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ISSUE N° 29: SEX

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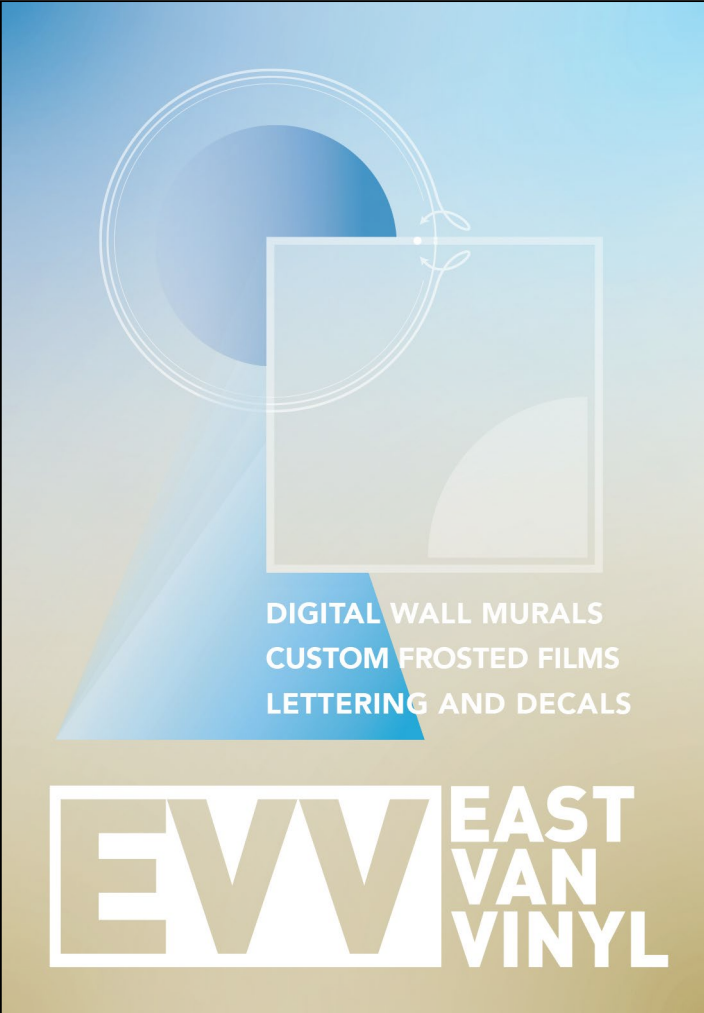
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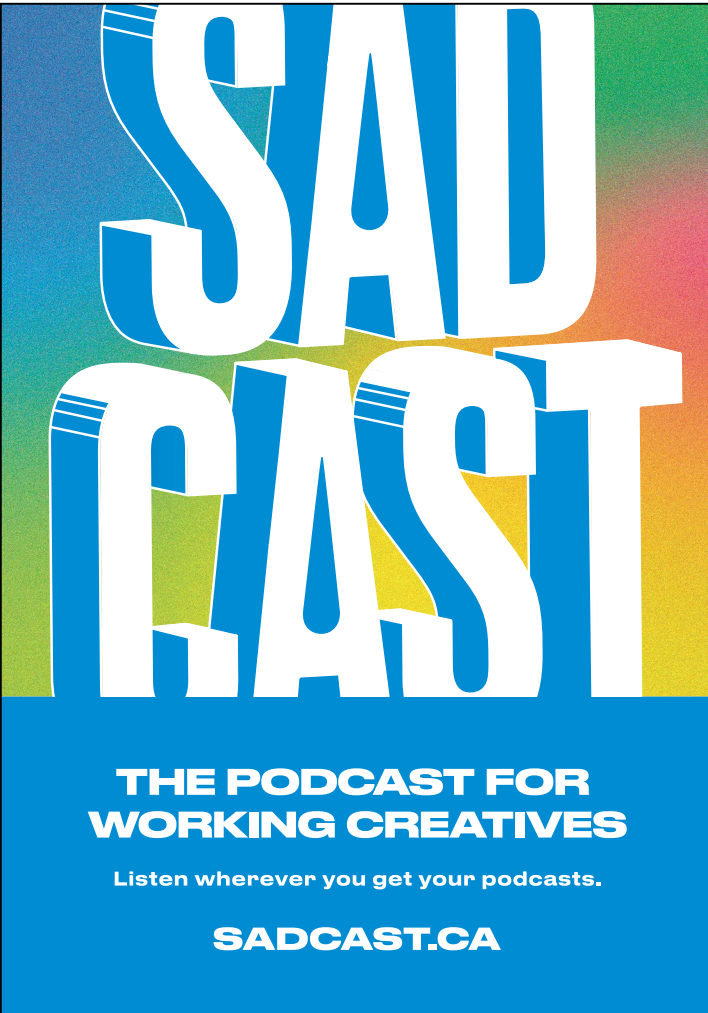
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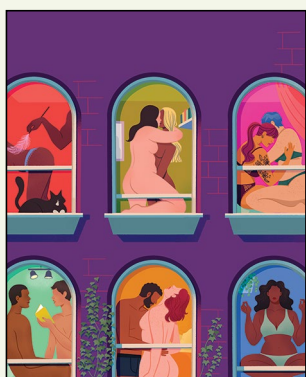
SAD Mag is an independent Vancouver publication featuring stories, art, and design. Founded in 2009, we publish the best of contemporary and emerging artists with a focus on inclusivity of voices and views, exceptional design, and film photography.

The SAD Mag Staff are grateful to be working, learning, and living on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the x̱məθkʷəy̱əm (Musqueam), səliwətaʔi (Tsleil-Waututh), and Skwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) Nations. We are committed to furthering decolonial editorial and business practices with every issue we publish.

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WHAT'S OUR NUMBER?

369

SAD SEXUAL * PARTNERS

*user defined

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Most of us have had fraught, confusing relationships with sex at some point in our lives. For something so “universal,” its many complexities can feel a lot like taunts. From living and dating with HSV-2, to navigating sexual racism, to managing vulvodynia or overcoming a crippling fear of sex, this issue is all about learning to see something we know intimately from a new perspective. If editing these works has taught me anything, it's that we're all just doing our best to see and be seen, and to know and be known by another human being.

I'm proud to bring you this collection of witty, funny, caring works on this theme; each reflects our desires to belong in ways that feel honest to us. However, some stories in this issue may be a challenging read—these pages are rife with the uncomfortable, beautiful, difficult truths that come with real vulnerability. We have included content warnings with some pieces, but I encourage you to read thoughtfully, and to take breaks or skip sections if you need to.

Producing this issue has been an honour, and it is with extreme gratitude that I humbly resign from the editorship. I joined this magazine when I was 19, and now, six years later, I am so grateful for the experiences and knowledge this publication has afforded me. I am especially thankful for Madeline, Syd, and Marcus, as well as Katie, Pam, and Michelle, for their friendship, guidance, and kindness. Our teamwork will bond us forever. When we say “SAD Fam,” we don't mean it lightly.

2020 has been a difficult year, but it has been so uplifting to see our literary, arts, and culture communities rally to support one another. We owe so much to our staff, stockists, artists, writers, and readers, and as I take my leave, I know these pages—and our community—will always resonate deep within my heart. I have loved every minute of our time together.

Take care, and thank you for everything,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Megan Jenkins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'M' and 'J'.

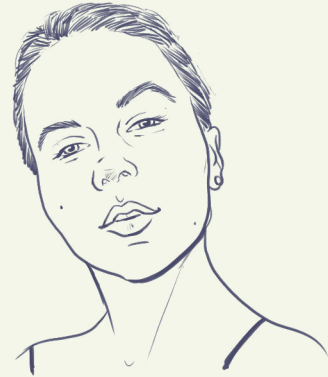
Megan Jenkins
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS



THANH NGUYEN

Thanh Nguyen is an apologetic introvert who hopes to one day be able to confidently call herself a writer without cringing. Some of her favourite pandemic pastimes include watching movies, cooking, singing karaoke, and contemplating the elasticity of time. She might have reused the same bio from a dating app.



ANGELICA POVERSKY

Angelica Poversky (and/or ANGELIQUOI?) (they/them) is queer non-binary Russian-Jewish poet, clown and media activist, residing on the stolen lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), səɫ ɪlwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh), and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples. ANGELIQUOI? has shared stages and pages with clowns, comedians, politicians, computer scientists and rabbis—talking about algorithmic oppression, media justice and unearthing blooming truths.



ANNALIESE FEININGER

Annaliese Feininger is a twenty-six year old film photographer and writer. Her visual work is comprised primarily of staged narrative fantasies, highlighting the use of the female form for art's sake rather than commodification. Her work has been published in print and digital magazines from across Canada, and most recently showed at *Mixed Gems*, her third group exhibition. A serial post-secondary dropout, Feininger is currently completing her bachelors of fine arts in analog photography at Emily Carr University.



MAGNUS VAN DER MAREL

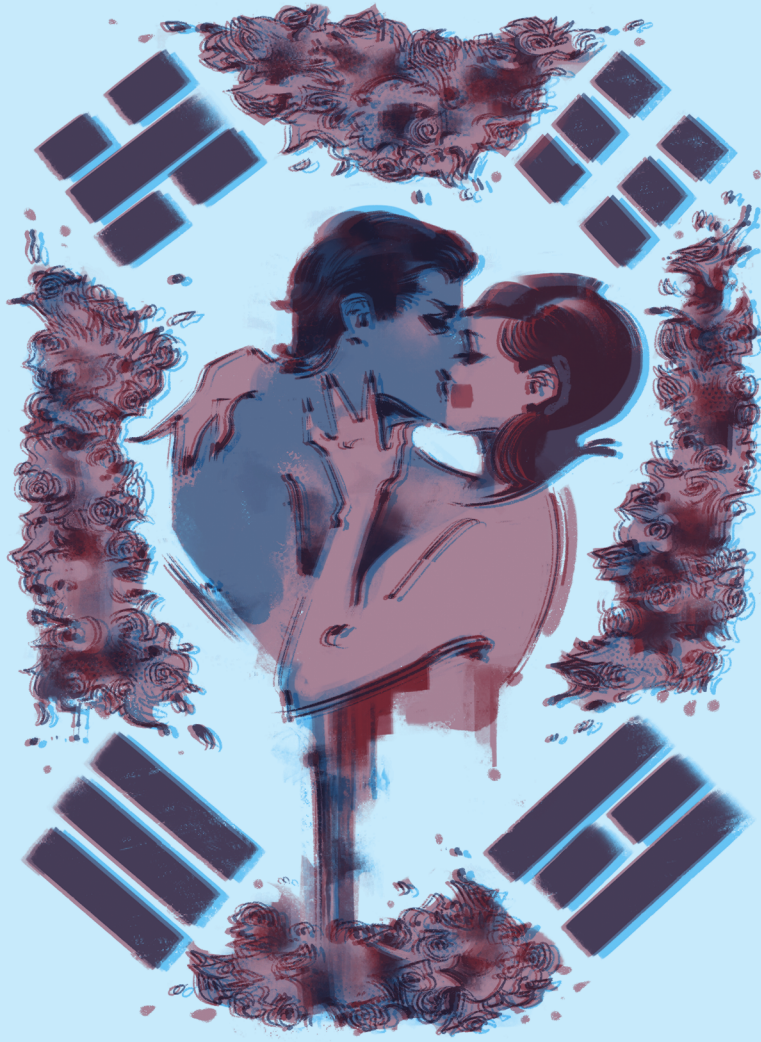
Magnus is an illustrator, comic artist, and cat person based in Vancouver, currently studying Illustration at Emily Carr University. Their work usually revolves around themes of love and LGBTQ+ identity, with a side of mythology and the supernatural. They hope to one day amass a collection of skull replicas.



True story: this issue of SAD Mag was created in quarantine. SAD normally exclusively publishes film photographs, but in this issue we've opened our submissions to digital photography so we can continue to support local artists and art while we're all apart.

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#SADNEXY





I BECOME A BILLBOARD

WORDS BY JULIA PILEGGI | ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH BASLAIM

I would wear the pussy you sketched.
I would wear it on my tote bag if it belonged to you.
If it was your self-portrait.
I want to wear your sex on my shoulder and carry it around.
I want to show it off to people.
I want to make them watch my bag when I go to the
bathroom to touch myself at the thought of making them
wet without knowing it.
I want to make people wet with the sex of you.
You're meant to be owning the streets.
Let my bag touch a thousand dicks as I walk
to the 7eleven for taquitos.
Let them high five me as I take you to church
to the poetry slam
to the bakery where I buy my bread.
Let them see what I see.
Let them give thanks like I give thanks.

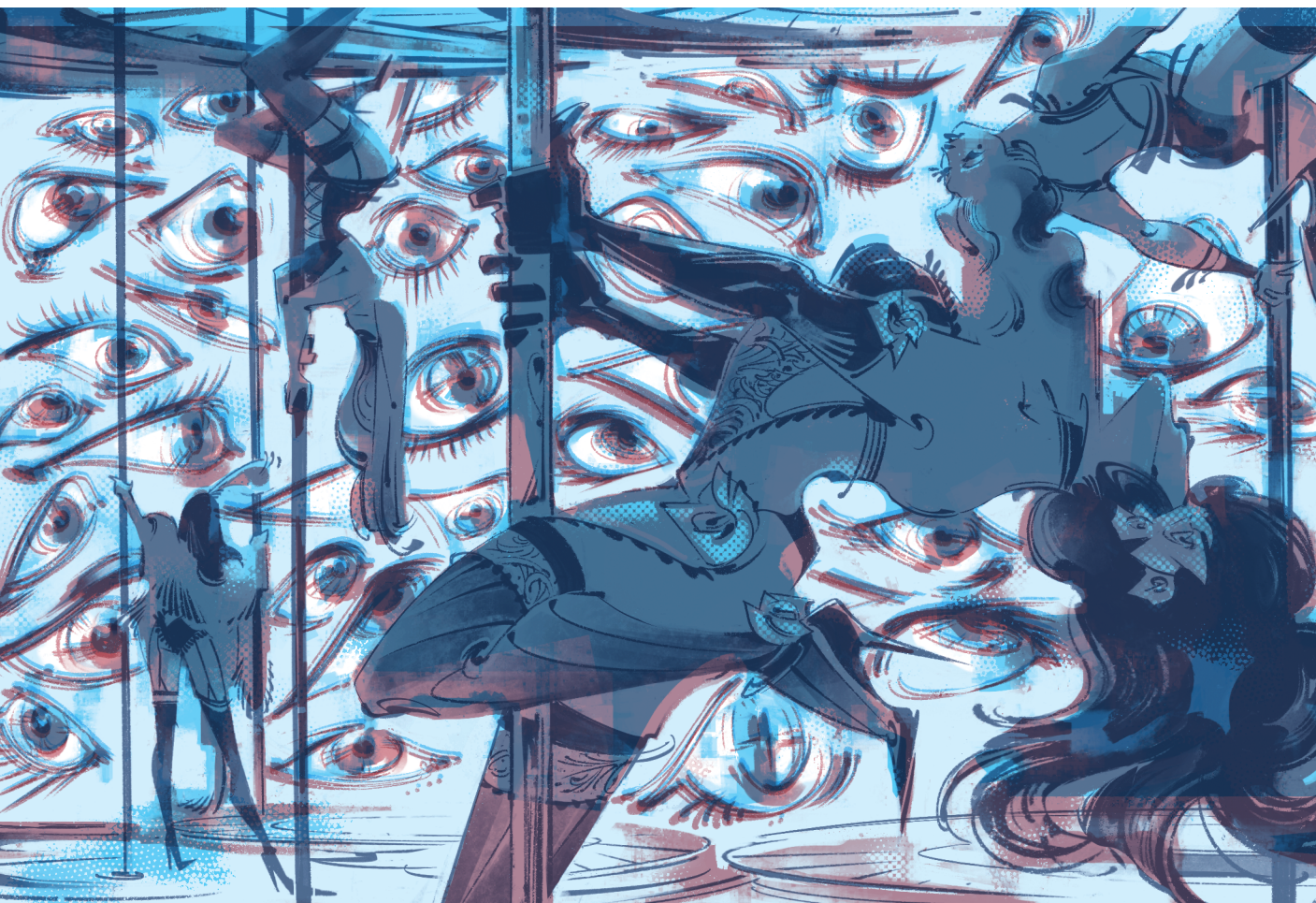


ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH BASLAIM

DIS- PATCH- ES

NEW ORLEANS

New Orleans both plays into and subverts every expectation you might have of it, disorienting you before you've had your first drink. The French Quarter, with its narrow cobblestone streets, colourful balconies, and constant crowds, is the dominant image that most people have of the city, and understandably so: Bourbon Street is one of the most popular destinations for party tourism worldwide. And, as you might expect, that's where most of the strip clubs are.

The clubs there are like those in Las Vegas: prepackaged, part and parcel of the experience sought by flocks of wig-clad bachelorettes and mobs of frat boys in too-tight polos. As part of the increasing Disneyfication of Bourbon Street, through which a once-unbridled nightlife becomes plasticized and consumer-friendly, there've been rules put in place that you might not expect.

My friend Clarissa stripped in Virginia before coming to New Orleans, and discovered the differences right away. "One night, years ago, all the clubs on Bourbon were raided by police, except the Penthouse... so it still has special privileges. Some places lost their liquor licenses, some are still on probation." There's a hierarchy, even if tourists aren't aware of it. "Barely Legal can't let their girls take their tops off during lap dances. Rick's has topless dances, but girls can't come into contact with customer's laps. Penthouse has topless, full-contact lap dances both in private rooms and out on the main floor."

Some of the best in the business work at these clubs, but the clientele and the environment can test even the most veteran dancers. There's a lot of turnover, and competitive atmospheres abound. New Orleans is seen by many as a playground for adults, but as ever, there's real people living and working here so that the overgrown kids might enjoy themselves. —Chris Anhorn

GOLD COAST

In Vancouver, sex and dating is rough—and not in a good way. It's a never-ending cycle of swiping right, drinking \$7 beers, and enduring prosaic conversation. But when you buy a plane ticket, dig up your gently used sandals, jump on a plane, and land in the tropics, finding love is a breeze.

Cut to day 3 of your adventure abroad:

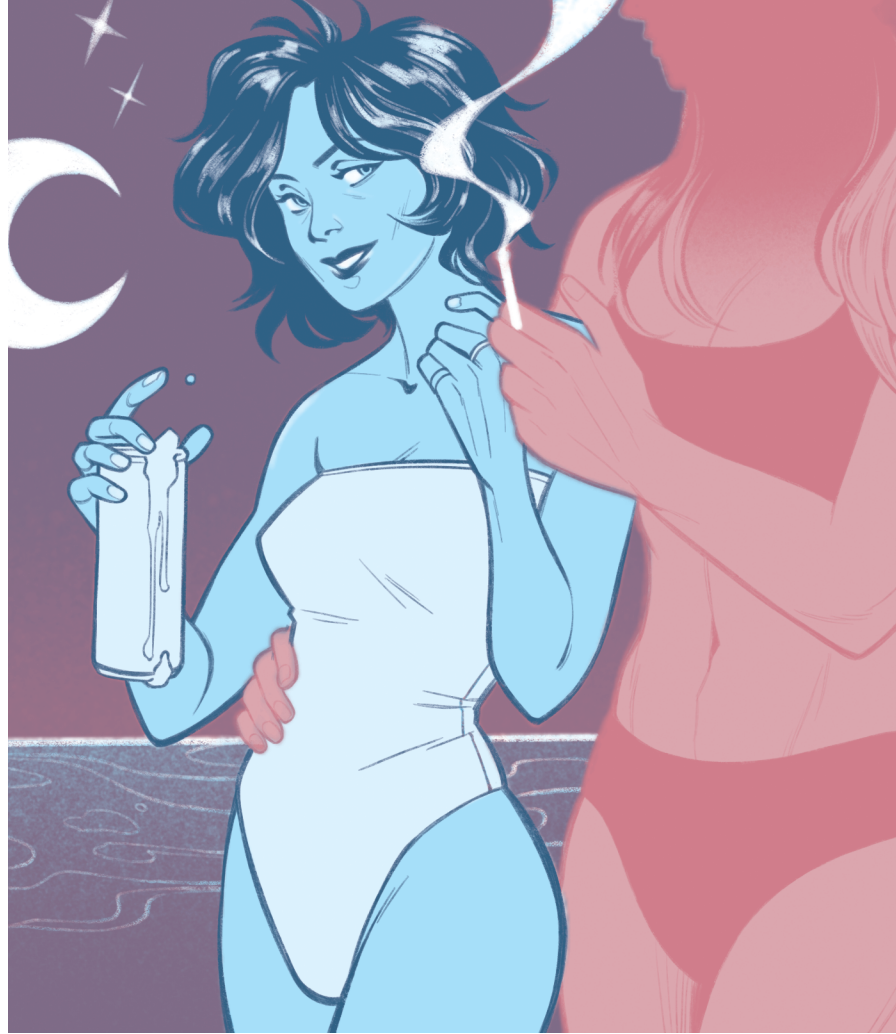
You've forgotten what you do for work, your gently used sandals have washed away in the surf, and you're on an obscure east coast Australian beach, under the stars, hammered off cheap beer, sharing a cigarette with the sexiest European backpacker.

And then you fuck. Right there in the sand.

There is something so beautiful about travelling, every moment is fleeting, and every experience is new. But there is also something perplexing about the fact that a touristy beach, corrupted by old chicken nugget boxes and sticky coke bottles, is suddenly *super hot*.

It's a perception that we're collectively consuming; that when we travel to a foreign place, we enter an erotic simulation where we embody free-spirited, emancipated versions of ourselves.

We return home and reminisce about our encounters as if they were the *Eat Pray Love* experiences we had hoped for. Our return to robotic routines is flooded with bittersweet memories of a dreamier place, with way better sex. —Kennedy Touet



ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAKI KING

SOUTH KOREA

History works in funny ways. For instance, if my grandfather hadn't fought in the Korean War, a Canadian diplomat would still be a virgin. Let me explain.

In 2017, I travelled to South Korea for a youth peace camp. As the Veterans Board of my home country told me, the camp was a week-long educational and cultural program set up by the South Korean government. The program was for grandchildren of international Korean War veterans as a thank-you for the soldiers' service. We would learn about South Korean culture, the war, and the country's history alongside other ambassadors. Enter one of the Canadian ambassadors, Mitch.

Mitch had broad shoulders, chestnut brown hair, and a crooked nose. He wasn't sharp but he was a good listener; my Albertan himbo. The night it happened, Mitch and I snuck away from a (secret) party I was co-hosting with one of the American ambassadors, who generously donated his only condom to our cause. "At least someone's gonna use it," he sighed.

In Mitch's dorm, I was already on top of him when he blurted out, "I've never actually had sex before." Suddenly sober, I bolted upright, desperately trying to play it cool. "Oh," I said intelligently, wincing. The Veteran's Board did not prepare me for this. Mitch just stared up at me, frozen and awkward. I sighed. If this really is his first time, someone had to take the reins. Giving him a soft smile, I placed my hand on his chest and reassured him, "We don't have to have sex if you don't want to." "No," he said resolutely, grabbing my hand, "I want to." I laughed, promptly lifted my purple sundress over my head, and kissed Mitch deeply.

I returned to my home country with hickies and a hefty 2000 word report. While my grandfather returned from South Korea a hero, I returned a hoe. Both are narratives I am proud of. —Winona Young

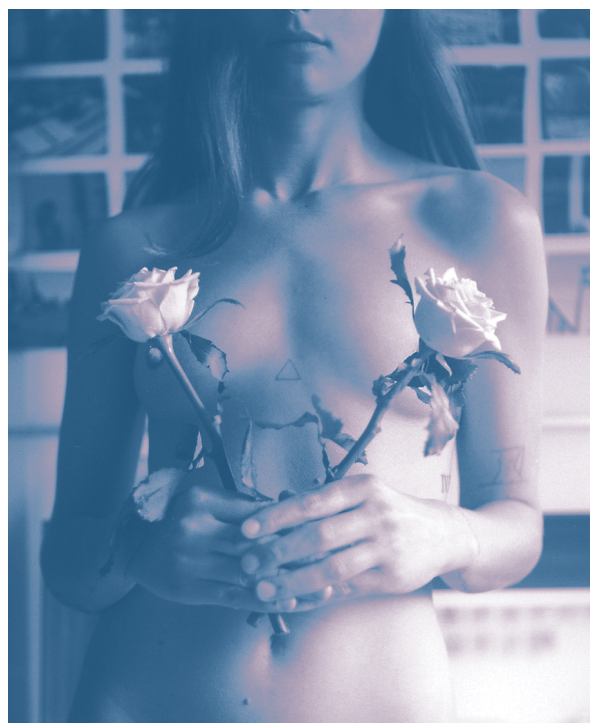




dirty talk

WORDS BY MADELINE BARBER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANNALIESE FEININGER

She kneels in front of her suitcase, palms together, lips pursed, paying homage to the shrine of her new life in Germany. We're in her basement room of our family home in North Vancouver. It smells like old roaches and too-sweet vanilla perfume. Electro-swing, hot from the discotheques of Berlin, plays while I prod her with more questions.



This was how it always went, Little Sister lapping up Big Sis' stories. I folded them away like hand-me-downs, adding patches to the plans with holes if I wanted to take them out for a spin. In whispers, she had taught me what it meant if a guy said he wanted to eat you out, how much weed you'd get if you asked for a quarter, what a queef was. She translated the sticky, taboo world for me. I helped her with spelling and grammar.

Everything's so romantic, she tells me, clutching a hair straightener made for European outlets to her chest. Everything except the dirty talk. She binds it closed with the cord and tucks it into the suitcase between La Senza thongs with the tags still attached and a monogrammed bag filled with sinus medication and Ativan. Things had started to heat up during one of their marathon skype calls, she tells me, and he, innocently, obviously, used the word "genitals."

I think about this poor German guy, who had no idea his sexy banter made him sound like a biology textbook. If only Google Translate had a bedroom mode. Maybe when my sister is living with him, she can casually bring it up when they're preparing bratwurst. Like hey, we call this a wiener, which is also what we'd call a dick, but not in a sexy way.

I want to tell her about my own uncomfortable moments. I want to tell her that saying "genitals" isn't so bad compared to the things I've been called in the midst of a steamy tryst. The stories that I don't share hang above us with the Ouija board spirits that played hard to get with our childhood selves. Her willing fingers had always pushed to spell out a word while my little hands resisted.

The music stops and I turn to look at her. Everything I've never told her seems to fill the silence and I wonder for the first time if it bothers her that I'm a bursting suitcase full of her secrets when she holds just a meagre handful of mine. Maybe I'm trying too hard to stay the little sister by not confiding in her. Maybe I'm holding onto the way things have always been with us, just short of tugging on her sweater, thumb in mouth, and begging her not to get on that plane. I think about sharing something with her, but I don't. I put on a new song and shuffle back onto her bed. With a German accent, I tell her that her genitals are wunderbar. She looks at me, and we laugh.



WORDS BY JORDAN JOHNSTON | ILLUSTRATION BY VINCENT LINS

Breaking the rules has never been my strong suit. As a kid, I gained acceptance and praise from adults by being well-behaved, and I loved feeling morally superior because I was good at following instructions. Don't judge me too harshly—I was, of course, terrible at sports.

Not quite. Instead of activism, I turned to crime.



DOIN' CRIMES

I hope you're picturing me plotting getaways and whizzing across desert landscapes like the real baddest bitches of them all, *Thelma and Louise*. Keep that picture of me in your head a moment longer. Firmly ingrained? Good.

Unfortunately for my sexy criminal alter ego, this is not what happened. Instead of subverting gender norms and railing against the patriarchy in delirious car chases, I found myself in the habit of stealing street signs, usually while drunk on the way home from a party or the bar. Glasses and coasters from chain restaurants seemed to find their way into my bag as well.

“I’ve never actually attended a protest where there was any real risk of arrest, and I have a feeling attending a demonstration just to get my Jane Fonda moment is a dreadful reason to get involved in something.”

Crime? Hardly. These acts were perhaps only misdemeanors that would, at the very worst, get me a fine from the City of Vancouver. But for a few moments, I would feel like I had control again, like the violence of the world had subsided in the glow of my own personal chaos.

Nothing I did would have gotten me a single minute in prison, let alone a night. Stealing street signs and hanging them in my living room was not a substitute for real action that would make any kind of difference to improve the situation I saw in the world. I wasn't following in the footsteps of the queer activists who risked their lives for a better world. I was a dumb, selfish 20-year-old with an unsettlingly large collection of civic signs (tax payer funded) and no progress to show for it.

I could keep committing petty theft, or I could try to live up to the legacies of LGBTQ+ activists that came before me, and actually try to make a lasting difference.

Since my crime spree, I've learned that talking is a much healthier way of working through emotions, and to take a stand against something you think is unjust you actually have to take a stand—one that might truly jeopardize your comfort and varied privileges. I'm not perfect, sometimes I act in selfish ways, lashing out superficially toward systemic discriminations against queer people. But I'm doing my best to not take my anger out on city road work projects.

It feels like, as a community, we're facing an unprecedented and terrifying world right now, and collective action is one of the best ways to combat the rampant injustices we're witnessing. That's what the Stonewall rioters and HIV/AIDS activists understood. They weren't protesting just for their personal gain—for a feeling of personal control—but for the benefit of everyone.

Now, when I think about my night in jail, I'm not alone. There's a whole community of people there with me, all trying to make the world a bit better.



WITCH. PLEASE.

Emboldening feminine sexual energy through mysticism

WORDS BY LAUREN EDWARDS | ILLUSTRATION BY BRONWYN SCHUSTER

NOTE: THIS ARTICLE USES THE TERMS “WOMAN” AND “FEMININITY,” OFTEN REFERRING TO VULVA-OWNERS. HOWEVER, THESE TERMS ARE NOT EXCLUSIVE AND THE IDEAS DISCUSSED IN THIS ARTICLE ARE MEANT TO ENCOMPASS ALL PEOPLE THAT IDENTIFY AS WOMEN, AND ALL PEOPLE THAT IDENTIFY WITH ANY SORT OF FEMININITY.

In a modern wave of feminism, and destigmatizing the shame around women’s sexuality, women are increasingly turning to witchcraft and other religious practices to get in touch with their feminine and sexual energies. Some may have their interests piqued by recent mainstream interpretations like Netflix’s *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, while others have long been spellbound.

“One of the wonderful things about paganism is sexuality is a part of your spiritual practice,” says Cara Agro, a priestess and Witch in the Reclaiming group in Vancouver.

‘Priestess’ is a gender-neutral term in the Reclaiming community. The title is earned by individuals who complete coursework and ritual planning like circling, which sees a sacred circle of people conjuring energy contained inside of the space.

For the Reclaiming community, the circling process consists of calling the elements or gods and goddesses, one of which is the South. The South represents fire, passion, sexuality, and a richness of thought and ideas associated with the electrical impulses in the brain when synapses are lighting up. Energy work participants can also set up a circle around their homes, completing it through having sex with a partner, with themselves, or drinking dream-inducing tea.

Varied Indigenous traditions have long embraced the presence and influence of spirits, and of mediums, who bridge the spiritual and physical worlds. Traditional Mi’kmaq spirituality uses a shaman, a figure who possesses the ability to directly contact spiritual entities, access altered states of consciousness, and draw in exceptional healing abilities to help their community. Wiccan and Pagan religions might be considered parallel, but are not necessarily ontologically compatible with such practices.

“Modern Pagan witchcraft and its variants, including Wicca, have roots in Western magical belief systems going back to the Neoplatonists... but are relatively new religions,” says Sabina Magliocco, Professor of Sociocultural Anthropology and Program Chair of Religion, Literature and the Arts at the University of British Columbia.

According to Magliocco, the origins of Wicca can be traced to 1940s England, when retired civil servant and amateur playwright Gerald Gardner “either discovered a group doing esoteric rituals or founded one.” Enticed, Gardner

adopted this movement and became an advocate and spokesperson. At the same time, other Britons claimed traditional witchcraft practices had been passed down to them within their families, creating new covens.

Wiccan practices emerged in North America later, in the 1960s, and were highly influenced by second-wave feminists and environmentalists.

“These led to new interpretations and sects of modern Pagan witchcraft reflecting the concerns of the counterculture: women looking for alternatives to male-dominated religions that disempowered them, and people looking for a spirituality that valued nature, the Earth, and human sexuality,” explains Magliocco.

Reclaiming is a form of neo-paganism like Wicca, but it sets itself apart from other witchcraft-practicing communities with its openness and non-hierarchical structure, whereas Wiccans closely follow ancient practices and traditions. “They have temples, they have [different] rules, they have mantras, they have [specific practices] that make them Wiccan,” says Agro.

However, the foundations are similar.

“The central belief in the modern Pagan religions, of which modern Pagan witchcraft is the largest, is the sacredness of the physical Earth and everything on it. [This] reverence for the Earth and its creatures, for the balance of nature, is entirely compatible with a scientific worldview,” says Magliocco.

Other than Gardner, one of the founders of the movement is feminist author and environmentalist Starhawk, who links enchantment with activism. Her Reclaiming events and rituals centre around building communities that foster personal and collective empowerment in service of healing the environment. When the community formed in 1979, Starhawk introduced feminine sexual expression to the collective of women through emancipatory rituals.

Along with practicing a deep, spiritual commitment to the Earth, Reclaiming’s conviction is that spiritual authority lies within oneself—and no other person is needed to interpret what is sacred.

“To me, the most important thing with practice, and its effect on spirituality and sexuality, is that there’s that ownership of everything you are, and everything you are is sacred,” says Agro.

Mainstream culture tends to pluck the sexuality aspect of witchcraft and heighten it, but *Sabrina*-esque orgies (wasn’t this meant to be a kids show?) are far from reality. Sex is understood as a valuable part of creating life, not only in conception but as “part of the whole that is natural, that is the Earth,” says Agro.



Of the many aspects to a person who calls themselves a Witch, sexualized women have become the face of Pagan and Wiccan communities. “If you think about the historical understanding of the Witch, usually they were women who expressed their sexuality in ways that were not appropriate within the cultural confines of the time and place that they lived,” says Agro.

To Agro, witchcraft was alluring because it was unapologetic. She was raised Catholic and while she saw the good parts, she doesn’t believe women are subservient or that sex should strictly be reserved for marriage.

“In paganism, there’s so much room for interpretation, understanding, and personal truth versus this eternal god-like truth that is so far removed from everyone else. The power is more on the self, the human body, and what we can do as individuals,” explains Agro.

The priestess has been practicing on and off for about 20 years. “I found the craft when I was probably 11 years old. I read a book that had astral projection as a part of it. Reading it, I thought, I know this is a fictional book, but this seems like it could be a real thing.”

Agro also advocates for removing the shame around the natural processes of the female body—sexuality, periods, breastfeeding, and more. She is proud to be a part of a body-positive, sex-positive community helping diminish insecurities around sexuality.

Before Agro joined the Reclaiming community, she did her research, joined message boards, and started her altar in a jewelry box she hid under her bed. She focused on meditation, and began working with Kundalini energy. Kundalini, in Hinduism, is a form of divine energy located at the base of the spine. It is an important concept in Śaiva Tantra, where it is believed to be a force or power associated with the divine feminine. Access to this energy can aid in deeper, more gratifying sexual experiences.

Kundalini energy work can be quickly flowing through various yoga poses—like marjaryasana (cat pose) and bitilasana (cow pose)—or staying in vajrasana (rock pose) and breathing vigorously through the nostrils.

Zoey Mayberg, a Vancouver-based graphic designer, started practicing tantric meditation practices and breathwork about a year ago and, like many witches, says Kundalini has elevated her confidence and creativity, and made her orgasms more frequent and satisfying.

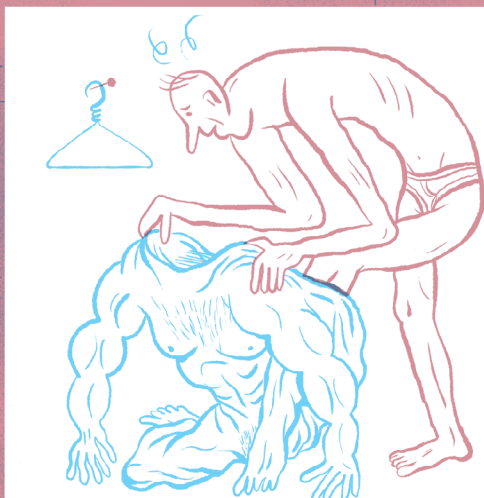
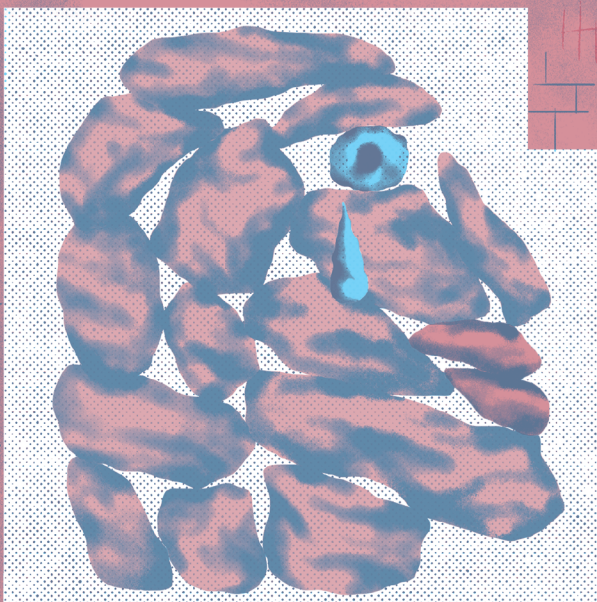
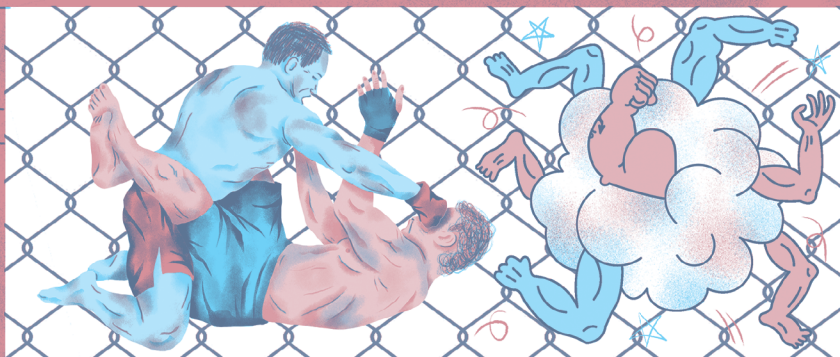
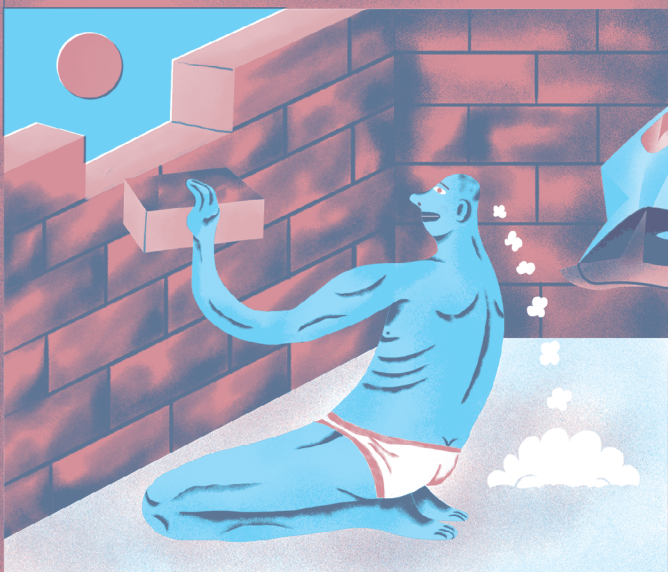
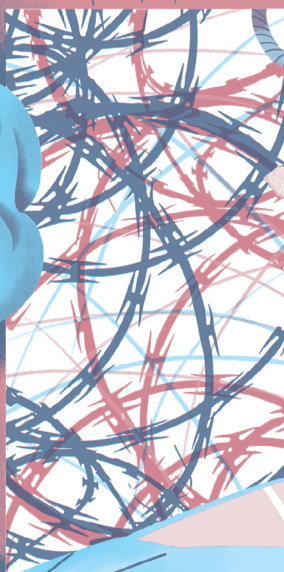
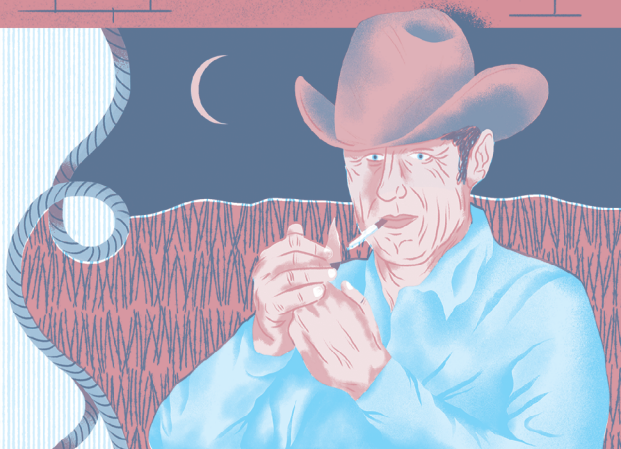
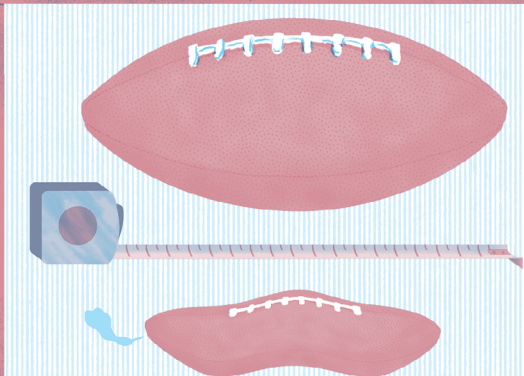
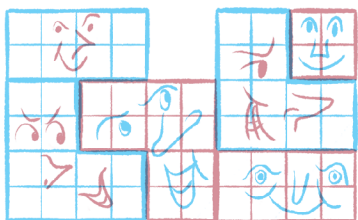
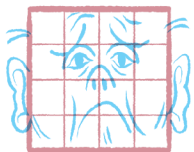
“By doing a self-pleasuring act and doing it a certain way with breathwork and edging—being on the cusp of orgasming, stopping yourself, and repeating—you can feel the energy rise to your head and you have these very deep, cathartic orgasms,” adds Mayberg.

When she first started the practice, there were a lot of frustrating moments following a rush to climax. Naturally, one can get annoyed while breathing deeply in vajrasana for several minutes only to feel nothing happening.

“As women, [often our sexuality is repressed] and told our pleasure takes too long, or we’re not allowed to spread our pleasure because men can’t control themselves. [Practicing tantric, magical meditation] helps you become comfortable being a sexual, feminine woman,” says Mayberg.

According to Agro, a lot of the energy work, including circulating and transferring energy, is what happens in orgasm. “That rush of endorphins, that rush of that chemical feeling, is very much a part of the energy work that you do as a Witch.”

“It’s not just what’s outside of ourselves...it’s a part of human experience so that is beautiful, wonderful, and amazing, and it’s a little bit of magic every time you climax.”



The Man Who was Scared of Sex

A personal journey toward understanding healthy masculinity

WORDS BY FELIPE ANGEL | ILLUSTRATION BY BRYCE ASPINALL

Anxiety and internal struggle related to sex has followed me from an early age. While my friends in high school and university wanted and had sex, it was my greatest fear. The spectre of sex, and feeling like I had to perform a certain way, caused me a huge amount of stress.

It took me a long time to understand where my fear of sex stemmed from, and I found answers only after a period of introspection. It turns out that, like many men in our society, I had never been taught how to navigate the complexity of being a man. I didn't know how to embody my masculinity and sexuality in a healthy way—I realized I was being told to be one thing only, and nothing else.

Our culture creates more shame than encouragement when it tells men to “be a man.” It is a statement packed with “shoulds,” telling men that they're lacking qualities that supposedly constitute being a man, especially when it comes to sex.

In *To Be a Man*, author Robert Augustus Masters explains that telling someone to “be a man” can alienate them from their basic humanity—that is, the many aspects of humans and life that are not strictly “masculine”—leading to emotional disconnection and numbness. Masters says that as a result, men are “far more capable of dehumanizing activity, far more able to rationalize harmful behaviour, and far more able to be caught up in abuse of power and sex.”

“Men in general are hurting far more than they are showing and *everyone* is paying the price for this, regardless of gender, age, nationality or occupation,” says Masters. The #MeToo movement has helped bring this to light, showing how people, mostly women, are paying the price for our culture's emotional neglect of men.

Society has continuously told me that I had to be emotionally stoic, show no vulnerability, and be tough and aggressive. With sex, being a man meant I had to make the girl orgasm every time, I had to last hours, I had to fuck her hard, my dick had to be a certain size, and that the more women I “conquered” the more manly I would be. This led me to believe that my performance in the bedroom was the only thing that would make a girl want to be and stay with me.

Allowing these ideas to find a home in my psyche has taken me to dark places. I can't remember the exact time that I started harbouring so much anxiety around sex, but I can recall that from an early age, I never felt good enough. As a result, I wore an alpha-male mask so I could be the man that my friends and society wanted me to be. Because of the fear and pain this caused, the majority of my high school sexual experiences were drunk and senseless—a pattern that continued into my university career.

My self-esteem dwindled rapidly due to my complex relationship to sex. It quickly became the thing I feared the most. I wanted to be with someone in a loving and genuine relationship, but I could not allow myself to be vulnerable. Vulnerability was not part of my lexicon and I had no support system to help

me explore it. I didn't want people to see the real me: a man scared of sex. A shift needed to happen.

It started with serious introspection. I parsed out what I actually wanted from the things I was taught about sexuality and being a man. It took, and continues to take, a lot of work and honesty for me to find enjoyment in sex. I discovered that sex is about being present with another, it's not *about* the other, but about sharing an experience together and both enjoying that experience. I've learned that being a man empowered by healthy sexuality requires complete honesty with oneself and one's partner.

Like most things, I find masculinity to be fluid and on a spectrum—what “being a man” means will be different for everyone. I cannot show or tell a man what it feels like to be empowered in their masculinity during sex, it can only be felt through their own understanding and experience.

“I've learned to listen to my body, to listen to what it wants and desires, when it can give, when it can't, and most importantly, how it can be open to receive.”

A big lesson I have learned is that vulnerability is the doorway to love. For me, vulnerability is speaking my truth, even in the face of humiliation and rejection. Vulnerability shatters all walls and builds bridges for us to connect to one another. It allows us to completely surrender to another person, allowing sex to become more than just a physical experience. It allows us to stand naked, both metaphorically and literally, in front of one another.

I've learned that I feel empowered in my masculinity when I am grounded and hold space—not only for my energies and emotions, but for those of my partner. I've learned to listen to my body, to listen to what it wants and desires, when it can give, when it can't, and most importantly, how it can be open to receive.

Sex has been one of my greatest teachers. It continues to teach and show me the areas of my life where I am still building my strength, where I don't love myself enough, and the places where I still hide. These lessons haven't stayed in the bedroom either—they have helped me in all areas of my life. And even as I reminisce on all of those awkward, uncomfortable, and fumbling moments, I'm grateful for the years I spent being scared of sex.



WORDS BY KALLY GROAT | ILLUSTRATION BY BRENDEN FORTESCUE

White socks. That's all I remember, not that I want to but it's burned into my memory like a laser-cut image. A scene uncovered by a barely-there curtain, parted like an open mouth: two floating marshmallows of white cotton, sticking straight up towards the ceiling. Attached were two legs, mostly covered by blankets that bobbed at a moderate and unflattering speed.

This was the first time I walked in on my parents having sex.

Ten-year-old me responded shyly to these legs, flailing as if independent from the rest of the body. Just like the bird from that kid's book who falls from the nest, approaching a machine of foreign moving parts, I might ask: are *you* my mother?

Why keep the socks on? I used to dwell. My adult-self shakes my head with trepidation at remembering having walked in on my parents doing the thing I swore they never did.

This event happened when we were camping as a family. Maybe the apple really doesn't fall far from the tree—I lost my virginity in a tent.

Like most of my small-town friends, it happened at a party—for me, a bush party. Sexy, I know, but I suppose there are worse ways to lose it.

My high school hosted things like Bush Bash—which could ironically be the title of my first foray—a supervised party in the middle of nowhere. Our teachers would sling us our prepaid beer and Jägermeister and let us run wild. If this was a school event, you can imagine what we did on our own time.

In my clouded memory is this: a tent in the dark on a patch of lawn. And then the bumbling awkwardness of first-time teenagers, all limbs and no clue. Have you ever noticed the way a gas pump shakes in its final moments? Ever so slightly, loosely—limp?

In the shivery damp winters of the west coast, water droplets tease the seams of your tent. Damp boots vaporize fireside and you sit huddled, fully clothed and clutching your whiskey, because Canada is damn cold.

The times in my life I've had roommates, I heard every one of them have unabashedly loud sex. The creaking beds, the mouthy, and abrupt “ahs,” the post-romp laughter. Camping has different rules. There's more taboo on a quiet starlit night next to your neighbor. Is that the wind or the rustle of a sleeping bag? Paper-thin walls barely mask the painfully slow unzipping and slipping onto your partner's sleeping mat. Tents have always created a false sense of security.

“Paper-thin walls barely mask the painfully slow unzipping and slipping onto your partner's sleeping mat. Tents have always created a false sense of security.”

At least that's how it felt during a hike in the Stein Valley last summer. It was one of those long days of hauling more beer than food; when you're so low on tobacco you fill the paper with dirt just to have something to smoke. And then the light goes down, the fire ash smolders to dim, and being the only couple in the group prompts creative acts of subtlety when you're “off to bed.”

At sixteen or thirty or anywhere in between, it's okay to steal away canvas-covered moments. In Vancouver, with the rain, it's going to be wet in there anyway. And you can bet I'm going to be wearing socks.



SONNET OF A DAMAGED SEX PSYCHE

WORDS BY AUDREY LOWE | ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTINE CRAWFORD

Innocent sin let God in, of course;
Eternal Love, Great Good, Ultimate Care,
so long as repressed feelings go un-shared.
O'Whore of marriage, have you remorse
for sanctimonious intercourse?
Is this the carry, cart, and choice: a brood mare
whose sexual stunting, crushing to bare,
prompts guilt, shame—fear—too forlorn to endorse?
Twenty plus summers gone, absent any dong,
desperate for clarity deep à la bong;
I traverse the spectrum, confused and high
left to wonder: dare I be bi?
Ash to ash, dust to dust, lust with no birth
daunts my poor, crucified, sexual worth.

SETTING THE MOOD

When SSRIs inhibit your sex life

WORDS BY GUINEVERE SCHLDT | ILLUSTRATION BY JEAN PAUL LANGLOIS

CONTENT WARNING: THIS ARTICLE DESCRIBES VAGINAL INJURIES SUSTAINED DURING SEX. IT ALSO MENTIONS SUICIDAL IDEATION AND THE USE OF SSRIS.

“The medication has really been helping... It’s just—I’ve been having a lot of trouble... finishing. During sex.”

“Well... Do you still want to kill yourself?”

She had me there!

I was 18 and had been on Citalopram for two months. It had been prescribed following a particularly feverish ratcheting up of suicidal ideation, which, while present in my life for as long as I could remember, took on a new, dangerous edge when coupled with my recently discovered autonomy.

For a few years before my prescription, I had been, in the parlance of youth clinic staff, “sexually active.” I had also been lucky enough to receive a sexual health education that was both sex-positive and emphasized women’s pleasure. As such, I enjoyed as healthy a “sex life” as any teenager: awkward, but often.

For the lucky unaware amongst us, the most widely used class of psychopharmaceutical treatment for depression are selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). These medications have a common side effect of not just lowering sexual arousal, but of making orgasm nearly neurochemically impossible.

Yes, the most useful medical intervention we have for people who are already pathologically empty and sad inside stops them from coming.

And yes, this fact is almost ironically comedic enough to qualify as a treatment of depression on its own.

While the humour of the situation was not lost on me, anorgasmia and lack of desire imposed a daunting and unique challenge onto my already challenge-studded little life. This was confounded by my status as a (newly minted) young adult, for whom complete control over sexual function served as a doorstep on the closet of actually dealing with childhood sexual trauma.

So I remained sexually active anyways, despite the dysfunction.

Orgasms quickly became another line item on the list of things I was missing out on: parties, university, family. The sense that I was missing a vital and time-limited experience of sexual exploration gnawed my insides sour. Loss of power over my body sent waves aching deep into my bones.

I did try to fake it. Not just orgasms, but physiological arousal as well. I would say it felt good, even when insertion burned and tore me due to lack of lubrication. I would say “yes” to things I didn’t really want, to people I didn’t really like, because it returned to me a feeling of sovereignty over my sexuality.

My body became my enemy. After a while, the line between saying “yes” because I desired intimacy or mastery, and saying “yes” to punish my betraying body blurred. After my first pap smear, the doctor took me aside and asked if I needed help because the rips inside me were so severe.

But I didn’t want to kill myself, which was cool.

“My body became my enemy. After a while, the line between saying ‘yes’ because I desired intimacy or mastery, and saying ‘yes’ to punish my betraying body blurred.”

Looking back, as a not-so-newly-minted young adult, I see the ultimatum posed by my circumstances: I could treat the depression, or I could “treat” the childhood sexual trauma, but not both. This could be an indictment against blanket use of SSRIs, but they really did help.

I think what made the biggest difference for me was the close examination of my own actions and motivators. Had I not eventually understood the connection between my white-knuckle grip on my sexual being, past trauma, and anorgasmia, I would not have been able to self-advocate my way into trying new medications to find one that didn’t cause such stark dysfunction. New medications which would be vital in the coming years, as my depression and ensuing ideation painfully and turbulently found its level in my new adult context.

But at least I was able to come!





SHUFFLE IN THE SHEETS

What I learned from five men and their sex playlists

WORDS BY JESSICA WONG | ILLUSTRATION BY HAYLEY SCHMIDT

My obsession with sex playlists all began with *Harry Potter* fan fiction videos.

For the unfamiliar (or as some might put it, those who were “athletic” or “had friends”), these were fictional stories told via footage from movies or TV shows edited together and set to music. A good portion of my teenage years were spent on Windows Movie Maker, carefully piecing together scenes to make it appear as though Draco Malfoy was casting flirty looks at Hermione Granger, set to a song by The All-American Rejects.

I longed for my love life to be underscored by the perfect song, too. And when I started having sex, that feeling only intensified.

Though many attempts were made, I was never good at compiling sex playlists. It was therefore left to my bedroom counterpart to provide the music, which not only relieved me of the stress, but also shed some unexpected insight into my partner and the nature of our bedroom rapport.

The High School Boyfriend

The precious moments where you have access to a bedroom without your parents around means you take full advantage. One time, in a bold move inspired by an issue of *Cosmopolitan*, I answered the door in only my lime green polka-dot bra and panties. His eyes popped out of his head. I congratulated myself on being a sex goddess prodigy, and we ran upstairs to my bedroom (also lime green), leaving a trail of La Senza and Hollister in our wake.

As we clambered into bed, he hastily mounted his iPod Nano onto my clock radio and hit shuffle. What followed was the most haphazard, awkward mix of 3OH!3 (“Don’t trust a hoe!”), My Chemical Romance (“When I was a young boy, my father took me into the city...”) and Bob Dylan (“How does it feel? How does it feel?”).

And if haphazard and awkward aren’t two of the most accurate descriptors for the tangled mess of gangly limbs that is 16-year-old sex, then I don’t know what is.

The Friend With Benefits

When I got to university, my attitude toward sex shifted. I was older, wiser, and more mature. I was a sexually experienced woman living on my own. So of course, I did what every old, wise, and mature 18-year-old would do: I got myself a friend with benefits.

I felt so cool and emotionally detached, texting him late at night to let him know I was coming over—his cue to start rolling a joint. Our “playlist” consisted solely of The Weeknd’s *House of Balloons* mixtape: nine tracks of distorted, throbbing bass lines and Abel Tesfaye’s whining, honey-dripped melancholy. I remember finding extreme satisfaction not in the sex itself, but the fact that I was on a cannabis-infused cloud nine and having sex while listening to “High for This.”

The LTR

My first long-term relationship marked a turning point in my sex soundtracks. Suddenly, it wasn’t about that dirty, sticky type of sex. Emotions were involved. I was in love.

We had been dating for three months and Beach House’s album *Bloom* had been out for three weeks when our summer jobs placed us on opposite sides of the country. We listened to it on repeat in the days leading up to my departure. It was sensual and dreamy, tinged with sadness and longing.

The summer passed and we were reunited. When Beach House announced they were coming to town, we bought tickets right away. But when the show arrived, the lead singer scolded the crowd for taking pictures, the speakers blared too loudly in our eardrums, and the songs lacked the same magic they had carried before the summer. That night, we got into an argument and six years later, we broke up.

The Rebound

I rebounded from that breakup right into the lap of a fuckboi and discovered that if anyone has perfected the sex soundtrack, it’s him. He had a dedicated playlist on Spotify that he would cue up for the occasion with songs that spanned genres and decades, tempo and mood. They were sexy without being too on-the-nose; considered, but not contrived. Yet the whole time, I couldn’t stop thinking about all the others before me that had heard this playlist and all the ones that would come after me.

The New Love

My rebound phase eventually ebbed and I started seeing someone more seriously. Given my obsession, the topic of sex playlists arose early on and we exchanged track records.

He one-upped my awkward shuffle experience, regaling me with a story of a time he was having sex and an old home recording of an original song came on. There was even an old playlist he’d created a few years back tucked away in his Apple Music library, aptly titled, “Sexy Time.” In the weeks that followed, he curated a playlist just for me entitled, “Sexy Time 2: The Sequel.”

One day, he pulled me into the bathroom, speaker in hand and a mischievous grin on his face. The playlist was haphazard, but far from awkward. As tempos sped up and slowed down, so did we. When the mood shifted from playful to carnal, so did ours. We wasted hot water for the next hour, casting wrinkled fingertips over flushed skin.

Suddenly, I was a teenager again. Only this time, I got off.

SO SAD, SO SEXY

A reader-sourced, SAD Mag playlist for doin' the deed

My partner’s favourite sex playlist is one he created himself. “Hey Google,” he’ll call into the living room, “play ‘Boner Jams 19.’”

“Okay,” Google’s lady-robot voice will echo back, and soon, the speakers tucked under our bed fritz to life. We’ve got a few classics and a few curveballs, but each track shares an undeniable groove that is somehow so amenable to a good old-fashioned bone-down. Even though I never listen to it otherwise, I can’t imagine a world without the filthy bass of Ginuwine’s “Pony” echoing through the apartment. And frankly, I don’t want to.

To showcase the musical menageries that accompany all kinds of folks partaking in all kinds of strokes, we present so sad so sexy: a reader-sourced, SAD Mag playlist for doin’ the deed.

1. 1+1 - *Beyoncé*
2. Don't Bother Calling — *Moses Sumney*
3. La Marcheuse — *Christine and the Queens*
4. White Rabbit — *Jefferson Airplane*
5. Fuck With Myself — *BANKS*
6. Send It On — *D'Angelo*
7. Nights — *Frank Ocean*
8. Often — *The Weeknd*
9. Mary Jane — *Rick James*
10. Cranes in the Sky — *Solange*

Find the rest on SAD Mag’s Spotify, and get it on!

Love,
Megan Jenkins
Editor-in-Chief



How sex-ed in B.C. is changing

WORDS BY ELLA ADKINS

More often than not, my 12-year-old lunchtime conversations were about sex. We would ask each other questions like “does it have to go all the way in?” and share rumours like “Sophie’s sister bled for three days after it happened.”

I hold those conversations dear; they mark an innocent time of crippling curiosity that lead to scarring internet searches. They remind me of the alarming discovery when giving my first handjob, that precum, was well, *precum*.

These formative moments are cringey, endearing, and seriously impactful. Our early learning about sex, puberty, and intimacy informs how we practice empathy towards bodies and orientations different from our own, and helps us understand healthy boundaries and relationships.

I had the great pleasure of speaking with sexual health educator Sarah Maitland about how sexual education is being conducted in BC today, and the ways sexual health programs have made necessary shifts to create more empathetic, aware, and respectful humans.

Maitland has been working with at-risk youth since 2011, and became a sexual health educator in September 2019. As the co-founder of the Vancouver Literacy non-profit The Writers Exchange, she’s no stranger to kids’ curiosity.

One day at a Writers Exchange program, she noticed some kids huddled under a table, giggling at a book titled *Where Do I Come From?* Maitland was disappointed when the teacher reacted by taking the book away.

“That created a spark in me,” says Maitland. “I want to help kids with this. I want to answer some of their questions and normalize bodies and sex, instead of making them feel like they have to hide under a table.”

The normalization of bodies and sex now begins as early as grade one in the BC curriculum. Kids are expected to be able to name their private parts, are taught that no one can touch their body without consent—and they say the word “sex.”

“If we start shrouding the word in shame, well, that just makes them more curious but also more embarrassed to talk about it which leads to all sorts of weird feelings,” says Maitland.

Currently, it’s in the hands of the Physical and Health Education (PHE) teachers to deliver these outcomes. I think about my grade nine PE teacher, who, on the first day, told us he would burn down our house and kill all of our pets if we didn’t show up to class. Naturally, I have a hard time imagining him talking to us about healthy sexual relationships and intimacy.

Fortunately, external organizations—like Maitland’s employer, Saleema Noon Sexual Health Educators—can also help ensure projected sexual health learning outcomes are met. The approach is different from what we all may remember. For example, all genders are kept in the same room.

“This creates empathy. Penis-owners need to know that uterus-owners use tampons and pads. Uterus owners need to know that practice erections are something that happens to individuals with penises and if you ever see that, that would never be something to make fun of,” says Maitland.

The language in these programs is kept gender-neutral. There’s a focus on bodies and what type of hormone your specific body makes, rather than saying boys feel this and girls feel that.

“Kids are still figuring that stuff out and, as adults, we really need to think about how our gendered language doesn’t leave much room for young individuals to discover things on their own. Due to changes in how to address kids at school and in our programs, we’re seeing kids asking to be called different names and genders, and other kids having no problem accepting that.”

As we can all attest to, sex-ed in BC and in many other provinces, up until very recently, has been taught through a heteronormative lens. This has made the education inaccessible, irrelevant, and unsafe for queer individuals or individuals who are unsure of their sexuality.

“It’s proven that queer kids are more likely to get pregnant because they tune out when everything is about penis-owner and vulva-owner intercourse. But then, there’s that one time that a queer vulva-owner has sex with a penis-owner, and boom, they’re pregnant.”

In Maitland’s work with at-risk youths over the years with the Writers Exchange and other programs, she has seen the repetition of their unhealthy familial relationships as they grow into teenagers. “I’ve seen the situations that some of them were in as children: abusive households, or unhealthy family situations,” she says. “Now seeing them as teenagers, I can see them repeating some of those abusive patterns, since they never learned about healthy relationships.”

The sex-positive approach in contemporary sex-ed is taking the reins. Instead of starting out with the scary stuff like unwanted pregnancy or assault, there’s a discussion of what respectful, consensual, and pleasurable sex looks and feels like.

“We tell kids, sex is supposed to feel good!” exclaims Maitland. “Even though lots of adults in the room feel uncomfortable when they hear that, it’s proven to reduce sexual assaults, because kids and individuals realize, ‘oh, this doesn’t feel good or my partner isn’t feeling good.’”

The contemporary methods of sexual education that Maitland and other educators working with Saleema Noon teach play a huge part in empowering young individuals to be respectful towards their own bodies and those of others. It teaches them safe and kind practices in sex, which translates into their relationships.

Sex is something we can all relate to, whether we’re having it or not, have trauma around it, or have been infatuated with it since we can remember. My discussion with Maitland caused me to reflect on how I was taught to understand sex from a young age, and my own resulting baggage.

Before I even had sex, I was informed that sex was scary, exciting, painful, destructive, something I wouldn’t want as a woman, something I could only have with a penis-owner, something that was going to be forced upon me, and the list goes on. To this day, I carry that heaviness, and maybe even share that residual baggage with others, letting it affect my current and past intimate relationships. After learning about Maitland’s work, I’m excited about little humans being able to experience less of that, and I’m driven to start doing some of my own sex-ed unlearning, shedding some of that shame-infused rhetoric that persists inside me.









QUEERNESS & TEMPORALITY

“Coming out” as a process

WORDS BY MARCUS PRASAD | ILLUSTRATION BY KIRANNA MARIE

My parents loved that I was kind of a girly-boy as a kid, but this made for a complex sexual identity as I reached teenagedom. While my friends embraced traditional aspects of masculinity, I associated “being myself” with things that were considered girly in the 2000s—playing with dolls, wanting everything to be pink, and having a penchant for rhythmic gymnastics ribbons (an obsession which persists to this day).

But all the while, I imagined my future self in love with a girl. This is something I can now easily attribute to the pervasiveness of heterosexual representation in media and within my own family (none of the adults I was surrounded by were queer either). I would spend my teenage years dreaming of a future with whichever girl was next on my constantly rotating roster of crushes.

I “came out” when I was around 19. Using quotations and an approximate age seems best here because it wasn’t a single proclamation that instantly shifted everyone’s perception of me, nor my own perception of myself. It wasn’t an abrupt change in attitude or presentation of who I am; I was exactly the same, only I had begun to acknowledge my developing sexual interest in men and started to allow myself to be okay with it. I remember this span of time clearly, especially the growing catharsis that came with letting myself have experiences with men that were, until that point, exclusive only to my thoughts.

It felt how I imagined it was to be a good-looking straight guy in high school. I was assured of myself for the first time in years, and ready to discover new pieces of myself through people that I had only dreamed of being intimate with.

After coming out, I felt excited and liberated, but I also harboured a sense of anger. Shouldn’t I have already “found” myself by now? And why did embracing my sexuality feel like a second puberty? It was like realizing that everything I had gone through to prepare for adulthood was thrown away, the credits of a straight teenagerhood completely untransferable to this new sexual awakening. Where all my friends had already been in relationships (plural!) and had experienced a breadth of hookups (plural!), mine were just getting started. I charged into casual sex and relationships like I’d been sexually starved and locked out of intimacy for decades, because I had been.

I had convinced myself that I didn’t want or need these experiences when I was younger. I told myself that I was some kind of advanced human that could stand at a distance from the hedonistic desires of adolescence. But inwardly, I did want them. I wanted to hold hands with someone in the hallways between classes, and I wanted to black out at a party and hookup with someone I didn’t know. I think I wanted people to know I was doing normal teenager things, and not spending my time convincing myself I was straight. But it wasn’t until I “came out” that I got to have those “teenage” experiences. As the second decade of my life came to a close, it felt like I’d hit reset.

I started to recognize a gap between my own experiences and the timelines of the heterosexual people around me. All of a sudden, I was having a different experience of time and forward motion, and the general idea of “finding myself” seemed unfamiliar and disjointed. I knew that everyone experiences things differently, but something within me still wanted the comfort that I wasn’t alone in my seemingly adolescent worries.

I was lucky to have had support from my friends and family when I came out, but I still felt so isolated from everyone I loved. I knew I could count on them for empathy, but what would that mean to me if they hadn’t gone through a similar shift in identity? I didn’t want comforting gestures, I wanted guidance through the fog.

But I had to learn on the job. Friends would set me up with men they trusted, and I spent time on dating apps trying to forge connections. Those guys seemed so certain about who they were, and I was jealous. I wanted to ask them for advice but I didn’t know how; I couldn’t put the questions floating around my head into words.

I eagerly looked for ways to reconcile my experiences with those of my peers. In my searching, I encountered queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman. She wrote that temporal experiences deviating from the heterosexual norm can actually be considered to produce queer ways of knowing and existing.

Freeman’s theory was a deeply comforting idea to me: what I had long seen as a weak point or disadvantage in my teenagerhood suddenly seemed productive. While at times painful and lonely, my experience was also unique and generative, contributing to a comfortable mode of being that was at the time unknown to me. This quelled the anxiety that I was behind in life, that I was wrong for doing in my twenties what most people did in their teens.

Realizing that it wasn’t a matter of getting things done early in life relieved a pressure I thought was inherent to being queer, and allowed me to focus on parsing out the positive qualities of my own experience. The awareness of different temporalities of queer experience helped me reframe my feelings of isolation, seeing them as moments of individuality and uniqueness that could be shared with other queer folk.

There are so many justifiably negative takeaways from growing up queer, especially in a political climate that increasingly exacerbates the divide between “normal” and “different.” For me, it’s important to do the work of finding the positive aspects of my sexuality and identity lodged in these nuances, so that facing the difficult parts of myself becomes less daunting.

Looking back, my adolescence and teen years were not just a closed off period of unrequited yearning—it was in those years I learned to be comfortable with myself, by myself. Doing that emotional labour alone was hard, but now I have an intimate knowledge of how to care for my own mental and emotional health.

And now, having had my own relationships, I’ve realized that I was not alone in the experience. But thinking I was on a solo venture brought me to a place where I learned to feel confident being there for myself. I am and always will be my own strongest support system.

There are still aspects to my queer identity that I am growing into and learning to love, and not all of them fall into place without strain. But knowing that queerness is an ongoing process, I find comfort in the certainty that the ups and downs of the past, present, and future are all meant to happen at my own pace.

CAMMING WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

Emancipation via webcam

WORDS BY BECCA CLARKSON | ILLUSTRATION BY NADIA SO

Even from the far-right, middle row of Vancouver's Rio Theatre, I could make out a knee brace under Stormy's jeans. She sat stage left at a table with the hosts of the *Sickboy* podcast, and explained early in the live podcast recording that she'd dislocated her knee the night before while cooking. Stormy commonly suffers extreme injuries from low impact situations because she has one of the 13 variations of Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS), a connective tissue disorder.

The 28-year-old was born with EDS, as well as comorbidities that include epilepsy, asthma, and a congenital defect that places her heart at the centre of her chest. She wasn't formally diagnosed, however, until she was 25; by this point, Stormy was already five years into her career in sex work.

"I've experimented a lot throughout my career choices, but sex work has been a constant," says Stormy. "I remember being as young as seven years old and discussing with my best friend that we wanted to be strippers."

Parts of Stormy's body partially or fully dislocate every time she has sex, and because she can't regulate her temperature properly, having intercourse can cause her to faint or black out. Add in the possible seizures that come with epilepsy, and penetrative sex is off the menu for her clients. Instead, she makes custom videos by request and offers a girlfriend experience by camming. Through her online platform, Stormy advocates for the sexual viability of the disability community.

"There's this whole misconception that people with chronic illness don't have sex or like sex because we're in pain all the time," Stormy tells me over the phone. "But we still like intimacy, love, and cuddling. We still need those things."

Though one antonym of pleasure is pain, Stormy says she has a high sex drive—one that some partners in her personal life haven't been keen to match after seeing the full impact of EDS. After her last relationship of six years ended, during which she had just as many surgeries, Stormy's ex-boyfriend confessed that he'd stopped seeing her in a sexual way after taking care of her so much.

Her experience allows her to better connect with clients who live with disability, and she likens the exchange as medicine for both parties involved.

"Sex in its various forms can be really therapeutic, both mentally and physically, which is another reason why I absolutely love what I do."

The mentality of sex work is what drew Puppy, another cammer I spoke with, to webcam-based sex work as her anxiety and bipolar disorder began to make leaving the house an insurmountable challenge. In four years, camming transformed her from someone who struggled with constant fat shaming online to proudly coining the term "Titty Earthquake."

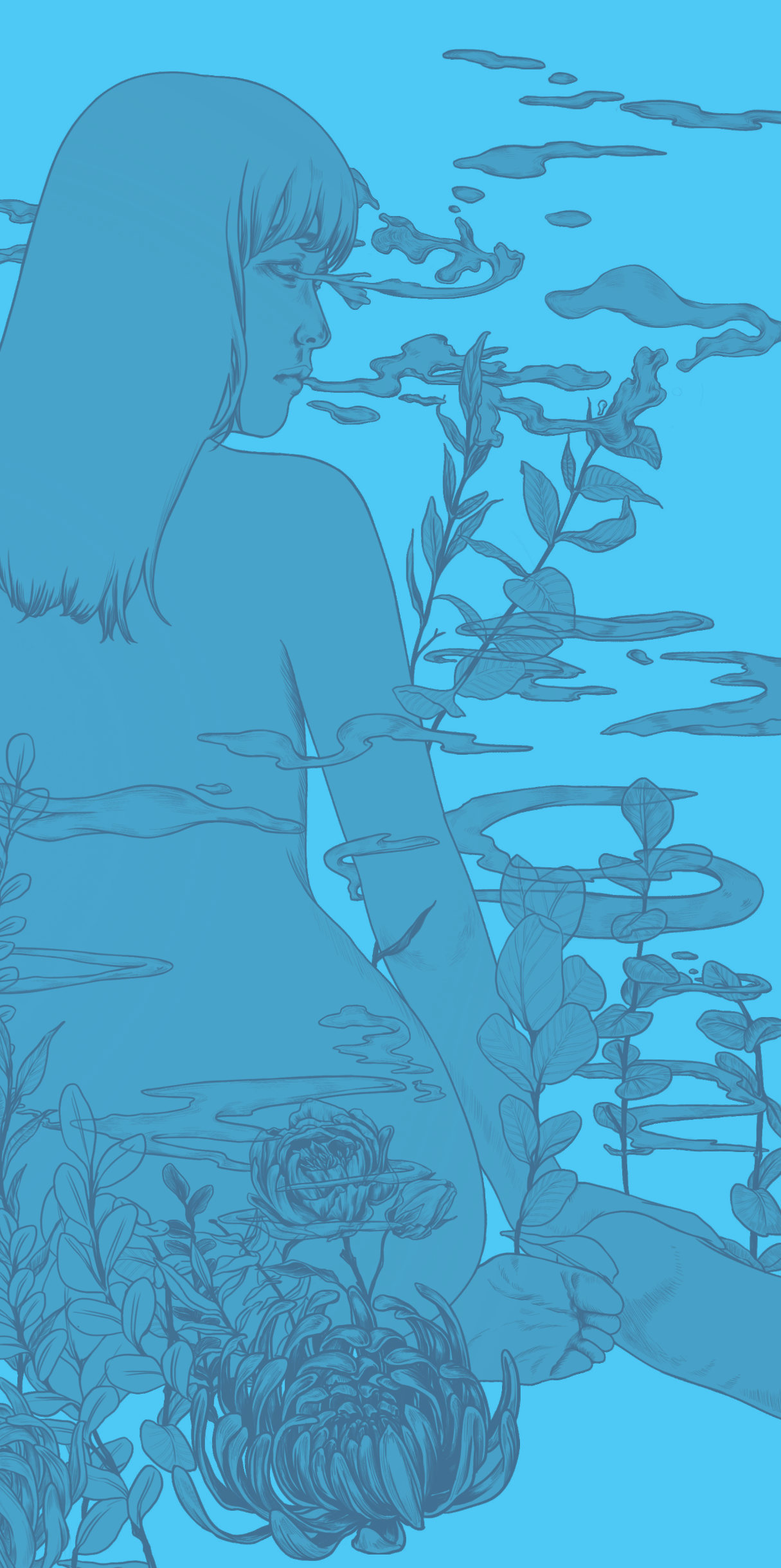
"Obviously you're going to get trolls, but now I laugh at the people who make fun of me because I make money off of how I look," Puppy explains. "Being on this platform and having people literally spend hundreds of dollars on you... It's like, holy shit, maybe I should love myself a little more, maybe I'm not as repulsive as I think I am in my head."

"There's this whole misconception that people with chronic illness don't have sex or like sex because we're in pain all the time,' Stormy tells me over the phone. 'But we still like intimacy, love, and cuddling. We still need those things.'"

Like Stormy, Puppy says she benefits from the exchanges as much as her clients do. She even consulted her doctor about transitioning to the meds she's currently taking based on several suggestions from her clients.

Neither women receive Employment Insurance or Disability Insurance payments—but by taking ownership of their respective disabilities, they're paying the bills. Beyond being lucrative, this upfront, unapologetic attitude has also helped improve their relationship with sex.

Rising above shame and stigma can be a turn on for people of all abilities. And turning it around and making it your career? Now that's hot.



A QUICKIE WITH KARLY REDD

WHO ARE YOU?

My name is Karly Redd, and I'm a sex worker from Vancouver.

WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN SEX WORK, AND HOW HAS IT IMPACTED YOUR LIFE?

It was always something I was curious about, I think I noticed my growing interest in it when I was about 13 years old. Looking back at that time now, I didn't realize how much of a positive impact it would have on me and my life. I grew up as a super shy kid with no confidence, and working in this industry has made me more outgoing and confident. It has shaped me into who I am today. I don't know where I would be without sex work.

WHAT IS YOUR DATING LIFE LIKE AS A SEX WORKER?

Honestly, it's tough. As a lesbian, dating in general can already be tough, but being both a lesbian and a sex worker, it's even more complicated.

DO YOU BELIEVE SEX WORK SHOULD BE LEGAL?

Absolutely. I would gladly pay taxes on my income so I could be protected, have health insurance, and all that stuff you get with a "regular" job.

WHAT WOULD YOUR ADVICE BE TO SEX WORKERS THAT ARE JUST GETTING STARTED IN THE INDUSTRY?

Practice self-care, save your money, and stay humble.

WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT YOU WANT REGULAR WORKING FOLKS TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT SEX WORKERS?

We're just regular people who chose an off-beat career.

SEXUAL HEALING

A budding somatic sex therapist explores the field

WORDS BY SARAH THOMPSON | ILLUSTRATION BY HANNAH SENDER

When it began, I was 13, and wanted Max with an earth-shattering intensity. He eventually took notice of me because we were both tall, blonde, and funny. After we tried and failed to become a couple, our friendship was profound and intermittent through middle and high school. We had seasons of messaging, seasons of sexting, and seasons of silence.

After high school, I entered my first serious relationship, and Max made a few appearances. On a particularly dreary day, he showed up at my building and surprised me with a few slices of cold, foil-wrapped pizza. Weeks later he visited again, and the softbox light from an overcast sky lit us as we kissed and dry-humped on my rumpled, sand-coloured sheets. While we continued to fall in and out of touch, getting in touch always felt so easy.

After a while, I meandered through a BA in Anthropology and fell in loving cohabitation with Thomas, a woodworking hobbyist. Close to finishing my undergrad, I turned to Google to find the next stepping-stone towards becoming a therapist. This search led me to Expressive Arts Therapy, a discipline that uses the creative process to therapeutic ends. And so I became a fledgling therapist.

Since beginning the program, my relationship with Max had been scaled-back but steady. My partnership with Thomas limited our incentive to meet. Still, one evening we went for drinks at Hail Mary's. Leaving the bar I was acutely aware of my lips; pleasantly bitter-tasting, slightly swollen from the acidity of the wine. As the bus carried him away, life felt very short. Drunkenly, I mourned the notion that our friendship would not allow me to put my hand on his chest or feel the texture of his hair. Later, with remarkably little to do, I realized I'd always been in love with him.

Thomas and I had discussed non-monogamy early in our relationship, but I was running an emotional deficit. On a good day, some iteration of ethical non-monogamy seemed like the perfect way to knit my wounds. We could update the exquisite corpse of current romantic ideals. I could love and trust freely. On a bad day, I felt only dread. Thomas let me lead, willing to follow me to any conclusion. He was a warm-hearted audience as I agonizingly dispersed my calcified fears and drew ever closer to what I actually wanted. We agreed that we'd keep non-monogamy in the wings until we knew it was time. This peaceful stalemate held until I had a most unusual dream.

Surrounded by inky blackness, I felt calm. Suddenly, a woman emerged from the dark fog and abruptly pointed a finger at the tip of my nose. Eyebrows raised, she said, "Look, if you ever want to open up, you must start with Max. Understood?" I was rendered speechless as I gazed upon my own stern face. I nodded meekly. At breakfast, Thomas coolly agreed with my simulacrum before asking what I'd like in my tea.

Soon after, I stumbled upon a book about somatic sex therapy, and pored over it as soon as it arrived. Inconveniently, this happened to be on my way to the Skytrain. I read the first chapter agape with wonder, half-heartedly trying and wholly failing to shield a tasteful nude illustration from my seatmate.

Somatic sex educators aim to provide a safe container for those seeking healing, empowerment, and education in their sensuality. They have many tools at their disposal: breath-coaching, movement, communication, sensate focus, and touch

for the sake of education and pleasure. Educator training focuses on centring the autonomic nervous system (ANS), the unconscious network that regulates stress and calm, and thus directs how we meet the world. Learning to dialogue with the ANS can help us notice where we constrict, dissociate, yearn, and flourish. In her essay "Transformative Touch," leading erotic educator Caffyn Jesse states that "Pleasure itself is healing." The field asserts that, in the realm of sensuality and feeling, we can strengthen our intuition, develop our capacity for self-care, and savour the experience of being alive.

I'd thought of Max often while reading, about how he'd become steadily less social since high school, heavier with existential dread. I worried that his anxiety made him feel unsafe in his own body and unable to access contentment, fulfillment, and joy. It seemed possible that, as a friend with a professional curiosity, I might be able to help.

A few weeks after my dream, Max came over. He didn't remove his windbreaker and curled in on himself when he sat down. When I asked if he wanted to move closer, he replied, "I haven't touched a girl since Obama was president, why would I need it now?" After a stunned silence, I laughed much too loudly. This and an \$8 bottle of wine seemed to relax him. He could be guarded—snarky, even—but he kissed me like he'd loved me for a thousand lifetimes; both hands on my face at the jawline, his pinkies brushing my earlobes, until I was breathless. Over a few months of seeing me, his posture softened. He began to reach out for me and pull me to him. Conversation felt lush and light.

We enjoyed seeing each other, but so, too, were there snags. And over time, they increased in frequency. He was rude, I was impossible. He became overwhelmed by our disagreements, which is fair. Still, I gathered him back up with the promise that I would be more gracious, less prickly. I was being optimistic.

I had taken joy in getting him small gifts, but he never took them: a bar of salted chocolate, a bundle of rosemary, one of George Orwell's essays. I couldn't understand. In this bewilderment, my lapse was revealed: I'd come to believe that I was better than him, emotionally healthier, socially more adept, generally more "together." As such, I was no longer curious, but judgemental and irritable. Suddenly, I remembered how safe I'd felt when I'd lay on him, letting my head rise and fall with his breathing as we watched *Jeopardy*. I'd been upset that he hadn't become what I'd wanted as a result of my experimentation. How unfair.

I'm still testing this theory, but the mistakes I make as a partner and as a therapist seem to be related. For example, when you're becoming a therapist, they're very clear that you shouldn't try to fix anybody. Doing so relies on the assumption that you understand them better than they understand themselves, and this simply cannot be true. To extend beyond oneself and want the best for another is a beautiful thing, but unfortunately, many of us fumble the execution. It takes cleverness to figure out how to help, and wisdom to realize you may not need to. Patience is the difference between doling out unsolicited advice and listening. I cannot stand seeing my loved ones suffer, but I must learn to. I cannot absolve them. I must also be patient with myself as I learn to carry out my good intentions with evolving dexterity.

I've always wanted to be clever. But as I continue into my present and future roles: friend, partner, therapist, somatic sex educator, I hope to become wise.



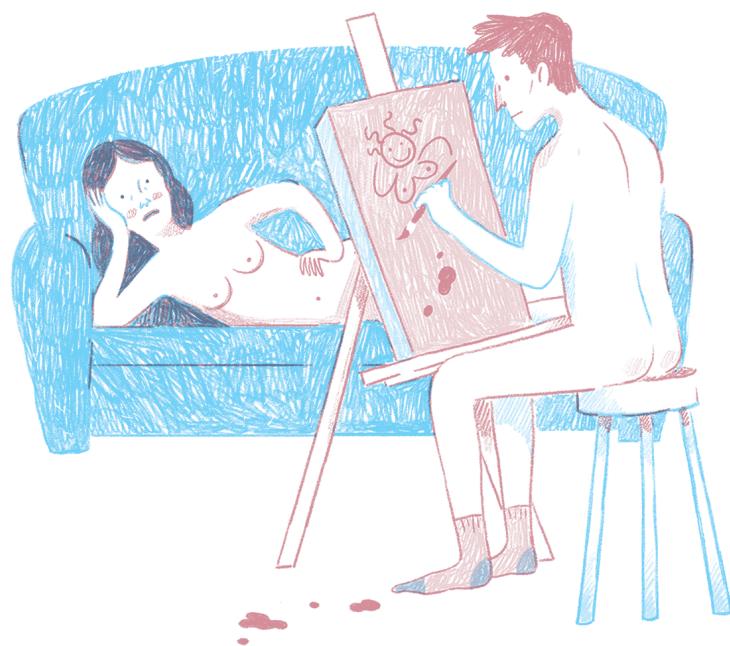
ONE NIGHT STANDS YOU'LL HAVE IN VANCOUVER

WORDS BY RACHEL BURNS
ILLUSTRATION BY JULIETTE VERMEERSCH



BC WALK OF SHAME

You heckled him at his comedy show and got recruited for his open mic. When the buffer of booze wears off, and the basement suite and mattress-on-the-floor combo sinks in, it's time to add one more star to your BC walk of shame.



ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

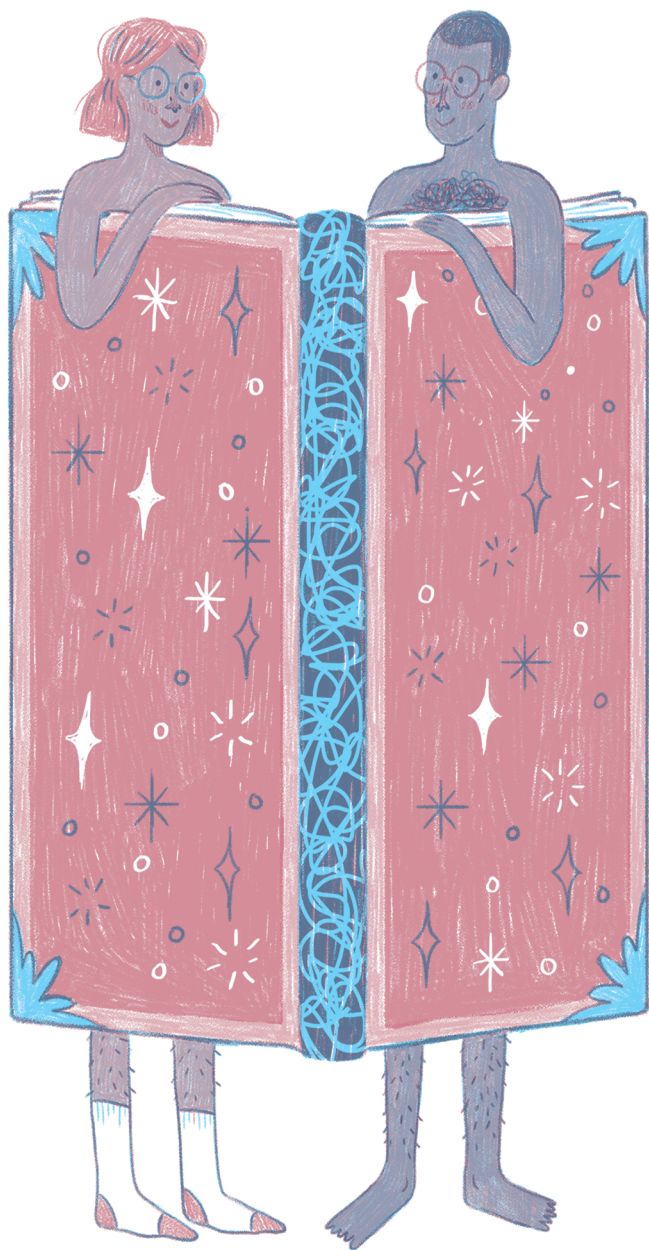
He stays the night, then the weekend. When dinner turns into brunch, things feel romantic. When the brunch turns into the weekend, it feels almost like a relationship. As days turn to weeks, while he stays in one place, you realize that he truly is an artist, in (your) residence, and you are his sole patron.

ZERO WASTE

He's an environmental hero—that's why he refuses to buy latex. Even though his compost bin seems empty, and his takeout containers go straight in the trash, he claims to be on the cutting edge of minimalist, refillable living. While sleeping with him is a "request to join the movement," you respectfully withdraw to "do your part for climate change."

RENOVICTION AND CHILL

You can't overturn the tenancy board, but you can be flipped by your landlord. The rent has been getting jacked up for years, and so have your growing desires. Fears of impending homelessness are easily abated as you trace the edges of his custom-tailored Brooks Brothers suit strewn over that sassy new backsplash. Now, laying down discounted, faux hardwood flooring and painting over moldy window sills is the foreplay you've never had, but always wanted.



TAP THAT (KOMBUCHA)

After a heated breakup, you've settled everything, save custody of your SCOBY. The jar is the cumulation of your relationship—fermented, imperfect, and enclosed. Its whereabouts trace you back to the passion you once cultivated—living, breathing, and growing. With lust on the line and commitment out of the way, you decide to get it started, just one last time.

GLORY JUICED

There was something organic about your chemistry, yet nothing worth preserving. The raw energy of the attraction flows from your dehydrated pulp cracker all the way to your turmeric boost. She extracts what she needs from you, leaving you both feeling cleansed. The passion would be unstoppable, if not for the constant pressure to urinate.

VPL HOLDS SHELF

You put 17 books on hold, convincing yourself you're capable of "reading." As you approach the shelves, an alphabetized fate hangs in the balance. When reaching for *Becoming*, she does too. For the first time at the library, you stick in more than just an expired printer card.



CARNAGE AND CLIMAX

*The violence of slasher
films and porn*

WORDS BY ALEXIS ZYGAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVEN SHEPHERD



Horror movies of the slasher variety saw a boom in the 1980s, feeding fans bodily gore and carnage. Inspired by classics such as *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), these films perpetuated the stereotype of an angry white male turned murderer. Leatherface mangles teenagers on a hot, unsuspecting summer day; Frank Zito dissects women and adorns mannequins in their clothing, and Freddy Kruger mutilates his victims with clawed gloves. These are horrifying scenes, but for some reason, audiences can't look away. Slasher movies have gained a significant cult following and remain a viewing staple on Halloween night (or any ordinary day if you're into that). But what could be gained—or lost—if such grisly mutilations were erased from those storylines?

For viewers of pornography, concerning parallels in filmic language become immediately apparent. Often incorporating forms of violence in its sequences, porn can feature more than just sex—in the missionary, locked-off camera sense—by engaging with kink and the expansive world of BDSM. Unlike the victims in slasher films, who are suddenly forced to undergo pre-death anxiety, actors in porn have consented to the scene and discussed its hostility—ideally allowing the actors to prepare before the filming. So why is the visual language so similar?

“ This is not to say that all porn is inherently violent or bad, but brutal fornication introduces a moral conundrum that Pornhub does not seem able to manage.”

Porn parallels slashers in many ways, one of which is found through the prioritization of male pleasure over female submission. Specifically, the depiction of the close-up, ecstatic male orgasm is reminiscent of the slasher's ghastly kill-shot, where the woman is a mere platform upon which the violent act takes place. For example, *Bride of Chucky* positions Tiffany as a flailing set of limbs in a bubbly bathtub during her death, where Chucky electrocutes her with a television set that plays *Bride of Frankenstein*. Scenes like this affirm the normalization of male power over female submission while also depicting the scene in what may be understood as fragments. By cutting up what is represented through close-up camera zooms for a front-row perspective of the indiscriminate kill, the terror of the victim is closely fixated upon as they take their final breaths and wilt away. This contrasts a zoomed-out shot that may allow viewers to distance themselves from the carnage. A tightly framed image looming close to the body brings the audience into the violence taking place while simultaneously depersonalizing the victim.

During its boom in popularity in the 1960s, pornography was widely viewed by adults and teenagers alike. Before the introduction of the Internet and its widespread proliferation however, people were forced to lurk around in the adult section of the local Blockbuster for their favourite on-screen sex scenes, or enter a sex store for a wide variety of content to fulfill their kinky desires. Hidden from their partners and parents, these nudie mags and VHS tapes were the main access point into an evening of provocative imagery.

Mainstream porn has evolved immensely since the softcore erotic burlesque performances of the late 19th century and *Playboy* spreads with unshaved genitals and quirky sidebars. The porn of 2020 often explicitly features dominant-submissive dynamics and the re-enactment of rape fantasies for the viewer's—and apparently the actors'—pleasure. Watching women as victims of violence in these fabricated situations has a pervasive effect, and contributes to the malleable argument that porn debases women. This is not to say that all porn is inherently violent or bad, but brutal fornication introduces a moral conundrum that Pornhub does not seem able to manage. What's worse: These depictions deliberately overlook the set-up of the scene where actors consent to a controlled amount of

brutality, instead focusing entirely on the grit. The safety of horror films lies in our knowledge that Samara from *The Ring* will not truly crawl out of our TV screens; the same is not true for depictions of violent sexual content.

For this reason, it is crucial to be aware that porn actors are portraying a scripted fantasy for the erotic pleasure of the viewer. Current and mainstream pornography fails to include a realistic depiction of sex by excluding prior communication from the final cut. The illusion hinges upon the failure to include safe words and conversations on boundaries, because they would dissolve its violent, non-consenting facade.

Contributing to this illusion is authentic slapping and spitting, unlike the blood and guts in slashers that are sculpted by a film studio's prop department to appear realistic. Once the director calls “cut,” the actors return to their dressing rooms and remove the SFX makeup and accessories. The veil is lifted, and our favourite slasher victims are no longer just a mangled set of limbs.

Despite the difference between ass smacking and hurdling a chainsaw at someone until they're nothing more than a lifeless pile of body parts, both erotic imagery and on-screen death induce memory blocks, according to *The Journal of Sex Research* in a study by the University of Turku. Here it is argued that constant fixation on pornographic films and murderous scenes can radically change the chemical composition of the brain. Slashers overwhelm their viewers with blood-soaked killing sprees that end up overriding the initial plot, where anything before the on-screen violence is long forgotten as they enter a hypnotic daze. The brain reacts to the chaotic display of bloodthirsty havoc by triggering the amygdala, producing a burst of adrenaline. Reaching an orgasm while watching bodies close-up in porn creates a similar explosion of dopamine, a brain chemical associated with excitement and falling head over heels in love. In both cases, overexposure to violence from slashers and pleasure from porn can have serious and permanent effects on mental health.

“ Once the director calls “cut,” the actors return to their dressing rooms and remove the SFX makeup and accessories. The veil is lifted, and our favourite slasher victims are no longer just a mangled set of limbs.”

Even if slashers were more popular in the 80s, many of their violent attributes continue to appear in theatres and on the screens of horror fanatics' televisions. While the filmic language of bodily gore closely resembles that of porn, audiences are well aware that what is being depicted on the big screen is not real. It is the product of meticulous choreography, scripted lines, constructed props, and visual effects. The acts displayed in porn, though, are not entirely unfamiliar to anyone who has ever acted on their horniness. Pornography is loyal to the realistic sexual impulse that resides in its viewers.

Its proximity to the reality of human behaviour can provide people with opportunities to experiment, introducing them to new kinks or the different realms of BDSM. Slashers however, inherently fictional and illusory, are removed from reality to such a degree that people don't feel encouraged to act upon murderous impulses. It's best not to perform the scenes from *Friday the 13th* unless you want to spend your life behind bars. Porn does not condemn its audiences' impulses in the same way—plots and action in these sexually driven scenes are necessarily rooted in a realistic and desirable attainment of sexual gratification. If porn can introduce folks to BDSM anything like horror films can purportedly introduce one to murder, consent is the difference that shatters the slasher's illusion.

MYTHICAL-

WORDS BY ALICE FLEERACKERS

“I like writing about sex!” David Ly laughs when I ask him about his new book of poems, *Mythical Man*. “Maybe people are writing about it more these days,” he smiles, “but, still, we need to talk about precum more.”

Ly’s latest poetry collection is both sensual and lyrical, an intriguing blend of mythology, social media, racism, and, yes, precum. With crisp prose, he takes readers on a journey through the daily experiences of an unnamed narrator who, like the poet himself, is young, gay, and of Vietnamese descent. The resulting poems are sometimes sweet, sometimes heartbreaking, but always thought-provoking.

I spoke with Ly about the making of *Mythical Man*, his experiences being queer and Asian in his hometown of Vancouver, and the surprising joy of writing about sex.

ALICE FLEERACKERS: *Last time we spoke, you had just published your first book of poetry, a chapbook called Stubble Burn. What’s the relationship between the chapbook and your new book, Mythical Man?*

DAVID LY: The first chapbook, because it was so short, was extremely focused on the idea of racism—of being gay and being Asian. The nice thing about *Mythical Man* is that I could build on that a bit more and open up that world. We’ve already established that the narrator experiences racism on social media. So what happens after that? How does that shape your identity? How does it shape your manhood or masculinity? The book builds upon and explores these different avenues of what it means to be a man in this day and age.

AF: *The book also touches on Asian ancestry, weaving in mythical imagery that gives it a sort of “origin story” feel. Tell me about your process, where do those myths and stories come from?*

DL: At one point I did some research into creation myths and Vietnamese mythology, which was really cool. But when I tried to write a poem to go into *Mythical Man* riffing off of that idea, I just couldn’t do it. Maybe because I’m not so in touch with my Vietnamese ancestry, it felt very forced. Instead, I decided to write what I know. And that’s basically my family experiences.

AF: *What, in your view, is the relationship between sex and Mythical Man?*

DL: Maybe halfway through writing or editing the book, I caught myself thinking or writing about sex in a different way than I’d seen

before. I like to think it about as, “How do I take the experience of sex and write it in a gentle way that isn’t outright dirty or erotic?” In *Mythical Man* I wanted to write erotic poetry from a different perspective or viewpoint. I tried to put more of a focus on the tenderness of everything. So, I use the word cum or precum, but not in a way that’s dirty.

AF: *You mean, you want to avoid sexualizing the sex?*

DL: Yeah. *Mythical Man* has a very strange, very particular relationship with sex in that the poems don’t focus on the act itself. It’s what happens around the sex that’s important. The goal of the poems is to describe the psychological aspects of those dramatic moments.

AF: *While reading the book, I really found myself wondering how you felt putting these poems out there into the world. Many of them feel so raw, so personal. Did that make it difficult to publish them?*

DL: Oh, I don’t care. For generations now, in the media and in literature, there’s been that stereotype of the Asian man who is not sexual, who is uptight and doesn’t feel feelings. That’s not true. I like sex! I have sex, just like many of us do. So I like to talk about those things, I love when I bring up sex in conversations and people get uncomfortable.

But also, because I’m writing it through poetry, it makes it “easier.” I’m not directly telling someone about it. It’s through poetry, which has always been a mode of conveying these really intricate or complicated relationships or experiences for me.

AF: *Do your parents read your poems?*

DL: Yeah, well, my mom does. It’s so funny. She still has my chapbook in the glove compartment of her car for some reason. My mom’s really excited to read my next book. But I’m not embarrassed by my mom reading my sex poems. It’s just funny. She shows all her friends.

AF: *Last time we spoke, you explained that your poems are actually not about you. Are you worried that many readers might think they’re autobiographical?*

DL: I think it’s funny. When people think the poems are all about me—especially the intimate, sexy poetry—people think, “Oh my God, he’s like, done all this stuff!” On one hand, maybe. On the other hand, why does it matter? Of course, even the fictional poems always have these strings of reality. The poems in *Mythical Man*—a lot of them aren’t about me. But I think that I can write them

-CAL MAN

An interview with David Ly

because I've had similar experiences, or I've had the feelings that are weaved into those poems. It's about whether you can connect with the work and you can relate to it. It shouldn't matter if the experience is real or not.

AF: *Many of your poems discuss the issue of sexual racism and fetishism—largely based off of your own experiences of being gay and Asian in a place like Vancouver. I'm curious, what are some of the most frustrating elements of having this identity?*

DL: One of the one of the most frustrating things of having this identity is being seen as this one thing—a gay Asian—and all of the labels attached to that. It feels like you're in a box, and it gives no room to show anything else. It's hard when someone just categorizes you and stops talking to you or makes a racist comment. I think the frustrating thing for me was—and still is, when I think about it—not being able to navigate those moments better than the last time.

At the end of day, the best thing is to remind yourself that it's never you. That may sound black and white, but I think when you're dealing with a racist person, or you're in a racist situation, it is 100% never really your fault. It's their reaction to how you present how you are, to what you are. In that sense, it's easier to separate yourself from the situation. You kind of have to be the bigger person—to shut it down in a more evolved way.

AF: *What do you hope readers do with these poems?*

DL: They can do whatever they want with them—just don't hurt anyone! Read responsibly.

But, really, whatever you take from the book, just know that the experiences of the narrator are written from a real place. I hope people connect with them, especially marginalized people, like queer Asians. I hope that seeing what they're experiencing or have experienced makes them feel less isolated, less alone in their horrible experiences! If anything, I'd like for readers to normalize discussions of sex more as well.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

I FINALLY LEARNED HOW TO LOVE MYSELF

Maybe he thought *sticky rice* was cute

to say after we fucked,

but I was hoping for an experience

where we could exist beyond an expression

that describes two Asians together.

I discovered that everything I despise

about how the world delimits people

infected him so that not even the way

I made him sweat could expel it from his body.

The truth: I took him inside

because I finally learned how to love myself.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



LOVE DOESN'T HAVE TO HURT

Overcoming chronic vulvar pain

WORDS BY FIONA REID | ILLUSTRATION BY FIONA DUNNETT

A NEW KIND OF NORMAL

Living and dating with HSV-2

WORDS BY AMY TUEC-NAGEL

When I was 21 and heartbroken, I did the reasonable thing and downloaded Tinder. A boy came over for a drink. When we had sex a few days later, he did not wear a condom. I stopped him and asked, confidently, “Wait, are you clean?” He nodded. “Yeah, yeah. I just got checked last month.” We were all clear: consensual, safe, and sexy.

A couple days later, I started feeling tingling, itchiness, and soreness whenever I used the bathroom. I had an unsettling feeling that something was off, and after researching my symptoms, I reluctantly knocked on the doors of my roommates’ bedrooms, asking for advice.

The two women sat on my bed and examined the blurry picture of my vagina that I took just moments earlier. They identified sores and redness assuredly, like they were off-duty nurses. “Take a shower then keep the area dry so they heal faster,” Eva said, while Corrine helped me make an appointment with the same walk-in clinic they had both attended when they contracted HSV-1 just two months earlier.

When the doctor said “HSV-2, genital herpes,” every comment I’ve ever heard about STIs popped into my head: those people are irresponsible, promiscuous, gross, and dirty. For months this stigma and shame was with me every day. I had monthly outbreaks—cruel reminders that I was still plagued with this infection. I became depressed, I lost my self-confidence. I felt used and undesirable.

The hardest part of the diagnosis was feeling like I’d never be clean again. No matter how many showers I took, or how many times I changed my underwear, I felt unclean. And for the most part, I suffered in silence. I was too embarrassed to tell people about the medical issue that had changed my life.

I felt so lucky to have my roommates, who had contracted herpes after receiving oral sex from their boyfriends. They knew how to articulate my feelings before I could parse them myself.

I decided I needed to focus on my health and pursue a full recovery, a life uninterrupted by outbreaks. I saw several doctors over the next few months. They gave me great comfort by debunking the myths in which so much of my shame was rooted. Most importantly, they assured me, this was not the end of my sex life. And they were right. My sex life just looks a little different now.

After those consultations, I started suppressive therapy. When I began dating again, I navigated my relationships slowly. I was more mindful about who I spent my time with, and who I felt safe sharing this intimate part of myself with. Then, I’d find time to have the awkward talk about 21-year-old Amy and how, despite careful management, there remains a risk of transmission if we have sex. Sometimes my partners respond with lots of questions; some declare outright that they’d rather not have sex. But most of the time, my partners are both understanding and appreciative of my honesty. Twice now, men have shared that previous partners had herpes, and that they’re familiar with navigating sex given such a diagnosis.

Disclosing an STI can be difficult, especially when you’re looking for casual sex. Revealing such private information is the farthest thing from lighthearted. On two occasions I convinced myself that I did not need to disclose unless my partner asked—decisions that were both unfair and dangerous. I (wrongly) felt it was excusable because I was carefully managing my outbreaks, and we used condoms. My current boyfriend was one of those two cases, but he knows now. One night, overwhelmed with guilt, I broke and drove to his house, blurting out “I have herpes!” before he could even say hello.

My boyfriend and I have known each other since we were teenagers, and telling him I had herpes was more painful than telling any other partner. I felt such shame—the “pure,” “clean,” sexy woman he knew years ago didn’t exist anymore. He answered my fears with reassurance and love. That day, and every day since, he has reminded me, and I have reminded myself: regardless of my HSV-2, I am still a strong, sexy, desirable woman. And better yet: one who takes care of her health.

A VIOLATION OF ONE'S OWN

A personal exploration of kink fantasies and sexual trauma

WORDS BY THANH NGUYEN

CONTENT WARNING: THIS ARTICLE DISCUSSES RAPE AND CHILD ABUSE.

A young woman cloaked in a red hood dashes through the woods, struggling to evade the pursuit of a threatening, primal force. She falls—we think, to her demise—as a half-man, half-wolf beast emerges from darkness and towers over her cowering body.

Cut to the woman tied down to a bed in the corner of a cabin; the wolf-man sharpening a knife in the kitchen. He approaches her with it while we wait with bated breath for a bloody finale—until she calls out his name in a familiar refrain. It's suddenly revealed that this is an orchestrated sex play between a couple, as part of the woman's fantasy.

This is a description of my grad film.

At the time, I saw my work as being a clever subversion of gender roles and expectations. Unfortunately, the conceit was lost in comical translation, and I ended up with the reputation of being perverse among my teachers and peers. I took ownership of that label, but secretly I was ashamed and embarrassed.

The film spoke to the kind of fantasies I've had since I was young, namely ones involving rape. I just wasn't sure what compelled me to put this deeply intimate part of myself on display until years after the film's premiere.

While other kids lulled themselves to sleep at night by counting sheep in their heads, I was running through a play-by-play of being raped in mine. Sometimes I would imagine myself being kidnapped and held hostage into sexual slavery for days; other times my bedroom was broken into by a masked intruder who needed a quick fix. Almost exclusively, the scenarios involved me being incapacitated in some form or another. Whether I was asleep, intoxicated, or drugged, the culprit was always a much older man.

Night after night I would construct these narratives that placed myself in precarious situations where the end goal was my violation. If the scenario began too complicated and the burden of real-world logic got in the way, I would simplify the process and remove any physical obstacles or moral struggles for my assailant. It was the Wild West; a garden of sin, and there I was playing chess like a lost god.

In the private theatre of my mind, I was an impatient watcher. I had habits of fast-forwarding or rewinding

to my favourite parts, skipping back and forth between scenes, and fixating on certain actions or behaviours. If I'm being honest, it wasn't the act itself that I was interested in; it was the build up to it. I was stimulated not by the sex per se, but by the moments of violently imposed restraint upon my body before I was taken. I often fell asleep before I got to the climax.

I don't know at what age I first started having these fantasies. All I can say is that I've had them for as long as I can remember, and that there was no gradual process or baby steps; the dial was always at ten. And as much as they offered me excitement, they provided me with an equal sense of comfort and relief from the anxieties that I was experiencing in my real life. Rape fantasies were my escape.

If you asked me if I felt normal growing up daydreaming about being molested on a daily basis, the answer would be a resounding no backed up by a choir at a Sunday service. I thought there was something wrong with me. I thought I was sick. And with that came twin pillars of shame and guilt. For obvious reasons I kept these fantasies to myself.

**“It was the Wild West;
a garden of sin, and
there I was playing
chess like a lost god.”**

In all of my relationships, I have gradually shined a light in that secret corner of my room, with the hope that I would be able to realize these unorthodox desires that have shadowed my imagination for the better part of my life. Although I've never had a partner translate the graphic scenes in my head to real-life with perfect fidelity, I've been generously granted and given the essence of what I wanted, unbridled masculine aggression and complete physical domination; to be treated like an object and nothing more.

But it left me feeling empty every time. Sex would begin with elation and pleasure, and end with me emerging from the bedroom hurt, indignant, or on the verge of tears. I wanted to be degraded, but I also wanted love, tenderness, and affection. Needless to say, it was confusing for both myself and my partners. I eventually abandoned the fantasy to avoid the sense of inner turmoil that it brought on.

In my late twenties, I read Alan Moore's graphic novel *Lost Girls*. The graphic novel presents an erotic and feminist revision of classic fairy tale heroines whose lives intersected and were bound by the sexual and physical trauma that each of them endured as a child. I was floored. Here are Alice, Wendy, and Dorothy, characters that I grew up seeing as two-dimensional vectors, humanized with such deftness and feminine authenticity. As I read on, I wept. I wept because of each woman's own richly and generously-depicted personal history. I wept because of their deeply complex relationship to sex and their singular brand of promiscuity. I wept because I saw myself in them.

Feminist author Susie Bright recounts in an essay the time when she was sexually assaulted at knifepoint and how she subsequently converted this traumatic moment into a fantasy of hers. In her analysis she states, “Erotic fantasies take the unbearable and unbelievable issues in life and turn them into orgasmic gunpowder.”

My first sexual experience happened to me when I was four. Other than the fact that it was in the hands of someone who was looking after me at the time, the grisly details don't matter here. And rather than attributing this one instance as the cause of my kink, I want to take stock of my life as a whole.

The concepts of love and cruelty, the familiar and strange, are inextricably linked in my eyes. I've been abused by one family member, neglected and abandoned by another, and cheated on by someone who supposedly loved me. During each of these events, I was a passive recipient to someone else's actions; a passenger on board a ship, with no control over the destination.

Bright goes on to say that, “A willing submission is every bit as powerful as domination. And in our fantasies, no matter how much we struggle to deny it, we control every frame.”

I am not a victim in my fantasies. Nor do I have to be a victim of them. In coming to the realization that my imagination is a source of power, rather than a burden, I feel emboldened to explore those old, twisted terrains that I was once so ashamed of.

And I see it clearly now that I've been on an ongoing path towards rewriting the narrative of my own trauma; to lay claim over helpless situations and to create a new meaning for it all.

NEXT-GEN CENTREFOLDS

An exploration of erotica post-Playboy

WORDS BY COLEMAN PETE

The Pew Research Center claims that Generation Z includes those born from 1996 onwards. Anyone born after this date has surely been told that they are the first true digital natives, growing up in the age of smartphones and instant access to information. This has drastically changed the way that Gen Z-ers learn about sex.

It seems improbable at best that today someone would learn about intimacy through the pages of a magazine, as was something of a tradition for the generations preceding them.

But what does this technological inundation mean for teens beginning to learn about sex? And what is lost—or gained—by the fall of legacy erotic print media?

Playboy is almost synonymous with the idea of the “nude mag.” Its glossy centrefolds defined an industry, and it even had a powerful editorial legacy with writers such as Ray Bradbury, Jack Kerouac, and Margaret Atwood gracing its pages.

But as time went on, the internet proliferated, attitudes about sex changed, and the erotic print industry saw a massive shift in demand. *Playboy* downgraded to quarterly issues and briefly experimented with eliminating nudity altogether before finally announcing on March 18, 2020 they would only publish digitally going forward.

Although the decision was claimed to have been hastened by the COVID-19 pandemic, this narrative should reflect the failure of the magazine to adjust to the #MeToo era, even as it quickly pivoted into a “woke” version of itself.

So now the question is, what will happen to the erotic print publication industry, and who—or what—will fill the vacuum left behind?

Treats! Magazine was founded as a “modern gentleman’s” magazine, with an affinity for artistic nudity without the “flesh mag” connotations of its predecessors. I found a copy of Issue 11 (circa 2016) in The Shop, a trendy Chinatown denim store. The salesperson behind the counter assured me that the most recent issue had sold out quickly all over town.

The issue included a couple of half-hearted interviews with models and a profile of Instagram influencer The Fat Jew. The nude mag was not dead, it seemed, but its editorial ambitions were lagging.

It’s relieving to find that several other independent publications offer a more critical editorial slate. These magazines have beautiful and inventive imagery, and often showcase non-heteronormative themes that are usually far from the limelight.

London-based *Suspira* is Valentina Egoavil Medina’s feminist horror magazine. She recently released the *Vampire* issue, billed as an exploration into the duality and sensuality of the Vampire archetype.

Egoavil Medina asserts that although the magazine is an expression of her love for the horror genre first, it also investigates the representation of women and other minorities, especially their sexuality (and its frequent censorship in media).

Brooklyn’s *Math* magazine is another alternative, with a progressive, sex-positive spin that editor and founder Mackenzie Peck created after noticing a lack of

representative media in the industry. It marries the incidentally educational but mostly flat-out erotic magazine with the reality of humanity’s sexual needs. This publication’s textbook-like cover also makes for great covert reading, unlike *Playboy*’s audacious photography.

Peck has been producing print issues since 2015, and their upcoming issue will be the tenth.

Creating issues in print has been important for *Math*, but they are eyeing a digital release as well. A transition to digital would amplify the magazine’s reach, but the move is fraught with risk.

“In print, I’m free to do whatever I want. There’s a lot of legal precedent to protect me,” Peck explained to me recently. The idea that working in print is about protecting the creators and contributors is one of the most compelling narratives of the erotic publication industry. It offers a freedom and control that isn’t guaranteed in digital media.

Because of its sexual nature, the *Math* Instagram account has been shut down several times and the website is constantly at risk of the same fate. Even their credit card company periodically stops processing their transactions.

“Anyone who is in the sextech industry has to try to deal with this bullshit,” Peck adds. “We are trying to compete with these big brands, and even the most basic services can be hard to reach.”

“All independent erotic publications face these challenges. The same platforms that allow them to grow their influence with a global fan base can suspend them at any time.”

All independent erotic publications face these challenges. The same platforms that allow them to grow their influence with a global fan base can suspend them at any time.

This isn’t only an issue of print versus digital, or whether anything can fill the space left by *Playboy*. In a way, *Playboy* was obsolesced when the internet began providing pornography en masse.

This is an issue of access to an even playing field. Independent magazines have the power and the desire to challenge sexual norms through stories and art. All they ask is for the opportunity to get their message out. This generation’s next big thinkers and artists will be found in the pages of any of these magazines, if they are given the chance.

Egoavil Medina says that she has “sometimes seen people who open up the magazine for the first time be very shocked and just close the magazine again. But those who dare to look closer and move past the initial shock are always rewarded.”

ANIMATED AWAKENINGS

Sexy cartoons that confused the SAD Staff

BALTO AND JENNA

I thought I was only into the rough and tumble half-wolf *Balto* (voiced by Kevin Bacon, obviously), but while rewatching the film, my Dad assumed I was into Balto's love interest, Jenna, and he was totally right. When it comes to cartoon dogs, I apparently do not discriminate. Thanks, I hate it.

- Megan Jenkins, Editor-in-Chief

LOLA BUNNY

I blame Lola's sexiness on the voice actor that played her—I mean, her sultry tone was borderline pornographic. When she says to Bugs Bunny in *Space Jam* “Don’t ever call me doll,” she sounds equally like an empowered woman (rabbit?) and very aroused. What can I say? Confidence is sexy.

- Madeline Barber, Managing Editor & Co-Publisher

DANNY PHANTOM

Something about a “conventionally” attractive boy that obliterates demons by night and fights bullies by day was extremely appealing to me. In fact, these qualities are still very appealing to me. Danny Phantom, if you read this, I'm free on Thursday night and would like to hang out. Please respond to this and then hang out with me on Thursday night when I'm free.

- Marcus Prasad, Managing Editor

FOX ROBIN HOOD

I've always been a little concerned that my sexual awakening was when the anthropomorphic Fox strutted his way onto my screen in that saucy little green tunic. But then, maybe it was meant to be. I've been looking for a foxy partner who casually steals from the rich ever since.

- Syd Danger, Creative Director & Co-Publisher

MEGARA

Hercules is my favourite Disney movie, but I was always unsure about how I was supposed to feel about Meg's overt sexual energy—do I support her taking advantage of the predictable male gaze, or do I wish she would avoid playing into that part of her identity? Furthermore, how can one be so pointy and curvaceous at the same time, and what real life ponytail could her hairstyle possibly be based on?

- Becca Clarkson, Web Editor

MODO FROM BIKER MICE FROM MARS

It has always been a little awkward to talk about my sexual awakening being extraterrestrial life (read: gray-furred giant mouse). He was the most empathic protagonist, equipped with a robotic arm and a bike that he called Lil' Hoss.. Hearing his voice—thank you, Dorian Harewood—still gives me shivers.

- Lisa Salomonsson, Social Media Manager

THE CENTAURS FROM FANTASIA

Should I be embarrassed? Probably—but all considerations for my dignity aside, those broad-chested horse hunks really did it for me back then. Who would have thought that Disney's *Pastoral Symphony* would be so formative?

- Jonathan James, Business Manager

TAUT, AGGRESSIVE SPHERES

Meditations on post-partum knockers

WORDS BY MICHELLE CYCA

Breasts are bizarre when you think about them. I mean, *really* think about them. No other part of your body has a secret, hidden function that is only activated partway through your life if you know this one weird trick (have a baby). I used to be one of you—walking around all day, oblivious to the untapped potential of my boobs. Now I'll never think of them the same way again.

My boobs and I have been together a long time. They arrived in the sticky chaos of adolescence, along with male attention, PMS-associated tenderness, and an overflowing drawer of neon bras from La Senza. Some women have a fraught relationship with their breasts, but I've always liked mine: they looked cute, didn't get in the way of my athletic activities, and didn't require the support of underwire. They were trusty and easy-going companions, like the best friends in a romantic comedy. My Judy Greers.

They remained purely decorative until I gave birth in the summer of 2019, and then everything changed. Suddenly their latent function was unlocked, and they became dual vending machines. You know, the kind that dispenses coffee or hot chocolate when you press a button. I literally woke up one day with a brand-new ability, feeling like Peter Parker when he discovered the power to shoot spider webbing out of his hands: *whoa, what the fuck?*

Some women's breasts begin to change during pregnancy, but mine were procrastinators. They waited until three days after birth to transform abruptly. I knew this was coming; all the pregnancy books had talked about how my milk would “come in” and fill up all the milk ducts that had been expanding and preparing during pregnancy in order to nourish my tiny, hungry newborn. But I was still taken by surprise.

I looked down one morning to see that someone—the plastic surgery fairy?—had given me implants in my sleep. My boobs had swelled dramatically into hard spheres, the skin stretched and shiny. They looked tacky and pornographic, and felt like they might explode if I bumped into something. If it weren't for the milk leaking out of them, I wouldn't have believed they were real.

It had never occurred to me until that moment that fake boobs have their origins in the real world. I don't mean discreet, tasteful implants, I mean the kind you see 13-year-old boys drawing in the margins of their

homework: ridiculous, gravity-defying orbs. But it turned out those taut, aggressive spheres do spontaneously occur in nature. They just wait until immediately after you give birth to appear.

It's ironic that during the time when you are probably the least sexual you have ever been (you are medically prohibited from having sex, even if you wanted to, which you definitely don't), your boobs look like they just opened the door to a surprisingly muscular hot tub repair man or an exceptionally horny pizza delivery boy.

“I literally woke up one day with a brand-new ability, feeling like Peter Parker when he discovered the power to shoot spider webbing out of his hands: whoa, what the fuck?”

Our society politely turns away from breastfeeding. Some people revere it as natural and beautiful; others have a hard time disguising their discomfort when they spot it happening in public. But both treatments ignore the painful, disorienting, sometimes hilarious reality of it. I saw images of breastfeeding constantly while pregnant: in books, on blogs, on the packaging of the many products I acquired to prepare myself for parenthood. All of them were hazy and romantic. A mother cradling her infant, smiling beatifically, looking serene and composed. None of these images depicted the part where milk shoots out of your nipple and hits your baby in the face. But my new gigantic boobs were the first clue that having a baby is funnier, messier, and stranger than I was led to believe.

I wasn't too exhausted from childbirth and my tiny new infant to enjoy this discovery. In fact, I would recommend that every new mother schedule a topless photo shoot immediately after birth, even if it's just you and your iPhone in the bathroom mirror. There's so little to enjoy during this period. You aren't sleeping, you are in tremendous pain, and you are leaving a trail of milk and blood wherever you go. At least you have your hilarious huge jugs. Embrace them. Literally. Because hand expressing that milk will relieve the pressure.

WITNESSING

A queered consent

WORDS BY ANGELICA POVERSKY | ILLUSTRATION BY MAGNUS VAN DER MAREL

I remember standing outside of the Calabash Bistro in downtown Vancouver with a friend of mine. Some of the people we were out with sat on the other side of the glass watching us, watching each other. I don't know if I spent forty minutes or two hours on that sidewalk, falling in love with his eyes. All I remember is how we stared at each other, locking eyes bitterly and willingly.

As we gazed into each other's eyes, I recognized the new and vulnerable intimacy that was becoming prominent in my life. It was present here, and present in all aspects of my most recent interactions. This intimacy, a profoundly consensual energy between us that was unable to be interrupted, was the expansive truth of seeing and being seen.

When we were done, my friend explained with his heavenly smile that "This is sex." And it was—eye contact can be sex, hugging can be sex, syncing up breath to breath while reciting lines of poems can be sex, naked bodies, touching legs, and savouring food is sex.

When I am in bed with my girlfriend, nothing about the way we look at each other and hold each other's spines is anything but sex. I love the way that bodies can spill into each other, how love can move hearts, how circulations can sync up—how much spirit there can be in exchanging honestly.

Sex with her, as an extension of love, is a process of trust and discovery.

"He believes he earned my consent the moment he got the green light to touch my left nipple, to take me out on a date, to get my phone number.

I don't blame him, and I don't blame myself either."

Last night, I cried because my script around consent has never been about witnessing or feeling witnessed. It has been limited by a narrow perspective of sex. Sex is becoming redefined for me, moving away from an anatomical calculation of how I can most optimally deliver a male orgasm, and becoming an exchange of emotion, physical presence, and vulnerability. Sex before, on its Petri dish created by patriarchal science, left no room for the nonbinary ways of gender expression.

I learned about sex in elementary school as involving precisely one cisgender man and one cisgender woman, with one penis entering one vagina—ending with a cisgender male orgasm, finally alleviating the woman of her suffering. I also learned that sex should make you bleed the first time, and by the 10th time you should at least pretend to be enjoying it because it is hard for a man to get off while you look uncomfortable.

Every penis that entered me unwantedly, and yet consensually, was called sex from this elementary definition. I have learned to call it sex too. I wonder what this cultural denotation of "sex" has done to my body.

How much trauma have I endured that I told myself I enjoyed, solely because I was taught that this "female" body is meant to be summoned into submission, servitude, and yet shamed for its slutiness? How much consent have I given because of the myths I was told about my worth, my pussy, and the rent I had to pay for having both?

I once went home one night with an extreme gym bro, and he told me we could have sex as long as there were "no feelings." He touched my left nipple for two seconds then wanted to put his penis inside me. He left when I protested. He said, "Don't invite me over if you just want to do that cuddly shit. I was here for sex."

"I remember the day after that time with my friend outside the Calabash Bistro when he sent me a voice message that said, "Thank you for witnessing me."

What he says, and what so many others just like him have said, is that I should let people fuck me after poking enough, breaking enough walls, or checking all the sexual script boxes. Then sex can be something he does to me. He believes he earned my consent the moment he got the green light to touch my left nipple, to take me out on a date, to get my phone number.

I don't blame him, and I don't blame myself either.

We've both seen consent as a campaign effort. Campaigns focused on getting boys to listen for a firm yes, reinforcing that cis men are insatiable sex animals, rooted in some essentialist biological view of hard-wired hard-ons in their DNA, making their horny hearts incapable of viewing women as anything but objects to masturbate with.

The myth of sex as violence, and the grey area of rape, is a direct result of never learning what it means to exchange love between yourself and others. To receive, give, and witness physically. When I lay with my girlfriend, or when I recall my friend outside the Calabash Bistro, or when I perform poetry to a person that listens—I am reminded of the multitude of ways that love, nurturance and discovery move into each other and reveal themselves.

There is nothing violent, forceful, or unwanted about showing yourself and seeing others. Nurturance is a step so much more profound than consent, because it is an ongoing process of commitment to vulnerability. Of seeing and recognizing a person as such.

I remember the day after that time with my friend outside the Calabash Bistro when he sent me a voice message that said, "Thank you for witnessing me."

And maybe that's all I can define sex as—truly witnessing.



Having a mother who was a community health nurse and struggled with boundaries (she's working on it) was a combo that made being a sexually active teenager both illuminating and embarrassing.

WORDS BY MADELINE BARBER

SAFETY FIRST

When my mum realized she had a house full of hormone-riddled teenagers, her Vancouver Coastal Health Mum Vibes™ kicked in. She got to work putting together a healthy sex kit for our bathroom, and insisted on explaining the contents of the bag to us in detail. Yes, it included studded condoms, and no I couldn't feel the difference.

HELP A SISTER OUT

When one of my girlfriends at school started having unprotected sex with her boyfriend, my Vancouver Coastal Health Daughter Vibes™ kicked in. Our mother-daughter bonding activity that week included putting together a kit for my friend, including pamphlets, a one month supply of the pill, the morning after pill, condoms, and lube.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO SAY NO

When I was 18 my parents divorced, and shortly after my mum hit the dating scene. On one of these dates, a gentleman came over for an innocent drink. He took that as a cue to get completely naked. Yes, someone pulled the Naked Man on my then 54-year-old mother. Despite his boldness, she politely told him he should put his clothes back on. At least, that's what she told me. He was a firefighter, so like, no one would blame you, Mum.

HAVE SLOW SEX

Growing up, I remember seeing *Slow Sex* by Diana Richardson on the family bookshelf. I was deeply disturbed that my parents weren't trying to be celibate and/or keep their interest in sex private. Not long ago this book was recommended to me, and once I got over the gross connection between this book and my parents, I had to admit... it makes some good points.

NEVER SAY NEVER

During the above mentioned post-divorce period, my mum and I once had a picnic on a Victoria beach. A woman was laid out in a bikini not far from us, and my mum and I both agreed she was beautiful. And then, in one of the best moments of my life, she said "you know, I haven't entirely ruled that out..."

TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT SEX

My mum once appeared on the local news in a segment about how to talk to your kids about sex. She stood in front of the rhododendron in our front yard and instructed parents to bring it up while in the car so their kids couldn't escape. As much as it made me uncomfortable to talk about sex with my mum (yes, often while trapped in the passenger seat of her Subaru), I'm ultimately so grateful that she normalized it, and above all cared about my health and safety. Never once did she try to shame me; it was always about my well-being. And I think that's pretty badass.

SHUTTING UP
MY MUM TAUGHT
ME ABOUT SEX



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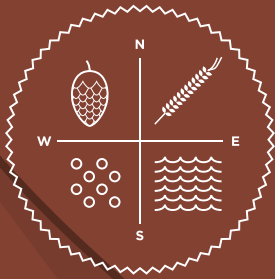
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