

## DEAR BITCH

some choices are better than others. Which is what big media does, with different criteria for selecting acceptable choices.

I'm surprised that you would give any weight to what other magazines did concerning the Nashville Pussy record. This point is highly ironic, for *Bitch* exists precisely as a counter to what other media do. What other media do is not a reason to do or not do anything in particular, and it shouldn't influence your own evaluations. I do record reviews for a New England arts paper, and I decided not to review the record because I think it's clichéd and boring. That's a different matter from whether the band or label should be allowed to buy that space.

Seth Berner  
Portland, Maine

**The editors respond:** We don't want to tell women what they should or should not be doing with their bodies. But we don't have to support it. Even when women are in control of their image, they don't necessarily make decisions that are feminist. Melanie Griffith, for instance, has enough power to choose the roles she plays, but she almost always chooses to play the bimbo. Are we supposed to like it simply because she's in control of her own image? More to the point, are we supposed to accept money to promote it?

That, after all, is what informed our decision most: the fact that, were we to offer up this image, it would have been as part of a commercial transaction. We

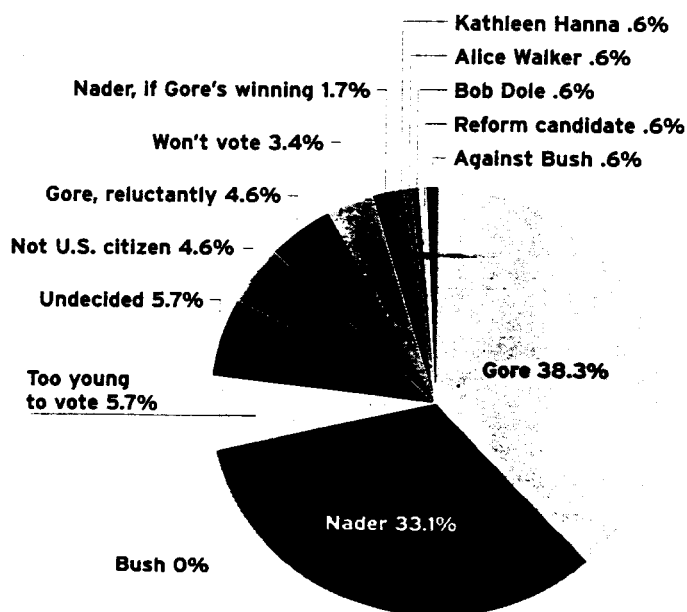


FIG B: HOW YOU'RE VOTING  
(AS OF OCTOBER 2000)

didn't reject the ad because we were trying to protect our readers from it, or as a blanket judgment about the band, their music, or their appeal to *Bitch* readers—but we couldn't justify getting paid to display an image that's so very similar to those we spill a lot of ink critiquing. That would make us worse than the folks we criticize.

And about that Boss Hogg ad, we felt that a photo of a contemplative woman who happens to be wearing a bra-top was pretty different from an image cribbed from faux-lesbian porn. It was a judgment call, like everything else, and we stand by our decision.

## P.O.'d about Y.F.

"The Yellow Fever Pages" (no. 12) articulated the same things that have been running through my mind for a long time. I am 19 years old, half-Chinese and half-Okinawan. I was born and raised in Hawaii, and have been surrounded by Asian people and culture all my life. Attending college in Wisconsin was my very first experience with this whole Asian-girl obsession. I have a friend who is half-Japanese and half-Caucasian, and her Caucasian boyfriend has had previous Asian girlfriends and believes he knows more about "the Chinese" than I do. For a while, I thought I was the only Asian girl who got irritated at white guys attempting to prove they know more about my culture than I do. I was cracking up when [I read that Karen Eng] has a test for them, because I do the same thing. I thought I was alone. Now I know I'm not, and I just wanted to say thank you.

Tracy Goya  
Beloit, Wisc.

I, TOO, HAVE BEEN A WITNESS TO YELLOW FEVER, but with my tale, there is a slight twist. One of my (white) boyfriends was totally into Asian women. He and I met in graduate school and we really hit it off. After a while, he proceeded to tell me how he loved being around Asian women (I am black, by the way), how their body frames were just perfect ("pocket-size," or something like that) and so on. The last time I talked to him, he was getting married to an Asian girl.

Now, with me being black, I find the same thing with white men; for some reason, white men who have no clue about me or my culture love going out with me just for the sake of being with a black woman. They seem to have this idea that I'm what they see on tv—I'm into hip-hop, I can dance really well, and the like. When they find out that I don't like hip-hop and that I am a graduate student with plans to go to law school,

## Women like Chrissie Hynde, Joan Jett, and Patti Smith have been kicking ass for years now—and doing it without having to take half their clothes off or make out with their bandmates onstage.

they immediately fade away. These men also think that I must be some exotic creature, taboo but oh-so-wonderful.

*Kimberly Richardson  
Memphis, Tenn.*

I AM A KOREAN-AMERICAN WOMAN IN THE MIDWEST. Yellow Fever is huge here, especially in the larger cities. Not just for men either—a lot of Caucasian women here have an “Asian persuasion” fetish. I got fed up with the guys who only wanted me for my ethnicity; I wanted revenge. So I became a dominatrix. An Asian dominatrix. What a mistake—little did I know, I was playing into the hands of the stereotypical view of Asian women. But, I have to admit, it felt really good to flog the crap out of guys and holler, “I’m Korean, you idiot! *Konnichiwa* is Japanese! Learn the difference!”

I [now] work with many liberal, upper-middle-class Caucasian women who are full of white Catholic guilt. One such lady spent a year in Japan. Within my first week of work, she chose to enlighten me on the subject of Asian culture, as well as tell me that I definitely have to visit Japan. I understand that she was just trying to find common ground. But I can’t explain these things to her, or to any other Yellow Fever perpetrators, for that matter. They think they’re being so open-minded and culturally literate, [and that this] makes them bulletproof.

*Stephanie  
Minneapolis, Minn.*

I WAS HOOKED ON “THE YELLOW FEVER PAGES” from line one. I ended up reading the whole article out loud to several of my friends—Asian-American, African-American, and Latina women who knew exactly what Karen was talking about with being made to feel inferior as ethnic objects/playtoys for white men. Her experiences were sadly (but almost humorously) familiar to me. I want to commend her not only for the article, but also for how she handles the situations now. I myself have not reached the point of being able to control my anger. It gives me a little hope that other Asian women get as upset as I do and eventually rise above that anger. Thanks to Karen for the great article that inspired not only Asian-American women, but other minority women as well.

*Liz Lee  
Claremont, Calif.*

I BELIEVE MY CASE OF Y.F. IS HONORABLE—IT wasn’t there until 1997, when I went to China to adopt my daughter, Jet Chunmei. (For context, I am a man.) I believe the problems with the men in Eng’s past are more related to culture than race. My cross-cultural experience is mostly with China and Chinese, but I have seen enough to know that one of the reasons American Caucasian men gravitate toward Japanese women is that it’s a much smaller gulf to cross than [that] to other Asians, particularly Chinese.

The Japanese, at least, understand that part of American culture which they haven’t already adopted. China (as a whole) never will. China doesn’t want to. Although Eng was born in New Jersey, maybe she is more Chinese than she admits. Japanese share American decadence in dress, music, and drugs. (This is why, to me, [*Ally McBeal*’s] Ling is so credible as a Chinese woman—she has those no-nonsense, stand-away manners that Chinese women use to evaluate and control social situations with Western men.) Japanese women may have had that as well, but it’s gone now—Japanese women want to be approached.

Ms. Eng, do you have Chinese manners? I think you do—your writing style is straightforward. You are no French deconstructionist, you believe in a definable right and wrong—very Chinese.

My daughter, Jet, is beautiful. She learned English in two months—at age 2—and just as quickly forgot Mandarin. But she has, every day, shown me how beautiful it is to be Chinese. I can’t help it.

*Kim Lathrop  
Portland, Ore.*

**The editors respond:** Eeeew.

I CERTAINLY SYMPATHIZE WITH KAREN ENG’S exasperation with men who try to mold her into their Asian fantasy girl. But by consistently focusing on white men’s desires instead of her own, on white men as the active protagonists of desire, she’s casting herself as the passive “victim” of European male colonialist sexuality. Of course, taking the victim role in these relationships makes her seem more pure and innocent and doll-like—just what these guys want.

Where are *her* desires in this story? Why are they rel-

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## DEAR BITCH

egated to a footnote, just the way Asian women's desires are so often relegated to footnotes in the historical record?

Why is Eng's fascination with Scotsmen so different from white guys' attraction to her? Is it possible that she's attracted to Scotsmen because she stereotypes them as burly, earthy, rebellious, but not terribly smart he-men, as in William Wallace of *Braveheart* fame? (I'm of Scottish descent—maybe I should take offense. After all, we're the historical victims of centuries of English oppression.)

I say, why not have a Celt fetish, and why not have an Asian fetish? We don't choose our desires for political reasons, and we can't really be blamed for them from some sort of political viewpoint either. The key is how self-aware we are in how we relate to our desires. Men who actually have long-term relationships with Asian women and marry them (like my own brother, who married a Japanese woman after living for years in Japan) long ago realized how different these women are from the shallow stereotypes they grew up with. They can have their buttons pushed by the fantasy and still have an in-depth relationship with a complete human being, too.

[Eng should] have a little more self-awareness about her own active agency in her life and her own little sexual/romantic stereotypes. We women can't keep blaming immature men for our ills if we are ourselves too immature to take responsibility for our own choices.

*Katharine Gates*  
 New York, N.Y.

**Karen Eng responds:** Have I cast myself as the passive victim of European male colonialist sexuality? My answer to that is in the whole structure of the article. It's like the parable of the frog who doesn't realize the heat is on 'til he's being cooked: I was innocent, but then I learned to identify and deal with the all-too-real difficulties of romance when you're an Asian woman raised and living in this country. (Furthermore, are all the women whose letters attest to their own similar experiences also immature and reluctant to take responsibility for their romantic choices?)

Perhaps the point I failed to make is this: I've lived my entire life in a place where the culture at large wants to cast me as foreign, when I'm very much not. This has made me realize that, to a certain extent, how I respond is political. Of course I can choose not to resist the stereotypes: Don't we constantly see those who are willing to accept fabricated projections to their benefit? But—contrary to Mr. Lathrop's advice—I actively insist

on being seen as who I am, and I will not cave in and take the easy way out.

I'm not saying we should necessarily obsess over every political nuance of what turns us on, but wouldn't it be fair to ask ourselves whether the person we're fetishizing—for any feature he or she may have—lives up to our fantasy, and ask ourselves whether we can live with the reality? How about if we ask the fetishee how she/he feels about it rather than remaining defensive and willfully ignorant?

I'm certainly not going to reject the friendship of those who happen to be white—only those blinded to me by a media-induced cultural yearning. Let them eat Lucy Liu.

As for macho Celtic stereotypes, well, Ms. Gates just made me giggle there, because the man I chose (my husband, Iain) is as unmacho as they come. But I do have to point out that her attempt at analogy doesn't hold: Scots were victimized by the English, yes. But I'm not English.

### **Long, straight, curly, fuzzy, snaggy, shaggy**

In response to "La Cage aux Follicles" (no. 12), I would just like to say that I have been hairy for five years now, and have found much enjoyment in knowing that my hair is sexy and the smell it generates is a very natural love potion that attracts men and women. Grow into a woman's body and love it!

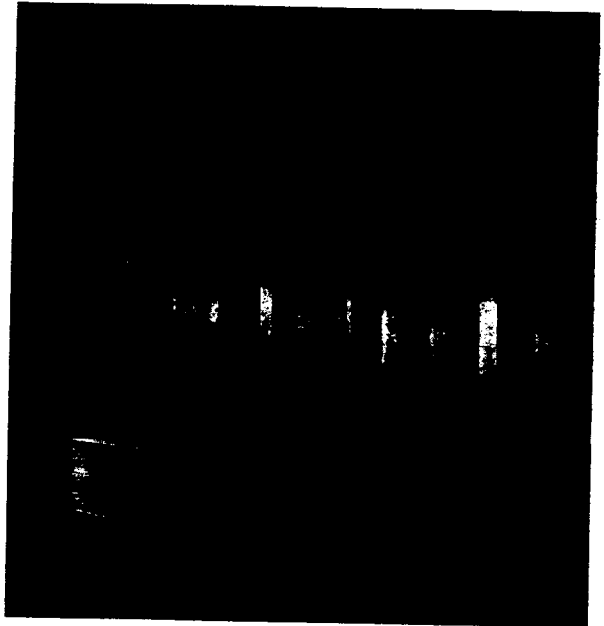
*Angela  
Minneapolis, Minn.*

**BODY HAIR: THE FEMINIST FINAL FRONTIER.** THE disjunction between my politics and my aesthetics always gets tangled up in leg hair. I don't have a problem with it on other women (nay, I admire it both politically and aesthetically), but when it comes to the black, wiry hair on my own legs, I can't revel in it.

I find that the wild 'n' crazy calf-and-shin hair does not work well with my standard winter wear of kneesocks and tights; not only do my legs get itchier, but the elastic of the kneesocks rubs the hairs the wrong way and it actually hurts. Oh, what's a feminist fatale to do? In my wilder (and, let's face it, more ambitious) moments, I threaten to coat those copious leg tresses with Manic Panic in electric blue or hot pink. Until then, though, I practice a sort of passive resistance to hairless hegemony: I maintain a near-constant stubble by shaving only every few weeks. In my liminal state, I'm forced to forever ponder the social prescriptions to uphold the artificial standards of femininity. Plus, I'm lazy.

*Rachel Fudge  
San Francisco, Calif.*

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