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A new photo exhibit challenges stereotypes of lesbian couples.

BY [JANE MUDER](#)

When photographer Dawn Hartman graduated from the University of Pittsburgh last year, she hadn't taken a single class in her craft. However, the 23-year-old Bloomfield resident's work impressed the Gay and Lesbian Community Center enough that an exhibit from her *Lesbian Intimacy and Identity* opens Sun., Oct. 12, at the Squirrel Hill facility.

The GLCC's meeting rooms and a stairwell -- though not typically an art venue -- provide an intimate setting for viewing Hartman's work. The collection of 35 shots represents a departure from media-friendly "lipstick lesbians." Besides the variety of gender presentations, Hartman says, the women in the photographs show genuine affection for one another. "There are butch women, there are transgendered women, but the women are in love," she says.

These shots are not saccharine. One black-and-white picture shows a couple on their wedding day -- with a twist. The bride, clad in a delicate white halter gown with pearl detailing, extends her hand to be kissed by the groom, who wears a crisp black suit. In a subsequent photo in the wedding series, the groom faces the camera, while the bride stands behind, freeing her lover's bound breasts from skintight duct-tape binding.

A sepia piece shows a blonde beauty gazing deep into the eyes of her lover, who sports a crew cut and a white ringer tee. A black-and-white shot, titled "Movie Still," features two black women with close-cropped curls grasping hands through opposite sides of a wrought-iron fence.

"I wanted to show [the Pittsburgh] gay community the versatility within the gay community," Hartman explains. Through the camera, she tells tales of gender identities and expressions, varying styles and attitudes, and, perhaps most poignantly, different roles women play in their relationships. One shot shows a woman weeping as she's consoled by her lover. Another shot focuses on the tensioned wrists of a woman being dominated by her partner. The BDSM theme is popular; Hartman notes that the shot "sold in the first 15 minutes" of a recent show including some of the same work at Garfield's Image Box gallery.

The GLCC show resulted from an e-mail the group's vice-chair, Kat Carrick, sent Hartman after the photographer advertised for models on the Pittsburgh Queer Events Mailing List. Hartman was invited to a GLCC meeting, where she wowed the advisory board with her work.

Admission to the Oct. 12 opening reception is free, and photographs will be for sale. Proceeds benefit Hartman's upcoming trip to Ghana, Africa, where she will engage in her other passion: tutoring underprivileged children.

Lesbian Intimacy and Identity opening reception: 6-9 p.m. Sun., Oct. 12. Show continues through Nov. 1 (see Web site for hours). Gay and Lesbian Community Center, 5808 Forward Ave., Squirrel Hill. 412-422-0114 or www.glccpgh.org

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