When I describe planning and writing “The Body Ecstatic” to my friends, I say, “I was doing homework and then I went off the rails.” I wrote this paper for Dr. Schumm’s Theories of Religion class; for the assignment, she asked us to form our own theory of religion using one of the disciplines we learned about in class as our foundation. I enjoyed reading theories of phenomenology, a word that I’m proud to spell correctly. Broadly, phenomenology studies lived religious experiences. Last semester, when I wrote “The Body Ecstatic,” I had been tinkering with thoughts of embodiment and somatics—a theory of psychology forwarded by Staci Haines in Healing Sex—for months before I received the assignment. I took it as a challenge. What could I say about religion that’s unique but interconnected with other sub-disciplines, and specific to polytheism (I endeavor to push against Christianity’s monopoly of religious studies) but general enough to qualify as a theory? My research question was, “What is a religious body?” I gathered some articles that promised to address my question directly. I knew the actual paper would have to narrow in, but this broad question helped cement my connection to existing phenomenologists. In my digital notes on a PDF of Meredith McGuire’s “Religion and the Body,” I can conveniently see how I went off the rails: I misread her phrase “One [body] being subject to passions and death” as “subject to passions of death,” which sparked something in me; I wrote, “This is not a religious studies paper anymore. This is a theory of sadomasochism paper.” (It is both!) Immediately next to that note, I wrote, “NO ONE CAN STOP ME. I AM UNSTOPPABLE—UNFORTUNATELY.” And no one did stop me—certainly not Dr. Schumm, under whom I had studied BDSM (among many other things) in her Sexual Ethics class two years previous. I ultimately used an ethnography of BDSM practitioners that we read in that class in “The Body Ecstatic.” Soon after this harried revelation my Theory class was due to read Teresa Hornsby’s “Capitalism, Masochism and Biblical Interpretation.” She mercifully takes a different tack than I was planning to, but her article gave me invaluable insight into current discourse about masochism in religious studies. I read other articles about religious masochism and was frustrated by some scholars’ coyness: their insistence on separating “spiritual” masochism—the motivation behind, perhaps, fasting during Lent or medieval cloistered people injuring themselves—from sexual masochism. This attitude reflects a desire to partition embodied faith, often connected to or synonymous with purity, from the body other’s great purview, heinous and hedonistic sexuality. I can be an unforgivable coward, but I wanted to be bold about this. Polytheism has no such sexual anxiety and thus it would make no sense to investigate masochistic devotion in polytheism without attention to sexuality. Due to my stubbornness about studying contemporary polytheistic traditions, I relied heavily on non-academic resources by Hellenic and Heathen adherents about voluntary possession in my analysis. I initially thought to analyze both ritualistic possession and godspousery (see: hieros gamos), but I condensed my argument. I value these non-academic sources as the insightful primary religious documents they are, no matter how ugly the font on some pagans’ blogs. They are my siblings in faith, after all.