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TRANSFORMING LESBIAN SEXUALITY

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Women are objectified and sexualized by the media and the economy, so that they live in a culture of sex. Lesbians are excluded from the mainstream sexual and appearance norms for women, yet are affected by these norms, including the association of sex and violence against women. The word sexuality has been used to connote both sexual orientation and sexual activity, and it is argued that this dual meaning illustrates the dominance of patriarchal definitions of women's sexuality. This article discusses methodologic issues in understanding who is a lesbian and presents various models or dimensions for understanding who is included in research about lesbians. It asks the question "What is sex?" and reviews the implications of this question for lesbian sexual activity. This question has implications for a collorary question: "What is a lesbian relationship?", and the article discusses the implications of this question on various forms of sexual and nonsexual relationships among lesbians.

The title of this article is purposefully vague, for the word sexuality has been used to mean either sexual orientation or sexual activity. It is my argument that this confusion illustrates how patriarchal definitions still dominate in defining the salience of sex for women (including lesbians), and this will be the first focus of the article. In order to theorize about the future of sexuality among lesbians, I ask the questions "What is sexual orientation?", "What is sex?", and "What is a relationship?"

THE CULTURE OF SEX

Being female in our society means being sexualized and objectified. The media portray women as perpetually young and sexual. Umiker-Sebeok's (1981) review of women in the media indicated that female adolescents

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are portrayed in the media as sexually alluring, frantically extroverted, and in need of protection by men. Young adult women often are doing nothing but displaying their appearance and sexuality. Men in the media touch women, tower over them, and display ownership of them. When middle-aged or older women appear in the media, they are portrayed as comical, plump, and engaged in domestic activity. Their sexuality is over.

Women's sexuality is portrayed in the media as lighthearted and trivial, yet billions of dollars are at stake. The U.S. economy alone consists of a $33 billion annual diet industry, a $20 billion cosmetic industry, a $300 million cosmetic surgery industry, and a $7 billion pornography industry (Wolf, 1991). It is vital for the appearance-related economy that women feel responsible for their own sexual attractiveness, so that they will purchase products and engage in practices (e.g., dieting, cosmetic surgery, exercise) to enhance their sexual appeal (see Rothblum, 1992a, 1993, for reviews). The economy would have much to lose if women stopped being influenced by its messages. Wolf (1991) described how, in the late 1960s, women in Great Britain began spending less for fashion, and sales of women's magazines fell by 1 million copies. Alarmed advertisers quickly changed their message from clothing to the body.

The culture of sexuality and its correlates, the cultures of fashion and pornography, portray women almost overwhelmingly as Caucasian, young, middle- or upper-class, able-bodied, and heterosexual. For the majority of women who do not fit this narrow demographic profile, privilege comes with being as close to this image as possible. Thus, Vanessa Williams, the first African-American woman to become Miss America in 1983, had light skin, green eyes, and reddish hair (Neal & Wilson, 1989). Women with disabilities are often desexualized and ignored by the media; they are perceived as not able to engage in the cosmetic and fashion rituals necessary for beauty (Connors, 1985). Research has indicated that people believe lesbians to be unattractive, to not dress well, and to be overly masculine (see Rothblum, 1994a, for a review). In short, women who do not conform to the media's image of sexual attractiveness and sexual availability may experience "sexism without the pedestal" (Fine & Asch, 1985, p. 6).

Any discussion of women's sexuality cannot ignore the effect of male sexual violence. Sex and violence against women are strongly associated in our society. The media frequently portray women as "depersonalized body parts" (Schur, 1984, p. 33). Women's bodies are exploited for men's eroticism, and a large number of women, including lesbians, have been sexually assaulted by men (Bradford, Ryan, & Rothblum, 1994). Most women, consciously or unconsciously, engage in a number of activities in order to avoid being raped by men (e.g., not listing their first name in the telephone directory, using a male voice on their telephone answering machine, not going out or driving or walking alone at night, taking a self-defense course, etc.). Catherine MacKinnon (1987) has written about the systematic punishment of women via sexual exploitation. She stated:

> Women are randomly rewarded and systematically punished for being women. We are not rewarded systematically and punished at random, as is commonly supposed. We may or may not be rewarded if we go along with male supremacy. If we try to get out of its cage, it is virtually certain we will be punished. Actually, we are punished whether we try to get out or not, which is not even done to rats in experiments. So we peck forever for the occasional crumb that seems to reward our efforts and reinforces our hopes out of all proportion to reality, and we spend the rest of our time skulking in the corners of the cages we no longer try to leave. Not even when the door—as it occasionally is, through inadvertance or compassion or perversity or who knows what, or maybe even because some others of us bent the thing or picked the lock—is ajar. (p. 227)

Sex and fear of violence are so intertwined for most women that it is difficult to conceive of living a life free from that fear. Sex and violence are so linked in women's experiences and emotions that we have yet to invent a sexuality (including lesbian sexuality; note discussion of lesbian sado-masochism and lesbian battering in the lesbian media) that has no history of violence against women.

Women do not invent the strict sexual and beauty norms for women, and these norms (e.g., dieting, foot-binding, female genital mutilation), although different across time and culture, are often unhealthy for women. The narrow definitions of female sexuality and attractiveness make nearly all women feel sexually and physically unattractive, while at the same time obsessed with improving their appearance. If women took control of their bodies and discarded oppressive norms of sexual attractiveness, they would free up tremendous energy for other pursuits. The patriarchy seems well aware of this possibility. Negative stereotypes of feminists focus on their lack of concern with feminine appearance—not shaving their legs or their armpits, burning bras, not wearing make-up, having short hair—rather than on their politics or beliefs. The appearance of feminists is equated with that of lesbians—women who are independent of men. If women stopped conforming to societal norms of appearance, the backlash from the media and the economy would be vicious. Women need to predict this backlash and be prepared to organize, so that the women's movement is not confronted with new ways to immobilize women's movements (Rothblum, 1993).

At the same time women are objectified in terms of their appearance and sexual appeal, this culture of sexuality is not made explicit. Even feminists—heterosexual, bisexual, or lesbian—are both affected by and often unaware of the centrality of sexual appeal norms. In the late 1970s, two anthropologists, Dorothy Holland and Margaret Eisenhart, studied a cohort of female college students at a predominantly Black and a predominantly White university in order to examine how peers influenced choice of majors. The researchers discovered to their surprise that college life for these women had little to do with choice of majors or even with academics in general, but focused almost entirely on their relationship to men. In

their book *Educated in romance: Women, achievement, and college culture* (1990), the authors state:

> . . . our "discovery" of the importance of romance and attractiveness and its implications for the women's response to schooling came relatively slowly and with some discomfort. . . . For us, thinking and writing about romance as culturally constructed—deconstructing its seeming naturalness—posed difficulties and discomforts. This was true even though our training and previous experience as sociocultural anthropologists had equipped us for such a task. . . . After all, we too have grown up in the culturally constructed world and have learned to experience the pleasures and satisfactions, as well as the pains, that go along with it. . . . What would we lose if we became fully conscious of romance as culturally constructed? (pp. 18–19)

How does the culture of sexuality affect lesbians? Before discussing lesbian sexual activity and relationships, it is important to review how the psychological literature has constructed "lesbianism."

Methodologic Issues in Understanding Sexual Orientation Among Women

As we approach the 21st century, there is still very little research about lesbians and practically none about bisexual women. The past two decades have produced vast amounts of research on women, but most often, researchers have not asked about the sexual orientation of respondents or else have focused on topic areas (e.g., divorce, use of contraception) that are not relevant to lesbians. Research specifically on lesbians often has used very small samples and focused on "out" lesbians who are networked into the lesbian community (see Rothblum, 1994b, for a review of methodological issues).

What is a lesbian? Burch (1993) has differentiated between "primary lesbians," who have never had sexual relations with men, and "bisexual lesbians," who self-identified as heterosexual and had sexual relations with men before they had sexual relations with women. Very few women have had exclusively same-gender sexual experiences (Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Main, & Gebbard, 1953). Once women come out as lesbians, the lesbian community presumes that this will be permanent; in fact some lesbians subsequently become sexual with men (a group the lesbian community now refers to as "hasbians"). Is sexual orientation a choice or is it predetermined (e.g., genetic, hormonal)? Generally, lesbians view sexual orientation as a choice (e.g., they state they became lesbians because it was more congruent with radical feminism), whereas gay men are more likely to view it as predetermined (e.g., Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Roscoe, 1988).

Who is bisexual? Does sexual orientation fall on a continuum and, if so, which continuum: sexual feelings, sexual activity, self-identity? Is it possible to study heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbian women as discrete groups? Kitzinger's research (1987) found lesbians' self-perceptions of lesbian identity and lesbian politics to vary considerably. Golden (1987) presented a model of sexual orientation that is multidimensional. Sexual identity ("I am a lesbian"), sexual behavior ("I have sex with women"), and community participation ("I am a member of the lesbian community") may be congruent or incongruent. Women who are sexually involved with other women may not define themselves as lesbian. Women who are married to men but sexual with other women may not define themselves as bisexual. Bisexual women who are currently sexually involved with men may not disclose this to the lesbian community so that they can remain members of this community.

As I have argued previously (Rothblum, 1994b), there are three dimensions along which psychologists who study lesbians can select research participants. The first, membership in the lesbian communities, is the most accessible method, because researchers can select participants who attend lesbian events (e.g., women's music festivals and concerts, lesbian bars or restaurants, gay churches, gay pride marches, lesbian support groups, or professional groups). Lesbians who participate in community events are representative of out lesbians. Interestingly, researchers often apologize for this nonrepresentative sample when, in fact, focusing on visible members of the lesbian communities is extremely informative. These are the communities that have successfully overcome the stress of coming out. Their views and behaviors affect more closeted women, as well as the general public, because the media tend to focus on members of the lesbian communities. They are in the vanguard of influencing social change; they are also the targets of hate crimes and antilesbian violence. Increasingly, research on out lesbians includes women who are adolescents (e.g., Schneider, 1989), elderly (e.g., Cole & Rothblum, 1991), members of ethnic minority groups (Mays & Cochran, 1988), or women with disabilities. I hope members of lesbian community groups are also the future, as more lesbians come out.

The second dimension for selecting research participants involves women who self-identify as lesbians, but who may not be part of organized community events and groups. Researchers have recruited lesbians via friendship circles, a method sometimes referred to as the "snowball" technique because women are asked to distribute surveys to their friends and friends of friends. Women who self-identify as lesbian, but who do not attend visible lesbian events, may differ in important ways from lesbians who are networked into the lesbian communities. There is some research that indicates that outness is related to positive mental health (see Rothblum, 1992b, for a review). Research on lesbians and alcohol abuse indicates that women who go to lesbian bars often have no contacts with

other lesbian organizations (e.g., Fifield, 1975). Studying women who self-identify as lesbian is also important when researching the coming-out process, because members of the lesbian communities are generally already out.

The final dimension for selecting research participants is sexual behavior. The general public views lesbians as women who have sex with other women. Lesbians may be extremely closeted and still be in sexual relationships with other women. Women who are sexually involved with other women may not view themselves as lesbians or bisexual. Wekker (1993) has described the phenomenon of Mati-ism among Black women in the Diaspora who have sexual activity with other women while also being in relationships with men. Thus, there are a number of ways in which women are sexual with other women while not self-identifying as lesbian. Yet very large-scale community surveys are needed to include this group of women.

It should be emphasized that these three dimensions for selecting research participants may or may not overlap. Just as women who have sex with women may not identify as lesbians, so there are women in the lesbian community who are not currently sexual or who are currently sexual with men. Silber (1990) has described women who are active in the lesbian community yet who do not define themselves as lesbian. Future research on lesbians needs to incorporate, both theoretically and empirically, this diverse group that varies in identity, sexual behavior, and community participation.

Most importantly, the reason it is difficult to conduct research on the lesbian experience is precisely due to heterosexism in society. Lesbian and bisexual girls and adolescents grow up in an environment that is profoundly isolating. It is easy to understand why women become involved in sexual relationships with men; to do otherwise is to be the object of hatred, intolerance, and discrimination. It is remarkable that women find the courage to express their attraction to other women, to come out to family, friends, and co-workers, and to find a supportive lesbian community. Given the extreme heterosexism that exists today, research that focuses on the lesbian experience in a representative way must take place in the future.

In sum, the research on lesbians not only has been sparse, but there also have been different (if overlapping) conceptualizations of who is included in a study on lesbians. When researchers define lesbians as women who have sex with women, what is their definition of sex? When lesbians are defined as women who self-identify as lesbians, what criteria do women use? The next section will focus on lesbian sexual activity and lesbian relationships.

What is Lesbian Sexual Activity?

What is sex? In our society, sex is commonly defined as heterosexual intercourse. JoAnn Loulan (1993) has described how adolescents who have

engaged in a number and variety of sexual activities but have not had intercourse will say that they haven't "gone all the way." The first time women go all the way has a powerful definitional value; it is the time they will remember as their first sexual experience. This first experience of intercourse will count even if women didn't find it particularly sexual, even if they didn't have an orgasm, even if they had hundreds of prior sexual encounters without intercourse, and even if these prior sexual encounters were extremely arousing and/or resulted in orgasms. Many women recall their first experience of intercourse as somewhat disappointing, but they knew that the realness of the experience, from the point of view of society's definition of sex, meant that they would never forget the experience.

What is lesbian sex? Sexual activity, as defined by lesbians, is greatly affected by heterosexual definitions of sexual activity. Two women are considered to have engaged in sex if they performed mutual genital stimulation. A lesbian who has never engaged in this activity will probably not believe that she has had sex with another woman. A lesbian who had an orgasm while watching or kissing another woman, for example, has not gone all the way.

These definitions of sexual activity, both the heterosexual and the lesbian/bisexual versions, focus on genital activity and thus ignore other, nongenital, sexual experiences that women may have had (Loulan, 1993; Rothblum & Brehony, 1993). We have no terminology for the early sexual crushes that some girls develop on other people, usually a female friend or female teacher. We have no language for the sexual feelings that arise between adult friends, even when both friends are in sexual relationships with other people. In contrast, if the friends engage in genital sexual activity with each other, we immediately have language; they are having an affair. Situations in which one woman has sexual feelings for another, but these feelings are not reciprocated, are not viewed as real sex; in fact, the term unrequited love reflects the lack of legitimacy of these feelings. In the lesbian communities, ex-lovers often remain friends and friends often become lovers (Vetere, 1982); closeted lesbians may introduce their lovers to their family or co-workers as their friends.

Lack of language for sexuality that is not focused on genital contact means that such experiences are forgotten or cannot clearly be articulated. Crumpacker and Vander Haegen (1987) asked college students to write about intimate, nonsexual relationships with their own friends. The authors were startled by the intensity of the students' written accounts, with vivid details of heartbreaks, painful rejections, and vows never to trust again.

A major survey of sexual activity among 12,000 people (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983) indicated that lesbians are less likely to have genital sex than are married heterosexual, cohabiting heterosexual, or gay male couples. Loulan (1988) surveyed over 1,500 lesbians and found the major-

ity (78%) to have been celibate for some period of time. Most had been celibate for less than 1 year, 35% had been celibate from 1 to 5 years, and 8% for 6 years or more. The results of both surveys were interpreted as reflecting women's lack of socialization to initiate sexual encounters. Survey authors also indicated that lesbians, being women, placed more focus on love, affection, and romance, than on genital sexual activity (e.g., Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994).

What are the implications of lesbians engaging in genital sex less than heterosexual women or than men, yet at the same time using a genital-based definition to define sex? This raises a number of issues. Why do lesbians engage in genital sex less frequently, and what does this say about women's sexuality? Is there a way that the lesbian communities should discuss the relative devaluation of alternatives to genital sex? Can we reclaim erotic, nongenital experiences as real sex? The next section will discuss the impact our conceptions of sex have on lesbian relationships.

What is a Lesbian Relationship?

Heterosexual marriage is defined by a legal ceremony. A married couple is considered to be in a relationship until they are legally divorced. This is the case even when the married couple is not engaged in genital sex, when one or both partners are engaged in sex with other people, or when the couple is living apart. This is not the case for nonmarried couples. Cohabiting couples, whether heterosexual, lesbian, or gay (lesbian and gay couples cannot legally be married in any U.S. state), are defined as a couple if they are having sex.

This sex-focused definition of a relationship has a number of implications for lesbians and bisexual women in female–female relationships. It focuses on an aspect (genital sexual activity) that occurs less frequently among lesbian couples than nonlesbian couples, thus overemphasizing sexual activity when this may not be what is important to lesbians in a relationship. Lesbians may feel pressure to have genital sex in order to provide a definition for their romantic feelings for another woman. They may feel pressure to continue having sex in order to view themselves as still being partners. If genital sex ceases, and if one or both partners tells close friends about this, the lesbian community may view the couple as having ended their relationship, and the members of the couple may be considered sexually available by other women (Brown, 1993). Lack of sexual activity may be interpreted (by the couple, the lesbian community, and their therapist) as a sign that something is seriously wrong with the relationship, even if all other aspects of the relationship are satisfying.

Further, the sex-focused definition of what constitutes a lesbian relationship ignores the reality of women's ways of relating. For centuries, women have felt strong love, affection, and intimacy for other women,

even when both women were married to men. When two unmarried women lived together as spinsters, they were considered to be in a "Boston marriage," a term that reflected the presumed asexual nature of the relationship (the word Boston usually referred to Puritan values). Lillian Faderman (1981, 1993) has described the passion and love between women in the 19th century. She stated (1981):

> It became clear that women's love relationships have seldom been limited to that one area of expression, that love between women has been primarily a sexual phenomenon only in male fantasy literature. "Lesbian" describes a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other. Sexual contact may be a part of the relationship to a greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent. (pp. 17–18)

According to Faderman (1991), societal tolerance for love between women ended when sexologists indicated that two women could be genitally sexual. Then this love was viewed as perverse, and women were discouraged from expressing intimacy to other women.

Interestingly, the lesbian community often assumes that women who expressed love for each other in past decades or centuries were, in fact, genitally sexual. The lesbian novels ***The ladies*** (Grumbach, 1984) and ***Patience and Sarah*** (Miller, 1969) are fictional accounts based on real women who lived together in past times. Although their sexual activities are unknown (and would have been hidden from society if they existed), the authors have introduced a sexual component into these relationships. A recent issue of the feminist periodical *Off Our Backs* contained a review of the published diaries of a British woman who wrote in the past century. The quote that was placed in italics stated (Johnson, 1993, p. 23): "In short, there can be no doubt that Anne was a *genuine* nineteenth century lesbian" (italics mine). The review highlighted several places in the diaries where there can be no doubt that the writer was genitally sexually active with other women. To be real lesbians, there has to be proof of sex, and finally, these diaries illustrate that there was such real sex between women in the previous century!

Lesbians may not have genital sex as often as nonlesbians, but we certainly spend a great deal of time thinking about, talking about, and being in relationships. Several years ago, Kathy Brehony and I reclaimed the historical term Boston marriage to describe current-day romantic but asexual relationships among lesbians (1991, 1993). There are women in our lesbian communities who live together and share long histories together. They may have been sexual in the past, or they may never have had genital sex. They are lovers in every sense of the word except for the absence of current genital sexual activity. They are usually viewed as couples by the lesbian community, which may in fact idealize the couples for the longevity and romantic nature of their relationship. Often, in marked contrast to

Boston marriages in previous times, these lesbians keep their asexuality hidden from the community.

In order to illustrate some of the diversity of romantic but asexual relationships among lesbians, I will briefly describe some of the ways in which lesbians form romantic but asexual relationships (from Rothblum & Brehony, 1993); all names are pseudonyms.

Lesbians may become sexually attracted to heterosexual women who do not reciprocate the desire for a genital sexual relationship. For example, a young lesbian, Laura, moved to San Francisco and became attracted to her heterosexual roommate, Violet. Violet seemed to encourage the relationship in multiple ways, such as having heart-shaped tattoos made with each other's names and telling Laura it was okay that people mistook them for lovers. Laura refers to their relationship as, "When we were whatever we were; whatever it was that we had." When Laura suggested they become lovers, Violet said she couldn't do it; Laura was devastated.

Lesbian ex-lovers often remain friends (see Becker, 1988, for a review), and the passion of the friendship may have the eroticism of the prior genital sexual relationship. For example, Elizabeth and Marianne were briefly genitally sexual, then Marianne ended that, saying that the age difference of 20 years was too great for her. Marianne, the younger of the two, became involved sexually with another woman, Eve, and Elizabeth decided to move out of state to get away. Elizabeth and Marianne continued their relationship over the telephone, and both agree that they are the most important people in each other's lives. Elizabeth says about Eve, Marianne's sexual partner, "she will never have access to the total person that I have."

A lesbian couple may drift into celibacy without much actual discussion of this happening. The following example also illustrates how the lesbian community may view a member of a couple as sexually available when she is no longer genitally sexually involved with her partner. Angie and Cedar met at a women's music festival, became lovers, and were sexual for 6 months. They moved in together and slept in the same bed. Then they slept in separate rooms 1 night a week, then half the time, then they slept together only 1 night a week. They stopped having sex. After 3 years of celibacy, Angie had an affair (a difficult term when the two women in the primary relationship are celibate). Cedar was devastated, and Angie broke off her affair with Linda. Linda was confused because as soon as she had found out that Angie and Cedar weren't having sex, she didn't think they were really a couple. Angie and Cedar entered couples' therapy. They, however, decided to lie to the therapist that they were doing the homework assignments to be sexual when in fact they didn't want to be sexual. They have recently celebrated their eighth anniversary and are still monogamous (that is, not having sex with each other nor with anyone else).

Boston marriages can exist today in multiple ways. For example, Pat is a 60-year-old retired teacher. She was involved with Cathy for 16 years,

and they were sexual the first 4 or 5 years. Cathy has a niece whom they called "Little Cathy." Pat and Cathy often wondered whether Little Cathy and her roommate Barbara were a lesbian couple. One day, Pat discovered that her lover Cathy had become sexual with Barbara (Cathy's niece's roommate). Little Cathy was devastated that her aunt had become sexual with her roommate and was considering suicide (even though Little Cathy said she had never been sexual with Barbara). The last Pat heard, Cathy and Barbara had moved to Texas and were currently asexual but still together. This constitutes a number of Boston marriages: between Pat and Cathy, between Little Cathy and Barbara, and between Cathy and Barbara.

Lesbians may associate genital sex with prior sexual abuse (although research does not indicate a correlation between prior sexual abuse and celibacy among lesbians, see Loulan, 1988). For example, when Janet and Marty met, both were alcoholics and abused drugs. They became lovers, had sex a few times, and moved in together. They became sober. Suddenly, Marty announced that she did not want to have sex. Marty had been sexually abused as a child and considered sex to be a hostile act. Now that she was in love with Janet, she wanted them to be asexual. The couple has built a log cabin together, tells everyone that they are asexual and are a couple, and has been celibate for 18 years.

When couples are not genitally sexual, they may need to find new language for sexual activity. For example, Ruth and Iris call what they do together in bed "bliss." Ruth is involved sexually with a man, and Iris with another woman. Their partners both want them to remain monogamous. Consequently, they all have an agreement that Ruth and Iris have only a spiritual connection and say it is ecstasy. Ruth says, "It's like coming to the goddess." Ruth and Iris say that it is the most important relationship in their lives, more important than their respective partners, yet they have trouble with people taking it seriously. They see the same therapist, and Iris says of her, "Bless her heart, she's trying!"

Not having genital sex may create confusion about whether women are really lesbians. For example, Sarah is in her mid-twenties and in love with Hannah who is in her mid-thirties. They have a primary relationship, but without sex. They have an agreement that they can have other lovers, but only men. Sarah is confused because she is a lesbian, and now her friends only see her with male lovers. It has shaken her whole identity as a lesbian. Hannah is primarily heterosexual. They are both afraid that sex would make them even more intense, given their closeness already.

These examples reflect a number of themes. They raise the issue of what is sexual activity, which is extremely important for the future definition of lesbian relationships. When the two members of a couple disagree on what constitutes sex and thus whether or not they are having sex, they may also differ on whether or not they are in a real relationship. Even when both members of the couple agree that their genitally asexual relationship

makes them a real couple, the lesbian community may disagree with this definition of the relationship. The couple will need to decide whether to disclose their lack of genital sex to other people and what to do if the lesbian community views them as sexually available or otherwise denies the reality of their relationship. Validation of a relationship by the lesbian community as well as by the heterosexual macrosociety is important, given the lack of acknowledgment that lesbians have received for their sexual feelings and behaviors while growing up or while coming out.

Another theme focuses on monogamy; a term that is difficult to define when the members of a couple are not genitally sexual. In contrast to lesbian relationships during the so-called sexual revolution of the late 1960s, norms of many lesbian communities today idealize lesbians who are in monogamous couples. Is it a real relationship when one or both members of a lesbian couple are not genitally sexual with each other but are engaged in sexual relations with other women (or with men)?

Should Boston marriages be normative? Should they be idealized? Pathologized? Laura Brown (1993) has discussed the implications for therapists of clients in Boston marriages. She describes the therapists' own attitudes about genital sexual activity, as well as their homophobia, as important factors influencing her question: "Is there a primary relationship present, or just two good friends in denial?" (p. 86).

CONCLUSION

Transforming Lesbian Sexuality

What is a feminist vision of the future of women's sexuality? What would be some components of a lesbian sexual revolution? Throughout much of women's history, women's sexuality was tied to reproduction and thus to men (see Meadow & Weiss, 1992, for a review). Women's sexuality was linked to pregnancy and motherhood. Lesbians can serve as models for sexual activity free from reproduction. Sexual activity free from reproduction also implies that sexual activity can be independent of genital activity, so that sex can truly encompass all aspects of women's bodies, spirituality, love, and passion.

Sexual relationships are so influenced by patriarchal definitions that we cannot truly conceive of women relating in ways that feel authentic to us. This is an area of tremendous power—one in which we do not even know what our questions are, let alone our solutions.

An article on the future of women's styles of relating has much to gain by citing a feminist science fiction writer. As Ursula LeGuin stated in her book *Dancing at the edge of the world: Thoughts on words, women, places* (1989):

With such fragments I might have shored my ruin, but I didn't know how. Only knowing that we must have a past to make a future with, I took what I could from the European-based culture of my own forefathers and mothers. I learned, like most of us, to use whatever I could, to filch an idea from China and steal a god from India, and so patch together a world as best as I could. But still there is a mystery. This place where I was born and grew up and love beyond all other, my world, my California, still needs to be made. To make a new world you start with an old one, certainly. To find a world, maybe you have to have lost one. Maybe you have to be lost. The dance of renewal, the dance that made the world, was always danced here at the edge of things, on the brink, on the foggy coast. (p. 48)

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