

NOTES

1. Leidholt, Dorchon. "Lesbian S/M: Sexual Radicalism or Reaction," *New Women's Times*, July/August, 1982.
2. See Faderman, Lillian. *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*. New York (Wm. Morrow & Co.: 1981).
3. Shainess, Natalie. "Psychology Constructs the Female," In *Sisterhood is Powerful: an Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*. Ed. Robin Morgan. New York (Vintage: 1970).
4. Harris, Marvin. *Cultural Materialism*.
5. Adrienne Rich, quoted by Dorchon Leidholt. See footnote 1.
6. Andrea Dworkin, also quoted by Dorchon Leidholt, *Ibid*.
7. *Op. Cit.*

Pornography By Women For Women, With Love

YES, THERE IS PORNOGRAPHY WRITTEN 100% BY WOMEN FOR A 100% female readership.

Surely I mean erotic?

Well, let's just say that to call something by one name when you like it and another when you don't is like those married ladies we all know who call what they do "making love" while what is done at singles bars is "shallow and trivial sex," and what homosexuals do is "perversion." (There are also those folks who call a work of art that supports the status quo "art" and works that question it "political.")

I tend to get restive at such honorifics, yet in the anti-pornography/anti-anti-pornography fight, "pornography" has become a loaded word, so for the purpose of this discussion we need a neutral one. Now that the title has caught your eye, and made some of you bristle, I'm going to talk about neither erotica nor pornography, but "sexual fantasy."

But first I must tell you about *Star Trek*.

In the late '60s, *Star Trek* brought into science fiction fandom a large number of women. Science fiction readers are very often amateur printers who publish their own non-profit fan magazines, or "zines," who attend science fiction conventions (and run them), and who know each other via all sorts of friendship networks, amateur press associations, and discussion groups. Pre-*Star Trek* fandom was roughly ninety percent male; *Star Trek* has moved the sex ratio much closer to equity, though nobody seems to know the exact figures. This influx of women is surprising in view of the fact that the *Star Trek* television show focused on the work relationship and friendship of three male characters: James T. Kirk, the ambitious, sometimes impulsive and emotional, rather *macho* Captain of the starship *Enterprise*; Spock, his First Officer and Science Officer, who is half human and half alien (from the planet Vulcan) and who is almost completely unemotional, logical, and self-controlled; and the ship's doctor, Leonard McCoy, a peppery, outspoken cuss, who serves as a foil to the other two, who (because of their very different personalities) serve as foils to each other. While the usual science fiction fanzine consists of personal essays, letters, gossip, Amateur Press Association news, book reviews, and philosophical or scientific speculation, the *Star Trek* zines (certainly the ones I'm going to consider) specialize in the fan writers' own stories and poems, which are based (often very minimally) on the TV show and now the two *Star Trek* movies. Within the *Star Trek* fan world lies a specialized sub-group of writers, editors, and readers who edit, write, and read fanzines called "K/S."

"K/S" zines are anthologies of fan-written stories about the relationship between Kirk and Spock. The authors rate their own stories G, R, or X, and their premise is that Spock and his Captain are lovers. This fact is often assumed in the G-rated work, very often talked about in the R-rated poems and stories, and the X-rated work shows sex between the

two characters again and again and again. (And again. Ditto the illustrations.)

And all of the editors, writers, and readers are women.¹

If your autonomic nervous system does the nip-ups mine does upon reading merely the premise of this material, it's quite irrelevant to talk about the beauty of friendship or the necessity of empathic compassion in human affairs. These are sexual fantasies. I've shared this material with eight women I know who like science fiction and *Star Trek*; they all shrieked with delight and turned bright red with embarrassment upon hearing only the *premise* of the K/S zines.

Briefly: not only are the two characters (Kirk and Spock) lovers (or in the process of becoming so; many of these are "first time" stories), they are usually bonded telepathically in what amounts to a life-long, monogamous marriage, which is often literally impossible for either party to dissolve. Sometimes the union of minds lasts only until death (often the death of one bondmate precipitates that of the other) but often it is assumed to last after it. Like Tristan and Iseult, the two are fated to love; even stories that don't specifically state this fact assume it. Anyone who knows the K/S literature knows that in a sense this love already exists—an assumption which imposes a kind of retroactive inevitability on the K/S "marriage," no matter whether the story chooses to comment on the inevitability of the relationship or not. Sometimes the stories show the death of one or the other or both, or separations (either final or temporary) or the impossibility of combining love with career. Moreover, even in the stories that end happily there is an extraordinary amount of frustration and delay; in these tales Spock's Vulcan notions of propriety (emotionlessness and pure logic) are used to postpone the declaration and consummation of the love, or the conflict between Spock's Vulcan and Human natures, or Kirk's pride, or everybody's scrupulousness and doubts and reasons not to—which

sometimes go on for sixty or seventy pages. These endless hesitations and yearnings resemble the manufactured misunderstandings of the female romance books (themselves sexual fantasies for women). In fact, so paralyzing are these worries and scruples and hesitations to the two characters involved that over and over again the lovers must be pushed together by some force outside themselves. Somebody is always bleeding or feverish or concussed or mutilated or amnesiac or what-have-you in these tales. Either both are starving to death on a strange planet, in which case they can at least die in each others' arms, or they are (temporarily) immured in a cave and Spock, concussed, thinks he's dreaming and acts on his passion for Kirk, or Kirk is suffering from brain-burn and is reduced, mentally, to childhood, in which condition he innocently makes sexual advances to Spock, who is horrified, not by Kirk's innocent actions, but by his own response.

In short, the stories, over and over, set up situations in which the two are not responsible. Other (R- and G-rated) stories present various beatings, blindings, and mutilations which necessitate not only intense emotional intimacy, but also one character's touching and holding the other with an eroticism only lightly veiled in the story (and probably not veiled at all in the readers).

So far the material sounds like the irreverent description by two of my friends: "Barbara Cartland in drag."² But if that's all K/S stories are, why don't the women who read them and write them simply read romances and be done with it? Why the "drag"? Why project the whole process on to two male science fiction characters?

First of all, K/S is not about two men. Kirk is a man, to be sure, but Spock isn't; he's a half-human alien. Susan Gubar has speculated in a recent essay³ that when women s.f. writers write about aliens they are very often writing about

women. Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana Veith also suggest (brilliantly, I think) that although Spock is not literally female, his alienness is a way of "coding" into the K/S fantasies that their subject is not a homosexual love affair between two men, but love and sex as women want them, whether with a man or with another woman. Lamb and Veith cite many more details which support this view: briefly, that Spock's reproductive biology is cyclical and uncontrollable, that although "a prince among his own people," Spock is just another Fleet officer in a Federation ruled by Human men, that he is isolated both from Vulcans and from Humans (as non-traditional women are alienated from both traditional women and from men), that he has no command ambitions, that he often gets Kirk out of difficulties caused by Kirk's impulsiveness and rashness (qualities Spock does not and cannot afford to display), that his Vulcan and Human sides are at war, that Vulcan is matrilineal, that he must be self-controlled and guarded, and so on. (The argument is much more detailed and convincing than I can mention here.) I would add that the lovers come from literally different worlds (the stories constantly emphasize the difference in their natures and backgrounds), and that the sexuality in the stories is only nominally male. (There are betraying details: the characters leap into anal intercourse with a blithe lack of lubrication that makes it clear that the authors are thinking of vaginal penetration, both approach orgasm with a speeded-up intensity of pelvic thrusting, and in many stories there is multiple orgasm.)

Although Spock encodes many female characteristics, what is striking in these stories (again I agree with Lamb and Veith) is the androgyny of both characters, the way responsibility, initiative, activity, passivity, strength and weakness shift constantly from one to the other. Spock, for

example, is the "female" alien, but he is also physically stronger than Kirk, and is unemotional and an expert in scientific logic, all characteristics we associate with masculinity, while Kirk, his superior in the Federation hierarchy of command, and also the "tomcat" many-times-lover, has the emotionality and impulsivity we consider "feminine." And so on.

As Lamb and Veith point out, the "marriage" of these two is in many ways ideal: neither has to give up "his" work in the world; both have adventure *and* love; telepathy provides lifelong commitment and the means of making such a union unbreakable and extremely intimate; and while both partners are "masculine" in the sense of being active in the world, they yet provide tenderness and nurturance for each other in a very "feminine" way. And the sex is marvelous.⁴

And yet—

If you ask "Why two males?" I think the answer is that of eighteenth-century grammarians to questions about the masculine-preferred pronoun: "Because it is more noble." Certainly the TV series made the Kirk-Spock friendship a matter of real respect and real love, in contrast with Kirk's absolutely *pro forma* affairs with various women. Lamb and Veith simply state that no one (including themselves) can imagine a man and woman having the same multiplex, worthy, androgynous relationship, or the same completely intimate commitment.

Camilla Decarnin's "Interviews with Five Fagging Women" in *Heresies* No. 12 have almost the same point to make. "A faghag is a woman, whether lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual, who devotes an important part of her social, affectional, or sexual attention . . . to homosexual men and who finds them erotically interesting because of their homosexuality. This attention need not be overt; it can take the form of fantasies." Decarnin's explanation of the motive for

this behavior is almost identical with my explanation of K/S: "the woman recognizes in the faggot a socio-erotic position she herself would like to hold, as the recognized peer *and* the lover of a male, a position impossible for women in sexist culture to secure."⁵

One of K/S's best writers says, "The problem is [women who] don't like their own bodies enough, they can't see themselves saving the universe once a week, they can't let their own sexuality out without becoming dependents or victims. So Kirk and Spock do it for them." She notes also, "the sex in Trek fiction (written by women for women) is female sexuality. . . . The readers . . . want to be strong, beautiful, complete adults who choose to love without limits, to trust utterly and never have their trust betrayed. . . ."^{*}

I agree with both writers. It's very, very difficult even for art, with its complexity and thoughtfulness, its inevitable alloy of reflection, its complicated evocations of emotion, to transcend the culture's givens. To do so in sexual fantasy (necessarily pretty primitive) is, I think, totally impossible. The K/S sex scenes are usually just as thin, just as repetitive, just as stylized, just as interchangeable, just as full of magic words, as those of male pornography, and just as anti-art.

What! (says the reader). All that tenderness and empathy and commitment and nurturance and scrupulous delay merely pornographic? On the contrary, the superiority of female sexual fantasy is proved by precisely those things: The lovers' personal interest in each others' minds, not only each others' bodies, the tenderness, the refusal to rush into a relationship, the exclusive commitment one to the other.

^{*} For legal reasons—these writers and editors are open to legal action for violation of copyright, even though their work is very different from the TV and movie plays of Star Trek—I will not name any of the names of the women quoted or list their fanzines. I *am* quoting real people, though. Honest.

Is all this merely a sexual turn-on?

The subject gets very difficult here, but what I'm trying to make clear is that fantasy isn't simply an attenuated version of reality, and the same imagination that provides the tender loving care (in the extremely common "hurt-comfort" scenes for instance) also provides the battering, mutilation, and torture that are the pretexts for the nurturance.⁶ In fact, the nurturance in these stories is quite unreal, just as the misunderstandings, the scrupulousnesses, and the worries that keep the lovers from declaring themselves, are pure ritual, manufactured for the occasion. By "unreal" I don't mean simply glamorized or idealized but *totally unlike reality*; if your beloved appears at your door bleeding and battered in real life, you probably don't feel a rush of erotic *tendresse*. In fact, once you've called for an ambulance, covered said beloved with a blanket, made sure the patient's head is lower than the patient's feet, and administered what medical help you can, you are far more likely to go into your bathroom and throw up. The nurturance in these tales is like Bette Davis's resolution in *Jezebel* to care for Henry Fonda, who has yellow fever, while she looks heavenward (in a very becoming gown) and the sweetness of a thousand violins swells up on the sound-track. Nowhere do you see, for example, Fonda vomiting blood or Davis ugly with lack of sleep or resentful of her never-ending, gruelling contact with such romantic objects as full bedpans.

I do not believe that the supposed female virtues of the K/S material (and that of similar female fantasy, like the romances) are morally privileged—though some feminists talk as if this were so. Rather we have—ingeniously, tenaciously, and very creatively—sexualized our female situation and training, and made out of the restrictions of the patriarchy our own sexual cues.

For example, women wait. Women are (quite realistically) wary of heterosexual activity. Thus the endless analyses

of motives and scruples for pages and pages, a delay that is in itself erotically arousing, since it's a sexualization of what is or was presented to us as "the real thing" for women. (Decarnin has suggested, in correspondence, that this waiting be taken metaphorically, as related to women's need for long "foreplay" in order to achieve orgasm.) Women must not initiate sexual activity. Thus the enormous plot conventions which finally free the lovers to be sexual, in which that lack of responsibility is itself exciting, an intensifier of arousal, vulnerability, and emotion made out of condition. Thus the "hurt-comfort" material, which pictures nurturance as a lot of open sexual touching and strong emotional intimacy (generally in the stories which lack explicit sex) is (again) something that has become a sexual cue, not anything resembling real help or real illness. Thus also the material about the death of one or the other or both (so ubiquitous, I'm told, that editors now refuse to accept it!), the meditations at the graveside, the grief that is somehow beautiful and exciting, not painful, all of it delicious. And let's not pride ourselves on the monogamy, either; this is another patriarchal imposition which women have sexualized—in fact, I believe it can be seen in the K/S material (as in the romances) as a metaphor for intensity. The telepathic union can also be read as a way of expressing intensity and completeness, not duration, but here too sexual expression waits on "love" while desire, by itself, is not enough. Again I think we're dealing with a sexualization of the feminine condition. What was, historically, the female terror of unmarried pregnancy, the main enforcer of women's anti-sexual training, has here been made into something sexually arousing in itself. That is, in the K/S world, *the myth of romantic love works*.

But that's not all that's in the material. In many ways the K/S world is a great advance over the standard romances. For one thing, there is explicit sexuality instead of the old

Romances' one-kiss-in-the-moonlight. And I believe Lamb and Veith see rightly when they describe the androgyny of the relationship, the impossibility (despite the coding into the Spock character of so many female traits) of assigning gender roles to either partner, ever—obviously this is very different from the romances, in which a woman's problems in life are solved for her by a dominant male. The K/S insistence that the characters be first-class human beings is inevitably compromised by the social necessity of awarding that V.I.P. status only to men.

To me one important conclusion we can draw from these stories is that sexual fantasy can't be taken at face value. Another is that no sexual cues are morally privileged (though some kinds of sexual *behavior* certainly are) since sexualizing any kind of behavior drastically changes the meaning of that behavior. Translated into real life, the "hurt-comfort" theme of K/S would simply be pernicious, from the woman who can do sex only under the guise of pity, to the lover who wants to keep her beloved dependent and powerless, in which condition she can then "love" the beloved. What excites in fantasy is both far more exaggerated than real life and not the same as in real life; that is, fantasy isn't just a vicarious substitute for real experience; its meaning as experience becomes changed when it's made into fantasy. Without understanding the rather complicated context of the fantasy, one "reads" it literally—like the woman friend of mine (new to *Star Trek*) who said in disgust that K/S was about rape and power games. This is simply not true in terms of the genre. In fact, the story that evoked this response is a classic K/S tale in which Spock goes into *pon farr** again after pages and pages of agonized misunderstandings, thus (thank goodness!) providing a way for the lovers finally to declare themselves and make out

* A state of heat in which he must "mate" or die. Kirk must, of course, offer himself to save Spock's life.

like crazy.

What seems to be happening in sexual fantasy is that any condition imposed on or learned with sexuality is capable of becoming sexualized, either as sex or a substitute for sex or as an indispensable condition of it. Such a process is certainly at work in the K/S universe. Yet it's perfectly clear to me that K/S writers and readers don't literally wish to become male any more than they literally want their dear ones to bleed and die in their arms or to die with their lovers. What they do want is sexual intensity, sexual enjoyment, the freedom to choose, a love that is entirely free of the culture's whole discourse of gender and sex roles, and a situation in which it is safe to let go and allow oneself to become emotionally and sexually vulnerable. The literal conditions and cues of the K/S world, far from being impeccably moral, are sexualizations of situations and behavior K/S fans did not choose and quite likely wouldn't want in reality. Moreover they are situations and behavior that are absolutely antithetical to getting sexual and emotional satisfaction in the real world, which fact at least some of the K/S readers and writers know perfectly well.

I'm convinced, after reading through more than fifty volumes of K/S material (most of it "X-rated") that only those for whom a sexual fantasy "works," that is, those who are aroused by it, have a chance of telling us to what particular set of conditions that fantasy speaks, and can analyze how and why it works and for whom. Sexual fantasy materials are like icebergs; the one-tenth that shows above the surface is no reliable indicator of the size or significance of the whole thing. Sexual fantasy that doesn't arouse is boring, funny, or repellent, and unsympathetic outsiders trying to decode these fantasies (or any others) will make all sorts of mistakes.

I've spent so much time on this material partly because it's the only sexual fantasy I know of written without the inter-

position of interests that are political or commercial.⁸ In some ways these stories stick to the old Romance formula (I find this aspect of K/S destructive, although it too can be read metaphorically) but in others they put forth an emphatic claim to experience that radically transcends the conventional. These readers and writers want a sexual relationship that does not require their abandoning freedom, adventure, and first-class humanity (these are points I've taken from Lamb and Veith), they want sexual enjoyment that is intense, whole, and satisfying, and they want intense emotionality. They also want (and I find this absolutely fascinating and aesthetically very valuable) to create images of male bodies as objects of desire. One of the worst things forced on us in the name of "femininity" is passivity, a distortion created by the heterosexual institution and a guarantee of sexual and human paralysis. The writers and readers of these fantasies can do what most of us can't do in reality (certainly not heterosexual reality), that is they can act sexually at their own pace and under conditions they themselves have chosen. The K/S stories, ritualized as they are, are the only literature I've ever seen in which women do describe male beauty—not "masculinity," mind you, but the passive, acted-upon glories of male flesh. Some of this is very well done, e.g., the lovely convention that Spock, when sexually aroused, *purrs* like a giant cat, and Kirk praising his lover's alien genitals as a beautiful flower, an orchid. (Shades of Judy Chicago!)

Until recently I assumed, along with many other feminists, that "art" is better than "pornography" just as "erotica" is one thing and "pornography" another; and just as "erotica" surpasses "pornography," so "art" surpasses "erotica." I think we ought to be very suspicious of these distinctions insofar as they are put forward as moral distinctions. I've said elsewhere that material presented outright as a sexual turn-on and nothing else can be a lot less harmful

than material that is presented as if it were a thoughtful and complex depiction of real life. One of the great virtues of the K/S stories is that there is far less misery and death in the X-rated stories, by and large, than there is in the G- and R-rated ones. I think we are probably right in seeing sexual repression as a very important source of violence in the patriarchy—though we must at once remember that we're talking about all spontaneous pleasure, not just sex, and about quality, not just quantity. (Elizabeth Fisher puts forward this idea in *Woman's Creation*.)⁹ Wilhelm Reich (with whom Fisher agrees) also said flatly that if you lift sexual inhibitions part-way (which is certainly the situation today, with the mass media force-feeding us plastic sex which is not only limited as to color, age, gender, and "flawless" personal appearance, but which is still very rigid about tactility and the real nature of real human sexuality and emotionality), you get sadism—by which Reich did *not* mean S & M (he did not discuss it at all in *The Sexual Revolution*) but rape, violence, brutality, and callousness.¹⁰

If female sex fantasies can't be taken at face value, maybe male fantasies can't either. Books like *Punished Slut*¹¹ (I have fifteen S & M paperbacks on my desk and am wading through them) don't excite me, so perhaps I shouldn't speculate about them. But it seems to me that such fantasies may be a kind of half-way house *out of* violence rather than into it. This isn't the common feminist view, but I think the comparison holds: if female K/S fantasies are complex and multi-dimensional and if one of their achievements is the reversal of women's substitution of romance for explicit sexuality, then (if I read them correctly) male fantasies of violence, either accompanying sexual activity, serving as a precondition for it, or as a cue to it, are attempts to partly undo the violence in the "respectable" part of the culture, where violence has been *substituted for* sexual enjoyment. I believe that movies like "A Clockwork Orange" or "Apoca-

lypse Now" are far more dangerous than *The Sadistic Sisters of Saxony*.¹² The latter are *at least* sexual. I agree with Fisher and Reich that quality counts, and by "sex" I mean pleasure that isn't joyless, furtive, perfunctory, unspontaneous, forced, guilty, partial, or trivialized (or made into a plastic goodie, either). I'm convinced now that the patriarchy damages male sexuality just as it does ours, though perhaps less than ours and certainly not in the same way. (Gay men don't seem to me exempt from the process; they're raised in the same culture and educated much the same.) Feminists who live apart from men (as one heterosexual feminist told me) forget how limited and foolish most of them are, and how thoroughly they are controlled by the culture's expectations. From the viewpoint of the female situation, I think we sometimes see men's sexual freedom as greater than it is, because it is in fact greater than our own. If you see male freedom as absolute, or close to absolute, then male fantasies of sexual violence will look, in a sense, worse than they are. We know that women don't want to be raped; episodes in female fantasies that look like rapes really are something else, *i.e.*, Will somebody, something, for heaven's sake, enable me to *act*? I think male pornography in which a woman is "raped" (*i.e.*, made to experience sexual pleasure against her will) may be struggling with a similar problem of permission—not that the man can't initiate sexual activity, but that he can't let go while doing it. And without letting go, self-abandonment, whatever you call the opposite of self-controlled and rigid behavior, sexual activity will be minimal and partial.

I've always thought that patriarchal male sexuality must be a rather difficult business. To over-simplify: A partner's hostility or boredom is ordinarily a real turn-off—and yet this is exactly the situation under patriarchy, where so many women are not interested, not excited, not participants, and not happy. Yet men must penetrate and ejacu-

late if there are to be any babies—and so the problem for patriarchy (whether you think of this as a one-time invention or a constant process) is to construct a male sexuality which can function in the face of a woman's non-cooperation or outright fear and hostility. Of course such a sexuality is, in fact, common. It is also furtive, guilty, miserable, unspontaneous, forced, unfree, and minimally sensual. No wonder Philip Slater writes about the perfunctoriness of sex for so many men ("the quicker it is done with, the better") and maintains that women's complaints ("he's only interested in sex, in my body") are missing the point: "A man who behaves this way is not interested in sex, either. . . . he is interested only in releasing tension." Slater interprets male fantasies of rape as twofold: "First, it expresses the common masculine wish for some kind of superpotency" (notice: not superreactivity!) and "it is *men* who have bottled up feelings and long to burst their controls. But since this yearning endangers the whole of our culture it cannot be allowed direct expression and is projected onto women. . . . the emotional specialists in our society."¹³

It sounds odd to say that men's fantasies of rape have their roots in a desire to be overwhelmed and acted on, but I think this may be at least part of the truth. Women, after all, fantasize "rape" as the solution to issues of permission and forced passivity; why shouldn't men (who must deal with the issues of forced activity) use the other side of the same fantasy?

What frightens me is not those sleazies on my desk (in one of which a woman puts needles through a man's nipples). It's the mainstream American habit of substituting violence *for* sex and presenting the result as "real life" and, even, Heaven help us!, "decency." In the one *Star Trek* TV show in which Spock went into *pon farr*, the first twenty minutes titillated female America with the promise of the controlled, logical Vulcan engaging in uncontrolled sexual

behavior (a consummation greatly to be wished). But the second twenty minutes gave us, not sexuality (which the K/S writers know perfectly well ought to be there and which they do put in their stories) but a good old (and very disappointing) American fight—between Kirk and Spock! I certainly prefer sex. Think also of “Klute” in which Jane Fonda as a call-girl (aha! bad) is threatened by one man and saved by another. And for a particularly nasty example, try the Hitchcock Hour’s 30-second advertisement of a few years ago: a montage of different women screaming in terror. Or the plastic cheesecake of *Playboy*, as drearily fake as the expensive stereos and fancy cars the readers probably don’t have either. Get stuck on those photos of women and your sexual failure is assured; for one thing, women don’t come airbrushed.

Well, I’m speculating. What I’m sure of is that we do not have nearly enough knowledge about female sexuality. For example, “masochistic” rape fantasies have bedeviled the women’s movement for a decade *as if they were a literal representation of what women want*, when they are quite obviously nothing of the kind. I’m sure there are female S & M “tops” who like S & M because they’re into power over others—but I also have two friends, one of whom still does S & M and one who dropped it non-traumatically, and they like(d) it because they found it a *sexual* (not characterological) turn-on. Similarly, there may be women in the K/S network who are really turned on by a lover’s illness or mutilation—but I doubt it, since what the writers obviously want is not twenty-four-hour-a-day nurse duty or people really bleeding and dying in their arms, but the sexual turn-on that the fantasy of touching and holding the lover gives them.

Fifteen S & M paperbacks is probably no representative sample, nor have I read all the K/S fanzines. Women probably read romances in much greater numbers than the K/S

readers anyway. (About 125 zines have been published since 1975-6, in editions of 500-1500.) Yet in all these stories I’ve found a lot less to complain about than I can find simply by turning on my TV at random on any evening at all. I don’t believe that men are taught to be violent by commercialized sexual fantasy; there are far too many worse teachers around. If anything, commercial, male-oriented sexual fantasy is (I suspect) a half-assed attempt to undo masculinity training, rather than the reverse. I don’t want to idealize it, but it’s certainly less offensive to me than (for example) “The Short and Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” Hemingway’s macho-misogynist short story which was taught to me (to us!) as “great literature,” full of “eternal truth,” and so on.

Many feminist women seem only to be following their gut reactions in hating male sexual fantasy and spending so much of their energies on it. I agree that it’s important to know one’s gut reactions, but before we make the jump from “It offends me” to “Therefore it is bad,” to “Therefore we must fight it” we need to know a lot more than we do.

I hope I haven’t offended anyone by calling K/S “sexual fantasy.” *If it weren’t, I wouldn’t pay any attention to it.* I love the stuff, I love the way it turns me on, and I love its attempt to establish a very radical androgyny in its characters. So many feminist creations of Amazons and Goddess-worshippers and so on simply don’t work—most are very thin—but *K/S works*, if you know and like *Star Trek*, and (as I mentioned) it is the only sexual fantasy by women for women that’s produced without the control or interposition of censorship by commercial booksellers or the interposition of political intent by writers or editors. It’s also a labor of love for the women involved, since it is (and must be, because of the possibility of lawsuit) non-profit. I find it raw, blatantly female, and very valuable and exciting, a judgment I owe to Lamb and Veith, since they had the

courage of their reactions and continued to study this material for close to six months, while I merely got embarrassed (because, I think, the stuff was so female and my response to it so intense) and hid it away—in the closet, of all places! I know now that it does not mean what it seems to mean—that we don't like sex except in committed relationships, that we think about "love" all the time, that we are sentimental, that we are altruistic, or any other sexist litany of our supposed virtues. What is so striking in K/S is the raw sexual and emotional starvation the writers are expressing so openly—and the attempt to picture a totally androgynous situation, *not* "Brigitte Bardot scotch-taped to John Wayne" (as I once called "androgyny") but a situation in which questions about who is the man and who is the woman, who's active and who's passive, even who's who, *cannot even be asked*. This is very heady stuff. Instead of presenting us with a couple who are of different sexes but the same species, K/S creates a couple who are of different species, but the same sex. I've already mentioned why that sex is pictured as "male"—and what subverts that "maleness" and makes it ambiguous—but the stuff works (at least on some of us) as fantasy. Such statements cannot be made in realistic literature, and one of the crucial things the K/S material has done for me is to make me glad I write science fiction and fantasy. And now, if you will excuse me, I must go back to my ancient Vulcan castle with the carved bedposts where I have left my two characters, Guess Who and Guess Which, in a very dramatic and painful situation. In fact, I left Spock preparing to beat Kirk, whom he has bought as a slave in an alternate universe in which violent Vulcan (Spock's planet) never reformed. Of course the point of the whole scene is that Spock can't bear to do any such thing because he is madly in love with Kirk. So he smites his forehead with his hand (or some similar gesture) and rushes out to agonize.

Meanwhile Kirk (who's of course in love with Spock) agonizes too, but in the opposite direction, so to speak.

They will do this for a long as I can contrive, and then they will make great music together, also as long as I can stretch the scene out.

Yum.

And so on.

Author's Notes

An editor: "It is pornography for women produced by women." Another notes that readers "fear their own interest in K/S will be interpreted as lesbian by friends and family."

About the "hurt-comfort theme," a writer friend of mine writes, about her playing at adventure with a friend (both were preadolescent): "An increasingly regular feature of this business was that characters who were sworn and bitter enemies were continually forced into situations in which one . . . would be wounded in some specifically painful manner and the other would grudgingly but lovingly, take care of him."

In "Big Brother is Trekking You" by James Wolcott (*Village Voice*, 2/2/76) Wolcott describes "Star Trek Lives!" by Jacqueline Lichternberg, Sondra Marshak, and Joan Winston (a commercially published book): ". . . these women have their libidinal thermostats turned up pretty high . . . [Fans'] stories . . . are sexually charged-up. . . the return of the runaway boys on the biggest damn raft you can imagine. . . 'Star Trek' also hooks the women by

the sexual tension beneath that buddy-buddiness. . . . Spock becomes a parody of the unreachable woman. He's practically an extra-terrestrial Garbo." (Wolcott's "raft" refers to Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel*, in which Fiedler derives a theory of American fiction from American novelists' male pair-bonding. Lamb and Veith also begin their first paper by citing Fiedler.)

A newspaper-catalogue of media fiction *in toto* (of which *Star Trek* is only a part) lists twenty-two kinds of media fiction, from *The Chronicles of Amber* to *The Wild Wild West*. The list includes *Dracula*, *Battle Star Galactica*, *Sherlock Holmes* (!), *MASH*, and *Hill Street Blues*. One story I have read from *Starsky and Hutch* media fiction, as well as one story I've managed to find from *Magnum, P.I.* media fiction both treat the male pair as Spock and Kirk are treated in K/S fiction, *i.e.* the two are lovers, yet somehow without being homosexuals. (There is no homosexual sub-culture presented, no awareness of being derogated, no friends or family, absolutely no gay friends, no gay politics, and so on. The men are masculine, even macho figures—and somehow they are lovers without ever thinking of what they do as "homosexuality." I would guess that other male-bonding pairs are treated in the same way in other media fiction.)

NOTES

1. Several K/S editors give these statistics. Moreover, only one piece of fiction or poetry out of forty volumes bears the statement that it was written by a man. The zines themselves always refer to writers, readers, or editors as "she."
2. Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana Veith, "The Romantic Myth and Transcendence: a Feminist Interpretation of the Kirk/Spock Bond," Conference on Fantasy, Boca Raton, FLA, 1982.
3. Susan Gubar, "C.L. Moore and the Conventions of Women's Science Fiction," *S.F. Studies*, 7:1, March 1980, pp. 16-25.
4. Lamb and Veith, unpublished.
5. Camilla Decarnin, "Interviews with Five Faghagging Women," *Heresies*, No. 12, III:4, 1981, p. 10.
6. In one self-parody (K/S writers enjoy such pieces and write them surprisingly often) the two alternately beat each other in the head with a shovel, and then say, "Let me be with you in your hour of pain," and similar statements. The self-parody seems to me to be a tongue-in-cheek recognition of the necessity for hurt *in order* to show comfort.
7. Monk's Secret Library, 1983.
8. I am thinking of Samois, *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M*, Up Press (Palo Alto, California: 1981). The purpose of the book, stated in several places, is explicitly political, *as well as* erotic.
9. Elizabeth Fisher, *Woman's Creation*, (New York: Doubleday) 1980.
10. Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution: Toward a Self-Governing Character Structure*, 4th ed. revised 1969 (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux) 1971.
11. *Punished Slut* (no location: Dame) 1980.
12. *The Sadistic Sisters of Saxony*, Monks Secret Library, (New York: dame distributors) 1980.
13. Philip Slater, "Sexual Adequacy in America," in *Intellectual Digest*, November 1973, pp. 17-20.

Pornography and the Doubleness of Sex for Women

REMEMBER UNCLE MAX? EVERY WOMAN I KNOW HAS AN Uncle Max. Say you're fourteen, at a family Passover celebration in a room so crowded that changing seats is almost impossible, and Uncle Max (who's your great-uncle, really, in his 60s) has suddenly begun telling you how much he loves you (he's never had two words for you before), how wonderful you are, how you're his favorite niece, and meanwhile he keeps kissing you sloppily on the cheek (or the mouth) and holding the back of your neck with one hand while he strokes your forearm with the other. You manage to get up and make your way to the kitchen, where you indignantly tell your mother what's happened and she says, looking past you with unfocused eyes, "I'm sure you must be mistaken, dear." You (angrily): I'm fourteen, not a baby, and I know what's happening, &c.

Mother: Well, I'm sure it's only your imagination, but if it bothers you, just sit somewhere else.

Once I had remembered Uncle Max (he came up in a discussion between me and a friend in which we finally realized we were talking past each other) all sorts of memories began to come back, like the fifteen-year-old male stranger at a party when I was twelve who had grabbed my wrist hard enough to leave bruises, dragged me to a couch, and sat there kissing me while his fingers dug into my flesh, like the boy (he must have been fourteen) who said to twelve-year-old me in high school, "Hey, baby, your pants are showing," like my mother's telling me in a strangely embarrassed voice when I was going to summer camp, "Remember, boys can't get pregnant." Or my friend's mother who, upon hearing on the radio that a woman had been beaten up in the subway at three A.M., said, "No decent woman would be out there alone at that hour."

Are there more? Oh, yes, lots more, from the constant obligato of Don't go out alone after dark, Don't go into "bad" parts of town, Don't let boys go too far, Don't get "in trouble," Don't "get caught," Don't ever visit a boy's apartment, Don't stay out after midnight, Don't go to a local doctor for contraception or you'll be expelled (this was in college), to another male fifteen-year-old who at camp said as he passed the counselors' bungalows, "Menopause Alley," to the girl friends who kept worrying aloud if "he" would respect them if they went "all the way" and the friend, with whom I conducted a little theater in our twenties, who came out of the women's room, saying in tones of intense relief, "Thank God it's come." When I was twelve or thirteen at my parents' New Year's Eve party I was pulled out on the living-room floor by our family dentist, to dance. Mind you, *nobody* likes a dentist, but this one (a friend of the family) never completed a filling in less than an hour, and didn't ever let me know about novocaine. (I was sixteen before I

found out that there was such a thing as local anaesthesia.) This was the detestable, incompetent boob who insisted on dancing with me. I hated it and I hated him so I shrunk away. He pulled me ostentatiously close and grinned.

And everybody laughed.

My mother laughed. My father laughed. The guests laughed. And in my head a voice said: *Come on now, this isn't serious, You're oversensitive; after all, he didn't rape you, did he? It's all in fun. Don't be a prude* (and so on).

I hear this voice still. I suspect most women do. It chided me in college when I solved the conflict between being an artist and being a woman, when the choices presented to me and my friends were: 1) Marry so you can have sex in safety, and thereby prove your inferiority and vulnerability, 2) stay celibate and go crazy (it was an article of faith then that all spinsters were "sexually repressed" and therefore diseased, 3) have sex outside marriage and die of an illegal abortion, or 4) become a Lesbian—a state so unthinkable and unspeakable, so utterly absent from anyone's view of reality that it probably didn't exist—but was, of course, unutterably criminal, insane, and destructive at the same time.

Shall I go on? Shall I mention the movies and plays in which "non-sexy" women were ridiculed? Or the ones in which ultra-"sexy" Marilyn Monroe was ridiculed? (My, some folks are hard to please!) Or what Erica Jong calls the King Kong school of art? As late as the mid-seventies a young male poet swaggered on the stage at a University where I taught, and prefaced his first poem by grinning and saying, "Women don't like this one." Earlier, in the late 60s, at the same institution, poetry readings inevitably included hairy young men who exclaimed, "Fuck you, America! I want to ram my cock up your asshole!" At which several women students whom I had carefully encouraged to attend, got up and left, surmising quite correctly that their

own poetry—and their presences—were not welcome.

I remember a discussion in the mid-seventies in which all the group (including me) said that their parents had been liberal and honest about sex, whereupon the group leader said, "Did they ever tell you about your clitoris?" and we all looked at one another and were struck dumb. A close friend of mine was dragged (at age eleven) into the boys' bathroom by a group of boys; they handled her breasts, and when she started to cry, they told her she had to like it because she had big boobs and women with big boobs "liked it." And there were the exquisitely sensitive young men of my 'teens, artists all, who chided us young women for not being free, beautiful, and spontaneous, by which they meant putting out for them—this in an era when abortion was illegal!—and one who said to me scornfully only a few years ago when I asked for his company to the subway (in New York), "I didn't think you were like all those *other* women."

If I stop now, don't believe there isn't more. There's much more, like the psychoanalyst of my twenties telling a woman who had almost been raped, "But you must have known there was something wrong with him. Why did you want to punish yourself?" (This was a woman who'd attended the singles dance, where she met this man, at the psychoanalyst's express suggestion.)

If I cite so much from my own life, it's because my life has been in no way exceptionally or spectacularly bad. I wasn't battered as a child, wasn't raped by father, stepfather, or mother's boyfriend, didn't have an illegal abortion, didn't run away from home to find that the only way I could keep eating was street hustling, didn't get pregnant while unmarried (or while married either) and never went through the pressures of outright rebellion against gender norms. I wasn't seduced or abandoned or beaten up, and I wasn't even caught masturbating—except once, come to think of it, when my parents told me I might "hurt myself" (I knew this

was a lie)—and oh yes, they caught me playing doctor with friends at the age of five and solemnly gave me the same warning. And, my word, I've forgotten the psychoanalyst I saw in my twenties (for symptoms of a chronic physical disease which was diagnosed fifteen years later) who told me that I envied the male penis. (I was willing to believe this, but hadn't the faintest notion of what to do about it.)

Perhaps the worst thing about our sexual training as women (if I've been citing heterosexual incidents it's because the vast majority of women, Lesbian or not, are brought up in heterosexual families and learn their lessons about sex from heterosexual standards and situations) is the enormous social pressure not to see or name the kinds of incidents I've been describing: to view them as trivial, to discount them, to accept them "tolerantly," to pretend to enjoy them or find them funny or simply to deny that they exist or existed or, worst of all, to deny that they are painful and out of our control.

Take a woman raised like this (and we are all raised like this, more or less) and expose her to arguments about "sexual liberation" and her response is likely to be that men are taking too many liberties with women as it is. What I need (she is likely to say) is safety and respect, not any more "liberation." Expose such a woman to pictures of women meant to turn men on, and she will—quite simply—become enraged. Show her *anything* designed to titillate men sexually, whether violent or not, and you will rouse the envy and rage of a whole lifetime—and it is utterly enraging, although the envy is not at all the envy of concrete sexual acts. Rather it's the envy of men's freedom, the envy of those who've been battered into choicelessness and silence for those who are entitled to speak and make choices.

Sexuality for men (including gay men, as far as I can see) is by and large a realm of free choice, limited to be sure by practical considerations, but not limited by the very fact of

being male. Men are "entitled to" sex.

Sexuality for women is a realm of helplessness and unpleasantness, in which bad and painful things are done to you that you can't control, in which you must "go along" with male behavior even when you dislike it, in which you are not entitled to your own wishes and your own enjoyment, and haven't even the privilege of seeing or naming the above facts. In the light of this truth, the anti-pornography movement is not only understandable; it's absolutely necessary. A society that claims that women's real trouble is "sexual repression" (whatever that is) badly needs to be enlightened. We aren't sexually repressed; we've been sexually battered and sexually brutalized. It's about time this particular vileness were exposed for what it is, once and for all.

But that's not the whole truth.

I also remember passionate "friendships" with girls and women, especially the friend who wanted me to kiss her and hold her. I remember necking in the front seat of a car at sixteen with a young man I'd lusted after for weeks, and being gloriously, sexually high for days. I remember endless crushes on movie stars, mostly male. I remember (with enormous pleasure) Mae West's "She Done Him Wrong," and some blazingly incandescent experiments with masturbation in my twenties. I remember coming out of a Gay Liberation Front lecture at thirty-three into the most luminously beautiful June twilight I've ever seen, and saying to myself over and over, that Lesbianism was real, that people really did it, and that I wasn't the only one and I hadn't invented it. I remember desire so pure and intense that it was almost enough just to feel it, I remember touching the delicate and precise helmet of bone under a beloved's fair, fluffy hair, I remember a New Year's Eve party where grown-up women went about playing wonderful kissing games, like kids. I remember, years later, another car

(cars seem to be some kind of adolescent American theme) and a curly-haired young man with a delicious amber moustache.

I think that for women sexuality is inescapably double. Even women whose sexual education has been horrendous (for example, those who are raped repeatedly by adult male relatives) have also to deal with some positive feeling, much of it sexual; even women whose experiences have been much more positive than typical cannot entirely escape this culture's negatives. I suspect that even Lesbians who've never had so much as a heterosexual thought must still deal in some fashion with the tangled mess sexism makes of sex.* Not to mention the male side of this equation, that is, the glamorization of male power and violence and the sentimentality about women and "family" which is the obverse of the violence. Sex is ecstatic, autonomous, and lovely for women. Sex is violent, dangerous, and unpleasant for women. I don't mean a dichotomy (*i.e.* two kinds of women or even two kinds of sex) but rather a continuum in which no one's experience is wholly positive or negative, and to which different women will give very different weightings.

I think this doubleness of experience may explain the bitterness of the fight against pornography (to which I've contributed as much as anyone, I'm afraid) and the phenomenon of the sides being so very horrified by each other because they are perpetually talking past each other. When A attacks violence and B hears her attacking sexual freedom, B will defend sexual freedom—and A will hear her defending violence. You see how it goes, round and round and louder each time, though A doesn't intend to attack

*Women who've been exclusively Lesbian from a very early age probably face a different set of problems growing up. It would be interesting to know how much of the anti-pornography movement such women make up. My impression is that most of those active in the anti-pornography movement are either heterosexual or Lesbian feminist—that is, women who have spent a good part of their lives as heterosexuals.

sexual freedom *per se*, and B doesn't mean to defend violence.

I think a woman's position on this continuum (which can change even from week to week) will determine on which side of the pornography issue she finds herself. The more your life has had to do with the violence and cruelty of (male) sexuality, the more salient these are to you, the more you will attack (male) sexuality as violent, callous, and cruel. And you will be perfectly correct. The more your life has had to do with the autonomy and joy of sexual expression, whether you have had to work your way through to this joy or not, the more sensitive you will be to issues of sexual suppression, and the more you will tend to defend sexuality *per se* as a valuable good. And you will be perfectly correct.

To make the whole business even worse, on the anti side there's not only sensitivity to the violence of patriarchal sex, but also *some* women who perceive any kind of open expression of sex as dangerous and brutal. And the other side has *some* women who perceive sexual expression as so important and valuable that any kind of sexual expression, no matter what it is, is fine. There are, indeed, *some* women who do get off on power, *some* who proselytize. (I suspect that they've simply felt really sexual for the first time in their lives, and are treating sexual pleasure as their own exclusive property.)

I am now more sensitive to the issue of sexual suppression than I was five years ago, when I was more sensitive to the issue of sexual dangers and pains; *therefore* I've been perceiving the opposite side as inexplicably crazy. No doubt they've perceived me the same way. We're both right—not about the craziness, I mean, but about sex. It is inescapably double. Depending on the kind of attention we pay to it (which may even vary from day to day or mood to mood) we will stress one side or the other—and mis-hear our op-

posite numbers on the other side. Each will perceive the other as having gone mad and we'll end up with just what's been going on for the past few years, with me passionately denouncing Andrea Dworkin, for example (for which I'm very sorry and wish to apologize publicly) and Robin Morgan, in her new book, not only denouncing Pat Califia (which I rather expected, considering the whole mess-up that's been going on) but also wasting invective on Deirdre English, of all people! I suspect that Morgan has gotten her information second hand (she cites the sloppy and sensational *San Francisco Chronicle* for some important figures and ignores *For Her Own Good*, a fine piece of work by Deirdre English and Barbara Ehrenreich) or is simply so caught up in the whole mishearing, misperceiving mess that she's as bitter and quick to denounce as everyone else. Something of the same kind happens when an anti-porn activist describes with horror the photograph of a woman in a sex magazine who's lying on her back with her knees up and spread and is spreading her labia apart with her fingers. I have heard this position called degrading and humiliating, though as far as I can see the position indicates only that the woman wants to be penetrated, which certainly isn't in itself degrading or humiliating. And yet in the context of the whole sexist treatment of women by men, the picture is another assertion of men's property in women and men's control over women.

Meanwhile, I hear that in this city, some woman tried fist-fucking another and caused permanent physical damage, hospitalization, and surgery in her victim. But what about a friend of mine who did S & M (she's a very good person) who described it to me as mostly play-acting? The fantasies involved were fantasies of violence, true, but nobody she knew wanted anything like that to happen in reality. And surely there's nothing wrong with that—except that fantasies like those, acted out by men *and sold to the public as*

depictions of reality, are among the things that create a cultural atmosphere in which rape and property in women are seen by men as "glamorous" and promoted as "natural."

Is there any way of establishing that we are not at each others' throats? That what's driving us all crazy is that women's experience of sexuality under sexism is inescapably double? I think only c.r. groups have a chance of succeeding in this matter and then only if the groups absolutely outlaw statements about women in general and any judgment of particular women's practices and everybody's political positions about everything. We must start with our own experiences—NOT judgments or opinions—and then we may have a chance of undoing the wickedness done to us by this violent and antisexual society. The con game that's been practiced on all of us has been the equation of sex with violence, as if we have to choose between being sexual and victims of violence on the one hand or no-violence-therefore-no-sex on the other. If we detest the violence inherent in our sexual experiences in the world as it is, the culture gives us to understand that we are denying sexuality itself; if we choose the positive good of sexuality itself (and I certainly believe that sexual expression is *per se* a very valuable and important thing) the culture then insists that we must also choose violence. If some of us go a little gaga and talk as if any exhibition of sexuality (especially male sexuality) were humiliating and coercive, it's no wonder. Meanwhile others of us are going out of our gourds in the other direction, insisting that even obviously hostile books and pictures are redeemed because they have sex in them at all.

Trouble is, we're both right—and both wrong.

Meanwhile nobody has bothered to define pornography or S & M or even prostitution (sometimes) in any precise and objective manner, so that we can begin to talk about them in a reasonably analytical and non-judgmental way.

After all, before you can judge something as good or bad, you do have to know what it is. And we need to stop calling "obscene" anything we don't like. We also need, I think, to find out a lot more about prostitutes and the only way to do this is to talk to the prostitutes themselves. (An early conference on prostitution, I am told, was an embarrassing flop precisely because this wasn't done.) I also think—and here I do disagree with a good many women—that psychoanalyzing somebody else's experience or fantasies (especially without listening to their account of it) is necessarily ineffective, however passionately you may feel about the subject. The only people capable of analyzing what fantasies really mean are those to whom the fantasies appeal most.* I have heard feminists explain the horrible psychic depths of S & M's to me and S & M's describe with relish the twisted Puritanism of anybody who doesn't like them. This is very much like hearing monogamists decry the revoltingly neurotic motivations and moral degradation of the promiscuous—not that they know anyone like that, of course, nor have they—Heaven forbid!—been promiscuous themselves. And so on and so on. Is it necessary to point out that these "explanations" and "analyses" are worth exactly zero? They are passionate self-defenses, not analyses of phenomena or people. In the first issue of *Trivia: a Journal of Ideas*, in an essay called "Sadomasochism" Kathleen Berry states that condemnation of the feminist anti-pornography movement "can threaten the very existence of feminism" and that when Gayle Rubin (in *Coming to Power*) asks for a repeal of all sex laws "except those dealing with actual, not statutory, coercion" what she really means is that threats of death are not coercion. Clearly, we are talking past each other!

When c.r. groups first formed, what we brought to them

*This doesn't mean that they will analyze them, or that their analyses will be accurate; it means only that they can know the context of such fantasies.

were those areas in which we felt most crazy, most weak, most wrong, and most defeated. I believe that knowledge of our real sexual histories (that is, not our political opinions) may be similarly difficult to feel and express. Such a task, considering our own tangled feelings and the inescapable contradictions built into female sexual experience by this culture, demands an honesty that will, at times, produce intense shame and (I would expect) feelings of defeat and self-condemnation. These must be listened to, not short-circuited by shoulds and oughts. What we need is the gritty reality of what we really feel, what we really want (however "disgusting" or "wrong" it seems to be) or how "anti-feminist." These feelings are very painful.

They are also messages.

Before we can know what something means, we must allow it to enter consciousness in full force. Is horror at something "fear swollen by a hidden wish" (as one psychologist, writing about something completely different, once said)? Is bravado merely hiding self-hatred? And so on.

I hope I won't be misunderstood here to be saying that our troubles with sexuality are "merely psychological" or due to our training in the past but not to constant pressures today. Any message our sexuality or feelings about it gives us is bound to be about us *and* our society; if there's any piece of crucial feminist knowledge, this is it.

If only we can do this, what an enormous gain it will be for the whole women's movement! I think we all feel right now that sexuality is a crucial issue for feminism—nobody would be so upset if it weren't. I don't think we'll be in shape to take on sexuality as an issue without a lot of consciousness-raising about female sexuality and female sexual fantasy.

Even so, pornography seems to me a very tricky issue merely from the point of view of tactics, and we might do well to direct our anger elsewhere, at least for a while. Not

only is feeling about this issue very divided in the women's community, it's an issue that is bound to be misperceived by the culture at large as anti-sexual no matter how many declarations we make to the contrary. *Some* women talk as if pornography were the one single cause, or the most important single cause, of misogyny in this society—and this is, I think, plainly untrue. (One limited issue after another has been proclaimed—by *some* feminists—to be "the" cause of patriarchy, a view that's ahistorical and much too simple. Something as long-standing as woman-hating can hardly be caused by a phenomenon so relatively new as pornography.) I've also heard—I may be wrong—that pornography is an issue which will enable us to reach right-wing women, an idea I find very self-destructive and dramatic rather than politically practical. The right is organized and wealthy, remember, and far more apt to use us that vice versa. And what good is it to reach women who disagree with all our other issues? Why the dickens are we not trying to reach the millions of women who are already inclined our way? I remember a c.r. group, the very young members of which spent an enormous amount of time and energy working with one battered woman, only to have her finally return to the man who battered her. Battering is, goodness knows, an emotionally gripping issue, but as Virginia Woolf says, a battle that wastes time and energy is as ill-advised as one that wastes lives.

And why, if what we're against is the glamorization of male violence, don't we direct our fire at Hollywood's ostensibly "realistic" depictions of life, like *Apocalypse Now* or *A Clockwork Orange*? Or those endless cop shows on TV? Or all those women so terrified on prime time TV because they are menaced by one man and need another man to protect them? Or the "family" shows which glorify traditional values (traditional ever since the 1950s) at the expense of our autonomy, humanness, and self-respect?

Surely this sort of stuff pollutes the cultural atmosphere far more than commercial fantasies made for masturbation. Movies and TV affect many more people (like women and children) that specialized, commercial, male fuck-books or films don't reach. More than that, the pornography I've seen—I have fifteen S & M books in my closet at the moment—seems to be aimed at specific sub-groups of male buyers. (The books advertised on the backs of the books I have come in clusters, i.e. monks-and-nuns books, Nazi-slave books, teenage-girls'-school books, and so on. The settings seem to matter, though they are sketchily limp; the sex scenes are just about identical from book to book.) As for the men's magazines, surely heterosexual men's desire to look at women's bodies is in itself perfectly acceptable. What's not acceptable is that the images sold to men are plastic and unreal, and that such sale takes place as part of a deeply sex-hating and woman-hating society. But to attack pornography seems to be going in the wrong direction. Sexual fantasies—to judge from women's—don't make much sense if taken at face value. Moreover, those fifteen books (chosen by a friend of mine for the horribleness of their covers) are much more concerned with fucking than they are with violence. It's not pornography *but the mainstream culture* which delivers violence as a substitute for sexual pleasure. I think the mainstream culture is much more dangerous than specialized-for-sex stuff, which has at least gotten to a sort of halfway position on the matter. It's true that if the Holocaust is of personal importance to you, and you read, say, *Nazi Love-Slave*, and lend it your own reality, you may be disgusted and frightened. That doesn't mean that the book is the cause of woman-hating or even an important cause. I find many of the things we take for granted much, much worse—like the sentimentality of "Little House on the Prairie," the TV tape of which I would very much enjoy burning with my own hands.

Several essays on pornography have stressed that the Nazis used it to flood occupied countries in order to corrupt the population thereof, but the fact that they did it doesn't mean that it worked or that they knew what they were doing. They allowed no such stuff in Germany itself; instead, the kind of propaganda made for home consumption was very much like what we're getting now from the right: For women, motherhood and "femininity" glorified, and for German youth, in general, the Virgin Mary as an ideal. For young men the ideal was the fervent love of comrades (some of these artifacts look very homosexual today) along with rigid sexual purity. The classic union of sexual repression with violence can't occur in pornography, which has sexual expression as its *raison d'être*; it's, as far as my experience goes, in supposedly non-sexual material that the viciousness gets really bad. Nothing in *Hard Knocks for Honey* or *The Sadistic Sisters of Saxony* (honest, I'm not making up these titles) comes close in vividness, realism, or loving attention to detail of the commercial for Hitchcock's TV program which was made up of a montage of different women screaming in terror. I would not mind too much re-reading the S & M titles (above) for the only hazard there is boredom; but I walked out of "A Clockwork Orange" a few years ago, shaking with anger, and would do so again.

That's the sort of stuff we should be attacking.

I've tried to find an inspirational ending to this essay and can't. The doubleness of sexuality will certainly continue. For years I hated myself for still having any affection for my father (who had become ill when I was about eight, and used to assuage his own fear by bullying my mother, and later, me). I thought I must be crazy to keep on feeling anything positive about someone who had so obviously hurt me. It took a long time to decide that I had not been defeated and that his misbehavior was far less humane than my continuing affection. When you live in a badly sexist

world and continue to have some positive feelings for those who are oppressing you, it's all too easy to become horrified at yourself and try to wipe away all positive emotion towards the oppressors. Since that is not entirely possible, many of us are left with an entirely understandable terror at ever expressing these feelings—it feels like total defeat—and a lot of energy must be taken up denying that these positive feelings exist. I have even heard of a few rape victims who were aroused sexually by the situation of rape—mind you, this does not make rape less Godawful; on the contrary, to my mind, such an impossible-to-deal-with contradiction makes the whole business infinitely more horrible.

Well, I am talking only about my own experience; this is the kind of thing I would say in a c.r. group. Double situations are not only painful but terribly confusing. If dancing with my dentist was sex, I certainly didn't want any; and yet—

Two other speculations; I don't think we should expect gay men's experience with pornography to be anything like ours. For many gay men, gay male pornography was the first (and sometimes the only) validation of their sexuality they could find. Nor—I'm convinced—is the issue of pedophilia identical with what little girls experience with adult men. For one thing, the major emphasis of this society is that women are passive or childlike vis a vis men. Contacts between adult males and boys are not harmonious with the major emphases of the society. Boys are brought up (once into adolescence) to be entitled to sexual feelings and experimentation as girls are not, and are therefore probably more capable (certainly in adolescence) of refusing and choosing sexually than girls are. (I'm not saying that this is the whole truth about male teenagers/adult males relationships, but that they are different from teenage female/adult male ones. *)

*I'm not talking about children.

How to stop Uncle Max? I think an anecdote a friend of mine told me lately is instructive. She has a fourteen-year-old son whose friends have taken to hanging around her house, in part because she's willing to give them straightforward information about sex and smoking and so on, and accepts the fact that they are sexually active without accepting dishonesty or coercion or manipulateness as O.K. because "anything goes." Recently one of the girls, at the age of twelve, decided to have intercourse (for the first time) with her thirteen-year-old boy friend. "She said that it hurt at first but after that she liked it a lot." This same little girl (she's under five feet tall) was recently grabbed from behind by a neighborhood rapist who'd already made attempts on two other pubescent girls; Lily (not her name) stamped backwards on the rapist's instep, crunching it heavily, and then screamed as she ran away. What was striking to both me and my friend was what Lily did NOT do: She didn't panic, wasn't helpless, and above all (says my friend) was enraged but without feeling the slightest guilt. When something like that happened to me at the same age, I felt that I must have invited it or colluded with it, or liked it somehow. I suspect that the two incidents are related and the more open and autonomously chosen sexual pleasure a woman has, the better she's equipped to deal with this culture's substitution of violence for sexuality and the sexual repression that makes such very bad things possible.

Perhaps a word here about "sexual repression." As far as I know, the only male authority who does not think that anything goes in sex is Wilhelm Reich—one of those clunky Germans who know only one thing (but one good thing) and kept repeating it ad infinitum. When I speak—as Reich does—about sexual "liberation" I do not mean (as he didn't either) any kind of sexual outlet of any quality, and the only superiority of this to that being which one happens more often. What Reich (I think very perceptively, for a man)

understood was that when classic forms of sexual suppression—like the Nazis' in their own country—first begin to disappear, what you get is not freedom but a lot of very nasty behavior in which the pre-existing violence begins to be visible, *along with* some genuinely progressive behavior and events. I don't know what Reich's opinion of S & M would be since he never mentions it. What he does call "sadism" is what we would call simply cruelty and viciousness—like (he mentions) getting a woman drunk so that she can't resist when several men fuck her, a practice that used to be common in college fraternities when I went to school twenty years ago, and may be still.

"Sexual liberation" does NOT mean, when I use the phrase, joylessness, furtiveness, compulsion, threats, or the kind of behavior Phyllis Chesler notes in *About Men* in which she asked men whether they enjoyed sex with women and got the answer, "I like orgasm, of course; who wouldn't?" This kind of partial and miserable activity is a sign of repression, not freedom. We are surrounded today by plastic images of "sexuality," of beautiful models with painted faces and blow-dried hair cavorting in stylized situations of glee, by endless stupid chatter about "sexiness," and "freedom," of endless exhortations that we must be (hetero) sexual—but with the partner of the right sex and age and class and capped teeth and advertisers' clothing, and semi-naked bodies shown in titillating poses without any (God forbid) real nudity or vulnerability or real touching. Anyone who thinks this society is anywhere near "sexual liberation" should try sitting in a bus with her hand on a friend's genitals, and watch the faces around her. Unfortunately we are caught today between two lies, not one: The still powerful beliefs of the right and the "you *must* be sexual and any way is O.K." which involves the utter unreality of, say, *Playboy* pictures—are women born air-brushed?—and any damned thing at all, from the pleasures

of shared fantasy (which do promote intimacy) to the acting out of power fantasies *against* others.

And, just to make it even more confusing, sexual situations (as defined by the culture), and the contact of warm bodies does indeed rouse some minimal response, which explains the man in *About Men* who has to fantasize a baseball game to come to orgasm and me and my dentist. I had responded, after all, and not knowing that this minimal, reluctant response, very much mixed with loathing, was not "sex"—how could I? I had no genuinely free sexual experiences to use as a comparison—believed that this sort of contact *was* "sex"—and I had somehow colluded in the whole business.

The best cure for pornography is sex—I mean autonomously chosen activity, freely engaged in for the sake of real pleasure, intense, and unmistakably the real thing. The more we have experiences like this, the less we will be taken in by the confusions and lies and messes all around us.

Sexuality is a personal issue for everyone, and an extremely painful one for many of us. Let me stress again that the early c.r. groups dealt with the kind of things that made us feel strong and free. In fact, the strength and freedom came directly from expressing the things that made us feel hopeless and crazy.

Let us begin—please!