

MOTHERTONGUE Reader's Theater

Mothertongue is a feminist collective founded by students at San Francisco State in 1976. Over the years hundreds of women have written and performed their life experiences, finding strength and joy in telling truths to one another. The more than 20 scripts are performed to dramatize women's experiences in a collage of dialogues, poems, stories, songs and one-liners. Each performance includes a discussion with the audience.

Between 1976 and 1993 I contributed to and/or performed in 6 scripts: Mothers and Daughters; Body Image; Loving Women; Passing: Identities Hidden & Exposed; Speaking of Aging; and Did you come or fake it? -- Women and Sexuality. Here is a sampling of my work for two of these scripts...

BODY IMAGE

My Body is a Map Lani 1980

There is a ritual I do when I remove my clothes with someone
whether it's to sunbathe, sauna, massage or make love.

I tell the stories of my scars.

MY BODY IS A MAP OF MY LIFE
A PATCHWORK QUILT
THAT IS WARM AND SOFT AND STRONG.

I didn't always appreciate my body. I used to be ashamed and embarrassed.
I had a difficult time baring myself with or even without other people around.
I would avoid looking at myself, I mean really looking beyond the self-hate, beyond the media
image that I should be, and that I could be if only...

There was no real sense other than I wasn't good enough.

I was constantly comparing my self with others.

The more I denied this closet character the more control it had over my life. It was a drag.
I wanted to be free; so I practiced. I practiced being nude dancing, walking, sitting, laying, playing
all while looking in the mirror at myself from every possible angle.

It wasn't easy but as the months and year passed I became more comfortable and accepting.

You could even say I developed a nonchalant attitude when in the nude.

I began to feel at home in my body and in the growing sense of well being.

SCAR WOMAN emerged from the closet.

All imperfections exposed, I claimed the unique, distinctive markings,
making them perfect in the showing.

MY BODY IS A MAP OF MY LIFE
A PATCHWORK QUILT
THAT IS WARM, AND SOFT AND STRONG.

DID YOU COME OR FAKE IT? -- WOMEN AND SEXUALITY

I wrote and performed this script with four other women from 1981 to 1992. We were three lesbians, one heterosexual and me the bisexual. I booked our script in women's [read lesbian] coffee houses, book stores and cafes, as well as several West Coast Women's Music and Comedy Festivals. We were regulars at Valencia Rose Cabaret, and Josie's Juice Joint. We also appeared on college campuses, at an early National Women Studies Conference and many other conferences and gatherings over the years. The script changed with the times and as we did.

I can do it myself Lani 1981

Alone in my bedroom, one afternoon in the late 60s
I read a book that said it was okay to turn myself on!!

Christ hanging on his cross on my bedroom wall
Was quickly banished to the bureau drawer.

How could I touch myself in front of him?
Sacrilege, Sacrilege!
Masturbation the sacrament of self love, loving self
Love yourself as God loves you, and you of so little faith
Keep it! How can loving my body put me in hell?
God frowns on it; there goes the neighborhood.
But who gives a damn what the statues think --
This feels good to turn my self on,
I just didn't know it was so easy, so good, so simple.

I can't understand to this day
Why it took me 27 years to figure that out;
I can do it myself.

It took months, maybe even a year
Not to feel guilty when I saw Jesus lying in the drawer
Waiting for me to return to his open empty arms.

I chose my self over Jesus, thank goodness all right
Hooray for me moaning, breathless into the night....

One day when I was 9 years old Patricia S. as told to cousin Lani, 1988

One day when I was 9 years old
I dashed into the house

Concentrating on getting to the bathroom on time
Running down the hall
I opened the door and plopped on the toilet
Just in the nick of time

It was then that I noticed my startled mother
In the bathtub
Trying to get her legs down from the wall,
Turn off the water and pretend
I hadn't caught her doing anything at all
Out of the ordinary.

I knew that look.
I had had it many times before,
But this time the tables were turned.
I don't remember anything being said
She blushed, I flushed and ran out to play.

But for the next few nights my bathtub routine
Was full of experimentation.
It wasn't long before I figured it out
Ahhh, one of those inadvertent lessons of life

Thanks mom.

Bless me father...
Lani 1981

Bless me father for I have sinned
It has been two weeks since my last confession
I have had impure thoughts and deeds.
There was no place to hide!
When I finally faced the fact that I'd gone all the way
I felt afraid and bad and cried myself to sleep
Holding a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
I woke up in the middle of the night
And to my horror Mary had fallen out of bed
And her head had broken right off!
It was a sign from heaven.
I was in trouble for sure!
I glued it back on. No one ever noticed
and I was left feeling sorry
Not for going all the way
But sorry sex was considered a sin.

That's a freedom we all deserve

Lani 1981

Several years ago, on my 15 year old daughter's invitation
We spent a Sunday afternoon in bed
Snuggling, massaging and talking about sex.
Orgasms, masturbation, the problems of oral sex and braces
What we did, what we liked, who we'd been with
Questioning, answering, laughing and just loving one another.

She'd tried everything she was interested in but intercourse.
She and her steady beau took turns having orgasms!
She told me she felt it was time; she wanted to go *all the way*.
They had already talked about birth control, and decided
Abortion would be the back-up in case of failure.
We went from amazement to shock, unable to believe
We were talking with each other like that.

I lent them my home for a day and night.
It was a first time with no guilt, no shame,
no fear of discovery or time limit.
That's a freedom we all deserve.

Sex is Over Rated

Dannielle 1982 [my daughter]

I think sex is over rated. People make too much of a big deal about it.
My boyfriend and I are 15. On a joint decision we decided to have sex.
We were both virgins at the time. After a quiet evening at my mom's place
we decided to venture into the unknown.
We carefully put on the condom and did it.
And both of us were disappointed!

What's the big deal? Is that all there is to it?
THIS is the biggest no-no in the world?
Personally, I like oral sex better.

Did you hear about Lani?

Lani 1981 [this piece is done with several voices]

[gossip]

Did you hear about Lani?

[resounding collective...]

NO!!

[secretive]

She went back to men! She has a boy friend, a 23 year old boy friend and she's calling herself a bisexual!! What a joke.

[disgusted]

Ha, how latent, she's hiding in heterosexual privilege.

[dismissive]

She's obviously working something out. She'll get over it, just wait and see.

[Lani to center stage]

So what can I say, bisexuality wasn't a stage for me. I'm bisexual. As I've come out in the lesbian community I've had reactions like those and I've had others like at this woman's party....

[whispered]

I've had a man in the closet for six months. I've been afraid to tell anyone...

[confidential tone]

You're brave to be so open. I keep my male lover separate from the rest of my life.

[Lani]

Why is it that a woman who is sexually intimate with women and men and self identifies as bisexual cannot be trusted to be a real woman-loving individual? I won't hide my erotic feelings for certain men to be a trustworthy revolutionary, that's ridiculous! I trust my self. All closets feel the same and nobody belongs in one!!

Which half is that?

Lani 1985

People are really confused by my bisexuality. They can't make up their minds as to whether I'm a heterosexual or a homosexual. A friend of mine said she could only relate to my lesbian half! I had to ask her which half was that??

Lesbians who sleep with men

Lani 1990

I've identified as a bisexual for over 10 years now, although I haven't been sexual with a man for the last five. My lesbian friends who sleep with men ask why I don't call my self a lesbian. And I have to ask why don't they call themselves bisexual?

Did you come or fake it?

Lani 1981 *[this piece is done with several voices]*

Did you come or fake it?

That is the question!

Whatta ya mean fake it? Who fakes it?

Who hasn't faked it?

That's a better question.

Well how do you fake it?

Most of the time I don't come.

They just assume I have and I don't say anything.

Well what I do is flex those kegels, breathe heavy and say
oooh baby, or oooh gawd.

Yeah, moan, grown and move more than once
and it's all over but the fucking.

Why do so many women fake orgasms?

Maybe because so many men fake foreplay.