

Subj:	RBR portrayal of fetish/leather/sm
Date:	4/18/03 3:08:49 AM Pacific Daylight Time
From:	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
To:	press@rockbottomremainders.com

Dear Sir or Madame,
and Dear Ms Tan,

I'm writing to inquire about recent press coverage of the Remainers featuring member Amy Tan in fetish gear, as well as some related commentary on the group's website.

I'm in the 'leather' (more commonly today referred to as 'BDSM') community, which Ms Tan, being from San Francisco may well understand. If so my comments may be unnecessary.

While I'm always glad to see people adopting leather garb, I have some mixed feelings about how leather and fetish wear are used in and by folks in the 'media'.

People who are knowledgeable of leather etiquette and history would look at Ms Tan's donning of the mixed symbols of a flogger and a collar with some amusement.

Personally I wish that when celebrities choose to don the garb of my culture that they do so with acknowledgment of the existence of that culture.

I believe to the general public it's just another sound bite, a bit of titillation. It saddens me to see the symbols of my culture being reduced to that because I don't equate co-option of those symbols out of context with acceptance or understanding.

Were Ms Tan to affect the habit or attire of a nun, monk or priest, military or for that matter any uniform, she would also be portraying messages to her audience. Indeed as a woman of Chinese descent I expect that she is aware of the widespread adoption of symbols of Asian culture in the US.

The image at http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/pop/117835_remainders17.html shows Ms Tan affecting a collar (the symbol of a bottom or submissive role) and a cap and a flogger (symbols of a top or dominant role).

While I do not wish in any way to dampen anyone's pleasure in dressing in leather I would be happier if Ms Tan would consider making some acknowledgment of the culture which created this fashion when she chooses to affect it.

The people in the leather community have been subject to strongly negative societal views of what we do, concurrent with a great deal of often exploitative use of the images of leather culture in advertising,

media etc.

Unfortunately the consequences of choosing to be 'in leather' (by which I mean practicing leathersex/bdsm) in daily life can be significant. People who engage in consensual SM are still sometimes subject to arrest, child custody challenges and discrimination in employment.

While I personally accept those risks (just as I think gay and lesbian people accept the risks of living in the open, and / or the difficulties of remaining closeted), I don't think that I am helped by the sometimes titillating, sometimes puritanical treatment that we all too often get in the mainstream media.

I was one of 200 participants in the annual Leather Leadership conference, held in Boston last weekend (<http://www.baywindows.com/news/420659.html>). Many participants shared their feelings of frustration with how 'our' culture is portrayed in the larger cultural context.

To conclude:

I do not mean to imply that the problems of acceptance of my culture and community are Ms Tan's problems or responsibility. I have also read her feelings (salon interview '95) on expectation that she represent Chinese culture. That said I would be gladdened if, when she dons her leathers she might choose to acknowledge the culture from which they originate.

I hope Ms Tan and all people who choose to can take pleasure and pride in their leathers their fetish and their sexuality, whatever it may be.

If Ms Tan would like to learn more about my world, I would suggest the writings of:

Patrick Califia
Joseph Bean .. particularly "Leathersex"
Geoff Mains