

Lusty

By Miriam W. Yeung, executive director, National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum

One morning last summer my pregnant partner rolled out of bed and exclaimed, "Call the midwife!" At exactly 3 hours and 50 minutes from that moment, my daughter, Penelope, pushed her way out into this big bad world and gave a "lusty" cry to let us all know that she had arrived.

Lusty. Now isn't that an interesting word? Commonly used to describe the strong, robust cry that you want your newborn child to score on the Apgar Scale, according to the American Heritage Dictionary, lusty can also mean:

1. Full of vigor or vitality; robust
2. Powerful; strong; a lusty cry
3. Lustful
4. Merry; joyous.

Wow, what an adjective! But then why do I feel so shy about using it?

Maybe it's my good immigrant Asian girl upbringing that cautions me to never talk about or acknowledge anything remotely having to do with sex, which of course is what most Americans think of when they hear the word—never mind the definitions in the dictionary. I think maybe it's not class. And maybe I'm afraid that bringing it up will reinforce bad stereotypes about lesbians.

Or maybe it's because lusty women are the number one thing misogynists hate. And like it or not, we've all internalized aspects of misogyny (and racism and homophobia) for so long that we come to deny our most basic feelings and instincts.

The fact is, lustiness is exactly what we need in a woman's nation. While we can celebrate women entering the workforce at equal rates to men, no woman's nation is going to be complete without reproductive justice and sexual liberation. Women need the ability to make the best choices for themselves about their bodies, their

families, and their communities. And for that to happen, there needs to be a lot more flexibility, creativity, and acknowledgement of the ways families really work.

I consider myself lucky in the creativity department. My partner Abigail is a pre-kindergarten teacher in a progressive New York City public school and I run a small national nonprofit. Both jobs require quick thinking and deep reserves of ingenuity. Without those pesky predefined gender roles, we've always shared our family responsibilities almost entirely equitably (I'm better at building Ikea furniture but she's more brave about mice). We both cut our teeth as AIDS activists so we have a deep appreciation for the ways networks of friends come together as chosen family to take care of each other.

Our daughter Penelope has a wonderful network of adults who love her and most of them, like me, are not biologically related to her at all. But sometimes love is not enough. Though I was there at conception, I have no legal relationship to Penelope until I "adopt" her. While New York City offers Abigail and me a lot of rights as domestic partners, we're nobodies if we venture outside of the five boroughs. And while we're lucky that there are so many lesbian and gay parents around us that we're never the only ones, or the first ones, I know that this is not true for many of the other 10 million children raised by lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender parents in the United States. In the end, while there may be some challenges in our biracial lesbian household, we're grateful that both of us are creating the home that works for our lives and that we get to create a world where our daughter can have as many opportunities as any other kid.

When I think about what kind of world I want my daughter to grow up in, I hope it's a lusty one. I hope that she will be able to be her highest, biggest, fullest, most robust self in the world. I hope she feels her vitality through working hard at jobs that enhance her. I want her to define her gender in ways that make her feel whole and authentic. I want her to come to understand, appreciate, and help build a just and peaceful world. I want for her a world in which she'll be able to safely proclaim her sexual desire, her lust, no matter her sexual orientation. And I wish her the same joy that I've been able to attain through my communities of families, biological and chosen.

As women in this nation, let's be reminded by our first moments of life to cry powerfully, live vigorously, and celebrate our sexualities joyously. Let's all remember to be a little more lusty.