

### 3. *Isn't Love a Given?*

I AM APPALLED by the fact that I have been asked on numerous occasions to state my position on the question of women and lesbianism. What really appalls me is that the person thinks that I ought to take a position on the sacred right of women to love and be loved. Isn't love a given?

But if I am appalled at being asked, I am doubly appalled and shamed by the fact that the question needs to be answered. We have not come a long way, baby. The prohibition of women's right to choose is all-encompassing in North America. It is the most deep-seated bias in the history of class society. Racism is recent; patriarchy is old.

Colonization for Native women signifies the absence of beauty, the negation of our sexuality. We are the females of the species: "Native," undesirable, non-sensuous beings that never go away. Our wombs bear fruit but are not sweet. For us intercourse is not marked by white, middle-class, patriarchal dominant-submissive tenderness. It is more a physical release from the pressure and pain of colonialism—mutual rape. Sex becomes



one more of the horrors of enslavement, driving us to celibacy. The greater the intellectual paralysis, the more sex is required and the more celibacy is desired.

Does this seem incongruous? Yes, but so are paralysis and movement.

Our life is lived out schizophrenically. Our community desires emancipation. The greater the desire, the more surely do we leap like lemmings into the abyss of alcoholism, violence and suicide. We cannot see our enemy, but we know we must have one. We are standing at the precipice of national destruction.

Women kid themselves that traditionally we were this way or that way. In the name of tradition we consent to all kinds of oppressive behaviour from our men. How often have we stood in a circle, the only female Native, and our contributions to the goings-on are not acknowledged?—as though we were invisible. We are the majority of the membership of almost every Native organization at the lowest level, the least heard and never the leaders. It is not for want of our ability to articulate our goals or lead folks, either. We have been erased from the blackboard of our own lives.

What pains me is that I never saw this before. How often do we read in the newspaper about the death or murder of a Native man, and in the same paper about the victimization of a female Native, as though we were a species of sub-human animal life? A female horse, a female Native, but everyone else gets to be called a man or a woman. (I will qualify this by saying that I do not recall the death of a Black woman ever being reported. Gawd, Cj, let's hope it is because no Black woman ever died on skid row. But we know different, don't we?)

I have been to hundreds of meetings where the male members demand written submissions from female members while giving themselves the benefit of collective discussion and team development prior to any attempt to write it up, thus helping male speakers to sharpen their ideas. Worse, I have watched the



chairperson sit and listen to an endless exchange between two male colleagues while a patient woman holds her hand in the air, waiting to be recognized.

It doesn't stop there. This anti-woman attitude by Native males seems to be reserved for Native women. The really big crime is that our men-folk rise when a white woman walks into the room. Native men go to great lengths to recognize her, and of course, where there is controversy, her word is very often the respected one.

We must and will have women leaders among us. Native women are going to raise the roof and decry the dirty house which patriarchy and racism have built on our backs. But first we must see ourselves as women: powerful, sensuous beings in need of compassion and tenderness.

Please bear with me while I try to unravel the tangled roots of this bias against love and choice. We must try to look at why women reject women's right to choose, and understand why women treat the love between women as some sort of leprous disease that is contagious. I cannot write for women who love women; so far, the only lovers in my life have been men. I *can* address the feelings of homophobia which preclude our ability to accept lesbians among us.

Homosexuality has been named abnormal. If love were a matter of mathematics, averages and so forth, then that would be a fitting way to look at it, since the majority of us are heterosexual. However, love is a thing of the spirit. It finds its major expression through the heart and body. Since contemporary society is based largely on the economics of class and power, norms and mathematics usually prevail. The nature of love, its spiritual, emotional and physical origins are never considered in the white, male point of view.

When men talk about love between people of the same sex as abnormal, they are not referring to love at all, but to sex. Since we are speaking about love, we will have to ignore the male viewpoint. When women refer to women who love women as



unnatural, what they really mean—and this is pathetic—is that it is almost unheard of, and, they agree, it is not allowed. Men loving women is almost unheard of: does its scarceness make it abnormal, unnatural? Any love women can garner for themselves will appear unnatural if women are generally unloved.

Nowhere in the white, male conception of history has love been a motive for getting things done. That is unnatural. They can't see love as the force which could be used to move mountains, change history or judge the actions of people. Love/spirit is seen as a womanly thing and thus is scorned. Women love their sons but men influence, direct and control them. Women love their husbands; men provide for women in exchange for a stable home and conjugal rights and that ever-nurturing womanly love. Men scorn love. We are expected not only to accept this scorn in place of love, but to bear untold suffering at the hands of men. That there is violence in North American homes is taken for granted: "Everyone knocks the wife around once in a while." And does anyone want to admit that very often after a beating on a drunken Friday, a woman is expected to open up to further scorn by moaning and groaning happy sounds while the man who beat her helps himself to her body?

Have you ever heard a man honestly admit that a woman's fear, her surrendering as a result of having been intimidated, excites and arouses him? Rape, ladies and gentlemen, is commonplace in the home. In the home, it is not a crime. What is worse, in our desperate fear of being unloved, a good many women plead for mercy and accept responsibility for the beating and beg forgiveness for imaginary transgressions. Could this be where men get the idea that women "like it, ask for it" when the subject of rape is discussed?

To be quite frank, my friends, if that is how we feel about ourselves, then it is quite likely that we are going to be vitriolic about women who are not victimized in the same way. A woman who has found love apart from men is seen as a traitor just as a woman who has found the love of a gentle man is seen



as undeserving. He, of course, must be a wimp—pussy-whipped. In our society it is loving women that is prohibited.

Sexuality is promoted as the end-all and be-all of womanhood, yet perversely it is often a form of voluntary rape: self-deprecation and the transformation of women into vessels of biological release for men. Our bodies become vessels for male gratification, not the means by which we experience our own sexual wonderment. Any other sexuality is considered abnormal and to be derided. White women spend a lifetime striving for the beauty of large breasts, a small waist, clear skin and that practiced look of submissive stupidity that indicates they will quietly acquiesce to brutal sex.

A woman close to myself and my lover left her husband not too long ago. He beat her on a regular basis for some fifteen years. Between beatings, she told us that he would get on top of her and without ever looking at her, relieve himself of sexual tension. Over the years, she was never sure if, every time he had sex, she had volunteered herself up for rape. That is the kind of story I have heard over and over again just too frequently. It is the kind of sex that is going on in too many homes of the nation.

How many women on Saturday night face beer-breathed husbands in the darkness of their rooms, saying, "Please, no," to men who carry on without their consent? They don't scream because they would awaken their own children. Marriages end over a woman's right to say no in her own bedroom. The law says she must allow her husband conjugal rights. This amounts to reducing women's bodies to soft knots in deformed trees.

Divorce alone gives a woman the right to deny her husband rutting privileges on his terms. We certainly cannot go beating our husbands as they do us. We are not usually their physical equals. Before the shame of colonization caught up to us and our men-folk started behaving like lesser white men (the more brutish type), Native men used to respond to flirting from



women. Some still do. We used to believe that men responded to women, naturally. We also believed that choice was sacred, and that women were sexually passionate beings. We had better get back to some of the traditions that kept us human.

Nearly every woman in North America, particularly if she is a woman of colour, knows the vacant look of a man who is "getting his rocks off," that phrase unspoken in polite company. Men say it to each other more often than anyone cares to face. The very thing we never bring up in mixed company is that basically men take great pride in referring to sex in just that way: "getting your rocks off," "changing your oil," etc. For those of you who think that feminism or women's liberation has brought about a change in this attitude, just go to a leftist social event and bring up the subject of fucking. There is no way to clear a room more quickly than to ask a man if he "got his rocks off much in high school." He will squirm and deny that he ever put it quite that way. If he merely squirms, like as not he was one of the boys who listened to other boys talking like that on the high school football field and laughed. If he squirms and turns red, he is lying.

Homophobes are quick to vilify love between women because the idea of women loving each other is diametrically opposed to volunteering yourself up for rape. The danger of women who love women, in the decrepit minds of patriarchal males, is that men may be challenged to love women too. No more "getting your rocks off." No more venting your frustrations on your wife. If you've got a problem, you'll have to solve it.

What else is there? Some man will have to answer that question. I am not about to help you to be more human; I have enough trouble doing that for myself. It is hard enough to reach inside myself and find my own humanity without carrying your load too.

I didn't always feel that way, as my friend Cj commented:



*The Servant*

Lee, you make me hysterical  
yes, you do  
this white man wants to be served  
and you trot out your daisy apron  
and serve him  
in his own language!

Listen to the tone of the women who curse "Damn dyke!" It is filled with resentment and laced with a very mysterious kind of awe. You just know that "Who does she think she is?" follows closely on the heels of that first epithet. If we accept brutal sex as the best we can get, the norm, then naturally we are going to hate women who love women and don't have to put up with the violence that degrades most women in North America. Hate is itself perverse and so of course we get even by referring to dykes and faggots as diseased or mind-sick individuals.

Even the feminist movement has a hard time with love. I have heard it said that lesbianism is "women identifying with women." I admit I am at a loss for words that would embrace the very intimate love between two people who happen to be women. I am at a loss as to how to describe it as anything other than love between Sue and Carol, or whoever they happen to be. But calling it "women identifying with women" feels like a misnomer. Sex, love, intimacy are not about identification, they are bigger, deeper and broader than that. I am at a greater loss to describe the phenomenon here in North America where lesbianism has become a liberating force, as though it were an alternative to love. Having the freedom to love, be loved, determine the nature of the physical expression of that love, the power to name it, govern it, is liberating, whether the person you enjoy this freedom with is the same sex as you or different from you. It is just as powerful to enjoy the freedom to love with a man as it is with a woman. What is lacking for all women



is the absolute right to be cherished and the absolute freedom to govern our love's expression.

All of our conversations about women who have women lovers are couched in terminology which escapes my comprehension: homosexuality, heterosexuality, lesbianism, homophobia . . . I have a very simple and straightforward philosophy, learned from my grandmother: "In the end, granddaughter, our body is the only house we will ever truly own. It is the one thing we truly own . . . What is more, in the end, command of it will only amount to the sacred right of choice."

From my grandmother's words I understand that there is human sexuality, a biological need for sex, and there is love. (All those who are easily embarrassed can put the book down.) Sex is sex. Sex and love are not the same thing and they are not equal. Sex is the one thing that we can enjoy completely on our own. (I suspect that a good many women do just that.) Few other animals have the wherewithal to gratify themselves sexually quite like we do. We do not need a partner or lover to have sex. When you up-grade sex to the level of love, you erase love completely.

When someone says she is a lesbian she is saying that her sexual preference is toward women. She is not saying that she does not like or love men. I have heard from women that so-and-so was bitter about her marriage so she went gay. It sounds so dangerously logical and absurd at the same time. It's as though "gay" were some place women go as opposed to, say, "shopping," and that there are only two attitudes women can have toward men, bitter and not bitter. Those who are bitter go gay and those who are not go shopping. The danger of the logic is that rather than respecting women as beings, it consigns them to going toward men or away from the men. It accepts that men and our attitudes toward them determine our sexual being. We get all tangled up in the web of our own misunderstanding and then ascribe that colossal ignorance to someone else.

Sex can sometimes go hand-in-hand with love. If it does, so



much the better. But it is not necessary to be in love to enjoy sex. When I first said that in public, an indignant, uncoupled woman said, "Well, sex and love have to go together." I responded brutally: "Yes, I am going to fuck my mother, my father, my sister, my daughters and all my friends." She didn't mean that.

What she thought is that women cannot have sex without love. Nonsense. I once went to a bar, looked around the room, saw a nice smile with a reasonable male body attached to it, walked over to the table and sat down. After a beer I grabbed hold of the gentleman's arm and let him know that any more of that stuff might impair his performance. To which he responded, "Are you interested in my performance?" I had hold of his hand already so I just nodded. "Why are we still here then?"

We left. The sex was not bad. There was no love, no illusions whatsoever, just the two of us rutting and being gratified.

Sex is good but love is precious. It is our passion and compassion. Love defines our humanity. Focussed, love binds two people together in a relationship that can be lifelong. If we truly loved ourselves as women, the question of who we choose to engage with sexually would be irrelevant. Let us stop elevating rutting to the position of defining our humanity. Despite the pressure of sexually oriented billboards and TV ads, let us stop placing fucking on a plane alongside moral principles which confine women to being sexual vehicles rather than sexual beings.

The result of telling young women that they cannot have sex until they are married and in love is that the shame of desiring sexual gratification will mis-define their lives from pubescence onward. My daughters know, as all girls do, that if they want sex no one can stop them from getting it. It is one of the most available commodities on the market, if you don't mind my cynicism. It is mis-defining their lives around sex that is degrading, and it usually comes from mothers at the behest of fathers.



Some mothers, in the interest of equality, try to convince their sons that they should also abstain from sex until marriage.

Pardon my heresy. I taught my children not to confuse love with sex, just as my mother taught me. I wanted them to learn about love from birth on. Surely we do not expect our babies to begin enjoying sex at birth. Is it love then that we seek to deny them? I am convinced that equating sex with love is what is behind all the perversity of child sexual abuse. Some people have taken the bullshit seriously.

The last little note I want to make on sex and sons is a curious one. We are dichotomous in the rearing of our sons and daughters. In order that our sons not grow up to be faggots, we teach them to be macho and to hate girls, loathe all that is gentle, loving and tender. We teach them to pursue sex with girls, who have been taught that sex without love is evil and immoral. We are ashamed when our daughters are discovered to be sexually active, but proud of our sons' sexual proclivity. "He is a real lady-killer." Listen to that: a killer, and we say it with pride.

Love is both a social and personal phenomenon. The dictates of individualism in North America put social love somewhere in the ashcans of the mind. I love men, but I choose one lifelong partner. I love women but sexually I prefer men, so the women I love will be enjoyed at the spiritual level and not the physical. Or the converse, I love men but prefer women sexually, therefore it is men who will be enjoyed on the spiritual level. Sound simple?

Love presumes the right to choose. That means it is no one's business but my own what goes on in my bedroom. Neither my children, my friends, my neighbours nor the world at large has the right to choose my partner. In fact, we don't practise that: our friends and families are notorious for pressuring us into choosing a "suitable" mate. Women influence their children to choose a partner that is compatible with them as mothers. Men extort from their sons the right to direct their choice of a lifelong partner. And yet we make loud noises about our freedom



of choice compared to people in places like Africa and India, where arranged marriage is still a reality. In practice, there is little choice in partner selection, right here.

The right to choice is as false in this society as the right to be free. Feminists are fond of analyzing the practices of societies in Africa and pointing out the horrible roles of women in such places. Pointing fingers at the oppression of women elsewhere changes not a damn thing for women here.

Before we force women who love women to parade their intimate affection for all to examine, we should talk about rape—the kind that goes on in the home between partners. Before we ask women who love women to justify themselves, we had better talk about why we hate each other. And before we bestow the right on society to judge women who love women, we had better demand that society rectify itself.

The next time a woman asks me what my position on lesbianism is, I am going to ask her what her position is on her husband “getting his rocks off.” If she gives me a straight answer, I am going to tell her that I am absolutely opposed to rape and that forcing anyone to accept my definition of who she may love amounts to rape.

To be raped is to be sexually violated. For society to force someone, through shame and ostracism, to comply with love and sex that it defines, is nothing but organized rape. That is what homophobia is all about. Organized rape.



## 11. Education

WHEN OUR GRANDMOTHERS sent their children to school it was with self-sufficiency and mastery over the production of new things in mind. They did not realize that we would never be taught to create iron cooking pots from the ore of the earth. Our third generation is being educated in the European system and our children know less about the production of the stuff of life than did our grandmothers. Schools have shown themselves to be ideological processing plants, turning out young people who cannot produce the means to sustain themselves, but who are full of the ideological nonsense of European culture.

We have learned something in the last two decades. We have learned that to change things will require tremendous power, and that we lack power. We are going to acquire it in the same fashion that we lost it, tenaciously and doggedly. We are going to pursue empowerment.

And don't point at the new crew of Native teachers who have been processed in the same fashion as all the other teachers, as an example for me to follow. Many of these teachers



have good intentions and pledge their allegiance to establishing separate schools with Native content in the curriculum for Native children. The dismal failure of Canadian schools is obvious, but the redress needed may not be merely segregation. Segregated schools alone will not change the basic historical pattern of colonialism; only decolonization will do that.

Adding a sprinkling of our culture to European parasitic culture is offensive, particularly in the absence of an understanding of our laws and the philosophy that underlies them. To spice the ideology of exploitation, individualism and middle-class aspiration with the emptied art-forms and stripped songs of the ancients, is to reduce ourselves to a joke. Tradition is useful only insofar as it allows us to continue to make use of our history.

To whine about the destruction of our language and customs, without trying to come to grips with the reasons for the destruction, is pure mental laziness. The appropriation of knowledge, its distortion and, in some cases, its destruction, were vital to the colonial process. The conqueror relies on his victims for obeisance. The culture of the conqueror is justified by the notion that some sort of "godly" or inherent right to conquer belongs solely to him. Colonialism has racism as its ideological rationale. We must fundamentally alter the relations of the colonial system; to dress our enslavement in Native garb is useless. We need to reclaim our essential selves, engage ourselves as the cultural, spiritual, emotional and physical beings we were and march forward, laying to rest one hundred years of cultural prohibition and arrest.

Armed with the skills of language and possessing the privilege of access to all the knowledge secreted in these institutions of higher learning, you would think that our educated heroes would investigate our history. It seems the farther we go in these processing plants, the more we leave ourselves behind.

The first thing a would-be Native educator ought to come to grips with is the function of education. It is not to become successful. Success is the by-product of what knowledge a person



applies to life; it is the satisfactory achievement of something. Too often success is seen as synonymous with wealth, useful employment or a regular salary.

It is the function of systematic education and training to promulgate the knowledge and culture of a given society in the context of a given historical perspective. That perspective is always determined by who has the power. The culture of this society is based on the rape and plunder of the nations it has conquered. It serves the interests of a few elite corporate entities, which are the sources of power and authority. The means to produce life does not exist solely within the borders of this society. Much of our clothing, electronic equipment, food, etc., comes from former colonies which are financially dependent on North America. That is the simple premise which Native teachers mis-educated by Europeans cannot deal with, without a gentle nudge from below. But deal with it we must.

Once we understand what kind of world they have created, then we can figure out what kind of world we can re-create. We need not worry how much or how little that new world is culturally Native. It is next to impossible to destroy culture without annihilating the people. The Beothuk culture of Newfoundland is definitely a dead culture by virtue of the fact that there are not any living Beothuks in the world.

I am bone weary of the new Native educators (and, for that matter, the Native lawyers) who prate about including our view of history in the textbooks. I can just see the way such a text would read. "Madman/spiritual leader Louis Riel massacred/defeated white settlers/the enemy at Duck Lake today." Or better yet, they are going to say that our ancestors "made a great contribution to the development of Canada." This implies that our grandmothers helped build colonialism as much as white folk did. Not my grandmother; she taught me to be loyal to myself and to our folk. At least she tried to.

A new history will only be written by those who would



change the course of history. There is no other way, short of re-instituting segregated schooling. To have one point of view for settler and Native, you must have unity between them.

Education is all about maintaining culture. In this country there is no need for children to be taught any practical skills. Very few of the educated children of this country will actually produce an object of utility or design the objects we use in our lives. Science, mathematics, health are all taught in the abstract, with no relation to practice. It is ridiculous that children don't acquire the practical training necessary to participate in the productive life of society until they are adults.

The first twelve years of instruction children receive amount to fixing up their heads so that they will move without complaint according to the way society is organized. The society we live in is racist. Naturally, the education we receive is racist. Our students are the victims of this racism. It takes a tremendous amount of effort on the part of Native parents and our children to prevent racism from becoming internalized.

The conditions of life of white people in Canada are much better than those of our people. White students cannot help but be aware of this. Our children know it. They are taught that this is our own fault: that we are inferior lunkheads, or, in a more sophisticated vein, that logic and science are not concepts we can readily deal with. White students have no basis for accusing us of disrespect, so they don't. To ask our students to hold themselves up under the biting lash of racism is criminal. To ask our students to forget the past is to negate their present. The present they enjoy is not disconnected from their past.

As mature adults, we are responsible for cleaning up the mess in which we historically have allowed ourselves to become enmeshed. Responsible: having the ability to respond to a given situation. (This has nothing to do with laying blame.) We must respond to our conditions of life in order to change them. This change does not amount to taking the same old story and



putting the words in the mouths of brown faces to be properly parroted by them. It amounts to finding a way to loosen the grip that colonialism has on us.

In the process of trying to free ourselves, we will learn. Change must be the basis for education and cultural development. It begins with learning. Learning begins with objectifying our condition and the condition of our homeland. To learn "how we are to live among them" does not mean that we should segregate ourselves from or subordinate ourselves to them. It means that we must build a new society based on the positive histories of both. A critical examination of the history of settler society is in order. Likewise, a critical examination of our society is in order.

We have not "lost our culture" or had it "stolen." Much of the information that was available to us through our education process has been expropriated and consigned to deadwood leaves in libraries. The essence of Native culture still lives in the hearts, minds and spirits of our folk. Some of us have forsaken our culture in the interest of becoming integrated. That is not the same thing as losing something. The expropriation of the accumulated knowledge of Native peoples is one legacy of colonization. Decolonization will require the repatriation and the rematriation of that knowledge by Native peoples themselves.