**Tits and Clits: Sexuality and Activism in Woman-Authored Underground Comics**

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**Abstract**  
This essay explores the uniquely crude and politically charged content of underground sex comics created by women in the 1970s. Lyn Chevli and Joyce Farmer's *Tits and Clits* (1972-1987) explored sex from a woman's point-of-view while maintaining the graphic humour of underground artists like R. Crumb. The content was in keeping thematically with Second Wave feminism, which was resisting the objectification of the female body and fighting for a place for women within the sexual revolution. I argue that the ways in which Tits and Clits conceived the female body and women's unique perspectives on sexuality connected the aesthetics and voice of underground comics to the feminist movement in a way that was mutually beneficial. Chevli and Farmer's struggles with censorship both inside and outside of feminist circles attest to both the power of their work to move readers, as well as the volatility of sexual and feminist discourse during the 1970s. This unique fusion of two concurrent social movements (the underground press and women's liberation) tested the limits of intelligibility, in terms of what could be identified as feminist activism.

**Introduction**  
This is by far one of the most fucking insane comic books I’ve ever read. Written by two wigged out chicks in Laguna Beach, it is sexual, funny, sharp, bitter, disgusting and sick. If you think you are cool, if you think there is nothing around that can still shock you, try reading this little epic. It blew my mind (what little there is left of it) and just turned my fucking head upside-down. This comic is perverse in only a way that a woman can create perversions. Sheeeit, really wiggly. Subject matter in this book includes such things as cunt dribble, Kotex chewing dogs, knee fucking, the Blueberry Yogurt Douche and Cosmic Orgasms. What more can I tell you? What more would you want to know? The Porn-O-Graph fell off my desk when I gave it this book. Make up your own mind for a change. Buy the damn book and freak out. Remember, nobody can make a dirty book like a woman can make a dirty book (CB 1974).

What would cause such a reaction in a reviewer from *The California Ball*, a sex tabloid accustomed to reviewing sexual material? What does he mean when he describes the comic as ‘perverse in only a way that a woman can create perversions’? According to one account, *Tits and Clits* was consumed by ‘feminists, curious bystanders, and the furtively horny alike’, yet the explicit content was largely not meant to titillate but to bring a woman’s point of view to discussions of sex during the apex of the sexual revolution (Skinn 2004: 145). *Tits and Clits* was explicit without being pornographic, but audiences often struggled to distinguish the difference. Lyn Chevli and Joyce Farmer’s aim to convey their sexual politics to both male and female readers and their use of imperfect female heroines set *Tits and Clits* apart from other projects emerging from feminist print culture in the 1970s. The project was a wholly unique form of feminist activism emerging from the worlds of both underground comics and feminist consciousness, but one that was not fully credited for its political content at the time.
In order to fully appreciate *Tits and Clits* as an activist undertaking, it is important to situate it chronologically within the newly democratised print culture of the 1970s, the Second Wave of feminist thinking and activism and the evolving sexual revolution. This essay first examines the creation and reception of the title and then conducts a close reading of the content to see exactly how it challenged the sexual culture of the 1970s.

The underground press exploded in 1965 when new offset printing technology made newspaper and comic production affordable to the masses (Rosenkranz 2002). Two years later, underground comics such as *Zap Comix* gained huge popularity by challenging the conventions of traditional comic books and creating a countercultural hero out of its author, R. Crumb. As Dez Skinn writes in his history of underground publications, through their instant accessibility by telling stories in pictures, comix became the perfect vehicle for a new way of thinking, a powerful tool not only to break the sex taboos, but also to present entire lifestyle manuals to the nascent peace and love generation (2002: 10).

The percentage of these publications that were produced by women was very small. Even rarer were titles like *Tits and Clits* (hereafter referred to as *T&C*) that operated as oppositional cultural forces within the already taboo-breaking genre of underground comics. When *T&C* #1 debuted in 1972, the publication and its creators faced resistance from within underground publishing, from law enforcement due to the title’s explicit content, and from feminists who were offended by the raunchy approach taken by Chevli and Farmer. Indeed, *T&C* entered a milieu that was rife with unsettled discussions about women’s roles within the sexual revolution and the relationship between explicit sexual material and the women’s movement.

Comic strips and characters played important roles in bringing Second Wave feminism to the masses. Trina Robbins was part of a women’s collective that produced its own comic called *It Ain’t Me Babe* (1970). In the pages of this comic, classic female cartoon characters, from Wonder Woman and Olive Oyl to Betty and Veronica, had their consciousnesses raised and decided to stand up against male oppression. Two years later, in 1972, when Gloria Steinem’s *Ms.* magazine launched its first stand-alone issue, it featured Wonder Woman on the cover. By the early 1970s, cartoons and comics had already become an established way of making feminist ideas palpable to the public. While *It Ain’t Me Babe* and *Ms.* used well-known, female comic characters to deal with the theme of sexism and celebrate women’s strength, the creators of *T&C* moved beyond creating feminist versions of mainstream comic characters. In fact, their characters were not traditional feminist role models either. In many ways, the characters in *T&C* were already liberated and their purpose was to raise the consciousness of readers by demonstrating how women could navigate/embrace the sexual revolution without shame.

*T&C* emerged two years after Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970) posited the notion that sexual liberation was a necessary precondition to women’s liberation, and a year after a pamphlet version of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1971) began circulating and offering women information and agency over their sexual and reproductive health. *T&C* was published a year before Erica Jong’s *Fear of Flying* (1973) created a female heroine on a quest for sexual fulfilment and introduced the world to the ‘zipless fuck’. It emerged the same year the ill-fated Equal Rights Amendment passed the U.S. Congress and a year before *Roe v. Wade* seemingly settled the reproductive rights question. Like Greer’s *Female Eunuch*, *T&C* deconstructed notions of traditional femininity and womanhood at the same time that it celebrated women’s differences from men. Greer’s book advocated using men for women’s own pleasure, and *T&C* mirrors this approach, seeking liberation on women’s own terms and through women’s unique experiences, with plenty of libido and little regard for what we would now call political correctness.

I argue that the ways in which *T&C* conceived the female body and women’s unique perspectives on sexuality connected the aesthetics and voice of underground comix to the feminist movement in a way that was mutually beneficial. The title exposed blind spots in the world of underground comix and fissures
within the feminist movement, which would later become a fully realised split, over the place of explicit material in culture. Chevli and Farmer's struggles with censorship both inside and outside of feminist circles attest to both the power of their work to move readers as well as the volatility of sexual and feminist discourse during the 1970s. This unique fusion of two concurrent social movements (the underground press and women's liberation) tested the limits of intelligibility in terms of what could be identified as feminist activism at the time.

_Tits and Clits: Creation and Reception_

Comic book writer, publisher, and self-described 'smut queen' Lyn Chevli and co-creator Joyce Farmer began publishing _T&C_ in 1972, under the banner of Nanny Goat Productions. In so doing, they created what is purported to be the first underground comic series created and published completely by women. The nanny goat is an ideal symbol for the obstinate and rebellious spirit that permeates the series. Writing on her collaboration with Farmer on what would become _T&C_, Chevli writes, 'our canniest instincts led us to the conclusion that whatever we did, it had to be funnier, filthier and all around better than what the good 'ole boys were doing or it would bomb' (Chevli n.d.[a]). Chevli and Farmer pioneered a humorous and often raunchy approach to female sexuality that challenged standard narrative approaches to women's involvement in, and responses to, the sexual revolution. The female heroines they created were neither glamourized objects of men's sexual desire nor victims of men's sexual violence; instead their stories spoke to women's experiences of sex and the female body in ways that had not appeared in graphic story form.

Women's sexuality was exploited in the 1970s not only by the mainstream media, but also by male underground cartoonists who frequently drew, as one male artist recalls, 'gleeful renditions of rape and mutilation' (Skinn 2002: 158). Robbins remembers that underground comics in the 1960s were an almost exclusively male field. As revolutionary as the male underground cartoonists may have believed they were, they understood little about the goals and concerns of the women's movement, and their content reflected this. Robbins recalls male cartoonists reacting to the perceived threat of feminism by:

> drawing comix filled with graphic violence directed toward women. People—especially women people—who criticized this misogyny were not especially welcome in this alternative version of the old boys club and were not invited into the comix being produced' (1991: 85).

Chevli and Farmer loathed the misogynistic depiction of sex in underground comics, so they sought to provide the same raunch but with a different perspective. Specifically, Chevli and Farmer detested the violence against women depicted in male-authored underground comics and set out to create 'stories to make a strong man barf' (Farmer 1988: 17).

In a letter to a bookstore, Chevli defended her work and speculated that:

> Anyone nervy enough to read an underground comic in the first place, expects and demands to be shocked. Being shocked and entertained at the same time can be a highly politicizing process. It pulls the myths out of your brain and makes room for more dynamic and humanizing thought processes to take place. As most of us know, sex is a very political business. All we want to do is equalize that by telling our side. (Chevli 1978).

The most striking difference in the approach taken by Chevli and Farmer can be seen in the way women see themselves and other women, versus the way men see women. Chevli and Farmer felt that while men saw women as idealised sex objects, women often found themselves preoccupied with the list of impediments and complications listed above. Chevli and Farmer took these issues to the forefront, and instead of creating self-indulgent stories they opted to create other material that spoke to some unfiltered universal truths that shook up sexual politics in the world of underground comics.
While both historical and critical attention have been paid to sexual content in the work of male underground cartoonists such as Crumb, the influence of sex comics for women in the sexual discourse of the 1970s has been largely ignored. More recently, however, female comic artists have been recognised for their contributions to the production of underground titles that took on sexuality as their primary theme. Specifically, a collection authored by comic historians Tim Pilcher and Gene Kannenberg, Jr., which focused specifically on the history of erotic comics, has contributed to a greater popular understanding of women's erotic comic art. According to Pilcher and Kannenberg, female underground artists responded to the extreme violence and misogyny in male-authored titles by ‘banding together under the second-wave feminist ideology’ and engaging in a ‘comic book backlash’ (2010: 162). Histories of underground and erotic comics, and documentary films like Sex in the Comics (Dir. Joëlle Oosterlinck, 2012) and She Makes Comics (Dir. Marisa Stotter, 2014), acknowledge the existence and political nature of T&C; however, they do not go beyond treating the title as a curiosity, and fail to delve very deeply into its creation or how the title challenged the existing sexual politics of the era.

T&C unapologetically centred menstruation, female masturbation, reproduction and even menopause under the theme of women’s sexuality by embracing (and even eroticising) abject and grotesque aspects of corporality. It embraced a raunchy form of feminist humour that broke through the mythology surrounding female sexuality, which often imagined the ideal women as passive and aesthetically perfect. In spite of its name, the series demonstrates that it was possible to be explicit and provocative without being pornographic and violent.

Chevli and Farmer knew that a majority of underground comic readers were male, and in order to survive their raunchy title would have to entice male readers. Chevli writes,

> what we decided to aim for was a title and cover which would appear to be traditional underground tease, but would not compromise our feminist morality. In other words, we wanted to fool the boys into thinking they were buying some really hot stuff and then sneak up on them with our content, mingled with laughs (Chevli n.d.[a]).

The title was part of this stealth campaign, but as Farmer recalls, the choice was both ‘our success and
our downfall’ (Farmer 1988: 18). While the provocative title helped in boosting sales, many mainstream publications would not review the comic because they would not print the title and the first issue became part of an obscenity case that took a year (and intervention by the ACLU) to settle. Farmer found the fear of arrest and prosecution crippling to her creative process, writing that after the incident, ‘deep inside me fear still censors my brain before my fingers can begin to pirouette’ (Farmer 1988: 15-19).

In the meantime, T&C faced judgement and resistance directly from feminist publications. In 1973 Chevli and Farmer tried to place an advertisement for T&C and other ‘fantastic, avant-garde books by liberated women’ in the Classifieds section of Ms. Magazine, but ‘Ms. refused. The editor sent the check back, citing concerns the publisher had about their content’ (Meier 2014). Sam Meier concluded that ‘the publisher of Ms. presumably considered the comics pornographic and feared that helping to distribute them would open up the magazine to legal action’ (2014). Recalling the rejection years later, Farmer felt that as Ms. was simply a new venture that was struggling to survive financially, it was not open to discussing sexuality so explicitly. ‘Ms. had plenty of prose regarding sexuality, but doing it visually, it hits you more in the gut ... I had gotten the idea we were too far - not Left or Right but too far out there...’ (Campbell 2013, emphasis in original). As one of the purveyors of popular feminism, more mainstream incarnations of the movement, Ms. felt T&C fell outside the bounds of acceptable speech on the topic of sexuality. The sort of idealised feminism that yearned for mainstream respectability embodied by Ms. was diametrically opposed to the types of feminists portrayed in T&C. However, the fact that some of the most promising avenues for publicity and distribution that would reach a feminist audience were cut off to the title was frustrating. As Farmer recalls, ‘we disgusted a whole lot of people that we used such a pejorative for women ... feminists were disgusted we used a pejorative, men were interested but a little afraid of the next step’ (Campbell 2013). At least in the early 1970s, Chevli and Farmer often failed to find the solidarity and sisterhood with other feminists, a main theme in T&C as far as their creative work was concerned.

A series of undated manuscripts among Chevli’s personal papers in the Kinsey Institute Archives outline her thoughts on the importance of her work, her frustrations with feminist criticisms of it, and the special place feminist humourists ought to play in the women’s movement. It is clear that Chevli was perplexed that more feminists did not share her sense of humour. She felt that feminists were unable to laugh at themselves or laugh along with her over the absurdity of the state of sexual politics in the 1970s. She wrote:

I do not ever want to write satire without retaining my feminist integrity, but when confronted with literal minded examinations of my political awareness, taken out of context, I am struck orgasmless. Some of us have to take a broad look at the situation and lighten up our style. (Chevli n.d.[b]).

Noting the seriousness of some feminists and defending her use of raunchy sexual imagery and themes, Chevli writes:

There can be no denying the vulgarity in our work, but that is a virtual requirement for a successful underground comic ... The unfortunate part about that is that, women especially, were disgusted by our blatant treatment of female sexuality; when one of our prime concerns was to lessen the revulsion (Chevli n.d.[a]).

Chevli acknowledged that women’s discomfort with raunchy feminist humour was complicated, but felt that the most important component of this discomfort was fear. She also urged feminists to examine their discomfort. ‘Most of us have been raised to feel shame about our bodies and our reproductive apparatus, but how can we change these attitudes if we are not prepared to laugh about them?’ (Chevli n.d.[a]). Humour, in Chevli’s eyes, was a defiant tool in battling sexual shame and could be the start of a productive conversation about female sexuality. In the end, the very elements Chevli and Farmer used to draw attention to their work were also the reasons many feminists used to disregard it.

There could be no denying Chevli and
Farmer’s feminist bona fides. An article in the Berkeley Barb in August 1973 chronicles the first issue of T&C and notes that the characters Chevli and Farmer created were composites of the variety of women the pair met while working as counsellors in a local free clinic (Geerdes 1973). In this way, Chevli and Farmer were privy to the lived experience of numerous women’s sex lives, including women’s satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the sexual revolution and the medical establishment. The Barb article, however, also mentions that feminists were critical of T&C because it did not present women in a heroic way but instead made them look stupid. To be certain, the characters in T&C have flaws. They often find themselves in compromising positions, and they sometimes make poor choices. Chevli and Farmer, though, believed that their characters’ flaws made them human. As the Barb reported:

they were not interested in the type of polemic which would advocate some ideal of womanhood, nor were they interested in the theory of that radical wing of feminism which defined all men collectively as the enemy. There are no dehumanized steely-eyed superheroinies or super-heroes in Tits and Clits (Geerdes 1973).

So, despite being no attempt at creating ‘realistic’ imagery in the pages of T&C, the characterisations and situations were realistic and resulted at least in part from Chevli and Farmer’s involvement with the women’s health movement.

Tits and Clits: Feminism and Sexual Discourse in the 1970s

T&C expanded depictions of women’s sex lives beyond narratives of romance, seduction, and copulation, to include stories about contraception, masturbation, menstruation as well as sexual violence and harassment. Chevli and Farmer’s chosen medium was inexpensive to produce and distribute and thus allowed for greater latitude of expression. Underground comics were one of the few places they could critique the institutions that shaped women’s sexual and reproductive lives and deal with the anxieties women had in relation to sex. By creating underground comics, Chevli and Farmer did not have to create a form of popular feminism that would gain mainstream acceptance.

T&C also proved to be an ideal place to turn the tables on the male dominated ethos that permeated the underground comic genre by using imitations of their visual style to challenge men’s sexual politics. Chevli and Farmer, like many female underground comics creators, were inspired by artists like Crumb while at the same time launching critiques of the violent misogyny they saw in his work. As Farmer recalled:

I can’t remember a story in ‘Zap’ that wasn’t misogynist one way or another. We decided to do a get-even series and then we decided that we couldn’t make up these get-even stories, we were not into cutting off men’s peckers in order to put it in print and get famous. We just couldn’t do that kind of violence! So we ended up doing a different kind of violence it turned out, although we didn’t think so at the time, which was dealing with menstrual blood and mentioning menstruation and birth control and things men didn’t seem to think about at all at that time, but was a particular burden to women because we were supposed to not only get off and have a great time with sex but we also had to be quietly responsible to ensure there was no repercussions (Campbell 2013).

An image on the inside cover of T&C #3 (1977) perfectly illustrates how parody was used to upend Crumb’s sexual politics (Figure 2). The image is of a naked man with an electrical cord attached to his backside. The cord is plugged into an electrical outlet and the man has an erection with what appear to be electrical sparks emanating from the tip of his penis. This image mimics the now-iconic cover image from the first issue of Crumb’s Zap Comix (1967), a milestone in underground comics (Figure 3). On that cover, a naked male character is similarly plugged into an electrical outlet; however, he is curled up in a foetal position and his genitals are obscured as the electrical charge surges through his body. The man’s speech balloon exclaims that Zap is ‘the comic that plugs you in’. The images connote different senses of being ‘turned on’. The caption on the T&C version asks, ‘Have you ever sought love but come to a stale
mate?’ The ‘Master Charge’ offers ‘all the benefits of a warm body combined with the best features of a vibrator’. The parodic take on the Zap cover taps into male insecurities about sexual performance and creatively objectifies the male body by literally turning the man into a human dildo or vibrator. It also implies that the male body, as is, is an inadequate sex object and requires technological intervention. Farmer recalls sending Crumb a copy of the first issue of T&C. He responded by sending her a letter calling it ‘a masterpiece’. In spite of her differences with some of Crumb’s content, Farmer framed the letter and hung it in her home (Campbell 2011).

It was precisely Chevli and Farmer’s ability to break the traditional boundaries of women cartoonists, who had been relegated to mainstream romance comics in past decades, which caught the attention of readers. The cover image of T&C #1 illustrates an invasion of male territory, the men’s room, as we see a woman barging in to borrow toilet paper and startling a man mid-stream at a urinal (Figure 4). Chevli wrote that the cover image ‘dealt with the bathroom; the place that women clean up, and men read comics in’ (Chevli n.d.[a]). A woman storming into this space is the perfect image to encapsulate what T&C represented to Chevli and Farmer: a hostile takeover. Chevli recalls that ‘neither of us was much of a comics fan, but at the time we started, I owned a bookstore, sold undergrounds, and was impressed by their honesty’ (Robbins 2001: 110).

However, Chevli found the lack of women’s voices in underground comics disconcerting; ‘they gaily ripped the culture to shreds, but I found the testosterone level in them so offensively high’ (Chevli

Figure 2: Image from Tits and Clits #3, (1977)

Figure 3: the iconic cover of the first issue of Zap Comix, 1967.
Figure 4: Cover of *Tits and Clits* #1 (1972)
n.d.[a]). When she created her own comic she ‘envisioned it as antidotal: the shot of penicillin necessary to curb pathological misogyny and promote healthy sexual liberation for all’ (Meier 2014).

A close examination of T&C demonstrates how Chevli and Farmer’s universalising quality of comic characters and comic storytelling to speak to their experiences of women’s sexual culture in the 1970s. The series changed the ways the theme of sex was treated narratively and visually in underground sex comics, mirroring, at times, methods and approaches employed by early editions of Our Bodies, Ourselves. The heroines of T&C, recurring characters with names such as Mary Multipary and Fonda Peters, were represented as sexually adventurous feminists and provided with a supportive community of sisters (both biological and chosen). Mary Multipary (Latin for ‘many births’) was described by her creators as a woman with ‘generous hips and a libido to match’ (Farmer 1988: 18). In short, Chevli and Farmer’s heroines displayed as much passion for their feminist community, and one another’s sexual health, as they did for men and sex.

The connections between women’s sexuality and the women’s health movement are made clear in one of Chevli and Farmer’s earliest comics. In ‘The Menses is the Massage!’ Mary Multipary spends 12 pages learning how to make her own tampons out of natural sponge. Mary shares her knowledge with her girlfriends, and they get together to craft their own sponges over cans of beer. They even discuss how they will explain the sponges to male partners. After creating and trying out their sponge creations, they dance around the living room singing ‘No more cotton! No more hooks! No more boxboy’s knowing looks!’ (Chevli and Farmer 1972). Mary’s girlfriends, filled with glee from their subversive fellowship, thank her for ‘a truly thigh quivering experience’ (Chevli and Farmer 1972). Another comic from the same issue ‘A Little Help from a Friend’ finds Fonda Peters in bed with a male lover when she jumps out of bed to phone her friend Mary about a birth control question. In another comic, ‘Fonda Peter’s Vaginal Drip’, Fonda spends weeks seeking treatment for a vaginal infection only to find a creepy doctor, an even creepier pharmacist, and little help for her problem. It is only when she phones a girlfriend who tells her to use yoghurt to treat her infection that she is finally cured in time to attend a swingers’ party she has been invited to attend. These strips dwell on the inadequate resources available for women to learn about their own bodies and find agency regarding issues of sexual and reproductive health. In each case, ingenuity and sisterhood are coupled together, as women discover that their best resources for questions of sexual health are one another.

The similarities between the experiences of these characters and women who were reading the personal accounts of other women in Our Bodies, Ourselves is striking. Both T&C and Our Bodies, Ourselves sought to contextualize the health and medical advice given to women by other women within a universe of women’s real-world experiences. Women’s sexuality and health were intrinsically intertwined and in ways that had yet to be explored in other print venues. Like the scenarios just described in T&C #1, early editions of Our Bodies, Ourselves warned against many of the products marketed to women that it considered unsafe, including coloured toilet paper and feminine hygiene sprays (Wells 2010).

Our Bodies, Ourselves harboured a deep suspicion of the healthcare system, and frequently recommended natural alternatives similar to the remedies mentioned in T&C #1. Homemade tampons prove to be a better fit and a cheaper solution for handling a period and the medical profession is ineffective; in the ‘Vaginal Drip’ strip, the doctor’s pills are not effective and the pharmacist, who knows yoghurt to be the best cure, withholds this information. These strips underscore the fact that, for women, sex often involves weeks of planning and preparation and often means dealing with a commercial culture and a medical establishment that is ill-equipped to deal with women’s sexuality in meaningful ways but instead works toward stigmatising and profiting from women’s sexuality. The heroines in T&C eschew sexual shame and gleefully look to one another for advice and alternatives.

T&C often included issues of menstruation in sexual situations, visiting the issue in such strips as ‘Hymn to a Hemorrhage’. The heroine, suffering without a tampon while in the woods, makes do with
a ‘slightly used Kleenex’ she procures from a girlfriend and remarks at the end of her ordeal, ‘menstrual flow is just about the same as semen, only it’s a prettier color’ (Chevli and Farmer 1976). This was an obvious swipe at all of the representations of semen that found their way into underground sex comics created by men. For instance, one title created by R. Crumb in the late 1960s even carried the title Jiz. This strip and others like it make the case for shameless acknowledgement and discussion of menstruation as a natural, if slightly inconvenient, part of womanhood.

Further connecting menstruation with sexual pleasure, on the back cover of T&C #1 Chevli included a parody advertisement for a product called the Dildomaid, meant to both clean and pleasure the vagina. The ad copy reads: ‘Hi Gals! What’s your problem? Gotta dripping pussy? Smelly quim? Messy uncontrollable periods? Do you just plain stink “down there”?’ The ad offers a product ‘guaranteed to change every monthly bummer into the epitome of ecstasy . . . Dildomaid sucks, churns and vibrates. It cleans you out, turns you on and gets you away from the family’ (Chevli and Farmer 1972). In their imagination, there was no need to hide feminine hygiene; in fact, her parody questions the ‘need’ for it altogether. In the realm of fantasy, of course, the parody speaks to women’s need for both solitude and sexual pleasure while underscoring the absurdity of some of the feminine hygiene devices that were being offered in many magazines for women at the time. Chevli and Farmer never let readers forget that women’s reproductive and sexual organs were co-mingled, a fact that many men seemed blissfully unaware of at times.

Chevli and Farmer’s boldest image of menstruation, however, is the cover of T&C #2 (Figure 5). In this image, a woman watching a parade from a sidewalk notices she has leaked menstrual blood on the American flag that she is wearing around her waist. She examines the stain and notes, ‘I leaked. But its [sic] on the red stripe’. Published in 1976, the year of the U.S. Bicentennial, Chevli and Farmer not only insisted on a place for menstruation in sexual discourse but also linked it to national identity. It certainly harkens to a female-centred take on the idea of ‘freedom’, freedom to move about and feel feminine in spite of your period. However, the image was no doubt meant to provoke thought on multiple fronts. Wrapping their menstruating heroine in an American flag on the cover of the revival of T&C, after the resolution of their messy obscenity case, seems as much a political choice as an artistic one. Pilcher and Kannenberg see the cover image as a defiant move on the part of Chevli and Farmer, a swipe at governmental authority after their experience with being charged with obscenity (2008). Chevli’s private correspondence, however, offers another possible interpretation. When asked why T&C seemed to dwell on menstruation, Chevli replied:

Menstruation occupies a lot of time in women’s sexual life, it was a theme which had not been dealt with, and since there is so much mythology surrounding it we felt that it should be given fair time. Most people don’t realize that menstruation is a part of women’s sex life, but it is, even though it’s hidden (1978).

With its focus on menstruation, T&C honed in on a uniquely female experience, one that was fraught with shame and anxiety, and turned it into the centrepiece of their sexual discourse. T&C embraced the raw corporeality of the female body and infused it with feminist consciousness.

A second theme frequently found in Chevli and Farmer’s work is women’s unfettered access to sexual knowledge and experience. In a particularly daring strip entitled ‘Fuller Bush Person’ (the title is a take on the classic door-to-door Fuller Brush salesman), a saleswoman driving a ‘clitmobile’ goes door-to-door offering sexual advice along with vibrators and other sexual aides. The saleswoman educates women one-on-one, doling out advice on the latest sexual aides. She promises one customer ‘no more tedious clit twiddling on weekdays or compulsory cunnilingus on Saturday night . . . I recommend our starter kit with a 4 inch vibrator which prevents primary male jealousy’. Later, explaining what she does for a living, the saleswoman states that ‘in spite of the medical establishment and the church, the sexual revolution did take place, but it left a lot of people puzzled. Since I know a lot about sex and needed a
Figure 5: Cover of *Tits and Clits* #2 (1976)
job I decided to go for broke and start my own business’ (Chevli and Farmer 1976). She goes on to state that there is more demand for her services than she can handle. Here, just like they had with menstruation, Chevli and Farmer identify female masturbation and sexual pleasure as subjects of misunderstanding and repression in American culture and posit women themselves as the remedy. As this example illustrates, women in the pages of T&C shamelessly seek out sexual information, sexual aides, and even sex workers. They ignore the stigma traditionally attached to women engaging in such behaviour and appear to do so not to ‘get even with’ men, but because they find sexual pleasure for themselves. In doing so, they more closely mirror Germaine Greer’s theory of sexual liberation for women instead of the liberal feminist goal of pursuing equality with men. T&C speaks to the absurdity, impossibility and undesirability of women ‘having sex like men’.

T&C engaged head on with the issue of how women’s sexual pleasure could be negotiated in an era of feminist activism and awareness. The approach Chevli and Farmer took to the issue reflected the work of other feminists who took on women’s sexuality as an opportunity for both activism and entrepreneurship. In her memoir about her involvement in the women’s movement, Dell Williams (2005), founder of Eve’s Garden, the first sex store exclusively for women, describes her motivation to start her own company in 1974. Williams writes of the feelings of guilt and shame she felt when she bought her first vibrator, a Hitachi Magic Wand, at a Macy’s department store in 1971 and how her feminist friends helped her erase the stigma attached to sex toys (Williams 2005). Williams decided to use her experience to create a business that catered to women much like the heroine in the ‘Fuller Bush Person’ story. Williams’s business was a direct result of her involvement with the New York chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and her attendance and participation in a women’s sexuality conference sponsored by the chapter in 1973. The conference offered women-only workshops on topics as diverse as ‘Creating a New Sexual Identity’ and ‘Overcoming Inhibitions’ to ‘Tantric Sex and Yoga’ (Williams 2005). At the conference, Williams met sex educator, artist, and author of the book Liberating Masturbation (1974), Betty Dodson. It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Dodson presented a slide show at the 1973 conference entitled ‘Creating a Female Genital Esthetic’. As Williams recalls, the slide show was:

a lovingly curated museum show of full-color, larger-than-life-sized slides of various vulvas, a parade of pussies—young pussies and old pussies, dark purple pussies and blush pink pussies, bushy pussies and bare pussies, pussies engorged and pussies in repose (2005).

Dodson spoke of masturbation as a primary sexual lifestyle and extolled the beauty of the female anatomy. Williams extended this approach when she opened Eve’s Garden, and in her memoir she connects her decision directly to the women’s movement:

To me it was clear and vivid: among all the issues that the women’s movement had to address in order for my gender to achieve the freedoms so long withheld from us, the most vital was that we wrest control of our own bodies away from anyone but ourselves (2005).

Like Williams, Chevli and Farmer centred their discussion of female pleasure around the female body in all its diverse incarnations, but they also acknowledged that women faced historic and systemic challenges in establishing agency over their bodies. They believed in the necessity for women to tap into their erotic power to overcome these challenges.

While Chevli and Farmer were adept at creating feminine sexual utopias, not every T&C comic was utopian. In an early piece that dealt with sexual agency, ‘The End of the World: A Stark Drama’, a post-apocalyptic heroine, Mary Multipary, is forced to have sex with the last man on earth, even though he has, by her estimates, a small penis. The aggressive ‘Lastman’ forces himself on Mary, insisting that it is her duty to help him repopulate the earth, stating:

I am an extremely powerful man capable of making wise responsible decisions. You, on the other hand, are merely a dependent, soft little pussycat who obviously needs guidance. You are also probably overly tense due to denial of your
basic sexual drives so a little good fucking, followed by a natural pregnancy ought to keep you happy and tractable for about 9 months as well as allowing me to fulfill my healthy masculine appetite—so come on sweetie let’s fuck with a vengeance! (Chevli and Farmer 1972).

To which Mary replies (in a thought bubble):

Suffering sphincters! I finally get laid and it’s by a guy with a dwarf dick and the mentality of a micromorph! Fortunately . . . it’s the right time of the month for my rhythm pattern, my dalkon shield and diaphragm are both in place. I’ve taken my pills regularly . . . and . . . I’ve managed to slip a finger protector over his pathetic penile member without detection . . . (Chevli and Farmer 1972).

Despite Mary’s precautions, she becomes pregnant. When she begins to give birth she asks for Lastman’s help. The caption above the scene explains the situation: ‘Blood, feces, amniotic fluid, urine and other assorted products of the human system gently glide out of Mary’s orifices as she has her first contraction’ (Chevli and Farmer 1972). Of course, Lastman is disgusted; he vomits and runs for his life, leaving Mary to deal with it herself.

Though comic in its exaggerations, this episode of sexual violence and abandonment could speak to the experiences of many women. Mary has to settle for the only man she can find (the last man on earth). He cares nothing about her sexual satisfaction, much less her emotional needs, and he leaves her while she is giving birth to the child she conceived with him. The tone of T&C, however, was never completely dark. Chevli and Farmer took every opportunity to use their abject humour and imagination to lighten the tone of their comic. In ‘The First Day of Spring’, like many other comics in T&C, imagines sexual pleasure free of complications and obligations. As always, women in the title are portrayed as strong, resilient and resourceful and they never sacrifice their sexuality to shame.

Chevli and Farmer liked to imagine erotic solidarity among feminist-minded heterosexual women, where the common purpose was sexual education and experience free of bodily shame, and other ‘hang ups’, including ageism, sexual violence, and intimidation. This idea of erotic solidarity is best conveyed in the cover art for T&C #3, where three women of various ages and races march arm-in-arm with hordes of other women towards the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C. (Figure 6). The women have their vibrators held high as they chant ‘We Shall Overcome’, giving new meaning to a well-known civil rights movement tune. This image sent a powerful message to both male and female readers of T&C: heterosexual women were ‘coming out’ and publicly demanding sexual pleasure. The image also underscores another dominant theme in Chevli and Farmer’s work, the primacy of sisterhood. It certainly is not a coincidence that this cover appears on the very same issue where T&C became an anthology, carrying the work of a variety of women artists and portraying women with a diversity of races and sexual orientations.

To Chevli and Farmer issues of sexuality were not necessarily a distraction from larger feminist goals. Instead, sexuality was a productive tension, a fact of life, and an exciting part of being a woman. And while feminist responses to T&C questioned this particular vision of erotic solidarity, Chevli and Farmer subscribed to it wholeheartedly. When Chevli was asked if she thought she was reinventing comics with her style of humour, she responded that she and Farmer were not inventing anything, but were instead:

willing to take some risks which a lot of people are frightened of... you have to take risks if you are going to go beyond the traditional boundaries set in life. I think women especially are prone to take the safe way. That is our training, but we don’t have to accept it (Chevli 1978).
Figure 6: Front cover of *Tits and Clits* #3, 1977
To Chevli and Farmer, humour and fearlessness were key to translating and expanding feminist activism.

**Conclusion**

*T&C* emerged at the intersection of the women's movement and the sexual revolution and bears the mark of both. History would bear out that this would be anything but a seamless merger. The story of *T&C* adds diversity and nuance to the highly mythologised ‘feminist sex wars’ of the late 1970s and early 1980s, showing a diversity of thought on the use of explicit material among feminist artists early in the 1970s. Feminist discomfort and opposition to the type of sexual discourse found in *T&C* also adds complexity to later feminist organising against pornography in the late 1970s. What is compelling is the fact that it was sexualised violence in underground comics that inspired Chevli and Farmer to create *T&C*. Likewise, it was sexualised violence in media that motivated feminist anti-pornography groups like Woman Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) (Los Angeles, 1976) and Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVMP) (San Francisco, 1976) to organize. Simply put, as members of these groups debated what sort of representations they considered pornographic, they focused first on the same sexualised violence that disturbed and motivated Chevli and Farmer. They all agreed on the problem, but differed on the solution. While Chevli and Farmer worked to influence sexual politics from within, anti-pornography feminists came to very different conclusions about how to respond, and set the stage for a larger debate that would split the movement into anti-pornography and pro-sex camps by the early 1980s. What use, if any, did feminists have for explicit sexual material? In the hands of Chevli and Farmer it became part of the answer to material they objected to. It became a key component of their activism.

Chevli and Farmer's troubled relationship with some factions within the feminist movement came about in large part due to their failure to adhere to the standards of propriety many feminists expected from feminist cultural producers at the time. The duo challenged the politics of respectability many liberal feminists invested in. It was not so much the themes that *T&C* addressed, but the explicitness and tone in which they dealt with menstruation, birth control, sexually transmitted diseases and other complications that prevented women's full engagement with a sexually liberated life. In addition, *T&C* also depicted group sex, sex toys and sex work which might have given some feminist readers pause. Disgust can operate as a mechanism of class distinction, but in this case it also delineated the expectations of many feminists from the irreverent and disruptive elements of the alternative press. Chevli and Farmer merged the two in ways that established them as original and provocative voices in the world of underground comics, but also rendered their work obtuse and unpalatable to many feminists. To Chevli, who frequently referred to the ‘honesty’ and ‘humanizing’ qualities in her work, the corporeal body was a much more tangible battlefield to the average woman than the philosophical musings of movement feminism. The material in *T&C* points to the complex cultural conversations women were undertaking about their relationship to the sexual revolution, but most importantly it acknowledged that feminism had to be lived/embodied while these revolutions unfolded.

In the opinion of Chevli and Farmer, strong women and feminists could not afford to have delicate sensibilities, especially in matters involving sex. Nice girls, personified by Greer’s ‘female eunuch’, seemed to finish last and often gave up sexual pleasure. The raunchy and humorous narratives in *T&C* consistently point to women’s yearnings for alternatives to the sexual culture being offered to them, their desire for greater access to knowledge about sex, and the beginning—much earlier than previously thought—of a popular feminist discourse on the place of explicit material for women in hetero-sexual culture. Feminist sexual humour continues to be a source of contentious debate, but by helping us find the edge of our sensibilities and gently nudging them, it forces us to reconsider the paradigm within which women are able to pursue their sexualities.
References


Chevli, L. (n.d.[a]) ‘Feminist Comix-Humor’ (manuscript), Lyn Chevli Collection, Box 1, Folder 9, 3.

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