

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Francesca Marcus for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in Philosophy, Philosophy, and Anthropology presented on December 15, 2004.

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This work is an inquiry into misogyny and patriarchy in order to move towards women's liberation. The role of misogyny is questioned through a collection of personal essays that illustrate the interconnectedness of women's experiences and feminist theory. The author's experiences with gender construction, cultural ideas of beauty, and sexuality are discussed, as well as theoretical concepts such as internalized oppression, horizontal hostility, and radical feminism. It is shown that misogyny is intimately connected to women's lives and their experienced oppression. In order for women's liberation to be realized, it is necessary for women to resist hating themselves and other women. Finally, women must embrace loving women qua women so patriarchy may someday cease to exist.

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Refusing to Hate Women: Essays on Feminism and Love

by
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Francesca Marcus, Author

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my beloved grandmother, Irma Olga Viccellio, for always believing in me when I did not believe in myself.

Refusing to Hate Women: Essays on Feminism and Love

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

misogyny, n. distrust of or hostility toward women.
misogynist, n. a woman hater.

I want to live in a world liberated from misogyny. I want to live in a world in which little girls are free to dream of doing whatever they want with their lives. I want to live in a world in which women do not believe that their entire self-worth is derived from their physical appearances. I want to live in a world in which women do not live in fear of being molested, raped, or abused by men. Unfortunately, I believe that the world I long for will never exist if we, as women, hate ourselves and other women.

In my own life I have struggled with my identity as a woman, and I have spent the majority of my life hating other women. I have wasted an enormous amount of time and energy despising myself, feeling inadequate as a human being, and being utterly disgusted with my body and physical appearance. I thought that something was wrong with me and that I was all alone in feeling this way. Now I understand that it is practically a rite of passage for women to experience this and, in a patriarchal society such as ours, it is often hard to identify the underlying misogyny that surrounds us.

The thesis of this collection of essays is that it is imperative that we resist misogyny and truly learn to love all women if women's oppression is to ever cease to exist. Loving women, more specifically, means that we must affirm, respect, and value women as women. In my own life it has

been difficult to affirm women even though I have spent a great deal of time studying feminist theories. Mainly because what I understood academically meant little until I began to apply what I learned to my own life.

Feminist theory is diverse. Not all feminists agree on the origin of women's oppression, and various schools of feminist thought have different ideas about how we need to go about ending women's oppression. Rosemarie Tong gives a detailed summary of various feminist theories in the Introduction of her book, Feminist Thought (1-9). For example, liberal feminists claim that women's oppression is rooted in the fact that women have traditionally been left out of the public sphere and confined to the private sphere of the home. They believe that if women are granted equal access to the public sphere, sexism will be eliminated. On the other hand, radical feminists assert that women's oppression is centered on the sex/gender system, that is, how we assign social meaning to the biological fact of our existence. This strict categorization of either "male" or "female," coupled with the objectification of women's bodies by men and the violence that women experience by men is the major source of our oppression.

Marxist feminists assert that capitalism, a system of social power relations, is the cause of women's oppression, whereas Socialist feminists focus on the link between capitalism and patriarchy. For each, the economic structure of capitalism must change for women to be liberated from patriarchy. In a different light, existential feminists point out that

women are conceptually referred to as the other, and that men are the subjects while women are consistently made the objects. Women experience a sense of bad faith in believing that we are not free to create ourselves or change our condition. To overcome this, women must be prepared to risk everything to create ourselves however we choose.

Psychoanalytic feminists claim that women's inequality is rooted in early childhood experiences that value masculinity over femininity. Postmodern feminism suggests that our language and ideas are centered on men, and that everything we know starts from the point of view of the male. Ecofeminists correlate the domination of the non-human world with the domination of women; they believe that androcentrism is the major enemy of both women and nature. Finally, multicultural and global feminists focus on the fact that traditional feminism is centered on the experiences of white, middle class, heterosexual women and that this sort of feminism does not hold racism, heterosexism, or colonial imperialism responsible for women's oppression.

I will explore the connection of misogyny and feminism through personal essays in order to investigate how I learned to hate women and how I learned to hate myself because I am a woman. I have chosen the personal essay as a method of philosophical analysis because a person's experiences are important in relation to theory. If we are searching for clarity and common ground within a complex problem, e.g., women's oppression, then certainly we can begin with something that we all share—

the human condition. More importantly, within patriarchy the lived experiences of women are especially important because they are connected to the political issues that feminist theory brings to light.

Unfortunately, philosophy has criticized a narrative account on the grounds that it does not constitute a philosophical argument since it takes only the position of the narrator into account. Feminists have resisted this criticism of personal story-telling for some time. Karen Warren, a contemporary ecofeminist, defends the role of the personal essay on the grounds that it is vastly misunderstood. She points out that the personal essayist is not trying to investigate and answer a philosophical question on her own, in isolation. Instead, the essayist presents one voice in collaboration with many, and that a multiplicity of voices is necessary in order to explore deep philosophical and ethical issues (Warren 119). Thus, this work is simply one voice out of many.

I have separated my experiences with misogyny into four essays. The first essay explores how I grew up and came to understand what it means to be a girl and what it means to be a woman. The second essay investigates the connection between misogyny and the beauty ideal. The third essay is an inquiry into the role of pornography in relation to patriarchy. Finally, the fourth essay is centered on love and forgiveness. In conclusion, learning how to love women in my own life is an attempt to liberate myself from hatred.

CHAPTER: 2 BECOMING A FEMINIST—FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

When I was younger I didn't want to be a feminist. I remember when I was a child my father once referred to feminists as ugly women who refused to shave their legs. When I was older I used to think that the definition of the word "feminism" meant the hatred of men. I did not realize that feminism, simply defined, means that women should have social, political, and economic rights equal to men. Nor did I realize that there are many different schools of feminist thought that seek to explain the cause of women's oppression. I had no way of knowing that feminist thought was so diverse. I did not identify as a feminist because I thought that feminism was a bad thing, and I did not want to be associated with women who hated men. Unfortunately, this is a problem that many young women experience because we are essentially afraid of feminism, and with good reason. In an article for Ms. magazine, Lisa Maria Hogeland writes that "to stand opposed to your culture, to be critical of institutions, behaviors, discourses—when it is so clearly not in your immediate interests to do so—asks a lot of a young person" (21).

However, the main reason I did not want to be a feminist is because I was convinced that I was not oppressed, at least not like my mom's generation or the generation before her. I was confident that things had changed and, although the feminist movement did a lot to help women in the past, it really wasn't necessary to continue to work on women's behalf. It was not that I was completely ignorant. I was aware on certain levels

that women were not always treated equally. In my own family I witnessed the inequality of being a woman. It was the women's job to cook, clean, and basically take care of the men, but I attributed that to the old school ways of my Italian American family.

For the most part I internalized my own oppression; I believed the negative stereotypes implying that women are inferior to men. I was convinced that women are irrational, emotional, weak, and unstable. I was also convinced that a man could perform any task better and more efficiently than a woman. Internalized oppression is detrimental to oppressed people because "as one takes in the negative messages and stereotypes, there is a weakening of self-esteem, self-pride, and group pride," and this internalized oppression in my own life dissuaded me from identifying with other women (Pharr 60).

I was sure that I wanted equality, not a world in which women were better than men. Of course, my ignorance at the time led me to view equality as white women sharing equal status to white men without any regard for the position of women of color. As a white woman it is easy for me to act as oppressor while simultaneously experiencing oppression. However, bell hooks, distinguished professor of English at the City College of New York and author of Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, asserts that "to build a politicized, mass-based feminist movement, women must work harder to overcome the alienation from one another that exists

when sexist socialization has not been unlearned" (16). How can sexism end if racism or heterosexism, for example, is still in place?

It was not until my third year in college that I even began to explore these issues. I enrolled in a Women's Studies class that was taught by an anthropologist. I had never taken a class that was focused on sex and gender, and I was completely uneducated in feminist theory. When the professor walked in on the first day of class, she advised us that if we did not accept as true that women were oppressed, then we should see ourselves out the door. I was afraid, but I did not move a single muscle.

As the semester went on, we studied many anthropological theories that challenged the assertion that gendered behaviors are essential to our nature. We read various cross-cultural studies and ethnographic fieldwork that highly suggested that gendered behaviors were in fact culture-specific. Our professor never backed down to the men in the class who would challenge her and yell at her when they were not comfortable with the course material. The strength of her convictions was extremely intimidating, but I was immediately enchanted by her wit and confidence. I was so impressed with her that I decided that I wanted to be like her. I finally found a role model who was a woman to look up to for her strength and intelligence, not for her body or her beauty.

The more feminist theory I studied, the more I felt ignorant and ashamed. It was similar to the feelings I experienced in my African American Studies classes. I went through a process of accepting the fact

that I was brought up in a world that trained me to distrust and feel uncomfortable around people of color. For example, I would openly pride myself on not being racist, and yet I was oblivious to my own preconceived notions and stereotypes regarding people of color. I was oblivious to the amount of freedom that I was given simply because I am perceived as white. My eyes were opened and I felt an enormous amount of shame for my ignorance. However, feminist theory centered me, a woman, in the role of the victim, the casualty, a member of a second class. Painful memories from my childhood and my life made sense now; there was a context for my pain.

The more educated I became, the more I wore my identity as a feminist like a badge. I wanted to convey to the world that I was a feminist, and I honestly thought that I was. I was dedicated to ending women's oppression. I refused to be fooled into a way of life that was solely male-serving. I was a feminist simply because my own life was an example of why it is so difficult to be a woman in a patriarchal culture. In addition, I felt that it was my responsibility to show those around me and prove to the world that women are suffering while men are benefiting from our disadvantage. I felt frustrated if I wasn't taken seriously, and I felt angry if my oppression wasn't understood for what it was. But I wasn't "for women." I certainly didn't love women and, as a matter of fact, I thought that most women were backstabbing, annoying and unintelligent. Instead of loving women, I displaced my own self-hatred towards other women.

Suzanne Pharr, author of Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism, explains this phenomenon as horizontal hostility. "If one has learned self-hatred because of one's membership in a 'minority' group, then that disrespect and hatred can easily be extended to the entire group" and "it is safer to express hostility toward other oppressed peoples than toward the oppressor" (Pharr 61).

When I entered graduate school I experienced my share of harassment from some of the male professors. Some were subtle and some were not so subtle. For the most part I tried to ignore it and I kept my mouth shut. In addition to this, I was involved in an extremely inappropriate relationship with a particular male professor, The Professor. At the time I did not feel confident in my academic ability and the attention he gave me made me feel worthy and special. If my youth and my sexuality were an asset in receiving academic attention, then why would I pass that up? Adrienne Rich, the great American poet and writer, explains that women often endure sexual harassment to keep their jobs and that women are left to believe that their sexuality is their true qualification (41). I swallowed my pride and I engaged him with a persona that I thought he expected from me. I kept it a secret because I was sure that his attraction to me was my fault. I remained silent. In my heart I knew that our relationship was wrong but I convinced myself that I was doing the right thing.

During this time another female student came forward and confessed that she, too, was experiencing sexual harassment in the department. When I heard the news, I immediately assumed that she was lying—even though I knew for a fact that she was telling the truth. I can't even explain why I disbelieved her. Maybe my inner hatred for women allowed me to blame her just as my inner hatred for myself allowed me to think it was my fault. It was a perfect example of horizontal hostility because I wanted to blame her and hate her when I should have blamed The Professor. If I admitted that she was telling the truth, then I would have to admit to my own experiences of sexual harassment. The more I tossed it around in my head I knew I had to come forward. I couldn't bear for her integrity to be questioned, as I questioned it, when I knew she was telling the truth. I feared for what would happen to me if I betrayed The Professor, but I came forward and admitted to everything about our relationship.

My whole life changed after I told the truth. Admitting that his actions were indeed harassment was empowering, and this feeling of strength forced me to critically analyze how I allowed myself to become involved in this dishonest relationship to begin with. I let a man who had an amazing amount of power over me manipulate me with his intellectual attention and sexual advances. I wasn't living my life as a feminist because I was not standing up against inequality, and my whole life felt like a lie. I was in a graduate program studying Ethics and yet, I was

participating in an immoral relationship with my teacher in my personal life. At the time I felt that I was immoral, but I understand now that the immoral aspect of the relationship was in his hands because our relationship was based on a systemic power differential, unfair advantage, and the objectification of my body. This was the pivotal point at which I had to ask myself: how did I get to this point when all I ever wanted to do was get an education?

Over the course of my life I had learned to hate myself. I never felt that I was smart enough, pretty enough, or good enough for anything or anyone. I wanted to be perfect and flawless, which is not realistic for any human being, and it was inevitable that I would feel guilty and pathetic when I was flawed. No one has ever been as hard on me as I am on myself. I realize now that it isn't possible to be a feminist and hate women, and this certainly includes hating myself. Yet, to be a feminist is more than acting in a particular way or resisting a set of ideas. In fact, if we are to truly come to terms with feminism and what it means to be a feminist, then we must learn how to love women.

The concept of learning to love women is a radical one, and for this reason it is necessary to understand exactly what this means. To love women implies that we affirm women and their humanity; it suggests that we respect women as human beings equal to men. I believe that if we, women, men, and everyone in between, do not learn to love women, then we will never end women's oppression. For example, if I loved and

respected myself I would never have let that professor take advantage of me. I would not have let him use me and my body for his sexual arousal. If I loved women, then I wouldn't assume that they were liars when I knew they were telling the truth. I am also positive that if The Professor loved women, he wouldn't be able to feel pleasure or enjoyment through manipulating and controlling his young, vulnerable, insecure students. But how do any of us learn to love women when we are immersed in a world filled with misogyny?

Unfortunately, the nature of oppression is dynamic and complex. It is not enough to blame gendered childhood toys, fashion magazines, or the adult entertainment industry. There are multiple forces that convince us that women are emotionally, physically, and intellectually inferior to men. There are multiple pressures that convince women that our self-worth is comprised of our physical beauty, and that being a "real" woman means being sexually desirable to men. This is not about blaming specific women or blaming specific men for the existence of women's oppression, but more about questioning why it is so hard to love women. Why was it so hard for me to love myself? Why do so many women struggle to love who they are? Within a patriarchy, how do we plan to shift our consciousness from misogyny to feminism if so many women actually believe that they are less than men? In the following essays I want to illustrate specific life experiences that affected me and my ability feel worthy and whole as a human being.

CHAPTER 3: DELUSIONS OF INFERIORITY

For the majority of my childhood I wished that I had been born a boy. It was not because I thought that it was easier to be a boy. I actually thought that there was something about boys that was special, and girls could never attain this special something. Deborah Blum, author of Sex on the Brain: The Biological Differences between Men and Women, writes that “gender identity has to do with one’s first awareness of one’s own sex and the kind of behaviors that go with it” (143). Thus, I did not understand that I was a girl until I was expected to act like one. I was convinced that boys were generally stronger, more athletic, smarter, more courageous, and more competent. Girls were generally weak, afraid, bad at sports, prissy, and not as smart. As a child I just happened to enjoy doing so-called boy things more than girl things. I didn’t like playing with dolls or playing house. I wasn’t interested in doing hair or wearing dresses. I really liked baseball games, comic books, and video games. After a couple of years of forced participation in ballet lessons, it was clear that I was not meant to be the ballerina of the family.

I was a hoyden, a wild little girl, and I knew this because my family always treated me like one. When I wanted a science kit, it was because I was a tomboy. When I didn’t want to wear dresses to church, it was because I was a tomboy. When I pleaded for Karate lessons, it was because I was a tomboy. When I wanted to hang out in my dad’s comic book shop, it had to be because of the tomboy thing.

Tomboys usually play with the boys, and I was no exception. My best friend growing up was a boy named Matthew. We were friends from the day we could walk to each other's house. He only lived two houses down from me and his older brothers were conveniently friends with my older brother. Whenever I was bored, I would run to the end of my driveway and yell for Matthew to come over. When I was sick of playing with him, I would tell him to go home. I guess one could say that I bullied Matthew and I controlled our play time. My brother would often tell me that I better learn to stop bossing boys around or the boys were going to beat me up. I didn't care about what he said because I was tough and I wasn't afraid of boys.

Like most annoying younger siblings, Matthew and I tagged along with the older boys whenever we could because we wanted to be just like them. As we grew older, our brothers would tease us and call us boyfriend and girlfriend. To prove that Matthew was not my boyfriend, I would punch him or try to wrestle him to the ground. Sometimes I took it too far and Matthew would cry. The older boys would jump at the chance to make fun of him for getting beat by a girl. They called him names like sissy, faggot, and little girl. Since Matthew was already self-conscious about his speech impediment, these kinds of attacks from the older boys always made him cry harder. Once, when this happened, my brother made fun of Matthew for acting like a stupid, dumb girl.

"Hey," I shot a mean look at my brother, "I'm a girl."

"Yeah, and you're stupid and dumb and nothing but a big wimp," he laughed smugly. From then on I made it a point to prove my brother wrong whenever I could. I was not a wimp, I was not afraid, and I was not a stupid girl.

The boys made it clear to me that being a girl was not desirable. To be a girl was less than being a boy and it made me deficient. On the other hand, the boys liked to hang out with me because I didn't throw "like a girl" even though I was a girl. I didn't run like a girl, cry like a girl, or show fear like a girl. Except that whenever they teased me, they made fun of me for being a girl. I was part of their club without being an official member. Because of this, I spent the beginning of my life trying to prove to the world that I was better than a girl. I knew that I would never be a boy and to compensate I rejected anything that would associate me with being a girl. Iris Marion Young, professor of political science at the University of Chicago, suggests that young girls are socialized to develop a sense of bodily timidity, and that understanding what it means to be a girl is to believe that we are fragile (154). Every aspect of my existence was a struggle to prove that I was not fragile; I was better than "just a girl."

I learned to hate girls, that is, I despised everything that girls were supposed to be. I did not want to be weak, sensitive, or complicit. I did not want to be inadequate in comparison to a boy. When did I learn to hate girls like this? Most likely it was when I understood that doing something "like a girl" meant that you didn't do it very well at all, or that, if you were a

boy, you could do it better. Referring to a boy as “a girl” was something that you did to insult him for acting like a baby or doing something stupid. It never occurred to me that the boys I grew up with were wrong because I was convinced that girls were less adequate.

Even though I believed that boys were superior, it didn't make any sense. For example, my brother taught me how to play baseball and I loved it. When I wanted to sign up for baseball, they told me I couldn't because girls were only allowed to play softball. My brother was allowed to play baseball, and I was jealous, but I signed up for softball anyway. I never had the opportunity to pitch because I didn't know how. Sure I could throw a baseball like there was no tomorrow, but pitching a softball is a completely different thing. To be honest, I thought it was harder. In reality I couldn't throw like the girls, and most of the boys that I grew up with couldn't either.

It wasn't just these instances from childhood that made me believe that men were better than women. The hero in every movie I ever liked was a boy. When you're a young girl and your favorite movies are Star Wars, The Never Ending Story, and Back to the Future, which character are you supposed to relate to—the boy who inevitably saves the world or the helpless pretty girl who needs the boy to save the world for her? And why is there never a woman president? Is it because women aren't smart enough to be the president? Why did my father trust my brother to run the cash register at the store but never me?

These subconscious feelings of inferiority paved the way for me to grow into a male-identified woman. That is, I identified with male culture and believed it to be superior to female culture. I was a misogynist; I considered men superior to me, and yet, I viewed myself as superior to women because I identified as male. I internalized my own self-hatred by simply believing that every man and boy I knew was somehow better and smarter than me. Psychologically, it was necessary for me to compartmentalize myself from other women. In other words, I felt as if I were somewhere in between being a girl and being a boy. Most other women were inferior to me because I viewed women through male eyes, and yet, I never felt that I fully lived up to the boys. Now when I think of this I cannot understand how I looked down my nose at other women while at the same time denying to myself that I was a woman.

Consequently, throughout my life, I worked really hard in school to get excellent grades. I wanted everyone to think I was smart like my brother. My grades were my badge of honor, the evidence that I was not stupid. This obsession with grades followed me all the way into college. When I first went away to college it was in part to prove to everyone that I was genuinely smart. I was the first woman in my family to even make it to college and, when I got there, the education I received opened my eyes to a lot of things. My favorite classes were the ones in which I learned about the world. I was intrigued by issues of social justice, and I was especially fascinated with the classes that dealt with these issues. I loved learning. I

never loved anything as much as the passion I felt when I was immersed in my schoolwork, attending lectures, and working closely with my professors.

My love for knowledge led me to graduate school immediately after I graduated. I thought I had it all planned out. I would go to graduate to earn a Master's degree in philosophy, and anthropology, and when I was finished I would use my newly acquired knowledge to go out into the world and make a difference. I wanted to help people. I had this vision that one day I'd be feeding sick children or working with refugee populations. Idealistic as it sounds, I saw my time in graduate school as a stepping stone towards something bigger and more important than myself.

However, after I moved by myself and away from my family at the age of twenty-three, I sort of panicked. Aside from feeling homesick for my family and my culture, I was surprised by the amount of work that my classes demanded. Naively, I didn't anticipate that graduate school would be a lot harder and more demanding. Unfortunately, I spent most of my first year convinced that I wasn't smart enough to even be there. I was sure that someone would find me out, or that my new professors would be disappointed in me.

I shared my fears with a female professor from my department and she assured me that many women in academia before me had experienced similar fears. She assured me that philosophy is still, for the most part, a male dominated field. I came from a family in which the

women are not college educated at all, nor were they encouraged to go to college. It seemed that all of my friends and colleagues in graduate school came from families in which a college degree was expected of them. My family saw my degree as an amazing accomplishment. I met professors who came from a long line of academics and I just felt like I didn't belong. More importantly, I felt that everyone around me could tell that I didn't belong.

When one of my male professors placed his hand underneath my skirt and touched my thigh, everything around me began to spin. My whole body flushed and the first thing I thought of was how stupid it was of me to wear a skirt to class that day. I lowered my eyes. Did anyone else notice what happened? Did he know that I wasn't attracted to him? Should I tell anyone? Would anyone believe me? If they did believe me and he lost his job, would it be my fault? Would the other male professors avoid me because I spoke up? I would never be able to finish my degree if I were blacklisted by the male professors.

The thing that really angers me is that prior to this I worked hard in his class so that he would think I was worthy. I longed for his academic approval. I stuttered when he called on me and I blushed every time he gave me a compliment. I thought he was one of the smartest men I had ever met. Yet, even before he groped me, he never treated me as anything more than a little girl. He never related to me as an adult or as if I

would one day be his peer. When I received an “A” in his class, I wondered if he gave me the “A” because I kept my mouth shut.

Then of course, there was The Professor. The circumstances were completely different with him. A few of the other students had a crush on him and the faculty absolutely adored him. As a woman I felt that I could really trust him. I thought he was an ally because he taught radical theories in social and political justice. When he gave me a lot of attention I thought it was because he liked me as a person. In the beginning I had this feeling that some of the other students were jealous of the attention that he gave me. I didn't understand exactly why they were jealous. Maybe it was because he praised my academic ability. Maybe it was because he took me under his wing or because there was an unusual closeness between us. Was it because I told them about the dinners or the private conversations over drinks?

When he started giving me presents, I stopped talking about my relationship with him. When we started communicating through instant messenger late into the night, I realized something wasn't right. The night he invited me over to his apartment, my roommate warned me not to go. Going to your professor's apartment on a Saturday night is not a good idea, he told me. I knew that, honestly I did, but if I didn't go The Professor might not like me anymore. If he didn't like me anymore then I would go back to feeling like an intellectual loser.

That night, when I went to his apartment, he gave me wine, then beer, then more wine. My head was swimming and I had to lie down. He offered his bed and tried to coax me into taking my clothes off. I refused. After that night the relationship only worsened. I was trapped into being this "thing" for him. At the time I felt guilty and responsible for how the relationship had progressed because I knew it was wrong; I was sure it was my fault, not his. Now I fully understand that he had all of the power and that he was responsible for the conditions of our relationship. It got to the point where I felt disgusted by him and yet I continued to act as if I found him charming. What was I supposed to do? He was my professor and my thesis advisor. He was the golden boy of the department and everyone loved him. I figured that if I just stuck it out for another six months I could leave this place and all of the creepy memories as well. So I played his game, and I pretended to be who he wanted me to be, and somehow I slept at night without contemplating the consequences of my actions.

When the other student came forward and the truth finally came out, everyone told me that none of this was my fault. I didn't believe them. I know that women who are assaulted or harassed always think it is their fault, but it was a long time before I could stop blaming myself for everything that happened. I am a sensitive woman and I had a gut feeling that The Professor was up to no good early on. A part of me was sure I imagined it because I didn't think that I was worthy of his sexual attention.

Another part of me wanted him to think I was special because if it was true, then maybe I would feel worthy. Somewhere I confused my academic worth with something else. I made the mistake of thinking that sexual attention and academic attention are the same thing. Now I know that what happened was not my fault, I really do. However, I also know that if I loved myself I would never have needed his attention in the first place to feel good about myself. If I loved myself and if I was truly a feminist, I would have put an end to it the first time I had a feeling that it was inappropriate. If I loved and respected myself then I would not have let him use me under any circumstances.

Looking back on that first year and my own insecurities, I realize that I felt utterly and completely substandard; I did not believe in myself. Now I suspect that as long as there is room for women to feel inferior, there will always be room for men to be sexual predators. In a male supremacist society in which sex is power, sexual dominance makes men feel powerful and in control. In his article, "Stopping Sexual Harassment: A Challenge for Community Education," Robert Allen explains:

Whether in the workplace or in the street, the purpose of sexual harassment is to reduce women to objects sexually vulnerable to men, and to reestablish the traditional power differential between men and women. Indeed, women's sexual vulnerability to men is a key locus of male power, something men learn to expect (575).

In another article about sexual harassment, contemporary feminist writer Naomi Wolf explains that "powerful men and woman who belittle and

humiliate their subordinates manage not to belittle or humiliate their supervisors. Neither men nor women tend to harass upward in a hierarchy” (Wolf 5). Men do not sexually harass women who they think will tell them to go to hell. Instead, they target the women who are insecure; they target the women they presume will never tell. I know this because I was that woman.

CHAPTER 4: WOUNDED AND SCARRED

As a teenager I learned quickly that I was not a pretty girl, or at least, this is how I felt. It's the typical ugly duckling story: I was awkward and boyish with a big Jewish nose, braces, and frizzy hair. I never received attention from boys in a sexual way and, after awhile, I began to develop a complex over this; I started to believe that I wasn't a real girl because the boys didn't flirt with me or want to go out with me. That's what it really came down to; the only way to know if I was a pretty girl, a real girl, was if the boys liked me. I yearned to be pretty and I was on a mission to get the boy's attention. I wore bras that made my breasts appear larger, and clothes that made me look skinnier. I started shaving my legs and bleaching my upper lip.

Without much success with the boys, I eventually grew tired of trying to impress them. Instead, I decided to rebel against it. I stopped shaving my legs and I stopped dressing like the girls in the fashion magazines. I concluded that I hated the girls in the magazines because they set the standard for beauty. My arch nemesis was Pamela Anderson, the infamous Playboy Playmate and lead actress from Baywatch. She was the perfect example of everything I hated in a woman. She was beautiful, blond, and skinny. She had huge breasts. I hated everything about her because I knew that I could never be as pretty as her.

Even though I gave up trying to be a pretty girl, I never stopped wanting to be one. Since I did not receive a lot of attention from the boys

in high school, I was taken aback when that changed in college. I don't know why or how it started, but suddenly it seemed that a lot of guys were asking me out and telling me that I was beautiful. At first I didn't know how to handle it, but after awhile I grew to depend on it. Older men were hitting on me and I began to enjoy it. I dated men even though I did not especially care for them simply because I could. I developed this idea that I was empowered because I had some kind of control over men. I knew they wanted me sexually and that meant that I could get them to do what I wanted in exchange for my body. I thought that this was my free choice.

Yet, it was false consciousness because it is not freedom to choose that which I had no control over. Catherine MacKinnon, a lawyer and radical feminist, writes that "women cope with objectification through trying to meet the male standard, and measure their self-worth by the degree to which they succeed" (395). I saw acquiring the attention of men as a game and, in an attempt to win, I started shaving my legs again and dressing sexier than ever. I did this because I was worried that I would lose this sexual attention and that men would stop finding me beautiful. I did not understand the power that those men had over me. In her article, "The Culture of Romance," Shulamith Firestone asserts that both eroticism and romance are cultural tools of male power that preserve the sex class system because they prevent women from realizing the condition that we are in (88). In my own life, for example, I was convinced that if men didn't think I was beautiful, then I would go back to being an ugly loser; my self-

worth was never in my own hands. This fear made me more conscious of my body and my looks than anything else had in my whole entire life. I went through phases of disliking myself to downright hating myself. College went from my safe haven to a dark place of depression. I thought that if I was really and truly beautiful, then my life would be perfect.

What I didn't know back then is that there is no such thing as "perfect looks." Even if you can attain the ideal of beauty, it won't be long before the ideal changes. In our own culture, one season "anorexic heroin chic" is in, and the next season "curvy, voluptuous vixen" is the desired look. We expect women to be thin, but then we criticize women when they are too thin and accuse them of having an eating disorder. We expect women to have supple breasts, and then we criticize them for having plastic surgery. We desire youth and praise women who look young for their age, but then we scorn women who have face lifts or Botox injections. It is nearly impossible to be perfect because there is no such thing. Even if an individual does fit the mold or trend, or if women in general do succeed in acquiring beauty ideals, eventually there will be a new look or body type to be desired because "ideals, by definition, are modeled on rare qualities" (Firestone 88).

The media have succeeded in producing and exemplifying very specific kinds of bodies—types of women—for very specific marketing campaigns. Playboy and Hustler, for example, market platinum blonde women with big breasts who smack their red lips while kicking up their

stiletto heels as their trademark. Why? Because Hugh Hefner and Larry Flint have decided that real men desire these women? Conversely, the glamorous business of high end fashion calls for abnormally tall women who are dangerously thin to model their clothes. Why? Because the designers of high end fashion tell us that their clothes simply look better on this type of body?

Victoria's Secret, one of the most popular lingerie stores in the United States, has its own criteria for the "perfect" female. These women must look tan, vibrant, and healthy (many of their models are imported from Brazil). They don't want their models to look dead like the women in fashion magazines. They can't look slutty or whorish like the women in Playboy or Hustler. The women who model for Victoria's Secret are supposed to be the tall and curvaceous girls-next-door. Why? So regular women will want to buy their lingerie in an attempt to look like these women? After all, that is the point of advertising: know your market and appeal to them so that they will buy your product. But why do women want to see their underwear modeled on these women? Is it a coincidence that most of the Victoria's Secret models are also the same models who are featured in the Swimsuit editions of Sports Illustrated? Is it a coincidence that the bikini clad women whom men objectify when they purchase Sports Illustrated are the same women who are modeling our underwear? Surely it is not coincidental, but instead a reinforcement of the beauty myth to both

men and women. That is the point of a beauty myth—to convince both women and men that there is one ideal “type” of woman.

I used to think that swimsuit models, Playboy centerfolds, and runway models were the reason that women, myself included, desired to be beautiful. As far as I was concerned, they set the standards and they were my enemy. This is because I looked at their naked bodies in Playboy wondering why I wasn't perfect like that. I purchased sexy underwear because I thought that whatever man I was sleeping with would find me more attractive in bed. I flipped through fashion magazines wishing I were tall and thin so that I could look beautiful in the clothes they wore. If everything on the TV, along with the men I knew, my father, my best friends, and lovers openly acknowledged that these women were the most beautiful and sexy women, then I reasoned that I was not good enough because I looked nothing like those women. I internalized the idea that I was not a real woman because I did not fit these media stereotypes of female beauty, and I tried everything I could to look like them. The more I tried to assert my individuality through the way I looked, the more I looked like every other woman who was trying to do the same, and “when women begin to look more and more alike, distinguished only by the degree to which they differ from a paper ideal, they can be more easily stereotyped as a class” (Firestone 89).

When I was in graduate school, The Professor used to tell me how beautiful I was and it made me feel better about myself. It was like a drug.

I needed his attention and I was afraid of losing it. I thought that if I didn't play his game the way he wanted me to, then he would give his attention to someone else. Now I understand that his attention was false flattery; it was not real. It was never anything but a tool to manipulate me. How could I, a supposed feminist, proclaim that men should not objectify women when I secretly felt better about myself when I was objectified by men? Since I was a young girl in high school I repeatedly thought my self-worth resided in how sexually attractive I was to men. I longed for the attention of men, I worked hard for it, and when another woman received it over me I found myself hating her even more than I hated myself.

Then one day I read an article written by Naomi Wolf, and in it I read these words:

A consequence of female self-love is that the woman grows convinced of her social worth. Her love for her body is unqualified, which is the basis of female identification. If a woman loves her own body, she doesn't grudge what other women do with theirs; if she loves femaleness, she champions its rights (478).

It began to make sense to me. I did not love myself or my own body. If I did, then I would not have hated another woman because of hers. A woman who loves women is dedicated to lifting women up, not tearing them down. I often read Pamela Anderson's column in Jane magazine, and this is how I learned that the first time Pamela Anderson had a sexual experience, she was raped as a young teenager. She is very open about her romantic relationships with men and how she has been the victim of

both physical and emotional abuse. When I think of this I cannot believe that we live in a world in which a victim of rape and domestic violence (or any woman for that matter) is even given the choice to sell her body to the sex industry to survive. The very same body that is supposed to be the icon for male sexuality and fantasy in this society, Pamela Anderson's body, a real human being's body, is a body that has been both raped and beaten by men over and over again.

Why did I blame her for using her body to make a living? She is not responsible for the condition that women are in. No single woman can be held responsible for the way that men, as a group of consumers, purchase and use women's bodies. Pamela Anderson grew up in a small rural town in Canada, and her invitation to appear in Playboy magazine symbolized the kind of financial freedom she never dreamed of. It was her ticket out of there, out of the drudgery of growing up in a small town just to become someone's underappreciated and overworked wife. With the limited choices that she was given, is it economic coercion? Given adequate choices to do and be whatever we want in this world, who would willingly choose to work in the sex industry? She did what many economically desperate women do, that is, she learned how to survive in a patriarchal, capitalist society with the limited choices she was given.

My venom towards her was a mistake. It is not any woman's fault that we are socially constructed under patriarchy to serve the needs and sexual desires of men. As feminists we need to affirm all women, to love

all women, regardless of what they do with their bodies or what they look like, and regardless of whether we agree with their choices. For all I know, Pamela Anderson may be a wonderful person. I know that she is the mother of two boys and that she writes fondly on motherhood. I also know that she donates generous amounts of money, along with her time, to various organizations in favor of animal rights and others that work against domestic violence. The point is, I don't really know who Pamela Anderson is, but I am sure that she, like every woman, has her own story to tell.

As for me, I have taken a lot of time to try to center myself and make sense of what it means to be "beautiful," mostly because I have longed to be beautiful for most of my life. How much longer can I look in the mirror and hate what I see before all I can see is unsightliness? How much energy can I use to wish for someone else's face before my face transforms into something I cannot recognize? A dear professor of mine once asked me this: how deep does a wound have to be before the scar shapes our very faces?

I want to write that I have completely learned to love myself and what I look like, and I want to believe that I am happy with my physical appearance, but it would certainly be a lie. It is hard to undo the overwhelming societal pressures of beauty, and consequently, I continue to struggle with body image and self-loathing. Except now I understand how this self-hatred fits into patriarchy. Now I see that misogyny is absolutely necessary for patriarchy to stay in place. The myth of female beauty within

patriarchy is one of the hardest and most important issues for feminists to face because we have no way of knowing what true female beauty is or could be.

CHAPTER 5: DECEIVED BY PORNOGRAPHY

Radical feminist writers John Stoltenberg and Andrea Dworkin argue that male sexual identity is mostly a social construction that relies heavily on the sexual objectification of women. In addition to this, the way that many men conceptualize and have sex with women reinforces this power. Furthermore, they argue that there is a definite link between pornography and male supremacy because what many men find sexy is often harmful and severely damaging to women. In a speech entitled, "Pornography Happens to Women," Andrea Dworkin explained:

In pornography we literally see the will of women as men want to experience it. This will is expressed through concrete scenarios, the ways in which women's bodies are positioned and used. We see, for instance, that the object wants to be penetrated; and so there is a motif in pornography of self-penetration. A woman takes some thing and she sticks it up herself. There is pornography in which pregnant women for some reason take hoses and stick the hoses up themselves. This is not a human being. One cannot look at such a photograph and say, there is a human being, she has rights, she has freedom, she has dignity, she is someone. One cannot. That is what pornography *does* to women (par. 6, italics in original).

Catherine MacKinnon asserts that the basic theme of all pornography is the strict dichotomy of dominance and submission. In other words, one person is always the agent, the one in control, almost always a man, while the other, usually a woman, is the object that faces restriction, repression, and danger with every sexual encounter (324). If male dominance is sexual, then pornography is an industry based on

consuming, using, but more importantly, dominating women; this mentality contributes to men feeling that it is generally their right to consume, use, and acquire women. Within a patriarchy, many men are taught that they have the right to do whatever they need to satisfy their appetites. They are taught to obtain and conquer objects and, unfortunately, because men are often taught to view women as less than them, women become one of the many objects that men desire to conquer

Think of this scenario. The young student clad in a short skirt walks into her professor's office. She coquettishly flirts with him and he aggressively places his hand on her thigh. She resists his advances, but ultimately gives in to his forceful, sexual desires. This is undoubtedly a common plot in pornographic films—I think I've seen a dozen films just like that. It is a common plot in many mainstream movies for that matter. All of these movies are supposed to be sexy and erotic, but in the real world, this scenario is sexual harassment. Women have the right to go to school without being sexualized by their male teachers. Male teachers do not have the right to use their power over women students to indulge sexual fantasies. In reality, it is not erotic when teachers sexualize their students.

Why shouldn't professors sexually harass their students? Why shouldn't men rape women? Why shouldn't men beat women? The answers to these questions may seem apparent. However, the message that pornography sends to us is that it is okay to do these things.

Pornography does not just give the message that it is acceptable to hurt

women, but that is also erotic to do so. Yet, if pornography does send the message to men that it is acceptable to use, harm, hurt and even rape women if it achieves orgasm, then why are there so many women who enjoy pornography? If pornography is so degrading to women, then why are so many women openly willing to defend the right to use and own pornography?

There is no point of writing an essay about pornography if I am not willing to share how pornography has influenced my life and my sexuality. I used to have a very intimate relationship with pornography. I recognized early on, while I was coming to understand my own sexuality, that I was attracted to women in addition to men. It was not easy for me to come to terms with this realization. I felt that there was something wrong with me, that I was perverted and sick. I didn't have an outlet to express my desire to love and feel physically intimate with women. My curiosities lead me to search for role models, illustrations, and examples. I wanted to know what it was like when women made love to women.

This is how I found pornography. When I figured out that there is a large genre of pornographic material that is solely dedicated to lesbian sex, I did my best to get my hands on as much of it as I could. I didn't feel bad about using pornography. Isn't that what pornography is there for, to teach us how to have sex? Wasn't pornography something that we could turn to when we have desires that we cannot share out loud or with another person? I wanted to explore my sexuality in private without feeling guilty or

dirty and I didn't want anyone to censor that. I was under the impression that it was harmless, and those who thought otherwise were in favor of censorship.

After watching the same type of films over and over I desired newer images that were different and therefore more exciting. Women having sex with women began to bore me and, as a result, I sought out heterosexual pornography. I thought that I learned how to have sex with men and with women by studying pornography. It was sexy and I enjoyed it. Of course, I viewed the women in those films as pathetic and disgusting. I assumed that no decent and respectable woman would ever want to be a porn star. For the most part, my sexual experiences with men were very similar to what I saw in pornography. I was sure I was good at having sex because I knew how to act; I just did what the women in the films did. It was easy: sex with men was centered on the man's penis. The sex began when he was aroused by me and my body, and it was over when he ejaculated through contact and stimulation with my body; the experiences were always centered on the objectification and usage of my body.

However, when I started sexually experimenting with women, everything I learned from pornography about lesbian sex didn't work; it wasn't appropriate. I thought I was supposed to mimic what the women in the films did. Instead, I learned quickly that sex with real women was nothing like the women I watched having sex in the films. Real sex with real women was, well, real. It was satisfying in a way that was not

comparable to my experiences with men. I could enjoy the sex without feeling that I was being used like an object or a thing. I was an actual participant. There was never a focus on my body parts. It didn't end with orgasm. It was playful, caring, sensual, and loving. The only way I knew how to have sex with a man was to use my body as a means for his end. I was sure that sex with men meant being used by men. If his erection required me to shave all of my pubic hair, then that is what I did. If he wanted me to dress like a school girl because it made him hot, then that is what I did. If he thought it was sexy to tie me up, then why not? They do it in pornography all the time.

Then I read an article written by Sallie Tisdale entitled "Talk Dirty to Me." In this article she outwardly defended her taste for pornography, especially the hard core genre. She wrote that she feels empowered, like she has the power to own her sexuality by deciding what videos arouse her. One difficulty she finds in her quest of purchasing pornography is that she tends to feel afraid when she frequents adult shops. Once, she was shopping for films in an adult shop and was approached by a stranger. He asked her if she wanted to go outside to his car with him so that he could give her something. He told her he had sex toys in his trunk and that he no longer needed them. Of course she felt immediate panic. She declined his offer and ran to her car before it got dark, and before he could follow her (Tisdale 1-4).

I thought about her story for a long time and something about her article did not make sense to me. Why is the idea of a man bending a woman over his trunk and penetrating her against her will erotic if it is in film, and yet it is dangerously scary if it is real life? One context is erotic and the other context is rape. I started to wonder, what is pornography exactly? On the one hand, pornography is simply a collection of images that are intended to invoke sexual excitement in the person who is viewing them. It is meant to arouse the viewer, to stimulate certain feelings and emotions. Pornography is used by an individual or a number of individuals to feel sexual.

I used to believe that pornography was innocent and I enjoyed using it. I thought that I learned how to love women through pornography. In actuality, I learned what I believed were acceptable ways for men to treat me and all women in general. I did not realize then that it is not alright for men to use me (and other women) as a thing or a mere means to their end. Now I see pornography for what it is, I understand that pornography not only teaches us to hate women, but moreover, pornography illustrates exactly how to hurt women and use women's bodies as if their humanity is non-existent. Pornography normalizes rape as if all women want to be violated against their will. Pornography eroticizes incest as if human beings want to be sexualized by their family members. Pornography depicts power differentials and victimization as sexy.

What I cannot understand now is how we actually plan to stop rape, incest, abuse, and harassment when we own and consume videos and magazines dedicated to using, hurting, and dominating women. How are we supposed to teach young men that women are not there for the sexual taking if these men grow up watching videos, reading magazines, watching television shows, etc. that teach them that being a man means to physically and sexually dominate women? And what about all of the women who are exploited for these films to be made? What about the fact that there is cold hard evidence that shows that pornography, rape, domestic violence, incest, and child abuse are deeply correlated? For example, the Oregon State Penitentiary has banned Playboy magazine because it increases the incidence of rape in the all male context (Roberts C07).

Many of those in favor of protecting the right to purchase and use pornography are outraged when human beings are forced to work in sweatshops, but they do not consider the impoverished, desperate women who must be exploited to make pornography. Many men will lash out, possibly with violence, if other men sexually objectify their mothers or sisters or wives, i.e., women whom they love and see as whole human beings. However, they have no problem sexually objectifying the faceless, nameless women in films, magazines, and in television, i.e., women they do not love and do not perceive as whole human beings. I know from experience that to use pornography, it is absolutely necessary to

compartmentalize the women in the pornography as less than human, as substandard and submissive, or else it isn't erotic. Why does our supposed morality not match our actions?

For many people, the question regarding the role of pornography within society is this: should pornography be illegal if we can prove that it is harmful to women? I think this is an excellent question and I stand behind anyone who dares to ask it. In a world in which women live in constant fear of bodily harm it is hard to imagine why pornography is so prevalent in our culture. If we protect men in Oregon prisons from rape through banning pornography, then I don't understand why we would not extend the same protection for women. If nothing else, given the historical circumstances of women in this country, isn't it a civil rights issue? John Stoltenberg writes:

Pornography institutionalizes male supremacy the way segregation institutionalizes white supremacy. It is a practice embodying an ideology of biological superiority; it is an institution that both expresses that ideology and enacts that ideology—makes it the reality that people believe is true, keeps it that way, keeps people from knowing any other possibility, keeps certain people powerful by keeping certain people *down*. Pornography also *eroticizes* male supremacy. It makes dominance and subordination feel like sex; it makes hierarchy feel like sex; it makes force and violence feel like sex; it makes hate and terrorism feel like sex; it makes inequality feel like sex (113-114, italics in original).

I know that pornography hurts women; anyone who has used pornography knows this deep down in their soul. However, for me the fundamental question concerning pornography is more a matter of loving

women. If we loved all women would be able to feel sexy and/or sexual when we watch pornography? Would we be able to use women for their bodies and their sex without any regard for the fact that these women are real people? Now when I research pornography for my work and I see the images of violence and domination against women, I feel ill. I am ashamed that I used to watch these images and I feel betrayed because in one way or another I was told that these images are normal and acceptable. Within a capitalist economic system, the only way an industry can survive is if there is a market for their product. Wouldn't it be ideal to live in a world in which we loved women as human beings so much that there was no market for pornography? I know that I do not want to live in a society that only claims to love women; I want to live in a society that does in fact love women.

CHAPTER 6: COMPASSION, FORGIVENESS, AND LOVE

To live in a patriarchy means that we live in a society in which many of us categorize human beings on the basis of their sex, while simultaneously assigning a higher value to one sex over another. It is similar to categorizing human beings on the basis of their race and then deciding that one race is superior to all others. I believe that what it means to be a man and a woman is constructed through the sex/gender system, and this means that as a society we often assign value and meaning to ways of being human based mostly on their biological sex. Furthermore, it is necessary within a patriarchy to believe that the gendered qualities we assign to biological males and to biological females are somehow essential to our natures (Tong 48-49). Since we live in a society in which we value men over women and believe that being a man is superior to being a woman, it makes sense that being a man, i.e., being born with a penis, will be valued highly and more so than being born a woman with a vagina. It follows that we have turned the biological fact of our bodies into a normative aspect of our existence.

This difference in value must be connected to women's oppression because the moment a value judgment is made in favor of one biological sex over the other, there is a hierarchy created of desirable humanness. Robert Jensen, professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, claims that it is inherently sexist to pick out the most desirable human characteristics such as strength, courage, and intelligence, and attribute

them to males exclusively, and conversely, to pick out the less admired human characteristics such as weak, illogical, hysterical, and neurotic, and attribute them to females exclusively. "To assign [admirable human traits] to a gender is misguided, and demeaning to the gender that is then assumed not to possess them to the same degree" (Jensen sec.3).

In actuality, there is no substantial reason to assume that human beings will either exhibit so-called masculine qualities or so-called feminine qualities. Real human beings are distinctive, and they possess multiple characteristics and traits that are unique to them. Not all human beings born with a penis are the same. Not all human beings born with a vagina are the same. "We are not born belonging to one or the other of two sexes" but instead "we are born into a physiological continuum on which there is no discrete and definite point that you can call 'male' and no discrete and definite point that you can call 'female'" (Stoltenberg 24). Part of what it means to be a man within a patriarchy is to be a human being afforded power and privilege within the social stratification. Part of what it means to be a woman is to be disadvantaged within this system.

To be clear, I do not believe that human beings are essentially masculine or essentially feminine because of the primary sex organs they are born with. I believe that we live in a patriarchal society in which we have created two very specific genders, and we value the male gender over the female gender. For the most part, we value men over women. To grow up as a woman in a misogynist society that denigrates femaleness,

femininity, and anything associated with womanhood is, to say the least, psychologically damaging and hurtful to women's self-esteem.

In conclusion, to attempt to free ourselves from patriarchy, it is necessary that we free ourselves from hatred. In other words, we must resist misogyny in our lived experiences as the first step towards liberation. For me, learning to love women, myself included, is an ongoing process. It is often a struggle. I constantly remind myself that feminism must be grounded in love. My resistance to misogyny has helped me foster and nourish relationships with women in a way that has changed my life. I no longer hate myself because I am a woman. I no longer waste my time hating or envying other women. Instead of worrying that another woman is more beautiful or more intelligent in comparison to me, I now worry whether the other woman truly knows how beautiful and intelligent she is in and of herself. I make it a point to lift women up because I love women as women, and I am a feminist.

Admittedly, there was a time when it was extremely difficult for me to refrain from shifting my previous feelings of hatred for women and of myself into a newfound hatred of men. When I felt strong, I was mad at all of the men who ever tried to make me feel inferior to them. I was mad at all the men who ever made me feel that I was nothing but a sexual object, or that I was not beautiful enough or sexy enough. I was angry about the way my own sexuality was influenced and controlled by patriarchy and misogyny. I was bitter because I no longer trusted male professors; I was

afraid to get too close to any man in my life. More specifically, I resented The Professor for the way he manipulated me into feeling special when in reality he saw me as less than a human being worthy of respect.

Although men may experience an enormous amount of privilege within patriarchy, I believe that men are suffering just as much as women are. Think of it like this: In a world in which women live in fear of rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence, what kind of human being is pleased through raping a woman? What kind of human being needs to seduce his students? What kind of human being feels that it is his right to beat his wife and children? Only a suffering, wounded, self-hating person can take pleasure in and find it acceptable to dominate and harm another human being. Only within a patriarchy do we accept the domination of women by men as the natural order of the universe.

I used to have this overwhelming desire to confront The Professor. I wanted him to know that he had damaged the core of my being in a way that devastated and changed my entire life. In an attempt to force him to understand these things I opened all of the wounds one last time and I wrote him a letter to express myself to him. It read:

Dear Professor,

Let me begin by explaining: You must know how much you have hurt me personally and all women theoretically. I realize now that men like you are predators; you feed off the weak. I am positive that where there is room for women to feel inferior, there will always be sexual predators. I am sure it is no surprise to you that I was helplessly insecure about my academic ability. I entered graduate school prepared to learn and eager to acquire the necessary tools to make this

world a better place. As a twenty-three year old woman just out of college, I moved across the country alone, away from everything I ever knew to pursue this degree. I was sure that I would fail. I was sure that I was not smart enough to be here.

Your attention comforted my insecurities because you made me feel that I had real academic potential. You assured me that I belonged here, even when I told you that other professors were putting their hands on me. Yet, it made me feel beautiful and mature to receive sexual attention from you, an older, educated man. Do not misunderstand me, I do not wish to plead innocence here because I went along with your game. Even still, I could not choose the rules or the playing ground because the ball was always in your court. When it went too far I had no power to stop it. I worked under you. You were my thesis advisor, my professor, and most importantly, my mentor. Just what, exactly, were you trying to teach me?

Please understand this if nothing else: as hurt as I am, I feel just as sad for you as I do for myself. You must be very miserable and lonely inside to abuse your power over a student to fulfill your sexual fantasies and fetishes. Why, given your education in liberation philosophy, coupled with your radical politics, do you lead a life of such hypocrisy? I sincerely hope that you are getting help for these gross indulgences—not just to save your job, but to save yourself. I hope you take this life lesson to remember who it is that you want to be, and how actually to be that person.

After I wrote the letter, I decided that I did not want to give it to him, nor did I want to confront him. It was never my job to be his teacher; he was supposed to be my teacher. Somehow writing the letter and exposing my feelings towards him changed my whole perspective. Now when I look back on my relationship with him I will always feel a bit of disgust and a lot of sadness, but more than anything I will feel empowered for finally having had the courage to do what was right.

I recognize now that his burdens in this life are nothing like my own, and for this I feel some compassion for him. I even feel love for him in the sense that he is human being who, like the rest of us, is struggling on some level to find happiness and peace. I no longer see him as the man who ruined my life, but more as a human being who feels alone and quite possibly unlovable. Why else would a beautiful human being, aside from a sociopath, need to abuse his power and manipulate others to feel important and desired? I realize that The Professor has his own demons to attend to, and whether or not he chooses to do so is not my responsibility.

So, for the most part, I let go of the feelings of urgency and confrontation, and with it I let him go. I finally learned the biggest lesson of all. My feelings of empowerment did not come from the fact that I came forward and accused the department of sexual harassment. In reality, my true empowerment comes from compassion and love because, when it comes down to it, I forgive The Professor. I understand now that the only way to end feelings of resentment is through forgiveness. Moreover, the willingness to forgive is a strong component in learning how to love. It is easy to foster bitterness and hatred, but it is courageous to experience love.

Every now and then I see some of the other graduate students from my department. Just the other day I saw a woman I knew from that time in my life and we started to talk and reflect on everything that had happened

since we met in our first year. I couldn't help but thank her again for supporting me when things were really tense in the department. She gave me a big hug and assured me that she would understand if I decided against continuing with my education.

"What do you mean?" I demanded an explanation from her. Why would she say this to me after all we went through?

"Because," she whispered softly, "you've lost so much." I could see that she felt bad for saying it.

"Sure," I replied, "but that's life. In the end I've gained a lot more than I lost and I am a better person for it." As soon as I said it I knew that it was true.

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