

Desire is in the Air



Photos by Cleve Wershler

Dear Femme Fertile Friends,

My bedclothes are out on the line, being caressed by a warm breeze that promises to scent my boudoir with the incomparable, delicious scent of outdoors. I have just returned from taking Obie, my Bordie Collie/Lab out for his walk. The North Saskatchewan River flows sensuously through her banks, freed from the last of winter's rigid ice. The Alberta sky bears its azure blue unabashedly, without one cloud concealing her splendour. It's my first foray out this year in shorts and sandals; I enjoyed the sun's tickling warmth on my legs and toes, newly polished with my favourite shade of coral.



Yes, Spring does seem a good time to settle in for some woman talk about desire. And thanks to our wise women contributors, I think you are in for many delicious thought provoking and sense stimulating ideas in this issue of *Femme Fertile*. Justisse Fertility Awareness Teacher Lisa Leger challenges those who practice periods of abstinence to try some alluring non-coitus creativity in *Abstinence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder* (pg. 6). Justisse Healthworks for Women Director Geraldine Matus invites us to explore the "throne" of our yearnings in

her stimulating article, *What Women Really Desire* (pg. 4). Naturopath Dr. Andrea Beaubrun explains how our menstrual cycle pulses with our natural surroundings in *Desire for Harmony* (pg 2). Justisse student and woolley felt hat creator, Kashka Zerafa, shares a lovely poem, *Desire*, with us (pg. 3).

Just as we were pining for regular *Femme Fertile* contributor, Planned Parenthood Executive Director Laura Wershler (whose wise words have been too much in demand in other domains), her gallant husband Cleve came through with the nature photographs you see on this cover.

And you? What is the nature of your desires? We invite you to wander with us into the fields of desire.

Deborah Witwicki, Editor

Please Keep in Touch

We welcome your questions, comments, story ideas and expressions of joy, pique or outrage.

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A Forthright Women's Magazine for Maids, Mothers and Crones

Femme Fertile



Desire for Harmony: The Gift of the Menstrual Cycle's Vital Signs

by Andrea Beaubrun

Don't all desires emanate from one basic desire — to be at harmony with the natural rhythms of our world around us? The earth is suffering and quite naturally our bodies are grieving — can you feel it? It's not surprising that there is an explosion in the number of cases of chronic fatigue, depression and fibromyalgia seen by both conventional and complementary practitioners. These conditions — and numerous others — have in common a lack of desire. A lack of desire that prevents us from living our lives to the fullest and silences us through fatigue and apathy. We can't ignore this epidemic any longer.

Fortunately, for we women, our menstrual cycle provides us with vital clues that can be helpful in deciphering why, at times, we feel apathetic, or withdrawn from our world around us. In fact, if more health care practitioners attended to the health significance of the menstrual cycle, then mysterious conditions such as chronic fatigue syndrome, depression and other illnesses might not be such a mystery at all.

The fundamentals of Chinese medicine hold true that our bodies are but a reflection of that which surrounds us daily. The basis of all eastern medicine is energy — the vital force (Qi), from which we derive our breath and spirit. Unlike western medicine, which views the human “machine” as being distinct from our surrounds, traditional Chinese medicine recognizes that human beings live in daily concert with our environment. Our bodies and psyches are intimately

connected with the wondrous rhythms of nature. It is this very relationship that makes the menstrual cycle so incredibly valuable to us all.

It makes sense that when the rhythms of nature are in distress, so too are the rhythms within our bodies. We need only look outside our window to witness the powerful transformation occurring within all living systems. As the earth becomes inundated with chemical toxins, our breast milk and ovaries become storehouses for the wasteful by-products of negligent industrialization. Our vital force attempts to

It makes sense that when the rhythms of nature are in distress, so too are the rhythms within our bodies.

communicate through various “symptoms” such as heavy bleeding, anovulatory cycles, painful periods and breast tenderness. Our symptoms are indicators of a disturbance in our homeostasis — what a magnificent blessing to have such a system inherent within us all!

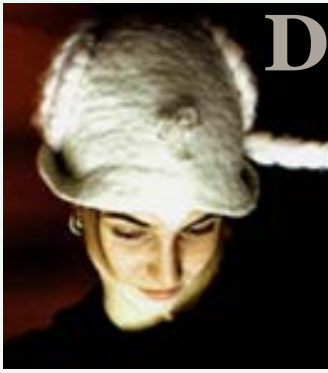
Once we start to recognize ourselves as self-healing, we start to appreciate and respect the ways in which our vitality speaks to us. For too long, though, we've been assaulted with toxic, powerful anti-pathic, synthetic hormonal drugs aimed at silencing the very symptoms our bodies use to communicate with us. For example, artificial hormonal birth control damages our own defense systems and body knowing.

The menstrual cycle remains one of the purest barometers of not

only our health, but also the health of our environment. Our menstrual cycle amplifies our internal balance; we need only listen. Revealing the ebb and flow of our vitality, the menstrual cycle is a microcosm for the world around us. Is it any wonder that so many women are experiencing abnormal menstrual rhythms and so many women are living with the daily struggles of depression, anxiety, chronic fatigue and other tiresome conditions? I believe it is critical for health care practitioners to acknowledge the connection between menstrual health and overall health and wellbeing.

As we seek to discover the imbalances within ourselves, we may be blessed with insight into the problems of the world. This is why I am convinced that learning to chart the menstrual cycle's vital signs provides the most empowering opportunity to reacquaint women with their bodies. Becoming aware of our natural rhythms is a necessary step in becoming aware of how we fit into the greater pulse of the earth and universe. It is my desire that women will awaken to the realization that the events of the menstrual cycle are great gifts. Understanding their rhythms gives us wisdom to better understand our relationship with the world and connect with our desires.

Andrea Beaubrun is a Naturopathic Doctor with a practice in Calgary, Alberta, at Integra Naturopathics. She pursues her passion for family medicine, focusing on energetic modalities such as Chinese medicine and homeopathy. Her approach to wellness includes a strong focus on cellular wellbeing.



Desire

by Kashka Zerafa

I have walked my life with desire and passion,

the specifics of which were not always consciously clear to myself, nor reflected in the world around me, as pre-described or condoned.

I desire to be seen, heard, felt and responded to.

I desire to make a difference in the world around me.

To take responsibility for the mark I make on the earth, in a group, or the ripple caused by how I move in a room.



I desire to be valued for who I am and what I truly bring into each moment, not just what I represent to another.

My desire lays fingerprints upon my heart, existing still when I take space from the influence of others, whispering inner direction as I move through my life.

My desire often requires forging new paths, with trust in their unique value.

My desire has struck fear in those who have sought power over me and sometimes means walking away from those I love.

My desire is the passion I feel for my fulfillment within the relationship I have with myself, embodied upon this mother earth.

I have vowed to the commitment of that relationship before I vow myself to another, and wear a tattoo on each ring finger, right and left, as a reminder!

Kashka Zerafa is a student of the Justisse Holistic Health Practitioner Program, a body-worker who encourages body literacy and a passionate artist of many forms (most recent desire of creation: woolly felted hats).

Femme Fertile Spring 2006

Table of Contents

1 *Desire is in the Air*

2 *Desire for Harmony: The Gift of the Menstrual Cycle's Vital Signs*

3 *Desire Table of Contents*

4 *What Women Really Desire*

6 *Abstinence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder*

7 *Woman to Woman: Holistic Reproductive Health Care Practitioners Answer Your Questions*

8 *Women's Health Conference*

Justisse Healthworks for Women Services

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What Women Really Desire

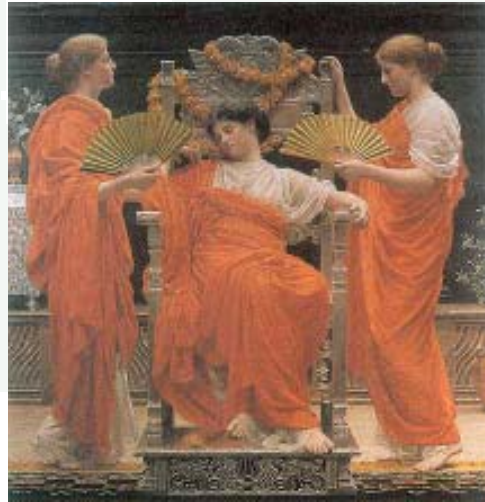
by Geraldine Matus

According to folklore, King Arthur once sent his nephew, the valiant and loyal knight Sir Gwain, on a quest throughout the kingdom to discover “*what women really desire*” (Phelps, 1981. Young-Eisendrath, 1984). The King’s life had been threatened and the answer was necessary to save him. A “grotesque” woman, Lady Ragnall, offered the answer in return for Gwain’s hand in marriage. Gwain willingly made the pledge to save his lord and won the answer: Lady Ragnall declared that what women really want is sovereignty – sovereignty over their bodies and the choices they make regarding their bodies in particular. I assume that this is still true today.

I know that my central desire is to maintain sovereignty over my body – the medium (matter) through which I express my desires, passions, and unfolding life. Such sovereignty is difficult for women when they are born (as was I and most other women) a daughter of a patriarchal society.

A patriarchal society is one in which the masculine principle dominates thinking and doing. Present in men and women alike, this mindset devalues the archetypal and symbolic feminine; seeks power over it and devalues the non-rational coherence of matter and nature, which is its realm. The patriarchal mindset disconnects itself from a conscious relationship to the balancing influence of the feminine principle. When the patriarchal mindset is unmediated by the feminine principle and dominates society, women’s bodies are

devalued, objectified, and forced to carry both negative and idealized projections of the repressed feminine. Women become alienated from their bodies. Shame and blame for being



female becomes their birthright. In this environment, women struggle to maintain body sovereignty. Many women live never having had the opportunity to even have the awareness that such a thing is possible.

I have been fortunate in that wise women have come into my life to teach me how to gain and maintain body sovereignty; how to shrug off the mantle of patriarchal contempt for the feminine that would envelop my body and my desires in shamed submission to its power principle. From them I have learned how to maintain a conscious and loving relationship to my body and the feminine principle. I have learned to love and honour the feminine as my psyche expresses it through my body, dreams, feelings, desires and imagination. Most importantly, I have learned to honour my sexual passions and love the reproductive body and blood

mysteries for their own sake. Without body sovereignty, I could not pursue a passionate life; without a positive relationship to the feminine, I would not have body sovereignty – nor I assume could other woman.

Gaily Sheehy’s (2006) latest book *Sex and the Seasoned Woman: Pursuing the Passionate Life* has created a commotion. It challenges collective ideas about “older” women and sexual desire. Women and men of all ages have fervently spoken either for or against Sheehy’s encouragement of older women to actively live out their desire for romance and sex, whatever their age (O’Connor, 2006). As an older woman who wants the freedom to express myself romantically and sexually regardless of age, I am happy for Sheehy’s book. More so, I am pleased her book addresses women’s desires for the personal power, choices, and opportunities to live out their lives passionately and meaningfully. Importantly, she includes the sexual body as part of passionate living, and does not separate women’s bodies from worldly pursuits. As in her other writings, Sheehy disputes (without “male bashing”) restrictive patriarchal ideas about women, insisting on women’s full expression of their ideas and their desire to obtain and maintain body sovereignty.

Body sovereignty is endangered by the patriarchal mindset, which prefers that women’s expression of desire and self be limited to their sexual and reproductive body in relationship to men. Becoming a desirable sexual body is a brutal trial when the

model of desirability is defined by unrealistic parameters, which only a few beauty queens and runway models can meet. It is an equal challenge to be a wife and/or mother when the paragon of

Body sovereignty is dancing when the body wants, crying when it's real, saying no when that is the truth.

wifely and motherly virtue is represented by figures such as the Virgin Mary. Imagine the challenge for women to hold onto a sense of their body and the feminine when negotiating the power politics of the corporate world where the patriarchal machinery is honed to a fine edge of power over matter and feeling.

Patriarchal projections of the devalued or idealized feminine onto women sets them up to fail and then to take the blame for failing. To survive, women yield to being bound by a patriarchal mindset. They learn to distrust their body and its desires; learn it is safer to define their desires according to those who have power over them; learn to avoid a conscious relationship to their body; learn to align themselves with the patriarchy's repressed, negative and distorted relationship to the feminine (Luke, 1995). How then can women find body sovereignty?

The works of Carl G. Jung (1970), and Jungian analysts such as Helen Luke (1995), Marion Woodman (1980, 1982), Barbara Stevens (1989), and June Singer (1994) invite us into understanding ways to consciously recover the territory of the too-long repressed archetypal and symbolic feminine. When the feminine principle comes forward into harmonious union with the masculine principle, women and men both become

conscious of the truth of their desires, without which there is no means for an authentic expression of passion or self. They gain the opportunity to discover the meaningful purpose of their sufferings and delights.

Woodman asserts that the development of a conscious and positive relationship to the flesh and bones of the body is the critical route for awakening to the truth of one's desires – critical to developing body sovereignty.

For women, I believe that body sovereignty means refusing to unconsciously carry patriarchal projections of the feminine – refusing to model ourselves after the women of MTV, afternoon soaps, or *Elle* magazine – unless that is exactly who they are. Body sovereignty is the willingness to risk tipping the social and personal relationship boat in order to express via larynx, pen, paintbrush, or action the truth of thought and feeling. Body sovereignty is dancing when the body wants, crying when it's real, saying no when that is the truth. Body sovereignty is nurtured by attending lovingly and patiently to the body, by honouring its

beauty and mystery and all that it means to be female outside of patriarchal definitions. Body sovereignty is honouring blood and menstrual cycle mysteries; honouring the milk of our breasts. When women meaningfully and consciously connect with their bodies they connect to the intrapsychic territory where “the dark discordant threads are interwoven with those bright and shining, to make, at last, a whole design”, which is the mysterious and meaningful pattern of their desires and life (Luke, 1995). The place of the archetypal and symbolic feminine is where women find the power to value their true emotion, intuition, body desires, and intellectual coherence. It is the seat of body sovereignty.

Not only did Sir Gwain honour his promise to marry Lady Ragnall but he also honoured her sovereignty, undoing a curse, which had kept her beauty from coming forth. You can find a version of the story about Sir Gwain and Lady Ragnall in *The Maid of the North* edited by Ethel Johnston Phels, or in *Hags and Heroes* by Polly Young-Eisendrath.

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Abstinence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder

by Lisa Leger

What could be sexy about not having sexual intercourse? My experience as a woman and as a fertility awareness counselor has shown me that when sexual partners practice natural birth control by abstaining from intercourse during carefully determined fertile days, they have the opportunity to become deliciously creative: creative about flirting, creative about making love without intercourse, and creative about exploring other non-sexual activities.



You may be surprised to know that making love with oral or manual stimulation is considered immoral in some circles. Perhaps this attitude derives from the fact that acts of fellatio and cunilingus are perceived to be purely for pleasure without any reproductive purpose, or

stimulation. The fact that they may also feel intense love and appreciation for their partner's willingness to please them in this way should not be overlooked.

I believe that creativity is the hallmark of erotic enjoyment.

Many women report that they find it easier to achieve orgasm with oral stimulation rather than intercourse. For these women, a sexual encounter that does not involve intercourse would be no hardship whatsoever!

Non-sexual activities can also promote affection and be highly erotic.

Showing affection, giving comfort, being intimate — these are the foundations of human bonding and they certainly enhance the sexual bond.

Flirting can be incredibly sexy and fun; certainly in a new relationship, but especially between partners who want to keep the sparks flying. When you can say, "I'm in my Count of Three..." and your fella knows exactly what that means (that your fertile phase is almost over), it can really charge the atmosphere with anticipation.

Making love without intercourse can be a great relationship builder. Sex therapists routinely urge couples wanting to enhance their love life to take the time to massage, stroke, lounge and taste, without expectations. Showing affection, giving comfort, being intimate — these are the foundations of human bonding and they certainly enhance the sexual bond.

perhaps because some consider it demeaning to the one servicing the other. These attitudes can be a barrier to a very pleasurable experience that does not imply force or servitude, but rather a gift given freely out of love.

Women who practice fertility awareness often report more intense sexual enjoyment during the fertile phase of their cycles. This phase is characterized by the presence of cervical mucus, engorgement of the vulva and genital organs, and peaking estrogen levels; factors that contribute to an increased sexual interest and heightened orgasmic ability. It makes sense when you consider that our bodies have evolved to enhance the possibilities of reproduction; we are designed to want sex when we are fertile. To avoid pregnancy, we make the decision to find sexual release without risking fertilization.

It is no secret that most men enjoy intense orgasms with oral

When my husband gets out the backgammon board, I am flooded with loving emotions, because I know that the only reason he is offering to play backgammon is to make me happy. Going for nature hikes, movies, and other "dating" behaviors play an important role in pair bonding. Sometimes, it is these non-sexual acts of giving that really develop the intimacy required for a healthy sex life.

I believe that creativity is the hallmark of erotic enjoyment. In the context of fertility awareness methods of birth control, couples who abstain from intercourse during the fertile phase have abundant opportunities for creative play that have great potential to enhance their relationship.

Lisa Leger is a Justisse teacher on Vancouver Island. She is hosting the upcoming Women's Health Conference in July (see page 8) and plans to guide a nature hike to her favorite forest and waterfalls.



Woman to Woman

Holistic Reproductive Health Care Practitioners Answer Your Questions

Dear Woman to Woman,

I am 27 years old and have been having sex since I was 16. I had never had difficulty having orgasms until about a year ago. When I got married two years ago, I went on the birth control pill because my husband and I wanted to wait to have children. Before that, we'd had good sex together, but because we lived in different cities it wasn't that often. Some newspaper articles I've read say that the pill reduces sex drive. Is this true?

Desiring My Orgasms Back

Dear Desiring,

There is evidence to suggest that hormonal contraception (the Pill, Depo shot, etc) suppresses a woman's sex drive and reduces or negates her orgasmic capacity. Studies show that hormonal contraceptives cause sex hormone binding globulin (SHBG) levels to rise. SHBG is a protein that binds to the free testosterone hormone, which makes it unavailable to the body. Free testosterone levels decline and with them the sex drive and orgasmic capacity. Dr. Susan Rako addresses this issue, and others related to women and testosterone, in her book *Hormone of Desire*. All that being said, a woman's sexual desire can be mercurial, changing with her mood, health, partner, and attitude towards her self and her body.

Newly married couples who have never lived together before may find that the quality of their sexual relationship changes as they adjust to new rhythms with each other and work out the dynamics of sharing a domestic



life. Patience and love help during the adjustment phase that may or may not include a changed interest in sex. Additionally, some women find it difficult to relax into sex play and orgasm if they are very concerned about an unplanned pregnancy. For these women, a reliable method of birth control improves their sex drive and orgasmic capacity. Learning fertility awareness from a reliable instructor and using it alone or in combination with barrier methods is a reliable method of birth control that preserves a woman's natural sex drive and orgasmic potential.

Dear Woman to Woman,

Ever since I have started writing my doctoral thesis I have been horny to distraction. Does writing increase your sex drive, or is there something wrong with me? **Fidgety at My Desk**

Dear Fidgety,

It is common for people to experience an increased sex drive when they are engaged in a creative activity. This is especially true if the activity involves expression of what is close to the heart of a person's intellectual or imaginative passion. I regard it as the consummation of the inner marriage of King Sol and Queen Luna; the bing, bang of the yin and the yang coming together. So enjoy the energy and let it channel through your work. If you get too distracted, you can always take an 'O' break.

Just Ask Us

If you have questions you would like to ask a Holistic Reproductive Health Practitioner, please contact us:

Woman to Woman



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Laura Wershler, Geraldine Matus

Inspiring Women to Self Care

Cathy Whitehead

Women's Reflections on Learning

Fertility Awareness *Rose Yewchuk*

ENITY: What Do Young Adults Really

Want from Their Sexual Health

Educators? *Cathy Whitehead*

Special Needs and Considerations in Women's Health

Adrenal Fatigue *Tris Trethart, M.D.*

Mapping the 5th Vital Sign: Using the

Menstrual Cycle Chart for Managing

Reproductive Health *Geraldine Matus*

Coming Off Hormonal Contraception

Megan Lalonde

Fertility Awareness Network:

An Update *Ilene Richman*

**Public
Performances: July 14 Evening
Workshops: July 15**

Evening Performances

Wandering Menstruals Show

Lisa Leno Interviews Laura Wershler

Menstrual Poem Speedwriting Contest

Menstrual Poem Open Mike

Jazz

Women and Girls Health Fair

Introduction to Menstrual Cycle

Charting *Rose Yewchuk and*

Megan Lalonde

Gathering in the Red Tent: A Work-

shop for Mothers and Daughters

Geraldine Matus and Laura Wershler

Bio-identical Hormones, Therapeutic

Uses and Consumer Choices

Keynote Speaker: Tris Trethart, M.D.

**For updates on conference
details, visit www.justisse.ca.
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