

## The Vocabulary of Passion

The other day, my girlfriend was reading some of the personal ads from one of the local free papers to me, and I was shocked. Not by my girlfriend's reading habits; she's frequently reading me some strange list of things from the paper. Our house looks forward to restaurant closing day with some excitement. The content of the ads shocked me by how boring they were.

When I lived in Madison, WI, I read the personal ads pretty faithfully, and there were some gems. Perhaps my all-time favorite was, in its entirety, *MINIMALIST SEEKS MAN*. Absolutely sublime. I would have called it, if I'd been calling them then. In any case, there were always several examples of clever expression to be had in the personals. Of course the majority were uninteresting, but although the interesting ones were in the minority, they were a strong minority.

L. A. has long been disappointing, and now I think I know why: not enough restrictions. These ads were very explicit, but they're like reading a shopping list. Absolutely no sense of humor, and no sense of fun. The ads may as well have been constructed from check boxes. They had all the passion of an Iowan ordering Chinese take-out, "I'd like the fellatio artist from column A, and the submissive from column B." All this because people can use **dirty words** and needn't be creative in describing their needs.

I really have no basis for complaining. I'm sure that the ads do what they're designed to far better than when people had to beat around the bush about what they wanted. When describing a service, access to a technical vocabulary, even one that produces giggles from fourteen-year-old boys, is useful.

What really disturbs me is the explicit reminder that sex has become a commodity rather than a relationship. I know this has been the case for longer than I've been around to witness it, but there was something reassuring in the personals showcasing the little bursts of creativity. I could imagine that people were moved to write these because of a childlike need to impress their intended, rather than just getting around the censor's block. Not even I can breathe romance into the LA personals.

I suppose I ought to be glad that I had a bit of childish romance left in my cynical body.