Uncompromising Positions: Reiterations of Misogyny Embedded in Lesbian and Feminist Communities' Framing of Lesbian Femme Identities

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Abstract

Queer femmes in 1950s bar cultures were often not viewed as "real lesbians;" radical feminism condemned femmes as trying to please patriarchy. This paper investigates ways such views regarding femmes reiterate misogynist notions of female bodies. It places femme narratives challenging such conceptualizations as contesting counter-cultural reiterations of misogyny.

Résumé

Les femmes queer dans la culture des bars des années 50 souvent n'étaient pas vues comme de "vraies lesbiennes", le féminisme radical condamnait les femmes queer disant qu'elles essayaient de plaire à la patriarchie. Cet article étudie les façons dont ce genre de vues au sujet de femmes réitère les notions misogynes sur le corps féminin. Il place les narrations su les femmes en mettant en défi ce genre de conceptualisation comme contestant les réitérations contre-culturelles de la misogynie.

Introduction

There is a popular conception that misogyny, a hatred of women, is solely perpetuated by "men" as a group against "women" as a group. This notion has contributed to the idea that lesbians and/or feminists would not be capable of perpetuating misogyny. However, misogynist conceptualizations of female bodies have created insidious cultural norms wherein associations with traits deemed feminine come to be seen in a derogatory light. As everyone, regardless of gender or gender expression, is indoctrinated into dominant cultural misogynist systems of power, everyone is implicated in reproducing or challenging such norms.

Within feminist/queer theory, much debate has taken place regarding lesbian butch-femme bar cultures of the 1950s and 1960s. Despite myriad debates regarding revolutionary potentials of such gendered identities, an examination of how views of femininity within feminist/queer discourses can reiterate misogynist views of female bodies has remained under-theorized. Examining the position of femme-identified people within lesbian and queer women's communities provides an interesting point of departure for investigating ways misogynies can be reiterated. As bodies in question may all be assigned "female," different discourse takes place depending on the gender expressions (masculinity, femininity, androgyny) of those involved. Rather than continue arguments that place butch-femme bar cultures in a feminist/anti-feminist binary, I engage writing regarding the 1950-1960s bar cultures as well as 1970s-1980s lesbian feminist responses to this period and examine

how both had complicated relationships to misogynist discourse.

This article begins with an overview of some narratives from anthologies where femmes speak of their experiences in community. Many femme-identified people have written about the need to assert the validity of their identities within their lesbian and queer counter-cultures. This overview is not intended to be a comprehensive review or to speak to the experience of all femmes. Rather, it is meant as a point of analysis - the discourse that some femmes have found necessary to invoke within narrative writing illustrates possible ways for misogynies to be reiterated from dominant to counter-cultural settings. From there I discuss sexological and psychoanalytic framing of female homosexuality, examining how misogynist constructions of female bodies were differently iterated against women who were seen as "masculine" and "feminine" lesbians. Psychoanalytic theory, though far from universally read, has contributed to cultural assumptions regarding gendered bodies/psyches. Such assumptions form taken-for-granted norms that become part of dominant cultural thought, whether or not the general public is aware of the various histories of such gendered norms. I use this overview as a basis from which to discuss ways counter-cultural views regarding femmes can unintentionally recreate such misogynist norms. In order to explore the significance of writing in femme anthologies, this article traces a lineage of queer femme gender expression beginning in the bar cultures of the 1950s and 1960s. I provide an overview which summarizes some of the defining characteristics within bar cultures that demarcate particular femme cultural histories. This history underwent extensive criticism by radical-lesbian-feminist theorists in the name of challenging psychoanalytic theory. Both eras will be examined as to ways misogynist discourse can be recreated even as it is challenged.

Femmes Fighting Misogyny: Femme Narratives

Whether writing about the 1950s and 1960s or writing about current North American queer communities, what is consistent throughout femme narrative writing is the defense that those with femme gender expressions are as equally able to know, navigate, and make decisions regarding their sexual desires as those with other gender expressions. Although there have been limiting views regarding femmes because of their femininity there is a long standing presence of self-identified femmes who have not accepted such limitations - be it from the dominant culture or from within their communities. For example, in Amber Hollibaugh's book, *My Dangerous Desires*, Cherrie Moraga refers to a conversation she had with Hollibaugh regarding femme identity during the bar culture era. She recounts, "I told you once that what I thought of as femme was passive, unassertive, etc. and you didn't fit that image. And you said to me, 'Well, change your definition of *femme*'" (Hollibaugh 2000, 74). Here Hollibaugh challenges the inevitability of misogynist understandings of femme identity. Distinguishing limiting interpretations of femme identity from possibilities for femme-identified people is reiterated by many femme authors.

Dorothy Allison discusses ways she and her femme peers in the 1950s and 1960s were expected to adhere to erotic codes that did not always suit them - particularly those which expected a femme to be passive. She also asserts that many femmes of that era transgressed these codes as they saw fit. Allison states, "I had no intention of behaving like a good femme if it meant limiting my own sexual horizons" (Allison 1994, 130). Similarly, in the well-known anthology, *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader* (1992), Joan Nestle writes about femme being a location in which she can unapologetically express the extent of her desire (Nestle 1992b, 5) and as "wonderful erotic traveling" (Cruikshank and Nestle 1997, 112). Both assert the power and agency they utilize when constructing their gender

expressions in marked contrast to misogynist readings of femme as passive, immature, and without awareness of their sexualities.

Later anthologies on femme gender expression such as *Femme: Feminists, Lesbians, and Bad Girls* (Harris and Crocker 1997) and *Brazen Femme: Queering Femininity* (Rose and Camilleri 2002) further engage with countering the idea that femmes are passive objects of desire and not desiring subjects. Harris and Crocker assert that femme is a "contestatory lesbian identity, a radical feminist position, and a subversive queer model" (Harris and Crocker 1997, 1). Such assertions are furthered in Cloe Brushwood Rose and Anna Camilleri's *Brazen Femme: Queering Femininity*. Rose and Camilleri write about femme as an independent, sexually forthright identity that occupies multiple subject positions, all of which are dangerous to the status quo that would equate femmes with a history that constructs femininity as passive. They write that a femme's combative "nature emerges, but this does not define her essence or her essential irony. What cannot be seen, what cannot be domesticated...Femme is the blade - fatally sharp; a mirror reflecting back fatal illusions" (Rose and Camilleri 2002, 13). While important in the face of discourse that states otherwise, the need to constantly assert that femme and feminist are not mutually exclusive categories bears further analysis. The dismissal of those linked with femininity being potential knowers, potential sexual subjects, has a history - a misogynist legacy.

Misogyny Explicitly Theorized: Psychoanalytic Theory and Female Homosexuality

Freud theorized that young girls start out with an active masculine desire; however, during puberty, girls are expected to realize the inadequacy of their bodies (their clitoris as a failed penis). The lack of the female body was the defining feature for what created femininity according to Freud. As Mari Jo Buhle writes in *Feminism and its Discontents: A Century of Struggle with Psychoanalysis*, "Freud persisted there were 'no other roots' of femininity than penis envy" (Buhle 1998, 79). The solution Freud proposed to the penis envy a female bodied person must feel when realizing her lack was to reach maturity by her desire to have a baby (as well as the sexual activity that would lead to pregnancy). "Female homosexuality" was then positioned as a masculine way of resolving penis envy (Buhle 1998, 73).

Femme gender expression could not easily be assimilated into theories of development in relation to penis envy. A feminine lesbian was not trying to have the phallus, as she was not expressing a gender that read as masculine. Neither was she trying to be the phallus, as she was not enacting femininity in a heterosexual context engaging in sexual activity that would produce a child (potentially one with a phallus). In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler writes that being seen as "having" or "being" the phallus has become so ingrained in cultural understandings of gender that it has come to demarcate a person's intelligibility as human (Butler 1993, 139). As a feminine lesbian's gender expression did not fit neatly into either of these two dichotomous understandings of what made someone intelligible as a mature and developed person with a sexuality, she was seen as not having fully matured.

In "It's What You Do With It That Counts: Interpretations of Otto Weininger," Greenway writes, "Weininger follows tradition in characterizing masculinity and femininity as polar opposites, with masculinity representing a higher degree of development. He derives from this, however, the unexpected conclusion that the highest type of woman is the masculine lesbian" (Greenway 1998, 29). Sexologists such as Magnus Hirschfeld further supported such ideology. Sally Munt explains that Hirschfeld "thought of mainstream lesbians as masculinized women. Suspecting that the feminine lesbian was either physically infantile or neurotic, unlike the former, which he admired" (Munt 2001, 98). Consequently, masculine lesbian sexuality was seen as active and the butch lesbian, although persecuted for her

homosexual desires, was recognized as a subject who could actively desire. In other words, according to some sexologists and psychoanalysts, by occupying a masculine subject position a butch could be taken seriously. The writings of sexologists such as Hirschfeld and Weininger illustrate how the bias against female subjectivity was inscribed differently against female-bodied people who are associated with femininity than against those associated with masculinity. It provides an example of how views that are linked to demeaning conceptualizations of the female body can become differently replicated in different contexts.

Femme Invisibility in the 1950s and 1960s Bar Scene

The dominant culture in North America in the 1950s took place in a post-World War climate which, generally, emphasized a return to "normalism" (LeGates 1996, 319). The cold war environment of the time, with its fear of communism, resulted in a climate "inhospitable to social change" (Greenway 1998, 316), in which viewpoints that were less conservative than the ones espoused by the dominant media on the idealistic nuclear family, were seen as a threat to the state. This contributed to an environment of astute, state-sanctioned homophobia.

In the 1950s and 1960s, in major cities, generally only one bar at a time was open to "homosexuals." In the National Film Board film, *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives*, directors Aerlyn Weissman and Lynn Fernie interview women who were active in the bar scene in Canada during this era. One woman in the film describes the bar raids that she often endured in bars in Montreal. She states, "We saw this red light come on and bingo it meant danger. The police are coming. It means take cover. What do you do? You just sit there" (Weissman and Fernie 1993). After describing the helplessness she often felt having "nowhere to go" during the unexpected raids, she then recalls that although she had a permit to work, she would have been thrown out of the country for being arrested because she was in a lesbian club.

Another interviewee recollects the dangerous of the bar scene in Toronto. She states:

> It was well known that the Toronto police got their kicks from picking out women. Taking them out to Cherry Beach, some of them were raped, some of them were badly beaten up, and they just left them there. I guess they got away with it because the women were gay and who cared about gay women? Gay women couldn't complain, there was no one to complain to. If you went to court you didn't exist. (Weissman and Fernie 1993)

Other interviewees recount always sitting with their coats on and their backs against the walls so they could get out in a hurry if they needed to. Though feminist and queer theory from the 1970s through the current decade has debated the revolutionary potential of the social structures within the butch-femme culture (Allison 1994; Harris and Crocker 1997; Hollibaugh 2000; Jeffreys 1994; Nestle 1992b), it is worthy to note that within a surrounding social system of such persecution it is a credit to the bravery of those in the community that they were able to establish a sub-culture at all. Many individuals did what they could to cultivate a space to express erotic relationships and codes within a dominant cultural climate of fear and hostility towards such expressions - part of these erotic codes were based on a butch-femme erotic dyad.

One femme from this time describes how the butch-femme dynamics provided codes for social interaction that facilitated people "getting together." She recalls:

> You glimpse across the room and you see someone and you say, mm, that's what I want, and you send them a drink, then the flower lady walks in and you buy her a rose, and

> she gets it, she gets the message, if she likes it she asks you to dance. That was beautiful. Everyone just got together that way" (Weissman and Fernie 1993)

This type of stylized interaction was based in polarized gender expression of "butch" and "femme." One femme states, "Femmes were expected to act like femme fatales, you never opened your car door, you didn't light your own cigarettes, you never had to buy your own beer. You could go out with a dollar in your pocket and go home with a dollar in your pocket" (Weissman and Fernie 1993). Conversely, the butches were "expected" to be tough and outgoing, pursuing the femmes. Though some feminist writers following this era, such as Andrea Dworkin (1987) and Catherine MacKinnon (1987), have claimed that such interactions merely recreated heterosexual roles, such claims have often been seen as too simplistic.

The bar cultures held some things in common with the dominant culture in terms of gender roles; however, they did more than replicate it. The social norms in the bars had cultural and community codes that were unique to those sub-cultures. As with dominant mainstream cultural expectations for men and women at the time, butches were often expected to be protectors and femmes' roles were often seen as associated with the home. However, these expectations did not always play out in stereotypic ways. For example, butches often adhered to codes of chivalrous and "gentlemanly" behaviour rarely seen in men at the time (Harris and Crocker 1997; Lapovsky-Kennedy and Davis 1994; Nestle 1992b). As well, the role of being in home did not always imply a subjugated one. For example, Lapovsky-Kennedy writes that there was a:

> ...tradition of house parties in the black lesbian community. But unlike the white bar community, it recognized and respected fem leaders. One reason for this may be the structural significance of home life in the black lesbian community. Home-based parties gave fems, whose role was associate with domestic life, an arena for contributing to the social well-being of the community. (Lapovsky-Kennedy 1997, 21)

Additionally, the sexual style within many of the bar scenes was boldly working class. In "Femme Icon: An Interview with Madeline D. Davis," Davis states:

> My whole sense of appropriate sexuality, the way discussions are held about it, the way it is characterized, and the way I feel comfortable participating in a lesbian dyad comes out of the fact that I am working class… It [middle class style] is more subtle, and where I come from it isn't subtle at all- it's very "in your face." (Hankin 1997, 55)

Many femmes, within these sub-cultures, did not adhere to "appropriate" gender norms by various dominant cultural standards. Their sexual styles were often considered "inappropriate" and "over the top" by conventional standards (Faderman 1992, 181). Conventional middle-class feminine standards often stressed modesty and a discreet sexual style as part of how women should express "femininity." Part of what made a woman feminine was trying not to draw "inappropriate" sexual attention to herself. In this way, her "passive" position within the construction of the heterosexual dyad can be seen as being reflected in expectations of physical appearance. However, the "in your face" sexual style of appearance that characterized femme expression in the 1950s and 1960s defied such conventions. Femme sexual pleasure was crucial to the sub-cultural norms. Lapovsky-Kennedy writes that femmes "cultivated an enticing feminine appearance and embraced an erotic dyad that was predicated on fem sexual pleasure" (Lapovsky-Kennedy 1997, 15). Quite the

opposite to mainstream heterosexual standards of the time during which it was generally thought to be the woman's "job" to satisfy her husband sexually, it was often considered part of a butches' "duty" in a relationship to make sure "her" femme was sexually satisfied (Healey 1996; Loulan and Thomas 1990).

Unfortunately, whether or not these identities and gender expressions were enacted in ways that were alternative to the mainstream, it seems that femmes lacked the social networks that butches had at the time. As Madeline D. Davis muses, "I think femmes had difficulty staying 'out' in the lesbian world because they lacked the group identity and strong friendship networks that butches' had" (Hankin 1997, 53). This may have been due to dominant cultural views surrounding femininity that were, in turn, imposed on femmes within their communities. One of these views was that femmes were fickle and not committed to their sub-cultures. Often femmes were seen as the misled heterosexuals who were just visiting the counter-cultural life because they had been seduced by butches, the true lesbians.

Femme authors such as Dorothy Allison, Amber Hollibaugh, and Joan Nestle speak of having been seen as suspect in the lesbian community because of the belief that femmes were likely to return to heterosexuality as easily as they were led away from it, that is, if they were seduced by a man. As Joan Nestle writes in, "The Femme Question," "We were not always trusted and often seen as the more flighty members of the lesbian world, a contradiction to our actual lives..." (Nestle 1992a, 143). She goes on to speak of the dedication she shared with femmes in the bar scene in terms of creating community, fighting violence and supporting butch lovers through persecution they experienced. Often femmes were not considered to be lesbians until they were with a butch. In other words, "feminine" desire became intelligible only by the presence of masculinity. In this way, femme desire was positioned as a passive site of an active butch or masculine sexuality. Such views of femmes are consistent with mainstream understandings of homosexuality. It seems femmes often received misogynist treatment (for example, as the association of femininity with being flighty and unreliable), rooted in negative ideas concerning female bodies that appeared in sexological writings by such theorists as Freud, Hirschfeld, Kraft-Ebbing and Weininger.

In the 1970s and 1980s radical lesbian-feminist activism became an increasingly dominant site for the creation of lesbian community. The misogyny in sexology and psychoanalysis was the subject of much second wave feminist critique at this time. The rejection of Freud's ideas regarding the inadequacy of the female body and the way in which that shapes femininity and a "feminine psyche" was a primary focus in such theory (Buhle 1998, 210). However, the proposed solution was not an examination of misogyny toward femme lesbians but the eradication of traits seen as feminine. While much has been written about the potential shortcomings of radical lesbian-feminist theorizing, little has been written regarding the ways in which these theories were both important to understanding misogyny and could recreate them. The following section examines this duality in relationship to queer femme identities.

Forfeiting Femme in the Name of Feminism: Radical Lesbian Feminism in the 1970s and 1980s

Radical feminism, and later radical lesbian-feminism, arose in 1960s in a general climate of social change through "leftist" activism. There was a general movement away from the conservatism of the previous decades towards challenging discrimination and oppression. However, women were often marginalized in their involvement and were relegated to supporting, non-leadership roles. The frustration this created led much feminist activism away from the liberal feminist focus on giving women equal access to male dominated institutions and towards more radical analyses of the extent to which women were oppressed in all areas of their lives.

Rather than focusing on the inclusion of women in dominant institutions or in male-dominated leftist movements, radical feminism focused on the ways in which women's primary source of oppression "under patriarchy" was the control of their bodies and sexualities.

At a New Left conference in the United States in 1967 a group of women had managed, with difficulty, to get feminist issues on the agenda that was otherwise devoid of feminist concerns. Despite this achievement, their treatment at this conference was the last straw which moved many feminists towards more radical and separatist politics. Marlene LeGates recounts this scenario, "Marilyn Webb rose to speak at a demonstration. Her speech was intended to enlist men as allies in women's liberation, but she was greeted with blatant hostility and shouts of 'take her off the stage and fuck her!' Shulamith Firestone, scheduled to speak next, went up to the stage, grabbed the mike, and told the men that this 'was the end'" (LeGates 1996, 335). In light of this violent exclusion from organizing, it stands to reason that there grew a feminist movement that defined itself as radical, or one which went to the root of sexist oppression to try to understand and contest the secondary status of women in society.

At this time, such radical feminist theorists asserted that sex was the natural or biological division of bodies into male and female whereas gender was thought of as the socialization into binary roles of masculinity and femininity. Catherine MacKinnon contests the way in which female sexuality had been viewed as a passive site for male control. She asserts that this has taken away women's humanity. MacKinnon writes, "A subject is a self. An object is other to that self…it is men socially who are subjects, women socially who are other, objects" (MacKinnon 1987, 55). In this way, MacKinnon questions the misogynist views of female bodies and the ways in which such views have been incorporated into the very foundations of societal social structures. MacKinnon theorizes gender as "an inequality of power, a social status based on who is permitted to do what to whom… it is not socially permitted to be a woman and neither a doormat nor a man" (MacKinnon 1987, 40). She adds that it is "a question of power, of male supremacy and female subordination" (MacKinnon 1987, 40). Femininity is, according to MacKinnon, the site upon which such control is exercised. To her, femininity is not linked to a female body or to being a woman. Questioning the link between imposing oppressive beliefs regarding femininity on female-bodied people was part of the radical feminist focus on uprooting systems of oppression from their source. By extension, then, rejecting femininity is seen as a way to reject being made into a sexual object as a woman.

Some schools of radical feminist thought, such as that espoused by theorist Sheila Jeffreys, argued that it was impossible for feminist women to be in romantic or sexual relationships with men. It was believed that the current hierarchical gender system did not allow for relationships between women and men which were not exploitative and that such relationships consequently took energy away from a feminist commitment to women. This faction of radical feminism became known as radical lesbian-feminism. It was not only heterosexuality that became suspect, but all gender and sexual expressions that were seen as being connected to heterosexual roles. Butch and femme gender expressions were then placed in the context of mimicking heterosexuality (Faderman 1992, 231), and should therefore be rejected if one was to identify as feminist. The fact that "[s]ome lesbians...identified as butch and femme and engaged in sexual practices seen as inherently unequal by the new political lesbians" (Faderman 1992, 318) was regarded as a political problem. Such lesbians were seen as participating in a gender that could only exploit women and reinforce oppression.

Radical lesbian-feminists saw the rejection of butch and femme gender expressions as part of moving away from sexological positioning of lesbian identity within a pathologized framework that positioned lesbianism as a response to penis

envy. British radical lesbian-feminist theorist Sheila Jeffreys describes the way in which this re-positioned lesbianism from being a sexual identity to being a political practice:

> The political theory of lesbian feminism transformed lesbianism from a stigmatized sexual practice into an idea and a political practice that posed a challenge to male supremacy and its basic institution of heterosexuality. Lesbian feminists articulated this challenge in the 1970s. They were heretics. Fundamental to lesbian feminist practice was the rejection of the sexological construction of lesbianism. The ideas of the medical establishment - that lesbianism was a congenital anomaly, that lesbianism was psychologically determined, a result of penis envy, that lesbianism was a sexual deviation which deserved to reside in sexological textbooks alongside child molestation and underwear fetishism - were thrown out the window. (Jeffreys 1994, iv)

Penis envy, as previously discussed, was based in the belief that women had to go through a different developmental maturation process than men because of what was seen as an inadequacy of female bodies. Radical lesbian-feminists reasoned that the rejection of femininity was a rejection of the concept of penis envy and therefore of misogyny as well. Hence, the proposed solution to misogynist conceptualizations of female bodies and subsequent ideas regarding masculinity and femininity was not just lesbian-feminism, but androgyny as an alternative to the current gendered system.

Although butch gender expression was problematized within radical lesbian-feminist theory, I will focus particularly on the ways in which the positioning of femininity created a discourse that continued to link traits deemed feminine within sexological views that would hold such traits as indicators of passivity. I do this to provide an illustration of how, without examining the ways in which femininity was specifically located within such theory, there is the risk of creating moralistic judgments that reinforce stereotypic gender norms and police sexual expression.

In *Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist Perspective on the Lesbian Sexual Revolution*, Sheila Jeffreys describes the way in which radical lesbian-feminism framed femininity and by extension femme gender expression. Jeffreys writes, "Women's 'difference' or femininity has been explained in lesbian feminist theory as a male invention, and the subjection of women to femininity is a projection onto women of men's fantasies... Femininity has been experienced by lesbian feminists simply as brutal restriction of freedom, as torture of the body" (Jeffreys 1994, 62).

While this may be a dominant cultural construction of what it means to be feminine, if such a connection between the social construction of femininity and those who appear feminine is not challenged, there is the risk of continuing to deny the subjectivity of those deemed feminine and to continue to position femininity as an object of hetero-male/masculine desire. This leaves populations seen as feminine at risk for being viewed as a "male fantasy." Such a view furthers the objectification of those who are deemed feminine rather than an analysis of why feminine people are seen as objects.

Jeffreys tells of one radical lesbian-feminist who had identified as butch before her identification with radical lesbian-feminism. She quotes the person recounting her former experience during the bar culture era when she saw femmes as "too sissy or too inadequate to be butch" (Jeffreys 1994, 64). Both she and Jeffreys argue that rejecting butch and femme gender expressions is the only possible solution to such attitudes towards femmes. However, they did not challenge the way femmes were positioned as inadequate. The idea of feminine inadequacy, however, was not originally divorced from notions of the female

bodies as inadequate versions of male bodies. Therefore a feminist analysis that does not challenge such associations is incomplete as it does not examine the ways in which misogynist notions regarding female bodies can be transferred and reproduced through a discourse that is not directly about physical bodies but still references meanings created about bodies.

The ways in which prevailing misogynistic and sexist meanings were read into femme gender expression during the radical lesbian-feminist era are explored in JoAnn Loulan and Sherry Thomas' book, *The Lesbian Erotic Dance: Butch, Femme, Androgyny and Other Rhythms*. In it Loulan and Thomas interview one woman regarding her experience trying to fit an androgynous gender expression during the radical lesbian-feminist era when she was more comfortable with a femme expression. Loulan and Thomas's interviewee recalls how the oppression she faced within academia, such as sexual harassment or not being taken as seriously as men in her field of study was often attributed to her "femininity." She recounts that when she adopted an androgynous gender expression she stopped being sexually harassed at school. Loulan and Thomas quote their interviewee's statement that:

> the truly wondrous part for me was that men stopped coming on to me. It was glorious. I walked across campus without drawing any attention to myself. I became invisible, which thrilled me. No more looks from men that seemed to undress me. No more innuendoes or outright solicitation for my attention. (Loulan and Thomas 1990, 64)

However, she also states that radical lesbian-feminists ought to have questioned the male entitlement that made her perceived femininity a ground for unwanted attention. Without such questioning, the interviewee felt that radical lesbian-feminists risked blaming women who have been harassed as having invited harassment by appearing feminine. She argues that holding those harassing women accountable for their actions and trying to change the culture in which this was seen as acceptable would have been a more productive feminist stance.

During the "sex war" debates there were also femme-identified feminists whose ideologies matched the radical lesbian-feminist analysis of sexual power and violence in the larger culture, but who drew different conclusions as to what was needed to bring positive feminist change. For example, in her essay "Desire for the Future: Radical Hope in Passion and Danger," Amber Hollibaugh agrees with much of the radical lesbian-feminist framework of defining problems in larger society. However, she also asserts that there are risks associated with creating taboos that mandated particular expressions of gender and sexuality as the only true feminist expressions. Hollibaugh writes:

> Instead of pushing our movement further to the right, we should be attempting to create a viable sexual future and a movement powerful enough to defend us simultaneously against sexual abuse. We must demand that our pleasure and need for sexual exploration not be pitted against our need for safety…And we can never afford to build a movement in which a woman can lose her reputation. Feminism must be an angry, uncompromising movement that is just as insistent about our right to fuck, our right to the beauty of our individual female desires, as it is concerned with the images and structures that distort it. (Hollibaugh 2000, 102-03)

Hollibaugh views a movement in which a woman can "lose her reputation" because of her gender expression or sexual practices as a movement in which women are still left vulnerable to be blamed for sexual abuse or shamed for their sexualities. Later

theory by Butler would critique the way in which "sexuality is regulated through the policing and shaming of gender" (Butler 1993, 238) within both dominant and counter-cultures. Positioning femme gender expression as passive or encouraging the adoption of an androgynous style in order to avoid harassment can then, in turn, be a way in which radical lesbian-feminists were regulating sexuality through the shaming of gender. Consequently, ways in which the humanity and subjectivity of people with gender expressions linked to femininity (which has historical connection to views about people seen as female) were not positioned as feminist concerns.

Conclusion

Femmes from the bar culture era had to contend with dominant cultural misogynist attitudes such as the sexological positioning of "femininity," as weak and unstable. Not only did they counter such attitudes within mainstream culture but also the ways these views manifested themselves within their sub-cultures. Femmes who were active in the bar scene attest to being treated in demeaning ways within their communities. One woman interviewed by Joann Loulan and Sherry Thomas describes how she dealt with her femme gender expression being treated with contempt, while simultaneously being erotized. She states that she dealt with butches, "coming onto me and wanting to be sexual with me, yet putting me down at the same time because I looked too feminine. It was very crazy making and I think there is still some of that that goes on" (Loulan and Thomas 1990, 67). Loulan and Thomas summarize these experiences by stating that, "Perhaps the most painful part of our femme-hating is the direct correlation it has to woman hating" (1990, 88).

That people with gender expressions linked to femininity could have the capacity to construct their expressions as part of an active engagement with feminist concerns challenges a long history of beliefs regarding what femininity can mean. The idea that femininity is a passive state, or the object of masculine desire, relates to misogynist notions based on conceptualizations of female bodies as inadequate or failed versions of male bodies. For this reason, challenging such notions regarding femininity has the potential to challenge residual misogynist constructions of femaleness. The ways in which oppressive gender norms have been extended towards femmes within lesbian communities that are often feminist speaks to the depth of which such norms have become part of a taken-for-granted cultural framework within dominant North American thought.

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