

Six women spoke about how they have found the politics of sexuality developing in their own lives.

Woman from S. Africa

From when she was a kid she wanted to be a boy.

When a teenager became "sexual imperialist" - she gathered that the idea was to get lots of blokes, lots of conquests - this reflected her achievement orientated upbringing.

When with blokes she played two roles: in conversation she would be intelligent, witty, competitive, would try to beat them at their own game (not realizing that they would never like her for doing so). Meanwhile in bed she would be very passive sexually - a token surrender to compensate for beating him in conversation.

She got into a pattern: when seeing a bloke she would work at it until she was dominant in the relationship (though sexually masochistic.) When she had got to be dominant, she split and found another bloke to repeat the same pattern with.

She always had masochistic fantasies which added to her enjoyment of sex. When they went, she got much less interested in sex.

On one hand, she saw fucking as liberation, as a gesture of "fuck you" to the system, symbol of defiance, etc. (this especially true in S. Africa) But on the other hand, when she was actually fucking, she just acted out the type-cast role of the sexual woman - not "liberated" at all.

Later.....
She began to relate sexually to both men and women. With men she continued to be masochistic, with women she was surprised to find she had sadistic urges, i.e. acting like a man. She was really scared of these sadistic urges, suppressed them and compensated by acting helpless - then despised both herself and the woman who was involved in ~~this~~ this relationship.

The men were still more important to her, so she ~~xx~~ ended up hurting the women.

Aware of a dual role - her inside different from her outside.

In conclusion, the women's movement has fucked up both her relationships with men and her relationships with women. She puts men down and treats them shittily as objects. At first she idealized women because of the women's movement, this made ~~problems~~ problems.....

She sees that sexuality is dominated by the modes of society:

Competitiveness..... Achievement..... The Future is more important than Now..... and above all, sexuality is dominated by power, Power, POWER.....

Gay Woman

At first she found it hard to relate to the women's movement, being gay. Saw women's movement as 'just for woman who'd been daft enough to get married and have kids, etc.

But she ~~xx~~ got into the gay movement.

There is a wrong idea around in the women's movement that gay people have somehow "solved the problem." Wrong, they haven't, are very oppressed.

Also, women like her without children ~~xxxx~~ have a lot of problems. She now regrets that she didn't have a kid. Earlier it seemed out of the question, and now she is too used to her independence and it's too late, would be too hard. Finds she feels closer to women without kids, whether straight or gay, than to women with kids.

Radical feminism - "It's better to be gay". This cannot be the case, she says. You can't suppose that everyone could ever be gay.

Unlike the last speaker, she feels masculine with men, and feels much freer to be feminine with women.

The one big difference that the women's movement has made to her sexuality is that before the women's movement she felt inferior for being gay, now she doesn't.

Woman who lived in a collective

When they started the collective they were in monogamous couples, felt they had to change their relationships. N.B. Although they were monogamous, they had had scenes with other people in secret before. Read Laing, Freud, Cooper - "Death of the Family" etc. They had a group therapy hour once a week, paid a professional £10 to come and run it. They were encouraged to freak out, and to have relationships with whoever they wanted. Much of the session was about who wanted to sleep with who.

Set up on a male initiative - did it reflect what men wanted ?

One way they tried to force themselves to be more open was by all sleeping ~~ex~~ in one room. It just made them more uptight.

So they moved on to having separate rooms - then terrible games and anxiety at bedtime about who would go where with who. The couples wanted to ~~x~~ change their relationships without splitting up - so did more and more hurtful things to one another, eg having to watch your loved one fucking someone else.

Rule set up - "No private conversations" - ie people were not allowed to talk separately at all. She ~~was~~ found this quite helpful, but it was a strain not being able to have anything privatised. Nothing - objects, people, or relationships, were allowed to be privatised. Everyone had to relate to everyone else - but heterosexually. This made jealousy even worse, eg she was aware of being attracted by some of the women, so when her bloke went off with them, she ~~x~~ was doubly jealous. No women slept with women.

Male ~~x~~ ethic dominated in other ways too - eg the men couldn't stand the women making approaches. Men also felt very threatened by the woman relating to one another. Eg three of them in bed, the two women started to get a bit interested in feeling one another's bodies, the bloke reacted by fucking one of them violently, this made the other collapse in tears.

They developed together a kind of theatre/psycho drama about the kind of things they were ~~going~~ doing. For example, in one bit you had a man and a woman holding one another, representing the monogamous couple, and the rest ~~x~~ of the group had ropes and had to try to pull them apart. These got a bit too near life sometimes, eg when it was her bloke and another woman who were really having a scene together and they were trying to pull them apart she freaked out totally. people got dragged about with ropes, they had to ~~drop~~ drop that ~~number~~ bit. All the items were around themes of death of family/relationships/jealousy. In the group people often felt excluded, so they played an "exclusion game" - someone was outside a knot of the other people and had to try to get in. "Dictator" game where one person ~~was~~ gives orders.... At the end of doing this show for a week at Edinburgh Festival their bodies were literally bruised all over because they were very rough with each other.

Eventually the group imploded - too much tension - gradually people split. Some of them are still more or less living and or working with one another in the same areas of London.

When she began doing political work with women, she began to see it as a problem of how to have relationships with blokes when she was working with women. In the collective, she had been vicious to the women. Now her relationships with women were easier, though still a problem. One effect of the collective is that since being in it, she now finds it much harder to touch people.

Since the end of the collective, she is not so compulsive ~~x~~ about sleeping ~~w~~ with people, because she knows now that she can take initiatives whereas in the collective she couldn't take initiatives and so felt that she had to take any opportunities that were offered.

During her experiences in the collective, she freaked out easily, but found that people weren't prepared to cope with it. So now she doesn't do it - but also doesn't show her positive feelings either.

She's still living collectively. She's having a fairly long-running relationship with one bloke.

(Typists Note: Having got this far I have realized how difficult it is to type up from longhand notes written very fast while people were talking. I have probably been very selective, and I may have added bits or misunderstood what the women were saying. This is one reason why I haven't put any names - because I'm afraid I may be misrepresenting them. If I am - apologies.)

Woman who has been married with kids

She said she experienced a gap between how she would like ~~x~~ to change, and she can change seeing as she's got kids. She used to be a wife and mother. Defined herself as a relationship: first she defined herself as her relationship with her husband, then she ~~defined~~ defined herself as her relationship ~~x~~ with her husband and kids. ~~Never~~ Never defined herself as herself.

Split from husband. "It was hard, and when I say that word it gives no idea of just how hard it was."

She tried living collectively and sharing child care with people in collective - but found ~~x~~ it very difficult to rely on other people in collectives.

Decided she had to change her own relationship with the kids herself - walk before she ran.

Kids make a huge difference to your life and structure it - you can't have relationships without those people relating to the kids, and people can't relate to the kids without relating to her.

Sex not important - too many other day-to-day problems.

Very hard to have close physical relationship without them being sexual as well (except with kids). So for her, since it is hard because of the kids to have sexual relationships with different people, it is also difficult to have close relationships.

So she asks the question: is it possible to have monogamous relationships where both partners are trying to fight sexism in the relationship? Is that OK? Because for her the choice is between that and no relationships.

- i.e. Not "destroy" family, but "politicize" family, - e.g. fighting sexism with the kids, battle for housework to be shared..... This more relevant than fighting for social laundries and canteens and changing housework that way.

Consciousness-raising groups - need to be able to be positively CRITICAL.

A Woman who talked about her experience working things out in a triangle
Work with women versus Sexual relationship with men.

Easy to get sisterhood in women's consciousness-raising groups - "sympathy" groups - when you're not confronted with e.g. jealousy over men. CR groups often separated from the main stream of women's lives - abstract emotional feeling of solidarity. ~~Engagement~~ develops which can evaporate if your special relationship with a man is threatened.

Life in a triangle: she talked about the relationship between the two women in that situation. Little things became important and made disproportionately angry and suspicious of one another. They resented meeting one another through him. There was too much tension between them for an easy mutual liking to grow like it could have in another situation. They worked hard to have a political relationship.

Talking about "liking" people is an individualistic approach - it really just reflects your own characteristics - you choose to "like" people who confirm you. It can be brutal - like judging someone as "good".

When alone with women, clothes still important to one another though men absent - male assessments still there in the way women relate to one another: "she's looking very tarty today".....

If the two sexual relationships were ~~k~~ are kept separate, each with its own "magic", then it's very easy for it to be dominated by the man or by whichever woman is topmost, usually the one who is newest. This leads

to manipulation. - So WORK IT OUT TOGETHER.

The private character of sexual love relationships with men makes long-term political committment with women hard.

So there must be collective working out of sexual relationships in the women's movement, otherwise there is a destructive separation. Otherwise women's movement has no real substance because women keep their important relationships private.

The last woman who spoke

She talked about a recent experience in which a bloke she was with went off with another woman and left her.

She was talking about the shitty terms in which this event had been presented to her - "Relationships begin and end, that's life...." and "Well, I like her more than you....." The person liked is more an object than a subject.

At first she had "rights" to the bloke, then suddenly she had none. It's as if the two people in the couple are the only people who have rights, the rest of the world are like non-people and have no rights.

The myth of the Happy Couple - suggests happiness comes from one-to-one relationships and not from generalised relationships. Important to understand how this serves capitalism's needs - it goes against solidarity.

In that kind of situation the man "doesn't understand." Understanding is not his role in life. In fact being understanding would unfit him for his role in life.

It's not enough to say: "I feel this and that's that." It's important to realize that our feelings don't just come because we're like that, but a lot because of capitalism.

Talking about the general theme of POWER in relationships.

SOME IDEAS FROM THE TYPIST ABOUT ALL THIS

In a way, all the women except one seemed to be saying that they have ~~x~~ tried to find a way of changing and liberating their sexual relationships, but have not yet found the way. Personally I believe that it is possible to change, but it is a slow and difficult process and there are lots of traps you can fall into. Like: You can make an intellectual decision to change and try to make yourself conform to an ideological tyranny, like "I must not be jealous..." This is one way of brutalizing yourself and others, it doesn't recognize how deep our conditioning runs or what a slow and profound process it is to change it. Another trap: you can put yourself in a situation which you think will change things, like a communal living situation where you are expected to sleep with lots of different people, but on one level you can't really deal with it, so you only survive by cutting off and this is another way of brutalizing yourself. An experience like this is likely to make us turn conservative - once bitten twice shy. Another experience is trying to break out of the couple by having several relationships, each "special," not realizing that the same oppressive elements of the couple can be reproduced in relationships with two or more blokes, or in relationships with women, as long as those relationships have all the same characteristics of being "special", private, one-to-one, mystified, collusive, dependent, etc. Couples are the battlefield of power games, but those same power games can be played out in many different kinds of relationships.

Another bummer is to see sexual freedom as the right to rip people off; a bit like the free market with yourself as the commodity - laissez-faire, let the best man win, survival of the fittest. This kind of totally individualistic bourgeois idea of freedom must be different from socialist freedom, which I'm not sure what it is but maybe we can work together towards it.

Another whole question I would like to ask is: why is sexuality so important to us? I think sex gets overmuch importance attached to it in our society largely because it is repressed. I think in our lives it is important because it is one of the few areas in which it is OK for us to "let go" - to play, be silly, experience intense pleasure and release. It would be good if could do all those things in the rest of our lives and not just in bed - it's worth struggling for. Another reason why I think sexuality is important to us as women is the whole thing of how a woman

sees her identity as lying in her sexuality, as her main drawing power ³

the one lever she has that she can use, and it determines her status in a society where she has no other status. I think because of this we make the mistake of seeing our problems in terms of our sexual relationships and thinking that by changing our sexual relationships we can solve them.

E.g. I'm miserable, so I try to change the pattern of my sexuality which means more or different men (or women), rather than finding the resources and identity in ~~xxxxxxx~~ myself. You think you have to change your life, so you change your bloke, but it aint never ~~xxx~~ going to change that way. Part of it is that as women we are brought up to find our reality in other people, the result is that we get too deeply immersed in the realities of other people, usually ~~xxx~~ a man. If we want to change, the answer is not to replace one man's reality with another's, or with several, but to find our reality in ourselves and to try to develop a coherence and a dynamic and a way of acting in the world which is grounded in our own senses, feelings and experience.

I think ~~xxx~~ Reich has written some terrific stuff, but I disagree with him when he says that if you can get it together ~~xx~~ sexually and have some kind of sexual relationship, then you're basically OK and not too fucked up. I actually believe that some people's neuroses stop them fucking, but some people's neuroses actually feed their sex drives, and they get a lot of substitute gratification out of sex. E.g. you think you want to make love, but what ~~x~~ you're actually getting out of it is that you want to be held, or you want to suck, or you want to be punished, or you want to control.

These random notes look abit negative, I don't mean to be. The fact that those six women spoke ~~xx~~ with such honesty and perception about their experience ~~xxx~~ in itself give a lot of hope. I think that recognizing and accepting our own feelings, however much we think them shitty and are ashamed of them, is something we have to do before we can start changing them. Having ideas about how we want to be, and trying new living situations and new ways of relating, are both important - but they can both lead to new forms of repression or manipulation if we are not allowed to own and express the emotions that difficult new situations make us feel. I want to be confronted but not condemned for my discreditable feelings, and I need people around who will do that and help me deal with it. Personally I have found Reichian-type therapy in groups really useful for uncovering the feelings hidden under layers of control-games and manipulations, and for understanding their source in the way we are conditioned and brought up under captialism. I think that owning our feelings is a step towards owning our bodies, and towards finding an identity grounded in our own senses and experience, not in our relationships, our men, or our power games. and control over other people. It's a long way off, but we can struggle towards it.....