

## A Feminist in the 90's dreams of 60's Free Love.

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If I'd been born in 1953 instead of 1973, I'd have been just the right age to join the '60s radical movements that we are all so nostalgic about now. I'd have real vintage tie-dyes not the store bought kind. I'd have love beads in my hair and my bra would be a charred pile of ash at my feet. I'd be living the movement instead of writing about it. I'd be experimenting with drugs, or strange love potions, or generally expressing my will to be.

What a time to be young. Hippies. Free love. Woodstock. Hope. No AIDS. No Barney. No worries, right?

Romanticized or not, the '60s appeal to me. I have bought into the image of the happiness and freedom of the Free Love Movement. As a woman weaned in the '80s, adult in the '90s, I look at the '60s social movements as a time when I could have expressed myself and my sexuality without the constraints of a society that defines me without knowing me.

For feminism, the liberation movement of the '60s represented women rejecting the socially accepted roles for women and asserting their ability and right to be whatever they wanted. To express sexuality with whomever, whenever, and however they chose.

My "hippie" sisters protested to free women from the strictures of the *Leave it to Beaver* 1950s world. Then, the dominant and socially accepted image of women was, what I like to call, 'the Happy Housewife'. She contentedly raised the kids, took care of her husband, cleaned the house and joined the PTA. And of course, she had no sexuality beyond procreation. The antithesis the pinnup girl, the movie starlet, the mistress was a woman with loose morals and a voracious sexual appetite. In part, the feminist movement sought to combat this either/or situation. The cry "Free Love" was issued as a challenge to the world: stop telling



DREW GILBERT PHOTO

me what to do with my body and my sexuality! But I was born in 1973. No more hippies. No more free love. Woodstock, the second (and commercialized) version. Hope? AIDS. Worries. Backlash.

So what happened? Did we win? Did women gain the freedom to express sexuality freely?

In a sense yes. I can wear what I want, love who I want (male or female), be sexy or not. However, like many of the gains that feminism has made, this has not come without cost. While women are no longer confined to the sexual identity of Mrs. Cleaver, incidences of rape, assault, anorexia and bulimia are rising at an unparalleled pace. Did women do this to themselves?

No. In rejecting the Happy Housewife image, women claim for ourselves the power to be, do, say and express ourselves, including our sexuality. This change ushered in the post Roe vs. Wade era (ERA—no pun intended), a recognition of a woman's control over her own body.

The cost is that the society which once told us to be good wives and good mothers now hawks the "be your own woman" package with an aggressiveness that leaves women broken in its wake. Think of popular ad images; "You've Come a Long Way Baby!" encouraging us to smoke. Deodorant ads feature a dress (empty of a body) that undulates around happily without white underarm residue. Models, 25% thinner than most women, sell us everything from diapers to RRSs. Judy, of the Saturn ads, takes her new car home as if it

were a new child and not a machine. Powerful looking women sell us new tampons and dishsoap. We are learning to recognize the appearance of power as success. Now that we are "free" we have found that freedom for women equals freedom to be a very specific set of things. In claiming our sexuality, we have become sexualized, objectified. No longer plugging the Happy Housewife, the media tells us to wallow in our liberation and be thin, sexy, rich...

This isn't what my feminist sisters fought for. It is not sexuality on our own terms but simply a reworking of the old rules for a new and refurbished game. Women are still facing a society in which we face stereotypes of what we should be. We appear to have freedom of sexuality, but most women know this to be false. While the scope of what I may do has expanded, there is also a broader scope of control over sexuality.

I thank the feminists who have gone before me every day for the beginnings they have made in the struggle for women's liberation. And while I would love to live in my idealized '60s utopia, I recognize it as nostalgia for a time in which I did not exist. Instead, I am here, a woman of the '90s. While there is a danger in seeing more in the changing attitudes on sexuality which once told us to be good wives and good mothers now hawks the "be your own woman" package with an aggressiveness that leaves women broken in its wake. Think of popular ad images; "You've Come a Long Way Baby!" encouraging us to smoke. Deodorant ads feature a dress (empty of a body) that undulates around happily without white underarm residue. Models, 25% thinner than most women, sell us everything from diapers to RRSs. Judy, of the Saturn ads, takes her new car home as if it



## Men Hunt Down the Beauty Myth

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As little boys and young men males in our society are taught to seek out symbols of status; to achieve victory in search for prowess; and hunt for the sake of recognition (a slap on the back). We have mutated our inherent will to survive with a stranger social need to be successful - not in our own eyes, but in those of others. This is evident not just in our work, but our play, our homes, our schools, and, yes, our relationships with one another. Whether we choose to admit it or not there exists a "beauty myth" around women (and, increasingly, men) in our society. And, just as women's attitudes about themselves are manipulated by socially-acceptable standards, men's relationships with women are all too often controlled by them as well. Many of us base our relationships on those superficial standards of beauty by assuming that they are our own personal attitudes. Often, in fact, that physical prerequisite we require for relationships with women is dictated to us by stories, movies, television, magazines, and even cartoons. Beauty is a prize to be won by conquering, not an attribute to be

admired. Every man, at one time or another, dreams of walking onto a crowded dance floor with every guy oogling his "girl" in jealousy of their "opponent's" achievement of status and victory - the hunter had done well.

Still other men treat sex in the same manner. Abundance and quantity all too often take importance over establishing an intimate friendship with a partner. Sex in these cases is like a trophy at a race track, or an auction piece sold to the highest bidder (yes, some cheat). The attitude these men set for themselves does not involve commitment or a concern for others; it is, instead, one of satisfaction and glorification of the self. For these men, what "I" want is more important than what is fair. Often they get women emotionally attached to them if that is what it takes. It becomes a game to be won or lost at any cost. Sex in this sense, as well as the latter, is approached as adolescent entertainment which views women as objects, not human beings. Involved in this is a socializing process by which women are categorized as acceptable and unacceptable. The standards for such measurements are the very same beauty myths that objectify the physical. There are those women

(the sub-standard) who simply count as a number. There are others (the beautiful) from whom sexual conquest deserves bragging rights to the fellas. These are the gold medals and trophies to be placed behind glass doors for posterity. The others are shadily protected memories fashioned in a taxidermist style deemed more a right of passage than a source of pride and affection.

My intention is not to sound like a self-hating, guilt-ridden male. Instead, I am simply trying to point out that in our transition from boys to man, many of us get caught up in, and never escape from, an immature sense of awareness that objectifies women as a prize, to be attained in a competition of conquest against other males. Simultaneously, there is a tendency to equate love with physical attraction. This leads to relationships that are, despite the existence of an emotional attachment, based solely upon the physical. Avoiding the inevitability of being called a prude, I must also state that as long as everyone involved (both men and women) is aware that the physical takes priority in the relationship then both (or all) can have a fun and exhilarating experience. However, what often happens is that one more than the other is (or becomes) attached emotionally

- reasoning that as long as they continue to please their partner sexually then everything will be fine. This, however, inevitably leads to pain when the partner attached physically becomes bored of their conquest, is attracted by another and moves on.

The point is not to say that all men are like this, and certainly a good amount of women are as well, but, is instead to explain that men have a much higher tendency to become, and sometimes stay, a physical/sexual predator - that person looking for sex and willing to mask their desire with an emotional attachment that takes second place to sex. This, I think, stems from their childhood lessons to be aggressive and competitive-to fight for whatever prize (ie, the most beautiful woman) is up for competition. This is, however, not an insurmountable hurdle; many men do over come it-many do not. This does not even imply that those men who get beyond it are monogamous and/or heterosexual. The point is that mature relationships are based on trust, and when one partner is not completely honest with the other in their intentions, the relationship is in trouble, the well-being of each involved is itself in danger.