

Looking For Lesbian Love, Virtually

BY CYNTHIA POTTS

The internet has changed the way we live our lives. With a few keystrokes, we can access information, watch movies, or buy products. But can the web help us find true love? If not, can it at least help us 'hook up' for the weekend?

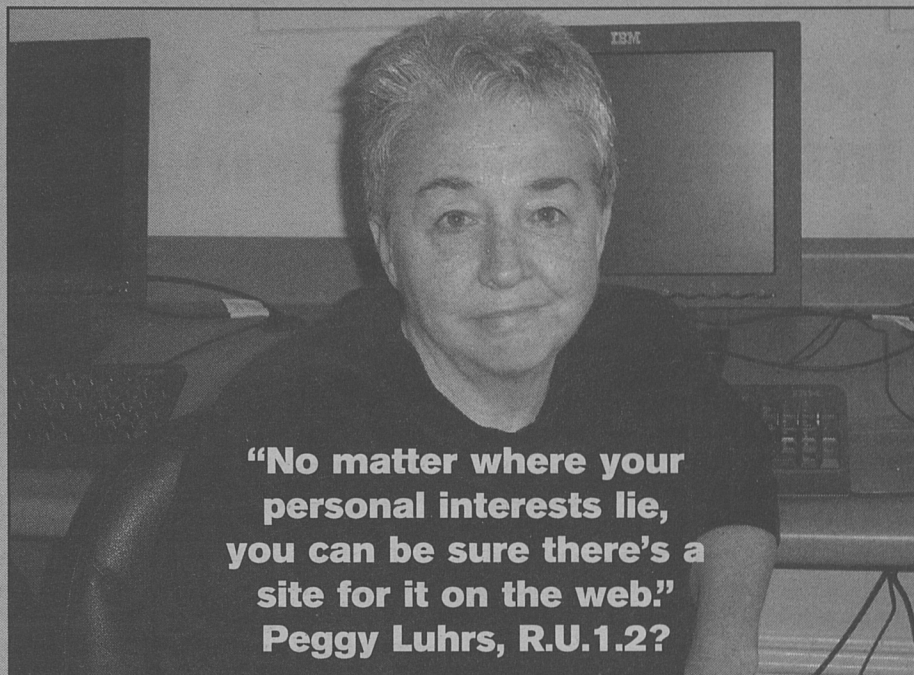
R.U. 1.2? is helping lesbians to find out. October 26th, the Bohnett Cyber Center was home to an interactive workshop entitled "Sex Online for Women."

"This is one of a series of workshops we'll be holding at the Cyber Center," explains Peggy Luhrs, of R.U.1.2? "We're very open to suggestions for future workshops, so that we'll be covering topics people are interested in."

Sex Online for Women was the brainchild of R.U.1.2?'s director Christopher Kaufman, and covers lesbian chat rooms, safe sex sites, and educational sites. "Some of this information can be difficult to find in Vermont," Luhrs explained. "But no matter where your personal interests lie, you can be sure there's a site for it on the web." She lists a few options. "There's a goddess club, a strap-on site, you name it. We've had requests for leather-oriented sites, so we'll be including a few of them."

At press time, Luhrs is uncertain how much demand there will be for the seminar. "The internet is still not the major way women want to meet. They don't use the personals the same way men do."

"Look at *Seven Days* [Burlington-based news and arts weekly] personals," she continued. "The men are very clear about what physical traits they're looking for, while the women are looking for relationships, emotional connection. In San Francisco, things are a little different. You'll see women



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On-line lesbian erotica ranges from the elitist and gentle to the down and dirty. Our selfless researcher devoted countless hours to exploring some of the best sites out there, and this is what she found:

www.girlfriendsmag.com/onourbacks - The on-line site for the classic magazine - includes photo and text features from the current issue.
www.lezlove.com - A membership site, lezlove features a wide range of erotic stories, over 500 videos, and a photo gallery featuring impossibly good looking women.
www.pervgrrl.net - Kinky, well-written stories, artsy photos and graphics.
www.qworld.org/womyn/webzine.htm - Sapphrodite - A women's journal, featuring 'Tasteful' erotica, where you find some story wrapped around the good parts.
www.leatherdyke.com - A free membership site, lesbians only, discussion forums and links to appropriate erotica.

Want to do some specialty shopping? Visit:

www.a-womans-touch.com - for a sweet and romantic approach to all things plastic.
www.goodvibrations.com - offers up every kind of toy you can think of - and some you didn't know existed!

being a little more overt about what they're looking for physically."

The comfortable anonymity of cyberspace may make it easier for local lesbians to find like-minded lovers. "We do cover some chat room safety," Luhrs said. "It's not as big an issue for women, but everyone needs to understand that there are people who will pretend to be someone else when they're online."

"When you're going to meet someone, it's a good idea to set up that first meeting in a public place. That way you can meet in a safe environment." More and more women appear to be using on-line chat rooms, and posting personal ads at queer websites like Planet Out.

The seminar format combines a brief talk on the wide range of lesbian-interest sites with some hands-on computer time. "We'll go to some of these sites as we discuss them," Luhrs explained. "We'll visit a chat room, and participants will be able to engage in the discussion."

When asked about community reaction to the seminar, Luhrs chuckled. "Some people think it's fabulous, a positive way to liberate ourselves sexually. Others feel that it cheapens our sexuality, and makes it a commodity." She places herself somewhere between the two - "I'm for some liberalization, against the commodization."

Luhrs is confident that there will be other workshops on the same topic, as well as some sessions focusing on the gay male sites. ▼

Cynthia Potts is a freelance writer who lives with her family and a growing menagerie of animals in Plattsburgh.

FCC Censors Gay TV

The FCC last month "flagged" a segment of *In the Life*, a gay-oriented one-hour news magazine television show broadcast on public television stations nationwide. The show airs on Vermont Public Television on the first Sunday of the month at 11 pm.

The episode, "Hidden Agenda," was scheduled for October broadcast. The flagged segment, "By the Book," featured footage that ironically was provided by an official of the Bush administration.

The show visits the Texas textbook hearings "to document the process by which textbooks are selected for

statewide use and ultimately for the rest of the nation. Texas, which has a large block of conservative voters on the state school board and an extremely active fundamentalist lobby, is currently examining health textbooks." The program looked at "how topics like homosexuality, AIDS prevention and gender identity are being treated."

Excerpts from a videotape produced by a group headed by Bush Presidential AIDS Council appointee, Dr. Joe McIlhane, featured in the season premiere episode of *In the Life* were identified as potential FCC indecency violations.

The questioned content consists of a line drawing demonstrating how to do a self-exam for breast can-

cer (taken from a high school health textbook) and excerpts from a videotape produced by McIlhane's Medical Institute for Sexual Health that promotes abstinence and discourages condom use. According to the Institute, their products are used in every state in the nation and in 40 foreign countries to promote abstinence-only practices to teens and parents. President George W. Bush appointed McIlhane to the President's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA) and the Advisory Committee to the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), according to ITL's press release.

Due to the content of the McIlhane video, American Public Television, a distributor of public television programming, suggested that stations air the program after the 7-10 pm "prime time" slot. The wording on a series of AIDS prevention posters by STOP AIDS! in San Francisco were also cited in the warning.

The program had already aired on Vermont Public Television by the time the warning was issued, according to VPT public relations director Ann Curran. But since the station normally airs the show in a late-night slot, she did not anticipate any fallout from the FCC.

"This whole FCC clamp-down is really making things difficult for broadcasters," Curran said. "We're seeing things [we now question] sent

by distributors that we wouldn't have thought twice about a few years ago. I just hope this [new strict standard] will pass. These strict standards are causing a lot of grief for broadcasters."

Curran added that the gay and lesbian newsmagazine had been in the schedule at channel 33 for "lots of years." The show "gets not a huge audience but we receive positive feedback from people who appreciate its being there." Referring to the late broadcast hour, she said, "We just hope that people program their VCRs." ▼