

**Bound to Struggle:
Where Kink and
Radical Politics
Meet**

Volume Five

praxis

Intro. Howdy.

Welcome to *Bound to Struggle* volume number 5 – Praxis. Praxis means theory+practice and its contemporary usage and definition comes from Brazilian educator and theoretician Paulo Freire, whose pedagogy of radical education is often cited as a main tool of resistance to the dictatorships and terror campaigns across Latin America in the 60s, 70s and 80s. I learned of this idea when I was taking a Liberation Theology class about 12 years ago, and it has stuck with me ever since. In my work with the Chicago Childcare Collective (ChiChiCo), I learned that many different kinds of progressive and radical educators use Freire's work to emphasize the importance of teaching in a way that speaks to the entire life of the student – their homes, histories, identities, what they ate for breakfast (or not) that morning. It refuses the isolation of the classroom.

In a way, *Bound to Struggle* tries to do something similar. It refuses the isolation of the bedroom. It marks against the privacy that mainstream movements, including some LGBT campaigns, fight for so that "we" can keep "our" sex away from the eyes of the state. Privacy from these intrusions is a privilege at best, and a farce more realistically. So best to flaunt it, I think. Best to cite the ways that sex is part of our entire lives, that we bring our histories, identities, experiences and what we ate (or not) for breakfast into the scene of desire and pleasure. And our desires and pleasures flow back into our scenes of struggle and celebration, back and forth, gleaned new knowledge and lessons and practices.

This volume is about six months late. Some people are able to put significant time into projects while in their first year of a PhD program, but I learned fairly late into the game that I am not one of them. I owe much gratitude to those who pre-bought copies of the zine, funded this printing, and waited for months while I sat on their money and communicated little about my progress. Thank you for your trust and faith in this project.

This volume has proved to be quite different in terms of submissions that I've received. The pieces are generally much longer and I think that

space has provided authors with the opportunity to really dig into the subject. Readers should know that this issue contains some very graphic descriptions of both consensual and non-consensual sexualized violence. Past readers who have had their boundaries pushed by previous volumes should know that this issue may push those boundaries even farther. Additionally, there are more ideas being traded, as well as records of personal experiences. While it's pretty hard to argue with a writer's personal feelings or experiences, there's some praxis here that I think is open for discussion.

In that vein, a friend of mine recommended a feedback method so readers can express their opinions and reactions to certain pieces. Beginning in volume six (which will come out next winter), letters/emails I receive about pieces published in this volume will be included in some way that I haven't quite worked out yet. But if you want to opine about what you've read here, send feedback to me – S.Strikeback@gmail.com. This is also the address for any other contact you'd like to make.

Another new feature is that volumes 1-4 will soon be available online once I figure out how to house all the jpgs and such. For right now, please visit the Queer Zine Archive Project (qzap.org) and download volume one. Volume five will be available only in print until I get volume six out. Then five will go online. Etc. And as always, nothing is copyrighted – just please cite the original author if you use their words/images.

That's all for now folks. Thank you for supporting this now seven-year old project. Thank you to all the authors and distributors and readers over the years. Thank you to Lakeside Printing Cooperative in Madison for being the first union/co-op printers of this zine!

All my heart,
simon strikeback

Dec 2011

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needles and thread

Anonymous

there is a rhythm of breath— a quickening, tension, and a release. this rhythm helps me focus, consider the balance achieved: top and bottom, active and passive, trust and interdependence. one can't exist without the other, but one is not more powerful or better than another. shared power, experienced together, still sends my neurons firing down a well-trodden path of anxiety, struggle, sometimes fear— but when power is shared, given, taken, and done so in a transparent and negotiated way, it feels empowering, exhilarating.

as an anarchist, i want to define sex for myself and have others define it for themselves; we talk about it and meet somewhere in the middle. sex is gently palming your groin through your pants; sex is having a strap-on cock rammed down your throat; sex is whispered threats of what will happen if you make one more sound. the paradigm of penetrative sex is wholeheartedly ignored in my sexual expressions: if it is included, it is because all parties are interested in that activity— and that activity alone is not what makes a sexual interaction sexual.

tonight i am playing with two dear friends; one is topping, another offering supportive snuggles. the look i get when i squirm tells me that i am, in fact, provoking more pain. i know that if it does actually get to be too much, i can utter a safeword and get a break or end the scene altogether. testing my limits is part of the game. There are four needles: vertical hypodermics threaded through me with the capped ends at the top. one in my right arm, right pec, left pec, left arm. i like to breathe deep, open myself to the moment, to the penetration of metal; let in the sensation and novelty and release breath and anxiety as the point emerges from my skin. a string has been wound around the needles' shafts, and if i flex backwards, they pull. if the thread is tugged on, i am drawn forward.

the person topping me has been amongst my play partners for about a year and a half. we sometimes throw play parties for our friends, and assorted invited punks and queers who find the public bdsm scene unwelcoming or too prone to emulate the power differentials that already exist in our lives, that are not kinky for us.

my piercer and i look at each other. my breathing is erratic, held when there is tension or anticipation, released to process pain or center myself. my arms are at my sides, my eyes mostly closed. this is iterative; a cycle of breath and negotiation and testing limits: the tensile strength of my skin, the tautness of the thread, the abruptness of my gasps that melt into sighs. my shoulders tense, relax. a friend sits behind me, offering nuzzles and tiny kisses, to balance the endorphins, the heat rushing to my front. we are connected this way; sadist, masochist, support. all three breathing along with each other, having come to an understanding about who is doing what, who can take what risks, who can handle what aspect of this scene.

some of the terms are the same in my head for activism and sex; these people are just as trustworthy and are involved in as intense activities as i would engage in with an affinity group. we gear up before we start; we gauge risk for ourselves. we strategize and critique. we develop theory, we practice. i find it difficult to extricate these political bits of language from sex: for me, sex is political.

sex with two other folks who don't conform to gender norms, who strive to build queer family, who are open about their desires and hangups, who can say without irony or gendered expectations "i like sucking cock" and understand that sexual speech doesn't obligate anyone to do anything they don't want to do— is radical. fucking our friends is radical. collapsing on a sweaty bed and making bad jokes at 4am and having a processing date the next night to massage out the soreness of the previous night's urgent strivings, because we know that all of us have bad backs and perverted brains. we are creating the communities we want to belong to

and having the cathartic, kinky, collaborative sex we want to exist in the world.

sex is therapeutic for me; kink has become a more structured and healthy way for me to process certain difficult things that i don't have other outlets for. when i was honest about this with my partners, they also acknowledged the connection between sexual and emotional release. for us, kink is a means to reclaiming painful or traumatic situations and transforming them into experiences that can be integrated into our lives.

kink is a loophole, an easy way to deal with some of the immediate effects of depression, anxiety, and self-esteem issues that i harbor and have trouble expressing in a healthy way otherwise. i recognize it is by no means a solution to emotional pain, boundary violations, or stress-- but it is a structured and negotiated space in which behaviors that could be seen as self-destructive instead serve to connect me more to my play partners. i feel better about having someone else inflict pain on me than how i feel when i do it myself.

this all places my sexuality at a complicated intersection: of desire, body hungers for touch and pain, emotional & physical validation (of my body, sexual expression, and friendship), mental health maintenance, orgasms. it also allows me to frolic in the often difficult spaces between shame and arousal, political correctness and not giving a fuck, the shadow and the light. one cannot exist without the other.

Untitled

Delanna de Hautenbas

"I spend a lot of time thinking about heterosexuality," I said. "So do I," he replied, delivering an open-handed slap to my bare ass. I was bent over the back of a couch, teetering in stiletto heels, with my panties around my knees and my voice half-muffled by the couch cushions. "No. No, you don't," I countered. "You spend a lot of time thinking about sex. It's not the same thing." His cock, stuck into me from behind, put an abrupt end to the conversation.

For radical politics to have any meaning at all, one's evolving political commitments must permeate how one actually lives, penetrating and rearranging, among other things, the structures of desire. A person who takes herself to have radical views about sex and gender, while leaving her own heterosexual desires and practices uninterrogated, ultimately opens herself to a fair charge of inconsistency, if not hypocrisy – like an animal rights activist who keeps on eating meat and wearing leather, steadfastly refusing to think about why he does so; or a workers rights activist who eats grapes, drinks coffee, and purchases clothing without inquiring into the conditions of their production. That the kinky radical's desires are sexual, rather than culinary or vestimentary, cannot render them somehow off limits to critique. If one takes any kind of sex life seriously, honoring and embracing, rather than shrinking from, polymorphous desire in oneself and others, one cannot dismiss sex as somehow too trivial for radical inquiry. The uses and desires of the body, what is done with it or to it, put on it or in it, must be brought before the radical gaze, with often disquieting results. But radical politics demands this much, potentially placing even our most intimate longings both under the microscope, and on the chopping block.

I lift the corset out of the crinkly gold tissue paper in which it is wrapped. After loosening the pink satin laces in the back, I wrap the black panels, stiffened with steel, around my body, latching the first of the metal clasps at the bottom of the busk (none of those wimpy hook-and-

eye numbers they use as bra-clasps!). I work my way up the front, and then, using the "80-20" breathing I learned in Bikram yoga, and the flexibility and visualization of paschchima namaskarasana (the behind-the-back prayer pose), I start tight-lacing. Standing in front of a mirror, alternately tightening the stay-laces above and below the waist, the impossibly feminine silhouette is conjured into being. My waist is gradually whittled down to 22", my hips are smoothed and rounded, my breasts are heaved upward until they almost spill out the top. Gratified, turned on, a little flushed, a trickle of sweat making its way into my cleavage, I inevitably ask myself, is this any way for a radical feminist to be attired?

A real corset is a bondage device, not (just) an article of fashionable lingerie. Since it takes about half an hour to put one on, it leaves ample time for reflection. Make no mistake, for me, this presentation is unequivocally "for" (heterosexual) sex. (And the same goes for less extreme versions – like push-up bras and high heels.) Robustly gender-differentiated, phallocentric, penetrative sex, with adult men (from their mid-20s to their late 50s), more or less BDSM-inflected (and I don't top from the bottom). With men who (mostly) don't spend a lot of (that is to say, any) time thinking about radical theories of sex and gender. With my body rendered temporarily, and expensively, virtually hairless from the nose down by plucking, shaving, and waxing; with skin buffed, softened, moisturized, scented... long hair loosely curled, lashes lengthened, eyes shadowed and lined, lips reddened and glossed, nails painted – I know at what a distance all this stands from my "ordinary" self, makeup-less, in glasses, sweats, and a ponytail. In other words, the "real" me, the way I look right now, as a matter of fact. So does it help to say all this artifice is not for "him" (whoever "he" may be) – that it's for *me*? That this is not just playing "dress up" – or perhaps, that all playing dress up is fundamentally *this*, an autoerotic form of solitary foreplay, the liminal transition from non-sexual to sexual modes of relating?

It's of course possible to go all Judith-Butlerian on this thing, and see it, as it surely is, as a self-aware performance of feminine gender (and

thus a "critique"? – a woman in feminine drag, as it were. My body could not be more "female" – I've menstruated for thirty years, had unplanned pregnancies, given birth to two children (vaginally), breast-fed them both. Yet echt-femininity still endlessly beckons and eludes (even?) me, bound up with oppositional heterosexuality...his hairy, muscular chest pressing down on my pliant breasts...the feel of his unshaven face against my smoothly-waxed pussy...the sight of his throbbing, glistening penis between my carefully-lipsticked red lips...this is what I mean by "hetero." And if it turns me on to go there, and pleases my partners, who's to complain?

My radical feminist self, for one. To be radical, it is not enough to be merely "unconventional" – or at least, it is not enough as a cisgendered heterosexual (white, privileged, able-bodied) woman, non-heterosexuality and/or transgender identity constituting radical enough interventions into straight supremacy to perhaps qualify on their own terms. Nor is it enough to have highly radical "ideas" (about the non-binariness of gender, for example), or progressive political commitments (about "LGBT rights," for example). For many feminists in our 40s today, who came of age during the pornography wars of the 1980s – feminists for it! feminists against it! in that innocent, pre-Internet time – the MacKinnon/Dworkinite critique represented a kind of watershed: an analysis after which one not only *thought*, but *felt*, and acted, differently. At least some pornography was, ever after, deprived of its power to titillate and excite – the cerebral cortex is, in fact, connected to the nether regions of brain and body, and at least some of us who have taken a good, hard look at the sausage factory no longer wish to consume what is made there. Yet in some ways this was cheap at the cost, most heterosexual women not being especially voracious consumers of image-based pornography. And most weren't willing to forswear heterosexuality itself – that somehow seemed too much to ask.

There we sat, next to each other, on his couch on a rainy afternoon. We'd had an unusual connection ever since the first time I walked into his house, and saw that every book on his shelves was one I'd either read or

wanted to read. That day, we might have been talking about sociobiology, or intellectual history, or our latest diet and exercise regimens. "There are so many ways for two people to communicate," he remarked – and then, as I'd known he would, he grabbed me by the hair and forced his stiffening cock down my throat until I gagged. While I struggled to breathe, he pinched my nipple hard enough to leave a mark, our endorphins and juices flowing.

The heavily-negotiated aspect that typifies a lot of kink (and perhaps necessarily so) is deeply unappealing to me. Its notions of consent seem to me so reflexively, uncritically bourgeois-liberal, so "legalistic," in the worst sense. I'm inevitably reminded of the notorious Antioch College Sexual Offense Prevention Policy of the early 1990s, which required consent for sexual behavior to be "(a) verbal, (b) mutual, and (c) reiterated for every new level of sexual behavior" – a policy that seemed to me designed (at least, for people like me) to take all the sexiness out of sex. "Can I touch you there?" is the antithesis of what I am interested in hearing from a man I am about to fuck – and I'm not interested in saying it, either. Surely, there is a place amid the logorrhea of modern life, for subtle, non-verbal, but real, communication between people? Surely, somewhere, one can turn off the words?

But the risk of rationalization, of self-deception, is ever-present. The things that excite us sexually, that get us hard, that get us wet, are very precious to us, so a lot of psychological machinery can get mobilized to "protect" them – one can feel heartsick contemplating that the selfsame radical ideas that energize our politics threaten to cost us in the economy of pleasure and desire. More distressing, even, than imagining classes of pleasures foreclosed, is imagining them utterly lost, casualties of a radical politics consistently, and ruthlessly, deployed.

But to see all kink as "radical" per se is lazy at best, and at worst, nothing but a disingenuous attempt to shield one's potentially politically problematic desires and practices, held dear, from the threat of disintegration. To suggest that radical politics have "nothing to do" with

kink is no better, and in a way, no different – both moves, the protective and the dismissive, endeavor to set aside a privileged zone of (sexual) conduct, where desire is “naturalized” and placed beyond the reach of critique, a naturalistic fallacy, which renders desire *a priori*, mute, and at the same time, unintelligible. Is there an alternative to this willful blindness that can only be maintained in bad faith? Perhaps only an honest, open-eyed engagement in the struggle between politics and desire, one whose outcome – like that of every genuine struggle – cannot be known in advance.

Praxis in Kink, Submission, Feminism, Consent: Where do they *not* intersect?

Bargain

I have never not been a feminist, never not been anti-authoritarian.

As far back as I can remember—which is to say, toddlerhood—I have had an insatiable sex drive, and as long as I have had sexual feelings, they've been kinky and almost entirely submissive in nature. I spent years feeling terrible for having such thoughts, fruitlessly attempted to rid myself of them in the same way I tried and failed to be the daughter my parents wanted (I'm a trans man). Ultimately, I found personal liberation by embracing every aspect of myself—queer, bottom, trans, gender fluid, male, submissive, et al. Acting on my kinky desires has given me community, brought me closer to my comrades in struggle, helped me realize what consent truly means and how it is applicable to every facet of life.

My seminal fantasies were deeply kinky and (I see with the power of hindsight) rooted in the bodily dysphoria which has colored so much of my life. I don't want to get too much into the details of that first major fantasy, but it involved sadistic doctors cutting off people's secondary sex characteristics and stapling them to other disfigured people as well as the doors of their solitary-confinement hospital cells. This daydream was most prevalent around age three.

I fell in love when I was four years old. It's the closest I'll ever be to "true" love, which is to say, blind monogamous devotion; I loved that person for longer and with more constancy than anyone in my adult life. Many people have trouble believing this, and to them I say: because you, as a toddler, did not feel that type of emotion doesn't mean no toddler did.

The person I loved molested me (as did other people, all approximately my age) until I was about twelve. I know that many of my particular bents

stem from those traumas, but they are not the reason I fantasize about degrading, terrifying situations, nor the reason I act them out with friends and lovers, people who respect my autonomy, humanity and boundaries even as they restrain me, beat me, sling dehumanizing insults my way.

My wetdreams and my nightmares have always overlapped. Fear and not being in control have always turned me on. I have always sexualized oppression as a way to process it on a level I can handle without wanting to immolate myself and the world. I am hardwired to love pain, whether self-inflicted (cutting), accidental (whoops, my hand is engulfed in steam, guess I won't put in ice, just gonna wait for it to blister) or other-inflicted (this one time somebody held me entirely off the ground just by their teeth buried in my side... shudder to think of it even now).

As a child, all of my favorite songs were one or more of the following: explicitly dirty (ACDC's "Big Balls"), explicitly kinky (Eve 6's "Inside Out"), desirous of nonconsensual acts (Nirvana's "Rape Me") or used kinky imagery as a metaphor for heartbreak (Natalie Ambruglia's "Tom").

"Tom" in particular played a major role in the formation of my sexual desires. It came out when I was seven and I had a recurring wetnightmare based on these lyrics:

"I'm all out of faith, this is how I feel:

I am cold and I am shamed, lying naked on the floor."

I would be walking to the library from my mom's house and one of the sidewalk blocks would trapdoor as soon as I stepped on it (I can still show you which square) and I'd fall into an underground dungeon where two or more adult cis men would strip me, hogtie me and gangrape me until I died. Sometimes I would be on the floor, sometimes suspended from the ceiling pipes.

I felt guilty about my desires at the time, continued to feel shamed by them and how I satisfied them for years after. I've been a feminist since

conception and I (mistakenly) thought my ideals and desires didn't match up. Since I could not masturbate satisfactorily until I started taking testosterone and got chest surgery at age eighteen, I found outlets for my sexuality by listening to 90's alt/rock and reading horrifying memoirs. One of my favorite books around the ages of eight to ten was "A Child Called 'It'" by Dave Pelzer. From what I remember of the back cover, it tells the story of the "third-worst child abuse case in California history." It's fucking terrifying. I don't know how one "ranks" these kind of atrocities but I can't bring myself to think of what the second- and first- cases could have involved. I don't know if I could get through it again now, but I can't count the number of times I read it then.

At age fourteen, I had my first consensual sexual experience and first orgasm—same night I bound for the first time. I read "I Never Told Anyone," a collection of survivors' writings, and realized I could get past this, could be whole again, although I was deeply frightened of doing so, afraid no one would want me if I was a functional human being.

Newly fifteen, I got involved with the first person I considered a top (though I refused to have sex with him). The interactions I had with My First Top did a lot to make me feel less hideous for having the needs I did and do but since he knew my desires without ever asking, they didn't do much for furthering my concept of consent, how necessary it is, how sexy it can be. [Humorous sidebar: the one time he did ask if I wanted something, it was, "Do you want me to change you into a vampire?" I said yes, of course... for some reason, it didn't take.]

A bit later but still fifteen, I began having heteronormative vanilla sex with my first serious boyfriend. He was a loving, kind boy who did his best to get over his disinterest in and discomfort with the kinky desires I could bring myself to voice—mild on my scale, extreme on his. We were baby anarchists, we learned about radical consent together, and when we went to a Bash Back! convergence (bringing a straight cis person to a queer space = total faux pas... my bad, y'all) I had the novel experience of being

in a room full of people who shared my interests in flogger-making and -using even though I was too shy to volunteer as the demo bottom.

Life right before and during medical transition was a period of personal horizon-broadening and border-smashing. I met—and crushed on—non-binary people for the first time, consensual Spin the Bottle became my favorite game, I talked with other queer people who hated authority, capitalism and government brutality as much as I did (and do!) but nevertheless found it sexy to play with power and pain in the boudoir. In fact, I read a volume of “Bound for Struggle” at this time and had a very “...0.o? I’m not alone? I AM NOT ALONE!” moment of glee and assbows. Assbows are when you fart rainbows of sheer joy, by the way.

Right after I turned eighteen, the boyfriend and I broke up. I swore off straight men forever and immediately found myself in a Super Serious Relationship with a queer man I thought was both respectful of me and kinky. I was wrong on both counts—respecting someone’s gender is not the same as respecting them on the whole, and he was definitely way more vanilla than he liked to admit. I don’t mean to sound bitter despite the fact that I certainly am. I learned a lot from our relationship: I have both the right and the responsibility to voice my desires, needs and limits. I am the only person responsible for getting those needs met, which includes the right to cut people out of my life if they interfere. I chose a safeword (still haven’t used it, but having it there is like carrying an invisible security blanket).

And we had one thoroughly wonderful, mindblowing experience involving me tied up in a closet for hours as he alternatively beat me, teased me, fucked me.

After he drunkenly punched me in the face in an extremely non-consensual way and dumped me, I took a year off from sex and almost any interpersonal physical intimacy. The first six to nine months or so were completely occupied by me processing that trauma and getting to

know myself as a single person, as self-sufficient—both new experiences for me. In the latter portion, I began to explore ways I myself could fulfill my own needs for pain, bondage and domination in a healthy and satisfying way. I needed concrete evidence of my self-sufficiency—the ability to articulate and satiate my own desires.

And, it worked! I've found community with other kinky, consent-centric, drama-free queers; I attribute this to my finally feeling at home in my own skin and brain, to my embodiment of the sex-positive-third-wave-feminist ideals I hold so dear. I enjoy having sex with myself for the first time, and enjoy it with other people more as a result. I can talk about my wants and needs without feeling ashamed, in or out of scene. I can ask people what they want and respond in kind. I'm no longer scared of being seen as "a bad sub" for safewording or enforcing my boundaries ...but I still love being a bad, bad boy. I know that I don't need to sacrifice my mental health or independence to submit to a sexy, aggressive, cane-wielding top. I can be crazy and wonderful and desirable without having raw angst and vulnerability constantly leaking from every pore.

I fetishize the oppression I face to figure how to deal with it, how to fight it. I play with authority during sex as way of undermining it everywhere else. Kinky sex with myself and others was a crucial part of becoming a healthy, self-actualized individual. Reliving certain aspects of abuses I've survived, in a safe environment where I have ultimate control over what happens to my mind and body, helps me process and heal from them. Attempting to force my sexuality to conform to the narrow bounds of second-wave feminism did nothing but open a shit-storm of self-defeating guilt within me.

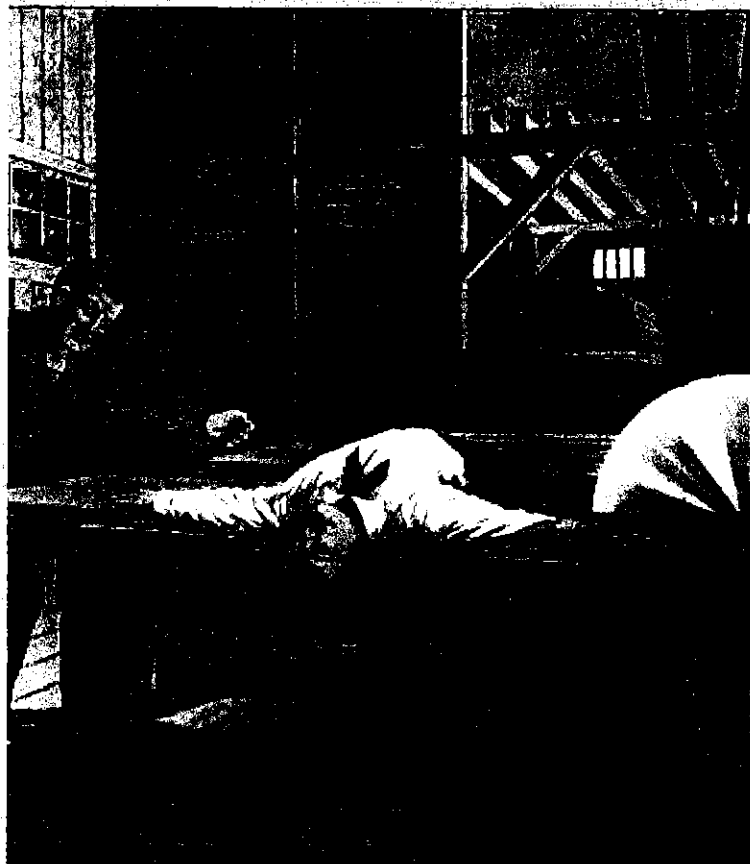
And pain floods me with very pleasant brain chemicals. Science!



BLUE



JEANS





Wholly Owned Subsidiary

Raven Kaldera

I'm a radical political activist who owns a slave.

For real.

Well, all right, some people won't want to lay the word "slave" on my human property, because his entering into our arrangement was entirely consensual, extensively negotiated, and is not supported by any legal constraint. (More than consenting, actually – more like jumping up and down saying, "Pick me! Pick me!") Some people would like to reserve the word "slave" for someone who is forced unwilling into servitude. People practicing dominant/submissive or master/slave relationships are well aware of the difference, and may be well-read on the situation of unwilling servitude in other cultures. I have some sympathy with that view, but right now that is unfortunately the word that people in full-time power-dynamic relationships are using, so I use it because it is understandable to them. Effective communication is more important than feeling righteous.

I also use it because it reminds me that I have responsibility for another human being, and that I had better not screw that up. It's a triggering word, heavy and baggage-laden. (So is the word "master".) I carry that baggage willingly because I don't ever want to forget how much power I have to harm in this situation, and how important it is that I – no, we together – get it right.

My human property of ten years is a smart, competent, obedient, service-oriented, adorable, and highly spiritual man with very good self-esteem named Joshua. He didn't sign up to turn his life over to me because he couldn't run it himself, or because he thought so little of himself. He did it because it satisfies something deep in him to be told what to do, to follow someone, to be part of something bigger. In order to do this, he decided to choose someone honorable that he could trust implicitly with that kind of power over him. I am still humbled that it ended up being me.

Full-time intense power-dynamic relationships are the last holdout of Politically Incorrect in the BDSM demographic. (Well, maybe second to

Nazi scenes.) People who can stretch their minds to get behind the ethics of one person consenting to be beaten by another and enjoying it seem to seize up mentally when confronted with one person consenting to turn their entire life over to another. For them, what makes it "safe" is that the power exchange is discarded after the scene; people who never put it down are viewed with suspicion. Surely after all the work done to ensure that no cultural customs rope anyone into unwilling servitude just because of their race or gender or class, isn't it kind of like being traitors to the cause to freely choose this? If nothing else, oughtn't we to refrain out of solidarity to people who were and still are forced into unwilling servitude?

The truth – which is uncomfortable to many people out there – is that there are people who enjoy and crave being in unequalitarian relationships, and not necessarily only for bad reasons. For some ... we like it, we're good at it, and we're fulfilled by it – including people on both sides. There may be a 50/50 chance that we'll end up in one anyway – possibly an unhealthy situation, because there is so little in the way of good role models for healthy unequalitarian relationships. In fact, I would wager that 99 per cent of the people whose politics resemble mine would say, authoritatively, that there is no such thing as a healthy unequalitarian life-companion relationship, period.

But I don't believe that, and the small group of people like us who are carefully trying to pick our way through the cultural minefield and find a clear path to do this ethically ... we don't believe it either. Yes, most people are not right for this kind of relationship, and yes, there are many people who couldn't be trusted to do it right, on both sides of the coin. But that doesn't mean that it can't work. People do equalitarian relationships wrong all the time, and no one is suggesting ending that practice.

Besides, this is important work. My slaveboy and I are committed to getting this right, and not just because it's so important to *us*. We are learning to figure out how to hold power over another, or submit to another, in ways that not only do no harm but help both parties to become better people. If we and others like us can figure this out and educate others, then the people who are fumbling around will have a path to follow. We hope to be able to save a lot of future pain for other potential

D/s and M/s couples ... and perhaps even people who wouldn't use those terms but who have agreed to a power dynamic for other reasons.

By educating and offering a public model, we also help those who are seeking such relationships. They can say to potential partners: "I know that what you're suggesting is not acceptable for a healthy power dynamic, because I've seen what that looks like, and this isn't it."

Polyamory activists have found that the best form of activism for alternative relationships is to train people in how to actually *have* them without blowing them up ... which contributes to the idea that "those just don't work."

In addition, educating people who are not into inegalitarian relationships about what a good one looks like can help them as well, and not just because they won't freak out when a friend decides to do it. Egalitarian relationships often have power struggles, some of which are subtle and may not be conscious on the part of either party. In a healthy power-dynamic relationship, all power inequalities are aboveboard, laid out on the table, negotiated and agreed to (sometimes in writing) in the same way that sexual and romantic liaisons are openly negotiated and agreed to in polyamorous relationships. Understanding what this looks like can help people in egalitarian relationships identify when there are subtle and underhanded power struggles in their own dynamics: "You know, this is something that it would be appropriate to ask of me if I were your submissive, but I haven't consented to that so it's not," or "It seems really important and emotionally satisfying to you to have a certain amount of authority over me in this area of life. I might be okay with that, so long as I understand where you are coming from and you don't express it in ways I find disrespectful."

I know that when I was attempting egalitarian relationships (and didn't think that there were any other alternatives) it would have been useful to have a partner point out when I was making manipulative plays for power, and perhaps say, "If you want that, you're going to have to find it elsewhere ... and keep it out of this relationship." Which is eventually what I figured out how to do, but I would have saved years of pain if I'd had access to that information. (And imagine what society would be like if

every long-term power-dynamic relationship, including boss/employee and adult student/teacher, was consciously negotiated like a M/s relationship!)

It's even possible that access to a model of healthy and consenting power dynamics where the individuals see the relationship as a personal custom-built choice might eventually seep in and change the choices of people in culturally-specific power dynamics where people are letterboxed into those relationships without recourse or alternatives. You never know where influence goes. Even if we can't quickly convince people who believe, for example, that men all ought to be dominant and women all ought to be submissive, we may be able to begin by offering a model of honorable dominance and valued submission to people of both those genders who are stuck in that place.

But really, it comes back to the same harm reduction strategy as passing out condoms to teenagers or clean needles to IV drug users ... or teaching people how to flog each other without putting anyone in the hospital. If someone's going to do a behavior anyway no matter how often you tell them that it's harmful, withholding information on healthy procedure will only ensure accidents, not stop the behavior. Look at how effective abstinence-based sex education *isn't*. My partner and I are both committed to harm reduction wherever possible, and we can't give people a manual until we have figured it out ourselves. In the long run, our mindful, scrutinized, and public power dynamic relationship is a highly subversive act.

As I said at the beginning, I am an activist – for intersex and transgender issues, for organic agriculture issues, for my religious community, and more. My slaveboy is my assistant in this work, doing at least as much unpaid labor as I do, but usually it's the scut-work. I write books; he formats my manuscripts. I put out free information on the Internet; he maintains my websites. I teach at conferences; he is my chauffeur, my PA with my notes and schedule, my servant who deals with hotels and food. I have a serious illness that would entirely prevent me from doing any of this work if I did not have a permanent body-servant

and personal care attendant trained to take care of my health every day, to keep me standing for the work and then take care of me when I collapse. We are a good team, and together we make sure that I get a huge amount done.

Frankly, even if I wasn't an impoverished writer, shaman, and activist, I could not hire enough support staff to do everything he does for me. Nor could I depend on friends or egalitarian lovers; it's just not fair to ask that much of someone who has their own life. Joshua, on the other hand, willingly turned his life over because he loves to serve, finds contentment in being told what to do, and finds self-worth in being useful. He chose me not just because he knew that I would treat him honorably, but also because he believes in what it is that I do. He knows that his contribution to my work makes a far greater positive impact on the world than he was able to do on his own, and he has found that service helps him focus on effective forms of action rather than fulfilling ego-based motivations. Unlike most of America, he believes that all service is worthy and the best service is invisible. He often signs his Internet posts on kink sites with "Joshua, a wholly owned subsidiary of the vast enterprise that is Raven Kaldera."

His own attitudes toward service often clash with the radical-political mores of some conferences I attend, especially those populated largely by college students. At one such conference, I was teaching for hours and he would be free until I needed him to get dinner. Since he is my resource to use for any honorable ends, I gave him to the conference as a volunteer. He offered to do coat-check, a job that required sitting in one place, missing the classes, keeping track of tags and details, and being polite ... which apparently made it difficult to fill. He had no problem with the job; his biggest hardship was actually the youthful conference-goers who tried to spare him what they saw as the indignity of his service, and by attempting to hang and find their own hoodies they simply made his job harder.

It's hard for me to speak about this and be believed. Usually it's better if the submissive partner talks about it, so that everyone can see that they're not just being pathetically muzzled by the overbearing

dominant partner. Joshua is also articulate and intelligent, and has words for people who tell him that he must have chosen this for reasons of damage; who want to "rescue" him from me and his choices. It's hard to communicate the many months of mutual discussion, negotiation, internal searching, and prayer that led up to us deciding to do this. We are both highly introspective people who don't jump into anything – and, in fact, we have angered more impatient folks with our insistence that power dynamics should be entered into slowly and with mindfulness.

Being a male/male couple also helps us to speak to audiences who would be triggered beyond their ability to objectively listen by an apparent female involved in any part of a power dynamic relationship. Some women of this sort who have heard us speak have told us that they had later been able to mentally see a female submissive acquaintance as "someone like Josh who just happens to be a woman" rather than as "a victimized woman", or see a female dominant as engaging in a "mutually fulfilling exchange of power" rather than "acting out internalized misogyny".

We also have a strong spiritual focus to our M/s. Spiritual mastery has given me a discipline of scrutinizing the motivation behind each of my commands, making sure that they come from a clean place. Spiritual servitude has helped him set aside his ego and learn to find a good attitude about difficult things in life. The amount of transparency required to do this properly creates not only greater intimacy, but also aids in self-awareness.

Some people in power dynamics refer to it as "traditional marriages" or "1950's -style". For some, perhaps, but I don't think it's true of most modern consenting master/slave relationships. In "traditional" relationships, the kind of transparency and intimate communication that modern M/s couples strive for was discouraged. Couples weren't expected to reveal how they were really feeling about what was expected of them. They certainly weren't encouraged to question it in any way, or mold the situation to suit them as a couple. While each party was responsible for enacting their role, neither was responsible for the other's comfort with that role, or would even have considered such discomfort as

anything other than a personal flaw. Unquestioned social rules were the framework, and family/social conditioning and opprobrium enforced it. Economic structures conspired to keep people from rebelling. The less one thought about it, the more livable it was.

This is in stark contrast to modern M/s relationships, where the dominant partner is encouraged to learn everything that is going on in the submissive's head, and use that knowledge to make them more comfortable and secure in their role. Honesty is mandated in both directions, and dominants are encouraged (though not required) to be emotionally open with their submissives whenever it will add to and support the relationship. Everything is scrutinized, and in the beginning negotiation stages at least, everything can be questioned. Each relationship is custom-built for the people in it. The roles are not generalized to the rest of society, and indeed M/s families are quite aware that they are a minority. The fact of consenting freely to be in this dynamic and of knowing other choices could have been made with social approval, in a way sanctifies the relationship. Rather than deriving strength from the social carrot-and-stick, we derive it from our conscious commitment in the face of social disapproval.

Historically, the modern paradigm of M/s relationships is a product of the post-sexual-revolution and post-gay-rights era, just like the polyamory demographic. The sexual revolution encouraged couples to talk to each other about sex and relationship for the first time; to question and deconstruct and communicate and make thoughtful choices. Modern M/s is the deconstructed "traditional" relationship reconstructed differently, keeping what works and throwing out what doesn't. Considering that gay male "leather" and "Old Guard" values have had a strong effect on the development of M/s (if only mythically and archetypally), one could say that part of the reconstruction was "queering" the original gendered model and making it applicable to not only M/f but F/m, F/f, and M/m relationships, as well as polyamorous/polymorphous families with a variety of genders and a web of power dynamics ... like mine.

Those of us who follow this path – and consider it to be a radical political subversion of relationship – don't believe that power

automatically corrupts. It's just that healthy and honorable ways to hold power aren't taught to most people, and those who do it wrong get all the attention. Removing power from the human equation isn't going to work. Instead, educating people on how it can be done rightly and offering it as just another mindful choice can go a long way toward solving problems of power. It's a kind of reclaiming work – we are reclaiming the concept of power-over and working out the knife's-edge path of doing it cleanly. It really does prove that there is nothing, in the end, which cannot be reclaimed and healed ... and isn't that a wonderful thing to know?

Anti-authoritarian Sadism and Radical Shackles

Corvus

I love pain. As early as 12, I remember wanting people to choke me and hurt me without having any reference as to why. I grew up in and out of some abusive kink situations mainly because I didn't have any reference as to how to tell people what I wanted in a safe way. My family and friends were often disgusted by my desires. I also had a lot of mental health issues that were caused by, and cyclically led to, me being with abusive people. I sought out sadists and dominant people on the regular. As a young teen back when chat-rooms were big, I constantly had kid-seeking older men chatting me back, willing to hurt me. Sometimes I found them in real life. As I got older, I grew to love causing pain to others even more than having it given to me. And when I came out as queer, I was able to analyze my past behaviors with older straight men in order to better understand why I had wanted them to physically hurt me as much as possible.

I spent a lot of time asking myself why I had certain desires and how oppressive I was being by having them after dating some non-kinky folks and talking to some second-wave anti-porn feminist people. I really wanted to examine why I had the desires I did. Was it because I was abused in the past, seeking unconsciously to relive the abuse? Was it because I had some underlying cop inside me that sought to oppress and harm people? Was I contributing to anti-feminist and anti-queer problems because I enjoyed seeing women consent to pain or because I enjoyed exchanging punches to the chest and hard bites with my with my genderqueer comrades? Were my madness and bipolarness being perpetuated and made worse by my need for pain and struggle in the bedroom? The longer I held these desires in, the more guilty I felt. Not because I thought I was contributing to oppression—but because I couldn't figure out how I was.

I still feel guilty sometimes. When I "switched sides" from mostly masochist bottom to mostly sadistic top, I wondered if I had become an abuser of sorts. I felt this way even though I remember where I came from and even though I am being completely true to my desires. Are my sadistic, topmy tendencies linked with my masculine presentation in some patriarchal way? Am I playing into something by combining transmasculinity and stereotypically "masculine" activities? I worry because my hands around someone's neck as I hold them down so they can't move is just as exciting to me as seeing a protester de-arrested from the strangling arms of a cop. I worry about how powerful I feel when I watch someone writhe in pain as I cane their ass, and my ability to get off using my strap on only if I've watched someone's skin jiggle under the hard slap of my palms or paddles.

While these concerns exist, I also feel empowered and free, because I am on a journey that involves embracing who I am with consenting individuals with whom I know that I am doing what they want. I have learned more about consent through anti-authoritarianism, anti-rape activism, animal liberation, and queer theory, but I truly came to understand consent through my own practices with others. This journey is constant.

With a very kinky partner of mine, who fits me like a perfect puzzle piece, I began to realize something: we like what we like. Even if every single impulse we have came from abuse or rape or some underlying tendency for some authority, we are working it out in a healthy, consensual way that makes us happy, and as a plus, brings us closer. I realized that when it came down to it, what turned me on the most was causing pain and using restraints on someone who WANTED me to. On someone who asked me, begged me to. When I "force" someone to orgasm, I know I'm giving them what they want because they asked me for it beforehand. Nothing is hotter than hearing "yes, sir" or "please, can I..." and knowing that I am not actually dominating in the same way a cop dominates someone. We are sharing an experience of mutual aid that benefits us

both in ways we wish to benefit. My desire was for those with whom I could talk about things, and their eyes would get wide and their skin would blush, and even when they were in pain or afraid of what I would do next, they were enjoying it. What was wrong with this? Was it wrong because people thought it was weird? Was it wrong because some second-wave feminist writer who sees me as a victim or believes I should be ashamed of myself said so? Or are they the ones who are being oppressive and authoritarian?

I still question myself regularly because that's who I am. I question my partners regularly to make sure their boundaries have not changed. I ask myself if a struggle in the bedroom perpetuates a struggle in the rest of the world. But, the truth is, I have learned more about consent and respect through sadism than I have through any book I have read by a dead white male anarchist or through any black bloc I have been part of. I examine my consent practices not only in sex, but in everything. Giving and receiving pain has played a huge part in helping me to do that. The freer I am to use restraints without the shackles of society, the more free I am everywhere else in the world. Sometimes the lines of liberation are grey. Some say that sexual liberation doesn't matter. For me it does.

self love exhibitionism and having the best lunch on the playground
lionel lions

self love

i just got out of the tub. normally, i am an in and out of the shower kind of little guy. really, people, minutes, sometimes a singular minute in the shower.

but there i sat, splashing my feet and hands around, thinking about writing this post. and i thought about how i always spend a longer time in the shower or bath with other people and how i always make more elaborate meals for lovers and friends. and then i thought about all the other things in my life where i will make it extravagant for someone else and half ass it for myself.

jerking off. crush art. fuck, even a good attitude. and maybe, i am afraid of this – self love is weirdly on that list. i know it is a solo activity and we can radical-cheerlead for one another. but i also think i am better at sharing my thoughts on self love than enacting them in the solace of my own body and heart and mind.

now, in writing and watching the words set to the fluorescent, i think about exhibitionism. i am more of an exhibitionist than a voyeur, but frankly watching or being watched (as something central to a scene) is not my deep kink. but, apparently, with self love, that's not true. i feel fulfilled, telling you all about my bathtub time and thoughts on self love.

recently, a single lady friend of mine (her words, not mine) and i were chatting about food, about food and living alone. we were talking about the cooking by oneself versus cooking with others. and so i devote this post to her.

this post is about self love. it's about making a sustainable meal plan for

yourself.

the plan

many of you probably know that i am a planner. i actually love to schedule and food is no exception. i've been known to make menus when shacking up for the whole weekend. menus are tender treasures and also grocery lists in disguise. but i digress.

i should say now, that i have never lived by myself. so this post is gleaned from house sitting gigs and weeks where i am so busy that i pack my lunches for the whole week at one time.

i like to pick a core element: one dish that often requires a bit of work to prepare that can be mixed with a variety of super easy to make foods to make new meals over and over throughout the week.

so, i'll model that here with my winter veggie medley. first, i will explain how to make the medley and then i'll talk about how to turn the medley into a new meal time and time again.

winter veggie medley

1. pick out your veggies. i go with whatever the farm i work for has a lot of. in this case, that was beets, winter squash, and potatoes. but it could have been carrots, turnips, parsnips, and the like. in general, winter veggies have fairly similar cooking times. if you know you are cooking veggies with different cook times, consider the size of pieces you cut the veggie into. for instance, if i was going to add carrots to this mix, i would make the chunks bigger than the other veggies because carrots generally have a shorter cooking time. alternatively, i would cut all the veggies up and put them into the oven (see step 3). then, i could cut the carrots and add them to the mix that's been cooking for 5 or 10 minutes at that point.

here are the veggies i used this time around:

2. cut the veggies into small pieces. see above pictures. this is not exact though. just remember: smaller pieces = shorter time. also, a note about peeling, peel the squash and take out the seeds. i keep the potato and beet skins on if they aren't too nasty. cut a lot of them - way more than you think you want. i make enough to spread out in two big (like 10-12 or so inch in diameter) cast iron pans. if you live by yourself/eat by yourself, try half that your first time around.

3. put them in a baking dish (i use cast iron. you can use whatever you prefer.). add salt and pepper to taste. you can also add herbs such as basil or thyme or sage. usually, i just do salt and pepper. add oil. i usually use high heat canola oil.

4. bake them at 450F (or 425F).

5. wait. check on them around 30-45 minutes. see how they are doing. i find roasting time often variable. they can take an hour plus, even cut up all small. they can also be ready by 45 minutes. you'll get a feel for it.

6. put the veggies in tupperware.

meal plan

okay, so that was cute. now, you have an absurd amount of roasted root vegetables. so now, i'll talk about how to take your perma-leftover-of-the-week and make it a delight!

option 1. eat them as is. i would recommend doing this earlier in the week than later. add a little veganise.

option 2. turn them into a winter salad. this winter, i have been obsessed

with winter salads, which is generally some sort of leaf thing that you can get in minnesota in the winter (aka kale or spinach) paired with roasted root vegetables. i'll talk about spinach here because it is simpler. warm your now-cold-leftover-medley and serve it over a bed of spinach with your favorite dressing.

option 3. make a pot of brown rice. fry up tempeh or tofu. add your now-cold-leftover-medley.

option 4. make a pot of quinoa. toss in some nuts and add a soft cheese (quark, goat cheese, etc) and your now-cold-leftover-medley.

option 5. chop up an onion. throw it in a pan. add your now-cold-leftover-medley. add some eggs. you have yourself a winter omelet. you can do more elaborate renditions of this to make a or frittata.

.....

there you have it. a whole week of food self love that you can talk to your friends about. you'll be the coolest kid on the playground in a non-hierarchical self-love-motivated sort of way.

