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Wetlands
An exploration of gender, identity, sexuality, politics, and intersectionality at the University of Puget Sound and beyond.
The staff of *Wetlands* would like to offer our thanks to the University of Puget Sound community for your amazing submissions! Additionally, we would like to extend our gratitude to the Gender Studies Advisory Board, with special thanks to Professor Alison Tracy Hale for her enthusiastic encouragement and generous erudition, the Associated Students of the University of Puget Sound, the Media Board, *Crosscurrents*, *The Trail*, the Student Diversity Center, Czarina Ramsay, Libbey Geissinger for cover art design, Anya Callahan, and you, the reader. Published with support from Campus Progress / Center for American Progress (online at CampusProgress.org).
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Letter from an Editor/Student/Woman/Activist

Tosia Klincewicz

TW: Mention of rape culture and rape.

When thinking about putting together this publication, one question, offered in a conversation with Czarina Ramsay, Director of Multicultural Student Services here at the University of Puget Sound, stands out: Whose voices are missing?

Because Wetlands is a submission-based publication, it is impossible predict what our final publication will look like until we have received all of our submissions and it isn’t until the review and selection process that our magazine even begins to take form. While the staff has patiently engaged in hours of discussion on how to compose a thorough and thoughtful publication, it is only possible to prepare so much before you are actually faced with the task of editing concrete content.

A few weeks ago the staff went around and shared our ideas for submissions; it was truly inspiring. Every member had such unique and strong points of view and issues they wanted to address that I had a hard time coming up with an answer to that ever-present question: Whose voices are still missing? What gaps in content are there left to fill?

To be honest, I am exhausted by the countless articles and social media projects about why we (still) need feminism. But the reason they exhaust me, infuriate me, is the very reason that they are necessary; they insist on exposing the innumerable instances of injustice based on antiquated misogynistic social norms that continue to oppress people of all genders. But sitting in the sunshine and listening to the staff’s submission ideas I felt that there was no way to publish this issue of Wetlands without reviewing the reasons that publications like ours are necessary in the first place.

But the thing is, articles like this, articles that attempt to shed light on literary and social responses to feminism and culture, are written every day by people who are just as exhausted and outraged as I am by the instances of gender-based violence and discrimination that happen every hour of every day. How can I, a twenty-something-year-old white female feminist student and activist at a private liberal arts university phrase it differently than it has already been said by millions of people with diverse experiences all over the world? How can I be more poignant than someone like Eve Ensler, author of The Vagina Monologues, in her article, “Over It,” in which she exposes the pervasive rape culture that permeates almost every aspect of our society?

Feminism is important. Feminism fights for everyone’s rights. Feminism is why I won’t stop reading and writing and supporting articles and publications like Wetlands and countless others. So thank you, reader, for your time, your submissions, your support and your consideration. I will never know how this issue has impacted you, but I can only ask that you approach our content with an open mind and that Wetlands will continue to contribute to the larger forces that are working to end oppression.
The Feminist Porn Debate: Part I

Anya Callahan

TW: Mention of sexual violence.

Pornography is a complex topic in feminist debate. Our culture sexualizes women and tells us our worth is somehow related to our ability to please men, our beauty, and our sexual availability. Women are rewarded for their compliance with this message.

I’m an attractive woman, and from time to time I get free coffee or an oil change, but the consequences of feeling victimized and in danger of being prey to sexual assault far outweigh the benefits. I believe when women try to use the forces of patriarchy to their own advantage, when women play into the system by participating in pornography, then more long-term harm is done than good. Yes, women can make plenty of money in pornography. In fact, porn is one of the few industries where women out-earn men. And though the capitol rewards for female porn actresses are often much higher than other available career options, the work of mainstream pornography reinforces harmful stereotypes of women and human sexuality that are perpetuated throughout society, and thwart the work being done to alleviate gender inequalities. Also, all that imagery you see on screen isn’t fantasy. It’s real. Everything you see in pornography actually happened somewhere to a real woman.

While there are some alternative, queer, and feminist “sex positive” porn that portrays more realistic, accurate, and safe depictions of women and human sexuality, the overwhelming majority of pornography is extremely degrading and often offensive. Pornography generally perpetuates stereotypical depictions of queer individuals and people of color. The majority of sexual education does not acknowledge the existence of homosexuality—and as a result, queer youth are often forced to learn about sex entirely from pornography. “Lesbian” pornography is largely produced specifically for a heterosexual male viewer, and “Gay” pornography usually depicts over masculine images.

Pornography is made for men and by men, often without acknowledging the women’s experiences. Women are frequently in positions of extreme submission, begging to be penetrated and acting out euphoric moans as soon as the male ejaculates on their face, or breasts, or wherever porn directors think men want to imagine coming on women. Not that the depictions of men are any better. It’s offensive that the porn industry over-masculinizes male sexuality and aligns it with aggression and dominance. Those messages are equally as detrimental to our society.

While I do think female participation in mainstream pornography is problematic, I am not blaming the actresses. I blame our corrupt system that rewards women who sell their sexuality with capital and attention, while simultaneously dehumanizing and slut shaming them—classic Madonna/whore scenario.

Another problem with mainstream pornography is that it often ends up being a main source of sex education for young men (and women). Many schools still only have abstinence-only education leaving students ignorant about safe and respectful sex. Female pleasure is never something taught in traditional sex-ed curriculum even when they are “comprehensive.” The reality of female pleasure is falsified in pornography as well. Women learn that their male partner legitimizes their sexual experience. If he comes, then it was good sex. But what about us? Women aren’t having orgasms at the rate men are, and I think that’s a big problem.

Perhaps the most problematic consequence of mainstream pornography is its common portrayal of sexual violence against women as an innate part of male sexuality—informing the reality of sexual desire. The unhealthy attitude our culture has toward sex, along with the lack of comprehensive sex education, means that pornography is many individuals’ only insight on what sex is supposed to be like. Mainstream heterosexual pornography communicates to men that sexual violence toward women is arousing, and that women enjoy the abuse, while also telling women that “normal” sex properly involves putting up with sexual violence.

Pornography is problematic because of the degrading, widely distributed representations of women, which contributes to our unhealthy sexual culture—with high rates of female sexual assault, rape, and domestic violence. Pornography is a single component of a harmful patriarchal system that perpetuates gender inequalities and unsafe sexual experiences. Though, in order to challenge the status quo of mass produced pornography, society must not punish or shame the actresses involved, but rather work to challenge the culture that led women to choose or be forced into such work.
They allege that women call the shots, make the money, and sell the films. That said, mainstream pornography (i.e., the highly accessible, free Internet amateur porn) is largely a non-commercial industry. In my experience some of the most gut-wrenching roles for women are found in that medium. However, my opinion on pornography, as with most matters of sexual expression and desire, is highly subjective. Feminist discourse expects participants to hold certain opinions on the ethics and potential for empowerment in pornography (e.g., pro-porn vs. anti-porn and pro-sex vs. anti-sex), as if the discussion itself can solve the issue of gender inequality. Regardless of how we categorize ourselves, these pornographic trends will continue. If feminism wants to move forward, we need to abandon the idea that pornography is the enemy.

The reality of sexual desire is that all imaginable kinks probably exist. This hypothesis can be tested with a simple Google Search. I absolutely worry how some of these images are informing gender relations in and outside of the bedroom. But more important than that concern is the fact that these images are communicating what is already present in the culture. Any attempt to censor them will not end violence against women, it will not increase the number of women in positions of power, and it will not give women more orgasms. Censorship will merely drive these desires and expressions further underground. Women are placed in degrading and stereotypical roles in children’s films and television shows, reality programs, and comic books. While pornography is widely accessible and often free, so are most forms of media. The focus on pornography as the enemy is a true distraction from the overall movement towards gender equity. The argument that the regulation of pornography is core feminist concern rests completely on subjective attitudes towards sexuality, bodily autonomy, and empowerment.

I highly doubt that many young girls dream to grow up and be porn actors. I hope they do not dream of one day being filmed calling themselves “dirty cumbuckets” while waxed men stand around and ejaculate into their hair. But our economic system produces many degrading employment opportunities for women (for all people, really). Bikini barista jobs, for example, are health hazards. Steamed milk is really, really hot but baristas in those little street side huts can make over $1,000.00 per day in tips plus their hourly wages. The reality of capitalism is that we are coerced to go where the money is to survive.

I have not yet reconciled what pulls women to participate in amateur videos without pay. However, if a women is consenting to be part of something I find problematic, that does not give me the right to define her consent as illegitimate or unsound. Being degraded on film might be her kink and it might be the most vile thing imaginable but that is the nature of sexual interest and expression: it is personal, it is weird, and often irrational.

What I know for sure is that feminism is still relevant because women do lack opportunities for power. I know that pornography can make me feel sick to my stomach, but that the medium as a whole is not generalizable. I do not think that Kevin James is funny, at all, but I do not write off the comedy genre. There is “good” porn that features unwavering enthusiastic consent and mutual pleasure, and I believe a wider dissemination of these images could be a valuable component to women’s empowerment and gender equality efforts. My official feminist position is that porn, like sex, is complicated. There are plenty of negative images of women featured in pornography. Ultimately, however, pornography is only one expression of the larger issue of the representation of women in media.
The world is black and white until people begin to justify their actions, and then it is smeared into a million shades of gray. But actions do not need to be justified.

They stand as they are, as strong as my feelings and future. This does not mean my colors do not mix. Rather than blur together from faulty excuses or whispered lies, they mix for acceptance, satisfaction, and bliss. The black and white morph into colors to create a rainbow that paints my life.

“How can you know?” asked my suburban, Catholic-raised father, looking questioningly at his daughter. It is as clear as how one knows if they prefer dark chocolate to milk chocolate, Star Trek to Star Wars, or summer ripples to winter stars.

They just do. I know by how my bones ache and my skin tingles. I know by how my feet make me dance and my arms propel me forward. Most of all, I know by the way she makes me feel. She makes my heart tremble and my breath stagger. She makes my cheeks burn red and my blue eyes sparkle.

I am not a liar for never having stated this or admitted it. I was simply withholding information. Until I couldn’t any longer. Her dangerous allure and forbidden secrets convinced me. I may not fit into the world’s clear-cut spheres used to categorize and separate people, but I fit into my world. There should be no normal, or right from wrong when it comes to the characteristics of a person. They should be no color, gender or orientation. There are just people. There are fascinating people, brilliant people and enchanting people, but never wrong people.

For the first time I am being honest with myself. Yet certain labels still make me recoil and stares make me shrink inside myself and crawl into my invisible foxhole. I do not respond in this way because I am not proud of who I am, but rather hurt by the world we live in. I do not feel different from anyone else who has ever loved. I should not be treated as such. I should not have to face the fear of being seen in public or accosted by a stranger.

During the process of finding myself, I wade through the arduous task of answering whys and find more of myself. I finally understand why discussing gay rights would get me so fired up. I understand my feelings and actions. I understand why she can make my stomach turn to butterflies and my soul turn purple.

I have finally come to believe my speculations and trust myself. Feelings I could never understand – why girls made me tingle with excitement and boys made me prickle with disgust – now make sense and I have finally become happy. I no longer rely on white and blue capsules that trick my mind. I don't rely on colorful food packages or the mundane spinning of a treadmill belt. I rely on myself. I trust myself to uncover my hidden character; pale from only a few slivers of sunlight she saw when she would briefly escape, only to be wrestled back down into the valves of my heart, tips of my fingers and souls of my feet. Although people may pass judgment and question my desires, I know what I want. I want my colors to run together and seep out of me, painting the earth as they express who I really am.
Wet Dreams

Ava Williams

She is not singing a siren song. She does not need to, with breasts like those. And those two shells are teasing: miniscule, iridescent, and placed just so— I want to pull her seaweed hair and ask if she feels anything, down there.

But when I go to touch, she smiles and slides into the sea. And so I dive in to the deep blue ditch— the maritime bed of the liquid illicit. But I find my hands are fins, and I find that we are fish.

A love like this could not be bestial. A love like this is nature on nature, undulation and odor, over and over and now we are kicking, making the shiver of eddies slip between our scales. My brains are bursting for breath, but God Damn, I never knew fish could move like this and now we’re swimming towards the surface we are almost at the surface we have almost hit the surface and one last swift kick and, and—

...breath. I ascend to a breath. The air in my room is holy. Musty. I feel the throbbing of my body in my bed. I feel the salted sea still damp between my legs.
Blue Legs

K.M.

Blue marks
On legs
Scars made
Beauty marks
I tell myself

Not magazine type
Skinny
But pale and strong
Love your body
Other women do

Who says small breasts aren’t
Sexy?
Many have touched
And rested between
My thighs

Soft lips on the way
Down
Beautiful women
Share in the moment
And embrace their sexuality

They make me feel
Alive
Even after I leave
They leave
Still I feel proud

I share these nights
Of love and lust
Blue legged girl
Let me rest
Between your arms

2013.
Naughty Haikus
Bebe La Grua

Sometimes I just want
A bruising fuck from behind.
But, please, kiss softly.

Your fingers slip in
While I'm aching under you.
Oh shit, fuckinghell.

Silky skin licking;
Reverent lips bless my hips
And claim smooth belly.
I am a virgin.

Before I entered college, I never thought that that was uncommon. My friends didn't start losing theirs until about the 11th grade and we would always sit close together at lunch and whisper about it. It was a huge deal, and a lot of times they felt like it was too soon. I would just sit back, scared of the day I would lose mine, but also silently and secretly wishing that I was in their position.

When I came to college, I had met several people who were still virgins and I had some friends back home who were also. There was a good concentration of people who had had sex, mainly guys, but it was usually people who had just come out of long term relationships, which I had never experienced.

As much as people talk about sex, they don't really talk about it. Or it's talked about only by the people who have experienced it, leaving no room for those who haven't. What I find weird is that virginity in college, and slowly now in high school, is becoming almost taboo. It's more common to overhear a conversation of people sharing gritty sex stories out loud and other people whispering things like "Well...I'm still a virgin..."

And I want to know why that seems necessary. I've found myself in intimate situations with people where I start silently freaking out, thinking, "Oh God, I have to tell them we're not going to have sex. I can't lose it like this!" Worrying what they'll think. But, why should I feel bad or scared or nervous?

I talked to a friend of mine, a fellow virgin, who said that they were apathetic to the whole thing, but that they think it sucks being a virgin because of the stigma and the pressure that society puts on us to have sex. They said "I think it's dumb to make your first time such a big deal. I mean, it shouldn't be bad if you lose it in a one night stand or if you wait." They also said that the problem is that "no one sits you down and says "It's okay to be a virgin". No one does that."

I'm writing this because there are times when I feel like the only person on campus who hasn't had sex. I feel like a prude or unlikable because of what I need before I feel comfortable losing it. But, I don't need to justify it. No one needs to. This is for all of the virgins who feel bad that they haven't had sex. We spend a lot of energy on not slut shaming and supporting people's sexual endeavors. Well, believe it or not, but virginity is a component in the sexual sphere, and it seems, now more than ever, that it needs to be supported as well.

Part of me feels silly writing this, as if I'm trying to make myself feel better by writing these words down. As if I'm trying to change everyone's mind with this single short essay. But I think people need to realize that there is no real standard. Standard is a social construct, as is beauty, gender, time, whatever. If you're a virgin, hold your head high, because just like consent, virginity can be sexy, too.
What is polyamory?

Polyamory is a word with Greek and Latin roots (meaning poly=many, amory=loves) and refers to romantic relationships involving more than two people. Polygamy is a marriage where one person has multiple spouses. Polygyny is one man with “many wives”, and polyandry is one woman with “many husbands.”

Polyamory is a practice in which partners are treated equitably, meaning that the emotions and decisions of all people involved are weighted equally. Non-monogamy is a larger umbrella term that includes open relationships, in which partners are not sexually exclusive but who also do not pursue “many loves.”

Is it cheating?

Cheating involves lying to someone. Ethical non-monogamy emphasizes honesty and communication. Cheating refers to breaking the unwritten rules of monogamy that few people ever evaluate or question. These “original” rules by which people live were written just a couple hundred years ago by religious organizations that thought of women as property.

Polyamorous people generally agree that lying about yourself to the people you love is unacceptable. They also agree that loving more than one person doesn’t make you love either of them less. Love is not like money—you don’t withdraw love from one person to give it to another. In friendships and families, people love each other fully without expecting exclusivity. Parents are especially good models because of their ability to love multiple children completely, but in different ways. Love is love, and sex shouldn’t be the only thing that keeps people from forming new, deep connections.

Nothing to “Fix”

One thing necessary for the majority of healthy relationships is being able to see yourself as whole all on your own. You are responsible for your happiness, first and foremost, and placing the responsibility on someone else is frustrating and unsatisfying. With this in mind, many polyamorists seek out partners not because they’re looking for missing pieces of themselves, but because they value the diversity of a variety of partners.

It is equally important to see each of your partners as whole by themselves, too. Unconditional love allows you to love people for who they are exactly as they are, not someone you hope that they will someday be. In fact, in many cases the differences between partners serves to reaffirm that the bond two people share is unique and irreplaceable.

When you can see both yourself and your partner as whole, evaluative comparisons to your partner’s partners (or “metamours”) tend to cease. It is much easier to see two people as merely different, rather than “better” and “worse,” when you can see that they are both whole people with different strengths, weaknesses, and interests.

Jealousy

People often dismiss non-monogamous relationships because they are afraid they’d get jealous. They say, “Oh, I could never do that,” marginalising it as some kind of fantasy. However, jealousy is a fear, plain and simple. Fears are not things to be crippled by; they’re things to be overcome. Many non-monogamous people still feel jealousy, but they trust their partners and communicate often enough to know that their jealousy is just an unfounded fear.

Polyamory is not generally the reason for the end of a relationship; non-monogamy often takes the blame for problems caused by incompatibility or unchecked jealousy. People who are compatible and communicate well with each other will succeed in relationships, and for people who are not compatible, polyamory will ex-
pose these dissonances quickly.

In poly circles, the “jealousy” is often discussed alongside “compersion,” a word meaning the opposite of jealousy. Someone who feels compersion derives pleasure and satisfaction from seeing their partner pleased and satisfied, regardless of whether they’re the reason for it. Very few people have “mastered” compersion because of hard-wiring, but it is a beautiful way for people to express the depth of their love for each other.

The “easy” way out

People who say non-monogamy is the easy way out are fooling themselves—polyamorous people invest a tremendous amount of energy into their relationships because they are defining the rules and limits as they go, rather than falling into monogamy by default. Maintaining relationships with multiple people successfully requires an enormous amount of candid and respectful communication, as well as managing the emotions and needs of multiple people.

Is it sexist?

Many people mistake polyamory for polygamy, which is a patriarchal and misogynist practice. Polyamory lets all people involved follow their heart, not just the husbands. Assuming that polyamory is a way to make “cheating okay” for guys perpetuates limiting ideas of female sexuality, suggesting that women shouldn’t like sex with more than one person. Poly men often get high fives and back slaps for “getting away with it,” and women are either thought of as “weak” for having caved, or a slut if she likes it.

The gendered double standard only reinforces the notion that women’s sexuality is defined by their relationship to men, not by themselves. Polyamorous relationships occur only with the consent of all involved. In fact, many of the polyamorous families that have been gaining visibility for the poly community have women at the “hubs” of polyamorous triads or larger groups.

Are there rules?

Generally, rules in relationships are put in place to protect people from being hurt, but many polyamorous people trust their partners enough to know that they will make respectful decisions and communicate with each other. Regardless, common rules from some forms of non-monogamy are *everything but sex* *everything but love* *always use protection* *no [specific gender] ask me first* *tell me everything that happens* *don’t tell me about anything that happens*

What about monogamy?

Polyamory and non-monogamy are different, non-traditional ways of defining relationships that can account for the nuances of love and desire that every person has. That said, people can have deep, nuanced, communicative, respectful relationships monogamously. Some may not even want to act on their desire for others, and for those people monogamy is the better choice. Assuming that it is the only way, though, belittles the human ability to love and deal with interpersonal conflicts respectfully.

Polyamorists are pioneers. They dare to think more critically about the way they love and interact with people. Perhaps most admirably, though, polyamorists are constantly defining for themselves what they want their relationships to look like. They make themselves incredibly vulnerable by opening their hearts up to more than one person, but they also stand the chance loving and feeling loved more than they ever thought possible.
Like most good things, it started with a book. It started with curiosity, geometry, constructions, and a single word – bisect.

It went on with a dictionary’s broken spine that I tried to pull from the shelf in one piece. It went on with feathery whistles as I flipped through onionskin pages:

abacus – acrostic – basalt – bilious – biscuit --

It paused when, three letters leapt out at me – the three letters that we giggled to friends on the playground, the three letters that gave us power over adults by making them blush and stammer –

s e x

It paused with my fingers pressed against the page, my fist curled against my mouth to keep me from shattering the crystalline silence of the library.

It paused my breathing and pulled me closer – as if distance had the power to change the smooth curves, straight lines, and black dots on the page:

 bisexual, adj. and n. : Being sexually attracted to both sexes

It stopped.

It stopped, my world narrowing to a book on a table and my body hunched over its open face.

It stopped with a simple realization that I was not alone.

It began again when I became aware of the page’s warmth, smooth and pliant beneath my palm. It kept on when I felt the sun soaking into my shoulders and thawing the terror and isolation frozen in a lockbox at the back of my mind. It was still there when I traced the words, making my body reaffirm what my heart already accepted, and when I said the word aloud –

My lips curled in before popping out: bi

My teeth came together before the corners of my mouth turned up: sex

My mouth formed an “o” shape before my tongue tucked itself between my teeth: ual

And I did it again, and again, never saying it the same way twice:

Bisexual, bisexual, bisexual

It exhilarated me by tripping lightly off my tongue, by tasting of promise and potential as a word should.

It changed me, releasing the tension in my body so I stood tall over the smooth pages of the opened dictionary, my spine no longer bowed and bent. It comforted me – like pulling a new favorite dress over my head and smoothing it over my hips, like picking a friend’s voice out of a crowd.

And it recognized me, understanding that I was somewhere between solely straight and only gay.

But – best of all –

It named me.
You have an orgasm. It’s amazing and there’s this gushing wave that pummels through your arteries and your feet feel really soft. It’s great, I know. I’ve always liked them a lot.

Two years ago, I met my vibrator, who I affectionately call Vera. Vera and I were a little awkward at first; she didn’t know what I liked because I didn’t know what I liked. We started spending more and more time together, and have since developed a healthy and loving relationship. But like with any couple, there are always surprises that emerge from what you thought knew to the core. It was a summer day — a late afternoon “naptime” moment — when the epiphany came: I discovered that I have synaesthetic orgasms.

Let’s pause at the really big word: synaesthesia is the neurological condition that connects otherwise unrelated senses. I have always been strongly synaesthetic in the sense that, since my childhood, I’ve linked music with visual responses in my mind’s eye, vowels each have a color, and time moves in very specific shapes. In fancy-speak, I have optophonia, chromaphagemia, and morphochronia synaesthesias. So it comes as no surprise that I also have a fourth type. To my disappointment, I found that it has no scientific name, so I now claim it as my chromagasm.

Here’s how it works:

Every part of my vulva, specifically along the clitoral nerve, yields a different colored orgasm. As the sex-educated of you know, this nerve is shaped like a wishbone, and the color-coded map corresponds roughly to that shape because of the heightened nerve densities. I can only gain the effect with my vibrator, because it needs very specific stimulation. Once settled in for a “nap,” I am able to move Vera to different parts of this map and perceive each area’s color as it is activated. Choosing which color of orgasm I want depends on my mood and the music playing, and sometimes I’ll find ways to combine colors into a single, multi-hued orgasm. When I find whichever one feels right for the time, I hold stimulation and concentrate. The mind’s eye works in a funny way. From these preliminary stages of masturbating, I don’t see any color — I just know the color. It’s like having a song stuck in your head. Working towards a chromagasm requires meditating on the synaesthetic color, until that wave comes — and it feels just as good as a regular orgasm — and that color completely fills my head. In the best of chromasms, I actually project the color, meaning I see it with my eyes as well as in my mind.

As far as self-exploration goes, this was a pretty big deal. It goes beyond the sexual to feeling almost spiritual at times. I don’t know if there’s any way I can ever share the experience with a partner, but I am more comfortable with myself for having found this secret power.
She rode her horse
in a circle
and I watched from the
rusty bars
that enclosed the display

She spoke Spanish
but not very well
(which was far from uncommon
for a California girl)
It sounded fine
to me

She walked towards me
out of the sunset
with her helmet still on
and we kissed
in the supply shed
among the trowels and spades
and I was not deterred
by the smell of
hay and manure

Sometimes
she would sing
quietly
when no one was around
but once
she sang
to me

She seemed to fear my shovel
she thought I’d dig her grave
so I dug with my hands
I dug with my mouth
and I required no payment;
I sought no compensation
the work was enough
the digging was enough
for me

Yet all my burrows were fleeting

She sang
but not very well
quietly
when no one was around
but once
(maybe more)
she sang
to me

... 

She made jokes about the horses
literary puns
and sexual suggestions
her bawdiness amused me
she would laugh at me,
a lyrical chuckle,
when I’d make a mistake
grooming the horses
she’d insult me,
and we’d laugh together

She made a face
-only once
in response to my excavation
one she might’ve been ashamed of
indiscreet
informal
what the public might call
“uncouth”
wholly natural
wholly honest
beautiful
to me

Eyes closed
Biting her bottom lip

She doesn’t speak Spanish anymore
at least not
to me

She doesn’t sing anymore
well
maybe she does
but it’s
quiet
and I’m not around

I no longer have dirt
under my nails
I no longer have roots
in my teeth

I no longer dig
the ground is now solid

I can’t recall her scent
I can’t recall her feel
And I can’t forget that face
carved into my mind

Eyes closed
Biting her bottom lip

My buried treasure.
Artist Statement: This is a self-timed portrait which I call “Going Solo.” The title is a play on words, referring both to masturbation and to the fact that the photo was taken during a 36 hour solo in Death Valley, CA. I am in a monogamous long distance relationship, so a sense of sexual and personal solitude pervades much of my current life. Being alone isn’t highly valued in our society, but I believe it is worthwhile. I seek solitude because it is regenerative, and reminds me how much I love other people. After all, humans are social creatures and I am no different.
Choosing Prostitution: Agency of Female Sex Workers in Post-Mao China

Erica Johnson

When we consider prostitutes, we often assume that they are sex workers against their will, having been forced into the sex business by extreme poverty, lack of education, or kidnapping. Yet, despite the illegality of paying for or receiving payment for sexual acts in China (Choi & Holroyd 490), the modern Chinese sex industry is by no means based on forced prostitution.

The majority of female sex workers in China are rural born women who have migrated to the city; these women seek both an improved modern lifestyle and identity and to serve their rural families with remittances earned through sex work. Studying female sex workers in post-Mao China has revealed that these women most often independently choose to be involved in the sex industry, despite its negative stigma, because it provides them with an opportunity to make good money for themselves and their families, as well as to make important social connections. These opportunities grant sex workers a means to develop a surprising amount of individual agency. However, despite the power that sex workers are able to create for themselves through their jobs, it remains a frustrated power of the weak as the opportunities of sex work are a double edged sword when sex workers are inevitably embedded in the sex industry that is created for and fueled by the ubiquitous male dominance of Chinese society.

In the West, the social problematization of prostitution is primarily perceived as an issue of the victimization and exploitation of women who have no other recourse for employment. However, in China, prostituting oneself is problematized chiefly as a shameful, decadent, and immoral pursuance of money (Jeffreys & Sigley 55). This moral problem of prostitution in China has been described variously as “a form of spiritual pollution that comes from the West . . . a source of urbanised pleasures, a profession full of unscrupulous and greedy schemers, a site of moral danger and physical disease, and [a] marker of national decay” (Zhou 246, 250). Perhaps this difference in thought surrounding prostitution stems from the fact that the majority of Chinese sex workers have willingly chosen their profession. This distinction could partially explain the particular Chinese stigma against prostitution, because it frames the motivation for the sale of the sex worker’s body as greed, instead of destitution.

Modern Chinese sex workers are unusual because they independently choose to work in the sex industry. These women are not necessarily the poor, uneducated, and otherwise unemployable dregs of society so often associated with illicit work like prostitution (Zhou 245). Though it is true that the overwhelming majority of female sex workers in China are rural-born women who have migrated to the city in search of better pay and better opportunities than they could find at home, there is an important distinction between an utter need to sell one’s body and choosing prostitution as a way out of relative poverty (Hershatter 375). Women are able to make far more money doing sex work than in other socially “legitimate” jobs such as factory work or waitressing. Therefore, the problem is not a lack of employment opportunities, but that prostitution has emerged as the most lucrative employment opportunity for certain sectors of society (Liu 329).

However, as natural as it may seem to view sex work as socially illegitimate, for the workers themselves the work has taken on a very legitimate form, and this view of themselves has directly empowered female sex workers to be able to transgress sexual and political norms through a positive view of their own involvement in sex work. In this way, they have become “a transgressive sexual-political minority, one whose challenge to the opposition between erotic/affective activity and economic life could have potentially liberatory effects for all women (Micoller 70). This perception of legitimacy for sex work, as opposed to illegitimacy because of the stigma most often attached to prostitution, is particularly of note because it is primarily formed by the sex workers themselves. The attitude of Chinese female sex workers is unique because they assert agency for themselves through their understanding of their own work as prostitutes as empowering.

While there is an unusually positive side of Chinese women’s choice to work as prostitutes, this should not be understood as a complete liberation, by any means. These women often express feelings of tedium and frustration with customers, and are routinely put in dangerous and violent situations through their work. They also go to extreme and usually unhealthy measures to keep their bodies thin and attractive for male clients, such as cosmetic surgery, harmful skin treatments, and frequent vomiting due to the excessive drinking required by their jobs (Zheng 186-189). Despite these drawbacks, however, prostitution gives women many opportunities that make it an attractive choice of employment, causing rural migrant women to carry on choosing it for themselves.

The power of the prostitute lies in the ability to manipulate her situation and clients to work in ways that are advantageous to her. One fundamental way in which the modern sex worker empowers herself is through her attitude towards her own body, as capital to be put to use for advance-
The limitations I have shown that operate on Chinese female sex workers mark this social group as a subordinate class such as James C. Scott explicates in his text, Weapons of the Weak (1985). Scott compares the limited agency of the weak to a barrier reef: “Everyday forms of resistance make no headlines. But just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, so do the multiple acts of peasant insubordination and evasion create political and economic barrier reefs of their own” (xvii). This is an accurate analogy for the Chinese female sex worker as well. It can clearly be demonstrated that these sex workers have built up quite a reef in the Chinese economy, so that removing them could actually wipe out a large portion of the economy, as well as leave many rural communities with unsupported elders.

Yet, as a small polyp, the individual sex worker has only a limited agency that is often frustrated by the greater powers of the patriarchal and traditional filial values that continue to reign in China, even today. Thus, Scott stipulates his argument for “weapons of the weak” with the warning that, “It would be a grave mistake . . . to overly romanticize the ‘weapons of the weak.’ They are unlikely to do more than marginally affect the various forms of exploitation that peasants confront” (29-30). Therefore, while the sex worker is able to effect personal agency to some degree, she is by no means a powerful figure in China.

Chinese female sex workers have become a unique social group because their situational factors most commonly cause them to choose jobs in the sex industry of their own accord, motivated strongly by the opportunities for social advancement and wealth that can be gained. Yet, in the end, the agency that prostitutes are able to gain for themselves persists in being limited and subsumed by the male dominance of society that has characterized the history and make up of China. Although the female sex worker is in many ways able to exercise power for herself within the climate of her job, she is powerless to make changes in the grand scheme of things. In China, beautiful women are often portrayed as dangerous to the men around them. Yet, while the modern sex worker has a wide and imaginative array of tactics in her arsenal, ultimately, they are merely “weapons of the weak.”
I once met this guy on 6th street
I sincerely just wanted his meat
We went back to his car
But he went in too far
And I shit all up in his back seat
If only all cum shots were this pretty...
My body is me.
My body is an ocean.
I ebb and flow.
I am vast. I am expansive. I am powerful.
My waves surprise me.

My body is an ocean.
My waters were uncharted.
So you wanted to swim out to me.

You ignored my tides, my waves of warning.
Instead, you swam.
I consume those that do not understand how to navigate.
Those that do not heed the signs of nature.
Those that do not heed me.

I consume those that swim without permission.
I swell violently when your strokes affect my waters.
My waters cannot be conquered.
My body is an ocean.
You are merely an intruder.

My body is an ocean
I am changing.
I am ebbing.
I am flowing.
And you may swim into my waters at my word.
But you cannot decide my waves.
For I am an ocean, and my waters change for no one.
Fucked
Madeline Ranstrom

TW: Sexual assault

You fucked me too hard that night.
I watched through the window as you talked
on the phone, walking around the yard
and then stopping
for long pauses
to look at the sky.
You got off the phone
and stayed out there for a while.
Maybe you were trying
to make the tears
roll back into your head?
I asked how he was
when you came in,
all you said was “fucked”.
I didn’t know what to say,
just put my arms around you,
and gathered you close to me
as you crumpled.
I know his blood is turning toxic
and killing his organs
one by one.
But you fucked me too hard.
I felt your
rage
worry
doubt
grief
regret
hurt
pounded into me,
over and over.
And then you left them there.
And didn’t want to talk.

To the Macho on the Bus
Madeline Ranstrom

TW: Sexual assault

Your fat, rough fingers
with wide, dirty nails
creeping around the hook
under my knee and the inside
of my thigh
still makes me afraid
to walk in the night
and now, sometimes,
I can’t help merging men’s faces
into one.
Artist Statement: We are five girls. We are different shapes, sizes, and colors. We have freckles. Wrinkles. Moles. Stretch marks. We sag in places. We are perky in others. We overflow, bulge, and muffin. We are scratched, scarred, and burned. We blot, we blemish, we blink. We peach fuzz and firework frizz. We bruise. We have curves, convex and concave. We have knobby knees and tiny toes. We have belly buttons with room for two jelly bellies. We get goosebumps and sniffly noses. We are ticklish. We grow, flow, and don’t always know. We quiver. We are unrolling and ever expanding. We have love handles for a reason. We love them. We love our bodies.

Editor’s Note: Submitted by the Love Your Body House
Artist Statement: This piece is from our women’s team practice called “suits on heads.” We see this as a bonding experience where we can be naked, we can laugh, but most importantly we can feel free in our own skin. We sent this piece in to show the love and support we have for one another and to extend this acceptance to the whole community.

Ali Smith and Lauren Kochanowski.

*Suits on Heads.* Photograph, 2013.
I come upon an orgy in a formerly white and sterile room—and I know there is a form penetrating, but I cannot see it amidst the tumble of bodies, whose parts are nothing but dead flesh, whose minds are nothing but the cold grim urges of the automaton dominating.

There is a form presiding whose law is death by choking, the application of pressure, the closing of access and potential aid—until it is not the marble fingers on marble skin that extinguish, but the isolation from a commerce of inhalation and exhalation, a shared atmosphere.

There is a form preaching, from just behind and slightly to the left, a religion of threat, to whom the construction of cloisters is the first rite, and the holy life is one spent looking out from behind whitewashed walls saying this is mine, and the ultimate pilgrimage is the last walk to the open mouth of the pyre.

I slip on a flow of blood and scatological excess, and as the impact of skull on drain-studded floor throws fireworks over my eyes the figure coalesces from mere steam.

Slick as the purgatoried gulf, pale and clammy from fever, transparent as a jagged window pane, and just as sharp—he is enthroned on a marble block furrowed by the ax, crackling with stillness and perverse silence, bleached and laughing, beautiful and monstrous in his presumed ubiquity.

His is the face that looks in the glass and sees only a face, featureless, abstract, and can only imagine a pale land, bleached and drained, permeated by his presence.

His face turns to regard me, He takes me in his hand, saying—Yes, you are my son, you are my heir!
To the Boy Rapist, From a Father

Anonymous

TW: Rape

Boy, I see you sometimes – in myself
A mirror for so many
It is only within the past few years
That I have come to feel
Remorse – guilt – shame

Boy, I hope you never forget, the way I did
Their faces –
Their protests –

For I see them now

Shaking, subdued
Suffering every minute of every night
Remembering
Still caught in unwanted embrace
Begging for surrender, for freedom
From this – what we’ve done to them

I see them now

Walking, beautiful and haunted
With a heaviness dragging
Under the ribs and behind the eyes
The resonance of nightmares
Repeating the scene again and again
Endlessly escaping

Boy, I see them now

Our victims – my daughters
Mirrors for so many
Warped by the futility of forgiveness
Boy, I hope you never forget
The Twelve Hours You Stole

Anonymous

TW: Rape, traumatic intoxication

12:00  Drink it. It’s just a beer. It’ll help you relax. Trust me.
1:00   Something doesn’t feel quite right.
       Can’t feel my fingertips.
1:30   Why are they laughing? Stop telling me everything is okay.
       What’s going on?
       Everything is not okay.
1:45   Vision blurring.
       Arms feel like a thousand pounds
6:00   Hours and hours of horrendous, gut wrenching, blood streaked, violent
       convulsions of vomiting. Hurts to breathe. Hurts to swallow.
       Darkness.
       Paralyzed.
       Floating in and out of consciousness.
       Four shadows standing over me.
11:30  Slumped on the curb at the end of my street.
       Alone.
12:00  Legs spread in front of my bathroom mirror, staring deep inside myself.
       Twelve hours stolen, and no idea what else.
       The twelve hours you stole
I was raped when I was 14 on a family vacation in Mexico.

Hands pushing hips away—I meant it when I said no penetration.

Maybe I wasn’t clear enough—it’s my fault, I let him do everything else.

I know your non-traceable name, Benjamin Cruz, but that’s no good now. My mother does too, and she’d stab you if she could—but to counter violent crime with violent crime just sounds like nonsense to me.

It passed so calmly, like water flooding into my basement room while I slept. I kissed him after, not even thinking that four-letter word. At that age, I had not been given the knowledge that rape could be something other than a forced encounter involving a weapon and loud screams of non-consent. The power of that knowledge is something I value greatly today and wish I could give to my past self.

At the time, the quiet domination of me occurred in a grey area that I preferred to ignore. It took my closest friend reading over my shoulder while I wrote in my travel journal to look me in the eyes and say the word “rape.” That wasn’t until I was on a plane back to the U.S, and by that time, taking action felt so impossible that I chose silence.

My room flooded with water while I slept and dreamed of virginity. I became cold and wet, dreading the thought of my friends excitedly sharing the experience of their first times. While drowning, the part that hurt the worst was not a lack of oxygen, but a lack of clarity. If it was not consensual, could I still call myself a virgin? I dug up my travel journal, ripped the page to pieces and flushed it down the toilet, the water erasing the event. But of course, not really.

What I know now is that there is no such thing as a physical virginity. It’s only a myth, one more way to regulate the behavior of and name the value of females. Today, it infuriates me that I wasted my attention on the technicalities of virginity, (an oxymoron if ever there was one) while I should have been registering the event, recovering, surviving. I was too distracted to be angry, and I don’t think I really felt that anger until someone raped my friend during our sophomore year. It wasn’t until then, 5 years later, that I told my family.

It may shock you to know my rape passed so calmly, silent water creeping in, minor struggle, too weak to even call a real fight. I wasn’t very strong at 14. But I’m realizing now that the impact was not minor.

My bed is supposed to be my safe place. I crawl under the blankets, wrap myself in the afghan my great Aunt Sylvia crocheted for me expecting warmth, weight and Christmas lights. But everything’s damp now and all the blankets reek of mildew. The lights and power cords have been destroyed by the silent flood and I can’t live here anymore.
My freshman year of high school a man sat on my lap
On a city bus,
Patted my cheek, and said
"Pretty girl, I'm gonna stay here a while"
He smelled like cigarette smoke and skunk spray,
And something I was too naive to recognize
But can now classify as marijuana,
And he was a long way from sober
When he tapped my knee and
Told me
My hair looked lovely in the "snowlight."
I lost his face to the gray space of memory
But I can still see his hand
On my thigh:
Big,
Like a father's,
Covering the rip in my jeans and just
Touching the outer seam.
Freckled, and rough,
Dirt under the fingernails and a
Scab at the base of his thumb
In the shape of Africa
Red, Like the backs of my eyelids
Where his scent is still buried
I asked him to get up

Why I Don't Ride City Buses
Anna Dunlap

TW: Sexual assault and child abuse

My freshman year of high school a man sat on my lap
On a city bus,
Patted my cheek, and said
"Pretty girl, I'm gonna stay here a while"
He smelled like cigarette smoke and skunk spray,
And something I was too naive to recognize
But can now classify as marijuana,
And he was a long way from sober
When he tapped my knee and
Told me
My hair looked lovely in the "snowlight."
I lost his face to the gray space of memory
But I can still see his hand
On my thigh:
Big,
Like a father's,
Covering the rip in my jeans and just
Touching the outer seam.
Freckled, and rough,
Dirt under the fingernails and a
Scab at the base of his thumb
In the shape of Africa
Red, Like the backs of my eyelids
Where his scent is still buried
I asked him to get up

(Please)
But my heart was racing and
My eyes were shaking—
The volume of my silence-screams mimicking the movement of his hands:
Up.
And In.
I remember thinking broken-record repetition
"Ohmygodohmygodohmygod"
Sometimes profanity becomes a prayer
And with crucifixion-folded hand I was begging,
Shrinking behind the metal-teeth fortress of my zipper-
wishing,
Praying Messages into bottles
Hoping
That my high-tide desperation could wave-crash loud enough to shake
The Eye-averting propriety of your small-town self-importance —

LOOK AT ME.

I've never Wanted to be noticed,
But invisibility shouldn't be so easy.
They can't understand why I didn't scream
Why I Didn't Push harder
Cry louder—
You'd think I would have known.
But at thirteen I was afraid of overreacting.
"Maybe this is normal" I thought
"Maybe it's not a big deal" I thought
"Get Over It" You said.
"It's not like nightmares can hurt."

The Last time I rode a city bus,
I dug holes into my palms with my fingernails,
Cut off the circulation in my hands,
And threw up.
I don't know why this happened to me.
But that's not the question we should be asking—
The Moral of The Story is that it happened to me,
What happened to him?
Who told him Manliness had to do with the number of places
Your hands have been
And “No” doesn't matter as long as they're still answering him
Why didn't his Mother teach him
What it feels like to be loved?
Where was his Daddy
When his mind started to grow up?

I wish I knew
What his name was.
I wish I knew
Where he came from,
Where he dreams and where he wants to be
He is more
Than just the nightmares buried in his fingertips—
Even though that's all I have left of him.
I still wonder if I should have been a little bit less Terror
And a little bit more
Understanding
Hoping God
Gives him some bigger arms next time—
Maybe Daddy's fists broke more than arms
Maybe his demons are a little bit
Too Strong
But maybe he was a father
Maybe he looked daily into the broken Eyes of his daughter
Through the brown glass of his bottle—
You tell me it's not my fault
Like that's what you think I want to hear—
Because that's what They tell you you're supposed to say
But where were you and your blame when that little boy's Mother
Left him stranded on the sidewalk
Or when that little girl's Daddy slapped her face
Whenever she opened her mouth to talk
Each and every one of us—
Y'all we're all somebody's angels.
There's a 2-year-old boy in my dream with a Halo
And he keeps asking me
Why do you have to run all the time,
Why do you kiss my head all the time,
Why are you so scared?

And I wish I could tell him that
I love him with all my world but
I don't know how to give him enough of my heart
For me to stop being Afraid

of what the next 50 years
could turn him into.
I hope for this work to both be a performative confrontation with my own personal privilege as well as a continuation of discussions of privilege and identity on our campus.

I'd like to start off talking about the strategic silence surrounding the assault of an individual on February 28 on this campus. The administration rightfully sent out a campus-wide email alerting students that “a guest of a student was assaulted—pushed to the ground—on campus by two or more individuals” and that the assault was accompanied by anti-LGBT slurs. What I don't think the campus community did, though, was meaningfully respond to the call coming from that email. Where did we have a discussion about queer presence on this campus? I'm of course not saying that particular groups failed to address this—what I mean is that we, as a campus community, did not have the supportive response that would have signified a meaningful ethical shift in attitude. To not speak about violence is still a choice to not speak. To refuse to address someone's pain is still a choice to not address it. It's not that this community didn't know this was happening—we don't even have that excuse available to us. The problem is that we chose to remain silent about it.

After taking a gender studies class, I've become convinced that acts of violence like what happened on February 28 are more than an irrational “homophobia”—I think they're part of a larger structure of dominance and control, which valorizes violence as a symbol of personal strength and therefore value. This valuing of violence is part and parcel with an atomistic view of society where individuals are seen as autonomous and in competition with one another. Dominance and power are seen as control over another being; pushing someone to the ground, then, becomes an act of one's literal bodily superiority above another while the accompanying verbal slur functions to promote an egoist superiority as well. It's not enough that I can throw you to the ground; I must likewise remind you that I am a superior being as well.

Our campus is profoundly privileged. The mere fact that the email about the February 28 assault was the first email about an assault on this campus should only indicate that our space of learning is thankfully a space relatively free of violence. The students here are overwhelmingly white, upper-middle class, and, as Judith Butler might be wont to say, live “livable lives.” Most are also heterosexual, cisgendered, and have never dealt with any form of anti-queer violence.

With that freedom from violence there is an overwhelming attitude that “that can't happen on our campus,” that what we're seeing is something that only happens in the Deep South or theocratic countries. That's simply not true. Matthew Shepard's death is not an isolated incident, and neither is the assault that happened on February 28. But again, I ask: Where was the rage?
Where was the anger? Why did we as a community fail to confront our privilege—the fact that our campus is a space relatively free of violence, that most of our students are likely heterosexual (or identify as “straight”), that many of us have never faced any kind of anti-queer violence—and allow for this memory to fade away?

All acts of violence against queers in our community should then be considered as gratuitous violence, no matter how minor they may seem. The queer body becomes the excess by which heterosexual dominance exercises its control to establish itself as normal, natural, and normative. As a liberal arts college, we should recognize this fact more readily than we have. When we see violence done to the queer body in our community, we should not brush it aside in the name of a harmonious, smoothly functioning community with no divisions within it.

The divide between the queer and the heterosexual is one which certainly exists on this campus, and the fact that the violence of February 28 has gone unaddressed in a meaningful way is a strategic silence on the part of all of us. I played a role in this by not making a bigger deal of this than I did. By not reacting more indignantly, by allowing my shock (“I’m so surprised that this happened here”) to overcome the call for justice that was expressed in the administrations email, I perpetuated that strategic silence. Each and every individual who tolerates violence to the queer, either verbal or physical, is taking part in this strategic silence and gratuitous violence.

The queer body is one which is doubly marked by society as expendable; first, because of the inclusiveness which we a priori impart to ourselves (“this campus has a GSA—there’s no way that queer violence could ever happen here!”); in this way, violence is already marked as an “accident” before it even happens, something “out of the ordinary,” and something which we therefore do not need to address. The second reason is because of the continuing hatred of queers and lording of power over the queer body by heterosexual (and other) individuals is one which we lack a language to express. To use the phrase of some Afro-Pessimist thinkers (specifically, Frank Wilderson), there is no “grammar of suffering” for us to describe the gratuitous violence done to the queer in a space which we always already perceive as a “civil society” which is self-correcting and never harmful. Because we believe ourselves to be so above this kind of thing, to be so separated from the violence that occurs in our communities, we lack a language by which to express the violence that manifests as part of straight privilege and heterosexual power. This is not just a problem for queer bodies to resolve. It is not the responsibility of queer groups on campus to unite in response to the violence of February 28—it is the ethical responsibility of everybody on our campus to react with rage and anger against the continuing heterosexual privilege and power that manifests every day and in every space on this campus.

When faced with a call from a broken body, when we look at the indigent face of the queer who cannot speak, we have, as Emmanuel Levinas says, an infinite obligation to answer their call for help which transcends any other consideration. It is not enough to merely not take part in the violence done to the queer. Each and every one of us is required to take action, intentionally, meaningfully, and profoundly, to galvanize a true campus response to the gratuitous violence which has been perpetrated and for which all of us are responsible. Before the face of the Other, we are charged and found guilty before we can even speak—a haunting, pulling, even terrifying responsibility rests in our hands; this responsibility is not just to “be nice” to others, it isn’t merely to “tolerate” the presence of “minorities,” but rather is a profoundly ethical responsibility and one which we cannot flee from. We failed on February 28. Are we going to fail again?
I am walking along a path that dissolves into igneous rock formations. Water pulses through the cracks, and rolls over edges into darkened pools, the bottoms of which are hidden by the opacity of sediment stirred up from yesterday’s rain.

Simbe comes here every day. His brother owns the hotel by the town’s main intersection. He says he knows the falls, and has visited them faithfully since he was a child. He is always smoking at the base where the river loses strength and becomes an estuary, eventually emptying into the sea.

He is like a water spirit. I would believe it if other people told me that I was the only one who could see him. He wears a tattered t-shirt from a thrift store that sells American clothes by the pound.

When I first met him, I coaxed the cigarette from between his fingers while he was talking and took a drag. I took it without asking. I suppose this is a kind of assumed intimacy. I had quit smoking for years, but the cigarette reawakened something in me. The pleasure was at once subtle and strong. The instant hum of nicotine loosened my frame and I felt myself open like a hibiscus toward the intense Central American sun.

The next day, Simbe tells me about a secret cove in the falls that none of the tourists know about. Past the lower falls rife with rope swings and zip lines are the upper falls. They are smaller, wilder, and less accessible. We had to sidle across ledges and hold onto roots that writhed through the dark cinnamon soil to approach them. A group of Norwegian backpackers sunning themselves on the rocks below watch as we disappear beyond the reach of the footpath.

The cove is only big enough for two people, the entrance sealed off by a thick wall of water. I turn around and Simbe is naked. The loud television-statistical noise of the cascade beating the rocks swallows my words. My voice is robbed as it evaporates beyond the reach of the footpath.

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He couldn’t hear me. No one could.

That was yesterday. Today when he sees me at the estuary, he takes off his knapsack, flicks his cigarette and disappears into what looks like a shallow puddle but must be one of the many secret sinkhole pools only he knows about. He did it for the effect, a glib magic trick.

I unzip the side pocket of his knapsack and find his cigarettes; a full pack. I take them and disappear into the foliage before he resurfaces.

... When I think of Simbe, I turn cold.

When I talk about Simbe, it is with words that feel numb on my lips. My face is pressed against the window of the airplane, and I watch Costa Rica and myself vanish beneath the cloud cover below. I am lost; I am an imposter. Others feel this too. I am not allowed to return to the falls ever again, they tell me.

The truth is that I never left.

A year later, I am aboard a research vessel in the Atlantic.

One of the first tasks I am given is to filet a large tuna. A long-time vegan, this is an especially violent act for me. I have to hoist her, club her, hold her expressionless face firmly in my hand as I snap the spinal cord through the gill with my knife.

I tickle her spine with the blade as I remove her flesh; nerves that are still attached dispatch volts that cause her to twitch. I throw the cleaned filets in a Tupperware container then hose the deck, throwing the spine, guts and head back into the waves as chum for the sharks.

"You should have kept the ovaries," said the captain. "In my country, they’re a delicacy."
I whispered “thank you” to her dismembered remnants before throwing them overboard; this was a ritual taught to me by the captain. Is that really enough? Is it a worthy exchange?

If she tried to speak, I couldn’t hear it. No one could.

I dream of the falls every night. Compassion resides in a heart that has room for pain, not one thoroughly soaked in it.

Emotional fallout is worse than the offending act itself. It is a long, slow bleed with a half-life. The original explosion destroys and cauterizes, and you walk away numb. But your soul has been amputated, and no one can recognize you anymore. It feels like they all abandon you, but the truth is you are hollow.

Forgive them.
Forgive yourself.

Empty rhetoric.

This is what it looks like:

I eat the same meal every day. Soup and pudding. I think about pirates and how they would get scurvy after long voyages subsisting on nothing but rotting potatoes.

I wonder if I need vitamin C.

I wonder if I should eat at least something that is not brown.

I wonder, and I do nothing.

Grocery shopping is an insurmountable task, unscalable.

I lay in bed and watch the patterns of the sun move across the ceiling, from one end to the other. I phase in and out of sleep, haunting the falls in my dreams, drinking the southern sun, breathing the electric air with my whole being. Returning constantly to what I lost.

... I know the punchline of this joke, and it’s cancer.

It is on the edge of my cervix, threatening to creep through viney capillaries upward into the uterus, where it would then be what the doctors call “invasive.” They want to cut it away.

A mutiny of cells aboard one’s body is the culmination of one’s toxic debts. They have been settling over time in layers, forming first a veiny mosaic, then a lesion, then a tumor. Sedimentary layers of tumor are a time-vault of cellular states; biopsy a piece and you see soup and pudding. Cut a little deeper and you see Marlboro Reds. Deeper yet and you see the cove. Underneath all of that is me.

Excise me. Cut me free.

They tell me that cervical cancer is a multifoliate problem with a variety of known causes that tend to act in tandem. Known factors that increase risk are cigarette smoking, poor nutrition, and the virus HPV, which is transmitted sexually. Depression is known to weaken the immune system, allowing an HPV infection to take hold. The cancer was a seed, nourished by toxicity, growing until it can spread seeds of its own to other organs through the currents of the lymphatic system.

My own cancer is a sprout, freshly germinated, not yet a seedling. Its twin leaves are in prayer position, angling upward.

... Cancer is nature. Cancer is unblinking, unassuming, and indifferent. It is a name we give cells that eschew death; immortal growth.

My body, a soft animal, speaks in the language of cells, and cancer is its voice. The layers of cancerous tissue that have accumulated need to be answered with layers of love. Layers of self-care. Layers and layers of listening, of fine-tuning and context and offerings. The cells must be reclaimed, not cut away. To unearth this seedling is to miss the message.

Cancer demands silence.
I have chosen to remain still.
I have chosen to listen.

... There is something I didn’t tell you.

In my dreams I see Simbe’s brother typing at his desk. Maybe typing to me. Maybe telling me that I am excommunicated from his family and his home. He clicks “send,” such a strong poison from such a subtle sting.

Behind him is a floor-to-ceiling window, and through that I can see the estuary, nestled among tangles of mangroves.

Behind that, between the upper and lower falls is a little tributary that breaks away from the river; it makes its way across the footpath, and there are three stones that function as a sort of bridge. I never regarded the tributary as more than an inconvenience to be crossed.

In this new dream, I divert from the path, and follow the tributary. It twists and teases through fallen logs and miniature canyons. I have to leave my sandals so that I can feel my footing, gliding over pebbles, sands, and slippery beds of moss. River spiders the size of my hand watch silently, flattened against stones, blending in like secrets.

The conclusion is her face: a bright cascade, cradled by sloped granite, softened by centuries of flowing relentlessness. Cool mountain water spreads over her in a smooth glossy sheet, and I know at once that this is a place that Simbe has never seen.

I lay back against her and listen to the water’s quiet roar as if it were air passing through a throat, boulders and lush mosses shaping her thick voice like a larynx.

To hear the way I needed to be heard; I give her that.
This isn’t unfamiliar territory, not in this relationship, not in any.

They always go the same way. Maybe it is the guys I pick, maybe it’s me.

My libido is always higher.

The media tells us, teenage boys, all they ever think about is sex.

SEX. SEX. SEX.

I’ve heard again and again, young men just want sex; it’s a wonder if they ever think about anything else.

Great. I want sex too. I want sex most of the time. Sometimes it’s a wonder I think about anything else.

Yet here we go again.

Not tonight.

I’m not in the mood.

I’m tired.

The reaction is the same every time. Blood rushes to my face, I feel as though I’ve been hit. I’m embarrassed, as though I have just proposed something utterly absurd.

I rationalize with myself.

I know it’s not like this all the time. I know we have a healthy sex life. It’s not that he doesn’t want to have sex with me ever, just not tonight.

But rationalization is hard. And every time, sooner or later, the anxiety creeps in . . .

Not tonight? Well why not? What the fuck is wrong with me? If teenage boys want to have sex all the time, why doesn’t he want to have sex with me? Does he want to have sex, but not with me? Why not me? I know he wants to have sex with me sometimes, why not now? I know it must be something about me.

I want to hide these thoughts, I want to be rid of these thoughts. I know they are not rational thoughts.

You are being ridiculous; it’s only one night. He’s tired, that’s understandable right? But it’s not just this one night. It has always happened this way. What is wrong with me?

My distress is palpable. I panic.

I can’t be upset. How could I be upset because he doesn’t feel like having sex? Isn’t being upset the same as pressuring him? THAT IS NOT OK. STOP being upset. Don’t let him know you’re upset.

But it is too late, as it always is, and I am upset. Trying to hide it only makes it worse.

And I cry.

I tell him I know it’s not fair, I know I shouldn’t be upset. I know it’s not about me, but I can’t help myself. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. What’s wrong with me?

We fight because there is no solution. We fight because of shame and fear. We plan for next time, so there is no next time, and he finds solace in sleep.

Will there really be no next time? Is my libido really higher? Or do I put too much stock in sex? Can we make this work? Can I really blame the media for this misconception, or does it boil down to me?

Eventually, I will find solace in his arms, thinking,

This is the time there won’t be a next time.
It started at Cabela's.
You might like those pink fishing lures over there.
Are you looking for a gift for a boyfriend or father?
Are you looking for the women's clothing section?
Are you lost?

It continued at Home Depot.
What's a pretty little thing like you doing here?
Do you need some help? This place can be intimidating.
Do you know what you're looking for?
Honey, you shouldn't be lifting something so heavy.

It's been going on for years.
Careful you might get your shoes dirty.
Oh, you're not mad, you're just hormonal.
You can't go there alone. Bring a few guy friends.
I don't think that's a job for a little girl like you.

It's everywhere.
Watch out for,
Teachers
Cab drivers
Friends
Friends' parents
Doctors
Boyfriends
Pizza Deliverymen
That one boy in your math class

It started a long time before Cabela's.

I'm not on my period.
I am mad.
and I know my way around a fucking Home Depot.
I push my way off
the crowded bus, tucking
my long hair
into my hood and hoping
no one will see
I am a girl
tonight.

I walk fast
watching for street lamps,
my only friends,
in these half-paved streets
of trash and broken glass.

I watch the shadows
for the cantina men
who come out in packs,
drunk and ugly, yelling
and pissing on the barrio dogs
just because
they can.

With a key
threaded through my fingers
like a knife
I think of the boy
who held me up two weekends ago.

His hand shook
while he held the
blunt screwdriver
at my neck
and his voice cracked
we he asked for my money.

It's hard to be a girl
and walk through the night.
I'm fat.

I saw it in the mirror one day: it was seventh grade and my eyes woke up. Like that I realized my clothes did nothing to hide the nameless bulge below my stomach. The bulge: hanging skin and fat that has sat on the lap of my hips since memory. I still don't know what it's supposed to be called, since I haven't experienced, even one time, another person acknowledging this commonplace anatomy.

In seventh grade, I was on Weight Watchers with Mom. Her weight side of herself was something like the moon. It had naturally gone through phases in her life which, though they looked different, did little to alter her true identity. She didn't seem to see it that way. When her thinness exhibited itself, relatives at muggy Kansas reunions embraced her body with the words “skinny mini.” She relished a moment like that. Because she wanted it, she talked like I should want it, too—“It feels so good to be thin, sweetie.” There was a praiseworthy, I saw, in the waning body.

Women at church would look at me approvingly and, because they too were convinced that the meat on their hips was enemy, ask “Have you lost weight?” Which I had, for a while on Weight Watchers and later, ninth grade, on Jenny Craig. But I was thinner without being thin, and I still looked like myself. My self always thought it was broken.

Eating only the boxed, microwave, and freezer-dependent diet of Jenny Craig, I became the thinnest that I have been since, by a good sixty pounds. “I’m still fat,” I told myself, and figured I would keep going. But of course, my underage psychology snapped in the face of a diet (an unhealthy practice for any adolescent, studies have shown and nutritionists since then have assured me)–I gained back my weight and then some, the typical problem of a dieter.

Somewhere along the line I decided that boys were trained to objectify, and that I probably disgusted them—the bulge below it into invisibility either. Dressed now to outline rather than hide, it confronts the vision—part of the discourse of me. My body, this part of me, is important as any. And it is important on the grand scale, as a part of the human spectrum.

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Somewhere along the line I decided that boys were trained to objectify, and that I probably disgusted them in the space of a glance. Without having any major fallouts, I experienced several years’ wane of the guyfriend population in my life. I also decided that until I one day stopped wanting food and became a different person, the best thing for me was faked confidence. There were always things I liked about myself, and plenty at that, but not my body. In dance class, for example, I was twice the size of anyone else in the room, or told myself I was. Inevitably in high school, I became really good at projecting a confidence that never asked myself how I was feeling.

This was the background I brought with me to UPS, and it was here, my freshman year, that I realized how tired I was of heaving it around. In a room full of friends, I finally admitted the insecurity that my weight gives me. I was accountable to a crowd, and the truth suddenly developed a real echo.

My body is not an accident. When I tried to diet again, a year or two after Jenny Craig, my doctor projected the healthy weight I should aim for. It was exactly the weight I’d been at my thinnest, the weight I rejected and subsequently gained away from. At that weight I was still fat; I was still well into the plus sizes. From my freshman confession on, I’ve been seeing that I’m supposed to be fat. My body works that way. And I use the term fat now to de-stigmatize it, because, like in seventh grade, I’ve realized that I’m fat. This time, though, I know what that means to me, rather than what it’s supposed to mean to the American world.

I am angry about the way fat people get treated; inadvertently by friends and family, blatantly by media. It isn’t just the culture’s fault—it’s our fault for disliking ourselves and normalizing negative self-talk. Just as a lineage was made between my mom and me, and her negative self-perceptions were born over again. And I’m angry that thin women get targeted as a foil for fat frustration. When the media—or whoever plays into it—tries to antagonize one sector of womanhood in the eyes of another, that can hardly be called progress. I’m angry, too, that men don’t seem to recognize equivalently how they are affected by issues of body image, when there is certainly a male standard towards athleticism and strength.

My body may not look like a warrior’s, but it is a body that has withstood attack. My eyes, my heart, my longing attacked and rejected my body. It wasn’t meanness—other than my own—that made me fugitive from my body through most of my teens. It was living in a cultural, temporal place at full-out war with the corporeal. Imagine us born on the factory line of the external, by our bodies dissected, divided between body and everything else and sent to spend our lives trying to put ourselves together, when that same outside tension fights at our makeup.

Today my body is reclaimed land. This stomach that swells is pregnant with self, heart, misplaced desires, blunder, and the human condition. I don’t have to clothe the bulge below it into invisibility either. Dressed now to outline rather than hide, it confronts the vision—part of the discourse of me. My body, this part of me, is important as any. And it is important on the grand scale, too, and so is yours; we free ourselves up, through the difference and distinctness of our selves, to join the picture of the human spectrum.
Andrea Eaton. *Shalom.*
Photograph of tissue prayer shawl. 2013.

Artist Statement: There is a group of women called Women of the Wall whom gather once a month at the Western Wall, otherwise known as the Wailing Wall, and have been meeting for the past 24 years to protest “ultra-orthodox” views that only men should be wearing Tallits, a Jewish prayer shawl, traditionally speaking while visiting the Wailing Wall. In fact there is a special section at the Wailing Wall specifically for women to worship. In February 2013, ten women were arrested at the wall for celebrating their religion and God. This piece is made in recognition of the women of this faith. It is made of tissues and thread. It is made with tissues both white and pink to denote femininity and the tissues act not only as a play on “Wailing Wall” but also because tissues are a universal object;

*Editor’s Note: As of Thursday, April 25, an Israeli court issued a ruling permitting women to pray at the Wailing Wall while wearing prayer shawls; the arrests of the women have been overturned. Appeals are still being filed by both sides in the case.*
Artist Statement: This work aims to capture the experience created when women come together to celebrate the body as canvas. The goal of this experience is to create a space where women are able to see their bodies (and each others’ bodies) outside of the daily socio-cultural context in which they usually reside. This work has as much to do with the final product, the photograph, as it does with the process. In a society that encourages the individual to be highly self-conscious, especially of the body, it takes a special space to allow us to unveil ourselves (in the most literal sense) and view our bodies in an entirely different way; the experience is really about encouraging a paradigm shift that allows us to question normalized ideas of the female body.

The chosen photographs are those that I believe best represent the experience and the inner battle that ensues when trying to complete this type of mental shift. I chose to represent this experience in black and white not only because I believe this aesthetic changes the way the female form is viewed, but because I see visual contrast as metaphor for contrast in perceptions of the body. While the painting of the body is an important piece in the experience, allowing participants to literally see the body as canvas, it is not the focus of the work, and varies widely in what each participant chooses to have on their body or chooses to paint on another’s body.

Cheap vodka is pulsing through my veins late on a Saturday night. My inhibitions are low, and I can’t pull my eyes away from the couple standing across from me in the kitchen. They are talking to friends, laughing, and staying close enough to touch one another. Both pairs of eyes turn in my direction, one pale grey and one dark brown, and I feel my cheeks flush as a grin spreads across my face. They motion for me to come over and I know something crazy is about to happen, something outlandish, unforgettable, and spin-off-your-axis wild.

I am young—eighteen—and the adrenaline rush of college has just begun. I am excited and terrified by all the recent changes in my life: moving across the country by myself, to a new school where I don’t know a single person; I am getting used to acting like an adult but at the same feeling like a child. I embrace these ups and downs and I decide to jump into everything headfirst. I put my friendliest face on and put myself out there, hoping I will make some connections, find support, and have a great time with these transitions instead of sinking under the stress.

I meet Hannah and Jared through mutual friends. We drink and talk together for hours, opening up and laughing easily, and they quickly become my mentors. They are two years older and advise me on classes, studying, campus activities, parties, hooking up; any problem I have, they help me out. As I get to know the lively couple better, I find myself drawn to them more and more often. Hannah is vivacious, beautiful, and at times, very intense. Jared is tall, dark, and handsome with a permanent grin and an easy shoulder to lean on.

We love to talk about sex, the three of us. I am naive enough to have hundreds of questions, but I have enough experience to know what I want to ask. Where do they do it? Anywhere. The kitchen, the bathroom, the backyard. His bedroom, tied up to the bedframe. When do they do it? Every day. Constantly. They are never satisfied, always wanting more. How do they do it? Any way they can imagine. All kinds and fantasies are discussed, and many of them are thoroughly explored. They ask me: What have I done? What excites me the most? What do I want to try? Soon enough, the three of us discover some answers.

On Halloween night, dressed in sequins and feathers and red wine, we crack open the door to a new experience. I nuzzle tightly between Hannah and Jared on the couch during a party. Hannah leans to kiss me tentatively on the mouth and I explore the soft skin of her neck and cheek with my hand. I don’t remember exactly how this started, but my head is spinning and my heart thumps in my ears. I pull back, smiling nervously and biting my lip. We turn to look at Jared, who is watching us, wide-eyed and grinning. When Hannah asks me to kiss Jared in front of her I am shocked but eagerly agree. When my lips meet his, fantasy collides with reality and I feel dizzy. A week later, Jared proposes a threesome, and I am not exactly surprised. I have been invited in to a world I have never known and I am a little nervous at the prospect. Regardless, I wouldn’t dream of turning the offer down.

A few weeks after the first time we kiss, it’s Hannah’s 21st birthday and Jared is having a party at his house. I show up with some friends, feeling buzzed with alcohol and the idea of seeing Jared and Hannah. I am wearing a short jean skirt over thin tights and a low cut sweater, shivering slightly from the November chill. I feel sexy, and though I am not sure this is the night, an excited tremble emanates out from my lower belly as I walk over to Hannah and Jared in the kitchen. “Tonight?” I whisper between them. They respond in unison: yes.

“If you’re ready,” adds Jared. And I am.

Throughout the rest of the party, they keep their hands and eyes on me. Leaning back against the counter, Jared rubs his leg between mine, my butt pressed into his sharp hipbone. Hannah traces circles on my arm with her finger tip, moving across my shoulder to the base of my neck and making me shiver. My breath catches and my pulse speeds up as Jared grabs my wrist and leads me up the stairs to his room. With the light turned on, they settle onto the small bed and look expectantly at me standing near the doorway. Looking at them and thinking about the situation makes me laugh, but I am not nervous anymore. We have been building up to this for so long and I want it. I want both of them, together, with me, right now.

Hannah pulls me to lie down between them, and two pairs of
hands begin to explore my body. Jared runs a finger along the skin at the edge of my skirt, toying with the button and making my stomach muscles clench. Hannah is kissing and nibbling at my ear. I pull her face to mine, kissing her gently at first and then sinking my teeth lightly into her bottom lip. I taste whiskey and mint on her breath. Jared is undoing the zipper on my skirt, and I arch my back as he pulls it down past my thighs. He lets out a satisfied murmur and he gives my butt a small slap as I stand up. I pull off my tights and remove my top so I am only wearing tiny blue underwear. Hannah and Jared, both in partial states of undress, rake their eyes over my exposed body.

“You are so hot,” Hannah breathes.

“Definitely,” says Jared. “You look damn sexy right now.”

Their complimentary words wash over me with a rush of pleasure. Hannah has removed her clothes, and her skin is like flawless alabaster. Her breasts are perky and round, and her flat stomach extends into her curved hips to connect to long, thin legs. I turn my gaze onto a shirtless Jared unbuttoning his jeans and inhaling sharply. His stomach is like a washboard, and I can’t stop myself from running my hand over the muscles making up his abs and chest while I climb back into bed. I turn to Hannah, my eyes shining, asking for permission.

She nods, and I crawl over towards a boxer-clad Jared to kneel so I am straddling one of his legs. I run a finger down the side of his face, feeling his dark stubble and running my finger along his lip. I dip my head down to kiss him and he pushes up to meet me while he strokes his large, callused hand down my bare side to grip my ass. I can hear Hannah’s breath behind me as I deepen the kiss, pressing my chest against his. He rolls me over onto my back, saying in a low voice, “I think we should start with over onto my back, saying in a low

The swollen lips of my vulva part slightly and ache to be touched. My gratification is delayed, however; Jared moves back up my body and begins to stroke my breasts, gently squeezing my nipples between two fingers. They stiffen under his firm touch, and he cups his palm underneath the curve, filling his hand. At the same time, Hannah moves down the bed, trailing kisses with flicks of her tongue down my stomach. My whole body is electric with the anticipation of her mouth on me.

“Sorry if I’m not good, I’ve never done this before,” Hannah laughs. I just lean my head back into the pillow with a grin, squeezing my eyes shut. Her small fingers slip down into the wet folds between my legs, and she slowly moves one inside of me. I am breathing heavily now; she gently strokes my most sensitive spots and kisses my lower belly. Her mouth moves to the top of my mound, and I gasp as she moves down an inch further and lightly sucks my clitoris in between her lips. Her tongue and mouth are small, wet, and soft. Her breasts and stomach brush against my thigh as she swivels her tongue around me and pushes a delicate finger in and out. For a long moment, my whole body feels wrapped in silk and warmth and softness.

Jared’s lanky, muscular body is pressed up against my side, and I feel his growing erection on my thigh. He is propped up to reach his mouth to mine as Hannah has hers pressed against my soaked lower lips. His expression is excited and his face is flushed as he whispers into my ear, “I am so turned on. Watching the two of you together is like an insane dream.” I press myself harder into his kiss, opening his mouth with my tongue and letting a moan escape my throat. His words have started a fire in my belly, and I long to feel his expert tongue between my legs. Hannah raises her head from my body, running the back of her hand across her panting mouth and pushing back her tangled hair. I thank her by rising up to kiss her warm, wet mouth.

Hannah told me once that she can come many times during sex, and I want to see just how easy it is to make her orgasm. I tell her to lie down on her back, and I push my index finger into my mouth and suck to make it wet. I spread her legs, fascinated by the sight in between—the rich colors, the folds, the intricacies I am not used to seeing on a woman aside from myself. I bring my hand down to explore her. Face turned toward me, her eyes widen as I find her clitoris and begin to pleasure her, rolling the hard nub around between two fingers. Within minutes, her mouth drops open, her breathing deepens, and she grinds her hips into my movement. Thrilled at her response, I increase my pressure and speed until I push her to the brink. Her moan is high pitched and sweet as she comes, hips shuddering, onto my hand.

My self-satisfied smile is quickly shocked off my face as Jared grabs my waist from behind, pulling me onto his back. I cry out in surprise and excitement, I can see in his face that he wants to make me come too. He pushes my knees up and apart and reaches under my ass to pull me further down on the bed. I am gasping as he leans down to cover me with his mouth. Where Hannah’s mouth on me was beautiful and soft, Jared’s is hot, demanding, and fully encompassing my body and mind. His skill is mind-blowing, his tongue moving in a way that is both passionate and precise, his lips sucking and kissing in exactly the right spots. Hannah kisses my breasts and brushes her teeth across my erect nipples. The combination of sensations, motions, and bodies is a feeling I could have never imagined. I lose all sense of time, I am no longer performing for anyone else—I am not anything but purely
myself, reveling in the pleasure of being indulged by two other bodies at once. I edge closer and closer to the warm glow waiting for me...closer, closer to the verge...breathe in and out and in and out and aaahhhhhHHHH I am engulfed in something amazing and I lose myself in rolling waves of pleasure, crying out into Hannah’s neck and biting down on her soft skin.

I float down from the high, panting with a heaving chest and gripping Jared’s dark hair to move his head away from my throbbing wetness. He emerges grinning and leans over and grabs Hannah, kissing her wildly and overcome with excitement. I scoot out from underneath them and push Jared onto his back. I pull off his boxers revealing his rock hard erection, flushed red and moving with each breath. I run my fingers through the dark, trimmed hair between his legs, reaching down to cup him in my hand. I move my head closer, filled with the urge to take him in my mouth. Looking up at Hannah and Jared, I ask if what I am doing is okay. They glance at one another and nod, Jared’s breathing speeding up. Hannah begins to kiss Jared’s neck and caress his chest as I lower my body between his legs.

I lick my lips and run my tongue up the back of his shaft, gripping the base with my hand. I rub up and around his cock until it is fully lubricated with my saliva. I slowly push his head between my wet, puckered lips until he fills my mouth. I move up and down the length of him, my mouth tight around his shaft and my tongue swirling up and over his tip. Now this I know how to do, there is nothing unfamiliar or nerve-wracking about it. My body takes over, and put everything I have into making him feel good in a hundred different ways—varying pressure, breath, tongue, speed, and grip while pushing him in and out of my mouth. He moans and writhes and eventually I take a break, sitting back on my knees and continuing to stroke him. I rub my thumb gently along the ridge where head meets shaft, and he shudders under my touch. “Do you think you can you finish?” Hannah asks Jared.

“Probably, I didn’t drink that much. We can at least try,” he says.

I move out of the way as Hannah and Jared shift into a familiar position for them. I am lying down, my legs between Hannah as she props herself up on hands and knees. Jared, from behind, grips her waist and pulls her back; she tips her pelvis up to meet him as he enters her and begins to move. Hannah grips onto my hips as Jared moves in and out of her, slowly at first, and then faster. She moans out softly and lets her head fall, moving Jared’s hand around her hips to touch her clit. He rubs her softly in a circle as he pumps in and out. Exhausted, I lie back watching them, and I am in awe of the ease of which they move together—they understand the signals of each other’s bodies and respond accordingly. Overcome by the feeling of both Jared’s hand on her and his cock inside of her, Hannah once again comes easily. I watch in amazement as she tumbles over the edge for a second time, her red mouth open in a silent O and her eyes closed tightly as she grinds her hips back against his. A few minutes later, Jared reaches his release, and groans loudly as he comes inside of Hannah. Rolling over, they collapse onto the bed and let their breathing settle. Flushed, sweaty, and satisfied, the three of us fall asleep in a warm tangle of limbs.
Wetlands Magazine is the University of Puget Sound’s literary and arts publication with a focus on questions related to sexual exploration and gender expression. Educational in scope and purpose, Wetlands Magazine intends to be a sex and body-positive, inclusive, open-minded, and a safe space for respectful conversations about issues of gender and sexuality. We aim to create a comprehensive reflection of unique experiences and thoughts in our community, while encouraging further dialogue and discourse on how these issues are manifested.

Again, we would like to extend a thank-you to the Puget Sound community and everyone who contributed to this semester’s publication. Thank you for being proactive and for being open and willing to engage in this platform which allows us to have the relevant and necessary conversations that Wetlands aims to foster. This year’s editing process was extremely difficult: we received so many touching, thoughtful, and beautiful submissions, but sadly it was impossible to include them all. However, whether your piece was selected or not, you deserve to be commended for your effort, creativity, and engagement in this important dialogue that is so significant not only to our campus community but to society at large.

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Cover Artist Statement: Composed of two anatomical diagrams of the male and female body, "Arranging Body Parts" dissects the body into incomplete segments. The naive arrangement of these parts presents the puzzle of matching the pieces to their whole. Referencing a paper doll cutout, my original intent in creating this piece was to acknowledge the objectification and sexualization of the body by focusing on individuals parts. Within an anatomical framework, the body parts of the male and female body appear more similar than distinct.

While the composition of the piece references an objectification of the body, for me "Arranging Body Parts" represents the feeling of disconnect between the body and one's identity. This "separation from the whole" is a thread throughout the work, whether it references a personal experience or a more formal interpretation.