making a place for yourself in bar society. Even today, nobody in a bar asks you how long you've been celibate with half the human race before they will check your coat and take your order for a drink. But in the movement, people insist on a kind of purity that has little to do with affection, lust, or even political commitment. Gayness becomes a state of sexual grace, like virginity. A fanatical insistence on one hundred percent exclusive, same-sex behaviour often sounds to me like superstitious fear of contamination or pollution. Gayness that has more to do with abhorrence for the other sex than with an appreciation of your own sex degenerates into a rabid and destructive separatism.

It is very odd that sexual orientation is defined solely in terms of the sex of one's partners. I don't think I can assume anything about another person simply because I've been told she or he is bisexual, heterosexual, or homosexual. A person's politics may be conservative, liberal, radical, or nonexistent, regardless of sexual orientation. In fact, a sexual orientation label tells you nothing about her or his sex life, for God's sake. There are lots of 'heterosexual' men who have plenty of anonymous sex with other men. There are celibate faggots and dykes. There are lesbians who've been married for thirty years and have six children. There are heterosexual women who frequently have sex with other women at swing parties. For many people, if a partner or a sexual situation has other desirable qualities it is possible to overlook the partner's sex. Some examples: a preference for group sex, for a particular socio-economic background, for paid sex, for S/M, for a specific age group, for a physical type or race, for anal or oral sex.

I no longer believe that there is some ahistorical entity called homosexuality. Sexuality is socially constructed within the limits imposed by physiology,

and it changes over time with the surrounding culture. There was no such thing as a Castro clone, a lesbian-feminist, or a Kinsey Six a century ago, and one hundred years from now these types will be as extinct as *Urnings*.

This is not to say that in a sexual utopia we would all be bisexual. There is nothing wrong with having sex exclusively with members of your own sex (or the opposite sex). I simply question some of the assumptions or attitudes that have grown around the fact that some people have an erotic preference for same-sex behaviour. Gay people have responded to persecution and homophobia by creating our own mythology about homosexuality. Whenever desire and behaviour conflict with rhetoric, it's time to re-examine the rhetoric. Some lesbians and gay men are having opposite-sex experiences. Why? What are they learning?

Gay male friends and lovers have taught me things that I would never have learned in the lesbian community. I can't exaggerate my admiration for the well-developed technology, etiquette, attitudes and institutions that gay men have developed to express their sexuality. (Remember, this is from the perspective of a woman who can't go to the baths every night or answer fifty sex ads in the 'Pink Pages'.) There's a basic attitude that sex is good in and of itself and that people ought to get what they want and treat each other well while they pursue it. That includes taking responsibility for preventing and treating sexually transmitted diseases. There's certainly room for improvement, but gay men are better educated about STDs and deal with them more promptly than typical heterosexual swingers or nonmonogamous lesbians.

Having good sex with men also allowed me to confront some of my fears about what it might 'mean' to be a lesbian. You know, all that stuff about dykes being too unattractive to get a man and all the psychobabble about penis envy. I now feel that having sex with women really is a choice for me. I know that sexually active women are in demand in any straight sex environment, and I could walk into most of those joints and take my pick. I just don't want what they have to offer. I no longer feel threatened by sexual come-ons from men. Once you've had vice-presidents of large corporations on your leash, straight men lose a lot of their power to intimidate you.

As for penis envy, I often think it would be nice to have a cock. I love fucking people, and because there's all this cultural meaning assigned to getting fucked with a cock (as opposed to fingers or a dildo), I'd like to have that sexual power. But I'm better with a strap-on dildo than most straight boys are at using their own cocks, and besides, I can change sizes. Once you've gotten two hands up somebody's ass, you aren't likely to feel jealous of a penis. Nobody's cock is *that* big. So, while I wouldn't mind having one, I think after I was done using it, I'd want to be able to take it off and leave it on a shelf. I don't want to have to be adjusting it in my pants all the time. And *I like* sitting down to pee. It makes it easier to read, and if you're outdoors, the grass tickles your heinie.

It's been very nice to lose my phobia about cocks. Our culture's phallic mythology has given the male sex organ so much highly charged symbolic significance that anything powerful is a phallic symbol. A lot of feminist antiporn ideology puts out the idea that cocks are ugly weapons that do nothing but defile or murder women. This symbolic system is very harmful. If cocks really have an inherent power to pollute and damage women, the only solution is to forcibly excise them from the male body. Instead I'd like to see women become more phallic (i.e., more powerful). Cocks seem more fragile than thermonuclear to me. There's a vulnerability about getting an erection that I'm really grateful I don't have to experience before I can give someone a night to remember.

The last and most painful thing I've learned from my contacts with gay men is how the war between the sexes looks from the other side. As embarrassing as it is, I finally had to concede that women engage in a lot of behaviour that is homophobic or sexist, and that it is women who enforce much of the sexual repression of the children they raise. This doesn't mean that I think women are equally responsible for their own oppression. Men get most of the goodies from the system and have the highest investment in keeping it running. But I no longer feel that all women are innocent victims, and all men are misogynist monsters.

The information flows both ways. I don't remember how many times I've explained to a gay man what rape is and why women, being physically smaller, feel less safety and mobility on the streets than men do. Then there's economics. Many gay men really don't understand what kinds of jobs women can readily obtain and what these jobs pay.

And of course they get to learn a lot about things like menstrual cycles and multiple orgasms. I can still hear the quaver in the voice of the first gay man who ever went down on me. 'Let's see,' he said bravely, as he gently spread my labia apart, 'where's that famous clitoris I've heard so much about?'

In the midst of the craziness, hostility, ignorance, and angst that plague human relations and sexuality, I feel entitled to whatever comfort or gratification I can find. I'll be looking for some more tonight, in the company of a girlfriend of mine. We have a date to tie up a furry little number and show him a good time. If it bothers you to envision the details, consider it in the abstract. Think of it as a fine example of lesbian/gay solidarity . . . just queers doing queer things together!