

Letters to the Editor

Our readers respond

Various Authors

2013

Send letters to **fe — AT — fifthestate — DOT — org** or Fifth Estate, POB 201016, Ferndale MI 48220.

All formats accepted including typescript & handwritten; letters may be edited for length.

What Size?

Not many mistakes in your Summer 2013 edition, but one I saw that referred to the 7-1/2" penis. It shrank significantly from the headline measurement of "Lessons from a 7-Foot Penis."

D. Borts

Ferndale, Mich.

FE Note: One can only assume that it depends on a state of arousal or lack of it.

Not Enough Sex or Women

It was surprising that in a 48-page issue about Sex and Anarchy [Summer 2013 FE], only 12 pages were devoted to the topic. Barely 16 if you count Marie Mason's poem and the two book reviews. Likewise, if you count Marie's poem, only two of the eleven writers were women. Yet another surprise.

None of the articles proposed any long-term solutions such as specific societal changes to our current state of sexual dysfunction. Most did not even attempt a thorough analysis of how we got to the point we're at now, or even bother to address current events.

Rob Dubey's book review of *Sex and Punishment* did touch on the religious aspects but only via Hebrew law and Christianity. Patrick Dunn's "To Abolish Rape, Overthrow Male Desire," made an effort, but was written in terms most people would be hard pressed to understand.

Due to our becoming an almost totally domesticated species, we seem to have become collectively ashamed of our natural sexual impulses, our wild sexuality. Confused and frustrated, this collective neurosis leads us to behave in ways that take the joy out of sex and life itself, making our learned sexual behavior the antithesis of a full realized life.

This dysfunction is rooted in the patriarchal religions that dominate our species. The sacred texts of every major religion reek with the hatred and oppression of women and the glorification of war and murder in the name of God or the Gods, from the Hindu and Buddhist Mahabharata to the Jewish Torah, Christian bible, and the Islamic Q'uran.

Despite the layers of beautiful sounding platitudes plastered over the top of these religious dung heaps, the stench remains and projects itself into the unnatural and mediate spectacle that is the modern world.

Rand W. Gould and Maureen A. Kane

Lapeer, Mich.

Plug for Monogamy and Marriage

I can't help but respond to the article, "Polyamory and Power: A Confession and Critique," by Andrew William Smith, in your Summer 2013 Sex & Anarchy issue, because of how problematic it is.

If the author's use of anecdotal first person narratives to extrapolate and make wholly unsubstantiated broad claims about human sexuality and the underdeveloped scattered logic of the entire article weren't enough to annoy the shit out of its readers, the uncritical praise for gay marriage would certainly put anyone still reading over the edge.

The article's culminating plug for monogamy and marriage as "an enduring social norm for good reason" should be horrifying to us all. Although the author alludes to an emerging equal partnership model for marriage, which places the emphasis on negotiating interpersonal dynamics, he does little to address the structural power imbalances inherent in the institution itself (i.e., gender hierarchy, gendered divisions of labor—even among same-sex couples, racial and class implications, etc). This kind of shoddy analysis ignores over a century of work by radical feminists from Emma Goldman to Yasmin Nair, in favor of a whitewashed version of "equality" politics.

The article goes on to dismiss those of us queers who take a critical stance on (gay) marriage by writing us off as wannabe outsiders (lefties and gender-queers, oh my!) hanging on to our passé critique of gay marriage instead of actually addressing our economic critiques of the institution, gay, straight, or otherwise.

Marriage is the primary institution through which the labor of care is privatized to the immediate nuclear family and functions as the nexus through which all our primary needs are met. This is neoliberalism at its finest and most personal.

If you don't have health care or you have precarious immigration status, well, just go get married! If not, go die somewhere else! An enduring social norm worth upholding indeed.

A few statements from the article I'd like to address directly since they are not supported by any actual evidence. Simply saying something does not make it true.

"Marriage could be seen not only as a state or religious institution, but as a community one." Oh, really. The day the state stops issuing marriage license with all the attendant benefits and the church stops officiating weddings, I'll jump right on board.

"...[M]arriage may redeem its historical roots in the contemporary period by its own transformation as a new kind of social norm." Guess what; marriage already is a social norm. And, do tell me more about these historical roots of marriage? I would love to hear about how marriage hasn't always been about maintaining private property and wealth through family clans over the centuries.

"[Gay marriage] has become the civil rights issue of our time." Thanks to a bunch of wealthy white professionals working in the non-profit/industrial complex, it has, indeed, become the civil rights issue of our time. EqualityTM has never felt so racist, classist, sexist, and heteronormative!

So, sure, you've had some challenging experiences through your experimentation with the poly community over the years and you've decided it's not for you, but hardly a critique that makes.

And, sure, maybe you want your LGBT friends to have the same rights as you, but maybe you should worry about all people having access to things they need to survive, like health care and citizenship status, without being coerced to marry by the state. Until a time at which our immediate needs are not met through state sanctioned institutions like marriage, to wed or not to wed will never be just a simple choice one makes about how to love.

Ryan Conrad

Co-founder, *Against Equality* againstequality.org

More on Monogamy and Marriage

As anarchists and surrealists, we already have our new world now; it's in how we live our daily lives and being examples of possibilities.

If you don't believe in the church or state, how could you possibly believe in church/state sanctioned marriage? [See Andrew William Smith's, "Polyamory and Power," FE, Summer 2013]

A pagan or DIY ceremony is delightful. If I'm with someone or someone's for five minutes, five hours, five days or 50 years, that's our business and nobody else's. Marriage is a weak bond between humans. If it were strong it wouldn't need so much reinforcement from the church, state, and societal pressures.

The only associations between or among humans that are worthy are those that are free because it's only in these types of relationships that we flourish instead of retard or debilitate ourselves.

Those marriages that do manage to thrive do so in spite of the institution and not because of it. There is not one institution in this society that is upheld as necessary, good, or as a necessary evil, that is free. Think of them: school, marriage, work, military, prison. Damn them all.

You want to be with somebody, be with somebody; why beg for permission and rights? Rights? What are rights? What the privileged class tells us we can and cannot do.

I'm sick of fighting and marching for every little or even every great advance: the right to vote, the right to sit, the right to inhabit any spot on this globe of my choice with whomever of my choice, the right to this; the right to that, the right not to do this or that; like fight your wars.

What gives you the right to determine rights? Only your billy clubs, guns, and jails; the privilege to wield punishment that you most wrongfully assume.

I won't allow rulers to control my thoughts, nor will I allow my comrades and companions. I'm open to being influenced out of my own free will and desires but I'm not open to thought coercion or manipulation from any quarter.

Gale Ahrens

Chicago

Andrew William Smith replies: After just a few years since co-editing an issue of *Fifth Estate* for the last time, I was thrilled when the FE editorial crew invited me to contribute an essay for the Sex and Anarchy issue.

My perspective on polyamory and marriage was just that—a perspective and not a position. While I am grateful for all the vigorous responses the piece received, I'm not sure what all the fuss is about from these readers' perspectives.

The magazine chose to publish a reply as long as the essay in part to show that my endorsement of monogamy and marriage hardly represents the consensus for FE or for anti-authoritarians anywhere else.

My critics focused on my embrace of a more conservative lifestyle and its apparent complicity with church and state.

The replies didn't address my concerns about the power dynamics of plural relationships, where it seems a reckless notion of romantic hierarchy can flourish.

While anarchists in general will probably never embrace traditional marriage as an ideal, the vigorous denunciations of my participation in this institution sounded like their authors were upset about something other than my article, which was a personal narrative and not a position paper.

It's a radical commitment to love and even romance that inspired my experimental phase and still inspires me in my more traditional choices. Love it seems should have multiple ways to flourish and many more choices, including even ones that some people would see on the surface as reinforcing the status quo.

Taking It Personal

Patrick Dunn in "To Abolish Rape, Overthrow Male Desire" (FE Summer 2013), so literally makes male desire/penetration to be the enemy that it's embarrassing, especially in a publication like the *Fifth Estate*. It's a sexist, anti-sex, old fashioned throwback argument.

I make no apologies for what I do in bed. "Violence towards women?" I don't think so. No woman has ever complained.

Dunn makes it so literal that I am taking it personal.

And, what about women's desire?

The Sultan of Sex

Yonkers, New York

Patrick Dunn replies: This reader clearly has no understanding of what is meant by "male desire" (or, for that matter, "desire"); otherwise, I doubt he would be lobbying so zealously on its behalf.

First, "desire" is not the same as "sex," or "sex involving males," or any other form of sex enjoyed by this reader. The idea that sex and desire are inseparable, and that "desire" is a natural or necessary extension of sex, is precisely what my article rejects.

Moreover, desire, in the relevant sense, is not an individual sensation or event, but a generalized force or organization of power. Indeed, what my article suggests, but does not make explicit, is that "desire" might be conceived as the primary reifying force governing all the rituals and behaviors that make up human culture.

It is obvious to me, as it will no doubt be obvious to anyone else who is paying attention, that “human culture,” as far as history records, is patriarchal culture. Thus, it is “male desire” whose overthrow is in question.

The article arose from my need to address the widespread problem of rape, which exists in every civilized society, and involves brutal, often lethal, violence perpetrated overwhelmingly by males against females.

In thinking through this problem, I also hoped to stimulate critical discussion of the power relations involved in male-female sex (which I highly recommend)—and, to this extent, I welcome the reader’s remarks.

His predictable, defensive reaction to the observation that rape is a manifestation of male desire, and his smug denial of violence against women, I find so disgusting as to not warrant further comment.

Brothers Behind Bars

As the editor of the *Brothers Behind Bars Pen Pal List*, I would ask that you give our information to anyone seeking a pen pal from among the gay, bi, trans male inmates throughout the US.

We publish the list quarterly consisting of roughly 300 ads plus art work, poetry and other things of interest. We generally ask a \$3.00 to \$10.00 donation per copy.

People can reach us at bbbmyrlin -AT — yahoo — dot — com or by writing BBB, PO Box 68, Liberty, TN 37095.

Harry Vedder,

Editor, Myrlin

Cautioning Anarchists

As an anarchist/anti-authoritarian I appreciated Jonny Ball’s article about modern Vietnam in the Winter 2013 FE.

Frank Joyce’s assertion in the Letters section of the Summer 2013 FE that it’s “risky business” for a “Westerner” to “pass judgment on another country’s government or social order,” makes me profoundly uneasy for several reasons, some of which were clearly dealt with by Ball and others in the same section.

I would like to add that, if followed, this caution could block anarchists from understanding the struggles of and offering solidarity to those who oppose governments in such places, as part of their fight for individual liberty in the context of egalitarian sociability and real community.

It would make it difficult if not impossible for us to identify with explicit and implicit anarchists/anti-authoritarians outside the legally established boundaries of the nation-state we live in, and especially if they are unfortunate enough to be opposing governments that have resisted the domination of the U.S. or other Western capitalist powers.

It would also rob us of the opportunity to explore the real possibilities and problems which can occur when people pursue the ongoing project of attempting to create a new and better social world. It is important for both us and other people who fight for anarchistic and anti-authoritarian goals that we engage in the challenge of figuring out what the explicit and implicit anti-authoritarian struggles in those places are about.

We can’t afford to accept the anti-egalitarian argument that those people can’t yet afford the luxury of the kind of liberty we ourselves aspire to. I don’t wish to support the people by supporting the most benevolent or least repressive political groupings, hoping that better things might come later.

The caution against judging governments other than our own can make it very difficult to recognize and respect the voices of dissenters opposing them, such as the Vietnamese writer, Duong Thu Huong, who has spoken out against the brutality of various Vietnamese government policies, and lack of freedom of expression or debate in her country.

It can frighten us away from listening to the voices of such dissidents as Ngo Van, the author of *In the Crossfire: Adventures of a Vietnamese Revolutionary*, and Truong Nhu Tang who wrote, *A Vietcong Memoir*, both of whom were participants in the resistance against the French and U.S. occupiers, and both of whom subsequently became critics of the established Vietnamese communist regime.

Refusing to seek out and get to know such people’s ideas can only weaken both us and them by weakening all of our ability to resist the machinations of the holders of state power and aspirants to such power.

No state, no master!

S. Kashdan

Seattle

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