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y sexual awakening came about at age 15 when I had my first contact with a real live "out" lesbian and fell hopelessly in love. She was 30 and living with a lover her own age and, therefore, completely unattainable, which probably only intensified my adolescent passions. In fact, I didn't work up the nerve to even tell her about my feelings until years after they had faded. But the impact she had on me never really faded.

Almost every baby dyke I know has a story like this. Older women, especially older lesbians, play an important role in our lives and development. The "older woman" in your life may have been an unrequited love, your first sexual experience, the third grade teacher you had a crush on, your coach, a community role model, a babysitter, a friend, a relative or the librarian who saw you check out *The Well of Loneliness* time after time and smiled but never said a word.

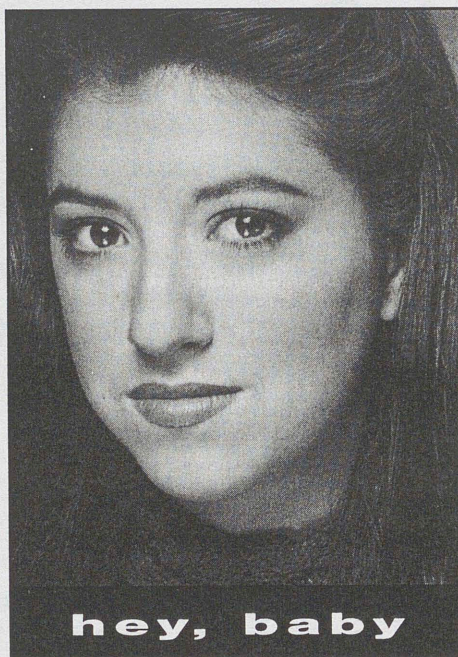
Even more interesting is the dynamic that occurs in the older/younger woman love relationship. Not only is it fascinating, it's of cultural and societal significance. It doesn't at all surprise me that more and more baby dykes today are getting together with older women. The social centers of the lesbian community are still the bars or, on the other end of the spectrum, AA meetings, both of which tend to draw an older crowd. I know I'm usually the youngest dyke in most situations. Resources for baby dykes are expanding, but there still aren't very many places for us to meet women our own age. Besides, baby dykes are still not as visible as our older sisters. I don't know about you, but I couldn't find any lesbians in high school to date. (So, not knowing better, I did what was expected and dated boys... YICH! Thank goodness for college, where it seems more women feel safe to come out, away from home and the family.)

Opinions on older/younger lesbian lovers vary in the gay community, the het world and among us baby dykes. On one level, it seems to work perfectly. I hear a lot of older women say, "She's keeping me

young," and a lot of younger women say, "She's helping me grow up." In some instances, a precocious baby dyke wise beyond her years is coupled with a woman twice her chronological age but still a kid at heart. It helps if common interests are shared. Believe it or not, dear baby dykes, there are plenty of women in their 40s and 50s who still go out partying and dancing at clubs and just as many baby dykes who like to go to potlucks.

Age need  
only be as

## The Joys & Perils of Older Women



important as the two women involved allow it to be. It can be nothing more than numbers; the year in which we were born a mere technicality. As they say, you're only as old (or as young) as you feel. My personal belief is that for any two people to feel the same way about each other is nothing short of a miracle. If you're lucky enough to have love present itself to you, why quibble over age? If you're in a lesbian relationship, you obviously got over the stigma society attaches to that, how is the issue of age any different? Call me young and naive, I may not even argue with you there, but I truly believe that love is blind — blind to sex, gender, race, religion and age and also blind to the constraints society imposes upon us in those areas.

Just a disclaimer — I am not by any means promoting inappropriate intimacy

or sexual acts between adults and children. By younger/older women relationships, I refer to young adult women, not little girls or prepubescents. I'm glad to say I've never heard of a lesbian equivalent to the Man-Boy Love Association.

That said, I still must offer a warning to dykes of all ages: Beware of the relationship in which you push your lover into the role of mother or caretaker or even financier. You're headed for trouble.

Likewise, couplings based on lies are usually not real, either. So don't tell her you're 25 to impress her or fit in with her friends. Older dykes, if you're reading this, don't tell us you're 25 and use us for a second childhood. Healthy relationships are based on truth, mutual love, respect and acceptance. My other warning: Beware the Sugar Daddy/Mama Syndrome. We all know plenty (too many, if you ask me) straight girls from high school who say all they want is a rich, older (preferably dying, to hasten the inheritance process) man. Unfortunately, lesbians are not immune to this. Especially when some of us get disowned, thrown out of our homes or worse. How easy it would be to find some older, wiser, wealthier woman to take care of us, house and feed us, get us through school and nurture us as perhaps we were not nurtured in childhood. Codependency alert: Don't do it! You'll only be putting off the inevitable — the difficult, but exhilarating pain of growing up.

Those nagging, but necessary comments made, I do believe that relationships between younger and older women can work. In fact, I'm in the midst of a very healthy and fulfilling one myself right this moment. How'd you guess? Assuming there is mutual love and respect and both women have the freedom to do what they need to do in their own lives, I say go for it. You love her, she loves you, you're happy together? You have my blessing.



Bree Coven is a 21-year-old baby dyke who lives in New York City. She dedicates this article to her friend, lover and muse, Sunny Grillo, who gave her the idea for this article.