



**CORPUS**

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**CORPUS**

An HIV Prevention Publication

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"Radiant Spaces" appears courtesy of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* and Duke University Press

*Dedicated to Ana Oliveira, whose clarity about coalition and patient love for gay men open a road to social justice. Ana, we stand ready as your brothers and sisters in struggle and celebration.*

*Dedicado a Ana Oliveira, cuya claridad sobre coaliciones y el paciente amor para los hombres gay abre un camino hacia la justicia social. Ana, estamos preparados como tus hermanos y hermanas en la lucha y en la celebración.*



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## Foreword

Laura Templeton Horwitz

Ubuntu is a word common to the Bantu languages of Southern Africa, such as Zulu and Xhosa. Loosely translated it means community, but it is a word that defies translation into the English language. Perhaps a better way to express the meaning of Ubuntu is to say that we become a person through the people around us. Women and gay men have often held central spaces in each other's lives, and because of that centrality there has been much room for ubuntu. In other words, we have been part of the creation of each other. *Corpus 5* visits these creations through a lens colored by HIV and AIDS.

In so many ways, women and gay men have learned tremendous lessons from each other in creating activist voices. Cheryl Clarke reminds us how black feminism impacted black gay men's conversations about creating movements that better represented the context of their lives. This has taught us that we can and do have multiple identities, rooted in our experiences of and relationships to race, class inequality, sexuality, nationhood, gender, religion and various other threads of who we are. We have also learned to challenge heteronormativity and to explore the impact of patriarchy on all of our lives. Sarah Schulman and Jim Hubbard speak to the importance of writing our own stories and not believing the false, hegemonic representations of

## Pr logo

Laura Templeton Horwitz

*Ubuntu* es una palabra común en las lenguas bantúes del Sur de África, como la Zulu y la Xhosa. Si se traduce ligeramente, significa comunidad, pero es una palabra que desafía la traducción. Quizá la mejor manera para expresar el significado de *Ubuntu* es diciendo que nosotros nos convertimos en persona a través de las personas a nuestro alrededor. Los hombres gay y las mujeres a menudo han sostenido espacios centrales en la vida de cada uno, y por esa centralidad, existe mucho espacio para *Ubuntu*. En otras palabras, nosotros hemos sido parte de la creación de cada uno de nosotros. *Corpus 5* visita estas creaciones a través del lente coloreado por el VIH y SIDA.

Los hombres gay y las mujeres han aprendido tremendas lecciones entre ellos, en la creación de voces activistas. Cheryl Clarke nos recuerda cómo el feminismo negro impactó las conversaciones de los hombres negros gay sobre la creación de los movimientos que mejor representaron el contexto de sus vidas. Esto nos ha enseñado que nosotros podemos tener y tenemos identidades múltiples, arraigadas en nuestras experiencias y relaciones con la raza, la desigualdad de clases, la sexualidad, la condición de nación, el género, la religión y otras tantas hebras más de quienes somos. Nosotros también hemos aprendido a desafiar lo hetero-normativo y a explorar el impacto del patriarcado en nuestras vidas. Sarah Schulman y Jim Hubbard hablan sobre la importancia de escribir nuestras propias historias y no creer las presentaciones hegemónicas falsas de nuestras



our lives. Thus, the importance of film, literature, art, and song—indeed, our voices—being heard and privileged is a sentiment that reverberates throughout this issue of *Corpus*.

Relationships between women and gay men have also helped to forge new-ness to how we live together in this world and allow ourselves to grow and better love one another. We’ve learned to transform and transgress meanings of masculine and feminine. In “The War Between Tops and Bottoms” there emerges both a challenge and an affirmation of common constructions of gender and sexuality. Yet, inasmuch as we have entered these challenges together, we see how they do not always come easily. And sometimes, the challenges take an emotional toll. So, we also learn to be gentle with one another, as we see in the conversation between Juanita and Shah. What is clear is that we find solace in our relationships with each other and meaning in protecting each other’s bodies, protecting each other’s lives.

Yet, we continue to learn. Sometimes we stray from these understandings and explorations of each other. Gay men and women – lesbian and straight – also find ourselves pitted against one another. We polarize our worlds. When we make narrower our vision of the world, we fight for resources. We compete for whose “battle wounds” are worse within useless notions of oppression hierarchies. We blame each other for infections – the “DL” being one of the most egregious of these examples in which we blame

vidas. Por lo tanto, la importancia del cine, la literatura, el arte, la canción (de hecho, nuestras voces) que sean escuchadas y privilegiadas es un sentimiento que resuena a través de esta edición de *Corpus*.

Las relaciones entre los hombres gay y las mujeres también han ayudado a forjar una innovación en cómo nosotros vivimos juntos en este mundo y nos permitimos crecer y amarnos unos a otros lo mejor posible. Nosotros hemos aprendido a transformar y transgredir los significados de masculino y femenino. En “La Guerra Entre Activos y Pasivos”, emergen ambos, un reto y una afirmación de las construcciones comunes de género y sexualidad. Sin embargo, dado que hemos entrado juntos a estos desafíos, nosotros vemos que no siempre llegan fácilmente. Y a veces, los retos causan golpes emocionales. Así que también hemos aprendido a ser amables entre nosotros, como lo vemos en la conversación entre Juanita y Shah. Lo que es claro es que nosotros encontramos consuelo en nuestras relaciones entre nosotros, y encontramos significado al proteger nuestros cuerpos unos a otros, y proteger nuestras vidas.

Sin embargo, continuamos aprendiendo. A veces nos descarriamos de estos entendimientos y exploraciones de cada uno. Los hombres gay y las mujeres, lesbianas y héteros, también nos encontramos enfrentados el uno con el otro. Nosotros polarizamos nuestros mundos. Cuando hacemos que nuestra visión del mundo sea más estrecha, nosotros peleamos por recursos. Nosotros competimos para ver de quiénes son las peores “heridas de batalla” dentro de unas nociones inútiles de jerarquías de opresión. Nos culpamos entre nosotros por las infecciones; los hombres que tienen sexo con otros hombres que no se identifican como homosexuales o gay es uno de los

and criminalize men, particularly black men, and make women victims. We forget to explore ways in which we collude with constructions of gender, sexuality and race that silence and make invisible the men loving and being loved by other men. We scrutinize and objectify each other’s bodies, and we often forget those bodies are attached to lovers, sisters, brothers, friends. We also forget how to have dialogue about these issues – dialogues that are critical to *our* survival.

Still, we continue with each other. We continue to construct each other. There is richness to these relationships between women and gay men and what results is not only an expansion of each of us but also of the kinds of communities to which we want to belong. And at the nexus of all these connections, what begins to emerge are alternatives. Alternatives to how men and women relate to each other; alternatives to hegemonic representations of straight life and queer life; alternatives to polarized discourses about social justice and identity politics; alternatives to prescriptive and controlling versions of our sex lives; alternatives to silence and stigma. Most critically, there emerge alternatives to HIV prevention in which all of our lives matter. *Corpus* honors these alternatives and reminds us of how and what we create together. This issue of *Corpus* powerfully deepens the work of The Institute for Gay Men’s Health. We are especially grateful to Guest Editor, Alexandra Juhasz for her skilled vision in helping us realize so many marvelous alternatives.

ejemplos más crueles en el que culpamos y criminalizamos a los hombres, particularmente a los hombres negros, y hacemos que las mujeres sean las víctimas. Nosotros olvidamos explorar las maneras en las que colisionamos con las construcciones de género, sexualidad y raza que silencian y hacen invisible a los hombres que aman y son amados por otros hombres. Nosotros escudriñamos y convertimos en objetos los cuerpos de los otros, y a menudo olvidamos que esos cuerpos están unidos a amantes, hermanas, hermanos o amigos. Nosotros también olvidamos cómo tener diálogos sobre estos temas, diálogos que son críticos para *nuestra* sobre vivencia.

Sin embargo, continuamos juntos. Continuamos construyéndonos a nosotros. Existe una riqueza en estas relaciones entre los hombres gay y las mujeres; lo que resulta no es solamente una expansión de cada uno de nosotros, sino que también las clases de comunidades a las que queremos pertenecer. Y en los nexos de todas estas conexiones, las alternativas son las que empiezan a emerger. Alternativas de cómo los hombres y las mujeres se relacionan entre sí; alternativas a las representaciones hegemónicas de la vida hetero y la vida queer; alternativas para polarizar los discursos sobre justicia social y políticas de identidad; alternativas a versiones prescriptas y controladoras de nuestras vidas sexuales; alternativas al silencio y el estigma. Aún más crítico, emergen alternativas a la prevención del VIH en las cuales nuestras vidas importan. *Corpus* honra estas alternativas y nos recuerda cómo y qué creamos juntos. Esta edición de *Corpus* profundiza intensamente el trabajo del Instituto para la Salud de Hombres Gay. Estamos especialmente agradecidos con la editora invitada, Alexandra Juhasz, por su habilidosa visión para ayudarnos a entender tantas alternativas maravillosas.

## Introduction

Alexandra Juhasz

These are our responsibilities:

To remember, represent, interact, and to love.

All are evidenced in these pages.

Those of us who were there when the age of AIDS commenced are answerable for maintaining its histories of activism and the stories of its dead. In the recent past, our friends died quickly and painfully. In response, we roared and raged at the indifference and discrimination of those who might have helped. We claimed (self) representation to ensure that AIDS was visible, and political. We scorned secrecy and shame; we promoted open dialogue about sex, drugs, poverty, racism, homophobia and the body. And, of course, we met, and talked, and argued, and then represented this as well. There was never one AIDS, or one AIDS community, and at our best we drew the connections between us while we observed, respected and learned from our differences.

In these pages, there are several attempts to shoulder our duty to remember the many pasts of AIDS, to recount our losses as well as the sustaining associations that were drawn in a time of horror. We conjure up past interactions and representations that were inspired by

## Introducción

Alexandra Juhasz

Estas son nuestras responsabilidades:

Recordar, representar, interactuar y amar.

Todas están demostradas en estas páginas.

Aquellos de nosotros que estuvimos allí cuando comenzó la era del SIDA somos responsables de mantener sus historias de activismo y las historias de sus muertos. En el pasado reciente, nuestros amigos murieron rápida y dolorosamente. En respuesta, nosotros nos enfurecimos y vociferamos por la indiferencia y discriminación de los que pudieron haber ayudado. Nosotros afirmamos la (auto) representación para asegurar que el SIDA fuera visible y político. Nosotros despreciamos el secreto y la vergüenza; nosotros promovimos diálogos abiertos sobre el sexo, las drogas, la pobreza, el racismo, la homofobia y el cuerpo. Y, por supuesto, nosotros nos reunimos y hablamos, discutimos; y luego representábamos esto por igual. Nunca hubo un SIDA o una comunidad de SIDA, y, en las mejores situaciones, generamos conexiones entre nosotros mientras que observábamos, respetábamos y aprendíamos de nuestras diferencias.

En estas páginas hay bastantes intentos de echarle el hombro a nuestra responsabilidad de recordar muchos pasados del SIDA, para recontar nuestras pérdidas al igual que las asociaciones sostenibles que se construyeron en un tiempo de horror. Nosotros

slaughter but which led to productive relations across differences: between gay men and lesbians (displayed in this issue’s contributions by Sarah Schulman and Jim Hubbard, Cheryl Clarke and Colin Robinson, and Monica Majoli), prostitutes and transsexuals (Ananya Mukerjea), mothers and sons (Juanita Imram and Shah Mohammed, Ming Ma and Richard Fung), and a girl/boy and his teen-queen crush (Claudia Rodriguez). Given the focus of this issue—on women, gay men, and AIDS—marking such movements previously made possible by the forging of allegiances across gender and sexuality, may not be surprising. But the further travels that were inspired, across nation, race, and HIV status, are the more inspiring in how they model the tremendous fueling potential of queer love, and politicized anger.

And none of this is hard to do, but somehow we’ve forgotten how. Those of us who suffered AIDS’ early losses in the eighties and into the early nineties first found our love and anger to be rousing but later experienced our grief as private and debilitating. We retreated back to that place of secrecy, guilt, fear and sadness. We stopped communicating, interacting, representing. Changes in the national and local, political and institutional climate around AIDS, coupled with an escalation of media about all things all the time, altered the conditions that supported our earlier activity and interactivity. It seemed hard to be heard, difficult to be productive, and impossible to be supported. But there are consequences to forgetting, and these are as visible as we had once made AIDS out to be.

evocamos interacciones y representaciones pasadas que fueron inspiradas por la matanza, pero que condujeron a relaciones productivas entre las diferencias: entre hombres gay y lesbianas (mostrado en esta edición con la colaboración de Sarah Schulman y Jim Hubbard; Cheryl Clarke y Colin Robinson; y Monica Majoli), prostitutas y transexuales (Ananya Mukerjea), madres e hijos (Juanita Imran y Shah Mohammed; Ming Ma y Richard Fung), y la chica/chico y su enamoramiento en su reinado adolescente (Claudia Rodríguez). Dado el enfoque de esta edición (en mujeres, hombres gay y SIDA), no sería sorprendente la marcación de dichos movimientos hechos posibles previamente, cuando se forjaron las alianzas a través del género y la sexualidad. Pero los viajes más lejanos que fueron inspirados a través de la nación, la raza, y el estatus del VIH, son más inspiradores en la forma de cómo ellos modelan el tremendo potencial del amor *queer*, y del enojo politizado.

Y nada de esto es difícil de lograr, pero de alguna manera hemos olvidado cómo hacerlo. Aquellos de nosotros que sufrimos las pérdidas por el SIDA en los ochenta y a principio de los noventa, al inicio encontramos que nuestro amor y enojo nos animaban, pero más tarde experimentamos nuestro dolor como algo privado y debilitante. Nosotros regresamos a ese lugar del secreto, de culpabilidad, de miedo y tristeza. Nosotros dejamos de comunicarnos, relacionarnos y representar. Los cambios en el clima político e institucional a nivel nacional y local, alrededor del SIDA, acompañado con el incremento de los medios de comunicación

Thus, I am equally moved by the contributions in this issue that claim responsibility for showing us what AIDS looks like today, and imagining what might be its healthier future. When baby-dyke, Tiffany Baires, finds solace and inspiration in her photographic investigations of gay male sexual indulgence on the paths of parks, or poet, Jessica Holter, imagines a female character whose ex-husband's dalliances in homo-sex inspire her to her own wild queerness, I recognize the radical possibilities of present-day interfaces across divides. I hear these possibilities when Juanita Imram and her teenage son, Shah Mohammed, or the women in the fag-hag roundtable (conducted by Monica Nuño), candidly converse about how frank discussion of sexual practices can save the people we love. I see these possibilities when Rheim Alkadhi and Emily Roysdon (in conversation with Jean Carlomusto and David Wojnarowicz) salvage photographic traces of other (men's) earlier subjugation to project a future of polymorphous, gender-complex pleasure. All of these words and images, answerable to past, present, and future, model new forms of communication that are deeply nourishing for me: across time, as well as over and between gender, race, and ethnic identity.

*Corpus* is a rare and glorious holdover that looks back to earlier tactics and practices of AIDS art and activism from that earlier time—for many of us our youth—when we took our responsibility seriously and collectively. *Corpus* survives in a landscape of didactic AIDS edutainment-of-

sobre todo y a toda hora, alteraron las condiciones que apoyaron nuestra actividad e interactividad al inicio. Parecía difícil ser escuchado, difícil ser productivo e imposible ser apoyado. Pero hay consecuencias por olvidar, y éstas son tan visibles como alguna vez hicimos que fuera el SIDA.

Igualmente estoy conmovida por las contribuciones en este número que reafirma la responsabilidad de mostrarnos cómo se ve el SIDA en la actualidad, e imaginar cuál podría ser su futuro más saludable. Cuando la nena machorrita Tiffany Bairdes encuentra consuelo e inspiración en su investigación fotográfica en las satisfacciones sexuales de los hombres gay en las veredas de los parques, o la poeta, Jessica Holter, que imagina un personaje femenino cuyo coqueteo de su ex esposo con el sexo homo la inspira hacia su propio lado de *queerness* salvaje, yo reconozco las posibilidades radicales de las actuales inter-fases entre las divisiones. Escucho estas posibilidades cuando Juanita Imran y su hijo adolescente Shah Mohammed, o cuando las mujeres en la mesa redonda sobre maricomadres (conducida por Mónica Nuño), candidamente conversan sobre cómo las conversaciones francas sobre las prácticas sexuales pueden salvar a la gente que amamos. Yo veo estas posibilidades cuando Rheim Alkadhi y Emily Roysdon (en conversación con Jean Carlomusto y David Wojnarowicz) rescatan vestigios fotográficos de otras subyugaciones tempranas (de hombres) para proteger un futuro de placer del género complejo y polimorfo. Todas estas palabras e imágenes responsables por el pasado, presente y futuro modelan nuevas formas de comunicación que me alimentan profundamente: a través del tiempo, así como sobre y entre género, raza e identidad étnica.

displacement: representing as if another's burden, as if absent or concluded. *Corpus V* models how we might better represent today. Evidenced in this body of work is a politics of AIDS representation that is messy, interactive, and communal, a representation that dares to associate the places, people, and times that aren't supposed to go together. I am so thankful to the participants for their will to memory, fantasy and passion. Their work reminds me that with the proper support (particularly that of series coordinator, Pato Hebert, and the AIDS organizations that support him, APLA and GMHC), and an expansive vision, we can shoulder our responsibilities to continue to make the difficult connections that are life-affirming in the face of death, depravation, and disavowal and in the name of pleasure, love, and complex community.

Of course, this issue of *Corpus* is *for Jim*. For that one gay man, James Robert Lamb (he seems only a boy to me now), who was lost to AIDS, leaving this one woman without him, and forever required to remember him, make it up to him, live, struggle and work on for him.

But, of course, he died in 1993. No longer of this world, he can be neither pushed nor comforted by this incredible and rowdy collection of words and images that link women and gay men together, as Jim and I once were and still may be, across time, gender, activism, desire, death and AIDS. Thus, I know this issue of *Corpus* is, in fact, *for me*: because I could never articulate by myself the range and depth of that love and loss. And it must also be *for us and you*:

*Corpus* es un retenedor poco común y glorioso que mira al pasado, a las tácticas y prácticas iniciales del arte del SIDA y al activismo de las épocas iniciales (para muchos de nosotros nuestra juventud), cuando tomamos nuestra responsabilidad seria y colectivamente. *Corpus* sobrevive en un terreno didáctico, de desplazamiento, de educación entretenida sobre el SIDA: representando como si la carga fuera del otro, como si estuviera ausente o concluido. *Corpus V* modela cómo se podría representar mejor la actualidad. En este trabajo de representación de políticas del SIDA, está probado que son complicadas, interactivas y comunales; una representación que se atreve a asociar los lugares, las personas y los tiempos que supuestamente no van juntos. Estoy muy agradecida con los participantes, por su voluntad de recordar, por su fantasía y por su pasión. Su trabajo me recuerda que con el apoyo apropiado (particularmente del coordinador de las series, Pato Hebert, y las organizaciones de SIDA que lo apoyan a él, APLA y GMHC), y con una visión expansiva, podemos fortalecer nuestras responsabilidades para continuar haciendo las difíciles conexiones que afirman la vida ante la muerte, la privación y el repudio; y en el nombre del placer, el amor y la complejidad de la comunidad.

Por supuesto que esta edición de *Corpus es para Jim*. Para ese hombre gay, James Robert Lamb (ahora él solamente me parece un chico), que se lo llevó el SIDA, dejando a esta mujer sin él, y que requiere que lo recuerde para siempre, y que tiene que cumplirle, vivir, luchar y trabajar por él.



because mainstream and queer culture provides only the most paltry renditions of why we women need gay men, how you teach and touch us, where you trouble and take us. You need us, too. And, of course, it is *for them*: all of those men (and women) who we loved and lost, the many and various Jims who died of AIDS but still haunt and frame the very texture of the lives we continue to live without them: in the friends and art we make, the places we visit and settle, the sex we imagine and enjoy, the memories we savor, and the knowledge of self, other and better world we pursue in their memory. You can see what we have done without and for them in these pages.

Pero claro, él murió en 1993. Ya no es parte de este mundo; él ya no puede ser empujado ni consolado por esta increíble y pendenciera colección de palabras e imágenes que vinculan a mujeres y a hombres gay juntos, así como Jim y yo lo fuimos, y tal vez sigamos siendo, a través del tiempo, género, activismo, deseo, muerte y SIDA. Por lo tanto, yo sé que este número de *Corpus* es, en realidad, *para mí*: porque yo sola nunca podría articular la amplitud y profundidad de ese amor y pérdida. Y también debe ser *para nosotros y para ti*: porque la cultura dominante y *queer* solamente provee las interpretaciones más irrisorias del porqué nosotras, las mujeres, necesitamos a los hombres gay, cómo nos enseñan y nos tocan, donde viajan y nos llevan. Ustedes también nos necesitan. Y por supuesto, es *para ellos*: todos esos hombres (y mujeres) que amamos y perdimos, los muchos y varios Jims que murieron de SIDA pero que todavía rondan y enmarcan la propia textura de nuestras vidas que continuamos viviendo sin ellos: en los amigos y arte que hacemos, los lugares que visitamos y nos quedamos, el sexo que nos imaginamos y disfrutamos, las memorias que saboreamos, y el conocimiento de uno mismo, de otro y de un mejor mundo que buscamos en sus memorias. Ustedes pueden ver en estas páginas lo que hemos hecho sin ellos y por ellos.







FAMED ARAB TG AND HER BI-RACIAL CHILDREN

These pictured here, is supposed to be something different of any, else, seen, and better things for transgressive intervention.



YOUNG ARAB PLEASURE SEEKERS WHO REFUSE OBEDIENCE TO SOCIAL DECREE

Young people sometimes symbolizing rebellion to HIV, they use play, conformity to each other's attitudes on the day commemorating the end of AID.



ARAB GIRLS IN GRADUATION GOWNS AWAIT THEIR DIPLOMAS.

Scholarly institutions in arid lands have prompted these young women to carry their new bodily knowledge in complex portable devices.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Q. She has trained the eyes of dozens of patients for nearly a decade. She is a love-labourer, nearly a housewife and awarded three Nobel Prizes.



## The Fag Whisperers

Monica Nu o

*Fag hag. Flame dame. Fruit fly. Fag whisperer (Margaret Cho's newest term). Whichever term you choose, they all mean women – gay or straight – who enjoy the company of gay men. I've been wearing the hat proudly for over 8 years and I wanted to know about the experiences of other women like me. So I invited four fag whisperers to my home, opened a bottle of wine, turned on the tape recorder and let them talk. Below is the conversation that ensued between Aracelli, a straight, married high school teacher, Joy, a bisexual government employee, Lena, a straight, human resources manager, Delmy, a straight high school teacher, and me, a straight employee for an AIDS service organization.*

**Lena:** I live in West Hollywood and never before have I felt so welcome. It wasn't like I just started hanging out with gay men when I moved to the neighborhood; I'd had gay friends before. But when I'm in West Hollywood, there's something about my brown skin and my chest that these boys adore. I feel like a mini celebrity. You're not looking at a guy thinking "I wonder what he thinks about me?" You just go and hang out at a club or a bar and you just have a good ole time.

**Delmy:** My brother is the gay man in my life. When we were roommates his friends were at my place all the time. Or when we lived at home, I would go to the clubs all the time. And I totally agree with what you were saying about that feeling of going to the clubs with them. It's like a freedom to be yourself and you feel like a celebrity. They say, "you're so beautiful."

**L:** And they're not coming from a real bad, funky place.

**D:** Yeah, you're not threatened by it. It feels good. "Those heels are fierce girl!"

**ALL:** Yeah [laughing]

**D:** And other women won't do that. That doesn't happen in a group of women like it does with gay men. It's a different feeling.

**Joy:** I have two brothers that are gay and I'm very close to both of them. But then, you know, I've worked in HIV/AIDS since I was 18. So, I've been surrounded by gay men. I'm also bisexual, so the whole idea of the gay, lesbian, bisexual community, it wasn't just being around gay men.

## Maricomadres susurradoras

Mónica Nu o

*Maricomadres (mujeres que les gusta tener amigos homosexuales). Damas cariñosas. "Moscas". Maricomadres susurradoras (el término más reciente de Margaret Cho). Cualquier término que escojas, todos quieren decir mujeres, gay o hetero, que les agrada la compañía de hombres gay. Yo he llevado puesto ese sombrero con orgullo durante los últimos 8 años y quería saber sobre las experiencias de otras mujeres como yo. Así que invité a cuatro Maricomadres susurradoras a mi casa, abrimos una botella de vino, encendimos la grabadora y las dejé hablar. A continuación está la conversación que surgió entre Aracelli, una maestra heterosexual de bachillerato; Joy, una empleada estatal bisexual; Lena, una mujer hetero que trabaja en recursos humanos; Delmy, una maestra heterosexual de bachillerato, y yo, una empleada hetero de una organización de servicios para el SIDA.*

**Lena:** Yo vivo en West Hollywood y nunca antes me había sentido tan bienvenida. No es que comencé a pasar tiempo con hombres gay cuando me mudé al vecindario; tenía amigos gay antes de mudarme. Pero cuando estoy en West Hollywood, hay algo de mi piel morena y mi pecho que estos chicos adoran. Me siento como una mini celebridad. Tú no miras a un hombre pensando, "¿qué estará pensando de mí?" Solamente vas, paras un rato en un club o bar y te la pasas padre.

**Delmy:** Mi hermano es el hombre gay en mi vida. Cuando éramos compañeros de apartamento, sus amigos pasaban allí todo el tiempo. O cuando vivíamos en casa yo iba a los clubes todo el tiempo. Y yo estoy totalmente de acuerdo con lo que estabas diciendo sobre ese sentimiento de ir a los clubes con ellos. Es como algo liberador, ser tú misma y sentirte como una celebridad. Ellos dicen, "tú eres muy hermosa."

**L:** Y ellos no vienen de ningún lugar que es realmente malo o raro.

**D:** Cierto, no te sientes amenazada por eso. Se siente bien. "Esos tacones están perros".

**Todas:** Cierto (risas)

**D:** Y otras mujeres no hacen eso. Eso no pasa en un grupo de mujeres, como pasa con los hombres gay. Es un sentimiento diferente.



**Aracelli:** I met Ray in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, he wasn't out yet. But now in retrospect, I think, "Oh my God, he was so gay." We were always in classes together and somehow we'd always end up next to each other and we'd pass notes and just talk the whole time. I remember how he told me, "I told my grandma that I'm gay." And I was like, "Oh you are? Oh okay." I'm glad that he felt good saying it. This was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. I'm very protective of my sisters and felt the same way with him. Every guy that I've ever dated, I have to make that clear to him from the beginning—it's not "maybe Ray's going to be around," he's around and he's a part of my life.

**J:** Yeah, and if you don't accept him then you're out.

**A:** And it's funny because, if you knew the background of my dad, you'd think he'd be more macho about the whole thing. But no, with my dad we would always joke, "My dad probably has a crush on you" or "my dad loves Ray." My Dad started telling us stories about how two of his close friends in high school were gay and they were really nice to him but he didn't say this until we shared stories about Ray. It was really safe in high school. When, eventually, a few of the guys started coming out of the closet all these other guys started coming out.

**Joy:** Yo tengo dos hermanos que son gay y somos bastante apegados. Pero también, sabes, yo he trabajado en VIH/SIDA desde que tenía 18 años. Así que he estado rodeada por hombres gay. También soy bisexual, así que la idea de la comunidad gay, lésbica, bisexual no era una cosa sólo de estar alrededor de hombres gay.

**Aracelli:** Yo conocí a Ray en noveno grado, todavía no salía del closet. Pero ahora, en retrospectiva, pienso, "Dios mío, él era bien gay". Nosotros siempre estábamos en todas las clases juntos, y de alguna manera siempre terminábamos juntos, y nos pasábamos notas y hablamos todo el tiempo. Recuerdo cómo me lo dijo: "le dije a mi abuela que soy gay". Y yo le dije, "Ah, ¿lo eres? Ah, está bien". Me alegra que él se haya sentido bien al decirlo. Esto pasó en décimo grado. Yo soy muy protectora de mis hermanas y siento lo mismo con él. A cada tipo con el que he salido se lo he tenido que aclarar desde el principio: No es: "Ray tal vez vaya a estar con nosotros"; él está con nosotros y es parte de mi vida.

**J:** Cierto, y si no lo aceptas, te quedas fuera.

**A:** Y es chistoso porque si tú supieras el historial de mi papá, pensarías que él sería más macho con todo esto. Pero no, siempre

**D:** He set the trend. Ray made it okay for people to come out.

**Monica:** What about in your personal life? I'm obviously a big woman and I'd go to a straight club and I'd feel bad all the time. I'd see the guys checking out all the skinny girls ... it's such a "meat market." It was totally opposite when I started going to gay clubs. Not only did I feel good, but I was always guaranteed a good time – always.

**L:** Well it's not a meat market for you.

**M:** My self-esteem has grown so much. They're looking at your outfit and saying, "You look so good." You never get that from your girlfriends. You never get that from other guy friends. All of a sudden I wanted to make sure I looked good because the gay men were going to be looking.



Photo courtesy of Monica Nu o

hacíamos bromas con mi papá: "Mi papá quizá está enamorado de ti" o "mi papá ama a Ray". Mi papá empezó a contarnos historias de cómo dos de sus amigos más cercanos en el bachillerato eran gay y que eran muy simpáticos con él, pero no empezó a contar esto hasta que nosotros empezamos a contar historias de Ray. Era bastante seguro en el bachillerato. Con el tiempo, cuando algunos pocos chicos empezaron a salir del closet, los demás empezaron a salir.

**D:** Él estableció la moda. Ray hizo que estuviera bien que la gente saliera.

**Mónica:** ¿Qué pasa en sus vidas personales? Es obvio que soy una mujer grande y voy a los clubes heteros y me siento mal todo el tiempo. Yo veo a estos tipos echándole el ojo a todas las mujeres delgadas... es una "carnicería". Fue totalmente opuesto cuando empecé a ir a bares gay. No solamente me sentía bien, sino que pasar un buen rato siempre estaba garantizado, siempre.

**L:** Bueno, no es una carnicería para ti.

**M:** Mi auto estima ha aumentado bastante. Ellos miran tu traje y te dicen, "Tú te ves espectacular". Tú nunca oyes eso de tus amigas. Tú nunca oyes eso de tus amigos. De repente yo quería asegurarme de verme bien porque los hombres gay iban a estar mirándome.

**J:** I haven't had a great relationship with my father, who's straight, or my oldest brother, who's straight. It's basically the gay men in my family, the gay men who are my friends, the gay men who I've worked with – that's who I've found the male role model in. Once, I was at Mickey's and I was having a good time with my gay male friends, just hanging out. This guy, I think he was just so bitter, he looked at me and he said, "Hag!" as I passed by, and he said it so mean ... I didn't think about it, but if I would have, I would have just smacked that motherfucker right in the face.

**A:** See, if he would have said that to me, I would have said, "Thank you." I don't know why people think that's a bad thing.

**L:** I guess it's because when you think of "hag" you think of a witch – an ugly person that's only hanging around homosexuals because they can't hang around straight men. What really frightens me out there is the number of men getting infected. A good friend of mine is positive. I look at him and it breaks my heart. My gay friends have told me of times that they should have protected themselves. And I say, "Oh my God, please. It's too scary for you to be out there not protecting yourself." I sit there as their friend and say, "Please promise me, you'll live whatever lifestyle you want, just protect yourself." You don't have to be gay or straight to

**J:** Yo no he tenido una magnífica relación con mi padre, que es hetero, o mi hermano mayor, que es hétero. Básicamente son los hombres gay en mi familia, los hombres gay que son mis amigos, los hombres gay con los que he trabajado; es en ellos en los que he encontrado el modelo masculino.

**J:** Una vez estaba en Mickey's y la estaba pasando muy padre con mis amigos gay, simplemente pasando un rato. Este tipo, creo que estaba amargado, me miró y me dijo, "maricomadre", al momento que pasé por donde él estaba, y lo dijo de una manera mal intencionada... Yo no pensé sobre eso, pero si lo hubiera hecho, le hubiera dado un puñetazo en la cara al hijo de puta.

**A:** Mira, si él me hubiera dicho eso a mí, yo le hubiera dicho: "Gracias". No sé porqué la gente piensa que eso es una cosa mala.

**L:** Supongo que es porque cuando tú piensas en "maricomadre", una persona fea que solamente se la pasa con homosexuales porque no pueden pasar tiempo con hombres heterosexuales. Lo que sí me asusta es el número de hombres que se están infectando por allí. Uno de mis buenos amigos es positivo. Lo miro y me rompe el corazón. Mis amigos gay me cuentan de las veces en que deberían haber usado protección. Y yo digo, "Dios mío, por favor. Da miedo andar allá afuera sin protegerte". Me siento con ellos y como su amiga les digo, "Por favor, prométanme que van a vivir cualquier tipo de

worry about that but I've noticed that in the gay community, that sort of layer or wall that you have to get through to have sex – it's not the same wall that you encounter in the straight world.

**J:** I've been out of the HIV/AIDS field for about 4 years; do you know the statistics in terms of the age-range for men? I know it's the youth that are getting more infected but is it still happening for gay men of color?

**M:** African American is the most followed by Latinos.

**L:** Is it the "down low"?

**M:** That's both in African American and Latino communities.

**J:** What is that?

**M:** The men who are on the "down low" are supposedly straight people but they engage in homosexual activities.

**M:** The big crisis right now is crystal meth. That's scary because they're seeing 50% of all new infections are due to crystal meth use.

**D:** My brother does a lot of research and he does a lot of reading. He says that a lot of gay guys have low self-esteem and they will purposefully have sex without protection.

vida que quieran, pero que se van a proteger". Tú no tienes que ser gay o hetero para preocuparte por eso, pero me he dado cuenta de que en la comunidad gay, el tipo de capa o pared que tienes que pasar para tener sexo, no es la misma pared que tú encuentras en el mundo hetero.

**J:** Yo dejé de trabajar en VIH/SIDA hace 4 años; ¿Saben cuáles son las estadísticas en términos del rango de edades para los hombres? Yo sé que los jóvenes son los que se están infectando más, pero todavía está pasándole a los hombre gay de color?

**M:** Los afro-americanos son los más afectados, seguidos por los latinos.

**L:** ¿Esos son los hombres que tienen sexo con hombres pero no se consideran gay?

**M:** Eso es para ambas comunidades, afro-americana y latina.

**J:** ¿Qué es eso?

**M:** Los hombres que supuestamente son heterosexuales pero que se involucran en actividades homosexuales.

**M:** La crisis más grande por ahora es la metanfetamina cristal. Da miedo porque están viendo que el 50% de las nuevas infecciones están relacionadas al uso de metanfetamina cristal.

- D:** Yeah, it's the "what am I living for" kind of attitude, the "who cares?"
- J:** I was at a training a few weeks ago and there were two outreach workers from the STD department. They were saying that they met two Latino teenage boys that intentionally got infected because of the public assistance that they'll get and because they'll see guys who are HIV positive who've had it for 20 years and are all big and buff guys. And they think that because of the meds and everything, they should be fine – they're not going to die. So they went ahead and got infected. They got the benefits, the public assistance, and it was that mentality of being kind of cool...
- M:** Your HIV-positive friend or the conversations that you have with your other friends about using protection, how has that affected you in your own relationships?
- L:** If I could jump into a sort of protective shield or if I could just paint it on, I would. It's scary because I do have friends that have, not AIDS, but other things. It's just that easy. It's made me fearful. It's made me very cautious. I think ten times longer.
- M:** And when you talk to your other friends who aren't infected about always protecting themselves, how do they react? Do they think that you're being protective and caring or being judgmental? Are they honest with

- D:** Mi hermano hace mucha investigación y lee mucho. El dice que muchos de los hombres gay tienen baja auto estima y que a propósito tienen sexo sin protección.
- D:** Sí, ... la actitud de "¿para que estoy viviendo? y ¿a quién le importa?"
- J:** Yo participé en una capacitación hace dos semanas y allí estaban dos trabajadores de alcance comunitario del departamento de ETS. Ellos dijeron que conocieron a dos adolescentes latinos que intencionalmente se infectaron porque así recibirían asistencia pública y porque ven a hombres que son VIH positivos que lo han tenido durante 20 años y son grandes y musculosos. Y ellos creen que por cuestión de la medicina y todo, que ellos estarán bien, que ellos no van a morir. Así que se infectaron, obtuvieron los beneficios, la asistencia pública; era esa mentalidad de que todo está padre...
- M:** Tu amigo VIH positivo, o las conversaciones que has tenido con tus amigos sobre el uso de protección, ¿cómo te ha afectado a ti en tus propias relaciones?
- L:** Si yo pudiera conseguir un escudo protector o si pudiera pintarlo, lo haría. Da miedo porque tengo amigos que tienen, no SIDA, pero sí otras cosas. Es así de fácil. Me ha hecho temerosa. Me ha hecho muy cautelosa. Yo pienso diez veces más.
- M:** Y cuando hablas con tus otros amigos que no están infectados sobre usar protección siempre, ¿cómo reaccionan? ¿Ellos piensan que eres

you about the type of sex that they're having and whether they're using protection or not?

- L:** I would hope so. The one that I'm most fearful of, because I believe he has a problem with meth, I tell him all the time, "Please! I don't want to wake up one day and have to hear your voice telling me that you've contracted AIDS." He's in that age group, he's a meth user, he's highly functional but he's out there on Santa Monica Blvd having a good ole time because he's 23 and invincible. I always ask if he used protection because he's not supposed to die before I do. And he's like, "Yeah yeah yeah." So I don't know if he's doing that to blow me off, but he never says, "stop nagging me." But when you're in the middle of that situation, do you make the right decision?
- D:** I think what's affected me is what you brought up earlier, the MSM, the men having sex with men who don't consider themselves gay or bisexual.
- L:** That's scary
- M:** The first time I went to Tempo, I saw the men, the vaqueros, the big-time macho men, and they're there doing quebraditas with each other.
- L:** What are vaqueros?

protectora y que te importan o que los estás juzgando? ¿Son sinceros contigo sobre el tipo de sexo que están teniendo y si usan protección o no?

- L:** Yo espero que sí. Al que me da más miedo, porque creo que él usa metanfetamina, le digo: "Por favor, no quiero despertarme un día y escuchar tu voz diciendo que has contraído el SIDA". El está en ese grupo de edad, él usa metanfetamina, él es muy funcional, pero anda allá afuera, en el Boulevard Santa Mónica, pasando un tiempo muy padre porque tiene 23 años y es invencible. Yo siempre le pregunto si él usa protección porque él no está supuesto a morir antes que yo. Y el dice, "sí, sí, sí". Así que no sé si lo dice solamente para callarme, pero él nunca me dice, "deja de joder". Pero cuando estás metido en la situación, ¿tomas la decisión correcta?
- D:** Yo pienso que lo que más me afecta a mí es lo que tú dijiste anteriormente, que los HSH, los hombres que tienen sexo con otros hombres que no se consideran asimismo gay o bisexuales.
- L:** Eso da miedo.
- M:** La primera vez que fui a Tempo, vi a los hombres, los vaqueros, los grandes machos, y allí estaban, haciendo sus quebraditas entre ellos.
- L:** ¿Qué son vaqueros?



- M:** They're the Mexican cowboys and they're dancing the cowboy dance, which is quebraditas; it's a very provocative dance. This club has all these men dancing together with the hats and the tight white jeans – it's a trip. Those are always the stereotypical macho men to me that would never be gay.
- D:** But I think that's why they dress that way, my brother's done it: he's this butch trying to look buff guy. Because that's what attracts other guys to him – a lot of guys don't go for the guys who are very feminine because then you go for a woman.
- M:** That scares me. I'm single and dating.
- L:** Yeah because you bring that home to the family. So you sit there and you believe you're in this monogamous relationship but they're going out doing all kinds of whatever with whomever and they're not using protection.
- A:** And gay friends of ours have said about going to Tempo, "I hooked up with some guy. He told me he has a wife and kids."
- J:** But that's a turn-on dynamic. They'll say that they're straight because it's just this fantasy within the gay community, "he's straight and he's married. Oh what a turn-on. It's fucking hot! I want to see if I can get him."

Photo courtesy of Joy Alunit

- M:** Son los vaqueros mexicanos que bailan el baile vaquero, que se llama quebraditas; es una danza muy provocadora. Este club tiene a todos estos hombres bailando juntos, con sombreros y sus jeans apretados; es increíble. Para mí esos son los estereotipos de hombres machos que nunca serían gay.
- D:** Pero yo creo que por eso es que se visten de esa manera. Mi hermano lo ha hecho. El es de este tipo masculino tratando de aparentar ser fortachón. Porque eso hace que él sea atractivo para otros tipos. Muchos tipos no van tras otros que son muy femeninos porque para eso van por mujeres.
- M:** Eso me asusta. Estoy soltera y salgo a citas.
- L:** Sí, porque tú traes eso a la familia. Tú estás allí, creyendo que estás en una relación monógama, pero ellos salen y andan haciendo cualquier tipo de cosas con quien sea y no están usando protección.



- A:** My husband and I started dating seven years ago and we've been married for a year and I remember asking him if he was gay. He said no. But I wanted to know because this guy didn't try to kiss me, he didn't try to hold my hand, and it had been a few dates. And when guys whistle at him, it doesn't bother him. So, at first, I remember thinking that maybe he is gay but he kept assuring me that he wasn't.
- J:** That's the type of straight man that I really love. They're comfortable with themselves and they're cool hanging out with gay men.
- A:** What you said about feeling comfortable about having sex or about protection, I remember Ray and I having that conversation. What happens to a lot of women or gay men, you have low self-esteem, so what's going to make you tell him to put on a condom when you're not empowered? So who cares if you have a condom?
- L:** They might ask, "Do you think I have something?"
- A:** I remember thinking that it's about my life and my health and I care about it – I want to live. I think that sometimes it's a struggle with some guys who are still in the closet or some who don't feel comfortable or empowered to do that because of Catholic guilt – that's very common in the Latino community.

- A:** Y nuestros amigos gay nos han dicho cuando van a Tempo: "Ligué con un tipo. El me dijo que tenía esposa e hijos".
- J:** Pero eso es una dinámica de excitación. Todos ellos van a decir que son heteros porque es una fantasía en la comunidad gay, "él es hetero y está casado. Ah, que excitante. Es súper caliente. Quiero ver si lo puedo tener".
- A:** Mi esposo y yo empezamos a salir desde hace siete años y hemos estado casados por un año y recuerdo haberle preguntado si él era gay. El dijo que no. Pero yo quería saber porque este tipo no había tratado de besarme, no había tratado de cogerme la mano, y ya habíamos salido en un par de citas. Y cuando otros tipos le chiflan, no le molesta. Así que, al principio recuerdo que pensé de que tal vez él era gay, pero seguía asegurándome de que no lo era.
- J:** Ese es el tipo de hombre hetero que verdaderamente me encanta. Ellos se sienten cómodos consigo mismo y se sienten bien al pasar tiempo con hombres gay.
- A:** Lo que tú dijiste sobre sentirse cómoda sobre tener sexo y sobre protección, recuerdo que Ray y yo tuvimos esa conversación. Lo que pasa con muchas mujeres y hombres gay es que tienen una auto-estima baja, así que, ¿qué es lo que va a hacer que tú le digas que se

**J:** I think that behavioral change is really hard. The fact that you're in the heat of the passion, you want to have sex. It's hard, but you make that choice because at the end of the day, it's about your life and you want to take care of yourself.

**A:** But I think that when drugs and alcohol are involved...

**J:** The choices that you make are all jumbled.

**M:** One of the things that has been so important for me about being around gay men is learning not to be so judgmental. I think that so many gay men are attracted to me because they'll say something about how they hooked up with somebody or they didn't use condoms and I'll say, "Okay, you didn't protect yourself and it was wrong. So what are you going to do about the next time? How are you going to prevent that behavior?" And that in turn has helped me because I feel more empowered and better about myself and feeling like those conversations are mutual and I can have them openly with a gay man.

**J:** Giving head, mybrother taught me, and the best sexual moves that I've done, I've learned from my gay male friends.

**A:** I think I can share with Ray anything sexual and he won't judge me. I love my sisters

ponga un condón cuando tú no estás empoderada? ¿Así que a quién le importa si tienes un condón?

**L:** Ellos pueden preguntar: "¿Piensas que tengo algo?"

**A:** Yo recuerdo haber pensado sobre mi vida y mi salud y que me importaba. Yo quiero vivir. Yo pienso que algunas veces es una lucha para los hombres que todavía están en el closet o para algunos que no se sienten cómodos o empoderados para hacerlo por la culpa católica. Eso es bastante común en la comunidad latina.

**J:** Yo pienso que el cambio de conducta es verdaderamente difícil. El hecho de que están en el momento de la pasión, tú quieres tener sexo. Es difícil, pero tú tomas esa decisión porque al final de cuentas se trata de tu vida y tú quieres cuidarte a ti mismo.

**A:** Pero yo creo que cuando las drogas y el licor están involucrados...

**J:** Las opciones que tomas son un embrollo.

**M:** Una de las cosas que ha sido muy importante para mí al estar con hombres gay, es haber aprendido a no ser tan prejuiciosa. Yo pienso que atraigo a muchos hombres gay porque ellos me dicen cosas sobre cómo ligaron con alguien o que ellos no usaron

but sometimes they say they'd rather not know, so I won't tell them and I'll share it with him.

**L:** Is that because there's an overwhelming acceptance of bad behavior amongst the gay community?

**M:** I don't think it's bad behavior.

**L:** Not bad behavior but I mean there's "nice" and "not so nice." There are steady relationships and then there are once a week.

**M:** I'm not trying to put down what you're saying but that's a judgmental point of view because you're categorizing what's right and what's wrong.

**L:** Why couldn't we take this information to a straight male friend or to a straight girlfriend?

**A:** I have female friends that are very open, but it's different because they're still women so if you're having sex with a guy...

**D:** You both don't know ... it's like the blind leading the blind.

**A:** It also made me more comfortable to tell my husband what I like and don't like – and it's okay for him to tell me if it's not doing it for him so we can do something different.

condones y yo les digo, "Bueno, tú no te protegiste y está mal. Así que, ¿qué vas a hacer la próxima vez? ¿Cómo vas a prevenir ese comportamiento?" Y al mismo tiempo eso me ha ayudado porque me hace sentir más empoderada y mejor de mi misma, y siento que esas conversaciones son mutuas y las puedo tener abiertamente con un hombre gay.

**J:** Mi hermano me informó sobre cómo hacer sexo oral, y los mejores movimientos sexuales que jamás he hecho los aprendí de mis amigos gay.

**A:** Yo pienso que puedo compartir con Ray cualquier cosa sexual y él no va a juzgarme. Yo adoro a mis hermanas pero a veces dicen que prefieren no saber, así que no les voy a decir y lo voy a compartir con él.

**L:** ¿Eso pasa porque existe una inmensa aceptación del mal comportamiento entre la comunidad gay?

**M:** Yo no creo que sea mal comportamiento.

**L:** No mal comportamiento, pero digo que hay "bueno" y "no tan bueno". Existen relaciones estables y a la vez existen las de una por semana.

**M:** No estoy tratando con desdén lo que estás diciendo, pero ese es un punto de vista prejuicioso porque tú estás caracterizando lo que está bien y lo que está mal.

- L:** But why is it that you feel more comfortable with gay men versus women?
- M:** There's this girl that I know, she works around gay people and she was born and raised here. And one day we were having this conversation and somebody said something about the three holes that women have "down there." And she said, "the three holes?" And we all responded, "yeah, women have three holes." She said that she only had two. And I kept telling her that she has three. She insisted that there was something wrong with her because she only has two. I literally had to go on the internet and pull up a picture of the female reproductive system and said, "One, two, three." And it wasn't until then that she believed me.
- A:** Didn't she learn that in high school?
- M:** That's what I'm saying – born and raised here, gone through school and everything – how do you not know that about yourself? So with someone who doesn't know that about herself, much less explored her own body, how can you have that kind of conversation with her? She'd tell me that she wouldn't enjoy sex; she'd just have it to please her boyfriend – she loved her boyfriend so much that she wanted him to have pleasure but not because she was feeling anything.

- L:** ¿Por qué será que nosotros no podemos llevar esta información a un amigo hetero o a una amiga hetero?
- A:** Yo tengo amigas que son muy abiertas, pero es diferente porque ellas siguen siendo mujeres, así que si están teniendo sexo con un tipo...
- D:** Ninguna de las dos sabe... es como que un ciego guíe a otro ciego.
- A:** También me hizo sentir más cómoda al poder decirle a mi esposo lo que me gustaba y lo que no me gustaba. Y está bien que él me diga si no está funcionando para él para que podamos hacer algo diferente.
- L:** ¿Pero por qué te sientes más cómoda con hombres gay que con mujeres?
- M:** Conozco a una chica, ella trabaja con hombres gay y nació y creció en este país. Y un día estábamos teniendo una conversación y alguien dijo algo sobre los tres agujeros que tienen las mujeres "allá abajo". Y ella dijo, "¿tres agujeros?" Y todos respondimos: "sí, las mujeres tienen tres agujeros". Ella dijo que solamente tenía dos. Y yo insistí y le dije que ella tenía tres. Ella insistió que había algo raro

- A:** I think having had Ray in my life since I was 14, it helped me to feel like it's okay. When I got my period I didn't know what it was – I thought I was peeing blood. I don't blame my mom – she tried her best. But having him helped me to learn. I almost felt dumb at the time but he never made me feel dumb. Having that openness, and it's from a guy, it helps.
- L:** And that's why I always said, you get the best parts of these guys because you get the bonding.



Photo courtesy of Ray Fernandez

- con ella porque ella solamente tiene dos. Yo, literalmente tuve que ir al Internet y buscar una fotografía del sistema reproductivo de la mujer y le dije, "Uno, dos, tres". Y sólo así me creyó.
- A:** ¿No lo aprendió en el bachillerato?
- M:** Por eso es que digo, nacida y criada acá, fue a la escuela y toda la cosa. ¿Cómo es que no sabes eso de ti misma? Así que, alguien que no sabe sobre eso de ella misma, mucho menos que ha explorado su propio cuerpo, ¿cómo puedes tener ese tipo de conversación con ella? Ella me decía que no disfrutaba del sexo; que ella tenía sexo solamente para complacer a su novio. Ella ama tanto a su novio que quería que él tuviera placer, pero no era porque ella estuviera sintiendo algo.
- A:** Yo pienso que al tener a Ray en mi vida desde que tenía 14 años, me ha ayudado a sentir que está bien. Cuando tuve mi primer período yo no sabía qué era. Yo pensé que estaba orinando sangre. No culpo a mi mamá, ella hizo lo mejor que pudo. Pero el tenerlo a él me ayudó a aprender. Yo casi me sentí tonta esa vez, pero él nunca me hizo sentir tonta. Ayuda tener esa apertura con un hombre.
- L:** Y por eso es que yo siempre digo que tú recibes las mejores cosas de estos hombres porque recibes la camaradería.



## The War Between Tops and Bottoms

Jessica Holter

Late.  
her hips pressed  
against my ass

Hot.  
because he was watching

It's like that?

It could be.  
but what she  
really wants to do  
is fuck a man in the ass

Like that?  
Yep.  
She's never done it before. I lied, not knowing it  
yet.  
Forty-five minutes and a bridge ride later  
my phone rang...

“Booty Call,  
    Booty Call,  
        Booty Call!”

I wondered if I could download that ring  
and set it for the men  
who phone disrespectfully  
after 10 o'clock pm

It was 2:15 in the morning  
“Is it cool?  
I'm on my way to your pad.”  
I looked at my woman  
as if to ask permission  
She returned a sly glance as if to say,  
“Bring it on!”

Five minutes inside  
he was just parking  
but she was already  
showered and strapped

I had seen her that way many times  
her plump ass squeezed between 3 black leather straps  
holding in place a 9 inch dick  
I had hand picked from Good Vibrations  
to match the John Henry hunk of the man  
I used to call my husband  
It was large, slightly flexible, jet black  
and bulged with human vein-like texture  
I had a special relationship to this dick  
It was mine  
and I was particular about it.  
to me, it was as real as any dick,  
as in relationships  
it would only stray if I got careless and lost it  
or as in tonight, chose to give it away.

It was huge next to her small body  
but trust,  
she wore it and used it like she had grown it  
She was soft butch, bisexual by admission  
and beautiful by even Hollywood standards  
If she were an ice cream she'd be a Creole Mocha Blend  
A tiny package, she was, full of surprises  
Hairs on her chin  
Egotistical and a Taurus  
even her cum smelled like a man's  
Yet her breasts were nearly as large as mine  
and I was busting provocatively out of a double D

I'd lie if I said living this life  
didn't bring thoughts of  
Jerry Springer to my mind from time to time  
I giggled like the child I felt like  
anticipating  
Nowhere to hide

She made a cup of coffee.  
sipped it wearing nothing  
but the dick and strap  
I blushed.  
abandoned her to the shower  
doorbell rings  
I scrubbed and tried to wash off the vodka  
so I could know that this was really happening  
Now let me get this straight ...  
rinsing my cigarette breath again  
spitting water  
My former lover  
Is coming over  
to let my lesbian lover  
fuck him in the ass

I shook my head a couple times  
but the thought was still there  
My heart would not stop racing  
it wasn't sexual excitement  
I was pretty sure of that

It felt more like the nerves that flutter about your  
stomach  
when you know you have done wrong and your momma has  
found out  
but you haven't made it home yet  
and your sister is running toward you  
shouting  
oooooh, you gonna get it!  
Accepting the inevitable  
you can only hope she falls.

I had known him for as long as I had known my own  
sexual being  
I was a virgin when we met  
He introduced me to the freak in me  
and has kept her skills on point for nearly 20 years  
but never this way  
Damn!

My momma told me he was gay!  
I was thinking this, when he stepped into the shower  
He washed my body  
kissed me everywhere  
just like he used to  
and did that thing he does with his thumbs  
massaging my inner thighs down to the bone  
gently stretching my pussy with circular motions  
until I had the urge to press down  
and give birth to another level of

our homie-lover-friendship  
 I was melting in the heat  
 I cooled the water down  
 Kissed the softest lips I have ever known  
 and said goodbye to love making as I had known it with  
 him  
 My momma  
 and the women of her generation  
 would have stopped us dead in our tracks  
 because there are some things you just don't hang out  
 to dry  
 What was going down tonight  
 was definitely going to leave some dirty laundry

She made it easy to get started  
 She didn't believe in awkward moments  
 He stepped out of the shower  
 She pushed me into him  
 He held me tight  
 lit a joint, passed it around  
 The kissing commenced quickly  
 I couldn't suck her pussy with the strap on  
 and her legs so tight, like they always are for me  
 so I sucked her dick  
 then his  
 He ate my pussy  
 then tongue kissed her ass  
 She ate my pussy then tongue kissed him  
 then put her tongue to his rim  
 for a very long time

he wanted to enter her  
 she wasn't having it  
 I stepped out of the room to grab two rubbers  
 while they decided who's on top

and what's on second  
 I don't know,  
 third base came so quickly  
 I didn't have time to think

I sat back and took a lesson in testosterone  
 waiting just a few moments to see if  
 he would give the ass up right away  
 A few more of her famous tongue lashings  
 inside and outside of his asshole  
 she was going to be in there  
 I couldn't bear to watch him go out like that  
 I wanted to know, but I couldn't watch

So I did what any woman  
 in denial about the sexual preference  
 of a man she's loved since childhood would do ...  
 I slipped my body under his  
 shoving hips into his  
 I spread my legs  
 Spread them wide  
 opened my pussy up in the candle light  
 Wet my finger  
 slapped my clit  
 pushed two fingers in an out of my self  
 testing the waters with my own tongue  
 and  
 attempted to flood the room  
 with the intoxicating pheromones  
 of my good pussy  
 but all I could smell was ass  
 as she dug into him  
 with such aggression,  
 her force urged him deeper inside of me.

Part of me hoped for a fast win in this  
 war between tops and bottoms  
 for the sake of my health  
 Cuz this was 2004  
 and I had been fucking a man who  
 desired a dick in his ass  
 for nearly half of my life

The other parts of me were  
 extremely turned on  
 extremely jealous  
 and angry  
 over how I had been a sexual fool  
 seeing all the signs, heeding no warning  
 What was more, I hadn't even been giving him,  
 what he was really looking for

My body grew hotter  
 as he kissed me and briefly remembered me  
 calling my name  
 I drew my pussy like an M16  
 and fired into the dark  
 He spread my thighs wider  
 Fucked me with his tongue  
 Sucking my fat pussy lips  
 on the up stroke  
 a couple feet away could hear her tongue  
 lathering up his ass  
 His hips began to roll  
 Pow she slapped it with a magical sting  
 and raised the ass high into the air  
 with the power possessed in her fingertips

My man was now my woman's bitch  
 And the 9 inch dick I had picked

from a little Berkeley sex boutique,  
 that reminded me of my husband,  
 and gave to my lesbian lover  
 to fuck me with,  
 was in my soulmate's ass  
 deeply, in his ass  
 "Stop."  
 he pronounced  
 candy in my ears

She withdrew

He caught his breath  
 Then whispered  
 "Tell her to put it back in."

My pussy got numb.

He continued to fuck me,  
 I think.  
 Mostly, she fucked him  
 She fucked him,  
 and busted so many times  
 before they came together  
 Their unified moans and grunts  
 were like a song, a dirty rap song  
 I added some curse words and moans  
 of my own but my pussy was only wet  
 with her juices  
 as they shot on his ass and thighs  
 and dripped down to tease me.

But he still wanted to enter her  
 in four years, I hadn't even put a finger inside of  
 her

she almost didn't lay down for that  
gave it the political lesbian try  
before her legs were spread so far apart  
I didn't recognize her or her porn star vocabulary

The pair weren't fighting anymore  
"Thank you, thank you, thank you"  
he repeated emphatically  
over and over as he dressed

He really meant that shit.  
I had two G's in my bed  
giving me the kind of truth  
you don't even get in church  
I had no reason to be mad  
I set the whole thing up  
I had asked for a pass to a game that was not for  
suckers  
He wanted something that I wasn't willing to give  
and now that I know this  
I can choose not to put myself at risk

I wasn't mad anymore.  
because I was no longer a fool,  
just maybe a little grossed out.  
I mean, except for the fact that  
the entire room smelled like ass  
It might have even been cool.

But the thought of where his ass goes  
on nights he can't find a woman  
so willing to engage in anal play  
was a little bit scary

It was 4:15 he went home to his wife  
I drank my girl's cold coffee  
Sat down at my computer and ordered  
a new dick online

T Calloway

# Black Female Sexuality...



has always been compromised.  
With a history like ours, there is no wonder  
we settle for love in disguise

Jessica Holter



## Juan the Brave

Claudia Rodriguez

It was a hot Saturday morning. While all the kids were indoors eating their bowls of sugary breakfast, Juan rode his tiny blue dirt bike up and down his block. His hair was wet from having showered and he wore his blue Bermudas – with the white flower print. He pedaled faster and bit down hard on his lower lip with each up and down pump of his legs, a sign that he was *echandole ganas a su* bike ride. The ends of his hair curled up towards the sky like light brown hooks. Magdalena, Maggy for short, Doña Rigoberta’s youngest daughter, was also outside with her pet Chihuahua, Tito. Maggy watered her mom’s rose garden and Tito bit his under belly where the fleas feasted on him.

“Hi Erica!” yelled Maggy.

Juan ignored Maggy as he got up from his seat, leaned over the handlebars looking as if he were about to take a plunge into the cement and leaped off the sidewalk just before reaching Doña Rigoberta’s yard. He only soared at the most five inches off the ground but imagined himself hovering in the air, doing a complete 360 and landing with the bike tires safely planted on the pavement.

“Ericaaaah!” Maggy waved with one hand and held the water hose with the other as a puddle accumulated in the flowerbeds. “Erica ... hi.”

Juan could spend all day riding his bike from one corner of the block to the other; this was the only route he was allowed to play on. He didn’t dare go into the off-limit zones; the always busy Compton Boulevard or around the block because his mom would take his bike away – de castigo. No one rode their bike more than Juan did. Juan rode his bike because it felt better than cannonballing into a pool on a hot summer day and because no one could tell him what to do while he was on his bike. He could pedal slow, fast, straight or as crooked as he wanted to. Juan treated his bike the way cowboys in the Western movies he’d seen with his Dad treated their horses. Juan had seen more than thirty Westerns with his Dad. They would go to the downtown theater, the one that only showed movies from Mexico’s golden cinema, to watch an early show. From the entire stock of cowboys Juan liked El Charro de Mexico, Pedro Infante, the most. Not because Pedro would beat up all the bad guys and win the ladies over with his long and soft singing, but because Pedro’s moustache was always so neat and thin – perfect like a streak left behind by a bike tire. So Juan rode his bike and that’s what he loved to do. He didn’t like playing house with the girly-girls because they were too clean and giggled a lot. He

## Juan el Valiente

Claudia Rodriguez

Era una mañana calurosa de sábado. Mientras que todos los niños estaban en sus casas comiendo sus desayunos azucarados, Juan montaba su pequeña bicicleta azul sucia, de una punta a la otra de su cuadro. Su cabello estaba mojado porque se había duchado y vestía sus bermudas azules, con sus figuras de flores blancas. Él pedaleaba cada vez más rápido y mordía su labio inferior con cada pedaleo que daban sus piernas. Era una muestra de que él le estaba echando ganas a su paseo en bici. Las puntas de su cabello se enroscaban hacia arriba, hacia el cielo, como ganchos color café claro. Magdalena (Maggy, abreviado), la hija más joven de Doña Rigoberta, también estaba afuera con su mascota chihuahua, Tito. Maggy regaba el jardín de rosas de su mamá y Tito se mordía la barriga donde las pulgas hacían su banquete.

“¡Hola Érica!”, gritó Maggy.

Juan ignoró a Maggy al momento en que se levantó de su asiento, se reclinó sobre el manubrio, mirando como si estuviera a punto de zambullirse en el cemento, y saltó a la acera, justo antes de llegar al patio de Doña Rigoberta. Solamente se elevó unas cinco pulgadas del suelo, pero se imaginó revoloteando en el aire, haciendo una vuelta de 360 completa y aterrizando con las llantas de la bicicleta seguras y firmes en el pavimento.

“¡Éricaaa!”, Maggy saludaba con una mano y sostenía la manguera con la otra, mientras se formaba un charco en el área de las flores. “Hola... Érica”.

Juan podía pasar todo el día en su bici, de una esquina de la cuadro a la otra; este era el único camino en el que le permitían jugar. Él no se atrevía a ir a zonas fuera de estos límites; como el siempre transitado Boulevard de Campton o a dar la vuelta a la esquina porque de castigo su mamá le quitaría su bicicleta. Nadie montaba tanto la bici como Juan. Juan montaba su bici porque le gustaba más que tirarse como un bombazo en la piscina en un día caliente de verano y porque nadie podía decirle qué hacer mientras montaba la bici. El podía pedalear como él quisiera: despacio, rápido, recto o torcido. Juan trataba a su bici de la misma manera que los vaqueros de las películas del Oeste (que había visto con su padre) trataban a sus caballos. Juan había visto más de treinta pelis del Oeste con su papá. Ellos iban al cine del centro, a la función vespertina, el único que mostraba películas de la época dorada del cine mexicano. De todo el montón de vaqueros, a Juan le gustaba más El Charro de México, Pedro Infante. No porque Pedro vencía a los malos y ganaba a las mujeres con su prolongado y suave canto, sino porque el bigote de Pedro siempre estaba tan perfecto y delgado; tan perfecto

didn't really like any of the girls on his block anyway except for Marisol.

Juan thought Marisol was prettier than any woman Pedro Infante charmed and she was only fifteen! Her burgundy hair fell down to the middle of her back, her lips matched the color of her hair, and the oil-black liquid eyeliner she wore gave her brown eyes a sharp slanted look. She wore acrylic nails and a gold ring on each finger and hung out on the street corner or her porch and watched the boys play football and call each other names. Marisol was Joker's novia but she still played around with Juan a lot.

"Hey cutie ... are you still my novio? You're so strong," Marisol teased Juan and made him smile. He smiled wide revealing his big front teeth and the small gap on his bottom row and his cheeks would get as big as gumdrops. Sometimes he would pop wheelies or do other bike tricks to show Marisol how strong he really was. It tickled a bit inside his ear every time she responded with an "Ooh, que fuerte eres Juan!"

"Erica, do you want to play house with me? Let's play that my doll was our baby and that I was watering the vegetable so that I can cook them later and...and." Maggy belted out again at Juan.

He slammed hard on his brakes leaving a curvy black streak on the pavement. He kicked his kickstand and slowly leaned the bike on it, not letting go until he was sure that the bike would not fall over. He walked over to Maggy; his hands were akimbo in a cowboy kind of way. The water from the flowerbeds

como una raya hecha por las llantas de la bici. Así que Juan montaba su bici y eso era lo que le encantaba hacer. A él no le gustaba jugar a la casita con las niñas porque ellas eran demasiado limpias y reían tontamente. En realidad, a él no le gustaba ninguna de las chicas de su cuadra, con excepción de Marisol.

Juan pensaba que Marisol era más bonita que cualquier mujer que Pedro Infante había encantado y, ¡ella solamente tenía quince años! Su cabello colorado le caía hasta la mitad de su espalda, sus labios concordaban con el color de su cabello y el delineador líquido, a base de aceite, de color negro que llevaba puesto, le daban una apariencia angular a sus ojos marrones. Ella usaba uñas de acrílico y un anillo de oro en cada dedo; y pasaba el tiempo en la esquina de la calle o en su porche y miraba cuando los chicos jugaban football y se decían apodos. Marisol era la novia de Joker, pero todavía jugaba bastante con Juan.

"Hola guapo... ¿Aún eres mi novio? Eres tan fuerte", Marisol se burlaba de Juan y lo hacía reír. El tenía una gran sonrisa, mostrando su enorme diente frontal y la pequeña separación en la hilera de dientes inferiores, y sus mejillas se hacían tan grandes como una goma de mascar. Algunas veces hacía piruetas con la llanta, u otros trucos con la bici para mostrarle a Marisol lo fuerte que era. Cada vez que ella respondía con un "¡Ayy, que fuerte eres Juan!", sentía un cosquilleo en el oído.

"Érica, ¿quieres jugar a la casita conmigo? Juguemos a que mi muñequita era nuestro bebé y que yo estaba

had spilled over onto the sidewalk and Juan's steps made squishy noises as he approached Maggy. Tito bounced up and down almost reaching the top of the fence but Juan wasn't scared. He slapped his hands together making a loud popping sound that sent Tito running into his doghouse.

"No me llamo Erica! Me llamo Juan!" Juan screamed and flipped a curl away from his eyes with a twitch of his head.

"You can pretend que tu eras el papa and that the bike was your car to go to work. I won't make you kiss me the way Vanessa makes you kiss her. Sí Erica?" Maggy continued to persuade Juan.

"Te dije que no me llamo Erica!" He yelled at Maggy "Me llamo Juan!" Juan stomped on a large puddle sending spots of muddy water all over Maggy's pastel-yellow coveralls. Maggys' eyes fluttered as she looked at her polka-dotted coveralls and cried. Tito rushed out of his house with his lip snarled and tiny sharp teeth protruding. Juan jumped on his bike and took off as fast as his little legs could take him and left Maggy and Tito behind howling together. Laughing while he sped away, Juan looked occasionally over his shoulder to make sure that Doña Rigoberta or her sons, Paco, the one with the shaved head, or Joker, the one with the scar on his face, were not chasing after him.

"I told you that's not my name!" he shouted. Juan, so caught up in yelling, didn't realize he had pedaled all the way up to the intersection of Palm Street and Compton Boulevard – the off-limits zone – until he was in the middle of the large street. Traffic was light but a car,

enjuagando los vegetales para poder cocinarlos más tarde y... y", Maggy de nuevo le insistía a gritos a Juan.

Él frenó de golpe, dejando una marca negra curvada sobre el pavimento. Pateó el soporte y lentamente inclinó la bici en el soporte, sin soltarla, hasta asegurarse de que la bici no se caería. Él caminó hacia Maggy; sus manos estaban como encorvadas, al estilo vaquero. El agua en la plantación del jardín se había regado hacia la acera y los pasos de Juan chapoteaban mientras él se acercaba a Maggy. Tito saltaba casi hasta alcanzar la parte superior de la cerca, pero a Juan no le daba miedo. El hizo un chasquido con sus manos, generando un sonido tan fuerte que envió a Tito corriendo hacia su guarida.

"¡No me llamo Érica! ¡Me llamo Juan!", Juan gritó y sacudió su cabeza para voltear hacia un lado un rizo que caía sobre sus ojos.

"Tú puedes pretender que tú eras el papá y que la bici era tu carro para ir al trabajo. No voy a hacer que me beses, como lo hace Vanesa. ¿Sí Érica?", Maggy continuaba persuadiendo a Juan.

"¡Te dije que no me llamo Érica!" le gritó a Maggy, "¡Me llamo Juan!" Juan pisoteó un enorme charco, salpicando con manchas de agua lodosa el overol amarillo pastel de Maggy. Los ojos de Maggy se estremecieron al ver su overol manchado con lunares, y lloró. Tito salió corriendo de su casa, gruñendo, mostrando sus pequeños dientes filosos. Juan saltó en la bici y se fue tan rápido como le

with its horn blaring, headed straight towards Juan. He dragged his foot along the cement and gripped his hand breaks, making the veins on his hand swell, but he was not able to stop his bike. There was a long screeching sound punctuated by a loud ‘pop’ as the driver of the car slammed on his brakes and swerved away from Juan and his bike. Half of the car ended up on the sidewalk with a flat tire and inches away from a fire hydrant. In all the commotion, Juan remained glued to his bike seat until his bike hit the curb, jumped onto the sidewalk and collided against a bus stop bench. The handlebars ended up in the shape of a U and Juan’s shoe and pants looked like Tito had chewed on them.

The driver of the vehicle, an older man with glasses, white mustache and patches of white hair ran over to Juan, he noticed the tag, with Juan’s home address and phone-number, on the bike. He picked Juan up along with the curled up bike and took both of them home.

“Miss is this your daughter?” Juan’s mom who was outside turning the soil and yanking the weeds from her herb patch hadn’t noticed the two approaching. She heard the man’s voice and turned up from her crouched position. She didn’t see much of the man but his moustache and the glare from his glasses.

“Sí, es mi hija. ¿Qué pasó Erica, estás bien?” She said recognizing Juan’s shoe. Juan’s mother’s face turned yellow at the sight of Juan with his messy hair, ripped pants and smudged face. She didn’t even get up; she walked on her knees over to where the man put Juan down and wrapped her arms around him, burying his entire face in her meaty bosom. She cried and rocked

permitieron sus pequeñas piernas y dejó a Maggy y a Tito atrás, aullando juntos. Riéndose mientras se alejaba rápidamente, Juan miraba ocasionalmente sobre sus hombros para asegurarse de que Doña Rigoberta o sus hijos, Paco, el que tenía la cabeza rapada, o Joker, el que tenía la cicatriz en la cara, no lo estuvieran siguiendo.

“¡Te dije que ese no es mi nombre!”, gritó. Juan, enredado en sus gritos, no se dio cuenta que había pedaleado hasta la intersección de la Calle Palm y el Boulevard Compton, la zona fuera del límite, hasta que ya estaba a mitad de la enorme calle. El tráfico no era pesado, pero un carro, con su bocina al máximo, se dirigía directamente hacia Juan. El arrastró sus pies en el cemento y apretó con sus manos los frenos, haciendo que sus venas resaltaran, pero no pudo detener su bici. Se escuchó un gran chillido, acentuado por un ruidoso estallido al momento que el conductor del vehículo frenó estrepitosamente y se desvió de Juan y su bici. Mitad del vehículo terminó en la acera con una llanta desinflada y a sólo centímetros de un hidrante de agua. Durante el tumulto, Juan se mantuvo pegado al asiento de su bici hasta que la bici golpeó el bordillo de la acera, brincó a la acera y chocó con una banca en la parada del autobús. El manillar terminó con forma de “u” y los zapatos y pantalones de Juan parecían como si Tito los hubiera mordido.

El conductor del vehículo, un hombre mayor con gafas, con un bigote blanco y parches de pelo blanco, corrió hasta donde estaba Juan, vio la etiqueta en la bici con la dirección de la casa y el número de teléfono de Juan. Él levantó a Juan junto con la bici torcida y los llevó a su casa.

side to side with her child. Meanwhile, Juan with his one good shoe, scratched at the trail of blood that trickled down his leg. Juan’s mom thanked the gentleman, over and over, before she swept Juan up and went inside. The pretzeled bike remained outside slopped against the steps.

Juan didn’t go outside for the rest of that day. Occasionally he’d stare out the window at the kids running after each other. Some of the neighborhood kids believed Juan refused to go out and play because he was scared to be outside without his bike – his second pair of legs. Some kids believed that Juan’s mom was really mean and as punishment she was going to keep Juan locked up forever until his skin turned pale and he could no longer stand the sunlight. Others swore Maggy’s brothers, Paco and Joker, beat Juan up and broke both of his legs. Juan had no choice but to stay indoors. Olivia, who was older than Juan by two years, told everyone that Juan *could* go out, he just didn’t want to. All Juan did was stay in his room and look at pictures of bikes in the store catalogues. No one ever found out what the real story was behind Juan’s decision to quit hanging out with the rest of the kids. Perhaps Juan would have preferred any of the other kids’ versions than the truth.

It was a Saturday evening, the sun was setting, kids sat on front steps of their homes or the curb, coming down from the excitement of the day. One by one Juan’s family walked out of their house, Sofia his mom, and Olivia were the first ones out, the last ones out were Juan’s Dad, because he had to lock the doors, and Juan in tow. All the kids turned around to stare at Juan, not because he was walking holding a present almost as big as him with a bow that covered his whole face, but because he was wearing a frilly dress. Juan’s pink, bell-shaped dress was outlined

“Señorita, ¿esta es su hija?” La mamá de Juan, que estaba afuera dándole vuelta a la tierra y quitando la maleza de su siembra de hierbas, no había visto que se acercaban los dos. Ella escuchó la voz del hombre y se dio vuelta de su posición encorvada. Ella no vio mucho del hombre, más bien su bigote y el reflejo de sus gafas.

“Sí, es mi hija. ¿Qué pasó Érica, estás bien?”, dijo, reconociendo el zapato de Juan. La cara de la mamá de Juan se puso amarilla al ver a Juan con su cabello desarreglado, pantalones rotos y su cara sucia. Ella ni se paró; caminó sobre sus rodillas hacía donde el hombre había puesto a Juan y lo envolvió en sus brazos, enterrando su cara en sus carnosos senos. Ella lloró y mecía de un lado al otro a su hijo. Mientras tanto, Juan, con su zapato bueno, se rascaba las huellas de sangre que bajaban sobre su pierna. La mamá de Juan agradeció al hombre, una y otra vez, antes de recoger a Juan y llevarlo adentro. La bici doblada quedó afuera, tirada sobre los escalones.

Juan no salió por el resto del día. Ocasionalmente miraba hacia fuera, por la ventana, a los niños que corrían uno tras del otro. Algunos de los niños del vecindario creían que Juan se negaba a salir y jugar porque él tenía miedo de estar afuera sin su bici; su segundo par de piernas. Algunos niños creían que la mamá de Juan era mala realmente y como castigo ella iba a mantener a Juan encerrado para siempre, hasta que su piel se tornara pálida y no pudiera resistir la luz del sol. Otros juraban que los hermanos de Maggy, Paco y Joker, golpearon a





Photo courtesy of Claudia Rodriguez

Juan y le rompieron ambas piernas. Juan no tenía más opción que quedarse en casa. Olivia, que era dos años mayor que Juan, le dijo a todos que Juan podía salir, pero que simplemente él no quería hacerlo. Todo lo que hizo Juan fue quedarse en su habitación y mirar las fotografías de bicis en un catálogo de una tienda. Nadie descubrió cual fue la verdadera historia detrás de la decisión de Juan de no salir más para pasarla con sus amigos. Tal vez Juan hubiera preferido cualquier versión de los otros niños antes que la verdad.

Era un atardecer de sábado, el sol se estaba metiendo, los niños estaban sentados en los escalones de sus porches o en los cordones de las aceras, relajándose de las emociones del día. La familia de Juan salió de la casa, uno por uno, Sofía, su mamá, y Olivia, fueron las primeras en salir, los últimos en salir fueron el papá de Juan, porque tenía que cerrar la puerta, seguido por Juan. Todos los niños se dieron vuelta para mirar a Juan, no porque él estuviera llevando un regalo igual de grande que él con un moño que cubría su cara, sino porque llevaba puesto un vestido muy adornado. El vestido rosado de Juan, en forma de campana, se contorneaba con un lazo blanco y tenía unos dibujos marinos haciendo de relieve que combinaban con el broche de flores que sujetaban sus rizos. Era un vestido viejo de su hermana y hacía que Juan se viera como una mini mujer, como una de esas muñecas que están encima de los pasteles de bodas. Marisol, que estaba afuera y al mismo tiempo estaba hablando con un grupo de amigos, notó que la caja pasó flotando. Algunos de los chicos señalaron a Juan y se rieron disimuladamente.

with white lace and speckled with tiny Stargazers, which matched the flower barrettes that pinned his curls down. The dress was a hand-me-down from his sister and made Juan look like a mini-woman, like one of those dolls that stand on top of wedding cake. Marisol, who was also outside at the time talking to a circle of guy friends noticed as the box floated by. Some of the guys pointed at Juan and snickered.

“She’s actually wearing girl clothes!” Paco high-fived Joker.

Juan didn’t turn around to look at anybody nor did he say anything; he walked on carrying the huge box and

stumbled a bit when the layers of the dress bunched up between his legs. Marisol broke away from her circle of admirers and walked over to Juan. She looked over her shoulder at the group of boys, Joker and Paco especially, and pressed a stiff finger to her lips commanding the snickering boys to hush.

“Hi Juan,” said Marisol, her voice bubbly with laughter.

“Leave me alone!” Juan mumbled from behind the bow.

“Where are you going in your pretty dress?” asked Marisol.

Juan looked at the group of boys who continued to laugh and point at him then gave Marisol a look that seemed too grown for his seven year-old face.

“Don’t listen to them, they’re stupid,” replied Marisol nervously. “You look pretty,” she added as she slackened her smirk.

“Erica, let’s go.” Juan’s dad jingled his keys for him to hurry up.

“Juan, I still think you’re brave,” said Marisol in the loopy voice she used when she played with Juan. Juan gave Marisol a quick look from behind the bow, hoisted the box higher and swaggered awkwardly to catch up with his dad.

“¡En realidad lleva puesta ropa para chicas!”, Paco chocó los cinco con Joker.

Juan no se dio vuelta para ver a nadie ni tampoco dijo nada; él caminó, cargando la enorme caja y tropezó un poco cuando los revuelos del vestido se le enredaron entre las piernas. Marisol se alejó de su grupo de admiradores y caminó hacia donde estaba Juan. Ella miró sobre su hombro al grupo de chicos, especialmente a Joker y Paco, y presionó un dedo erguido sobre sus labios, mandándoles a callar a los chicos que se estaban riendo.

“Hola Juan”, dijo Marisol con una tonta sonrisa.

“¡Déjame solo!”, Juan refunfuñó por detrás.

“¿A dónde vas con ese vestido tan lindo?”, preguntó Marisol.

Juan miró al grupo de chicos que continuaban riéndose de él y señalándolo, después le dio una mirada a Marisol que parecía demasiado adulta para su cara de siete años de edad.

“Érica, vámonos”. El papá de Juan sonó las llaves para que se diera prisa.

“Juan, todavía pienso que eres valiente”, dijo Marisol con la voz socarrona que ella usaba cuando jugaba con Juan. Juan miró rápidamente a Marisol, levantó más alto la caja y se contorneó de una manera incómoda para poder alcanzar a su papá.

## Doing HIV Prevention and Building Community Coalitions In and Across New York City and Calcutta, India

Ananya Mukherjea

“We all—queers, immigrants, prostitutes—had this thing happen, where we went from being a regular part of the city, but under wraps, to being really stigmatized and seen as public health risks. People even called the Sonagachi women a ‘plague.’...We collected dollars here for them, and they met with me every time I went to Calcutta and helped me figure out how to deal with the immigration bureaucracy here.”

This was told to me by Prashant, a queer man from Calcutta who did service provision to queer immigrant men in New York and who had also worked in Sonagachi, the red light district of Calcutta, with a sex workers’ labor union called the DMSC (whose initials in Bengali stand for “The committee of women working together”). I was in a sociology graduate program and working as a researcher myself, learning a great deal about feminist and queer and community politics in the process. For example, if I wanted to study community work in the HIV/AIDS pandemic, I had to figure out how to represent my informants respectfully and responsibly. I had to figure out how I was, in turn, going to contribute to slowing the epidemic and keeping people safer and healthier. And I had so much to learn about how queer and feminist activism work in other places, in other communities.

The one good thing that has come of the HIV/AIDS pandemic is that people who have historically stayed invisible for their own safety have recognized the need to organize themselves for strength. Now, as the pandemic continues to grow, this is the one proven prevention method that those of us in health fields and/or high-risk groups have to draw from: using visibility and organizing to produce strategic, focused coalitions can be really effective. This is the model we have to build on to protect ourselves in the future. So, in this essay, I will look at how seemingly impassable boundaries of race, nation, sexuality, gender, and class have been broken because of HIV/AIDS, so that gay men, injection drug users, sex workers, and immigrants can better share strategies that marginalized communities have developed to rein in infection rates and to empower themselves.

Like a lot of other folks, I started doing HIV/AIDS work in my teens, holding up signs along highways in state capitols demanding more funding for AIDS research, and doing safer sex workshops at high schools and colleges. Doing that work, for me like for many others, was about questioning the dominant social

## Prevención del VIH y construcción de coaliciones comunitarias en y entre las ciudades de Nueva York y Calcuta, India

Ananya Mukherjea

“A todos nosotros (maricones, inmigrantes, prostitutas) nos pasó esto: dejamos de ser una parte normal de la ciudad, por debajo de las envolturas, para realmente ser estigmatizados y ser vistos como riesgos de la salud pública. La gente hasta llama “plaga” a las mujeres de Sonagachi... Aquí, nosotros colectamos dólares para ellos. Ellos se reunieron conmigo cada vez que fui a Calcuta y aquí me ayudaron a comprender cómo lidiar con la burocracia de migración”.

Esto me lo dijo Prashant, un hombre *queer* de Calcuta que ofrecía servicios a hombres inmigrantes *queers* en Nueva York y que también había trabajado en Sonagachi, el distrito rojo de Calcuta, con un sindicato de trabajadores sexuales llamado DMSC (sus iniciales en bengal significan “El comité de mujeres que trabajan juntas”). Yo estaba en el programa graduado de sociología y trabajaba como investigadora, aprendiendo enormemente sobre las políticas feministas, *queer* y comunitarias en el proceso. Por ejemplo, si yo quería estudiar el trabajo comunitario en la pandemia del VIH/SIDA, tenía que ingeniármelas para saber cómo representar a mis informantes respetuosa y responsablemente. Consecuentemente, tuve que comprender cómo iba a contribuir a desacelerar la epidemia y mantener a la gente más segura y más saludable. Tuve que aprender mucho sobre cómo el activismo *queer* y feminista trabaja en otros lugares, en otras comunidades.

Algo bueno que ha surgido de la pandemia del VIH/SIDA es que la gente que históricamente se ha mantenido invisible por su propia seguridad ha reconocido la necesidad de organizarse para tener fuerzas. Ahora, a la vez que la pandemia continúa aumentando, los que trabajamos en el campo de la salud y/o grupos de alto riesgo tenemos que servirnos de uno de los métodos de prevención comprobados: La utilización de la visibilidad y la organización para producir coaliciones estratégicas y enfocadas que pueden ser verdaderamente efectivas. Este es el modelo que debemos construir para protegernos en el futuro. Así que, en este ensayo, exploraré cómo el VIH/SIDA ha roto los límites aparentemente restrictivos de la raza, nación, sexualidad, género y clase para que de esta manera los hombres gay, los usuarios de drogas endovenosas, los trabajadores sexuales e inmigrantes puedan compartir las mejores estrategias que han sido desarrolladas por las comunidades marginadas para dominar las tasas de infección y para empoderarse.

Como mucha gente, yo empecé a hacer trabajo de VIH/SIDA durante mi adolescencia, con pancartas en las carreteras de los capitolios estatales, demandando más financiamiento para la investigación del SIDA y

expectations about sexuality and community boundaries. For instance, as a young woman, I was interested in challenging the prevalence of sexual violence, and changing attitudes about the relationship between sex and domination was a critical aspect of challenging the anti-sex attitudes of abstinence-only prevention messages. The early 1990's, when I first got involved doing peer education and risk counseling with other young folks in Florida, was a funny in-between time for the AIDS epidemic of 20+ years. This was after the generalized panic of the first decade of the epidemic and before combination antiretroviral therapy changed the disease for everyone with access to those drugs. Health officials in the 90s weren't always calling AIDS a pandemic yet (meaning a disease that has spread across much of the globe), and many countries still were actively changing their immigration policies vainly trying to keep the virus out of their borders: borders that, in most cases, had long since been permeated from within as well as from outside.

But there is much that hasn't changed about the HIV/AIDS pandemic over these two decades. From the beginning, both the way the virus spread and the way officials responded to it singled out certain communities of folks who have not, historically, had a lot of political power or safety. So gay men, injection drug users, sex workers, and immigrants were early seen to be the people who were most at risk for infection and, therefore, the same people who were most "dangerous" (to others who felt "safe" themselves) because they were thought to be likely to spread the disease.

haciendo talleres sobre sexo protegido en los bachilleratos y colegios. Hacer ese trabajo, tanto para mí como para otros, se trataba sobre el cuestionamiento de las expectativas sociales dominantes sobre sexualidad y límites comunitarios. Por ejemplo, como una joven mujer, interesada en desafiar la prevalencia de la violencia sexual y en cambiar actitudes sobre la relación entre el sexo y la dominación, era un aspecto crítico ante el desafío de la actitud anti-sexo de los mensajes de prevención basados en la abstinencia. Al principio de la década de los noventa, cuando empecé a involucrarme en hacer educación de pares y consejería de riesgos con otras personas en la Florida, fueron tiempos intermedios raros para la epidemia del SIDA de más de 20 años. Esto fue después del pánico generalizado de la primera década de la epidemia y antes de que la terapia antirretroviral combinada cambiara la enfermedad para quienes tuvieran acceso a esos medicamentos. Los oficiales de salud durante los noventa no llamaban al SIDA una pandemia todavía (es decir, una enfermedad que se ha esparcido en una gran parte del mundo), y muchos países estaban tratando aún, activamente, de cambiar sus políticas migratorias, en un esfuerzo vano de mantener al virus fuera de sus fronteras: fronteras que, en la mayoría de los casos, ya habían sido penetradas desde hacía mucho tiempo, tanto desde fuera, como desde adentro.

Pero al mismo tiempo hay mucho que no ha cambiado sobre la pandemia del VIH/SIDA durante estas dos décadas. Desde el principio,

This is the part of the history that we all know too well, the part that's damaged many of us the most. Feeling ourselves to be members of, or allied with, or sympathetic to these "dangerous" (but actually endangered) communities is what propelled most of us to get involved in HIV/AIDS work – whether that meant doing prevention or service provision in our own communities or activism or lobbying. And we have amazing historians of the epidemic, people like Simon Watney, Paula Treichler and Michael Callen, who wrote about how lots of folks who were hurt the most by AIDS actually used that threat to make themselves stronger, to build coalitions with each other. In the mid-90's, when antiretroviral therapy became available for many people, we had a chance to look back at the past decade and to focus on the increasing gap between positive folks with economic means and those without. So I wondered: how was it that those coalitions were so often formed *across community lines*. Those coalitions often bridged deep conflicts between groups of folks who didn't usually work together. Early on, the epidemic was divided amongst communities that seemed like opposites. There was one epidemic of rich people, which was very different from the one of poor people because of the routes through which people got infected (sex tourism vs. sex work, for one easy example) and what kind of treatment (if any) they got. And there was an epidemic of white folks, which differed from the epidemic of people of color, just like the way HIV/AIDS affected queer communities in the US more thoroughly than it affected straight ones. And, definitely, you had an

ambos, la manera en que se esparció el virus y la manera en que los oficiales respondieron señaló a ciertas comunidades de personas que históricamente no habían tenido mucho poder político o seguridad. Los hombres gay, los usuarios de drogas endovenosas, los trabajadores sexuales e inmigrantes fueron vistos rápidamente como la gente con más riesgos para la infección y, por lo tanto, ésta misma era la más "peligrosa" (para otros que se sentían "seguros") porque se pensaba que ellos eran más proclives a transmitir la enfermedad.

Esta es la parte de la historia que todos conocemos muy bien, la parte que más nos ha dañado. Sentir que somos miembros de, o estamos aliados con, o simpatizamos con estas comunidades "peligrosas" (pero en realidad son comunidades en peligro) es lo que nos ha impulsado a muchos de nosotros a involucrarnos en el trabajo del VIH/SIDA, ya sea haciendo prevención o proveyendo servicios en nuestras comunidades o haciendo activismo o ejerciendo presión. Y tenemos grandes historiadores de la epidemia, personas como Simon Watney, Paula Treichler y Michael Callen, quienes escribieron sobre cómo mucha gente que fue la más golpeada por el SIDA en realidad utilizó esa amenaza para hacerse más fuerte, para construir coaliciones entre ellos.

A mediados de los noventa, cuando la terapia antirretroviral se hizo disponible para muchas personas, tuvimos la oportunidad de dar un vistazo a la década anterior y enfocarnos en la gran diferencia entre la gente positiva con medios



epidemic that affected men and another epidemic that affected women, but this aspect of the disease was a little different from the others because certain segments of these two groups quickly found that they had many important things in common, and they began forming coalitions across these differences.

Gay men and women realized they shared some similar social positions that put them at higher risk for infection. They were both more likely than straight men to be the receptive partners in sex, which meant they were more likely to develop cuts and tears that could come in contact with an infected partner's semen. They had access to less political power and visibility in society, so they were less likely to be able to control when they had sex, how they had sex, and whether they used latex barriers when they did have sex. And they were more likely to need to hide that they were having the kinds of sex that other people might make judgments about, and more likely to need to trade sex for money. Researchers and health workers weren't super-quick to make these links between these communities, but plenty of women and gay men were creating alliances themselves, particularly when there were other factors that made their situations similar. Like when both groups identified as queer, or when both groups were migrants, or poor, or of color, or all three, or when members of both groups were doing sex work. For example, immigrant men who have sex with men, and women who do sex work in New York City and in Calcutta, in India, strategized together and supported each other to help protect

económicos y los que no los tenían. Así que me pregunté: ¿cómo fue que esas coaliciones se formaron a menudo *a través de las líneas de las comunidades*? Esas coaliciones conectaron, a menudo, profundos conflictos entre los grupos de personas que usualmente no trabajaban juntas. Al principio, la epidemia se dividió entre comunidades que parecían como opuestas. Había una epidemia de gente rica, la cual era muy diferente de la de los pobres debido al medio por el cual la gente se infectaba (turismo sexual vs. trabajo sexual, para dar un ejemplo sencillo) y qué tipo de tratamiento recibían (si es que recibían algo). Y había una epidemia de gente blanca, la cual se diferenciaba de la epidemia de gente de color, así como el VIH/SIDA afectó a las comunidades *queer* en Estados Unidos más extensamente que a los heteros. Y, definitivamente, teníamos una epidemia que afectaba a hombres y otra epidemia que afectaba a mujeres, pero este aspecto de la enfermedad era un poco diferente de los demás, porque ciertos segmentos de estos dos grupos encontraron rápidamente que ellos tenían muchas cosas en común, y ellos comenzaron a formar coaliciones con sus diferencias.

Los hombres gay y las mujeres reconocieron que ellos compartían posiciones sociales similares que los ponían a un mayor riesgo de infección. Ambos eran más proclives que los hombres heterosexuales a ser parejas receptivas durante el sexo, lo cual significaba que eran más proclives a desarrollar cortaduras y rasgaduras que podían entrar en contacto con el semen infectado de una pareja. Ellos tenían menos acceso al poder político y visibilidad en la sociedad, así que eran menos proclives a tener control cuando

themselves from HIV infection and to get care when they were infected. This is the story of community building I want to focus upon here.

Sex workers in India, starting with those in the city of Calcutta, have built an international reputation for their AIDS prevention work over the past decade. Curtailing the spread of HIV, for the most part, has not been very effective. Partly, people just don't want to change their behavior when they could have a cure instead, and partly, it's been really hard for us to talk about sex and drugs honestly when so many people are offended by any mention of these "private" aspects of people's lives. But also, prevention work has been slow to change people's practices because most of us don't want to accept anyone else's prescriptions for our most intimate lives.

Through the mid-to-late 90's, sex workers in Calcutta were part of a peer-organized initiative launched by some doctors and social workers with vision, focused on the work of Dr. Smarajit Jana, a physician with a public health mission. Dr. Jana and his colleagues – some of whom were gay men stigmatized as high-risk themselves even though the disease spreads more quickly through heterosexual routes in India – deployed the radical idea that prevention efforts can only be useful if they're developed and communicated by the very members of the community you're working in. In other words, people have to set and enforce their own limits. So, Dr. Jana and others went to major red light (sex trade) districts in Calcutta, a large and very diverse city, and recruited sex workers to

tenían sexo, qué tipo de sexo tenían y si usaban o no barreras de látex cuando sí tenían sexo. Y ellos eran más proclives a tener la necesidad de esconder el tipo de sexo que estaban teniendo dado que otras personas podrían juzgarlos; y también por necesidad eran más proclives al intercambio de sexo por dinero. Los investigadores y los trabajadores de salud no fueron súper rápidos en hacer estos vínculos entre las comunidades, pero muchas mujeres y hombres gay estaban creando alianzas, particularmente cuando encontraban otros factores que hacían su situación que fuese similar. Como cuando ambos grupos se identificaban como *queers*, o cuando ambos grupos eran inmigrantes, o pobres o de color o los tres, o cuando los miembros de ambos grupos estaban realizando trabajo sexual. Por ejemplo, los hombres inmigrantes que tienen sexo con otros hombres y las mujeres que realizan trabajo sexual en la Ciudad de Nueva York y Calcuta, en India, juntos realizaron estrategias y se apoyaron entre sí para ayudar a protegerse de la infección por el VIH y para conseguir tratamiento cuando ellos se infectaban. Esta es la historia de la comunidad constructiva en la que me quiero enfocar aquí.

Los trabajadores sexuales en India, comenzando con los de la ciudad de Calcuta, han construido una reputación internacional por su trabajo de prevención del VIH durante la década pasada. La reducción del esparcimiento del VIH, en gran parte, no ha sido muy efectiva. En parte, porque la gente no quiere cambiar sus comportamientos cuando ellos, en cambio, podrían tener una cura y en parte porque ha sido verdaderamente difícil para



Photo courtesy of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), special thanks to Melissa Hope

be trained as peer educators, and then to train each other to do outreach, to develop safer sex campaigns, and to increase access to condoms and clinics. This was happening all through the mid-to-late 1990's, and the sex workers of Sonagachi, the largest and oldest red light district in Calcutta, ended up unionizing themselves, as the labor union, DMSC. They reduced their HIV infection rates over 60% within the first two years of the program and went on to improve their image in the city so that officials had to sit up and take notice of them as citizens. They began to get international attention from women's, labor, and civil rights groups who supported them in resisting police coercion, and they began to organize for better education for themselves and their children. Over the past five years, the Calcutta sex workers' union has also helped sex workers elsewhere in India and Asia unionize themselves.

Around the same time, immigration laws in the United States were changing. Before 1996, *long-term residents* of the United States, even if they were undocumented, received certain, limited public services, and the U.S. government allowed some of these people to go on living in the United States if they would face real hardship if they left. After 1996, combination antiretroviral therapy ("the cocktail") emerged, but health-related services to undocumented immigrants were cut off, and having HIV became a *cause for deportation* rather than a reason to waive it. Then, in 1997 and again in 2001, the deportation process sped up so that undocumented immigrants actually left the country more quickly after their deportation process began.

nosotros hablar sobre sexo y drogas sinceramente cuando tantas personas se ofenden por hacer cualquier mención de estos aspectos "privados" de las vidas de las personas. Pero también, el trabajo de prevención ha sido lento en cambiar las prácticas de las personas porque la mayoría de nosotros no queremos aceptar la prescripción de otras personas y aplicarlas en nuestras vidas más íntimas.

A mediados y finales de los noventa, los trabajadores sexuales en Calcuta tomaron parte en una iniciativa organizada por pares, emprendida por algunos médicos y trabajadores sociales con visión, focalizados en el trabajo del Dr. Smarajit Jana, un médico con una misión en salud pública. El Dr. Jana y sus colegas (algunos eran hombres gay estigmatizados como de alto riesgo a pesar de que en la India la enfermedad se esparce más rápidamente por vía heterosexual) desplegaron la idea radical de que los esfuerzos de prevención pueden ser útiles solamente si son desarrollados y comunicados por los propios miembros de la comunidad en que están trabajando. En otras palabras, las personas tienen que establecer e imponer sus propios límites. Así que el Dr. Jana y otros fueron al distrito rojo más importante (trueque sexual) en Calcuta, una ciudad muy grande y diversa, y reclutaron a trabajadores sexuales para ser capacitados como educadores de pares y después para capacitarse entre sí y realizar trabajo de alcance comunitario, para desarrollar compañías de sexo protegido, y para incrementar el acceso a condones y a clínicas. Todo estaba pasando a mediados y finales de los noventa, y los



Folks who had been living in and contributing to the U.S. economy under the table for years suddenly felt in danger.

I was doing Bengali/English interpretation for HIV+ folks at the time, and I once accompanied my supervisor to a hospital in Queens to explain to an undocumented man not only that he had HIV but that he would be deported as soon as he was well enough to go. He had been living in the city for over 6 years and had recently been admitted, unconscious, to the hospital's emergency room. It was a crisis point for immigrants in the city, and a lot of queer men who did have the relative protection of immigration or citizenship paperwork decided to support those who did not. And they did so by using some of the same techniques that the sex workers were using in Calcutta, whom some of them knew through working together in India or at international conferences or from internet networks, especially because the DMSC publicized their own work really well. The sex workers in Calcutta, in the meantime, were using harm reduction techniques that they had learned from gay men in New York who had publicized those efforts through international zines and workshops at conferences. Harm reduction is the idea that, when it is impractical to completely transform someone's life circumstances into ideal ones, it's always better to reduce the amount of risk in that person's life. So, it's better to provide condoms in prison and to give clean needles to drug users and to help sex workers have a clean, secure working environment than to wait for the eradication of drug use or prostitution before beginning any

trabajadores sexuales de Sonagachi, el distrito rojo más grande y antiguo de Calcuta, terminaron creando el sindicato DMSC, como un sindicato de trabajadores. Ellos redujeron la tasa de infección por VIH hasta en un 60% durante los dos primeros años del programa y mejoraron su imagen en la ciudad, de tal manera que los oficiales tuvieron que verlos como ciudadanos. Ellos comenzaron a recibir atención internacional de grupos de mujeres, grupos laborales y de derechos humanos, quienes los apoyaban para que resistieran la coerción policial, y empezaron a organizarse para una mejor educación para ellos y sus hijos. Durante los últimos cinco años, el sindicato de trabajadores sexuales en Calcuta también ha ayudado a trabajadores sexuales en otros lugares de la India y Asia a sindicalizarse.

Alrededor del mismo tiempo, las leyes sobre migración estaban cambiando en Estados Unidos. Antes de 1996, los residentes de largo plazo en Estados Unidos recibían ciertos y limitados servicios públicos aunque estuvieran indocumentados; el gobierno estadounidense permitía que algunas de estas personas se quedaran a vivir en el país si es que ellos comprobaban que enfrentarían dificultades si salían del país. Después de 1996, emergió la terapia de combinación antirretroviral ("el cóctel"), pero los servicios relacionados a la salud para inmigrantes indocumentados fueron suspendidos y tener VIH se convirtió en *un motivo para la deportación* en lugar de ser una razón para su aplazamiento. Después, en 1997 y de nuevo en el 2001, el proceso de deportación se agilizó



para que los inmigrantes indocumentados en realidad salieran del país más rápidamente después que su proceso de deportación había empezado. La gente que había vivido en Estados Unidos y que había contribuido a la economía del país por debajo de la mesa durante años, de repente se sintió en peligro.

En ese entonces yo estaba haciendo interpretación de bengali/inglés para personas VIH+ y una vez acompañé a mi supervisor al hospital de Queens para explicarle a un hombre indocumentado, no solamente que tenía VIH, sino que sería deportado tan pronto mejorara. El había estado viviendo en la ciudad durante los últimos 6 años y recientemente había sido admitido inconsciente a la sala de emergencia del hospital. Fue un punto de crisis para los inmigrantes de la ciudad y muchos de los hombres *queers* que tenían la protección relativa de inmigración o la documentación de ciudadanía decidieron apoyar a aquellos que no la tenían. Y ellos lo hicieron al usar algunas de las mismas técnicas que los trabajadores sexuales estaban utilizando en Calcuta; algunos de ellos las conocían al trabajar conjuntamente en India o en conferencias internacionales o de redes de trabajo en el Internet, especialmente porque la DMSC publicitaba muy bien su propio trabajo. Los trabajadores sexuales en Calcuta, mientras tanto estaban utilizando técnicas de reducción de daños que habían aprendido de los hombres gay en Nueva York quienes habían publicado esos esfuerzos en publicaciones de intercambio internacional y talleres en conferencias. La idea de reducción de daños se trata de que cuando no es



prevention efforts at all. And this interfacing across national borders was something intentional that organizers in the two countries had meant to accomplish, to make connections with and bolster the efforts of people working towards similar ends but in really different circumstances.

This is an example of an unlikely coupling in the name of AIDS. These two groups of people – the immigrant men in New York and the sex workers in Calcutta – shared strategies; they spoke to each other and shared financial support and sometimes became friends. They had similar situations, and they backed each other up. Some of the immigrant men in New York did sex work, and many of the sex workers in Calcutta were migrants themselves. Their two cities were both launching campaigns to “clean up” the streets so as to open each city to as much international finance and business as possible, and the easy targets for these “clean-up” sweeps were migrants and sexual “deviants.” Queer kids of color in the West Village in New York felt the effects of these sweeps as much as did residents of Sonagachi and other red light districts in Calcutta. But these very different groups of people recognized how much their circumstances had in common.

Ami, a transgender sex worker in India told me she gained a lot from the trans movement in the United States. It helped her develop a language to explain her gender to authorities in India, and she found allies who supported her through a brief but difficult incarceration. Several people told me that the increased nationalism of the U.S. and

práctico transformar completamente las circunstancias de vida de una persona en algo ideal, siempre es mejor reducir el riesgo en la vida de la persona. Así que es mejor proveer condones en las prisiones y dar jeringas limpias a usuarios de drogas y ayudar a trabajadores sexuales a tener un medio ambiente de trabajo limpio y seguro, que esperar la erradicación de los usuarios de drogas o la prostitución antes de empezar cualquier esfuerzo de prevención. Y esta interconexión a través de fronteras nacionales fue algo intencional que los organizadores de los dos países habían querido cumplir, hacer conexiones y apoyar los esfuerzos de la gente trabajando hacia finalidades similares pero en circunstancias realmente diferentes.

Este es un ejemplo de una colaboración insólita en el nombre del SIDA. Estos dos grupos de personas (hombres inmigrantes en Nueva York y trabajadoras de sexo en Calcuta) compartieron estrategias; hablaron y compartieron apoyo económico y algunas veces se convirtieron en amigos. Ellos estaban en situaciones semejantes y se apoyaron mutuamente. Algunos de los hombres inmigrantes en Nueva York realizaban trabajo sexual, y muchas de las trabajadoras sexuales en Calcuta eran inmigrantes. Sus dos ciudades estaban lanzando campañas para “limpiar” las calles para abrir cada ciudad al mayor financiamiento y negocios internacionales posibles, y los puntos fáciles para estas barridas de “limpieza” eran los inmigrantes y los “pervertidos” sexuales. Los chicos *queer* de color en West Village en Nueva York sintieron los efectos de estas barridas tanto como las sintieron los residentes de

Indian governments through the 1990’s worked to make the countries seem further and further apart, even if more and more companies were doing business in both places. But the way activists traveled to international protests together and helped each other organize over e-mail and through the media made folks who lived on the margins feel like they had this other place where they belonged politically. It’s the way queer and feminist activism has always worked: turning power dynamics around so that the people who get pushed around can be allies to each other and together create a new center, a powerful place of their shared marginalization. In the process, we model how we think about our bodies, our communities, and the best ways for us to care for each other when we feel that our governments are not caring for us enough.

Sonagachi y otros distritos de la zona roja en Calcuta. Pero estos grupos de personas tan diferentes reconocieron qué tanto tenían en común sus circunstancias.

Ami, una trabajadora sexual transgénero en India me dijo que ella se había beneficiado bastante del movimiento trans en EE. UU. Le ayudó a desarrollar un lenguaje para explicar su género a las autoridades en India, y encontró aliados que la apoyaron durante un período breve pero difícil en el que estuvo detenida. Algunas personas me dijeron que el creciente nacionalismo de los gobiernos de EE. UU. e India durante los noventa trabajó para hacer que los países parecieran más distantes, a pesar de que más compañías estaban realizando negocios en ambos lugares. Pero la manera en que los activistas viajan juntos a protestas internacionales y se ayudan mutuamente para organizarse a través de correo electrónico y a través de los medios, hizo que la gente que vivía en los márgenes se sintiera que tenían este otro lugar al que políticamente pertenecían. Es la manera en la que el activismo *queer* y feminista siempre ha trabajado: voltear las dinámicas de poder para que así las personas que son manoseadas puedan aliarse entre sí y juntos crear un nuevo centro, un lugar poderoso de su marginalización compartida. En el proceso, nosotros modelamos cómo pensamos sobre nuestros cuerpos, nuestras comunidades y las mejores maneras de cuidarnos los unos a los otros cuando sentimos que nuestros gobiernos no nos están cuidando lo suficiente.



## Identity, Intimacy and Mortality

Monica Majoli

For the past fifteen years my work has engaged issues of identity, intimacy and mortality. While predominately sexually explicit, the primary focus of my work has consistently been on the psychological aspects of physical experience. The underlying content addresses the quest for emotional closeness and connection.

Following my earliest paintings of gay male sex, which documented the experiences of a close friend, my work became strictly autobiographical. The paintings dealt with sexual identity and gender more overtly through the use of the dildo as prop. In these works the dildo acts as a site of longing and limitation, as locus of both desire and absence.

In 1999 I began an extensive project depicting men engaged in a fetish, which involves donning multi-layered rubber suits. I employed a new medium, watercolor (transparent and opaque, i.e. gouache), as I felt it best described a fluid, disembodied consciousness encased within a confining structure. The rubber suits act as a second skin, while the opaque shapes that surround the men describe both the isolation within the suit and a location or barrier around the men. The highly deliberate subtlety in value and form created by delicate washes, gives a vaporous quality to the figures. The shape around the men becomes symbolic of both a specific space and a void, echoing the men's transparent bodies within their suits.

This work has evolved into its current form, which involves life-size figures in rubber, suspended from trees in the woods. Identification either with the hanging masochist or the controlling sadist is immediate due to the large scale of the bodies. The woods, painted in gouache, in which the figures hang are blurred, muted and abstracted to create the muffled perception of the landscape as experienced from inside the rubber suit. The chalkiness of the surrounding landscape in combination with the luminous transparency of the figures acts as a disjunctive element between exterior and interior dimensions.

RIGHT: Hanging Rubberman #2 2003, watercolor and gouache on paper, 64 x 51

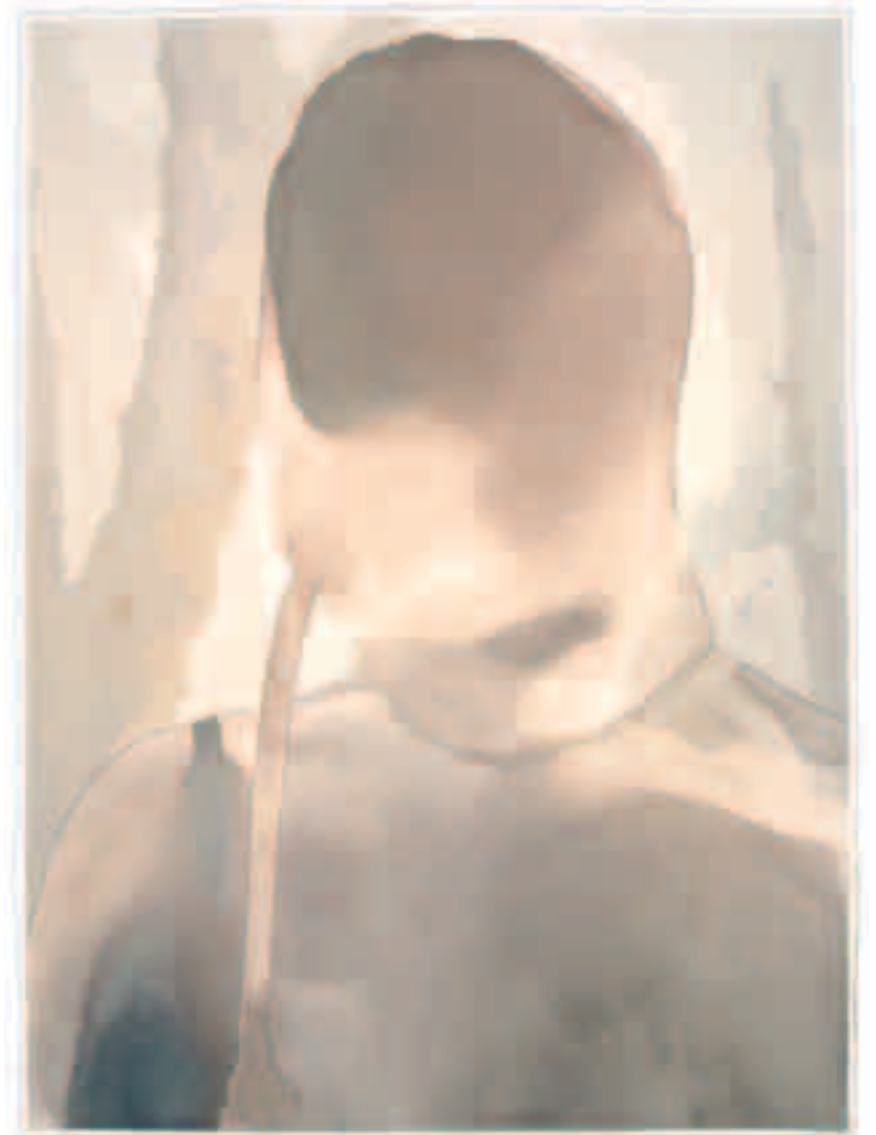
FACING PAGE: Untitled 1990, oil on wood, 12 x 12 x 1.5







Individual, larger-than-life heads of rubbermen in watercolor are my most recent works. Pumps and tubes emanating from anonymous heads highlight the psychological and physical aspect of suffocation and heightened awareness of both confinement and breathing that is essential to this activity. The liquid, impenetrable rubber acts as a kind of mirror for the viewer; not allowing interpretation of facial expression, one is prone to projection or self-reflection. Landscape in these works is internalized, echoing or superimposing the landscape within the boundaries of the body and mind.

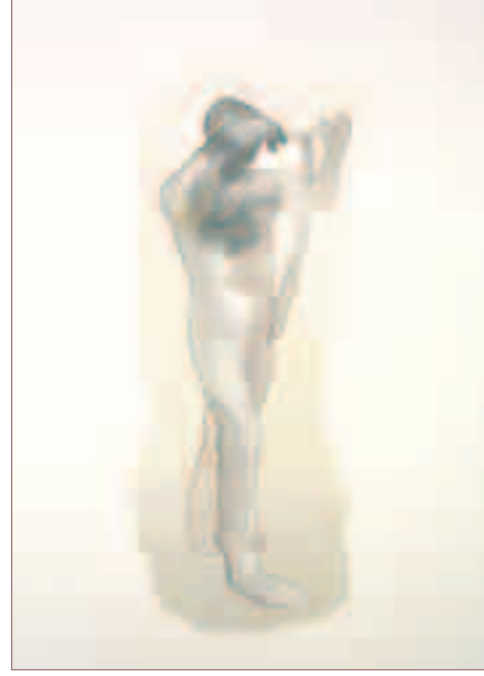


ABOVE: Head #3 2004, watercolor and gouache on paper, 30 x 22.5  
FACING PAGE: Untitled 1990, oil on panel, 12 x 12





All images from the Rubberman series, 2000-01, watercolor and gouache on paper, each 10 x 14



FACING PAGE: Untitled 1991, oil on wood, 12 x 12 x 1.5  
BELOW: Head #2 2004, watercolor and gouache on paper, 22.5 x 30



**for cj**

Colin Robinson

to love you like  
 a lesbian like a  
 man make love to you like  
 worship taste you where it  
 burns my tongue discovering  
 cracks and crevices and  
 holes secretions odours yours with mine mixing colours  
 white with brown with clear licking smelling eating  
 sucking biting teasing tickling thrusting oozing trickling  
 swallowing dribbling rimming bubbling fart and  
 come and sweat and spit with shit and cheese and breath  
 with toes and faint cologne bouquet from hairy sachets'  
 potions

**Kittatinny**

Cheryl Clarke

*I wanna love and treat you, love and treat you right.*  
 — Bob Marley

Kittatinny Tunnel in that holy place you let me hit  
 I push on toward your darker part.  
 I'll take you there and mean it.

In my car, by the road, in a tent, in a pit  
 stop, and practice a funkier art,  
 Kittatinny Tunnel of that holy place you let me hit.

Shout, cry, promise, beg, cajole, go limp, or spit  
 on me with dirty words to test my heart.  
 I'll take you there and mean it.

Crawl from me, pitch a fit,  
 stand, hug the wall, bend, and direct me part  
 and penetrate Kittatinny, that holy place you let me hit.

And take it, take it, take it.  
 Call it bitch, whore, slave, tart.  
 I'll take you there and mean it.

Tribad, dildo, lick your clit-  
 oris. Come, pee, shit, or fart,  
 I'll take you there and mean it,  
 Kittatinny Tunnel of that holy place you let me hit.



## Pomo Afro Homo Vexing of Black Macho in the Age of AIDS

Cheryl Clarke

Through their deployments of literacies—the writing, films, and politics drawn from the teachings of black feminists and black nationalists—“black gay renaissance” writers (1982-1996) negotiated the rough terrain of black, queer, and man. Will we reckon with the tremendous toll AIDS has taken on black communities in the United States? The vexing of black macho has had to do with the absence caused by AIDS, shifting gender expression, and strategic silences—“I won’t tell you who I am”—e.g., when Sylvester appeared on the Tonight Show on New Year’s Eve, 1986, and tacky hostess, Joan Rivers asked him, “So, what did your family say when they found out you were going to be a drag queen?” Sylvester exclaimed dramatically, “I’m not a drag queen! I’m Sylvester” (Gamson 12).

*Once we reclaim the camp and crazy “carnavalesque” excesses of Little Richard—the original Queen of Rock ‘n’ Roll—we can appreciate the way black men in popular music have parodied the stereotypes of black masculinity to “theatricalize” and send up the charade of gender roles.*

So said black cultural critics, Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer (1994), as they vexed black macho eleven years ago and looked to black literacies and histories to find those who have done so before them. But even (Little) Richard Penniman would not have been possible without Louis Armstrong. Did Little Richard—Elvis and James Brown, too—not learn his excesses from Pops? What excesses could ever match Pops’ excesses? Remember his Zulu King at the Mardi Gras parade in New Orleans in 1949? He claims to have been awakened from a nap by “something crawling around my chops.” One of his fellow members of the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club—Pops’ longtime fraternal association—was steadily making him up in preparation for the parade. After the member applied the whiteface, Pops “donned ... a wig, red velvet tunic, yellow grass skirt, black tights, and a crown adorned with red feathers ... A grotesque sight,” according to Laurence Bergreen, one of Armstrong’s more recent biographers. To preserve the luster of Pops’ heterosexuality, Bergreen is quick to mention the “retinue of female assistants” who attended him as he “mounted” the Zulu Float (444). This was, most certainly, the “carnavalesque” send-up that Mercer and Julien were looking for.

Besides the campy men before them there were also sisters who led the vexing cry. In 1986, Audre Lorde’s warrior poem, “Sisters in Arms,” theorizes suggestively that “the men will follow” the women into

battle. Black feminism’s impact on the work of black gay men cannot be overstated. Four years earlier, in the first volume of *Yemonja*, a New York City black gay journal, writer Isaac Jackson calls for “an autonomous black gay movement,” stating that “the white gay male movement is not equipped to help me integrate my gayness and my blackness” (1982, 4). Because silences regarding sexuality were still, in the 1980s, so deadly within black communities, this piece wants to be a conversation that begins to sort out what it means to remember the black gay writers who sent up “the charade of gender roles” in this age of AIDS.



Photo courtesy of George Ayala

Of course, a leader of this conversation was Essex Hemphill (1957-1995) who stakes his claim on the body of Afro-American writing, taunting the black heteronormative canon with his homo-lyric blues. Hemphill faces off the rules of black macho prescriptiveness by asserting his phallogentric masculine “place.” He awakens to “recognize the authenticity of my Negritude” (read as “my homosexuality,” *Ceremonies*, 1992, 5) by declaiming his membership in the black gay nation and laughing off the dangers of a homophobic white supremacist culture:

*in america,  
I place my ring  
on your cock  
where it belongs  
(Conditions, “XXIV,” 1986, 24)*

Let not our brother’s inclusion and canonization in the *Norton Anthology of African-American Literature* mark our forgetting the resistance to black normativity explicit in his crucial and beautiful writing!

#### “Lover Man, Oh Where Can You Be?”

Gone? Dead? Killing me? Sylvester (1947-1988) “rose on a ramp from beneath the stage” of the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House, “in a blue sequined number” (Gamson, 2005, 171) dead in the spotlight and singing “Lover Man, Oh, Where Can You Be” (Davis, Ramirez, and Sherman), a song first recorded in 1944 by Billie Holiday and her only hit, also historically sung by the likes of Sarah Vaughn, Ella Fitzgerald, Dinah Washington, Blossom Dearie, Barbara Streisand, and even Linda Ronstadt, among others, but, of course, not *sung* by a man and rarely performed instrumentally by men—except for Duke, Monk, or Dizzy—unless the “girl singer” was up front for cover. Sylvester helps us negotiate that third or “in-between” space of ambiguous difference (King, 2000) disrupting our longing for a grounded racial and sharply-gendered sexuality. Sylvester was the first black gay singer—after Little Richard—to cross over and be “out” or, as Gamson says, “himself,” a queen (188). That night in 1979 at the Opera House, his rich falsetto version of “Lover Man” made history as it insinuated itself into the annals of pop music, up against a do-wrong black patriarchal/matriarchal community that would come to marginalize its own—the homosexuals, whores, crack and heroin addicts, single mothers, and others with AIDS. Is it possible to raise any questions about black men—including straight ones—and not talk about AIDS?

#### BGM Looking for Same

Isaac Julien’s *Looking for Langston: A Meditation on Langston Hughes* and Marlon Riggs’ *Tongues Untied* remain two critical and crucial independent films released in 1989 on the state and status of gay men of the African diaspora. Both Riggs (1958-1994) and Julien explore the unknown territory of black homosexual masculinity. As Julien terms his film a “[m]editation,” full of surreal footage and overdubbing, I’d term Riggs’ film an “ejaculation” of his own subjectivity as a black (American) gay man, as well as a more autobiographical script than that of his British peer. Riggs occupies much of the footage of his film while Julien appears in only one scene in the opening sequence of a funeral, ostensibly James Baldwin’s. But it is Julien’s face we see, playing the death mask, as the camera revolves around the top of the casket. Essex Hemphill, whose words and body appear in both films, is their linchpin, for the fateful lines from “Part VIII” of his multipart poem, “Conditions” are voiced in both:

*Now we think  
as we fuck  
this nut  
might kill us.  
There might be  
a pin-sized hole  
in the condom.  
A lethal leak*

Both films acknowledge the scourge of AIDS and the scourge of violence, including murder, against black gay men.

Joseph Beam (1954-1989) entitles his introduction to the anthology *In The Life*, “Leaving the Shadows Behind,” playing upon the twentieth century metaphor of the “veil,” established by DuBois in 1903 as a metaphor for the Jim Crow system black people in the U.S. were forced to live within. Beam claims that his feminism, radical masculinity, and eroticism were fed by the courageous works of diverse lesbian and feminist writers. The anthology contains work by newer writers like Craig Harris, Donald Woods, Essex Hemphill, Assotto Saint—all of whom would die of AIDS by the mid nineties—and more established writers like Melvin Dixon, who, after a fruitful writing and teaching career, died of AIDS in 1993, and Samuel Delany, whose memoir, *The Motion of Light In Water*, among other works, continues to inspire our cultural production. When Beam died of AIDS in 1988, he passed on his sheaf of submissions to Essex Hemphill for the second anthology of writing by black gay men, *Brother to Brother*, to be published in 1991.

In 1987 the black queer world mourned the deaths of James Baldwin, Bayard Rustin, and Bruce Nugent. Nineteen-eighty-seven also marks the debut demonstration on Wall Street of ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) New York, whose “camaraderie was central to its activism, and it fostered strong bonds between gay men and lesbians that gave substance to newly-emerging notions of queer identities and politics,” according to Ann Cvetovich. The organization’s “in-your-face activism” caused black lesbian video-maker, Jocelyn Maria Taylor, to join its ranks, “even though it was a predominantly white gay male organization” (McKinley and Delaney, eds., 1995). A year later, the journal, *Other Countries: Black Gay Voices, A First Volume*, published by the Other Countries Collective in New York, was intended to be a periodic resource for emerging black gay writers in New York City. The brothers still felt maintaining separate space to express their black gay selves was crucial to their development. This first issue is dedicated to Baldwin, Rustin, and Nugent and contains one of the last interviews Rustin gave, and, among many other topics, including the Civil Rights Movement, he talks about AIDS and his vision of stimulating “a conference ... which would create in our own localities ways to relieve suffering” (Jeanmarie 13).

In 1988, the only members of the black community who were organizing around the AIDS epidemic in black communities were black gay men and some black lesbians. (Fresh in my memory is becoming a founding member of New Jersey Women and AIDS Network, because over 50 per cent of the people with HIV/AIDS in New Jersey were women and seventy per cent of those were women of color. But this was a straight organization, though lesbians were in the leadership and one even went on to become the organization’s director). Colin Robinson, poet and activist, was one of those who early on committed himself to working in the New York City community as a gay activist and an AIDS activist, caring for sick and dying friends, many of whom were in the black/gay publications of the time as well as in the professional field of AIDS research and education. He was also the production coordinator for the issue of *Other Countries*, in which his poem, “for cj,” appears. Robinson’s speaker follows the tutelage of his lesbian sisters not only in the writing but also in the acting. In the opening lines:

*to love you like  
a lesbian like a  
man make love to you like  
worship.\**

The genders are merged, and he posits an “in-between space of kinship” for lesbians and gay men. Mindful of AIDS, the speaker catalogues body fluids, secretions, and emissions: “holes secretions odours [sic] . . . thrusting oozing trickling . . . dribbling rimming bubbling fart”. Robinson takes seriously here the lessons of lesbian writing and lovemaking, as in Lorde’s “Recreation” (“I made you / and take you

made / into me,” 1979), and my own rondeau, “kittatinny” (“come, pee, shit, or fart, / I’ll take you there and mean it,” 1986), which he places in conversation with “for cj.” All enhance the surging desire, *sans penis*, reclaimed in the age of AIDS. Mr. Robinson, in a letter to this writer on November 2, 2005, states the following about “for cj”:

“Of course the poem has links to your work and Audre’s: you and Jewelle [Gomez] pretty much were my guides as a writer starting out. But ‘make love to me like worship’ is [Cherrie] Moraga’s exact line, in the poem my acknowledgement of all those lessons in expression of sexuality and identity I got from all those women of color readings in the early 1980s.”

In 1993, the Other Countries Collective returned with Volume II, *Sojourner: Black Gay Voices in the Age of AIDS*. Its cover presents the book’s title in various configurations of red, black, and green, and to the right displays an image of young black men’s faces with closed eyes; and the names of the many who have died of AIDS appear in white reversal lettering. “Red, black, and green—they stand for liberation” sang Gil Scot Heron at the height of black nationalist expressivity. The editors have “stolen” and “vexed” this masculinist sign as a gesture of their own struggle and contribution to black survival and black nationalism. After the front matter, in a section entitled, “Standing on the Shoulders of Our Ancestors,” are the names of nearly four hundred men known to the editors, who have died of AIDS, from earliest to most recent deaths. White letters are foregrounded on black, evoking the Vietnam War Memorial. Sylvester’s name is at the end of the third line on the first page.

In its vexing of black macho, black queer masculinity often means living on a continuum of multiple identities, as Marlon Riggs asserts in “Reflections of a SNAP! Queen.” Philosopher Élias Farajaje Jones says (1992) these are strategies that enable one to do one’s work, to know the danger and go there anyway. The vexing of black macho has further involved taking the same risks of being black and “as much man” as one’s straight black brothers while being willing to pass to avert discovery of one’s sex or gender preferences or HIV status—we wear the mask, too, and we take it off. The vexing is a refusal to be any other identity than that of black gay man, despite the instability of both racial and sexual signs: i.e., “BGM looking for same,” as implied in a scene from *Tongues Untied*, in which gay classifieds are spoofed.

The vexing is a manipulation of the two signs, silence and invisibility (Bambara, 1988), which penetrate Afro-American life and culture: an invisibility that sometimes enables access to that which we are denied and a silence that is not always acquiescence or death. Just as often, the vexing eschews the protection of nationalism, evangelism, and the mainstream. Often the vexing has meant a simultaneous indeterminacy of gender and a fixing of gender, as in the separate male spaces invoked in the two films, *Looking* and

\* Mr. Robinson, in a letter to the author.



*Tongues*, and all of the anthologies and journals I have mentioned in this essay. Or vexing can be, for a time, to give up risk, as the wary and ironic speaker in Craig Harris' (1958-1991) unpublished poem, "Sacrificial Cock:"

*I no longer invite  
strangers in  
I am afraid  
I am confused  
I am cautious  
I no longer sing:  
'Va, Loco, Loco Valadi'  
sacrifice my cock.  
offer rum libations*

I offer this unquenching libation.

Author's Note:

This is an abbreviated version of a longer article written for the *Masculinities, Femininities* Seminar in 2003-2004 conducted by the Institute for Research on Women at Rutgers University. A version of it also appeared in the Institute's *Working Papers*, published in the spring of 2004. Many thanks to Wesley Brown, who commented on the paper, as well as all the members of the seminar for their insights and comments. I'd like to thank Mr. Steven G. Fullwood, Manuscripts Librarian, of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and curator of the pioneering Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, In the Life Archive, where I found the copy of *Yemonja* and the Craig Harris poem "Sacrificial Cock." Many thanks also to my friend, Alex Juhasz, who provided very helpful edits of this piece.



Photo of Cheryl Clarke courtesy of George Ayala

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## A Conversation About Women, Gay Men and AIDS

Richard Fung and Ming-Yuen S. Ma

*On a hot and humid summer day in Toronto, videomakers Richard Fung and Ming-Yuen S. Ma sat down on Richard's lovely back porch. Ming was visiting from Los Angeles, working on a new video. They spoke about how the issue of "women, gay men, and AIDS" relates to their work and their lives.*

**Ming:** Considering the topic of this issue of *Corpus*, I think it is significant that both of us, as gay Asian video makers, made a video about our mothers. You made *My Mother's Place* in 1991, and I made *Mother/Land* in 2000. One of the issues that I want us to address right away is the cliché that gay men are somehow closer to their mothers than heterosexual men, that our sexuality is a product of the "distant father/smothering mother" syndrome.

**Richard:** I left home when I was sixteen, so she wasn't exactly smothering, but I was in fact closer to my mother than to my father. I think for many immigrants and their children the relationship to a "home country" is learned through the family, through stories and not through history books. What kind of role did oral history play in your family?

**M:** My family is not an immigrant family in the traditional sense, and my mother appears in *Mother/Land* as a subject who speaks with an authoritative voice, one who is quite privileged, one who migrates transnationally with relative ease, and so does not fit well into the representational trope of immigrant mothers—images of elderly women shown cooking or sewing in low-lit kitchens, speaking haltingly in broken English. So the "talk story" tradition of oral history does not apply very well to my family and how we communicate. In the same way, my relationship with my mother also exceeds the "gay son/smothering mother" stereotype, especially since my mother has had a woman lover since I was twelve. The picture of my mother, and by extension, of my family, that emerged in *Mother/Land* was both queer and transnational.

**R:** How is your family transnational?



BOTH PAGES: Ming-Yuen S. Ma, stills from the video *Mother/Land*, 2000



**M:** Transnational in the sense that I live in Los Angeles, my mother in London, and my father in Hong Kong. Growing up in Hong Kong, we never had a sense of ownership of the land because it was a British colony. Plus, I was born in the United States, which makes cultivating any sense of belonging very complicated. In fact, the important story in *Mother/Land* came

from my grandparents' generation. Their story, told by my mother, traced their migration from Japan-occupied Hong Kong to China during World War II, where my grandfather died. It provides an important background to the kinds of migrations that my mother and I are engaged in now between Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

**R:** Yes, here again the mother passes the history down to the child, which is also a center-point of *My Mother's Place*. It's interesting that the titles of both videos use the word "mother," but primarily in relation to social, geographical and political locations. In your case, the metaphor is literally that of a landscape—the Hong Kong bauhinia trees versus the British highway—in relationship to diaspora. In my work, diaspora is addressed more in *The Way To My Father's Village*, which explores my relationship to my father and to China, a place I had never seen but which defined how others saw me.

*My Mother's Place* is not about immigration to Canada. Even though it was shot in Canada, where my mother was an immigrant, it's about Trinidad, where her family had lived for four generations by the time I was born. I was interested in how our disagreements reflected our different generations and the shifts in social and material conditions. She grew up under colonialism and I in the post-independence era. Our sense of ourselves in terms of race, gender and nation was clearly shaped by our different contexts. Many Trinidadians of her era felt proud of belonging to the British Empire.

**M:** I think another issue our conversation is bringing up is the representation of Asian women in our work. I think the investigation into how race and gender intertwine with each other is something we take from feminist practices, especially from feminists of color and some white feminists.

**R:** That's probably true. There is definitely a hetero-masculinist strand of the Asian American movement that critiques the misrepresentation of Asian males as a kind of castration or feminization, but stops short of criticizing the disempowerment of women—and of queer men. In the nineteenth century, Chinese American men were often consigned to “women’s work.” They survived as cooks, laundrymen, housekeepers, and so on. This is partly the root of the stereotype. This situation did not, however, prevent Asian men’s patriarchal behavior towards women. Gay Asian men also benefit from male privilege. So we must be careful not to mistake representation for reality.

**M:** But your work has demonstrated that in North American gay communities, representation translates quite literally into our daily lives.

**R:** The representation of gay Asian men and our lived realities do shape each other, but I wouldn’t say it’s a literal translation. I was in Thailand recently and was struck by the visibility of the sex trade where you do see lots of foreign men—mostly white, but also black and Asian—with much younger, more attractive Thais. This is the sort of relationship that fed the “rice queen” and Asian houseboy motifs.

In the 80s and 90s when I was more directly involved with gay Asian organizing, these sex trade relationships were assumed to be the template for those between white and Asian men in North America. We were particularly concerned about the Asian-femme-bottom image that circulated. This is what I was writing about in “Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn.”<sup>1</sup> But my concern was primarily about how uniform and static the regime of images was—I could find no butch, Asian tops in the porn—and not a rejection of being feminine or a sexual bottom, or of sex between people of different ages.

Back then, in my circle, many younger Asian men were foreign students from well-off families in Hong Kong or Singapore and were actually better off than their older white partners. In North America, unlike in places like Thailand, economic power is generally less a factor in who gets whom. And of course the flip side of the rice queen phenomenon is that in homo North America, Asians are often seen as undesirable. The late Boston gay activist, Siong-huat Chua, used to say, “Thank God for rice queens; otherwise, I wouldn’t have had sex at all!”

**M:** Yes, in the Los Angeles gay community, I have noticed a recent increase of xenophobic and racist attitudes, expressed towards Asians and Blacks in bars, clubs, Internet chat rooms, personal ads, etc. Perhaps this has to do with the overall move of U.S. society towards conservatism? What I am describing is a popular reaction against what is perceived to be “correct” behavior. It is a “I know this

is wrong but so what?” type of attitude. In a way, the recent phenomenon of gay men choosing not to practice safer sex<sup>2</sup> is an interesting parallel. There seems to be a generation of gay men who have been inundated with safer sex education, who are now collectively choosing to not follow the rules.

**R:** Do you think it is a backlash to “political correctness”?

**M:** There is the joke that “rules are made to be broken,” right? The thrills of danger and risk-taking are very much tied to some men’s sexual expression. I can understand a desire to give all these rules and regulations the middle finger, so to speak ...

**R:** So you see a connection between this renegade sexual expression and a renegade racism?

**M:** Yes, sexual racism makes you a rebel, thus “cool” and desirable in certain gay circles!

**R:** I would like to shift our conversation to the topic of AIDS/HIV. What prompted you to make work addressing the issue of AIDS/HIV?

**M:** For my generation, AIDS/HIV has always been a part of our sexual experience. When I came out, the AIDS pandemic was already devastating our communities, so I do not have any experience of a pre-AIDS sexuality. I was involved in AIDS activism, with the group ACT UP/New York in the late 1980s and early 1990s. So it is a part of my lived experience.

For instance, in *Slanted Vision*, which addresses queer Asian sexuality and representation, the topic of AIDS/HIV emerged quite naturally in my interviews with a group of queer Asian men



Ming-Yuen S. Ma, still from the video *Slanted Vision*, 1995



about their sexual practices. In another part of the video, I was also reflecting on my experiences participating in the design of culturally specific AIDS education in ACT UP and other groups. At that time, we believed that to stop the spread of HIV in our communities, we simply needed to provide information about HIV transmission in a culturally-specific manner, such as brochures in different Asian languages. Now we realize that is not enough, and issues about prevention education are a lot more complex, and involve sometimes contradictory psychological and situational issues, so it is not as simple as “here is how to put on a condom” (or make a dental dam, or clean your needles) but it still addresses why we behave the way we do sexually. I am not sure if *Slanted Vision* can be used in AIDS education, but some of the issues it brings up, such as agency and informed risk-taking, are issues that AIDS educators are interested in now.

**R:** I made two videos directly for AIDS education campaigns. *Fighting Chance* was done for a series that John Greyson and Michael Balser<sup>3</sup> produced for community television. Having worked with the Gay Asian AIDS Project in Toronto (now merged into Asian Community AIDS Services), I noticed that educational material addressing the gay community assumed gay white men, and the emerging material geared towards the Asian communities assumed heterosexual Asians. So Asian gay men fell out of the picture. It seemed that people needed the proof of HIV+ gay Asians on screen, so I made a talking heads documentary featuring the voices and faces of these men.

*Steam Clean* was done for Gay Men’s Health Crisis in New York, as one of the Safer Sex Shorts that they were showing in bars and various places. They asked me to do an Asian one, and in it I chose to show sex between an East Asian and a South Asian man. Later, in 2000, I made a really nostalgic piece, *Sea in the Blood*, about my sister, who died of thalassemia and my partner Tim, who has AIDS. These are both diseases of the blood, but they figure quite different socially.



Richard Fung, still from the video *Steam Clean*, 1990  
Courtesy of Vtape

You make a distinction between the community organizing you did as an AIDS activist, and your work as a video artist. I am thinking, though, how HIV/AIDS seems to haunt a tape like *Sniff*. It has a sense of yearning and absence that I cannot help but read as being about AIDS.

**M:** I make a distinction between AIDS as a subject matter in my work and AIDS activism. *Sniff* emerged from the experience of seeing so many friends, lovers, and people in the community die, and having to think about death every time I have sex. Initially, I limited my activist work to organizing only, not through making video. But in 1997, I made *There is No Name for This ...* in collaboration with the Asian Pacific Wellness Center in San Francisco as a part of an anti-homophobia education campaign within Chinese-American communities. It explores issues around the Chinese diaspora and queer issues, it foregrounds lived experiences, it deals with story telling, and portrays a community.



Ming-Yuen S. Ma, still from the video *Sniff*, 1997

However, my experience in negotiating the relationship between women, gay men and AIDS did not initially come from my video work, rather, I remember the productive coalition between AIDS activism and the reproductive rights movement in the 1980s and ‘90s. Many direct actions at that time, such as Stop The Church,<sup>4</sup> were staged by both groups. Both movements were also about struggles to take control of our own bodies. In this I saw a lot of the theoretical affinities between queer theory and feminism demonstrated in action, which was very exhilarating!

There was a coalition between the gay men of color and women activists in ACT UP, which was informal but quite productive. As I recall, the issues of race and gender eventually contributed to some of the rifts within the organization, namely the division between gay white men and the women and people of color.

**R:** That did not happen so much here in Toronto with AIDS Action Now!, our equivalent of ACT UP in New York, partly because there were not that many people of color involved. There were a number of very prominent women activists in AIDS Action Now! I am thinking, for instance, of Darien Taylor, who is HIV positive and made a video about women and AIDS, *Voices of Positive Women*, in 1992. The first video on women and AIDS in Canada, *AnOther Love Story: Women and AIDS*, was produced in 1990 by Debbie Douglas and Gabrielle Micallef, a mixed-race lesbian couple, and featured a lot of local black women. But many women, straight and lesbian, put a lot of energy into this issue, this disease that did not affect their own bodies, but had ravaged their friends, their brothers, their sons.

**M:** These women are now playing a significant role in memorializing that period of the AIDS activist movement. I am noticing a trend in the U.S., where many activists from my generation are remembering and re-evaluating their experiences from almost twenty years ago. Since a lot of the men have died, many women activists are performing important roles in this process.

**R:** What do you think is the legacy of that past period of coalescence for activist agendas today?

**M:** Personally, I think every generation has a defining moment, and that period was the moment that transformed my generation. When I show AIDS activist videos in my classes now, I find it very difficult to convey a sense of our lives during that time to my students. They do not share the experience of being in a life-or-death situation. It was not a war in the traditional sense, but that period was war-like in that it was about people's lives on the line. There was a sense of urgency and passion that brought people together in a way that is hard to imagine in the same communities today. I remember a quote from *Sea in the Blood*, "I have always lived close to illness." I think this video is significant in that it brings together the issues of gay men, women, and AIDS in your work. In the works we discussed earlier, the issues of AIDS, gay Asian sexuality, and the experience of women are important yet separate strands of thought, but they come together in this tape. Interesting, too, that your mother's voice figures prominently in it as a part of the video's narrative. So we do come full circle, back to the mother ...



ABOVE: Richard Fung, still from the video *Sea In The Blood*, 2000  
Courtesy of Vtape

## Videography

*AnOther Love Story: Women and AIDS* (1990) Debbie Douglas and Gabrielle Micallef, TRT 30 min.

*Fighting Chance* (1990) Dir. Richard Fung, TRT: 26 min.

*Mother/Land* (2000) Dir. Ming-Yuen S. Ma, TRT: 25 min.

*My Mother's Place* (1991) Dir. Richard Fung, TRT: 50 min.

*Sea In The Blood* (2000) Dir. Richard Fung, TRT: 24 min.

*Slanted Vision* (1995) Dir. Ming-Yuen S. Ma, TRT; 50 min.

*Sniff* (1997) Dir. Ming-Yuen S. Ma, TRT: 5 min.

*Steam Clean* (1990) Dir. Richard Fung, TRT: 3 min.

*There Is No Name For This* (1997) Dir. Ming-Yuen S. Ma & Cianna P. Stewart, TRT: 50 min.

*Voices of Positive Women* (1992) Michael Balser and Darien Taylor, TRT: 27 min.

## Distribution Information

For Ming's videos, go to [www.mingyuensma.org](http://www.mingyuensma.org)

For Richard's videos, go to [www.vtape.org](http://www.vtape.org) or [www.vdb.org](http://www.vdb.org)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> An essay originally published in *How Do I Look?*, by Bad Object Choices, Seattle: Bay Press, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> The practice of "barebacking"—fucking without a condom.

<sup>3</sup> John Greyson is a filmmaker, activist and academic (York University), and Michael Balser was a video artist and AIDS activist. Together they produced *Toronto: Living with AIDS*, a cable TV series in 1990-1991.

<sup>4</sup> A demonstration held on December 10, 1989, organized by ACT UP and WHAM! (Women's Health Action and Mobilization). 4,500 protesters gather outside St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York to decry the Church's opposition to safer sex education, violent homophobia, and attempts to block access to safe and legal abortions.

All images from the series *Untitled* by Emily Roysdon  
with assistance from CC Choe and JD Samson  
photography on pages 72 and 76 by Cass Bird



## Radiant Spaces

Jean Carlomusto

### An Introduction to Emily Roysdon's photo series, *Untitled*

My first glance of Emily Roysdon's photo series, *Untitled*, an homage to David Wojnarowicz's "Rimbaud in NY," evokes the eerie experience I sometimes have on the streets of NYC. I'll see a friend whom I haven't seen in years. As I approach to say "hi," I realize they died of AIDS years ago and the person passing by merely bears a resemblance. A momentary lapse; a suspension of disbelief; a desire to recall a friend's presence back into the everyday tableau of the NYC streets; Roysdon's work reminds me of these radiant spaces: places of suture and reclamation.

Inspired by Laclau's argument that myths offer possible collaborations and "a new space of representation," Roysdon goes on to assume Wojnarowicz's subjectivity in a playful cultivation of everyday life. She has him hanging with the gang, even stitches him into bed – not with her – but as Roysdon herself.

Her photos embrace what I appreciate in David's original "Rimbaud in NY," a desire to re-embodiment our eccentric and slutty icons. To transport the spirit of our heroes to the present drama of our lives, a drama they somehow inspire anyway.

Roysdon's "Untitled" is a courageous endeavor to both acknowledge Wojnarowicz's now mythic stature as Queer icon, and to keep him engaged in a queer feminist backdrop.

### Q & A with Emily Roysdon and Jean Carlomusto

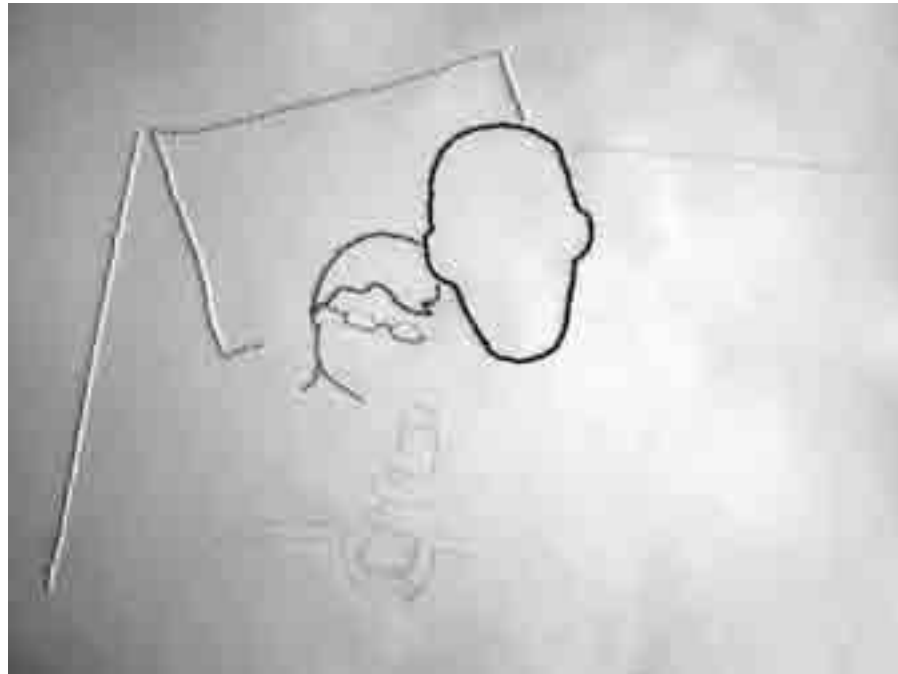
**J:** In your artist's statement you mentioned that these photos reflect a "personal realization of a complex identification with Wojnarowicz." Besides David's "politics, urgency and method" what are the other identifications you have with him?

**E:** David was one of the first people who allowed me to identify as an artist, and it was his everyday life and method and commitments that spoke to me here. Living life.

**J:** Wojnarowicz had a strong identification with Rimbaud. Their lives shared many similarities – broken home, abandonment, homosexuality, early death, are you going to that level of "spiritual soul mates" kind of identification with David?



- E:** I do heavily identify with David, on a personal level, many of my best friends have died, my first when I was 8 ... so the sense of loss and growing up young I think I saw in David. Having to make different kinds of decisions in a youthful mind, but also deciding different reasons to live and deliberate ways to do that.
- J:** Since David's original Rimbaud series was done in the 70s, before HIV/AIDS, what made it dramatically possible for you to "go home again?" Did you find the specter of HIV/AIDS intrusive in creating these photos?
- E:** I wouldn't say intrusive, perhaps melancholic. I feel emotionally as well as politically attached to the AIDS community because of the loss I mentioned earlier. Growing up, even in college, when I was discovering David, many people do not have a relationship to death and loss and grieving, and I had to do most of this on my own and very young, which is of course a giant specter in the communities affected by HIV. I was absolutely fascinated that communities were being wholly affected, as well as, growing up and organizing around something that had been so critical for me. But besides death, moving into a critical and queer identity in those years, I felt responsible to the history, the struggle and commitment that we all still face. As far as "before" the "infamous disease," it's almost hard to imagine, really having grown up "inside AIDS" as a queer, and ideologically in the United States, to find the space "before."



- J:** Were you conscious of looking for the "space before" when creating these photos?
- E:** I wasn't looking for either a space before or after.
- J:** Interesting, I find David's place in these photos as one of hope.
- E:** Yes, it is a hopeful space, a productive space.
- J:** Rimbaud and Wojnarowicz both acknowledged and drew energy from their roles as outsiders. In fact, this has remained part of their mystique. What if any subtle differences do you see between the artist as gay outsider or lesbian outsider? Do historical struggles around issues of lesbian invisibility threaten to erode the type of identification/alliance you are building in this piece? Does lesbian invisibility make it more difficult for you than it did for either David or Rimbaud to romanticize the position of outsider? Or, is this one of those empty spaces you venture boldly towards?
- E:** Great. It is important to me for this not to be lesbian work, which is difficult to say, because I love lesbians, I'm fine to be called a lesbian, to stand in this position, but it is explicitly a queer project, a

queer gender and sexuality project. So I am attracted to David, I am supposed to be a woman, supposed to be a lesbian, but this project hopes, among other things, to bring gender and performance into the frame of gay and lesbian politics. So beyond the historical gay/lesbian divide in community and also in the history of HIV/AIDS, this project takes for granted, or jumps from the hope that we have collapsed many of these boundaries and distinctions already and strengthened our communities, but its also a call to queer trans politics.

**J:** Why can't it be lesbian too? Having lived this incredible moment in the late 80's/early 90's when lesbians and gays got on the dance floors and into the streets together and called it queer, I am not ready for any "Queer Eye" makeover that tosses out lesbian identity like dowdy undies.



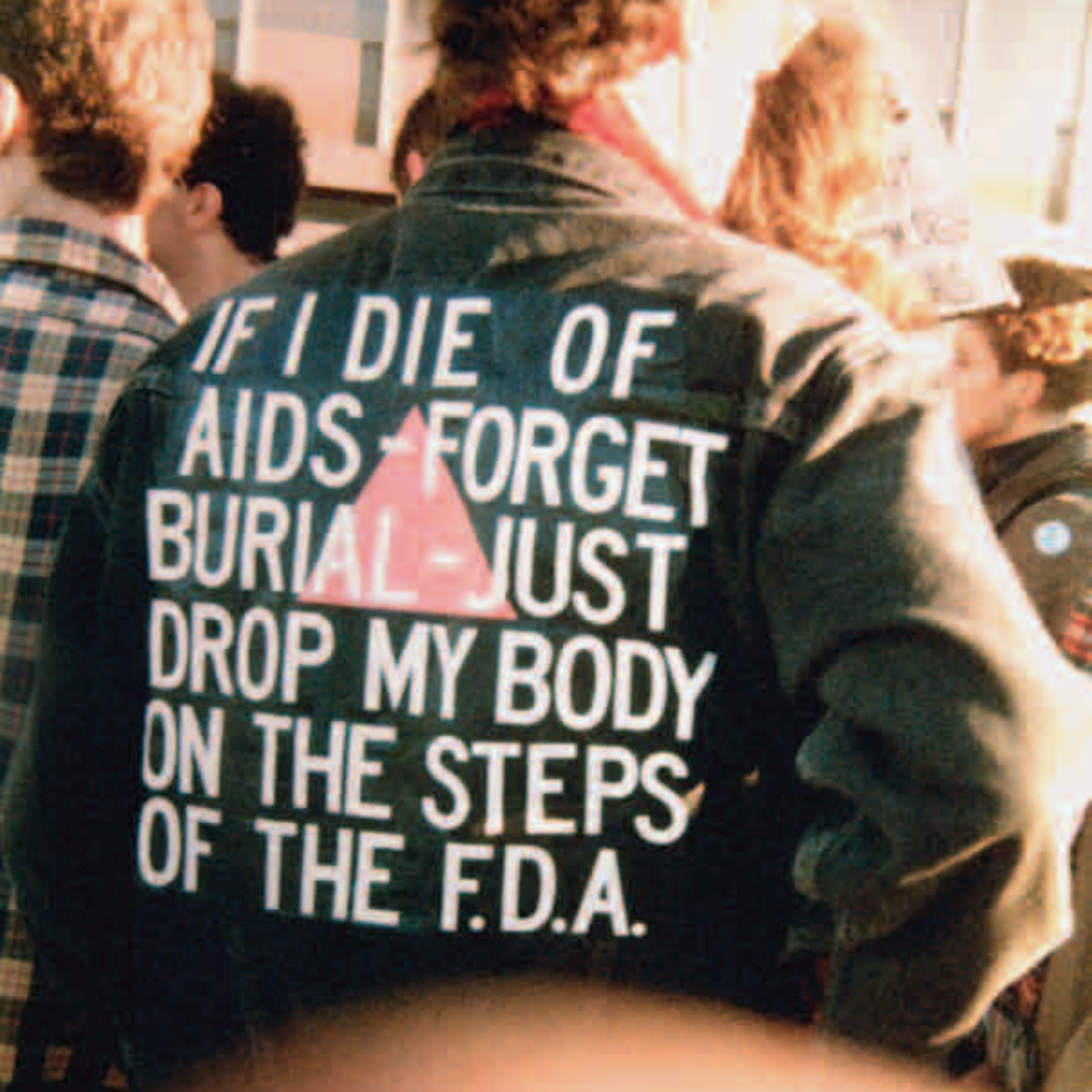
**E:** It really is that only that word (lesbian) can foreclose upon an act. And I definitely want those spaces to remain open in the project. Away from sensationalizing his gayness, or our difference. I feel like him sometimes ... and my desire is powerful.

**J:** In your artist statement you refer to Laclau's "empty spaces" – "It is in this empty space in which our feminist queer identities become analogous and our performances collaborative." Is the radiant sexuality exhibited in the dildo photo a manifestation of your "guest spot" as David, or a co-inhabitation of that space of desire? (Maybe it is none of the above options. Tell me differently.)

- E:** I know what field we are in, but I don't know exactly how to answer this. It's both to say definitely a guest spot, in having the phallus, in making the sex and sexy images, and also in feeling a desire to work with David, stitch myself into bed with him, turn myself into a fag. Yes, turn myself into a fag, allow my desire to move my body, change my body, to make something that gets me closer ... Maybe we should get more into this ...
- J:** In "democracy, invisibility, and the dramatic arts" you state that, "Making boundaries is politics, crossing them is drama." For queers is there a mystical aspect to this crossing? Queer in that it occupies position of outsider; mystical in that it refuses boundaries of identities, space and time. What is it that makes us don masks, makeup and costumes in search of the dramatic impulse of our present life?
- E:** Performance and play are official tactics as well as vernacular expressions of life ... I agree that there is a mystical relationship between queers and boundaries, as you define it. Especially capital Q identifying queers, as a subjectivity that resists being defined by a specific action or gesture. Also a queer relationship to history in the movement between time and space. I know that even in my community now, we live in a mythical space. Spinning histories wide, looking far and queering all that we can. Mythical as well in the expansive web of our relations and commitments ... I think especially from the ravaging of our communities through AIDS and the straight world we live in, queers are less willing to forgo our icons and the lessons from the past. We have had the opportunity to cull our history and in that action we perform our future. What we remember, the spaces we inhabit, the jeans of a lover, the face of a lost friend. We can't release them, so we play with them.







## Interview with Jim Hubbard and Sarah Schulman

Alexandra Juhasz

**Alexandra:** This issue of *Corpus* is on women, gay men, and AIDS. I'm interested in talking to you about your working and social relationship, and your project devoted to ACT UP's oral history ([www.actuporalhistory.com](http://www.actuporalhistory.com)).

**Sarah:** AIDS has been a part of our relationship since we met.

**Jim:** Well, not quite. I can't remember where we first met, but I think it may have been at a party. Through [my then roommate] David [France].

**S:** That's right. A party of all the gay leftists. There used to be so many. But, my earliest memory of AIDS in our relationship was you and David, making AL721, an early AIDS drug, in your apartment. What year was that?

**J:** It probably was 1986.

**S:** When we started the NY Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival [now called the MIX Experimental Queer Film Festival]. AIDS was a factor the very first year.

**J:** Definitely. We had people from ACT UP come and talk, and they had a table.

**S:** But when did Roger [Jacoby] die?

**J:** He was diagnosed in August 1984 and he died in November 1985. It was February 1987 that we decided to start the festival.

**S:** Did we show Roger's work that first year?

**J:** We had a whole show of his work: "Floria," "L'Amico Fried's Glamorous Friends."

FACING PAGE: If I Die ... , Picture of David Wojnarowicz by Bill Dobbs  
RIGHT: Still from *Target Bush*, a video by James Wentzy, 1991





S: "How to be a Homosexual." And the first AIDS film we ever showed, by Larry Brose, "An Individual Desires Solution," which was this really dense, very painful, visually overwhelmed film that really accurately showed emotionally what everyone was feeling. It was exciting to see that an experimental film could express a truth about AIDS that no conventional film could express.

J: Remember the statement from the third year where we said: "In the first year, there was only one film about AIDS, in the 2nd there were a large number, and in the 3rd year, every film was informed by AIDS." It was a really fast transition.

A: I was recently at a panel about AIDS art from that period at a conference for art critics. People wanted to talk about how they can't find any current art work about AIDS to write about today.

J: I don't understand why people don't find it interesting.

A: You two still do, what does that say about your relationship?

S: It's all about the Holocaust, my dear. We're Jews of the same generation. We grew up with this never-forget mentality, and being responsible to your people who were murdered and getting justice for them. It's motivated us for two decades.



BELOW: Still from Target Bush, a video by James Wentzky, 1991

J: Currently we are doing an ACT UP oral history project. We have completed 62 interviews that last 2-4 hours each. We have 110 hours of tapes, and 101 people on our waiting list. We're obsessed by the subject. To me it's the central tragedy of our time. I don't understand why others aren't interested in it.

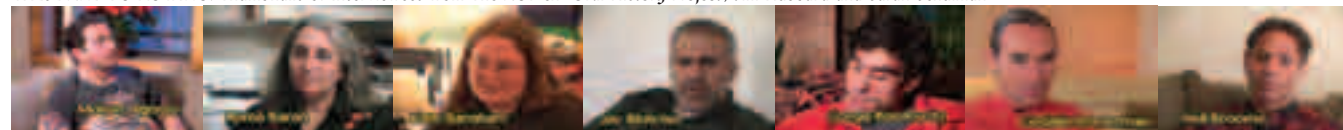
S: What is plaguing this generation is that they are being bombarded by fake representations of gay life that are corporate product. When we were young, there was zero representation and so everything came from the subculture and from personal experience. If you are being constantly told that AIDS is over, that gay people cause their own oppression, that straight people are the heroes of AIDS—and this is the main message of official corporate works about AIDS—you become disassociated from the subject matter.

A: Yet you two stay connected, to AIDS, and to each other. How do you name your relationship?

FACING PAGE: Still from Seize Control of the FDA, a video produced by Jean Carlomusto and Gregg Bordowitz for GMHC in 1988, (prior to and apart from The ACT UP Oral History Project)



THESE AND FOLLOWING: Thumbnails of Interviewees from The ACT UP Oral History Project, Jim Hubbard and Sarah Schulman



S: Jim is not my lover, or my partner, he is my friend that I have been working with for 20 years.

J: And we work really well together.

S: We know how to work, but we don't know how to work it ...

A: How are you drawn to each other, if both of you are uninterested in the other, at least sexually? I use queerness to describe a kind of love or admiration that is not sexual.

S: You don't like to use the word Jewish? There's things about Jim that remind me of certain relatives I had as a child.

A: You guys do have a familial relationship with each other. I call that queer. But, of course, there's another use of the word that is used to tell a history that says AIDS activism brought us queer activism and this was the first time women and gay men were working together on a cause.

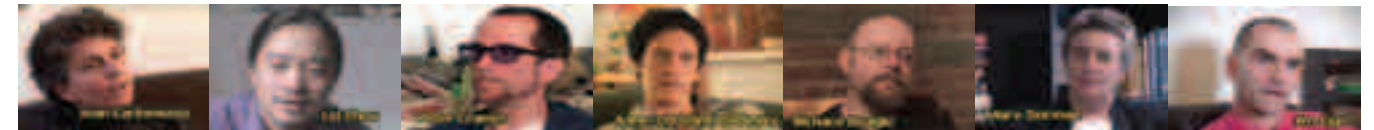
J: Didn't gay men and lesbians work together before queer activism? It depended on where you were and in what situation.

S: If you were on the left and schleppey, there was more interactivity. But not for slick, beautiful people. And we're not slick. That's a real point of bonding; our feelings get hurt by slick people.

A: You use the Yiddish word schleppey to talk about a way of being in the world.

S: I had male relatives in my family who worked and worked and couldn't GET a break and didn't get respect. But they knew the difference between right and wrong. And that part of how we do things is familiar to me; HAIMISH is the word. It's a certain kind of person, and we're not being reproduced.

J: Well if we are I'd like to meet them!





LEFT and FACING PAGE: Stills from *One AIDS Death ...*, a video by James Wentzy, 1991

**S:** Socialists.

**J:** That's a big part of it, too.

**A:** And that's not being reproduced either.

**J:** We're getting a long way from AIDS. To get back to our AIDS-related project, there are 1,000 unique hits a day to our site for the ACT UP Oral History Project. And 20-60

people per month are downloading each transcript. 15,000 copies of interview transcripts are out there in the world.

**S:** In places like Moldova and China. This material that did not exist 2 years ago is now being disseminated to people who crave it and need it. It's amazing. And if people in Moldova are learning how to build an AIDS activist organization, I'm happy. That's the point of the project!

**A:** Is the AIDS that is currently between you past or future oriented?

**J:** My relationship to AIDS is largely of the past. I created a collection for the NY Public Library of AIDS activist video from the 1980s and early 90s. The activism and films I did ended in 1992. And our oral history project is about reflection. A great deal of it is in the past. I know surprisingly few guys with AIDS.

**S:** That's not true.

**J:** Compared to 1987.

**S:** Our cameraman has AIDS and two of our best friends have AIDS.

**J:** I'm talking about feelings. This is my impression: that I don't know so many.

**A:** There are lots of HIV-positive people that are in the closet for new reasons.

**S:** Maybe they don't see how it will help anyone, how it will make a difference to be out with AIDS. People we interview don't feel that way about the past, when they participated in ACT UP. It's rare to have a group of people where no one expresses regret. At a moment when very few people did the right thing, all these people for very diverse motives and from diverse backgrounds, did the right thing.

**A:** Why, do you think?

**J:** The largest motive for women was that they knew someone who was sick or died. The men came out of fear. It was more immediate. And, a lot of those people have not done such interesting things since.

**A:** Do they say that?

**S:** People say that was the best moment of their life. When they were the best that they've ever BEEN.

**A:** Because people were dying and the stakes were higher?

**S:** No, because they did the right thing. Fighting for justice and winning is exciting. Fighting and not getting progress is very defeating. It's a chance of history whether you are in a moment where a movement will succeed or not.



**A:** Was it just a chance of history that ACT UP succeeded?

**S:** I'm a "vulgar" Marxist and I believe in the pendulum of history. You cannot force a mass movement, it has to be in the zeitgeist to exist. This is a group of people who were despised, they had no rights, they had no support from their families, society, or government, they had a terminal illness and they were supposed to roll over and die. And they decided that they mattered. And they decided to come together and forced others to change, against their wishes. And that's the story. That can happen again. It has to and it will.

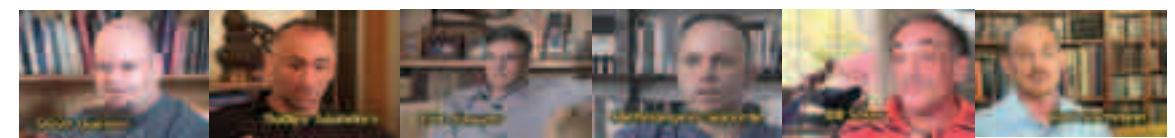
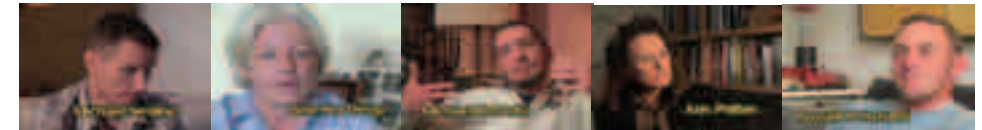




- S:** One of the things that comes up over and over again in our interviews is the word “forced,” it is a very important word in all of this. Right now we are in an oppression mentality, broadly, in every aspect of culture. There is a predominant value of allowing the powers that be to control the structure. If you are trying to force change you are doing something wrong, something negative. You are supposed to be zen and your higher power will do it for you ... if it’s meant to happen, it’ll happen. That’s propaganda about people not having impact on their own environment. ACT UP consciously articulates that we can force people to do things they do not want to do because those things are right. That’s what Jim and I do all the time, we are like a force of nature. We force people to do things, because we know that it’s right. And look how many people are responding to our project and how many people have this information now because we are pushy.
- A:** Imagine the people reading this magazine are primarily young, gay, urban men of color, who may or may not be HIV positive. What do you want to tell them? What can you say that they want to hear? Especially given where we began: Jewishness, socialism, and AIDS brings you together and these are not currently deemed as sexy.
- S:** I’m 46.
- J:** And I’m 54.
- S:** We’re the generation before representation. This current generation has an obstacle that we did not. They are being bombarded by fake stories about themselves. And their challenge is to look at their real life and notice the difference between that and what they are being told about themselves. That’s their journey and struggle, and anything I can do to help with that, I will.
- J:** The bombardment is interesting. When we were growing up there were very few stories and they were all horror stories, but because there were so few it made you yearn for something else. Today’s overwhelmingness is the huge obstacle.
- A:** Gay and lesbian activism and AIDS activism fought for increased visibility.
- S:** That’s not what they got, they got misrepresentation.



- A:** Increased representation of misrepresentation. If you imagine coming into a sense of being young and gay where the only project is to make your own representation, that’s ennobling. As opposed to being young and gay and your job is picking through the crap.
- S:** On your cell phone ...
- A:** That’s not ennobling, it’s just tedious. No wonder people feel tired. It wakes you up to make things, it tires you out to wade through them.
- S:** I want to say to our readers that your life matters. We get the message everyday that somehow we don’t matter and we’re supposed to overcome that. I care about what happens to you.
- J:** In this culture, individual success is what matters. The society has changed enough so that certain young gay men of color can have influence and success, but, the large majority cannot. And it’s only through some form of mass action that change can happen. I think this would be a better country if people stopped striving for individual success.
- S:** You’re saying that celebrity culture is a huge obstacle towards AIDS awareness.
- A:** Sarah speaks of personal love, and Jim speaks of a mass movement. What’s the connection?
- J:** It’s the basis of the gay movement. We have a movement based on love for yourself and other people.



## Artist's Statement

Tiffany Baires

Boys have always been a part of my life. They were my homeboys throughout elementary school. I would hang out with guys on the playground. I would run around scraping my knees and having the same kind of nosebleeds. I was one of the boys. In middle school, things got different. The girls would hang out with the girls and they would talk about hair and makeup and boys. The boys would talk about guy stuff—cars, video games—and those who were developed would talk about girls. I did not fit in with either of these groups. There was something different. I didn't spend my lunchtime cutting out pictures of Hollywood hunks from all those teenybopper magazines. I would rather spend my time gazing at the girls running on the PE field or go to the school dances to watch that one cute little *hyna* shake her ass. But at the same time, I did not realize what I was doing because I did not understand it.

I'll never forget one day in seventh grade. I was eleven or twelve. I was hanging out on the PE field for lunch. Then the bell rang to go to class. I was walking up some stairs to go to class. At the top of the stairs were three girls. They yelled out, "*Marimacha!*" I got so mad, I remember my fat butt tried to race up the stairs in order to beat their ass. "*Mariamacha.*" "I'm not a dyke", I thought. Why did they call me that? Why did I get so mad? Because it was the truth. I then took a look at myself. I was wearing boy shorts. My knees were ashy and hairy. My hair was a mess. "It's true," I thought. "I am a *Marimacha*. I am a manly lesbian." No one had ever called me that before. It was an eye opener. I then had the answer to my question about why did I feel so different. I would like to thank those three girls that teased me that day. If it weren't for them, I wouldn't have discovered my sexuality. Well, I think I would have eventually figured it out.

So now, I'm twenty, in college, and I'm the same tomboy I always have been. In the gay world I would label myself a stud. I still hang out with guys but this time there is a twist. These guys would rather talk about fashion and boys. They are my gay homeboys. They have shown me that it's okay to be who you are no matter how many people in the world fear and hate us. They have shown me that we should not closet ourselves. We are who are, whether it is being a stud dyke, butch diva queer, or fairy.

No matter how feminine my boys act, they are still guys. I feel like these guys keep me balanced. They keep me in touch with my feminine and masculine side. Because no matter how manly I am, I'm still a girl. I think getting my period every month verifies this. These guys are not only my friends they are my brothers. They are my brothers of the LGBT community. We all have to stick together in order to create more education and tolerance towards homosexuals. Because "we're here, we're queer, get used to it!" We are not going

anywhere. We have been on this earth for generations and generations and will be for more generations to come. Many people argue that man was made before woman because of the Adam and Eve thing. But for all we know they could have had a gay son, nephew, niece, daughter. No one is entitled to judge us just because we choose to love who we do. This is why it is important for the brothers and sisters of the community to stick together in order to battle the inequalities that we both face. This is why I have developed close relationships with my brothers. They have my back and I have theirs.

Plus, I don't have to worry about them messing with my girl.

*This is one of the pictures I took on a walk with my friend Albert on the Elysian Park trail where the cruising goes on for all the guys. I was there to see what's up: how guys have sex in public. I wish there was a place like that for lesbians. I hoped I'd meet a lesbian there. If I was there, I figured there had to be another girl there, one who knows gay guys, like me.*







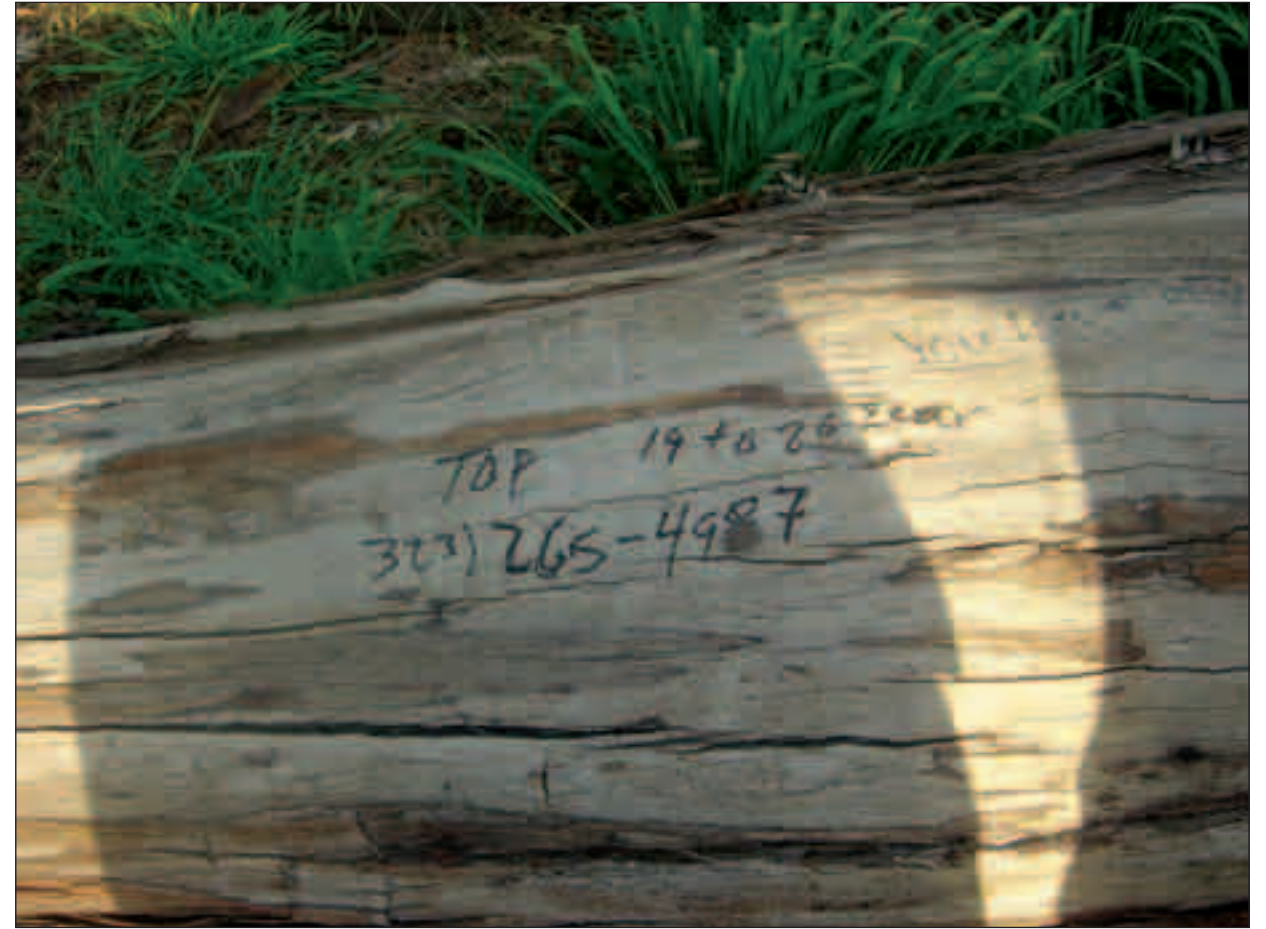
*Gross! That's my first reaction. A used condom! But then, I felt, "Man that's really cool ..."* Men were doing it right there, where I was standing.

*It's an upside down triangle. It represents gay pride. There's a whole bunch of gay pride going on in that park! A lot of gay sex. We didn't see any. But we saw people sitting down and waiting. I guess someone makes eye contact with someone else and then they do it.*

*We had never gone up there before. But that place looked so beautiful: a gay triangle at the top of all of L.A. It makes you wonder if anyone else in the world knows about this. All those straight people, do they know about this triangle that marks where all this incredible sht goes on?*



*I like this one because they're not ashamed to advertise what they are. It's hard to understand how there can be things like this, but yet still some people are closeted. I'm not closeted, but businessmen who have families are. They go there for a nooner and then they go back to their straight life. They're living a double life. Everyone does, but how can they deny who they are? It makes me wonder: why are they scared to come out when we have gay pride? The more of us that come out, the more we can build tolerance and gain respect.*





*That was the first condom that we saw. It made me feel I was on the right trail. It made me happy to know that gay men really are promiscuous. And it made me happy that they're being cautious. That's because I'm the manly lesbian, like a guy in many ways. They say guys think with their dicks, so of course they're going to do it all the time. They both want it and they'll do it whenever they feel like it. None of this, "I have a headache." I admire that they can go to the park and do it. As long as you protect yourself, I don't think it's a bad thing.*



*Each one of us is different but we come together to educate people about HIV prevention. People can come together for one thing, if they set their differences aside and if they are really passionate about something. I'd like to call this picture "The Family."*



## Bricks Falling from the Wall that Sex Built: A Mother/Son Conversation

Juanita Imran and Shah J. Mohammed

**Mother:** My name is Juanita Imran, and my 17 year old son, Shah Mohammed and I conceived this article as a conversation via videotape relating to what we do and do not talk to each other about when it comes to sex, HIV and AIDS. After we taped the interviews we looked at them, discussed what we said, and then individually wrote what we learned from each other. Originally we were going to do the project with three other mothers and their sons but the further along we went into the process the more nervous the other boys got until they finally pulled out, claiming they did not want to talk about sex with their moms. Shah, too, wanted to pull out many times. As you will see, his answers are short and to the point. I had to bite my tongue and take a lot of shit from him to keep him involved, but in the end it was worth it.

It seems mothers and sons cannot talk openly about sex without it feeling dirty, without connotations of lust or the forbidden. When we started we were very serious. We could not joke about it like fathers and sons. However, there's a point in the video when I ask Shah if he thought I used protection and he called me "a freak." I laughed for two minutes and at that moment the bricks starting falling from the wall that sex had built between us. There is a taboo that mothers and sons do not talk about sex. In this society, if you want to upset a boy or a man all you have to do is call him a "mother fucker." Why does this upset them so much? Is it because the specter of incest is a taboo? Is it because motherhood is so mystified? Interesting to think about, but where does that lead in this society where there are so many families with no male figure, where it's up to the mother to inform their son about sex, HIV and AIDS?

I asked my son to work with me on this project because I wanted us to become closer. The older he gets the more distance I feel between us. Despite all the planning and conversation it was not until July that we actually sat down and interviewed each other. For my part, although I wanted to get the interview over and done with, part of me was afraid of what he

All photos courtesy of Juanita Imran



## Los ladrillos se caen de la pared que construy el sexo: Una conversaci n entre madre e hijo

Juanita Imran y Shah Mahommed

**Madre:** Mi nombre es Juanita Imran. Mi hijo de 17 años de edad, Shah Mohammed, y yo, creamos este artículo a partir de una conversación vía video casete relacionado a lo que nosotros hacemos y de lo que no hablamos entre nosotros cuando se trata de sexo, VIH y SIDA. Después de haber grabado las entrevistas, las miramos, discutimos lo que habíamos dicho, y después individualmente escribimos lo que aprendimos uno del otro. Originalmente, íbamos a hacer el proyecto con otras tres madres y sus hijos, pero a medida que nos metíamos más en el proceso, los otros chicos se pusieron más nerviosos, hasta que finalmente se salieron del proyecto, alegando que ellos no querían hablar de sexo con sus madres. Shah también quiso salirse muchas veces. Como verán, sus respuestas son breves y al punto. Yo tuve que morderme la lengua y soporté un montón de mierda de él para poder mantenerlo involucrado, pero al final valió la pena.

Parece que las madres e hijos no pueden hablar abiertamente sobre el sexo sin sentir que es algo sucio, sin connotaciones de deseo o de algo prohibido. Al principio comenzamos serios. No podíamos hacer chistes sobre el sexo como lo hacen los padres y los hijos. Sin embargo, hay un momento en el video en el que le pregunto a Shah si él pensaba que yo usaba protección y él me dijo que yo era "rara". Yo me reí durante dos minutos y en ese momento se empezaron a caer los ladrillos de la pared que el sexo había construido entre nosotros. Existe el tabú de que las madres y los hijos no hablan de sexo. En esta sociedad, si quieres molestar a un chico o a un hombre, solamente tienes que decirle "ve a coger a tu madre". ¿Por qué les molesta tanto? ¿Será porque el espectro del incesto es un tabú? ¿Será porque la maternidad es tan mistificada? Es interesante pensar sobre esto, pero ¿hacia dónde nos lleva esto en una sociedad donde hay tantas familias sin la figura del hombre, donde depende de la mamá informar a su hijo sobre sexo, VIH y SIDA?

Le pedí a mi hijo que trabajara conmigo en este proyecto porque yo quería que nos acercáramos más. Entre más años cumple, más es la distancia que siento entre nosotros. A pesar de toda la planificación y las conversaciones, no fue hasta en julio que en realidad nos sentamos a entrevistarnos. Por mi parte, aunque yo quería terminar la entrevista lo antes posible, parte de mí tenía miedo de lo que él pudiera revelar. Yo quería saber si él todavía era virgen o no, y si no, yo quería saber si él estaba usando protección. De nuevo, una parte de mi no quería saber nada.

might reveal. I wanted to know if he is a virgin or not, and if so, I wanted to know if he is protecting himself. Yet again, part of me does not want to know anything.

**Son:** In the beginning when my mother asked me to do the interview I was a little reluctant. I did not want her to know my personal information, but a part of me wanted to ... Plus, she begged and practically blackmailed me into doing it!

It was embarrassing to talk to her, but it was okay once we started. I tried to hurry her through the questions and conversations. I wanted to get it over and done with. It was so embarrassing. I expected her questions and answers to be harder and weirder and nosier. So I am glad we worked on the questions together beforehand.

**M:** To the question “What is sex?” we both agreed that it is a physical, emotional, biological, mental connection between two people. He felt it was complicated. In a way I was surprised he did not answer as the horny teenager I see him as. It is too easy for me to stereotype him because he is my child. I have forgotten what his penis looked like when he was a child and he has never seen my vagina. We are secrets to each other. It was easier for both of us to answer that “safer sex was a way of protecting one’s self and partner from

**Hijo:** Al principio, cuando mi madre me pidió que hiciera la entrevista, yo estaba un poco reacio. Yo no quería que ella supiera mi información personal, pero parte de mí lo quería... ¡Además, ella me suplicó y prácticamente me chantajeó para que lo hiciera!

Fue muy vergonzoso hablar con ella, pero todo estuvo bien una vez que empezamos. Yo traté de apresurarla con las preguntas y las conversaciones. Yo quería terminar lo antes posible. Era muy vergonzoso. Yo esperaba que sus preguntas y respuestas fueran más difíciles y más raras y más metiches. Así que me alegró que trabajáramos juntos en las preguntas antes de empezar.

**M:** Con respecto a la pregunta sobre “¿Qué es sexo?”, ambos acordamos que sexo es una conexión física, emocional, biológica y mental entre dos personas. Él sentía que era complicado. En cierto aspecto yo estaba sorprendida porque él no contestó como el jovencito caliente que creo que es. Es muy fácil para mí estereotiparlo porque él es mi niño. Yo he olvidado cómo se veía su pene cuando era un niño y él nunca ha visto mi vagina. Nosotros somos secretos uno para el otro. Fue más fácil para ambos responder que el “sexo seguro era una manera de protegerte a ti mismo y a tu pareja de



getting disease.” We agreed that you have to care about your safety if you are going to care about anyone else’s. Even though defining safer sex it is a more important question than “What is sex?” we were both quick to point out the facts and go into no further detail. If we went into the ins and outs, we would have had to name the sexual parts and the steps that go into using protection, and we were too inhibited about that.

**S:** I feel that we talk about sex, HIV and AIDS too much, because she has been constantly bringing it up since I was a little kid. I do not feel there is much more to say. It has all been said before. She, on the other hand, feels that she has to talk about it over and over. I am not a child. I heard her the first hundred times. There has always been a table with condoms in my house. How can I get away from it? She feels like just because I have not seen the way people with AIDS used to look, that I do not think it’s real. She thinks that TV and the news make me think the epidemic is over, that my friends and I think the new pills will keep us well. We are not stupid.

**M:** Shah, like all teens, does not really want to talk to me about the subject, he looks bored, does

enfermedades”. Acordamos de que a ti te tiene que importar tu seguridad si es que te va a importar la seguridad de otras personas. Aunque definir qué es sexo seguro es una pregunta más importante que “¿qué es sexo?”, rápidamente ambos señalamos los hechos y no entramos en detalles. Si hubiéramos cubierto los detalles, nosotros hubiéramos tenido que nombrar las partes sexuales y los pasos que se necesitan tomar al usar protección, pero estábamos demasiados inhibidos sobre el tema.

**H:** Yo siento que nosotros hablamos demasiado sobre sexo, VIH y SIDA, porque ella siempre lo menciona, desde que yo era un niño. Yo no siento que haya mucho más que decir. Ya se dijo todo antes. Ella, por otra parte, siente que tiene que hablar sobre ello una y otra vez. Yo no soy un niño. La escuché las primeras cien veces. Siempre ha habido una mesa con condones en mi casa. ¿Cómo puedo alejarme de eso? Ella siente que simplemente porque yo no he visto cómo se miraba antes la gente con SIDA, que yo no creo que es real. Ella piensa que la tele y las noticias me hacen pensar que la epidemia ya acabó, que mis amigos y yo pensamos que las nuevas píldoras nos mantendrán bien. Nosotros no somos estúpidos.

**M:** Shah, como todos los adolescentes, no quiere hablar conmigo sobre el tema, él parece estar aburrido, no me mira a los ojos, ofrece respuestas en monosílabos. El siente vergüenza al hablar conmigo por el mero



not meet my eyes, gives monosyllabic answers. He feels embarrassed to talk to me for the very fact that I am his mother, the one who had sex to give him life. He can talk easier to his friends and sister. But I will talk to him and any one else who will listen about HIV and AIDS. I talk to my colleagues and friends and we all realize our children are so inundated with sex there is nothing we can do about it, no way we can enter into the conversation. It is really scary being a parent these days. Sometimes, I feel I may have talked so much that I scared him. For example, I use to miss my condoms. Finally I realized that Shah was using them to masturbate with. However when it was the first time to tell him about sex, I asked my daughter's boyfriend to do it. What was I afraid of?

While I do think my son would use protection if he was having sex, I only believe he would use it in the beginning. I really feel that as time goes on he would begin to get careless, as we all do, no matter our ages. I pray that he will never forget the dangers, but I have to face facts. Since I do not always use protection, how can I be sure what my son will do?

**S:** I know my mother uses protection because of the way her condoms keep disappearing and the way she is always running her mouth about protection. Sometimes she actually has the nerve to ask me to get her some. The woman is one sick freak. Just kidding.

hecho de que yo soy su madre, la que tuvo que tener sexo para darle la vida. El puede hablar más fácilmente con sus amigos o su hermana. De todas maneras, hablaré con él y con cualquiera que me escuche hablar sobre el VIH/SIDA. Yo hablo con mis colegas y amigos, todos nos dimos cuenta que nuestros hijos están tan abrumados con el sexo que no podemos hacer nada al respecto, ni manera de poder comenzar una conversación. Es verdaderamente escalofriante ser padres durante estos tiempos. A veces siento que he hablado tanto, hasta el punto de asustarlo. Por ejemplo, los condones solían desaparecer. Finalmente me di cuenta de que Shah los estaba usando para masturbarse. Sin embargo, cuando llegó la hora de hablar de sexo por primera vez, le pedí al novio de mi hija que lo hiciera. ¿A qué le tenía miedo yo?

Mientras que sí pienso que mi hijo usaría protección, si es que estuviera teniendo sexo, creo que solamente los usaría al principio. Yo verdaderamente creo que con el correr del tiempo, a él le va a importar menos, como a todos, sin importar nuestra edad. Yo rezo para que él nunca olvide los peligros, pero tengo que enfrentar los hechos. Ya que yo no siempre uso condones, ¿cómo puedo estar segura de lo que mi hijo va a hacer?

**H:** Yo sé que mi madre usa protección por la manera en que desaparecen los condones y por la manera en que siempre está hablando sobre la protección. Algunas veces ella tiene el descaro

**M:** When I was young we were not as trusting or open with our parents, they just told us to keep our clothes on. They only talked about getting pregnant, never about disease. I was afraid and embarrassed to talk to them. The first time my brother had a wet dream he thought he was dying and came to me to find out what was happening to him. I explained early on to my son about sex and masturbation and tried to instill into him that sex was good as long as no one gets hurt.

**S:** I am not afraid to ask questions or make comments, but I do not want her to drag on the point or make assumptions. My generation thinks differently from her: we are not afraid, we have more information, we think for ourselves. I cannot answer for anyone else because I am an individual. I think sex is between the two people doing it. They have to decide what they are going to do.

**M:** As a mother, I am not personally afraid of HIV/AIDS for myself but I am afraid for my children. Just because I give them the information and they listen does not mean they put the information to use. My twenty-four year old daughter, who is very educated about the subject, has two children. I feel that because children are blasted with images of healthy looking people with HIV/AIDS they think of it as just another disease that a pill can take care of. Parents are afraid to talk to their children, half the time they do not take the time to get the facts, so they end up telling

de pedirme que le consiga algunos. “Esta mujer es una enferma mental”. Estoy bromeando.

**M:** Cuando yo era joven, nosotros no confiábamos en nuestros padres, ni tampoco éramos abiertos con ellos, solamente nos decían que no nos quitáramos la ropa. Ellos solamente hablaban sobre no quedar embarazada, nunca sobre una enfermedad. Yo tenía miedo y vergüenza al hablar con ellos. La primera vez que mi hermano tuvo un sueño húmedo él pensó que se estaba muriendo y vino a mí para saber qué era lo que le estaba pasando. Desde muy temprano le expliqué a mi hijo sobre el sexo y la masturbación y traté de inculcarle que el sexo era bueno siempre y cuando nadie saliera dañado.

**H:** Yo no tengo miedo de hacer preguntas o hacer comentarios, pero no quiero que ella prolongue los puntos o haga supuestos. Mi generación piensa diferente a la de ella: nosotros no tenemos miedo, nosotros tenemos más información, nosotros pensamos por nosotros mismos. Yo no puedo responder por otras personas porque yo soy un individuo. Yo pienso que el sexo es entre las dos personas que lo estén haciendo. Ellos tienen que decidir lo que van a hacer.

**M:** Como madre, personalmente no tengo miedo del VIH/SIDA por mi persona, pero si tengo miedo por mis hijos. Simplemente porque les doy la información y ellos escuchan, no quiere

their children myths and half-truths. I am afraid to talk to my son sometimes for fear of scaring him or pissing him off or telling him the wrong thing.

- S:** I am not personally afraid of the disease. I feel if you get it you get it, “que sera sera.” The only thing I can do is try to be safe in the future. When you are getting it on, it’s a little hard to be thinking about condoms. Most guys want sex because it feels good. We want sex because we have a feeling for the person, but mostly it’s getting the good feeling. I am afraid for my two nieces. They are only three and six now but one day they are going to have to know about sex, AIDS and HIV. I am happy that I am only their uncle so their parents have the responsibility to tell them, not me.



decir que ellos ponen la información en práctica. Mi hija de veinticuatro años de edad, que está muy bien educada sobre el tema, tiene dos hijos. Yo siento que porque los niños son aporreados con imágenes de personas saludables con VIH/SIDA, ellos piensan que es tan sólo otra enfermedad que una píldora puede tratar. Los padres tienen miedo de hablar con sus hijos, la mitad de las veces no toman el tiempo para conseguir los hechos, así que terminan diciéndoles mitos y medias verdades a sus hijos. A veces tengo miedo de hablar con mi hijo por miedo a asustarlo o molestarlo o de decirle alguna cosa errónea.

- H:** Personalmente no me asusta la enfermedad. Yo siento que si lo coges, lo coges, “lo que será, será”. Lo único que puedo hacer es tratar de protegerme en el futuro. Cuando estás en la acción es un poco difícil pensar en condones. La mayoría de los hombres quieren sexo porque se siente rico. Nosotros queremos sexo porque tenemos sentimientos por la otra persona, pero en gran parte es por sentir lo rico. Tengo miedo por mis dos sobrinas. Por ahora una tiene tres años y la otra tiene seis, pero un día tendrán que saber sobre el sexo, el SIDA y el VIH. Estoy feliz que yo solamente soy su tío, así que sus padres tienen la responsabilidad de decirselo, no yo.

Ambos acordamos de que las escuelas podrían tener un gran impacto en la manera

We both agreed that schools could have a lot of impact on how kids think of HIV/AIDS in the future. Schools have to give the information in ways that are fun, in ways that everyone understands. They cannot tell us what to do, and they have to be consistent. They cannot blab to our parents or other teachers about what we say. Condoms should be around but in private places. Television and newspapers and magazines are looked at by all teens, they have to become more honest, stop showing good-looking people with HIV/AIDS. Commercials about the subject need to be shown earlier than they are and there should be more shows on the subjects, shows with characters with the disease. Singers and actors need to talk more about it, make more songs about it. Parents need to give us the facts, then let us decide. They do not have to say things over and over. Parents need to realize that sex is not the only thing we think of.

- M:** Parents need to be more honest with their children about their own sexual experiences. Parents should listen to what their children have to say and not condemn them. We need to keep up with new information. Give your son that condom and let him know it’s okay with you if he uses it. Trust your kids more, treat them like adults or mature human beings. We have to get out there and make the government get more involved with finding a cure and educating our society, not just the kids but the parents as well. We need to support the community-based organizations

que los niños piensen sobre VIH/SIDA en el futuro. Las escuelas tienen que ofrecer la información de una manera que sea divertida y que todos puedan comprender. No nos pueden decir qué hacer, y por otro lado tienen que ser consistentes. No pueden revelar a nuestros padres o a otros maestros lo que nosotros decimos. Los condones deberían ofrecerse, pero en lugares privados. La televisión y los periódicos y revistas son hojeadas por todos los adolescentes, ellos tienen que ser más sinceros, dejar de mostrar gente bonita con VIH/SIDA. Los comerciales referentes al tema necesitan mostrarse más temprano de lo que se muestran, y deberían de existir más shows sobre el tema, con personajes con la enfermedad. Los cantantes y actores necesitan hablar más sobre el tema, hacer más canciones sobre el tema. Los padres deberían enseñarnos los hechos, y luego dejarnos decidir. Ellos no tienen que decir las cosas una y otra vez. Los padres deben entender que el sexo no es la única cosa en la que pensamos.

- M:** Los padres deben ser más sinceros con sus hijos sobre sus propias experiencias sexuales. Los padres deben escuchar lo que sus hijos tienen que decir y no condenarlos. Necesitamos estar al día con la nueva información. Dale ese condón a tu hijo e infórmale que está bien de tu parte si él lo usa. Confía más en tus niños, trátalos como adultos o seres humanos maduros. Nosotros tenemos que salir a las calles y hacer que el gobierno se

that are alone out there trying to help our kids. We need to remember what it was like for us to be teens.

In the end, there will always be a barrier between mothers and sons when it comes to talking about sex, HIV/AIDS and anything related. Not until we are able to break the taboo will we be able to fully help our boy children. However I do think this conversation brought my son and I closer, breaking down a few of the bricks that make up that wall between us, not just in talking about sex, but other issues as well.

- S:** In the beginning we were not able to look into each other's eyes as we talked, but she did make me laugh about some of the crazy things she said. I answered truthfully and I think she did too. I would do another video with her if she did not get too personal. I think I can talk to her about anything if she does not go crazy and start getting into my business. I will promise to try to use condoms all the times when I have sex.

involucra más para encontrar una cura y para educar a nuestra sociedad, no solamente a los niños, sino también a los padres. Nosotros necesitamos apoyar a las organizaciones de base comunitaria que están solas tratando de ayudar a nuestros niños. Nosotros necesitamos recordar cómo fue la adolescencia para nosotros.

Al final, siempre habrá una barrera entre madres e hijos cuando se trata de hablar sobre sexo, VIH/SIDA y cualquier otra cosa relacionada al tema. Nosotros podremos ayudar completamente a nuestros niños varones el día que podamos romper el tabú. Sin embargo, sí pienso que esta conversación nos acercó más a mí y a mi hijo, quebrando algunos de los ladrillos que hacían esa pared entre nosotros, no solamente al hablar de sexo, pero de otros temas también.

- H:** Al principio, nosotros no nos podíamos ver a los ojos en el momento en que hablábamos, pero sí me hizo reír con algunas de las locuras que dijo. Yo contesté con sinceridad y pienso que ella también. Haría otro video con mi madre, si ella no fuese tan personal. Yo pienso que puedo hablar con ella de cualquier cosa si es que no enloquece y empieza a meterse en mis asuntos. Yo voy a prometer que intentaré usar condones todo el tiempo, cuando tenga sexo.





## Contributors

**Rheim Alkadhi** emerged wet and wailing from amid the caravan of a traveling circus. Her early years were spent in the Middle East and North Africa juggling fire and performing aerial stunts. Recent work includes new and old media shown in the United States and abroad. She lives in Los Angeles.

**Tiffany Baires:** I am a 20 year old half-Salvdorian and half-Nicraguense. I was born and raised in South Central Los Angeles by my mom and both of my grandparents. I am the only child. I'm in college at LACC, my major is social work. I hope to transfer to Cal State LA by next year. I hope to get a Masters in social work. I really don't know what school I want to go to yet. Oh yeah, and of course I love girls. I am currently working at the bookstore at school. Pretty much I got my shit together.

**Jean Carlomusto's** videotapes and films are unorthodox investigative reports on subjects that have been erased from history. Her work pieces together lesbian history using scraps of gossip and memory. Her videotapes have been exhibited internationally in festivals, museums and on television. In 1987, she founded the Media Production Unit at Gay Men's Health Crisis, where she produced numerous videos on HIV/AIDS and safer sex. She was a member of Act Up, and Testing the Limits AIDS Video Collective. She is an associate professor of Media Arts at Long Island University and Director of the Television Center.

**Cheryl Clarke** was born in Washington, D.C. in 1947. She is an unregenerate black lesbian-feminist, poet, and author of four books of poetry, *Narratives: Poems In The Tradition Of Black Women* (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), *Living As A Lesbian* (Firebrand Books, 1986), *Humid Pitch* (Firebrand Books, 1989), and *Experimental Love* (Firebrand Books, 1993). Her poems, essays, book reviews have been published in numerous feminist, lesbian, gay, and African-American publications, among them *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women Of Color*, *Conditions*, *Feminist Studies*, *The Black Scholar*, *Belles Lettres*, *Gay Community News*, *Outweek*, *The Advocate*, *Sojourner*, *Blue Stones And Salt Hay: An Anthology Of New Jersey Poets*, *Gay And Lesbian Poetry In Our Time*, *Bridges: A Journal For Jewish Feminists And Their Friends*, *Inversions: Writing By Dykes, Queers, and Lesbians*, *Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*, *Radical America*, *A Formal Feeling Comes*, *Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks and Gays Fighting Oppression*, and most recently in the new journal of lesbian and gay writing, *Bloom*. She was an editor of *Conditions*, a feminist magazine of writing by women with an emphasis on writing by lesbians, from 1981-1990. Her last book of poems, *experimental love*,

was nominated for a 1994 Lambda Award for Poetry. Her book, *After Mecca: Women Poets and the Black Arts Movement* was published by Rutgers University Press this year. Her new manuscript of poems, *Corridors of Nostalgia*, is slated to be published by Suspect Thoughts Press of San Francisco in 2006. She has worked at Rutgers University since 1970 and is currently serving as the Director of the Office of Diverse Community Affairs and LGBT Concerns.

**Richard Fung** is a Toronto-based videomaker and writer. He teaches at the Ontario College of Art and Design.

**Jessica Holter** is a writer and mother of 1. She is founder of The Punany Poets and most noted for an appearance on HBO's *Real Sex* in which her popular poetry group was featured in live performances of erotic poetry-based theater. Her self-published titles include *Punany: The Hip Hop Psalms* (I, II, III), *Verbal Penetration*, and *Speak the Unspeakable*. Holter can be found on-line at <http://www.opunany.com>.

**Laura Templeton Horwitz** is an Associate Director at the Institute for Gay Men's Health, GMHC. She oversees the Community Based Research and Youth and Young Adult initiatives. Laura has also worked in HIV prevention in South Africa. She holds a Master's degree in Gender and Transformation.

**Jim Hubbard** has been making films since 1974. Among his 19 films are *Elegy in the Streets* (1989), *Two Marches* (1991), *The Dance* (1992) and *Memento Mori* (1995). His films have been shown at the Berlin Film Festival, the London Film Festival, the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, the New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Tokyo, London, Torino and many other Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals. His film *Memento Mori* won the Ursula for Best Short Film at the Hamburg Lesbian & Gay Film Festival in 1995. He co-founded and is president of MIX—the New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film/Video Festival. Under the auspices of the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS, he created the Royal S. Marks AIDS Activist Video Collection at the New York Public Library. He curated the series *Fever in the Archive: AIDS Activist Videotapes from the Royal S. Marks Collection* for the Guggenheim Museum in New York. The 8-program series took place December 1-9, 2000.

**Juanita Imran** is an independent video producer who has been producing videos focusing on AIDS for the past twelve years. She produced videos for the Gay Men's Health Crisis Multimedia Department as well as other AIDS community-based organizations in New York. A.K.A. as Misery Dane Diversity she is the mother of the House of Diversity and an aspiring poet. She is currently working on a video focusing on lesbians and safer sex.

**Alexandra Juhasz** is Professor of Media Studies at Pitzer College, and Chair of Cultural Studies at the Claremont Graduate University. Her scholarly and video work focuses upon committed uses of the media, including AIDS activist video. She is the author of *AIDS TV: Identity, Community and Alternative Video* (Duke 1995). Her media work includes the AIDS videos *Women and AIDS* (1988 with Jean Carlomusto), *Prostitutes, Risk and AIDS* (1988), *A Test for the Nation: Women, Children, Families, AIDS* (1988), *Safer and Sexier: A College Student's Guide to Safer Sex* (with The Lay Techs Entertainment Group, 1993), *We Care: A Video for Care Providers of People Affected by AIDS* (with Women's AIDS Video Enterprise, 1990), and *Video Remains* (2005). For more on her work go to: <http://pzacad.pitzer.edu/~ajuhasz>.

**Monica Nu o:** Since September 2002, I have been working in the Education Department of AIDS Project Los Angeles. I work very closely with the Prevention staff in producing publications (*Corpus* included) and I also am part of a team working on a technology transfer study with gay Latino youth in Los Angeles County. Prior to coming to APLA, I worked for many years for the Los Angeles County in various administrative roles. In addition to the work that I do for APLA, I consider myself a very active "fag hag" and have come up with the idea to hold a roundtable with women in similar situations to discuss what roles gay men play in our lives.

**Ming-Yuen S. Ma** is a Los Angeles-based media artist, and he teaches in the Media Studies Program at Pitzer College in Claremont, CA. His experimental videos and installations, including *Movements East—West* (2003), *Mother/Land* (2000), *Myth(s) of Creation* (1997), *Sniff* (1997), *Slanted Vision* (1995), *Toc Storee* (1992), and *Between The Lines; Who Speaks?* (1994-6) have been exhibited nationally and internationally in a wide range of venues. Currently, he is working on a large-scale media project, *Xin Lu*, which explores the intersections between tourism, travel, immigration, autobiography, exile, and displacement. As a curator and media activist, Ma has been affiliated with Highways Performance Space, L.A. Freewaves, Visual Communications, The Rockefeller Foundation, Creative Work Fund, American Film Institute, The Los Angeles Festival, FAR (Foundation for Art Resources), MIX/NYC, and other media organizations at different points in his career. He has received grants and awards from Art Matters, Inc., the Brody Arts

Fund, the Durfee Foundation, Long Beach Museum of Art, WESTAF/NEA, and other institutions. For more information on Ma, go to [www.mingyuensma.org](http://www.mingyuensma.org).

**Monica Majoli** is based in Los Angeles and received her B.A. (1989) and MFA (1992) in painting from University of California, Los Angeles. Through her artistic practice, she has examined the relationship between physicality, expressed through sexuality, and the intangible aspects of consciousness and identity. Represented by Gagosian Gallery in Los Angeles, she has participated in numerous national and international exhibitions, and has had solo shows at Feature, Inc. in New York and Air de Paris, France. In numerous private collections, her work is represented in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and will be exhibited at the Gagosian Gallery, New York, spring 2006. Her work will also be on view concurrently in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, New York. A 2006 recipient of the Fellows of Contemporary Art fellowship, she also received a Getty Grant from the California Community Foundation in 2002 and was the Diebenkorn Teaching Fellow at the San Francisco Art Institute in 2001. She has recently taught in the Graduate Studies program at Yale and is currently teaching painting at the University of California, Berkeley.

**Shah J. Mohammed** is an eighteen years old senior at Bushwick High School in New York. An aspiring poet, musician and writer, his work focuses on the angst of teenagers. He is currently writing a short story on an ex-assasin who is a named Leo Gun and his girlfriend Faith who is half-rat, half-human.

**Ananya Mukherjea** is assistant professor of women's studies and sociology at the City University of New York's College of Staten Island. Her research is on infectious disease epidemics in big cities and the politics of how these epidemics are managed (or ignored). She worked for 8 years as a safer sex/HIV outreach educator and as a client advocate and interpreter for HIV+ folks in New York City and on the Florida Gulf Coast. Ananya's doctoral research was a history of community organizing formed around HIV/AIDS and civil rights in New York City and Calcutta, India. She has served on the board of the Prison Moratorium Project, New York, and is currently on the board of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at CUNY. Ananya loves New York City but is still a Florida girl at heart.

**Colin Robinson** is a Trinidadian immigrant and Brooklyn resident who straddles an ethnic and cultural identity with the Caribbean, where he spent his entire childhood and adolescence, and a sexual identity developed in political and expressive community with other Black Gay men and queer people of color in New York City, where he has lived his entire adult life, much of it illegally. His work is no less fragmented:

currently executive director of the New York State Black Gay Network, where he created the 2003 publication *Think Again*, he has served as director of prevention and of community partnerships at GMHC, field producer for Marlon Riggs's 1989 film *Tongues Untied*, and editor and administrator for *Other Countries*.

**Claudia Rodriguez** is a writer/activist from Compton. She received her MFA in creative writing from the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts). Claudia received the Emerging Lesbian Writer award from the Astraea Foundation in 2001. Her work has appeared in *Trepan*, *Tongues Magazine*, the *Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Latino Arts Anthology*, and *Westwind: A Journal of Critical Studies* out of UCLA and *Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of MALCS*. Claudia has taught at Loyola Marymount University and UCLA and is a founder of Tongues (a project of VIVA) and a member of Butchlalis de Panochtitlan (BdP), a sketch-driven performance/installation/video ensemble.

**Emily Roysdon** is a Los Angeles and New York-based interdisciplinary artist whose projects engage language, gesture and memory. She is an editor of *LTTR*, a feminist genderqueer art journal, and a co-founder of the dance/protest group Dykes Can Dance. She completed the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program in 2001 and is currently a MFA candidate at UCLA. Her work has been exhibited at the Freedom Salon, Deitch Projects, New York; Art in General, New York; MIT - List Visual Art Center, Cambridge; Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania.

**Sarah Schulman** is the author of the novels *The Child* (2006), *Shimmer*, *Rat Bohemia*, *Empathy*, *People in Trouble*, *After Delores*, *Girls Visions and Everything*, *The Sophie Horowitz Story* and nonfiction books *Stagestruck: Theater, AIDS and the Marketing of Gay America*, *My American History: Gay and Lesbian Life During the Reagan/Bush Years*. Plays include *Carson McCullers* (Playscripts Inc) and *Manic Flight Reaction*. Co-Director with Jim Hubbard of the ACT UP Oral History Project ([www.actuporalhistory.org](http://www.actuporalhistory.org)). Awards include Guggenheim (Playwrighting), Fulbright (Judaic Studies), Revson Fellow for the Future of New York City, Stonewall Award for Improving the Lives of Lesbians and Gays in the United States, 2 NYFA's, 2 American Library Association Book Awards, Finalist Prix de Rome.

RIGHT: Photo courtesy of Tiffany Baires and the Mpowerment Archive

*This was my trip to UC Davis. As I was looking out the window, I had a God realization. I knew there was one when I was looking at the mountains, the way they were veiled. There were rainbows, and I knew that God loves me, and all of us. Even though so many people judge us, I know He doesn't find anything wrong with me loving a woman or a man loving a man, as long as we are good people.*





