

BOOK REVIEW by Martine Algier

REDEFINING SEDUCTION: *Women Initiating Courtship, Partnership and Peace* by Donna Sheehan and Paul Reffell, 2009

What does Seduction have to do with politics? Loads.

Here's a quote: *The stigma surrounding the word seduction comes from centuries of social and sexual repression of women reinforced by patriarchy, religion and movie fantasy. This has given rise to myths and mores that are now outdated.*

Authors Donna and Paul live in West Marin, Northern California. They are partners, creative collaborators and eco activists. You may remember "Baring Witness," the beautiful and moving photographs of reclining naked women whose combined shapes make peace signs. Just one of Donna and Paul's many creative endeavors.

I first encountered Donna years ago when, one foggy morning at dawn, I joined members of MOW (Donna's non-profit, *Mow Our Weeds*) to drive out and park our cars in front of the trucks about to spray poisons along Highway One. Donna started this group and to this day continues to work on the issue of pesticide poisoning. I saw her then as a high priestess of social change and was excited to get a copy of this new book. I started reading it with afternoon tea and could hardly put it down.

As a high-school girl in the fifties I was taught never to call a boy and certainly not to be the one to initiate a kiss! The few times I have it worked out well, but early programming has prevailed and I've spent many years being single, not daring to even strike up a conversation with a man I found attractive. What a revelation reading about Donna's seduction of Paul.

One of the first things they both discuss is how scared men often feel about approaching a woman, even just to initiate a conversation. Hey, maybe this is why I've left the dances alone for so many years!

I love how they bring science into this potent discussion of sexuality and social change. They point out that a central aspect of Darwin's theory of sexual selection was "suppressed for a century" until when, "*In the 1980's evolutionary biologists began to document the sexual selection tactics used by women.*" According to more recent studies of human and other animal behavior, "*While the competition between males is still important, the selection of mates by females was finally recognized as equally if not more important...*" Millions of years of evolution have prepared us to be active in choosing our mates and we **can** make the first move. In fact, according to Paul and Donna, most men are quite relieved when we do! And better yet, the survival of our species may now depend on us embodying this act of affirming our own wisdom.

With deeply personal, insightful and funny stories about their own courtship and practical, wise counsel on partnering successfully, this fascinating book is about much more than finding and sustaining life-affirming partnership. It teaches us about creating a world of our own conscious choosing and building a culture of peace.

For that to happen we need to end the Gender Wars. Understanding male and female differences, valuing those differences, helping each other to make changes without blaming or shaming are important keys. And, critically important for women, is reconnecting with our innate trust in our own instinctual awareness.

Donna and Paul acknowledge the continuum of sexual identity, including all sexual orientations in their discussion, sharing with us again their caring insight.