

A special feature from the archives of ReclaimingQuarterly.org

from the RQ Archives

Two Features on Gender

Gender in all its aspects has been a lively topic of discussion and practice among Reclaiming folks over the past few years.

Discussions about inclusive practices and language have filtered through the Spiral Dance ritual, the all-Reclaiming Dandelion Gatherings, and on Reclaiming elists.

Two RQ features from past issues have been downloaded a lot, and we decided to combine them into one PDF. Here you'll find:

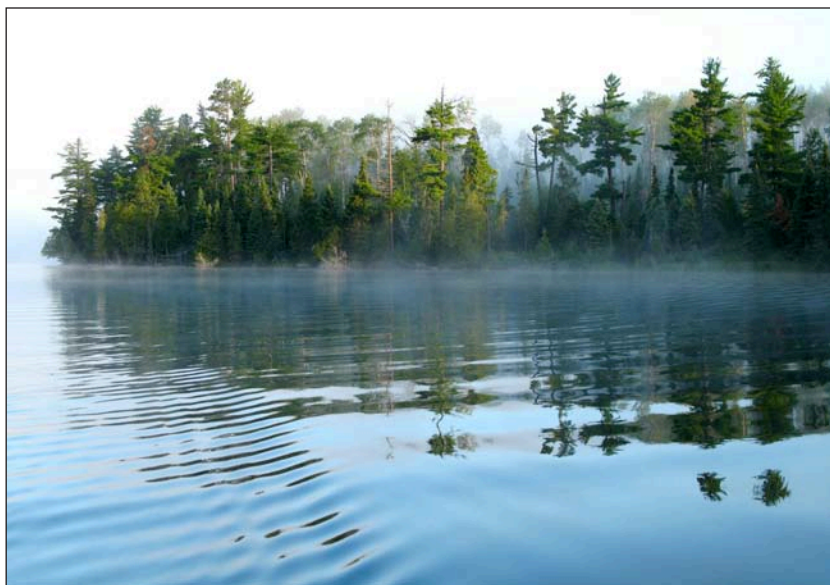
from RQ#101: What If the Earth Is Not Our Mother

by Keith Hennessy, Kirk Read, Rachel Kaplan, Jack Davis, and Ravyn Stanfield

from RQ#96 - "Undoing Sexism: A Forum"

by Lynx, Donald, Keith, Phillipe, Rosa, Seed, Jonathan, and Scarlet Harlot, and Luna

To be part of these discussions, you can join Reclaiming's International Elist (RIDL) or the Bay Area elist (BARD). To join either list, email quarterly@reclaiming.org



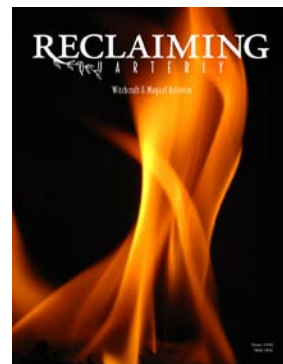
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Chants & Music available online



Reclaiming has released four CDs of Earth-based chants and music. All four are available on our website.

Many Reclaiming musicians and teachers have also released CDs. *Witches Brew* is a good introduction to Reclaiming's musicians.

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What if the Earth is NOT Our Mother?

The following conversation begins with a provocation from Keith Hennessy and is followed by responses from Kirk Read, Rachel Kaplan, Jack Davis, and Ravyn Stanfield.

The goal of this polyvocal text is not to resolve an issue or come to consensus but to create some queer friction or turbulence that might yield fresh intelligence and ritual experimentation.

A PROVOCATION

by Keith Hennessy

I want to trouble the relationship between gender and deity.

I was raised Catholic, taught to call my dad, all priests, and God, “Father.” Feminists and other critics of monotheistic and patriarchal religions have challenged this triple conflation.

Through these critiques I learned to recognize the structural network of home, society, and universe as a series of male-dominated “families.” The one God becomes the ultimate head of global household. He might be a loving father or a stern father, but he’s

our daddy. We accept as normal a vast network of psychological and political dynamics held in patriarchal place by the language, metaphor, and icon of Father.

In the Bay Area during the mid-

to late-1980s, I was part of a vibrant culture created by anarchists, feminists, direct action activists, collective houses, worker-owned businesses, politically engaged artists, and hybrids thereof. Among the many influences and participants in this network were

people who identified as feminist Witches, or simply Pagans. Many of these activist Witches gathered within and around the collective called Reclaiming. We *reclaimed* deity as feminine and feminine as sacred, and we brought ritual performance to all spheres of political action, creative work, and daily life. A new world felt not only possible but actual. And this new world, following the beliefs of both Native Americans* and (neo) Pagans, would be called Mother.

As an assertive

response to 2000 years of Father God, today’s Pagans claim a much longer history, however hidden or marginalized, of goddesses, Earth Mothers, and Mother Earth. But this feminist move, dependent on essentialist tropes of mothers and fathers, can never fully reverse or topple a gendered hierarchy that is structurally enforced.



* - Variations of Earth Fathers exist in at least a few indigenous or ancient cultures. In Egyptian mythology Geb is the Earth-god or Father Earth and Nut is the mother or goddess of the sky. Neil Maclean, an Ohlone solidarity activist, told me that the native people from San Francisco, before contact with Europe, called the Earth their father and the sun their mother. For further research, I suggest Malcolm Margolin’s well-researched *The Ohlone Way: Indian Life in the San Francisco–Monterey Bay Area*.

Photos by Luz

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Earth Our Mother?

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What happens when we anthropomorphize the Earth, when we give it human names and social roles? How does it serve either a Pagan or ecological project to assign a gender and a social role to the Earth? What do we gain and what do we lose when we refer to the Earth as Mother? How are we influenced in terms of perspective, experience, wisdom, ambitions, or motivations? Is it possible to experience the Earth as alive without linking it to our own perceptions and politics of mortality? Maybe s/he is neither alive nor dead, neither great provider nor great destroyer. Clearly, the Earth and the human are not separate events. Might we consider new language (or less language) to frame ecological and Pagan perspectives and action?

I grew up reciting a prayer, which begins:

“Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name.”

In my late 20s, already having identified as both an ex-Catholic and a recovering Catholic, I heard a version that is allegedly a closer translation of the original Aramaic text (the language of the historical Jesus):

“Dear you, from whom all light and sound vibrations emanate.”

I was changed forever with the potential of this revelation, despite the fact that its mystic inclinations are considered by conservative Christians to be more conjecture than translation. Replacing “father” with the source of sound and light vibration destabilizes the conflicts between science and religion, between mono and poly, and supports my conviction that neither god nor Earth is best considered in gendered human terms.

Twenty years of developing the

tools of queer and feminism for inspired analysis and action have prompted me to challenge Pagan friends and networks. How can we say mother without invoking “father”? In the myth/story of Mary and Jesus, the virgin birth is a non-consensual fertilization by the Holy Spirit, a proxy of God the Father. Are we silently calling an all-powerful father god every time we call Mother Earth? Feminist and queer perspectives remind us of the hegemonic damage of continually reasserting the heterosexual nuclear family as a universal norm. Mother plus father does not have to be



the only frame for creativity, life, law, generation, or genius.

There can be significant patriarchal disruptions and spiritual inspirations when calling the Earth a mother. But the ambivalent subtexts, both heterosexist and human-centered, suggest that we reconsider. What if the Earth is not y/our mother?

THE EARTH IS A COMMUNAL ORGY

by Kirk Read

I get queasy with the girl and boyification of nature in general. The insistence on Mother Earth and Father Sky and the way water is always equated with wombs and menstruation. Enough with the Pagan clichés already! I’ve been reading a lot about plants lately.

And earthworms. Socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity don’t make sense in a compost heap. I mean, we can call them male and female plants, but they’re nothing without bees. And where do bees fit into the binary gender map? Gender is best left to humans checking boxes on match.com. I’m worried when my transgender friends recreate the worst imaginable cartoon archetypes of gender, as well as lesbian friends getting super-entrenched in pop culture and fashion. Gay men have been on a hypermasculine trip for a long time, which is intimidating to me

even though I fall under its spell pretty easily.

What I’m trying to say is that people often identified as gender pioneers are huffing the same gnarly fumes of gender stereotypes as everyone else. I don’t think the answer is to dig ourselves further into the gender ditch by referring to trees with alternative pronouns like zie and hir. Sometimes a tree is just a tree. Not to get all Gertrude Stein on you.

I resist Goddess language and gendered language because it

transfers gender maps as understood by humans upon an Earth that is far more complicated than we’re collectively able to imagine. This language turns the Earth into a nuclear family, with a mom and dad and babies. And the Earth is not at all a nuclear family. The Earth is a big communal orgy of vines growing out of dead bodies on top of poop, then getting inoculated by some floating spore carried in the fur of a squirrel.

GENDER IS A STORY

by Rachel Kaplan

As I sit to write, the wind is whipping through the green trees outside, another storm heading from the sea to me. It has been a wild winter and the wonder

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Earth Our Mother?

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of water continues... do I need or want to think of this gift of life-bringing rain as female? No, I do not. Do I need to think of the destruction taking place everywhere, everyday, of the Earth and its inhabitants, as male? No I do not. But is it simpler by far to rest in the "hegemonic structuralism of gender"? Yes, it is. Does it serve us in recreating the world? I am not sure, but I am not sure either that I have another way. As a permaculturist, I am trained to look at the natural systems around me and to use them as a template for action. I cannot help but notice the gendered reality that pervades the natural world. These differences are unstoried in the natural world in a way that is never true for the human world. Perhaps it is the story that is the problem (which is what gender is after all), rather than the reality of the biological difference between us. But if it is true that biological differences — which we call gender — are part of the natural world, and our dis-ease in culture comes from separating ourselves radically from the natural order of which we are a part, how else are we to understand our lives, our actions, our selves? If we could get to the place where nature is — a sense of being-ness without the story of meaning — then gender wouldn't be an issue at all. But our differences, and what they tell us about our purpose and how to act, would still be there, inherent within us.

After a stint as a radical lesbian feminist, I became active in the Bay

Area artistic-anarchist-Pagan culture that Keith Hennessy describes above. But a key difference in coming from a Jewish background, rather than a Catholic or Christian one, is not in the way god was personified, but in the way people were. We were victims of culture and history, rather than the victors, making it simpler for us to identify with the oppressed, the downtrodden, the dispossessed. From there, and living in a woman's body, it was an easy step to feminism, lesbianism, Paganism, moving ever outside the reach — or so I



hoped — of god the father. Did it work? Not really. I am subject all the time to patriarchal reality, patriarchal decision-making, both internal and external.

I fight all the time with my feminist-raised boyfriend/husband who wants all things to be "equal" between us, who has somehow swallowed the fantasy that there is even such a thing as equality between men and women, or between people and one another. Biology showed us, in the form of our daughter, that there is a reason why culture evolved the way it did, and that in fact, there is a destiny inherent in our biologies. Can you imagine? It took having our daughter to realize that biology on some level is destiny. If we live in a differentiated universe because our bodies and their capacities simply do different things — even in an age where

that can be modified and tricked out, as in tranny love and queer procreation — we are left with a gendered universe that dictates some of our decisions, actions and ways of being. Is our alternative as simple as telling a different story? Who tells a story outside the box in which they live? Not too many people I know.

I worship the Earth as the vehicle of regeneration, the wheel of death and rebirth, the altar of reality, rather than the distorted lies of religion and people's stories. As a permie, I witness the power of the Earth in destruction

and regeneration. I dig that. Is it a female power? Maybe. I certainly identify with it in myself, as a woman. As a mother, I am living out a story of my gendered body — pro-creative, protective, maternal, fierce, nurturing... Do I see my partner living out many of these same aspects? Yes. Is it equal? No.

And the beat goes on...

FAGGOT MAGIC

by Jack Davis

I recently co-facilitated a class in elements of magic for gay men. One of the questions we posed: What does it mean to be a gay man involved in

goddess spirituality?

We created invocations that were not directed to a specific deity and called upon the aspects that we desired from a queer god. Our chants embraced:

copious amounts of jism...
gentle and animal fucking...
sweet faggot god...
weirdo...
your mighty cock...
and bring it girl!

Sometimes deity is the goddess because she is not the god, the god is the colleague and not the consort of the goddess, the goddess is a man in a dress, deity has no gender, or deity is all genders.

Maybe thinking of deity can be like shopping at a thrift store, picking and choosing, holding out for exactly

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Photos by Luz

Earth Our Mother?

continued from preceding page

what you want. During the class, it was revealed to us that if, as Dion Fortune says, magic is the art of changing consciousness at will, then faggot magic is the art of changing costumes at Goodwill.

SYMBIOSIS OR DOMINATION?

by Ravyn Stanfield

“The Earth is our Mother, we must take care of her.” This is a chant that I learned in my twenties through the feminist Earth-based spirituality movement. It was attributed as a traditional Native American chant.

While attempting to avoid the romanticizing of indigenous cultures that white folks like to do, there can certainly be an argument made that people who lived in North America prior to European colonization placed a value on relationship with their landbase. One could further argue that most people in contemporary Western culture are several steps removed from the ways that the land provides staples for our continued survival.

The Earth Mother archetype perhaps shook that up, muddied the waters, asked us to relate to our planet in a way that evoked a primary connection with nourishment. I see/saw it as an attempt to give a face to the faceless, to make the vast spaces of the planet accessible through familiarity. Perhaps it was also an attempt to offer an alternative to flesh mothers who may have failed in small or large ways to nurture us in the ways we wanted. At any rate, “we must take care of her” was a statement asserted without question, a

mission/invitation/provocation.

Identifying the Earth with the oppression of women in all countries, pasting genitals and gender roles on the planet, was a bold political move of its time, a strong blow in the struggle to capture the imagination of the people. We could have easily called the planet Native, African, Jewish, Irish, Queer or Muslim at various times of our collective evolution, and it would have made the same point.

So has Earth Mother passed her prime, so to speak? I see ways that this archetype/identity is still useful, inviting humans to seek healthy relationship with the planet within a parasitic culture that consumes everything in sight and has nothing at all to do with functional communion. I can also see the false

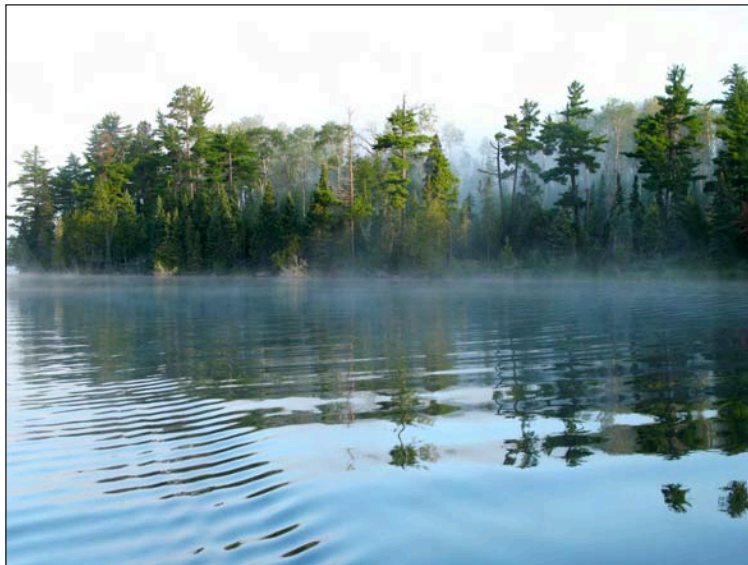
of the most difficult tasks that humans can accomplish. Recognizing that we belong to a group that is stigmatized by a larger culture is vital to resistance and liberation efforts. However, when does this identification end? Is it when the group itself feels free? Is it when the tangible liberation goals of the group have been accomplished? Is it when another group points out that this group is “free enough”? This gets tricky for me because I know that for every one of us who grows beyond strict gender cages, there is a girl who survives a rape and identifies with the feminist movement for the first time.

Are we free enough yet to let go of the planet as our Mother and say that the goal has been accomplished? To continue the metaphor, would it mean that we would simply move out of the house or live far away?

The war on qualities that we/they assigned to the “feminine” is real, and the gender-role socialization that kills continues to unfold as soon as people get the gender results of the ultrasound. Those born with the biological bodies of boys are still told that they must separate from intimate relationship with others (and ultimately the planet) to be seen as strong. Those born with the biological bodies of girls eventually see that this ability to separate

seems to be a way to success and status. Interdependence is not a consensual teaching that we offer children in Western culture.

For me, the question is not masculine or feminine, pussy or prick, queer or hetero, it is about whether we are living in a relationship of symbiosis or dominion with the planet. I welcome our questioning of whether or not we need the Earth Mother archetype to help us shift the reality of dominion. I also see Western civilization in active opposition to symbiosis. I wonder what will the Earth be to us instead? Our vital home or a silent lifeless rock?



ways that we can glorify the “feminine” and continue to expect female-bodied people to do something magical to “save the Earth” as if living well on the planet was not the responsibility of all humans. I can see the false ways that MotherFather gods still keep humans infantile and powerless in the face of authority, as well as continuing a heterosexist reality.

What is our goal in moving out of the oppressed “feminine” identity that we have politically associated with the planet? I haven’t fully uncovered the answer for myself yet, I think that releasing our oppressed identities is one

Photos by Luz

Undoing Sexism

Gender dynamics in Reclaiming and other progressive communities

In the following pages, RQ gathers a range of views on sexism and gender relations — not just in the broader society, but as they operate in progressive communities such as Reclaiming, where the nuances are often more subtle. To join this discussion, see page 10.

by Lynx Adamah

THERE IS A commonly held belief that sexism, as well as other “isms” like racism and homophobia, don’t exist in progressive communities. Unfortunately, this simply isn’t true.

While most of us are liberal, open-minded, and well-intentioned folks, the reality is that we all have some work to do freeing ourselves from old, deeply rooted beliefs and feelings towards other groups of people, be they people of color, women, queer and/or trans folks, Jews, etc. It would be nearly impossible for us as individuals raised in this very oppressive and dehumanizing culture to not have recorded at least some of these messages, somewhere within us.

While it’s not our fault that we struggle with such messages, it is each individual’s responsibility to take on the work of eliminating oppressive behavior and transforming the beliefs. To effectively move forward in our struggle as humans to end all oppressions, it is crucial that we

be willing to name these oppressions and speak openly and honestly about them. It is from this place that I address sexism in our community.

WHAT IS SEXISM?

SEXISM is any mistreatment of women, ranging from violence against women, to the treatment of women as inferior, to the objectification of women. Any time a woman is treated in any way other than as a brilliant, powerful, respected human being, it is sexism.

When women do not stand up for themselves, tolerate abusive behavior from men, mistreat other women, or deny their own intelligence, internalized sexism is occurring. After being systematically bombarded with sexist misinformation, many women internalize these messages, start believing them, and act out of this hurt place. Though women in our community have done much empowerment and healing work here, we still have more to do, myself included. The

more women free themselves from internalized sexism, the less power and impact men’s sexism directed at us will have.

Thankfully, in our community, most forms of overt sexism are not present — violence against women, sexist language, sexual coercion, male domination. So many men in our community are incredibly loving, kind, open-hearted, generous, strong and gentle, compassionate, caring, expressive — beautiful models of what is possible. These men have clearly done some work around sexism, and have consciously chosen to be part of a community where women are valued, respected, and empowered leaders; worlds away from the current sexist model of our dominant culture. This is a huge step, and has been incredibly inspiring and hopeful to me. The deep, loving, and strictly platonic relationships I’ve developed with men in our community have been some of the sweetest relationships of my life. They have fed me deeply, been huge contradictions to sexism for me, and in many ways, have given me the strength and inspiration to continue on in the struggle for women’s liberation. These nurturing relationships have left me hopeful that not only will sexism end in my lifetime, but that many men actually want it to end and are willing to be allies to women in ending it.

While many men in Reclaiming have come a long way, there is still work to do. Even within Reclaiming, sexism still exists. While we are rarely faced with men perpetrating overt forms of sexism — though this does occasionally happen — sexism in its more subtle forms is actually a fairly common occurrence.

SUBTLE SEXISM

SOME OF THE subtle forms that sexism can take include:

- men yelling at women
- interrupting women
- not listening to women or taking women seriously
- making women repeat “no”

What Men Can Do About Sexism

- The most important thing that men can do is listen. Listen to us as women, and if we challenge you on something, be willing to look and see what’s there for you.
- Be proud to be men! It is far more empowering to have you as proud male allies willing to take on sexism, than for you to feel bad about yourselves as men or apologetic to us for being male.
- Read *Men’s Work*, by Paul Kivel.
- Join a men’s group to connect with other men and safely work on anger and any patterned feelings towards women you may have.
- Get involved in co-counseling, an organization committed to ending all oppressions. Go to www.rc.org, or contact Lynx (she loves to talk about co-counseling)
- Check out the resource lists included in this issue.
- Know that I welcome you as allies!

- men always speaking first and/or for the longest amount of time
- confusing closeness and sex
- men pursuing connection with only the young, attractive women in our community or placing a higher value on connections with them
- not fully supporting women on our path to empowerment because it feels threatening to men
- repeatedly hitting on women who are half the men's age
- always being the aggressor or initiator of sexual relationships.

EVEN THOUGH these forms of sexism are not life-threatening, they are still damaging to women. They get in the way of women having big, full and empowered lives. They affect our self-respect and confidence, and

lead us to make choices around relationships, our bodies, and sex that we may not otherwise have made. All forms of sexism are to be taken seriously and actively campaigned against. To ignore subtle sexism is to give up on women's liberation.

That some men in our community still act out these sexist patterns at women doesn't mean that our community is bad, nor does it mean that such men are bad or even to blame. As I stated previously, it would be unrealistic for us to expect that men, having grown up in such a pervasively sexist culture, would make it through unscathed and not carry with them a piece of the patriarchy, no matter how unknowingly or unwillingly. While this is not men's fault, especially the subtle stuff, it is key that men take responsibility

for their sexist behavior and for releasing the patterns and unlearning sexism. I truly believe that no human being wants to behave oppressively towards another human, and this certainly includes men and sexism. But patterns won't just go away by themselves. They need to be actively worked on and transformed.

I am writing this article not only to shed light on sexism in our community, but largely to get the dialogue started around sexism. I want to hear people talking about this stuff, and not shying away from getting involved or making this struggle their own.

SETTLING FOR LESS

THERE IS A way in progressive communities that we "settle," both as women and as men. We're so grateful that we're not subjected to overt forms of sexism, and that men here are more loving and open-hearted than the general population. We've stopped going after more for ourselves and from our men. We don't really talk about sexism. We let a lot of "undesirable" behavior go.

We need to talk about sexism. If we as a community and as individuals desire to grow, heal, and become truly empowered, it is crucial that we be willing to address a real and disempowering inequity among us.

We're not doing our beloved brothers any favors by not challenging them on their sexism. By naming and calling them on it, we give them a chance to identify an oppressive pattern, to work on it, and truly transform it. By ignoring it, we leave them stuck with a harmful pattern that serves only to diminish their humanity and their chances for real human connection. No man truly wants to be oppressive. When women are complacent around sexism, settling and putting up with it, we end up only perpetuating our own oppression. The reality is that sexism affects all of us.

As a planet, a country, a culture and a community, no one is truly free while anyone else is oppressed. Ending sexism is everyone's business and will free us all.

Lynx Adamah is a fierce co-counseling crusader for women's liberation. She lives in West Oakland, CA with her AMazing wife AManda and their two adorable kittens. She loves to talk about co-counseling and eliminating sexism and can be reached at lynxylulu@hotmail.com



An abridged version of *The Adventures of Flowy Bi Grrl and Super Dyke* unfolds over the next several pages. For the full story, complete with super-power charts, visit the RQ website, www.reclaimingquarterly.org/96

Gender and Sexism: a Forum

A roundtable discussion of teachers and organizers

As part of our Gender and Sexism theme section, RQ asked a half-dozen teachers and organizers in our various communities to contribute their views on five key questions. A sampling of their responses is found on these two pages.

You can join this discussion either on the RQ website — visit the current issue, www.reclaimingquarterly.org/96, — or mail us your responses of up to 50 words to each question on these two pages — see page 2 for submissions info.

To be part of future forums, contact us at quarterly@reclaiming.org, or write us at the address on page 2.

Forum Participants

Donald Engstrom is a Minnesota artist, gardener, and Witch involved with Mystery and the Spirit Peoples for over twenty years. His roots spring from Queer Spirit.

Keith Hennessy is a performance artist, dancer, Witchpriest, anti-war activist and director of Circo Zero.

Melissa Moon is a pre-op MTF transsexual, lesbian, activist, Reclaiming Witch and Vermont Witchcamp devotee who lives in north central Vermont.

Phillipe Lewis is a perspective shifter, sensual artist, and community builder based in San Francisco.

Rose May Dance, a San Francisco hypnotherapist and healer, has been teaching, writing, and making ritual in Reclaiming since 1981.

Seed is a Reclaiming priestess and teacher, who finds herself called to depth and mischief.

Jonathan Furst is a free-range magical Jew, currently practicing uncle and auntie skills in the wilds of Northern California.

How does sexism show itself, overtly and subtly, in our community?

Keith: Sexism operates like a disease. No one in Reclaiming, even the youth who grew up in our community, are free of sexist conditioning, imagination, and practice — shame about one's body, alienation from the earth, sexual fantasies and pleasures. This is not entirely negative. For some folks, experiencing sexism in Reclaiming is a gateway to healing.

Melissa: Sexism shows itself in the predominant heterosexist paradigm evident in most of the myths chosen as Witchcamp themes. We need to create or find more queer positive or queer inclusive myths.

Jonathan: We often repeat stereotypes in our rituals, such as when the men drum and the women dance. Or when it's assumed we'll call in the god and the goddess. Are we redefining male and female divinity or institutionalizing gender roles? What about the Queer ones, the Great Mystery, the Stone beings without gender at all...

Philippe: Overtly, I see it so little in this community compared to other communities. Subtly, I see it showing up in people's perception that something is or might be sexist when it really was not intended that way consciously or unconsciously by anyone involved.

Donald: Frankly, in many ways. The most striking is the way folks who identify as women dishonor each other and each other's work. They seem to often give folks perceived as male more breaks than folks they perceive as female. And those of us who are third-gendered are just simply invisible.

Rose: During Spiral Dance planning meetings we always noticed when men were present or absent. We got things done quicker with no men, yet there was a dynamism and charge when the men were present. This is neither good nor bad, but something to note, so we can be conscious of our interactions.

How, concretely, do we interrupt and transform sexism?

Keith: Central to reclaiming goddess spirituality is a rejection and/or transformation of masculine-centric spirituality, culture, and politics. In Reclaiming the majority of the leadership (elders, teachers, and organizers) and the community are women. Gender queers and outlaws have been welcomed in Reclaiming community and imagination, furthering the reframing of oppressive cultural norms with respect to gender and sexuality. Many in Reclaiming celebrate empowered sexual pleasure for all beings, especially for women who have been denied, abused, or limited by patriarchal and dick-centric pleasure principles.

Rose: There's a song that goes, "I am breathing, I am open, I am willing." An attitude that is both questioning and loving is essential, or else the battle takes up again!

Donald: I have experienced some direct constructive talk. But in my experience, a passive-aggressive response or the old-fashioned rumor mill are the usual reactions to what may be sexist behavior.

Philippe: By being in loving, open support of a shift in understanding and acceptance of all perspectives, and especially of how sexism has a negative impact on everyone. In practice, by listening, not judging, and sharing about sexism when it shows up in our perception or in conversation.

Jonathan: Speaking order is a great tool for de-institutionalizing lots of "isms": let people born outside the country talk or choose first, then people of color, queer identified, youth, elders, working class, etc. Within each category, women precede men, and trans-gendered before either.

What is men's role in Reclaiming?

Rose: I appreciate when men are aware of the historical importance of "women's religion" — a place for women to shine and take leadership roles. How great there is a place like Reclaiming for men to share

with women. There is a place in Reclaiming for men to be both supportive and expressive.

Philippe: As individuals, it is whatever role that they feel safe, comfortable, and open in taking. For that to be possible, there must be space for them to do it, in terms of positive ways of being for men both towards each other and towards women in the community.

Jonathan: My first year in Reclaiming, I spent a lot of time wondering where I fit in. It would be nice to simply say "men and women are equal," but the truth is that men hold a lot more power in the world, and we carry it with us wherever we go. We need to carry it well, learning when to step back and make room for others, when to step up and speak out.

Keith: Men's role in Reclaiming is to practice a feminist and queer-inspired transformation of male identity, body, and imagination; to innovate and experiment with masculinity; and to integrate a reclaimed femininity into a whole self that is more creative, more sexually mature and alive, more intuitive and intelligent, more connected to the web of life and death.

Donald: I was not aware that men's roles

were any different than anyone else's. I thought all genders were actively working to find their own authentic roles within the tradition.

How does your concept of your own gender affect your spiritual work and connections in your community?

Donald: In the classes I teach, gender is a central topic. I assign a bit of homework in which each person recognizes and declares their own gender without using either male or female identifiers.

Rose: I came to Reclaiming because it was a perfect place for my ministry and my spiritual expression, because it is founded in the reverence for Goddess. In Reclaiming, unlike in the Episcopal Church, I feel totally accepted and valued in my spirituality.

Melissa: My gender is a major part of my spiritual work. As a pre-operative transsexual lesbian Reclaiming Witch my very being challenges others to think about their gender, and it bonds me with my community of choice — a community that celebrates my uniqueness.

Seed: As a woman entering her crone years, it is such a huge relief to be in a

community that values the wisdom of older women. Every day, I am confronted with the attitudes of our society, in which older women tend to be discounted at best, and disrespected at worst. Having just one context in my life which holds an alternative view is such an antidote.

Keith: Claiming a male identity and celebrating a gay/queer sexuality have a big role in my experience of the divine. Ritual with men and gay sexual healing have been laboratories for magic and prayer, and for rediscovering art and activism as prayer. Reframing the mature man as Earth steward, as queer uncle and father to the world's children, and as sensitive artist and healer, is integral to the process of my spirituality, including my participation in Reclaiming.

Philippe: Because of the prevalence of sexism in our society and how it affects us deeply, I think that it tends to affect us more negatively — or perhaps gets in the way — than when we take a more genderless approach to the spiritual work. But I do see how my concept of gender can be used in an empowering way while empowering others too!

Any last thoughts?

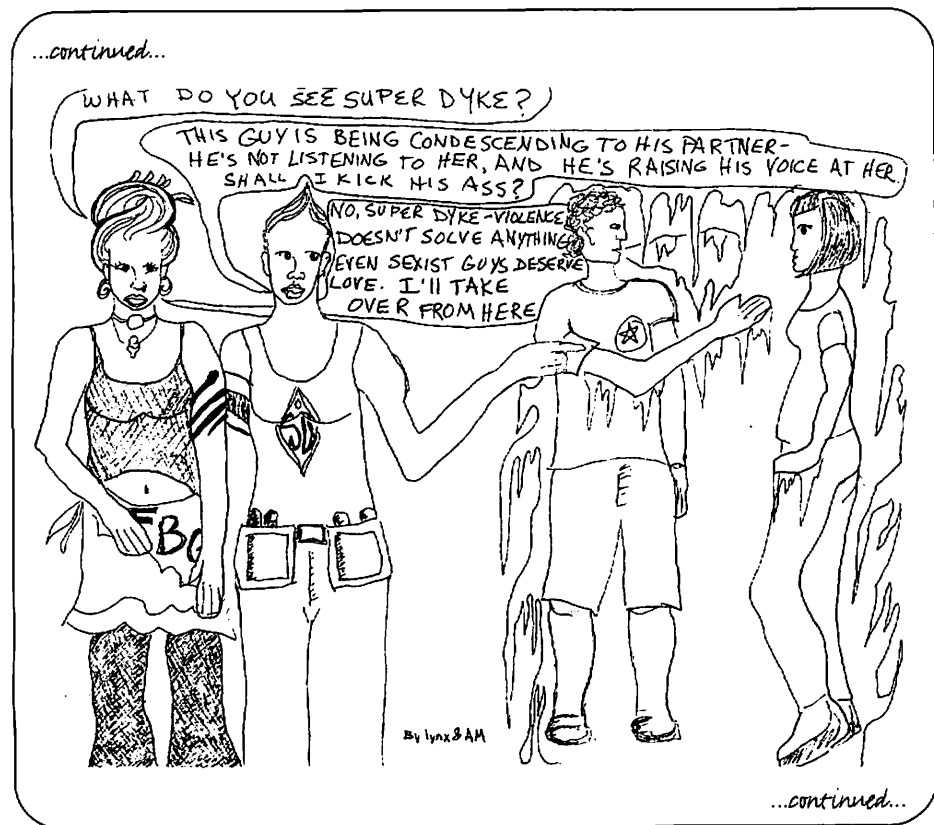
Philippe: What does a community beyond sexism look like?

Rose: Reclaiming should return to more fostering of separate womens' and mens' mysteries, to enrich what happens when we make ritual all together.

Donald: It has often been tough being a third-gendered person in Reclaiming. We are still stuck in a bi-gender worldview. When there are only two choices, many gender queers can never find a place to sit down no matter how many chairs are at the table. May we dare to embrace the ever-growing, fluid nature of the multiverse and all of Mystery.

Melissa: I am a pre-operative Transsexual Lesbian Reclaiming Witch. The unconditional love and acceptance I have received at Vermont Witchcamp has healed me into wholeness. Whereas the pull towards surgery and "gender conformity" is great, VWC is a place where I can embody "living between the worlds" and feel completely safe.

Join the discussion — see introduction on opposite page.



Sex Work: Sex-positive or Sexist?

Sex Work and Sexism

By A.

SEX WORK and sexism—how are they related? Or better yet, how are they *not* related? One way that sexism pervades our culture is the way we are bombarded with images of women's bodies to sell everything, including the women themselves.

Is sex work inherently sexist? I invite you to read on, and then choose the answer yourself.

I have many friends in this and other communities who have chosen either in the past or present to make money by being sexual. Most commonly, I find women who work at strip clubs, or dance privately, as well as women who give erotic massages, or do modeling for internet erotica or porn sites. As I do not have personal experience with other sex-work dynamics i.e.; men as sex workers, I will not speak directly to this, but I welcome all to read on and see if there is something for you here.

I have, at two points in my life, worked at strip clubs. I have also done modeling for internet erotica. As a woman who has done this work, and no longer sees it as the sex-

positive calling she believed it was, I want to give some perspective.

When I worked as a dancer, I really thought I was in integrity with myself and promoting sexual healing. I believed I was giving those men who were my customers an opportunity to be with a person who could show them what authentic connection was like. This was my product. In exchange for my product, I was given money.

First of all, there is the product I was selling. I strived to have this product be as real as possible, having authentic conversations and being myself, but that wasn't really the product I was selling: it was what I used to get someone to purchase my product. What I sold was lap dances. Lap dances can be described as simulated sex, or even sex through clothes. I may have been able to retain my integrity during my verbal and intellectual interactions with these men, but when I started selling my body, I was coming from a place of denial and hurt. I was denying that these men had any power over me. I told myself I was the one in power, and that this was my self-expression, even my way of bringing

continued on page 28

The Unrepentant Whore

An Interview with Carol Leigh, aka Scarlot Harlot, by Luna Pantera

Sex Work, or getting paid for work within the pornography, prostitution, erotic dancing, a.k.a. "the sex industry," brings up a lot of issues around body image, past sexual trauma or abuse, or the fact that women are "used" as mere objects for sexual pleasure.

*Carol Leigh, also known as "Scarlot Harlot," is a longtime activist, artist, and self-proclaimed "Sacred Whore." She is the author of *The Unrepentant Whore*.*

RQ: Scarlot, I'm looking for a way to give our readers some insight into the sex work industry. In your book, you say that before you dedicated your life as a "Sacred Whore" you gathered a few of your friends in a circle and blessed the path you were undertaking. Do you feel this has strengthened and helped you in the work you do?

I believe that everything that I did to bring the female Goddess alive inside me has made me stronger. I did many candle offerings to find work before I got into prostitution. And once I made the decision to become a prostitute, things seemed to fall into place.

I identify with the libertine spirit of sexuality. To me that can be about deciding to support my art by being a sex worker. You might just like to have a lot of sex and not get paid. You might like to have sex that is seen as outside the "morals of society." It's about being who you are and being as comfortable as you can be with it. Sluts Unite!

RQ: Which brings up how we met. You joined the San Francisco NOW Sex Workers Task Force. Before that time I had no idea how divided women were in regard to sex workers' rights. Women could unite on almost every other issue of empowering women, but when it came to prostitutes, walls came up. Do you see a way we can bridge that gap?

Feminism is sometimes liberatory and sometimes repressive. In contemporary feminism we see reflections of the temperance movement. I would like to see feminism as free thinking and total

continued on page 29



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the book will likely be confusing.

In the end, such minutiae is inconsequential. This is easily the best nonfiction I've read in 2004. I encourage readers to find their favorite outdoor spot to curl up with *The Earth Path* and allow it to open their attention to the life cycle around us that is so important and so pervasive that it is too easily forgotten.

For those returning to Starhawk's work, *The Earth Path* will be a welcome addition to their collection. For those who haven't yet had the pleasure — run, don't walk, to introduce yourselves to the challenging work of one of the most important philosophers of our time.

Reviewed by Jennifer Martin-Romme.

Sex-Work and Sexism

continued from page 12

healing to the world.

Some people may say, "I do sex work, and I really am healing my customers in my time with them." I ask you to take a good, hard look at what is given as product, and how incredibly precious it is, and what is received in return. Since gaining distance from doing sex work myself, I realize it didn't serve me. I actually find that it undermined my personal power.

I INVITE ALL sex workers (and those who love sex

workers) to take a look at this. Maybe there are ways to make it healthier. Here are some questions I have asked myself in re-considering my prior belief that I was doing sex work from a clear and powerful place.

- What is my relationship to money? Am I truly choosing this work, or do I feel that society provides no other way for me to support myself?
- Have I, or do I suspect I have been, sexually, physically, or emotionally abused? Is putting myself into a position of compliance or submissiveness with a person with financial power over me a perpetuation of this earlier hurt?
- Do I feel that I could be contributing to the dynamic of women and their bodies being goods for sale?
- Do I think the objectification of women can co-exist with women's empowerment?
- What is being sex-positive? Is disconnecting sex and intimacy promoting a world where all beings are respected and self-expressed?
- As a Witch, what spell am I casting over myself and the world in doing this work?

THOSE OF US who look at distant history for information on how to have a goddess-centered world come across temples where priestesses possibly gave or received sex as a form of god-

dess worship. We want to embrace the Sacred Whore. We may think that we could emulate these women in doing sex work. But I think our society is too far removed from the possibility that sex for money can be rooted in respect.

Then there is the question of what the phrase "Sacred Whore" can mean. What if "whore" wasn't originally a word to describe a woman who sells sex, but really means a woman who is empowered and thinks for herself? In this case, emulating the Sacred Whore in the sexist context of our "adult entertainment industry" seems inappropriate and misunderstood.

Since I have stopped selling my body and images of my body, I have had so much more access to healing. I have been able to see how I lived my life in a way that perpetuated my own oppression. This is not an easy road. The questions above are not easily answered. To honestly answer them requires a certain readiness to heal sexism in ourselves. As Witches, and people committed to healing our world and the people in it, we know the power of what is possible when we let go of what is consuming our powerful transformative energy. May the questioning of our personal assumptions lead to the liberation of ourselves and all people.

A *is an artist, doula, and student midwife who lives in Oakland, CA with her righteous babe wife I and their two kittens.*

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The Unrepentent Whore

continued from page 12

empowerment. The reality is that feminism reflects the biases and prejudices of society at large. In the last ten years, fundamentalist Christians have co-opted a large portion of the feminist movement. The right wing fundamentalist Christians are quoting the anti-sex-work portion of the feminist movement almost verbatim. If you read my last chapter, you'll see how fundamentalist Christians and contemporary anti-sex feminist have joined forces within the Bush administration. I invite progressive-minded feminists to take a look and see who they are "getting in bed with," in regard to the issue of prostitution. I see it as Gloria Steinem verses Angela Davis. Angela, a local resident endorsed our recent decriminalization efforts and Gloria Steinem endorsed the opposition, actually part of a campaign against the sex worker rights movement. Angela Davis has taken into consideration the criminal injustice system, the racism in arrest, conviction, and sentencing - while Gloria is still attached to the anti-porn, anti-prostitution views.

RQ: Your mother is very supportive of your work. Do you think it helps to have parents who are supportive?

My mother's support has strengthened my dedication to sex work. Part of it has been observing her strength in the face of oppression. My father was verbally abusive, and I watched her suffer and overcome. That gave me great strength and wisdom, because she shared a lot of her experience with me. My mother is a very loving Goddess. With her support, unconditional love, and strength, I felt very supported.

RQ: One of the many arguments to decriminalize prostitution is that under the present system, women have no protection or recourse from the violence they have to face. Do you have stories such as these?

I was raped while working at a massage parlor, and the owner and other workers persuaded me not to file a report since it would close down the parlor and put both me and my friends out of work. I also was aware that by going to the police I probably would not have been treated fairly. If you are raped in your home, we might fear that we can be put on a list of "known prostitutes," which could make it more likely for you to get busted. So women are definitely not encouraged to report acts of violence and even rape to the authorities.

There is more organizing going on among sex workers to provide support to report acts of assault to the police. There are bad-trick lists circulated among prostitutes on who to look out for.

What you need to do to protect yourself from the rapist is the opposite of what you need

to do to protect yourself from the police. The situation is set up to make you vulnerable to either rape or arrest. That's why I go crazy with feminists who organize to keep prostitution illegal. By keeping it illegal, it puts women who are sex workers at more risk of being attacked and victimized.

RQ: In your book, you suggest that feminists should be attacking the things that force women

into the sex business against their will: economic injustice, poverty, etc.

Decriminalization is not the cure all for prostitution. It's a much deeper situation. We need to have economic and gender equality. Jobs for all women where they can support themselves and their families.

RQ: How do you address women who might
continued on next page

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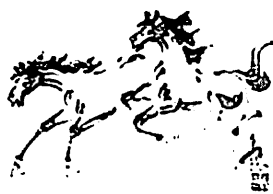


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have gotten into the business from a place of pain around childhood abuse, and who may carry the added burden of being victimized again?

Friends who are sex workers have told me that they have healed a lot of past trauma through their work. This is a very controversial topic. We need to respect each woman's "survival strategies." Poor women might find prostitution to be their best option for supporting themselves and perhaps their families. For woman who have survived abuse, if this is their way to reclaim their power and sexuality, who are we to say they are wrong or demented?

The survivors' community is as divided on these issues as other communities. It comes down to sex work being good or bad. There is a rising voice of pro-sex work survivors, those that respect survivor strategies. There are also survivors who understand that for all women to be safe, some form of decriminalization is mandatory. It's very easy to point to sex work as one cause of abuse in our society. And it doesn't help that prostitution/sex work is still very much taboo. Until we take the stigma out of this type of work, we may never have a true and open discussion.

A lot of women enter the sex work industry as erotic dancers/strippers. For some people, in some situations, it definitely takes a toll - degradation, humiliation, and intimidation from management. Some

women had been pressured into prostitution while working at the strip clubs in recent times in my city, in order to keep their jobs. Instead of targeting working conditions, some former sex industry workers target prostitution, porn, etc. Sex work, being a "slut," is a deep taboo. I can understand how some lash out against this part of culture. Some women look back and say, "That was really horrible and I would never go back. It's bad for women." But many of us are "slut identified," identifying as part of a broader community of sexually transgressive, queers, trans people, people in sexually alternative communities, etc. Being a sex worker is part of our identities. Sex work is part of our culture, so we try to improve our lot with political action, sex workers rights and by building sex worker culture.

I see myself as a "spiritual healer" in general, mostly as an artist and cultural worker. I believe that sexual work can be healing work, under the right circumstances. As one can have a priest for spiritual guidance, one can have a spiritual-sexual facilitator for sexual healing and enlightenment. There are many movements of erotic healers around the world.

I don't believe that all sex work is healing work. A lot of sex work at this time is about women being oppressed with no other options. The link between sex work and poverty is there. Being forced into sex work, being criminalized and then stigmatized by society, is not a desirable situation. While people are in this position they should be as safe as possible, and be given the same rights and protections as other people in our society.

RQ: Do you think the shift from male-centered pornography to female-centered and empowered erotica is the wave of the future?

Sexual liberation and experimentation has definitely given rise to women-owned sex businesses. Unfortunately, now we have another battle. Like all major businesses, the sex industry is being taken over by corporations. Most of the major strip clubs in San Francisco are owned by corporations, which makes it harder to organize and unionize. It's easier to get blacklisted for doing that.

RQ: What words of wisdom would you give to any young women thinking of getting into the sex work industry?

This is such a complicated question with so many variables. People can write to me at harlot@unrepentantwhore.com because the answer to that question is very personal.

RQ: Any last words of wisdom to share with us on how to get involved in sex workers' rights?

There are many people in the sex work industries who are Pagan and not able to be "out," because they are afraid of prejudice and being stigmatized in their own community. Within your own group of friends, community, or coven, perhaps it would be wise to assume that there might be sex workers among you. Be respectful in how you talk about the work. You have to be proactive and welcoming to make sex workers feel comfortable and included. Because of the anti-sex worker discourse and political strategies by some feminists it will take a lot of work to open some doors of trust. I want people to look at the history of prostitution criminalization and notice the last century of alliances between repressive Christian movements and feminists. Women and progressive movements should take some responsibility for the criminalization and support these efforts to fight for our rights and for justice within the sex industries.

For more information on these issues, visit Scarlot's website, www.bayswan.org. People can also check out www.unrepentantwhore.com, or email Ms. Harlot at harlot@unrepentantwhore.com. Scarlot also presents the San Francisco Sex Worker Arts Festival from May 4-8. Visit www.bayswan.org/swfest.html.

Luna Pantera is an activist, Reclaiming Witch, and mother. As a Daughter of Oshun, Orisha of Beauty and Sensuality, she has found and is reclaiming her "Sacred Whore."



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