

**Queer Feminine Disidentificatory Orientations: Occupying
Liminal Spaces of Queer Fem(me)inine (Un)Belonging**

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'If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies
for me and eaten alive.'

- Audre Lorde

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In October 2004 I walked into my very first ever lecture. Immediately I was hooked and within the first two weeks of my BA in English with Gender at Swansea University I knew that I wanted to pursue a career as a writer and as an academic for the rest of my life. A decade since that life changing turning point, I am finally submitting my PhD thesis for examination and, despite occasional lovers tiffs, I am still deeply passionate about and committed to writing and learning about Gender Studies. All in all, it's been quite a journey. A journey that has certainly not been without its challenges. It has been a journey that has been as personal as it has been political. A journey of the intellect, the heart and the spirit. A journey taken with others and one that has challenged me to grow in so many ways, for which I will be eternally grateful. Finally, it has, of course, been a journey that has produced the bound pages of writing that you are holding in your hands and which I hope will make a contribution to both the scholarly field in which I work and the various communities in which I am situated. As the saying goes, we are but mere dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants and our own scholarly and political contributions are indebted to the dedicated work of our predecessors and the conditions of working that have paved the way for the emergence of any piece of writing, which will in turn hopefully play its part in contributing to further learning, writing and political activism. With this in mind, I would first and foremost like to thank my supervisors Dr. Shirley Anne Tate and Professor Ian Law, from the Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies, School of Sociology and Social Policy, Leeds University.

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Abstract

This thesis develops fresh critical insights regarding dynamics of queer feminine identity construction and community (*un*)belonging, with a specific focus on the rhetorics and realities of inclusion and exclusion occurring *within* queer feminine identities, communities and representations. The project takes an intersectional approach to exploring these dynamics by interrogating how various positionalities (e.g. “race”, disability, class etc.) interact with queer feminine genders and sexualities. Synthesising insights from Sara Ahmed’s (2006) queer phenomenology regarding processes of orientation with José Esteban Muñoz’s (1999) theory of disidentifications, the project explores the possibilities that experiences and articulations of *queer feminine disidentificatory orientations* offer for a critical take on queer femininities from within. The key research question that this project addresses is: How and why are disidentificatory orientations experienced by various differently positioned queer feminine subjects and what can queer feminine disidentificatory orientations tell us about dynamics of inclusion, exclusion and (*un*)belonging within queer feminine subjectivities, communities and representations? The project developed a collaborative queer fem(me)inist ethnographic approach that combined questionnaires, interviews and visual materials (collages and photographs) produced by a diverse sample of 15 queer feminine participants in the UK, with insights gained from a discursive analysis of three major contemporary femme anthologies: Chloë Brushwood Rose and Anna Camilleri’s (2002) *Brazen Femme*, Ulrika Dahl and Del LaGrace Volcano’s (2008) *Femmes of Power* and Jennifer Clare Burke’s (2009) *Visible*. The project presents a significant new data set which demonstrates the complexities, politics and cultures of femme subjectivities and the ranges of (sub)cultural capitals that one has to either already be invested in, or actively invest in, to access queer feminine identities, recognition and community belonging. Thus, the project argues for the continued necessity of engaging in positioned reflexive work on the lived experiences of minority subjects *within* our own queer, feminist and femme communities.

Chapter 1: Introduction

i) Introduction

This introductory chapter begins with a brief summary of the project and chapter outlines, before moving onto a discussion of the key theoretical framework that this project develops and deploys. The chapter then progresses to a detailed literature review of previous scholarship on femme and queer femininities, which highlights the relevant research gaps that this project aims to contribute towards. Finally, this introductory chapter ends with a discussion of why queer femininities matter, which highlights the timeliness and importance of conducting research on queer femininities and, in particular, those minoritarian positionalities, subjectivities and experiences, as well as the associated dynamics of inclusion, exclusion and (un)belonging, that occur *within* our own queer, feminist and femme communities.

Thus, to begin by offering a brief summary of the project. This thesis develops fresh critical insights and discussions regarding dynamics of queer feminine identity construction and community (*un*)belonging, with a specific focus on the rhetorics and realities of inclusion and exclusion occurring *within* queer feminine identities, communities and representations. The project takes a strongly intersectional approach to exploring these dynamics within queer feminine identities, representations and communities, by interrogating how positionalities (e.g. “race,” ethnicity, ability, class, size and geographical location) interact with queer feminine genders and sexualities. Synthesising insights gained from Sara Ahmed’s (2006) theory of queer phenomenology and processes of orientation, with José Esteban Muñoz’s (1999) theory of disidentifications the project explores the possibilities that experiences of *queer feminine disidentificatory orientations* offer for a critical take on queer femininities from within. To clarify, if, as this thesis argues, disidentificatory orientations signal a productive “failure” (Halberstam 2011), or an intersectional and positioned impossibility of becoming entirely orientated, or to entirely inherit and inhabit (Butler 1999, Ahmed 2006), queer feminine “figurations” (Dahl 2008), they may indeed engender the possibility for a critical take on queer femininities from *within* by becoming neither fully aligned with, nor

entirely rejecting, the internal norms and ideologies of this dispersed subculture. The three central research questions that this project answers are: 1. How and why are disidentificatory orientations experienced by various differently positioned queer feminine subjects *within* our own queer, feminist and femme communities? 2. How do positionalities, power and privilege operate within queer feminine disidentificatory orientations? 3. What can queer feminine disidentificatory orientations tell us about queer feminine subjectivities, representations and communities, specifically with regards to dynamics of inclusion, exclusion and (un)belonging? The project developed a collaborative queer fem(me)inist ethnographic approach to answering these questions, which combined questionnaires, interviews and visual materials (in the forms of collages and photographs) produced by a diverse sample of 15 queer feminine participants¹ in the UK, with fresh insights gained from a discursive analysis of three major contemporary femme anthologies: Chloë Brushwood Rose and Anna Camilleri's (2002) *Brazen Femme: Queering Femininity*, Ulrika Dahl and Del LaGrace Volcano's (2008) *Femmes of Power: Exploding Queer Femininities* and Jennifer Clare Burke's (2009) *Visible: A Femmethology*. The project presents a significant new data set that demonstrates the complexities, politics and cultures of femme subjectivities and the ranges of (sub)cultural capitals that one has to already be invested in - or to actively invest in - in order to access queer feminine identities, recognition and community belonging. Thus, the project argues for the continued necessity of engaging in positioned reflexive work on the lived experiences of minority subjects *within* our own queer, feminist and femme communities.

The organisation and progression of the thesis is as follows. *Chapter 2: Methodology: Towards a Collaborative Femme Ethnography*, outlines the reflexive and collaborative queer fem(me)inist ethnography, qualitative interviews, visual methods and discursive analysis, developed in this project for the purposes of investigating queer feminine disidentificatory orientations. It details the rationale, deployment, successes and limitations of these methods. *Chapter 3: Theorising Queer Femininities: Falling Under and Out of the Sign of Femme*, begins by providing a brief history of the emergence and meanings of the terms "femme" and "queer femininities." The chapter progresses on to a discussion of how femme, alternative, subversive and queer femininities are defined by my participants and the selected texts and explains how these terms will be deployed in this project. The

¹ Please see Appendix A for an introduction to the queer feminine participants.

chapter closes with a critical discussion of some of the situated limitations of queer femininities, which forms the starting point for subsequent chapters. *Chapter 4: Rethinking Queer Feminine Privilege, Positionalities and Power Through Disidentificatory Orientations* argues that critical takes on positionalities and privilege are crucial for theorising and experiencing queer feminine disidentificatory orientations, as these form the ‘starting points’ (Ahmed, 2006) for orientations and can either facilitate - or limit - the access to and inhabitation of queer feminine identities and communities that specifically situated subjects may - or may not - have. The chapter focuses on three positioned intersections of identity, including ones that are often under-theorised, namely: 1. geographical location with a focus on rural queerness and femmeness 2. disability, chronic illness and mental health 3. Queer femininities and (critical queer hetero)sexualities. Thus, this chapter highlights moments of exclusion or marginality *within* queer, feminist and femme identity and community building projects and asks where this leaves queer feminine subjectivities and communities as “we” femmes strive towards building intersectional political movements, identities and communities across various situated differences. *Chapter 5: The Art of Queer Feminine Failure* puts the work of Muñoz (1999) and Ahmed (2006) in conversation with Halberstam’s (2011) *The Queer Art of Failure*. By looking at queer feminine disidentificatory orientations through the critical theoretical lens of Halberstam’s (2011) concept of productive queer “failures,” this chapter explores those situated queer feminine subjects who articulate their disidentificatory orientation towards queer feminine identities and communities through their experience of a “failure” to inherit, inhabit or identify with queer feminine cultures. Again, the chapter takes an intersectional approach by looking at further intersections of identity including those of trans*, size, class, “race,” ethnicity and whiteness. Crucially, through these apparent “failures,” these subjects also productively highlight some of the norms operating *within* queer feminine representations, identity constructions and communities. In *Chapter 6: The Politics of Queer Feminine Anger* affect theory, specifically Audre Lorde’s (1984) ‘The Uses of Anger’ and Sara Ahmed’s (2004) *Cultural Politics of Emotions*, become the central theoretical guiding light, as the project turns to a critical consideration of the vitally important topic of how politicised and positioned forms of anger inform queer feminine disidentificatory orientations. The chapter traces the pulse of queer feminine anger to highlight how this affect surfaces particularly in situated and relational moments of queer feminine invisibility or misrecognition and in instances of femmephobia or misogyny against femininity (Serano

2007), be it within patriarchal, feminist, lesbian or queer contexts. The chapter also concerns itself with cases of anger *between* queer feminine subjectivities. Specifically in instances where racism or ableism occur within our own communities, as these are arguably two axes of oppression requiring significant further attention and work *within* queer and femme writing and organising.

ii) Theoretical Framework: Disidentificatory Orientations

The synthesis of Ahmed (2006) and Muñoz (2004) developed in this project strives to conceptualise the disidentificatory orientations of queer feminine minoritarian subjects *within*, the sometimes treacherous terrain, of both majoritarian and subcultural spheres. It seeks to uncover those dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that might otherwise be obscured and which come to light precisely through deploying the theoretical lens of *disidentificatory orientations* when exploring the experiences of queerly feminine subjects.

In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Ahmed (2006, p.2) discusses the concept of orientations, as being about ‘how it is that we come to find our way in a world that acquires new shapes, depending on which way we turn.’ In exploring queer feminine identities, my initial question was how do subjects who identify their femininity as queer find their way to their specific feminine gender identities and communities and what happens once they arrive at this orientation? Quickly, however, through various encounters, productive disorientating moments, twists and turns, fruitful stopping points, tell tale limitations and critical reflections, this question changed, to become about *who* – that is to say, which positioned subjects - can orientate themselves towards queer feminine identities and communities – or which situated subjects can do so more easily than certain situated others - and why? Furthermore, who is left inhabiting spaces at the margins? Moreover, what can this tell us about contemporary dynamics within queer feminine communities, writing and spaces? To answer these questions the project followed *four* major trends occurring within Ahmed’s (2006) work and combined these with theoretical insights gained from Muñoz’s (1999) *Disidentifications*. Drawing on Ahmed, this thesis takes as its starting point that orientations involve 1) situated and

complexly intersecting *positionalities* 2) performative lines of *inheritance*, that are reproduced by citationality and reiteration 3) lines of departure and deviation, otherwise known as *productive queer “failures”* and 4) *affects*. The project explores these in relation to queer feminine disidentificatory orientations, to investigate dynamics, rhetorics and realities, of inclusion and exclusion. To explicate these separate yet interrelating elements one by one.

Firstly, orientations are influenced, yet never entirely determined, by our various situated intersecting positionalities (Hall 1993, 1996). Positionalities are clearly important for theorising orientations, since, as Ahmed argues, orientations, the directions we face, what is present or absent, near or far, is not casual, rather these elements are always, already, at least partially, organised. To quote Ahmed (2006, p.15) ‘the body gets directed in some ways more than others. We might be used to thinking of direction as simply which way we turn, or which way we are facing, at this or that moment in time. Direction then would be a rather casual matter. But what if direction, as the way we face as well as move is organized rather than casual?’ Ahmed (2006, p.21) elaborates on this organised nature of orientations by adding that ‘what is ‘present’ or near to us is not casual: we do not acquire our orientations just because we find things here or there. Rather certain objects are available to us because of lines that we have already taken: our ‘life courses’ follow a certain sequence, which is also a matter of following a direction or of ‘being directed’ in a certain way.’ Moreover, ‘the concept of “orientations” allows us to expose how life gets directed in some ways rather than others, through the very requirement that we follow what is already given to us’ (Ahmed 2006, p.21). Indeed, Ahmed draws on black, feminist and intersectionality scholars (e.g. Lorde 1984, Rich 1986, Haraway 1991, Collins 1998, Brewer 1993, Smith 1998), as well as canonical theorists (e.g. Husserl 1989, Merlau-Ponty 1964) and various situated examples (e.g. the ‘bad habit’ of whiteness) to highlight the importance of positionalities in processes of orientation. In being influenced, yet never entirely determined, by these positionalities, orientations are directed by the positionalities that subjects inherit, yet the directions that we take and the orientations that we come to inhabit throughout our life time can also shape our positionalities. The significance of positionalities for queer feminine disidentificatory orientations is discussed in *Chapter 4: Rethinking Queer Feminine Privilege, Positionalities and Power Through Disidentificatory Orientations*. Yet, positionalities are also strongly present and

reflected on throughout each chapter, as this project strives for a situated and intersectional analytic approach.

Secondly, this project understands orientations as being partially structured by the concept and lived reality of lines of inheritance. That is to say, the idea that we inherit certain orientated and orientating lines to follow, which pressure us to reproduce what we inherit. We may inherit proximities, objects or habits, we also may inherit norms and implicit pressures or felt obligations – indeed, as I argue in this thesis, we may also inherit queer and, yes, even queer feminine “norms” and implicit pressures or felt obligations to inherit, cite and reproduce what is deemed to be properly “queer,” “femme” or “subversive.” Indeed, this idea of how we inherit the orientating lines that we follow and reproduce links to theories concerning normalising power and resistance; how we become subjected by normalising power (Butler 1993, 1999) and interpolated by ideologies (Hall 1993, 1996), be they mainstream or subcultural, whose schemas we are called on to performatively reiterate and reproduce, in order to become viable and recognisable subjects (Butler 1993, 1999). However, we may also “fail” to make these gestures of return, to become interpolated, subjected by normalising powers, or to performatively reproduce the lines that we are given to follow, in ways that hopefully generate productive departures, the possibility of new pathways and arrivals, particularly for those subjects who are not situated at the centre of queer or queer feminine inheritance, but occupy various situated spaces on the margins of these queer kinship networks (Weston 1997) and imagined communities (Anderson 1991).

Thirdly, although positionalities and inheritance are important factors in influencing orientations, these are not entirely deterministic since (productive) “failures” to inherit, follow or performatively reproduce the lines given to us by our inherited positionalities, do occur (Ahmed 2006). This process produces new forms of liveability (Butler 2004), new configurations of identity and sociality. The significance of such productive failures and how these relate to queer feminine orientations forms the focal point of *Chapter 5: The Art of Queer Feminine Failure*.

Fourthly, orientations are affective. They involve multiple overlapping and intersecting emotions including anger, pain, shame, sadness, fear, pleasure, desire, happiness and disgust.² In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004) and *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Ahmed presents emotions and orientations as being intimately intertwined. In theorising ‘emotions as intentional: as being “directed” toward objects’ and ‘affect as contact’, Ahmed (2006, p.2) writes of how emotions orientate subjects, since ‘we are affected by “what” we come into contact with. In other words, emotions are directed to what we come into contact with: they move us “toward” and “away” from such objects.’ Thus, emotions are directed towards objects and others *and* emotions give us directions by moving us towards and away from physical objects, objects of thought, other subjects or spaces. We feel a certain way about objects, others, spaces, thoughts and talk, *and* we are moved, directed, orientated or disorientated by them in certain ways. How emotions inform queer feminine disidentificatory orientations is the topic of the final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 6: *The Politics of Queer Feminine Anger*.

Muñoz (1999, p.7) describes “disidentifications” as relational processes involving complex and often contradictory dynamics of subject formation and performance consisting of, simultaneously, a partial identification *and* a partial counter identification. This does not denote a straightforward counter identification or an unproblematised full identification with the other, in the psychoanalytic sense, where, as Laplace and Pontalis describe it, ‘the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a

² It is important to note that although the words affect and emotions are often used interchangeably, affects and emotions are not the same thing. Rather, affects and emotions are distinct yet intertwined concepts. Thus, whilst emotions, according to, Eric Shouse (2005, p.1) denote ‘the projection/display of a feeling’ or a (conscious) ‘expression of our internal state,’ the term affect denotes ‘a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential’ which ‘cannot be fully realised in language.’ However, whilst my work follows Ahmed’s (2004) work on the politics of emotions, by exploring the social and political meanings of queer feminine anger in Chapter 6, I nevertheless use the term affect throughout the project to point towards a larger body of theoretical literature which is concerned with the social and political dimensions of the ‘body’s *capacity* to affect and to be affected’ (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010, p.2). Indeed, I position my work as falling within point 5 and 7 of Gregg and Seigworth’s (2010, p.7) 8 point schema detailing the main orientations that affect theorization has taken over the years. Here point 5 denotes: ‘politically engaged work – perhaps most often undertaken by feminists, queer theorists, disability activists and subaltern peoples living under the thumb of normativizing power – that attends to (...) “experience”’ and point 7 denotes: ‘the critical discourse of the emotions (and histories of the emotions) that have progressively left behind the interiorized self or subjectivity (...).’

series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified.’ The Muñozian (1999, p.7) ‘disidentifying subject’ is one who ‘is unable to fully identify or to form what Sigmund Freud called that “just-as-if” relationship’ to the model of identification provided by others. Significantly, in Muñoz’s (1999, p.7) own examples of disidentifications, he found that ‘what stops identification from happening is always the ideological restrictions implicit in an identificatory site.’ Often, these are linked to minoritarian subject positions and situated clashes with ideologies. Departing from ‘linear accounts of identification,’ Muñoz (1999, p.8) draws on and extends psychoanalytic work on identifications and the work of theorists like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1991) to develop a model of disidentifications involving a process of simultaneously identifying *with and against*, that is of particular use to minoritarian subjects who inhabit multiple intersecting positionalities:

Identifying with an object, person, lifestyle, history, political ideology, religious orientation, and so on, means also simultaneously and partially counter identifying, as well as only partially identifying, with different aspects of the social and psychic world. Although the various processes of identification are fraught, those subjects who are hailed by more than one minority identity component have an especially arduous time of it. Subjects who are outside the purview of dominant public spheres encounter obstacles in enacting identifications.

Focusing on this idea that disidentifications are of particular use to minoritarian subjects, Muñoz (1999, p.4) argues that disidentifications constitute ‘survival strategies’ that minority subjects deploy ‘in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere.’ According to Muñoz (1999, p.5) disidentifications are particularly relevant to minority subjects because ‘the fiction of identity’ is ‘accessed with relative ease by most majoritarian subjects’ in comparison to minoritarian subjects who, Muñoz argues ‘need to interface with different subcultural fields to activate their own sense of self’ and to construct identities often formed through ‘multiple and sometimes conflicting sites of identification.’ Thus, minoritarian subjects, according to Muñoz (1999), who focuses on queers of colour, are more likely to draw on disidentificatory strategies because their positionalities mean that they are not able to fully identify with or belong to one thing or another, because of conflicting demands and competing fragments of identity. Muñoz (1999, p.7) furthermore describes these dynamics as producing disidentificatory ‘identities-in-difference,’ which ‘emerge from a failed interpellation within the dominant

public sphere.’ In this way, Muñoz (1999, p.99) describes disidentifications as constituting what Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1991) calls an “*intersectional strategy*,” involving multiple situated identity positions that interact with one another to create complimentary and conflicting identities and modes of relationality. In developing this intersectional disidentificatory strategy, Muñoz (1999, p.11) discusses disidentifications in context of Pêcheux’s (1982) delineation of the ‘Good Subject’ of identification who unproblematically ‘chooses the path of identification with discursive and ideological forms’ and the ‘Bad Subject’ who ‘resists and attempts to reject the images and identificatory sites offered by dominant ideology and proceeds to rebel,’ yet in doing so actually reinforce dominant ideology. Indeed, Muñoz (1999, p.11) claims that disidentifications reject this binary by forging an alternative third or middle path: ‘Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counter identification, utopianism), this “working on and against” is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always labouring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance or local everyday struggles of resistance.’ Of course, dominant ideologies, like power or norms, are always shifting, if we are working within a Foucauldian (c1975, c1976) model of power, an important point to remember when thinking through the dominant ideologies, norms and power structures that hold sway over our own subcultural communities and representations. Muñoz (1999, p.12) also draws on Judith Butler’s reflections on ‘the failure of identification’ (Butler, 1991). He sees questioning ‘the possibilities of politicizing disidentification’ and the ‘uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong’ as being potentially affirmative, because for Muñoz ‘the failure of identification, is itself the point of departure for a more democratizing affirmation of internal difference.’ This sense of a disidentificatory “failure” to identify, which leads to a partial affiliation and a partial antagonism, a partial belonging and a partial unbelonging, or a partial identification and disidentification, and the internal difference that this both highlights and fosters, is important when analysing internal differentiation within femme and queer feminine communities. This is why some femme, queer or otherwise feminine subjects may feel more drawn towards a disidentificatory relation towards femme and queer feminine representations, communities, figures and figurations. In any case, for

Muñoz (1999, p.12) ‘Both Butler’s and Pêcheux’s accounts of disidentification put forward an understanding of identification as never being as seamless or unilateral as the Freudian account would suggest. Both theorists construct the subject as *inside* ideology. Their models permit one to examine theories of a subject who is neither the “Good Subject,” who has an easy or magical identification with dominant culture, or the “Bad Subject”, who imagines herself outside of ideology. Instead, they pave the way to an understanding of a “disidentificatory subject” who tactically and simultaneously works on, with, and against a cultural form’ that is dominant or majoritarian. At this point, it is important to note that what is dominant or majoritarian does, to a certain degree, shift and change, depending on our subject positions and relations of power. To take a more fluid Foucauldian approach to power, in this case, can help us to understand how what is subcultural and oppressed in one instance, can in another instance be majoritarian or oppressive.

To be more specific, in the context of this thesis, it can help us to understand the disidentificatory relations and subjectivities that emerge *within* and *against* queer feminine communities, representations and identities, at those points where certain femme or queer feminine figurations become, to a certain extent, another dominant or majoritarian discourse, from the positioned perspective of further excluded, marginalised and minoritarian subjectivities. It is important to pay close attention to these shifting hierarchies and power dynamics, particularly when it comes to queer subcultures, spaces and identities, which are often touted as being automatically inclusive, anti-oppressive or anti-hierarchical, yet contain their own power dynamics like any other group, if we are to truly build an intersectional, inclusive and diverse community. A further interesting point that Muñoz makes, which is helpful for understanding the ambivalent relationship, the push and pull, that minoritarian subjects often feel towards majoritarian ideologies, discourses, figurations and representations, is his linking disidentifications to Freudian (2005) melancholia. Muñoz (1999, p.71) describes disidentifications as being similar to Freudian melancholia, saying that ‘Like melancholia, disidentification is an ambivalent structure of feeling that works to retain the problematic object and tap into the energies that are produced by contradictions and ambivalences.’ In other words, like a melancholic subject, a disidentifying subject holds onto the “problematic object” (perhaps this is an object that could never belong to them in the first place; a figuration or identification that

they could never fully inhabit or align themselves with) in order to reconfigure it or subject it to a “making over” (Muñoz, 1999, p.72). Finally, whilst Muñoz (1999) focuses on disidentificatory performances by queers of colour and the tensions between minoritarian subject positions and majoritarian cultural representations and ideology, this thesis looks specifically at the *everyday* disidentificatory dynamics, articulations and identities *within* subcultural queer feminine representations and communities from various positioned vantage points. Furthermore, this thesis will do so, always with an emphasis on how these everyday disidentificatory failures to fully identify or counteridentify, like those politicised disidentificatory performances that Muñoz (1999, pp.ix, 5 & 29) describes as transformative, affirmative and ‘worldmaking’, are ultimately productive, rather than destructive, in that they work on ‘expanding and problematising identity and identification,’ rather than simply rejecting, with the aim of envisioning and creating ‘new social relations.’ Thus, this thesis traces the Muñozian disidentificatory moments that are subtly inscribed within and erupt throughout the published texts and the talk of my participants, to explore where these moments of ambivalence lead us. Through tracing these erupting Muñozian disidentificatory moments within discourses concerning queer femininities, we can explore the following issues: 1. which positioned subjects express ambivalent forms of disidentification with(in) queer femininities 2. why these ambivalent disidentificatory moments are expressed 3. what precisely do these disidentifications tell us about queer feminine identities, representations and communities.

In connecting Muñozian (1999) disidentifications with Ahmed’s (2006) concept of orientations we could say that disidentifications are both *orientated* - for example, by our positionalities that effect what is on or off our bodily horizon for means of identification in the first place and how we approach these - and *orientating* – in that they give us directions, affinities, affiliations and antithesis. Disidentificatory orientations arguably affect our proximity and distance, moving us closer or further away, from certain subjects, objects, others, spaces, discourses, representations, figurations, identities and communities. Whilst the role that identifications and disidentifications plays in orientating subjects is not discussed explicitly and at length in Ahmed’s (2006) *Queer Phenomenology*, one significant passage where Ahmed describes walking with her white English mother and Pakistani father, to illustrate how the cultural norm of whiteness makes her identify or ‘side’ more strongly with her mother, demonstrates the orientated

and orientating quality of identifications and disidentifications. Here these orientating processes of identifications and disidentifications are described as being about inheritance, positionalities, politics, power and affects, which are structured by and actively structure certain directions, proximities, distances, ‘social and political allegiances’ or ‘alliance formations,’ as well as processes of ‘siding.’ Muñozian disidentifications in many ways can be interpreted through Ahmed’s queer phenomenological language as being constituted by a push and pull effect, as an orientated mode of orientation that involves a simultaneous turning away and towards, as well as a siding with minoritarian positionalities and a strategic navigation of the majoritarian. When considering Muñozian disidentifications in light of Ahmed’s (2006) *Queer Phenomenology* we might thus explore what happens when certain discourses, and figurations do not extend our bodies, identities or arrivals. Or when certain figurations, discourses and definitions available for identification do not orientate us, help us to find our way in the world, or help us to feel at home. We might wish to investigate what occurs when we cannot follow the lines that are in front of us, which involve alignment and being in line, yet are intended to help us find our way. Or what happens when we cannot inherit the figurations, discourses and figures of identification passed down to us, when these do not extend us or when we cannot align ourselves with them in either personal or political forms of allegiance, often precisely because of the intersecting positionalities that we inherit and inhabit. In short, the concept of disidentificatory orientations provides us with a tool for exploring what happens when we stay disorientated, or only partially orientated, through a disidentificatory relationality that, for Muñoz, is constituted by a simultaneous *partial* identification and *partial* disidentification or counter identification. Indeed, the concept of disidentificatory orientations allows us to think critically about what happens when those identification processes and figurations that could orientate us fail. This point will be elaborated in Chapter 5, which draws on Halberstam’s (2011) *Queer Art of Failure* to argue that certain representations, definitions and figurations of femme and queer femininities available for identification and alliance (for example, perfect high femmes, middle class, fashionably and expensively dressed or slim power femmes and white femme muses etc.) fail to extend certain positioned identities, embodied subjectivities or lived realities (e.g. trans* femmes, working-class femmes, fat femmes or femmes of colour) in a way that prompts these subjects to cultivate, inhabit and navigate a disidentificatory relation to queer femininities. Thereby, these subjects who fall outside of queer feminine belonging also productively expand the meanings of femme and queer femininities. If orientations are

thus about finding our way in the world or coming to feel at home, then disidentificatory orientations may signal the productive failure or impossibility of becoming entirely orientated and aligned or to entirely inherit and inhabit queer feminine figurations, which may engender a possibility for a critical take on queer femininities from within, by neither becoming fully aligned, nor rejecting. They may indeed signal the productive yet disorientating experience of staying lost (Ahmed 2006, Muñoz 1999, Halberstam 2011). Of failing to inherit or inhabit a subcultural figuration and community that may nevertheless signal productive ways forwards. We can draw on Probyn's (1996) reflections in *Outside Belongings* to explore whether disidentificatory orientations can tell us something about "who" - that is to say which positioned subjects - fall within and 'outside of belonging' both from, so called, "normative" femininities, thus effectively producing queer femininities, or *within* the representations, writings, communities and identities of queer and queer femininities themselves. Hence disidentificatory orientations, by being essentially about partial (un)belongings and affinities, shed light on dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. About the processes of how and why some specifically positioned queer feminine subjects are orientated towards these disidentificatory moments more than others. Specifically, in relation to queer femininities, disidentificatory orientations can thus arguably shed new light on our queer feminine identities, representations and communities.

The connection between queer femininities and Muñozian disidentifications has been articulated by Ulrika Dahl (2008) as a strategy for navigating dominant ideologies around femininities, in a way that invokes Luce Irigaray's (1991) notion of playful mimicry. In the opening of *Femmes of Power*, Dahl (2008, p.25) writes:

In queering femininities you all go beyond the radical individualism of identity politics. Playing with, rather than fully rejecting the "dominant ideology" of femininity, means engaging in what queer scholar José Esteban Muñoz (1999) calls a strategic act of disidentification. By neither assimilating in its structure nor strictly opposing it femmes try to "transform a cultural logic from within, always labouring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local everyday struggles of resistance (1999: pp.11-12).'

On another occasion, Dahl (2008, p.54, my emphasis) invokes Muñoz to discuss femme in relation to drag and trans* or critically cisgendered femininities:

To many femmes of power, femininity does not originate in femaleness, but is rather a kind of dissonance that goes far beyond conventions making us question where it came from and where it is going. While engaging with dominant ideologies of femininity, the femme figurations here employ what José Esteban Muñoz (1999), scholar of queer (of colour) cultural production and radical drag, has called strategies of disidentification. That is, *we are intentionally transforming the cultural logic of femininity by working both within and against it*. And in the end, it seems to me, that as Judith Butler (1992) has taught us – herself citing drag queen performance – simply put, we are all unfaithful copies, copies without originals.

Dahl is absolutely correct in highlighting the disidentificatory strategies deployed and space inhabited by queer femininities in relation to various situated “dominant ideologies” of femininity as a way of transforming cultural meanings surrounding femininity from within. Indeed, this thesis does look at how this particular version of disidentificatory relation to “normative” femininities orientates queer femininities. However, this thesis takes a significantly different approach to theorising queer feminine disidentificatory orientations by focusing on the marginalised positions that some situated queer feminine subjects inhabit *within* queer, femme, queer feminine and feminist feminine identity and community building efforts, themselves. It argues that due to the various intersecting minoritarian positionalities that some queer feminine subjects inhabit, they may occupy a disidentificatory orientation towards queer, femme, queer feminine or feminist feminine identity and community building efforts that works simultaneously within and (seemingly) “against” yet also strongly in solidarity *with* these queer, feminist and queer feminine theorising, subjects and communities. Through taking a disidentificatory orientation towards queer, feminist and queer femininities, these subjects crucially and critically highlight tensions between the rhetorics of inclusion and the realities of exclusion that they face *within* queer, feminist, femme and queer feminine communities. Therefore, this project argues that it is precisely through tending to those orientated and orientating disidentificatory queer feminine moments that highlight the discrepancies between the commendable aims of our queer, feminist and queer feminine communities and the work we have yet to do to engender these and bring the ideal of inclusive queer feminist feminine coalition politics across differences into fruition.

In combining Ahmed (2006) and Muñoz (1999), to explore queer feminine disidentificatory orientations and what this can tell us about the performative

constructions of queer feminine embodied subjectivities and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within queer and queer feminine communities, this thesis places Ahmed and Muñoz in dialogue with various theorists and schools of thought, including queer theorists - particularly queer theorists of colour - in Chapter 3, scholarship concerned with difference, situatedness, positionalities and intersectionality in Chapter 4, Halberstam's (2011) *Queer Art of Failure* in Chapter 5 and, finally, Audre Lorde's (1984) 'The Uses of Anger' and Butler's (1993, 2005) work on recognition in Chapter 6.

However, before we proceed, it is important to clarify the relationship between Ahmed's concept of orientations and Muñoz's concept of disidentifications; their similarities and differences, how they complement each other in useful ways and why their combination is fruitful. Firstly these concepts share various similarities including their root in critical "race" and ethnicity studies, gender and queer theory; their concern with social (in)justices, power, privilege, identities, embodiment, (un)belonging, minoritarian subjectivities; their emphasis on affective processes, oppressive normativities and their resistance. Furthermore, these concepts are both fundamentally about how embodied subjectivities – especially those that are marginalised – find their way through a world that does not make space for them to exist and belong. They also both locate agency within productive "failures" to follow normative lines of orientation or identification and forging a positive pathway in-between the binary polarities of (anti)normativity, (dis)identification, (dis)orientation and (un)belonging. Nevertheless, despite these similarities, these two concepts should not be mistaken or conflated as being somehow the same thing, because they are also significantly different, with distinct roots and meanings. In terms of their epistemic roots, whilst Ahmed's orientations is rooted in philosophy – primarily phenomenology – and cultural studies, Muñoz's disidentifications has its roots in psychoanalysis and performance studies. Thus, whilst orientations is about the phenomenological and psychological process of how the embodied subject *becomes constituted*, is affected by and finds their way in the world, disidentification is about the psychosocial process of the *already constituted* subject, who occupies more than one minority positionality that are in conflict, and how this subject navigates *both* their own multiply marginalised and conflicting identity positionalities *and* it gifts them a strategy for navigating phobic normative public spheres of many different kinds which require these subjects to fragment their complex intersecting identities into impossibly discrete

identity categories. Another important difference is that, whilst orientations speaks of the embodied subjects relation to space, place and objects generally, disidentification speaks of the embodied subject's relation to mainstream and (sub)cultural spaces and modes of representation more specifically. Furthermore, whilst orientations discusses how marginalised subjects in general – especially black and queer subjects – find their way in the world, disidentification is specifically about how marginalised subjects who inhabit more than one minority identity position that are in conflict orientate themselves in the world through partial identifications and counter identifications, or through partially orientating themselves towards and away from communities, representations and identity categories. Therefore, Muñoz's disidentifications arguably gifts us a more explicit intersectional strategy, than Ahmed's account of orientations. A final difference is that disidentifications gifts us a more explicitly hopeful, utopian and, to cite Muñoz (1999, ix)'worldmaking' strategy for navigating the differences between and inside of us. Yet orientations provides us with the fundamental understanding of the dynamic processes through which subject's become constituted, are affected by and move through the world, from a phenomenological perspective. Crucially, orientations thus describes the dynamic process through which identities come to be and how embodied subjects (are) move(d) through the social world. When combined, the concepts of disidentifications and orientations are arguably at their optimum strength, as they give us something close to a whole picture of the various processes through which (minority) subjects become constituted, find their way in and through the world and negotiate the power of norms, through carving out and occupying liminal spaces and third (path)ways. Indeed, the two theories also offer us a language with which to understand each other, and by using one concept to understand the other, we can go deeper and further with our analysis and understanding of both, as is evidenced by the ease with which they translate into each other when describing them. To conclude these musings for now, in the context of this project, the concept of disidentificatory orientations denotes a specific type of orientation which is characterised by a simultaneous push and pull effect, as well as the affective processes of simultaneously, desiring and longing for, and being angry at or abjecting an object that the subject (dis)identifies with. If orientations are about how it is that we come to find our way in the world, then disidentificatory orientations offer us one specific answer to this question. It offers us the answer of occupying liminal spaces between being entirely orientated or being entirely disorientated, and of becoming okay with being (dis)orientated and becoming comfortable with (dis)identifying - of occupying, existing in

and moving through the world, and of relating to our own identities and to the identities of others. Disidentificatory orientations resists the end point of finally becoming wholly orientated or interpolated by ideologies and embraces (dis)orientation as a valid space to occupy politically, affectively and as an identity. In other words, disidentificatory orientations resist the Ugly Duckling styled narrative structure or even the Goldilocks and the Three Bears fairytale of happy endings of coming home and of belonging easily to a community, identity or cultural representation, that supposedly fits us just right, and it gifts us something much more complex, realistic, gritty and interesting. Combining these two concepts into the concept of disidentificatory orientation is, thus, arguably immensely fruitful because it gifts us a specific strategy for orientating ourselves in the world and finding a place for ourselves – our whole selves just the way we are, contradictions, conflicts, complexities and all, through embracing the liminal space of simultaneously feeling community belonging and alienation, feeling orientated and disorientated, moving simultaneously towards and away, of partially identifying and partially counter identifying with the thing that we (dis)identify with. And, it is precisely this dynamic which this thesis has sought to explore.

iii) Literature Review: Femme and Queer Femininities

Since the late 1980s and 1990s and continuing into the 2000s writing on femme and queer femininities has truly begun to flourish. Beginning with seminal publications by femme writers like Joan Nestle (1982, 1988, 1992) and Amber Hollibaugh (1983, 2000) and continuing with further anthologies dedicated to the exploration of butch and femme identities (Munt 1998, Gibson and Meem 2002, Coyote and Sharman 2011) and an increasing publication of anthologies dedicated solely to the exploration of femme and queer feminine identities (Newman 1995, Harris & Crocker 1997, Brushwood Rose and Camillerie 2002, Dahl and Volcano 2008, Burke 2009, and Fuchs 2009), femmes are finally coming into their own. Emerging amongst this literature are a variety of trends with regards to genres, topics, personal and critical reflections on femme and queer femininities. These include genres like autobiographical, historical and critical writing, which chart themes like the relationship between femmes and their queer and feminist communities, the politics of femme visibility and femme as subversive queer identities,

amongst others. This section will outline some of the major developments in writings on femme and queer femininities, before situating the project within the existing literature and highlighting its originality and significance.

To begin with historical writings on femme and queer femininities. In the tradition of the genre of the feminist herstory, femmes have written their specific history, giving voice to a diversity of femme perspectives, with the aim of rendering femme identity visible, in context of previous disempowering and critical literature by feminists on femininity and in light of the previous emphasis on butch, which has left femme identity and experiences largely underexplored, misunderstood and misrepresented. In terms of femme herstories, Joan Nestle (1992) provides us with a seminal collection of essays by femme authors, who are concerned with writing femme identity back into a lesbian history from which they have been largely excluded, or else overshadowed by a focus on butch identities and experience. She argues that there is a need to produce a critical history that prioritises femme experience, by including writings from a lesbian femme standpoint. The collection also emerges out of and is situated in the context of the 1970s lesbian feminist rejection of butch and femme identities. Therefore, it embodies a writing back against radical feminist stereotypes of butch and femme. Indeed, much of the collection concentrates on reclaiming butch and particularly femme identity as subversive, authentic and valid versions of lesbian gender identity and sexuality, in light of this rejection of butch and femme identity by 1970s radical feminism. As part of the rhetorical strategies for reclaiming femme as a subversive and authentic lesbian identity, writers such as Nestle (1992), MacCowan (1992) and Davis (1992), argue that femme is a specifically lesbian identity, rather than an imitation of heterosexuality. More specifically, Nestle (1992), reclaims femme identity by arguing that choice, strength, power and resistance, are central to femme identity, whilst Davis (1992) redefines femme as a core gender identity, rather than a form of role playing. In terms of rationalising the rejection of femme identity by radical feminism, Istar (1992) propose that this is primarily because butch is the recognisable signifier of lesbian identity, whereas Austin (1992) claims that femmes are stigmatised by their association with a rebuked feminine gender identity. In opposition to this, they too argue that femme identity is an authentic and politically valid lesbian identity, by revising assumptions surrounding the victimised status femme femininity and by asserting choice and awareness as a core part of femme femininity

(Austin, 1992). When it comes to reclaiming butch and femme as subversive and authentic versions of lesbian sexuality and relationships, Laporte (1992) argues that these relationships are mutually fulfilling, whilst Sanders (1992) argues that they are mutually complementary and embody a yin and yan type balance of lesbian erotic energy. In terms of self representation, Stein (1992) discusses the repudiation of butch and femme styles in the 1970s by radical feminism and the re-emergence of this style in the 1980s. MacCowan (1992) explores what the androgynous dress styles enforced by radical feminism restrictions meant for femmes and butches. Platt (1992) reclaims femme as a subversive style, by arguing that femmes style themselves in a diversity of highly nuanced ways, including the prototypical image of the “bad girl.” Whereas, Johnson (1992) focuses on the emergence of the 1980s “butchy femme” as a hybridised version of lesbian masculinity and femininity, embodying a subversive form of “gender fuck.” All of these authors therefore argue against the radical feminist repudiation of femme, by reclaiming femme as an authentic version of lesbian identity and a subversive form of femininity. Further work on femme herstories includes a reflective essay by Nestle and Cruikshank (1997) that charts how the construction of femme history makes femme existence possible and interrogates the apparent differences between lesbian femmes and women more generally. Lapovsky Kennedy (1997) reflects on the key supportive role that femmes have played for their butch partners in American working-class lesbian communities of the 1940s and 50s. She argues that femme experience has been considerably overlooked in light of the historical gaze being too heavily focused on the figure of the butch and traces the difficulty of articulating femme identity and experience in a world that privileges the butch as the signifier of lesbianism. Harris and Crocker (1997) discuss a working-class African American bar community of *stud* (butch) and *fish* (femme) lesbians, by tracing the similarities between *fishes* and femmes (for example both are seen as inauthentic versions of lesbian identity) whilst articulating the specificities of *fish* identity. Thus, Harris and Crocker (1997) contribute a black working-class history of femme and butch identities and communities. Elsewhere, Harris and Crocker (1997) discuss the figure of the “bad girl” in relation to femme identity, by charting the similarities between lesbian femmes, working-class heterosexual women and sex workers, all of whom are traditionally perceived as sexually “deviant,” yet are repositioned here as positive and empowering role models. Further literature discussing the history of femme and butch identities and communities include Hollibaugh & Moraga’s (1983) essay on the tense relationship between femme and feminism and the

political silencing and oppression of femme sexualities and genders by radical feminism in the 1970s and 1980s, Hollibaugh's (2000) *My Dangerous Desires* which explores her own femme political, classed and sexual experiences, as well as the relationship between activism and desire, Kraus's (1996) account of desire work, performativity and the (working class) structuring of butch and femme community and relations in the 1940s and 1950s and Kuhnen's (1997) account of German butch and femme erotic cultures, amongst others. This wealth of research provides insight into the specificities of femme history, which functions to render femme experiences visible and to claim femme as an authentic lesbian and a subversive feminine identity.

Published transcripts of interviews between femmes provide further perspectives on femme and queer feminine identities and communities. A dominant theme within these is the rhetorical work of reclaiming femme as a subversive feminine gender identity and as an authentic version of lesbian sexuality. Hollibaugh (1997) establishes the subversive nature of her femme identity by forming a strategic alliance between femme and trans* identities. She situates her femme identity on a trans* continuum by explaining how as a femme woman she identifies with trans* women and sees her femininity as being closer to the explicitly constructed gender performance of the drag queen, than heterosexual femininity. Indeed, Hollibaugh strongly distinguishes her subversive femme identity from a heterosexual femininity, which is unfortunately cast as "normative" by default. However, although this distinction between the lesbian femme and heterosexual femininity is certainly typical of writings by lesbian femmes. Nevertheless, I argue that, if, as Hollibaugh suggests, lesbian femme femininity should be assessed independently of her butch, might not cisgendered heterosexual femininity, as a sexed, sexual and *gendered* identity, also be assessed independently of her man, on the virtues of her own gendered identification and performance, which may not conform to the normative standards of heterosexual femininity. In Chapter 4 I make a case for the existence of queer heterosexual femininities that arguably have strong *affinities* to femme and may be said to fall on the *femme continuum*. Another significant interview with Hollibaugh (2004) offers a unique social history of the social justice movement in the 1960s and 1970s from her standpoint as a working-class, queer femme. A further interview with Gomez (1997) argues for the need of an examination of how femmes and butches are oppressed differently, rather than creating a hierarchy of oppression. She reclaims femme femininity as subversive by the very virtue of its ability to pass as straight, since this way a femme

can help gain acceptance for queer subjects within heteronormative culture. She also argues that femmes are subversive because they reinvent femininity, in a manner that does not always necessarily fall in with the ideals of feminine beauty. Thus, Gomez (1998, p.106) debunks popular stereotypes of what it means to be femme, like the typical assessment that femme is always passive in bed, wishes to pass as heterosexual, is either high class or trashy and is always white, whilst butch is often realized as black and argues that femme identity emerges where 'unexpected elements come together.' Similarly, Pratt, (1997, p.197) regards femme identity as embodying a conscious 'site of resistance' against patriarchal and middle-class feminine gendered norms. Indeed, Pratt (1997 p.197) posits femme as 'a place to divest femininity of limiting stereotypes, and a place to assert the power and dignity of femaleness.' Further paths for reclaiming femme as subversive are opened by Ortiz (1997) and Sandoval (1997) in their differing explorations of Chicana femme identities. Ortiz (1997, p.91) claims femme identity as subversive on the grounds that it is about possessing an 'intrinsic power and comfort in your body' and performing femininity for self pleasure or for the gaze of a butch. Sandoval (1997) reflects on how her fluid border identity gives her the ability to continuously reshape her femininity and performatively manipulate her multiple identities(s) to her own advantages. Davis (1997) presents us with two further arguments for claiming femme as embodying a subversive form of femininity. Firstly, Davis (1997) writes that femme femininity is aligned with a wild, passionate and unruly femininity, rather than the civilised and appropriate femininity, constructed by heteropatriarchal culture. Secondly, Davis (1997, p.57) argues that femme lesbians use the visual codes of feminine gender identity in a more complex manner and redefines femme as 'a practiced feminine,' which is closer to a conscious performance of femininity. In constructing queer femininity and femme as subversive, queer and authentically lesbian, femme writers frequently create a distinction between themselves and heterosexual femininity, which is either explicitly or implicitly constructed as normative. Again, this distinction will be problematised in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

In terms of cultural studies approaches to femme identity, these concentrate predominantly on strategies for rendering femme identity visible and the visualisation of femme identity through self stylisation and fashion. An example of femme literary analysis is Henson's (1997) essay, which discusses the marginalised figure of the lesbian

femme in Radclyffe Hall's (1928) *The Well of Loneliness*, to reclaim femme agency and active desire. Further literary analysis focusing on femme characters and identities include: Liberty Smith's (2002) 'Listening to the "Wives" of the "Female Husbands:" A Project of Femme Historiography in Eighteenth-Century Britain,' Clare Hemmings' (2002) 'All My Life I've Been Waiting for Something:' Theorizing Femme Narrative in the Well of Loneliness,' Harris' (2002) queer dyke spin on compulsory heterosexuality in context of femme and butch family romances which rewrites "incestuous" momie and boy desire in Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart* and Sydney Fonteyn Lewis (2012) 'Everything I Know About Being Femme I Learnt From Sula? Or Toward A Black Femme-inist Criticism.' In terms of film studies, Whatling (1998), explores the possibility of a femme cinematic gaze as an analytic tool for uncovering femme on femme desire and identification. Additionally, Whatling (1998) discusses how the femme is visualised on the cinematic screen through styles of embodiment, such as hyper femininity, high femme drag, camp (re)appropriations of feminine gendered signifiers, the disruption of idealised standards of feminine beauty, the mixing of feminine and masculine signifiers and the directing of the sexual gaze onto another femme, which render the femme visible. Further film studies approaches to femme include, Cober's (2005) considerations of cold war femme lesbian visibility in Joséph Mankiewicz's *All About Eve*, Hankin's (1998) discussion of femme lesbian spectatorship in Hollywood cinema, Keeling's (2007) monograph exploring the haunting figure of the black femme who is simultaneously absent and present in hegemonic cinematic formulations of raced and gendered subjectivities and Dawson's (2009, 2012, 2010) ongoing work exploring femme figurations in German cinema. Similarly, Smyth (1998) discusses how butch and femme identities are visualised in photography of the 1980s and 90s produced by queer artists, in an analysis of how these gendered and sexual identities are composed, what political statements they embody and how they change as they come into contact with queer theory and trans* politics in the 1990s. In context of performance studies approaches to queer femininities and critical reflections by queer feminine performers themselves, Chalklin's (2012) thesis 'Performing Queer Selves' explores embodied subjectivities and affect in queer performance spaces Dukie, Bird Club and Wotever World through interviews with femme performers, Weaver (1998) and Garland (1998) reflect on their own femme performance praxis, whilst Shoemaker (2007) analyses Lois Weaver's 'resistant femme(nine)tease' and Kennison (2002) analyses of Marlene Dietrich's gender-bending performances that disrupt traditional dichotomies including those of butch and femme.

From visualising and analysing the femme through photography, live performances and cinema, to the rendering of femme as visible through bodily styles and fashion, Ainley (1995, p.1) discusses the changing images of lesbians from 1950s and 60s butch and femme styles, through 1970s androgynous lesbian feminism, to 1980s and 1990s 'designer dykes and leather girls.' An important strategy for reading queer femininity and rendering femme identity visible is provided by Rugg (1997, p.184), who argues that femme identity can be rendered recognisable by paying close attention to what is 'wrong with this picture,' what is out of place or non-normative about this particular form of femininity. A further strategy for reading queer femininity is illustrated by Dahl (2009) in '(Re)figuring Femme Fashion,' which discusses some of the visual repertoires and trends in femme fashion, that render femme identity visible as a queer performance of femininity. Another significant essay by Dahl (2013) 'White Gloves, Feminist Fists: Race, Nation and the Feeling of Vintage' explores the relationship between whiteness, imperialism, affects and activism and the iconic femme fashion of vintage. Blackman and Perry (1990) also discuss trends in lesbian femme style and how, although lesbians are traditionally considered unfashionable, style is nevertheless often a visible marker of belonging to a lesbian subculture or of articulating lesbian identity. They discuss how femmes in particular challenge feminist thinking around feminine styles, by hybridising femininity with masculinity or using it to attract other women. They also trace the specific lesbian styles that emerge in the 1980s and 90s, including sadomasochistic and leather fetish gear, femme camp, exaggerated femininity, femme punk and ethnic fusions. Lisa Walker (1998) discusses the role that piercing and other forms of body modification, such as tattooing and corseting, play in butch and femme self representation, particularly during the 1970s and 80s. In addition to announcing, constructing and reaffirming queer femininity as a subversive style of gender identity, Walker argues that body modifications also function as a form of resistance against standards of female beauty, act as an agent in the creation of queer communities, embody a visual and tactile erotic economy and allow for the hybridisation of femme and butch, hard and soft signifiers, that characterise the often contradictory fusion of styles embodied by queerly feminine subjects. Further significant studies of femme, fashion and embodiment include: Walker's (1993) *How to Recognize a Lesbian*, Fuch's (2002) essay of femininity, visibility, recognition and lesbian stylisation, Dahl's (2010) paper on femme embodiment, vulnerability and affects, Laalo's (2012) online, visual and narrative based, participatory project, 'Beyond Lipstick,'

which explores the diversity of femme stylisation in order to challenge misogyny and femme invisibility.

In terms of recent ethnographic and qualitative social science studies on femme and queer femininity, Levitt et. al. (2003), Dahl and Volcano (2008), Caroline and Bewley (1998) and Eves (2004) present us with relevant interview based and ethnographic studies. Whereas Levitt et. al. (2003) focus on the experiences of femmes from Northern Florida, Eves (2004) and Caroline and Bewley (1998) present us with rare case studies of British femme experiences. Moreover, Dahl and Volcano (2008) illustrate a diverse transnational mix of perspectives from American, Western European and Australian femmes. Commonly, all of these texts in one way or another focus on femme visibility and arguments for why queer femininity is a subversive queer and feminist manifestation of femininity. Levitt et. al. (2003), argue that femme identity is experienced by their participants as an innate identity, that is exclusively lesbian and embodies an agentic feminine sexuality, based on the principle that their queer femininity is presumably different from heterosexual femininity, because they are not objectified by their performance of femininity, which heterosexual femininities by implication supposedly are. Caroline and Bewley (1998) argue that the distinction between queer femininities and normative femininities lies in the fact that their performance of femininity is pleasurable and powerful, fluid, flexible and diverse, which unfortunately does not acknowledge how these qualities can also be present in heterosexual or seemingly “normative” performances of femininity. Finally, Eves (2004) highlights the various discursive repertoires that femmes use to claim their femininity as lesbian and subversive, including discourses of choice, performativity, agency and strength, which again, I would argue, glosses over how this can also be true for, so called, “normative” - or heterosexual - femininities. Significantly, Levitt et. al. (2003) also chart the various developmental processes of becoming femme, yet their study does not cover processes of orientation to the depth that this project intends. With the exception of the above discussed research by Eves (2004), Caroline and Bewley (1998) and Dahl and Volcano (2008), most of the research conducted on femme identity and queer femininity thus comes from or is conducted with femmes based in the USA.

Further interesting social science based studies of femme include: Bailey et al. (1997) psychological study of homosexual attraction and gender preference,

Rosenzweig's (1992) study of the relationship between sex role perceptions and sexual fulfilment in relation to feminine, masculine or androgynous gender and sexual identities, Cvetkovich's (1995) theoretical rewriting of receptivity and femme sexualities, Maltz's (2002) exploration resignifying erotic the roles of mommy, daddy, girl and boy in butch and femme relations through focus on the need for family rather than the pathologisation of these 'powerful, consensual roles,' Levitt and Horne's (2002) exploration of how gender expression influences queer women's experiences of social interaction and particularly homophobic discrimination, Cartier's (2003) exploration of 1950s butch and femme sexual practices as quasi religious practices, Levitt and Hiestand's (2005) considerations of constructivist and essentialist rhetorics in narratives of butch and femme understandings of identity, Carfagini's (2005) considerations of the role and experience of self-identification and labelling in context of femme subjectivities, Van Newkirk's (2006) demystification of the gay vibe from a femme queer woman's perspective, Lev's (2008) essay on butch and femme couples, families and homemaking practices which goes beyond the previous focus on butch and femme eroticism in context of recent LGBTQ* political focus on parenting and marriage, Peluso's (2009) critical discussion of high femme drag, Levy-Warren's (2009) comparative research on differences and similarities between butch and femme young lesbian and bisexual women's experience of the coming out process, Dahl's (2010, 2012) notes towards a queer femme-ininist ethnography and collaborative methodology and a field of critical femme-ninity studies, Parsons (2012) exploration of lesbian sexual and gendered stereotypes, as well as further studies considering femme and butch political activist identities, movements, moments and communities (Morgan 1993, Smith 1989, Ryan 2009, Dahl 2008, 2010 and 2012,) and reflections on femme as a subversive or transgressive sexual and gender identity (Maltry and Tucker 2002, Crawley 2002, Michale 2004, André and Chang 2006, Blank 2006, Galweski 2005, Dahl 2010).

Another common debate found in writings on femme is whether femme is a relational identity that is constituted through its desire for a butch or another woman, or, in contrast whether femme is an independent identity, in reaction to the femme often only becoming visibly queer through the presence of a butch lover. Whereas writers like Nestle (1992), Levitt et. al. (2003), Laporte (1992) and Sanders (1992) explore femme identity in relation to butch identity, writers like Hart (1998), describe how the femme is regarded as invisible without the signifier of her butch lover and reduced the status of being

normatively gendered and therefore not as radical as other queer identities. In reaction to this, writers such as Sandoval (1997) and Gomez (1998) have reclaimed femme as an autonomous queer gender identity, by virtue of femme being a chosen identity, which is possessed by the individual femme (Sandoval, 1997), and by claiming that femme possesses an erotic independence, which exists separately from the butch lover (Gomez, 1998). Another perspective is provided by Sheiner (1997) and Ward (2010), who discuss femme identity in relation to transmen. Whilst, Sheiner (1997) concludes that femme is an autonomous identity that revolves around the conscious choice to perform a feminine gender identity, rather than being produced purely through the relation of desire, Ward (2010) highlights how femmes and transmen are involved in a collective labour of coproducing gender transgression and argues that femmes play a significant supportive role in the construction of their partners trans* masculinity, which, according to Ward (2010), can sometimes inadvertently lead to the silencing of the various nuanced ways in which femme gender identity is also queer or subversive. Finally, Eves (2004) and Caroline and Bewley (1998), discuss femme identity in relation to mainstream and subcultural spaces and how they are often misrecognised.

In recent writings on queer femininities, femme has begun to become disentangled from a lesbian identity, to signify diverse ways of being queerly feminine, which are not necessarily defined by lesbian sexuality, but may include bisexual, male, trans* and, as I argue, heterosexual femmes. Alex Robertson Textor (1997) presents the possibility of a male femme identity, by arguing that drag queens, effeminacy, trans*, bottom, gay and male forms of femininity, embody alternative configurations of femme. The intersection between bisexuality and femme is explored by Clare Hemmings (1998), who argues that femme and butch are not exclusively lesbian identities, but can also be embodied by bisexual subjects. Hemmings (1998) discusses how the bisexual femme is rendered impossible in writing on femme, because this figure is seen as threateningly ambiguous and unsettling by those femme lesbians who are trying to claim femme as a discretely lesbian identity category, since the bisexual femme confirms the possibility that a femme may desire a man. This factor according to Hemmings (1998) positions the bisexual femme as doubly invisible, because femme identity is usually rendered visible through the lesbian butch. Therefore, the bisexual femme is both invisible as a woman who may couple with a man yet identify as femme and as a femme who may pursue her desire for another woman yet still remain invisible by virtue of her being femme. Significantly,

Hemmings (1998, p.95) argues that femme identity is structured through the refusal of heterosexuality, yet she claims that bisexual femmes may also flout heterosexual norms. She claims that far from being an inauthentic copy of the lesbian femme, the bisexual femme is 'a subject in her own right.' Furthermore, what the bisexual and the lesbian femme share in common, according to Hemmings (1998, p.100), is that they occupy 'a site of non-heterosexual resistance.' Leah Albrecht-Samatasinha (1997) also identifies the bisexual femme as a disturbing concept for some femmes, because of an anxiety surrounding the maintenance of boundaries between lesbian femme and heterosexual women. She highlights how lesbian femmes developed an exclusionary model of femme that defines this identity in terms of the butch and femme couple, in reaction to the radical feminist claim that these were merely imitating heterosexual gender relations and identities. In light of this, she proposes that the category of femme should be expanded to include bisexual femmes on the grounds that, like lesbian femmes, they have more in common with drag and trans* identities than with heterosexual women. Thus, she claims bisexual femme identity as a valid identity by aligning it with the recognisable queer signifiers of drag and trans* femininities, feminist values of awareness and agency, and in opposition to a heterosexual femininity that is discursively constructed as normative and oppressed by the binary gender system.

Further positioned approaches to exploring femme and queer femininities, which I have not yet discussed, include reflections on how queer femininities intersect with fat embodiment (Devit 2006), trans* (Noble 2006), heterosexualities (Mock 2003, Whatling 1992, Galweski (2005) age(ing) (Walker 2012), disability (Samuels 2003, Wachsler 1999) and social class (Weber 1996, Crawley 2001). There also exist significant studies of how queer femininities intersect with 'race' and ethnicity, including Lim-Hing's (1990) reflections on 'race' and sexuality in context Asian American lesbians, Yarbrow-Bejarano (1997) and Gilmartin's (2002) work on chican femmes, Pisankaneva's (2002) analysis of butch and femme experiences within the emerging Bulgarian lesbian community, Leung's (2002) considerations of lesbian genders in contemporary Chinese cultures, Enguchi's (2011) critical interpretative analysis of the 'femme' gay Asian body in the heteronormative world, Savitz's (2011) study of a femme-centric community of Latina lesbians in Miami Florida, Manauat's (2013) exploration of bisexual-lesbian identities and narratibô in the Philippines and Dahl's (2013) discussion of whiteness, 'race,' nation

and affect in context of international femme performances, activism, networks and the fashionable femme aesthetic and iconography of vintage.

What previous critical literature on queer femininities does not offer – and what this project subsequently strives to offer - is a thorough and sustained critical exploration of queer feminine disidentificatory orientations using a strongly situated and intersectional analytical approach, with a specific focus on how queer feminine disidentificatory orientations can help us to understand the tensions between the rhetorics and realities of inclusion and exclusion occurring within our own feminist, queer and femme communities. To this extent, in contrast to the focus on making claims for subversion found in previous literature, this project also highlights some of the exclusionary norms circulating *within* our own queer, feminist and femme communities. The project offers fresh insights into femme and queer femininities through presenting UK based research and findings, in the context of most critical literature, research and data on femme and queer femininities originating from the USA. Furthermore, the project offers these fresh insights by adopting a novel synthesis of methodological approaches, which combines feminist ethnographic work and qualitative interviews with visual methodological approaches, through the use of participant created collages and photographs, and textual analysis. I argue that this work is significant because it is precisely through exploring queer feminine disidentificatory orientations, dynamics of inclusion, exclusion and queer feminine experiences of (*un*)belonging, to explore the experience of being a queer feminine minoritarian subject *within* feminist, queer and queer feminine communities, that we may move forwards with our overall aim of creating a queer feminine community with open boundaries. Arguably, this necessitates, *firstly*, acknowledging that boundaries to our communities do exist and mapping these territories and their borders; and *secondly*, of challenging these (*in*)visible boundaries from the position of minoritarian disidentificatory subjects - always with the aim of opening these territories of identity and community up to further differences and of creating the truly reflexive and inclusive sites of queer, feminist and queer feminine identification and belonging that we are all, hopefully, striving for.

iv) **Why Queer Femininities Matter!**

So, why do queer femininities matter here and now? Why is the study of femme, queer or any type of femininity interesting and important; topical, timely and significant? Arguably, there is a continuing and ever growing surge of events, publications and organising currently happening around femme and queer feminine identities. Building on a long legacy of femme archiving, writing and organising (including key publications on femme in the late 1980s and 1990s - e.g. Hollibaugh and Moraga (1983), Nestle (1988 & 1992), Fadermann (1992), Lopovsky Kennedy and Davis (1992), Newman (1995), Harris and Crocker (1997) and Munt (1998), amongst others), queer feminine organising continues to flourish in the naughties. Besides from the anthologies that this thesis focuses on and the critical literature on femme and queer femininities discussed in the literature review above, femme and queer feminine writing, creating and organising is flourishing in numerous ways and within a variety of international contexts. Though *explicitly* queer feminine organising is significantly limited to predominantly - yet not exclusively - USA, UK and Western European and Australian sites. Continuing their excellent ground breaking work on bringing femmes together to discuss, appreciate and create, the biannual *Femme Conference* (USA) has been going since 2006. The *First Italian Femme Conference* was hosted in Rome, June 2013, by Eyes Wild Drag as part of GendErotica Festival. It showcased an array of inspiring performances, academic papers, artistic reflections, photography and workshops, by femmes from Italy, France, USA, UK and Canada. In terms of femme organising and collectives, there's Femme Mafia Atlanta, Paris Femme Menace, Femme Sharks and The Sydney Femme Guild. Another anthology on femme and butch, *Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme*, edited by Ivan E. Coyote and Zena Sharman, was published in (2011), which includes the infamous Femme Shark Manifesto by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna. In German, there is Sabine Fuchs' (2009) *Femme! Radikal – Queer – Feminin*. Furthermore, Ulrika Dahl's *Femme as Figuration. Rethinking (Queer) Femininities* was published in 2014 in Swedish. Undergraduate and MA thesis are being written, e.g. Maria Lönn's thesis on femme, ageism and agency, Connie Laalo's project 'Beyond Lipstick' and Jodi Savitz (2011) award winning work on Latina femmes in Miami. Doctorates are being awarded, one of the most recent being Dr. Vikki Chalklin's (2013) 'Performing Queer Selves: Embodied Subjectivity and Affect in Queer Performance Spaces Duckie, Bird Club, and Wotever,' Goldsmiths. And, of course, there's this one! Femmes are appearing in various queer news sites, including Jodi Savitz's (2013) 'The Never-ending Coming Out Story' and Zinzi Minott's (2013) 'The Reluctant Femme. Femme.' Creatively speaking, femmes are writing novels (e.g. Wendy

Delmore, *Quatrième Génération*), poetry (e.g. ‘mapache’ by Angela Martinez Dy), erotica (e.g. *Overflow: Tales of Butch-Femme Love, Sex, and Desire* by Miel Rose), documentaries (e.g. Jodi Savitz, *Girl on Girl*), and staging performances (e.g. Rosie Lugosi, Bird La Bird and Dyke Marilyn). Femme blogs are popping up all over cyberspace, including *This is Hard Femme*, *The Queer Fat Femme Guide to Life* by Bevin Branlandingham and T.J. Bryan’s *AfraFemme*. Another recent personal favourite is *Black Girl Dangerous* and, particularly, a contribution by Edward Ndopu, ‘Musings from a Queercrip Femme Man of Colour.’ Beautifully innovative femme zines, like *Femmes in Space* and *Femme Babe*, are being lovingly edited, collaboratively created and hand crafted. In the UK, femme organising and performances are happening in and around Club Wotever and Dukie, in London. Just a little closer to this writers current home, the Leeds Femme Collective was established in 2012, organised by members of the queer cooperative, Warf Chambers. In 2011 I had the pleasure of hearing Joan Nestle speak passionately on her femme archival work at Lesbian Lives, Brighton, which deservedly provoked standing ovation and plenty of tears and smiles of gratitude from the femmes, butches and allies in the audience. The First UK Femme Conference is in the process of being organised for 2016 by Dr. Leanne Dawson and myself. Furthermore, the first UK based anthology on femme, *Queer Feminine Affinities*, edited by myself and Dr. Vikki Chalkin, was initiated in Spring 2013 and is positively well underway. Tying in to all of this is a continued flourishing of writing and organising around femininities more generally, often in reaction to negative feminist constructions of femininity (e.g. Ussher 1997, Tate 1999, Holland 2006, Serano 2007, Gill and Scharff 2011 and Dahl 2012). There are countless further examples of queer feminine writing, creating and organising happening and whilst this introduction unfortunately cannot list every single one, the above *brief* list indicates that this is, indeed, a critical time to be reflecting theoretically on the nuances of queer feminine subjectivities, communities and movements. It is also a critical time for us to be taking stock of our achievements, as well as taking an honest look at our limitations and the work we have yet to do, so that we can move forwards effectively both individually and collectively.

But why is this strong continual gathering of momentum and flourishing of writing, creation and organising around queer femininities happening and why does it matter? Critically, during a workshop I hosted at Lesbian Lives, Brighton (2013), where femmes created collages on their queer feminine identities and communities, a young

femme spoke passionately about how she is often disrespected, dismissed or silenced in the political activist circles - including feminist ones - she inhabits and actively contributes towards, simply because of her femininity and despite her committed political engagement. She spoke of how she was often seen as apolitical or as having nothing of worth or significance to contribute. She articulated how this is an experience she faces daily, in various different contexts. Femme performance artist and novelist, Rosie Garland, who also attended the workshop, sympathised with her perspective and expressed a mixture of solidarity, regret and anger, that these issues of misogyny against femininity is *still* something we femmes, queer and otherwisely feminine subjects are fighting against!

Indeed, these experiences and perspectives are echoed by several of my participants, including Donna, Sarah and Vikki. Whilst Donna describes how her femininity often leads to her being patronised, mistrusted and dismissed as unintelligent or apolitical within anarchist political scenes, Sarah and Vikki spoke of not being respected and fighting for respect as feminine subjects both in everyday spaces like pubs, yet also in certain feminist, academic, intellectual and professional spaces. All three participants illustrate how femininity is often perceived negatively in these apparently libratory or critical spaces, where it is all too often conflated with weakness, passivity, stupidity, apoliticalness or a lack of, so called, “professionalism,” by implicitly white, middle class, heteronormative, masculine, ableist standards. In fact, in reaction to the frequent disrespect that Sarah is subjected to because of her feminine gender identity, Sarah passionately described one of her subversive feminine feminist hobbies as: ‘dressing up in a short skirt, heels, the works and academically taking the fuck down anybody who tries to talk to me like I’m stupid!’ A similar everyday embodied interpersonal activist political strategy is used by Vikki, who spoke of finding politicised pleasure in challenging negative cultural associations around femininity by performing her gender in ways that are not aligned with the norms of the various spaces she inhabits. For example, Vikki spoke of attending academic and feminist events ‘in a big pink dress’ and giving ‘a really fierce academic debate’ to highlight and refute negative cultural associations around femininity.

Certainly, these are scenarios that femmes familiar with in context of the invisibilising of femme gender and sexual identities and desires in both heteronormative and queer contexts and the opposition that founding femmes like Joan Nestle (1988, 1992) and Amber Hollibaugh (with Cherríe Morgan 1983, 2000, & in Dahl & Volcano, 2008, p.186) encountered within second wave radical feminist circles in the USA. This disrespectful attitude towards femininity is also found more broadly in some, yet certainly not all, feminist academic work and populist writing (e.g. Friedan 1963, Firestone 1970, Greer 1970 and 1999, Millett 1977, Raymond 1979, Bartky 1988 and 1990, Faludi 1991, Jeffreys 2005).

It seems like we fabulous, capable, fiercely femme, queer and otherwise identified feminine creatures are *still* not getting the respect we deserve! One concrete illustration of this issue is provided by Amber Hollibaugh who writes of how femmes are disrespected within their own queer communities. This is a sentiment that is shared by many subjects in *Femmes of Power*, *Femmethology*, *Brazen Femme*, as well as by some of my interview participants. To quote Amber Hollibaugh directly (Dahl and Volcano, 2008, p.186):

while I know the world of queerness has shifted and expanded in countless and powerful ways, the bottom line is still that femmes and femme identities don't really count for much, aren't valued or seen to be as truly queer as other homoerotic personas. It still seems that a femme identity is assumed to be a sort of default – not something forged in the fire of its own complex, unresolved human possibilities and hungers. In fact, the real suspicion is that we are just faux straight people sleeping over at the LGBTQI campground. And that tells you how despised women are, even by those of us born female. Femmes are read as imposters, betrayers of the authentic queer self.

Evidently, femmes face disrespect and invalidation in our homes, in our communities, our work places and our political collectives. Arguably, the misogyny against femininity, which Julia Serano (2007) so well outlined in her groundbreaking work *Wiping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, is still running rampant across various situated levels of our societies. As Serano (2007, pp.5-6, my emphasis) writes:

Examining the society-wide disdain for trans* women also brings to light an important yet often overlooked aspect of *traditional sexism: that it targets people not*

only for their femaleness, but also for their expressions of femininity. Today, while it is generally considered to be offensive or prejudiced to openly discriminate against someone for being female, discriminating against someone's femininity is still considered fair game. The idea that masculinity is strong, tough, and natural while femininity is weak, vulnerable, and artificial continues to proliferate even among people who believe that women and men are equals. And in a world where femininity is so regularly dismissed, perhaps no form of gendered expression is considered more artificial and more suspect than male and transgender expressions of femininity. I have called this book Whipping Girl to highlight the ways in which people who are feminine, whether they be female, male, and/or transgender, are almost universally demeaned compared with their masculine counterparts. This scapegoating of those who express femininity can be seen not only in the male-centred mainstream, but in the queer community, where "effeminate" gay men have been accused of holding back the gay rights movement, and where femme dykes have been accused of being the Uncle Toms of the lesbian movement. Even many feminists buy into traditionally sexist notions about femininity – that it is artificial, contrived, and frivolous: that it is a ruse that only serves the purpose of attracting and appeasing the desires of men. What I hope to show in this book is that the real ruse being played is not by those of us who happen to be feminine, but rather by those who place inferior meanings onto femininity. The idea that femininity is subordinate to masculinity dismisses women as a whole and shapes virtually all popular myths and stereotypes about trans women.*

As Serano highlights, femmephobia is a significant part of the misogyny against femininity - along with transphobia and sisiphobia - which all operate in very specific, context bound, ways. This misogyny against femininity and femmephobia can have the effect of invisibilising and invalidating our queer identities and dismissing our political, intellectual or community centred contributions. So why is writing and organising around femme, queer and otherwise feminine subjectivities important? Isn't this just all a bit of a made up individualistic identity politics? Shouldn't we be concentrating on something "more" important like fighting the government cuts to our wages and welfare systems? Well, yes and no. To draw on Amber Hollibaugh's reflections on the importance of femme visibility projects like Dahl and Volcano's (2008) *Femmes of Power* or femme solidarity and community building projects like the Femme Conferences, in reference to her own experience of coming out as femme and coming to terms with this identity, Hollibaugh (in Dahl and Volcano, 2008, p.186) writes:

in confronting the irrefutable knowledge that I was a femme, I tried to kill myself. Nothing else in my life ever got me to that edge; nothing else seemed so impossible to understand, or to claim. While many of us are defiant and eloquent in our refusal to shut up, many more of us sink, and do not survive. These are the unseen femme configured corpses whose stories die with them.

As we know, from disabled femme Sharon Wachsler (2009, p.51) self injury behaviour (SIB) - and suicide attempts arguably being at the most extreme end of this spectrum - are often caused by invalidating environments:

Studies agree that conditions that lead to SIB always involve “invalidating environments” (selfharm.net/injury.html – “Why do people deliberately injure themselves?”), with a history of neglect as the most powerful predictor of SIB (selfharm.net/injury.html – “Etiology [history and causes]”). Most think of “neglect” as inaction of individuals toward those who are under their care. However, I believe the multiple layers of hiddenness disabled femmes suffer – whether the paradoxical hiddenness of stares or condescension or the literal hiddenness of physical or communication isolation – are a form of cultural neglect. In essence, the world is our invalidating environment.

Arguably, in a contemporary social and political climate where (at least in the context of the UK) major cuts are being implemented to our welfare system by a corrupt coalition government - including disability living allowances and mental health services - it is absolutely crucial that - as well as challenging these cuts and structural inequalities on the level of politics and policy - we organise, write and fight, build communities, theories and connections, to protect and strengthen ourselves and each other, at whatever level of our complex situated and intersecting identities and communities we deem necessary. And, arguably, interrogating the exclusions that our own communities can at times engender, with the ultimate aim of expanding these communities to those who continue to inhabit *marginal spaces within*, as well as reflecting on and celebrating our achievements in building supportive and affirmative femme centred communities, theories and representations, is part of this.

A case in point illustrating the effects of marginalisation from within is presented by Julia Serano (2013) in *Excluded: Making Feminist and Queer Movements More Inclusive*. Serano’s experience of the same conference is vastly different from Amber Hollibaugh’s (in Dahl and Volcano 2008, p.185) who discusses the 2006 Femme Conference as being: ‘one of the most powerful moments in my life’ and as ‘the dreams I had nurtured for kinship and connection, for finding voice and possibility, for discovering rooms filled with others who shared a passionate, difficult, impossible-to-nail-down kind of femaleness – seemed on the brink of realisation.’ Serano (2013, pp.54-55) presents her own situated trans* bisexual femme experience of the conference by citing *both* the

positive moments of femme organising, which is recognised as striving strongly for inclusion and being successful on some accounts *and* the painfully negative moments of exclusion within a community where she hoped to find an easy sense of belonging and queer kinship. Serano recounts arriving at the conference with the hopeful expectation that ‘trans* women and femmes were natural allies’ yet her experience of insensitive trans* exclusionary and ciscentric discussions left her feeling that her ‘belief that trans* women and femmes were natural allies was not shared by all the attendees, not by a long shot.’³ Serano’s experience illustrates the vastly different ways in which the same community can be experienced from different standpoints. She also demonstrates the significance and necessity for further intersectional research into internal dynamics of queer feminine inclusions and exclusions.

On a further structural level, as some queer feminine subjects have highlighted, misogyny against femininity and femmephobia can also significantly affect the lives of feminine identified and presenting subjects, within a queerphobic, racist, sexist, ableist and ageist institutions and places of work, in terms of access to jobs, being taken seriously whilst on the job and, therefore, also access to recognition of our contributions and decent pay, as we are picked on for what we wear, whom and how we desire or the manner in which we act, as signs of, so called, “unprofessionalism.” A few examples of these dynamics are highlighted by femme professionals like Suzann Kole (in Brushwood Rose and Camileri, 2002, pp.95-100), Joséphin Brink (in Dahl and Volcano, 2008, p.159) and Ann Tweedy, (in Burke, 2009, pp.37-46), all of whom critique the false dichotomies established between femininity and intelligence or professionalism. Indeed, Ann Tweedy (ibid) explicitly describes femme as ‘a feminine feminist,’ ‘a gender identity combined with a political outlook’ and describes how ‘femmes are all about trashing society’s messages and stereotypes about who a feminine person is and what she can be.’

As has already been discussed, misogyny against femininity and femmephobia is also present in feminist and queer spaces, where femmes are rendered invisible, their queer, subversive, empowered or chosen gender identity being dismissed and misrecognised as heterosexual or normative by virtue of their association with femininity which is all too

³ For further details see Serano, 2013, pp.54-69.

often seen as a default gender position. Furthermore, within these contexts, cisgendered heterosexual feminine subjectivities are equally dismissed as suffering duped victims of an enforced compulsory patriarchal gender regime. Misogyny against femininity and femmephobia is also present in sexual, physical and verbal violence against women, or feminine presenting subjects, including yet not limited to victim blaming in rape cases, which is often articulated in terms of choices in feminine clothing or behaviour. Indeed, this was the case in events leading up to and the actual embodied politics of the international Slut Walks (2011). It is also present in everyday cases of sissy bashing and transphobic attacks, for example the racist, transphobic and, arguably, femmephobic assault and trial of transwoman of colour CeCe McDonald (2011). However, this is not just all about sex and gender or a single issue feminist politics, which would make this an implicitly white, middle-class and able bodied affair, by association with a white, middle-class and ableist centric feminism and queer politics. Femmes, as Ulrika Dahl (Dahl and Volcano, 2008, p.18-26), aptly highlights face multiple oppressions and are actively *striving* towards building an intersectional movement that is, supposedly, inclusive of femmes of colour, poor and working-class femmes, fat femmes and differently abled femmes.

However, whilst the project of “empowering femininity” (Serano, 2007) and ‘liberat[ing] femininity from its history’ (Tara Hardy in Dahl and Volcano, 2008, p.18) is a crucial battle with strongly intersectional aims, whose ranks this project actively seeks to join. There are also omissions, limitations and inequalities *within* our own feminist, queer and femme communities, which I argue, need to be tended to with as much committed passion. Indeed, it asks what becomes of those who inhabit a troubling disidentificatory orientation to those sites of political organising, theoretical musing, community and identity building projects that at first glance would appear to offer them liberation and solidarity from the sorts of misogyny against femininity and femmephobia previously discussed? What becomes of those subjects who cannot find their way easily towards queer feminine organising, politics and communities, due to other intersections of identity that they inhabit which act as stopping points or those subjects who on entering these spaces of identity, politics and community face further multiple oppressions? If, as Amber Hollibaugh highlights, the isolation of being femme in a femmephobic world nearly drove her to suicide and the organising of Femme

Conferences and the publication of collections like *Femmes of Power* provided solidarity that enabled her survival, what becomes of those who cannot find their feet within these spaces of identification, affinity and solidarity? What becomes of those who are outside of belonging *within* queer, feminist and femme writing, collectivising, identity and community building? This project therefore investigates the important issue of internal dynamics of exclusion and marginalisation. In true Muñozian disidentificatory fashion, this project is thus situated at the intersection of allegiance, identification and disidentificatory critique. It positions itself *within* a tradition of femme, queer feminine and feminist writing on femininity, as well as in a productive tradition of queer and feminist academic critique, which strives for an intersectional interrogation of and solidarities across differences, as is exemplified by the work of black feminists and queers of colour and critical whiteness scholars (e.g. Davis 1981, Lorde 1984, hooks 1984, Anzaldúa 1989 and 1991, Frankenberg 1993, Dhairyam 1994, Goldman 1996, Kunstman and Miyake 1998, Collins 2004, Ferguson 2004, Cohen 2005, Johnson and Henderson 2005 etc.) feminists and queer scholars concerned with disabilities (e.g. Wachsler 1999, McRuer 2006, Hall 2011, Kafer 2013 etc.) or class (e.g. Goldman 1996, Skeggs 1997, Cohen 2005, Taylor, 2007, 2009, 2010 etc.) and *other, others*, such as heterosexual queers (e.g. Calvin 2000) and rural queers (e.g. Taylor 2011, Baker 2011 and 2012, Gorman-Murray et. al. 2013, Johnson 2013 etc.).

v) **Conclusion**

To conclude, queer feminine subjectivities, community organising, creative projects and theorising, matters here and now! As queer feminine community spaces, creative, academic and activist projects, as well as everyday identifications with femme as a diverse gendered and sexual embodied subjectivity, increasingly circulate transnationally, it is important that “we” queers, femmes and feminists develop a “leave-no-femme-behind” policy for queer feminine organising that is attentive to the various interlocking intersections of identity (and associated experiences of oppression) that each one of us inhabit. Taking a critical look at those moments where queer feminine subjects experience *disidentificatory orientations* that simultaneously move them towards and away from femme identities, representations and organising, occupying the vital yet contentious in-between spaces of affinity and criticality, is thus crucial - as this project

illustrates - in raising our awareness of the internal experiences of exclusions by various situated queer feminine subjects. Indeed, raising our awareness of queer feminine disidentificatory orientations will hopefully help us to move beyond tokenistic rhetorics of “inclusion” and “diversity” towards true intersectional engagement with the exclusions that *can* and *do* occur within our own communities, with the ultimate aim of building conceptual and practical tools for preventing internal marginalisation and creating the inclusive femme movements, communities and theories that femme theorists, artists and organisers are ultimately aiming for.

Chapter 2: Methodology: Towards a Collaborative Femme Ethnography

i) Introduction

This chapter lays out the rationale and practicalities for the particular methodological approach that this project develops and deploys. It begins with a brief summary of the methods that are deployed in this research project to provide the reader with a general overview, before discussing queer fem(me)inist methodologies, ethnography and the significance of deploying intersectionality - as an epistemological framework and methodological approach - for researching queer fem(me)inine disidentificatory orientations and community (un)belonging. The chapter then progresses to a discussion of researcher reflexivity, before discussing the theories informing the methods deployed and the actual practicalities of these methods, through sections on recruiting participants, designing and implementing an initial questionnaire, sampling, visual methods, qualitative interviews, discourse analysis of visual and verbal data and, finally, the ethical considerations that inform this project throughout.

ii) Summary of Methods

To very briefly outline the methods that this project deploys, before going into these in more depth. The method that this project develops is essentially composed of three approaches. Firstly, the project involves interviews with a small, yet diverse, sample of 15 participants who self identify with queer femininities, but are not necessarily situated at the centre of femme subcultures. Secondly, it develops a visual methods approach involving participant created collages and photographs that represent their queer feminine embodied identities and perspectives, which were discussed in the aforementioned interviews. Thirdly, the project engages in a discourse analysis of these interviews and visual materials, alongside three published anthologies, containing autobiographical reflections, which are already in circulation among queerly feminine subjects, including Brushwood Rose and Camilleri's (2002) *Brazen Femme*, Dahl and Volcano's (2008) *Femmes of Power* and Burke's (2009) *Visible: A Femmethology*. Using this triangulated approach, the project therefore strives to engage with perspectives circulating both at the various centres and margins of this subculture. The project draws on Halberstam's (1998)

theory of *queer methodology*, Duggan and McHugh's (2002) model of *fem(me) science*, and Dahl's (2010) *collaborative queer femme-inist ethnography*, to create a femme centred approach that strives for a collaboration between femme researcher and femme participant. Thus, I deployed an interpretivist and critical ethnographic approach through conducting interviews to foreground the perspectives of queer feminine identified persons and to seek out an 'insider view' on this diverse identity and community (Blaiki in Mason, 2002, p.56). Furthermore, I balanced this interpretivist approach with a critical approach to analysing my data through using discourse analysis to achieve a greater understanding of these "insider" perspectives in a way that contributes significantly to the existing critical literature. With regards to the interviews, participants were recruited through an advertisement flyer (Appendix 2) and information sheet (Appendix 3) that I circulated around various queer, feminist and gender related email lists, online forums, academic conferences, activist sites and club nights. The sample of participants is largely "self selected" according to whether participants identified with the flyer and the aims of the project. Furthermore, the sample was also purposively selected by myself, using a basic questionnaire (Appendix 4), through which I selected a diverse sample of queer feminine participants that is mixed in terms of age, ability, class, 'race,' ethnicity, sexuality and gender, thus allowing for an intersectional analysis to emerge. I used purposive sampling to challenge and extend the scope of existing theories on queer femininity (Seale, 2004). Gaps and limitations concerning the diversity of my interview sample was largely amended by further diversity present in the published texts and vice versa. Participants were asked to take one or more photographs of themselves and to create between one and three collages to represent their gender identity, styles of dressing and embodiment, and perspectives on queer femininity. These visual materials formed the focus of one to two hour interviews, which used photo elicitation interviewing - where images are used as interview probes - for fostering focused discussions on participant's perspectives about queer femininities (Knowles & Sweetman, 2004). Interviews asked participants to describe their queer feminine identity, the positionalities that influence them, styles of dressing, how they define and conceptualise queer femininity generally, how they arrived at this identity and construct it in everyday life, who they identify and disidentify with, along with anything else they deem important for the production of their queer feminine identity. For its analysis the project draws on Potter and Wetherell's (1987) social psychology model of discourse analysis. Visual analysis was grounded in the postmodernist work of Goldstein (2007), Holliday (1999, 2004 & 2007) and Back (2004).

Throughout the project I strove to engender a reflexive approach (Mason, 2002) that is attentive to the positionalities of my participants, as well as my own.

iii) Queer Fem(me)inist Methodologies & Ethnography

In striving to investigate processes of queer feminine orientations, embodiment and subjectivity this project develops a ‘queer methodology’ (Halberstam, 1998, p.13) that is femme centred and works with the ethics of what Duggan and McHugh (2002, p.168) call ‘fem(me) science.’ Halberstam (1998: p.13) defines queer methodology as:

A scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour. The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion towards disciplinary coherence.

Through borrowing methodological approaches from a variety of disciplines, this project draws on participant created visual methodologies including collages and photographs, qualitative interviews and discourse analysis to engage with the often marginalised perspectives of queer feminine subjects, as well as those situated perspectives that are marginalised within discourses surrounding queer femininities themselves. As its overall approach this thesis is grounded in feminist ethnographic methods that involve immersion in social contexts - in this case through conducting discursive analysis of published anthologies of autobiographical essays, qualitative interviews, visual methods, collage making workshops and a limited amount of participant observation in community settings such as femme performances, conferences or workshops - ‘to understand the group’s underlying beliefs and assumptions’ (Aune 2008, p.1) with a specific focus on queer feminine genders, sexualities and how these intersect with other positioned identity variables, like class, ‘race’ and (dis)ability. Specifically, my approach is informed by the queer fem(me)inist ethnographic approach outlined by Ulrika Dahl (2010) in “Femme on Femme: Reflections on Collaborative Methods and Queer Femme-inist Ethnography,” with its emphasis on collaborative knowledge making, as well as its focus on researching with and writing about the communities that one is situated in.

With regards to its epistemological framework, this thesis is grounded in queer, feminist and especially black feminist epistemology, in its emphasis on situated knowledge production, reflexivity, power, reciprocity, intersectionality as an epistemological framework and method, as well as its interest in positioned marginalised perspectives and subaltern voices (Choo and Ferree 2010, Crenshaw 1991, Collins 2000, Harraway 1991, MacKinnon 2013, Spivak 1988). Especially important for its epistemological and methodological framework is the concept of intersectionality, which denotes the ways in which positionalities, structures of power, privilege, domination and oppression are interconnected and co-constitutive (Crenshaw 1991). In this project intersectionality does not simply constitute a politically correct feminist “buzzword” (Davis 2008) , rather intersectionality forms the very core of my theoretical, epistemological and methodological framework for researching queer fem(me)inine disidentificatory orientations and community (un)belonging. Firstly, because intersectionality is core to disidentificatory orientations, due to the fact that Muñoz’s (1999) theory of disidentifications and, of course, this thesis itself, are grounded in minoritarian perspectives expressed by subjects who inhabit multiple intersecting and often conflicting positionalities. Secondly, because of its epistemological and methodological emphasis on a) ‘group-centred’ intersectionality, which places ‘multiply-marginalised groups and their perspectives at the centre of the research’ and b) ‘process-centred’ intersectionality, which ‘highlights power as relational, seeing the interactions among variables of multiplying oppressions at various points of intersection, and drawing attention to unmarked groups’ and c) ‘system-centred’ intersectionality, which ‘see[s] intersectionality as shaping the entire social system’ and ‘pushes analysis away from associating specific inequalities with unique institutions’ by ‘looking for processes that are fully interactive, historically co-determined, and complex’ (Choo and Ferree 2010, p.129). In addition to being attentive to these three layers of intersectional theorising, this thesis develops a intersectional, collaborative, subaltern femme centred, queer fem(me)ininist ethnography that adopts an interpretivist approach, which is interested in ‘people, and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings, as the primary data sources’ (Mason, 2002, p.66). Therefore, it actively seeks out what Blaikie describes as, ‘the “insider view,” rather than imposing an “outsider view”’ (in Mason, 2002, p.56). By foregrounding the perspectives of queer feminine subjects, this project thus engages in a process of collaborative knowledge production along the ethical, methodological and epistemological lines of ‘fem(me) science,’ which Duggan and

McHugh (2002, p.168) theorise as a ‘localized, tactical and specific’ fe(me)inist research strategy, which has the ‘explicit aim’ of transforming perceptions around femininity. Duggan and McHugh articulate the collaborative impulse between femme researcher and femme participants as follows: ‘fem(me) science recognizes the imperative to *win*, and, rather like a delicately gloved hand that is capable of stinging slaps,’ which I am interpreting as necessary moments of criticality, ‘should the need arise, the fem(me) scientist solicits loving, grateful collaboration’ (emphasis in original, 2002, p.169). This collaborative impulse of fem(me) science is elaborated by Dahl (2010, p.158), in her discussion of a specifically *queer femme-inist ethnographic* approach, which this thesis draws on, where she argues that femme participants should be treated as agentic femme theorists in their own right and, thus, as ‘co-producers of knowledge.’ Furthermore, Dahl (2010, p.165) argues that collaborative queer femme-inist ethnography is ‘a methodology committed to making community.’ It is on this basis that I construct my intersectional and collaborative queer fem(me)inist critical ethnographic methodological approach as a femme researcher who is becoming increasingly committed to research practices that create a space for participant agency, collaborative research methods, reflexive intersectional politics, theorising and community making and the creation of spaces where a multiplicity of diverse perspectives are represented. With this in mind, I therefore define a queer fem(me)inist ethnographic approach as being a feminist ethnography that is performed *by* a researcher who identifies with queer fem(me)inities - even if this takes a disidentificatory form - *in collaboration with* research participants who identify with queer fem(me)inities and on the topic of queer fem(me)inities with the epistemic aim of building knowledge around queer fem(me)inities and the political aim of building queer fem(me)inine communities. What is distinctive about a queer fem(me)inist ethnographic approach is therefore the fact that it actively values collaborative knowledge building on queer fem(me)inities by queer fem(me)inine subjects, wherein the queer fem(me)inist ethnographer seeks to empower their queer fem(me)inine participants to actively construct knowledge about their own identities in collaboration with them. Importantly, this involves balancing critical perspectives that we might have as researchers with a collaborative participant centred approach of listening and learning from our participants, rather than entering the field as, so called, “experts” who possess the power to *theorise over* - rather than *theorising with* - their participants. A queer fem(me)inist ethnographic approach therefore has the potential for challenging the very concept of “thinking critically” by encouraging us to *think with* our participants,

understand their life experiences and perspectives, and to generate fresh theoretical perspectives from this *balancing act* of thinking simultaneously *with* and *against* the grain of what our queer fem(me)inine participants or texts are telling us, yet continually coming back to an ethical position of valuing, affirming and learning from our queer fem(me)inine research participants and their experiences. Therefore, it is also an ethnographic approach that strongly values and affirms “*insider*” perspectives. Both in the sense of working as queer fem(me)inine researchers with queer fem(me)inine participants on queer fem(me)inities and in the sense of valuing and affirming the perspectives of our participants and learning from these. Even if these “*insider*” perspectives might also involve disidentificatory expressions of feeling like an “*outsider within*” and even if these “*insiders*” might question the very meanings of queer fem(me)ininity and, indeed, what it means to be an “*insider*.” Additionally, queer fem(me)inist ethnographic approaches also involve actively valuing femininities in their diverse forms of expression, as a political and epistemic act of resistance against traditional feminist research which has tended to devalue femininity as “patriarchal false consciousness” and which has therefore tended to *theorise over* feminine subjects, rather than *theorising with* feminine subjects. In this sense the word *queer* in the phrase “queer fem(me)inist ethnography” also signifies its traditional meaning of being resistant of normative and hegemonic practices, including normative and hegemonic feminist ethnographic research practices and forms of “critical thinking.” This is the definition of a *specifically* queer fem(me)inist ethnographic approach which the project has developed throughout each of the stages of this research project.

iv) Reflexivity

Throughout this project I deploy a situated and reflexive approach, which is defined by Mason (2002, p.5) as the act of ‘thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognizing the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see.’ Following Parker (1999, p.8), I paid a ‘critical reflexive attention to the position of the reader’ - or researcher - and ‘the way *analysts* become part of the text and must be able to turn around, to take account of the way they represent a text to an academic audience

and take responsibility for their activity in the construction of meaning.’ I actively engaged in this process of reflexivity, as far as possible, at every level of the research, from the methodological to the theoretical, from the personal to the epistemological, from the conceptualisation of the research design to the analysis of the data. Indeed, reflexivity is particularly important for engendering projects like this one, which are with issues pertaining to and how differences within queerly feminine identities inform disidentificatory orientations and community (un)belonging. Throughout the fieldwork phase I recorded ‘field notes’ in my research diary, for example, after hosting queer feminine collage making workshops at conferences, engaging with queer feminine community spaces, reading the anthologies or new theoretical texts and, especially, after conducting interviews to note significant ‘aspects of the interaction’ (Byne in Seale, 2004, p.191). I used the diary as a medium for conducting active reflexivity on issues including positionalities, diversity and power, as well as analytical observations about the interview process, research participants and my readings of the femme anthologies, that were potentially relevant for the analysis. Thus, the diary was also used as a space for tracing emerging themes, developing my analysis and reflecting on my experiences with this identity and community, in a way that fosters self awareness and a situated approach to the project. Whilst it is not within the scope of this chapter to illustrate all of the reflective processes that conducting this project prompted, it is helpful to reflect on the following key issues. Firstly, despite my being interested in working with femme of colour perspectives, this project “failed” to recruit more than one interview participant, Hem, who identifies as: ‘Person of Colour/Mixed race Bengali-Indian and Jewish/British.’ As Sara Ahmed (2006, 2007) observes: whiteness orientates subjects, placing certain things within reach and on their bodily horizon, more so than “others.” So to, due to my own whiteness, and my own *gradual* (re)orientation towards and *eventual* arrival at critical whiteness studies in 2012 - after finishing my interviews and as part of the larger learning process that this research project has entailed - I, as a white researcher who was initially not familiar with reflecting on whiteness, have to a certain extent (re)produced a white centric cohort of interview participants. Nevertheless, despite this “failure” I strove to not allow whiteness to remain an unreflected upon discursive silence that maintains white power and privilege within my own work, by discussing dynamics of racisms *within* queer, feminist and femme communities, which my own intersectional “failures” and working with black feminist/queer and critical whiteness theory, brought to my attention and which forced me to question how whiteness functions as a norm within “our” queer,

feminist and femme communities. Similarly, whilst my call for participants was able to reach and include femmes with mental health difficulties or disabling long term health problems like Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome, it was not able to reach and include femmes with physical disabilities. For example, reflecting critically on my use of visual methods - which is centred in being sighted - visually impaired femmes are one example of a disabled positionality that this project “failed” to include and, thus, forms one potentially fruitful area for further reflexive and activist work through future projects. With more awareness of critical disability and whiteness theories at the time of designing, conceptualising and implementing this project’s methodology, I might have been able to make this project more accessible and inclusive of femmes of colour and femmes with physical disabilities. However, I strongly believe these limitations and apparent “failures” were actually incredibly productive as they encouraged me to reflect on the significance that whiteness and (dis)ability play in queer feminine communities, by being indicative of wider problematic intersectional “failures” present in our queer, feminist and femme communities that this thesis actively strives to address, yet most certainly does not claim to stand loftily outside of. When it comes to working intersectionally, we are most certainly *all in this together!* Indeed, if anything, these “failures” have made me increasingly aware of and passionate about the need for working intersectionally and to interrogate the workings of *both* marginal(ised) *and* majoritarian positioned perspectives in order to not leave normative centres of power unproblematised (Choo and Ferree 2010). Furthermore, whilst my participants *did* present diverse critical perspectives on queer femininities from various intersecting positionalities, the afore discussed “failures” also illustrate the importance of supplementing my own interviews with textual examples that served to further widen the scope of diverse queer feminine perspectives that I otherwise would not be able to access, for example, perspectives by disabled femmes with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity like Peggy Munson (2009).

The textual sources that this project draws on and the dynamic of my choosing these texts specifically - rather than my asking participants to choose texts on queer femininity for me to explore - is another researcher power dynamic that required significant reflection. I chose to analyse the three contemporary femme anthologies - *Brazen Femme*, *Femmes of Power* and *Visible* - because these texts are a) circulating within queer feminine communities and amongst subjects who identify with queer femininities,

thereby they play an active role in how queer femininities are defined both individually and collectively, as well as allowing insights into community dynamics, b) because they illustrate diverse contemporary understandings of queer femininities, which have significantly proliferated in meaning from earlier understandings of the term *femme* as meaning a feminine lesbian who, often yet not always, couples with a masculine lesbian, thereby rendering the term, identity and community increasingly, yet not entirely, inclusive of bisexual, male and trans* femmes c) because these texts contain the sorts of liberal rhetorics of “diversity,” “inclusion” and “intersectional success stories” (e.g. *Femmes of Power*) that this project was interested in interrogating, *and yet they also* provided this project with useful examples of diverse *femme* perspectives that I could not have accessed otherwise (e.g. *Visible*) through their use of different mediums for soliciting *femme* stories - e.g. edited collections in the case of Burke’s *Visible* being able to solicit stories from femmes who are extremely socially isolated due to their disabilities like Wachslar (2009) and Munson (2009) - that may be more accessible to some femmes - for example disabled femmes - than a verbal interview using creative visual methods in locations that are not necessarily equally accessible to all. Therefore, whilst asking participants to choose the texts this project engaged with might have engendered an interesting collaborative research approach, I strongly believe that it is important that - for the purposes of this research project on queer feminine disidentificatory orientations and community (un)belonging - texts which are circulating within queer feminine communities and are thus both reflective of and actively constructing the identities and communities under discussion, as well as texts which represent *both* the liberal “diversity” rhetorics *and* provided actual diverse queer feminine perspectives, were drawn on to critically support the interviews that I conducted, by rendering available a larger data set of perspectives on queer feminine identities and communities. Nevertheless, it is certainly significant that a large number of my participants *did*, in fact, reference the texts that I chose, either as points of identification or in order to critique their construction of queer feminine identities and communities. Finally, all of these reflections and the analysis that I have been able to produce using this triangulated methodological approach, arguably confirm that this *combination* of autobiographical texts with qualitative interviews and visual methods was significantly beneficial in providing me with a extensive data set for analysing queer feminine disidentificatory orientations and community (*un*)belonging that none of these approaches *individually* could have achieved.

v) **Recruiting Participants**

With regards to recruiting participants, I advertised for research participants using a flyer and an information sheet that I circulated through various queer, feminist and gender email lists and online forums, such as the Feminist Activist Forum and Feminism in London. It was circulated via friends, colleagues and organisers of subcultural spaces that may be popular with queer feminine subjects, like Club Woteva, London, and Wet Spot, Leeds. I passed the advertisement on to anyone who I met who might identify as queerly feminine and I encouraged a snowballing process, where potential participants pass the advertisement on to friends or acquaintances who may be interested in participating. I advertised for participants at conferences and cultural or activists events that I attended, such as the Carnival of Feminist Cultural Activism at York University and Slut Walk London 2011. I actively recruited participants at LGBTQI night clubs and events that are outside of the main subcultural spaces used by queerly feminine subjects, such as Duckie, Club Lash and Torture Gardens, mainly through their related online pages to ensure that the intersectional impulse of the project was achieved. Additionally, queer performance artists, Lashings of Ginger Beer, included the flyer on their blog and *The Antagonist*, an underground magazine edited by one of my research participants, included it in one edition. In recruiting my participants the emphasis was persistently placed on how participants themselves identify and allowing this to challenge, inform and change my perceptions of what queer femininity is. In producing the advertisement flyer, I tried to pay attention to the language used to make this as inclusive as possible and to attract a “diverse” range of research participants. I therefore strove to engage in, what Spencer describes as, a process of ‘strong reflexivity,’ where the researcher actively reflects on and takes responsibility for the fact that their use of language plays a part in the phenomena being researched (in Mason, 2002, p.194).

vi) **Questionnaire**

Participants completed a basic questionnaire, asking them to describe their queer feminine identity and any factors that play a significant role in the construction of this identity, like

their class, 'race,' ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality and age. Though I did not include a section about disability, because I was not as aware of this as a crucial impacting factor at the time, disabilities - particularly those relating to mental health – nevertheless emerged in the questionnaires and interviews, regardless. Plenty of room was given in the questionnaire to allow for self description. The questionnaire therefore served to highlight important issues that could be investigated further in the interviews by tailoring my questions to suit the circumstances. The questionnaire was inevitably completed by more people than I interviewed, due to restrictions of time and resources. Therefore, the questionnaire was used to identify a diverse sample of participants and for establishing the context of the speaker. Indeed, the questionnaire was significantly helpful in guiding my tailoring of certain interview questions to specific participants and their respective positionalities, thereby enabling an intersectional analysis to develop from an explicitly intersectional data set. This impacted on the data gathered across the sample through a) allowing me to select a data sample that included subjects who identify with queer femininities to varying degrees and queer, feminist or femme community (un)belonging, in order to investigate dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, along with the related issues of (un)belonging b) ensuring that the data contained explicit articulations and reflections on the subject of how the queer feminine identities of my participants intersected with other positioned aspects of their identities, so that dynamics of community inclusion, exclusion and (un)belonging could be investigated through the epistemic lens of sociocultural difference and situatedness.

vii) Sampling

According to Potter and Wetherell (1987, p.161) approximately 10 carefully chosen participants is sufficient for a project that uses the 'labour intensive' method of discourse analysis. Therefore, my research sample consists of 15 participants who identify with queer femininities, since this was a manageable size in terms of the work load involved - especially considering the additional visual data and related labour - whilst also providing a diversity of perspectives. I used purposive sampling that aims to 'extend and broaden the scope of an emerging theory,' which, according to Seale (2004, p.241), involves 'choosing' participants to interview and texts to analyse 'with view to finding things that might challenge the limitations of the existing theory.' The sample thus focuses on

achieving a diversity of perspectives to challenge existing theories on queer femininity. The sample was largely self-selected, since research participants identified themselves according to whether they identify with the objectives of the project and were interested in participating. The sample was thus also purposefully chosen by myself, on the basis of the questionnaires that participants completed. This enabled a funnelling process to occur, where a larger number of applicants (approximately 30) was narrowed down to 15 participants, who represent some elements of the diversity that exists amongst queerly feminine subjects, thus allowing for meaningful comparisons to take place. In selecting a sample of participants, I looked for whether research participants fit in with the framework of the project and what combination of participants will produce a greater understanding of the intersectional complexities involved in this identity category. Drawing on Patton (2002) who suggests that researchers should seek out typical, deviant, diverse and unique cases, as well as maximum variation, using the questionnaire I therefore select participants who obviously fit into the category of queer femininity and participants who challenge dominant perceptions of queer femininity, to increase the diversity of perspectives encompassed by the project.

viii) Visual Methods

Participants were asked to take one or more photographs of themselves and make between one and three collages to represent their queer feminine identity, styles of dressing and perspectives on what constitutes this particular identity, before the interviews took place. This method is known as auto driven photo, or image, elicitation, which Samuel's (2007, p.198) defines as photos or images 'taken by the research subjects themselves.' In this method the researcher is removed from the image making process and participants are asked to create visual materials on certain topics, in a way that is either 'scripted' by the researcher or 'scriptless' and determined by the participant (Samuels, 2007, p.202). I applied this method as follows. I provided basic materials for making the collages through an information pack that included guidelines (Appendix 5) for creating these collages. Guidelines were suggestive, rather than instructional, with regards to how the materials *can* be used and what questions participants *may* wish to consider. The aim of this was to give participants a structure to work with, yet enough space to engage with the materials and the topic in a creative and "individual" manner. Therefore, I used a

method that may best be defined as a semi-scripted method of auto-driven image elicitation. In asking participants to take a picture of themselves, to represent their queer feminine identity, I prompted them to depict their styles of dressing, bodily and attitudinal expressions and anything else they deem important. In guiding participants into possible ways of creating the collages, I suggested that they may want to use pictures of famous people, people they know personally, words, symbols, textures, quotes from songs and books, colours, as well as pictures of objects, animals, clothes, styles, spaces or anything else they deem important. Furthermore, in creating the collages, participants were also guided into thinking about questions such as, what queer femininity is and is not, how they came to this identity and how they construct this identity on a daily basis, who they identify with, disidentify with and desire or not, as well as anything else they deem important. Thus, the question of “anything else” was intended to open out the structure that I am using, to actively involve participants in setting the interview agenda. This open structure furthermore aimed to facilitate participant agency and collaboration between myself and the participants, because although it keeps the central research questions in focus, it also gives participants space to discuss what is important to them. Throughout the process, I aimed to be flexible and work with what is presented to me by participants. These visual materials thus formed the focal point of the interviews.

The benefits of using visual materials have been thoroughly explored by visual sociologists, ethnographers and anthropologists, on whose work I base the following justification for my methodological approach. Ali writes that ‘we live in a society where visual images have proliferated and our ways of seeing and our experiences of and responses to visual spectacles are central to our understanding of who we are and where we belong’ (in Seale, 2004, p.266). According to Winchup (2004, p.77), the use of visual methods may thus ‘visualize’ the ‘intangible dimensions of human activity.’ Indeed, since Pink argues (in Mason, 2002, pp.105 & 107), that conversation ‘is filled with verbal references to images’ and words ‘cannot express all of the elements of the visual in which we are interested,’ it therefore makes sense to use visual methods to represent those visual aspects of identity and experience that might otherwise be referred to using abstract words. In fact, images can help to explicate and concretise thoughts, meanings and words. Thus, the use of visual methods closes the gap between the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified,’ (Barthes in Zoonen, 1994, pp.74-75) since it allows for subjective meanings to be

clarified through visualisation and for the visual image to take on specific meanings through the speech of participants.

Another good reason for using visual methods, according to Samuels (2007), is that the use of auto driven image elicitation in conjunction with image elicitation interviews, yields far richer data than word only interviews. Samuels (2007, p.201) argues that only a few prompts are needed to elicit 'very focused and detailed descriptions,' requiring little intervention from the researcher. This argument is supported by Byrne and Doyle (2004, p.175 & 177), who found that 'images seemed to enable words' in the context of their photo elicitation interviews, since images can aid participants in expressing 'complex understandings' concerning their perspectives and experiences. By minimising the influence of the researcher in the production of the visual images and interviewing process and focusing on the images and interpretations of participants, Samuels (2007, p.199) argues, that 'primacy' is given to participants, which 'provides a greater opportunity for research subjects to create their own sense of meaning and disclose it to the researcher.' According to Samuels (2007, p.204), auto driven image elicitation and interviews can challenge the researcher by 'breaking' their 'frames' of reference, in order to focus on what is important to the participant, including issues that may not have occurred to the researcher. It therefore 'grant[s] interviewees an increased voice and a greater authority to interpret their own personal experiences' (Samuels, 2007, p.213). Thus, as Stanczak (2007, p.13) argues, the use of images may create a space for the unexpected, as 'images open up internal worlds and interpretations of our participants regarding issues that we might not otherwise think to probe.' Similarly to Samuels (2007), Holliday (2007, pp.257 & 262) demonstrates how auto-driven approaches to the production of visual materials can facilitate participant agency, by engaging them in an 'empowering process' that is both 'active and reflexive' and gives participants 'greater editorial control' over their self representation. This therefore enables participants to become, what Holliday (1999, p.487) calls, 'writerly' rather than 'readerly' texts, since it allows participants to take control of how they represent themselves and are represented in the research. Additionally, the use of images can help to establish rapport and encourage the participant to feel comfortable about the interview process, since images can effectively 'relieve the strain of being questioned' (Collier in Samuels 2007, p.198). Furthermore, as Holliday (1999, 2004 & 2007) and Gauntlett (2007) note, auto elicitation

visual materials give participants *time* to reflect, which gives participants greater control over their self representation and enables participants to present more thorough, considered and complete answers to interview questions. Additionally, as Ali argues, the use of visual material can encourage ‘participants to become creatively involved in the research’ (in Seale, 2004, p.277). Furthermore, according to Stanczak (2007, p.15) the use of images in the interview process effectively ‘brings the “subject” into the research process as an interpreter or even an active collaborator rather than as a passive object of study.’ Thus, I propose that this my use of visual methods brings the project in line with the ethical and epistemological impulses of fem(me) science, which strives for collaborative knowledge production and the creation of a space for participant agency (Duggan and McHugh, 2002).

ix) Qualitative Interviews

Participants were asked to take part in one to two hour interviews about their queer feminine identity and perspectives, using the visual materials that they created as a focus point. Interviews were semi structured, in depth, one to one, focused yet informal discussions, using open ended questions and prompts. The interview schedule and questions were both ‘planned’ and ‘responsive’ (Bryne in Seale, 2004, pp.189 & 191). Interviews were ‘flexible and sensitive to the specific dynamics of each interaction’ and I tended to ‘tailor’ the interview schedule to each participant, by ‘take[ing] cues from the ongoing dialogue with [the] interviewees’ (Mason, 2002, p.65), as well as from the information provided on the initial questionnaires. Throughout the process, I continually reflected on, what Samuels (2007, p.197) describes as the key challenge of qualitative research, namely the problem of ‘arriving at questions and issues that are meaningful to the interviewees.’ As Samuels (2007, p.197) writes:

Initially, field research begins with a set of questions that a researcher finds interesting and for which he or she wishes to find answers. Even though the questions posed by the ethnographer might elicit responses from the interviewees, the ethnographer must remain *en garde* that the questions themselves are not too detached from the everyday world of those interviewed. Bridging the worlds of the subjects and the researcher requires the ethnographer to reflect continually on the validity and relevance of questions to a given context.

Therefore, although I was working with particular theoretical questions that I think are important, I remained flexible and open to any emerging issues that were of importance to participants and required further exploration. Interviews were composed of two different sections. The first section involved planned key questions to contextualise the queer feminine identity of the participant and their perspectives on queer femininity. Questions focused on issues like what queer femininity means to them, how is it different from other forms of femininity, how participants initially orientated themselves towards this identity, how they embody this identity in their everyday lives. Follow up questions, ‘floating’ prompts and ‘planned’ prompts will be used to elicit information on issues that arise spontaneously and guide participants to explore the central research questions of the research project (McCracken in Zoonen, 1994, p.137). (Appendix 6 contains a rough outline of the interview schedule).

The second part of the interview discussed the visual materials produced by participants, using the method of photo elicitation interviewing, which Suchar describes as ‘the use of photographs as interview probes’ (in Knowles & Sweetman, 2004, p.150). Since, as Burges aptly highlights, ‘photographs do not speak for themselves,’ rather ‘it is words which give meaning to images’ (in Knowles and Sweetman, 2004, p.150). Furthermore, since ‘images gain significance through the way that participants engage and interpret them’ (Stanczak, 2007, p.12), this part of the interview therefore used ‘open ended questions’ (Stanczak, 2007, p.11) and ‘prompts’ (Samuels, 2007, p.201), as advised by Stanczak (2007) and Samuels (2007), who argue that very little input from the researcher is necessary when it comes to photo elicitation interviews. Thus, participants engaged in a process of ‘decoding’ the very visual materials that they have produced and ‘encoded,’ (Hall in Zoonen, 1994, pp.7-8). Moreover, to use Collier’s metaphor, we used the images ‘as a “can opener” for deeper reflection and discussion within the interview process (in Stanczak, 2007, p.15). Typically interviews ended by drawing together key themes that have emerged to confirm what the participant has said, by asking participants if there is anything else they want to discuss, by reiterating the key question of what is queer femininity, so as to clarify this answer now that they have had time to reflect on this and by asking participants to reflect on the process of creating the visual materials, if they have not done so already. Typically, throughout the interview I also deployed methods of concept checking, by mirroring back to participants what I have understood from what

they said in my own words, asking further questions to go deeper and encourage participants to articulate explicitly anything that has been implied, as well as to check and asking for clarification if I feel I have not understood something, to ensure that we were always on the same page with regards to the discussion. Throughout the interview I followed up any strands of enquiry that emerged spontaneously during the discussion, which are of importance to participants and the research project. Therefore, emphasis was placed on finding a middle ground between following the impulses of participants and the specific agenda of the project.

During the interviews I encouraged a friendly and informal tone that was intended to establish rapport. Therefore, I displayed an open, enthusiastic, accepting and respectful attitude towards participants and their perspectives. I answered any questions participants had about the project and my own perspectives as fully as possible, to maintain rapport, whilst emphasising that I did not have any definitive answers and was primarily interested in their opinions, to ensure the focus remains on their perspectives (Oakley, 1981). I also paid attention to any body language or changes in tone of voice, where these may be significant for the analysis or for indicating whether participants feel comfortable enough to engage with the interview process, so that I could respond to this appropriately. Furthermore, following the advice of Potter and Wetherell (1987) who propose that it is sensible to conduct a few pilot interviews before engaging with the official sample, to test the methodology of the project, the interview schedule and make any necessary changes, I conducted one pilot interview before advertising for research participants and interviewing my sample of participants. The pilot interview revealed that the visual methods that this project deploys are a creative and engaging activity that participants can enjoy and use to explore their gender identity in depth. My pilot interview participant, Jess, voiced her appreciation of and interest in this method as an activity that she 'really enjoyed' and found 'fun.' This appreciation of the creativity of the deployment of visual methods and the fact that it gave participants time to prepare and think about their identity before the interview was positively articulated by many of my subsequent interview participants. Helpfully, the pilot interview also revealed a few challenges with deploying collages as visual methods in the context of qualitative interviews, which I strove to be attentive to whilst using this method throughout the rest of my interviews. Namely, the pilot interview revealed the practical challenge of keeping track of which images are

being discussed as participants may point towards certain images during the interview or refer to the image vaguely, which the oral based medium of using a dictaphone to record the interviews could not document clearly enough to act as a reliable memory aid. Having noticed this issue, wherever possible in subsequent interviews, when a participant referred to a picture, I strove to briefly describe the picture in order to create a record to prompt my memory of which pictures were being discussed at the time of the interview when listening to the recordings of the interview later on. Another challenge I faced as interviewer was balancing the necessity of allowing space for participants to talk freely about their identities through discussing their collages and prompting participants to *explicitly* link their discussions back to the topic of their queer feminine identities and to stay focused on the topic, as the collages and interviews could easily go off on various tangents. Therefore, although all collages and interviews were essentially about their queer feminine identities, sometimes I did have to use prompts during the discussion to ensure that the implicit links that were being made were rendered explicit. One final challenge that my pilot participant, Jess, noted, was that the guidelines I provided to help participants to create their collages were vague in what she consciously expressed was a simultaneously disorientating and intimidating, yet also potentially helpful and opening way. On this matter Jess said: 'I thought the guidelines were really vague, I think it was probably good, I think it was probably necessary for the project, because where I went with it isn't necessarily where somebody else would, so I think that's probably good, you're going to get more out of people by doing that, that's awesome.' Having been made aware of this challenge yet also being aware of the necessity and fruitfulness of a structured yet open approach to guiding participants through the creative process of making their own collages, I decided to keep the guidelines as they were, but I ensured that I provided further space for dialogue about the method and further support, guidance and encouragement via email to participants who were struggling with overcoming the initial challenge of figuring out their own - often highly personal and original - way of engaging with this method. All in all, whilst this method was very helpful and enjoyable in many ways, in allowing participants to reflect on, engage with and communicate their identities in a creative manner both prior and during the interview, this method also turned out to be incredibly labour intensive prior, during and after the interview, for both my participants and for myself, as researcher and interviewer. Nevertheless, I feel strongly that the visual data produced and the powerful immediacy with which it documents and communicates the identities of my participants, and the potential this has

for engaging future audiences and readers of this work, is worth the collective labour and effort that myself and my participants invested in this method.

x) Discourse Analysis

As part of the analytical process, I transcribed the interviews before coding the discursive and visual data to break an ‘unwieldy body’ of data ‘into manageable chunks’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.167). Like Potter and Wetherell (1987), I understand coding to constitute the first stage of discourse analysis, where the researcher, through careful reading and rereading, searches for patterns in the data. In coding the visual and discursive data, I looked for words, phrases, images, discourses and themes, within which I searched for shared patterns, as well as differences and exceptions to these patterns (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.378). The coding process was an ongoing and cyclical one, because as the analysis progressed more patterns or themes emerged that needed further coding and analysis. Therefore, whilst certain thematic patterns were evident from the beginning from the theoretical material that I have read, which informed the initial central research questions of this project, other patterns only emerged once I began to work with the materials and read more theoretical work, especially work on critical ‘race’, ethnicity and whiteness studies, through a process of repetitive close reading of the visual and discursive data.

Initially, I used an ‘open coding’ system which involved the ‘naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data’ (Seale, 2004, p.243). For example, using open coding I coded the data for patterns of identification and disidentification, processes of orientation that involve positionalities or affects, alongside other themes that emerged from the visual and textual data through discursive analysis. As more complex patterns began to emerge, I used an ‘axial coding’ system that ‘involves intensive work within a single category, examining how it connects with other categories and seeking to explore its conditions, contexts, action, interactional strategies and consequences’ (Seale, 2004, p.244). Additionally, I looked for ‘negative instances,’ which contradict the patterns and categories that are being constructed, throughout the process, so that these could add further nuances to the analysis (Seale, 2004, p.232). I strove to be

reflexive when coding the material, by questioning what assumptions underlie the categories that I used (Seale, 2004, p.244).

Practically speaking. With regards to the published texts, I colour coded the original texts and added notes in the margins or straight into a word document of any analytical thoughts as these arose. Concerning the interviews, I used the tagging system in Microsoft OneNote to mark passages of the transcripts and added analytical thoughts in the margins using hypertext notes. Finally, for the visual materials, I used an indexing system, to group together images and visual repertoires that are similar or repeated and those which are different or exceptional to these groupings. I coded the visual materials always in context of how participants had discussed these.

In order to interpret the textual and visual materials, I used discourse analysis because it is 'concerned with the production of meaning through talk and texts' and 'involves a perspective on language' (or, indeed, a perspective on signs, be they linguistic or visual) 'that sees this not as *reflecting* reality in a transparent or straightforward way, but as *constructing* and organizing the terms in which we understand that social reality' (Tonkiss in Seale, 2004, p.373). Thus, discourse analysis, according to Tonkiss, is 'interested in language and texts as sites in which social meanings are formed and reproduced, social identities are shaped, and social facts are secured' (in Seale, 2004, p.373). It is 'concerned with the examination of meaning, and the often complex processes through which social meanings are produced' (Tonkiss in Seale, 2004, p.380). In so doing, discourse analysis works with the notion of 'language as action' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.28). Indeed, so too we might understand visual signs, like linguistic signs, to be a type of discursive action that produce contextually mediated social meaning. Therefore, discourse analysis draws on Austin's theory of speech acts, which states that '*all* utterances state things *and* do things' and that all utterances thus have a 'meaning' a 'force' and an 'effect' (in Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.17). Discourse analysis is therefore not only concerned with analysing what language means, but it also tries to establish what language does, its effects and how it produces these. I believe discourse analysis to be most appropriate for working with texts on and by queer femmes. Firstly, because of this acknowledgement that language has both a meaning and a force that is

striving for an effect. Secondly, because discourse analysis acknowledges that subjects draw on discursive fields and repertoires, in understanding, communicating and constructing their identities. Thus, subjects can only come into being in and through discourse (Foucault, 1972). In relation to the visual data that my participants produced, I see these visual signs as working similar to the linguistic signs, as visual expressions which manifest a force and effect, simultaneously communicating and constructing the objects that they represent and actively bring into being.

My analysis drew on the social psychology approach developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987: pp.37, 95 & 106), because it takes ‘the individual as its main unit of analysis,’ is concerned with how people represent and construct their identities through language and acknowledges that this process is inherently social and interactional. I also draw on Potter and Wetherell (1987, pp.164 & 168) for my understanding of discourses analysis as a process involving ‘careful reading and rereading,’ which focuses on ‘identifying regular patterns in language use’ and ‘recurrent or significant themes’ (Tonkiss in Seale, 2004, p.378). Potter and Wetherell (1987, p.168) argue that discourse analysis involves two main, separate yet overlapping, phases of analysis:

First, there is the search for pattern in the data. This pattern will be in the form of both variability: *differences* in either the content or form of accounts, and consistency: the identification of features *shared* by accounts. Second, there is the concern with function and consequence. The basic theoretical thrust of discourse analysis is the argument that people’s talk fulfils many functions and has varying effects. The second phase of analysis consists of forming hypotheses about these functions and effects and searching for the linguistic evidence.

Drawing on the social psychology approach to discourse analysis developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987, p.32), I thus read the texts *and the visual materials* (since I believe this method of discourse analysis can be applied to both visual and linguistic elements) for their ‘function, construction and variation.’ I understand ‘function’ to mean the ‘purpose,’ force and effect of words and images, ‘construction’ to mean the process of ‘active selection,’ inclusion and exclusion which forms the meaning of a text or image, and ‘variation’ to mean differences within and between texts and images (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, pp.33-34). Parker’s (1999, pp.6-7) equivalent terms are ‘contradiction,

construction and practice.’ Since the process of constructing meanings, as Potter and Wetherell argue (1987), involves processes of inclusion and *exclusion*, I will also pay attention to the ‘silences’ of the text, by reading ‘*along* with the meanings that are being created’ and ‘*against* the grain of the text, to look to silences or gaps to make conjectures about alternative accounts which are excluded by omission, as well as those which are countered by rhetoric’ (Tonkiss in Seale, 2004, p.379).

One way in which I paid attention to the discursive silences and the oblique articulations present in my data, alongside the explicit articulations, was by listening to, reading, analysing and writing about the affect of queer feminine disidentificatory anger in Chapter 6. In researching for, analysing the relevant data and writing this chapter I considered the methodological question of how do we read or recognise anger present in our written or spoken data when this is not necessarily always explicitly articulated? For this, I drew on Shirley Anne Tate’s (2009, 82) *Black Beauty: Aesthetics, Stylization, Politics*, where she explores how we can recognise shame present in our data, here specifically in relation to black beauty shame and its powerful transformative potential, by developing a methodology for recognising shame when shame is not spoken, through ‘paralinguistic cues and talk on (com)plaints,’ which are translated to readers via conversation analytic transcripts. As Tate writes (2009, 80) ‘Shame makes us uneasy so we rarely admit to it. The point is that positions of shame are always there for us to occupy and shame is present when we speak even when we do not use the words “shame” or “ashamed.”’ Tate (2009, 81) investigates ‘how shame can be spoken without mentioning the word shame.’ So to, I asked, how can we recognise anger, when anger is *imminently* inhabited, performed and spoken, yet rarely explicitly or objectively named as though one is assessing ones emotions from a distance. What are the linguistic and paralinguistic cues of anger? For instance, in reading or listening to anger, one might recognise the presence of anger through repetitions, particularly the use of tipling or other forms of emphasis like italics, loudness or emphasis placed on certain words through tone, the precise choice of words or the mirroring back of what one is angry about through retelling the story. Thus, wherever possible and necessary throughout this chapter I highlighted the linguistic and paralinguistic cues that I used to recognise anger in the specific cases where anger crops up.

Turning back to the more general discussion concerning the use of discourse analysis in this project. I engaged with Mason's (2002, p.78) three levels of reading, 'literal, interpretive and reflexive.' I understand literal reading to mean what is actually being said and the meanings that are being produced, interpretive reading to mean how what is being said may be interpreted through the lens of theory beyond the literal meaning, and reflexive reading to mean this act of critical reflection on the position of the reader in analysing the text. Furthermore, I used a comparative approach that looks for 'differences' and 'similarities,' 'consistency and variation,' 'patterns' and 'exceptions' (Mason, 2002, pp.66, 169-170). Therefore, I looked for prototypical discourses and the 'outliers,' 'extreme cases' and 'negative instance,' to see what further light these shed on queer feminine identities (Zoonen, 1994, p.145). Throughout, I focused on the *subjugated knowledges* (Foucault 1972, Speak 1988, Collins 1991) present in the accounts on queer femininities, particularly with regards to dynamics of inclusion and exclusions, centrality and marginality, disidentifications and critiques of and *within* queer femininities.

When it comes to the analysis of the visual materials produced by my research participants and those published in literature on queer femininity, I took the same approach of discourse analysis, applying these principles to the images, which function as 'texts' that I 'read' for their meaning (Ali in Seale, 2004, p.266). In adapting my discursive analytical approach, the following was taken into consideration, when working specifically with the visual materials. To position myself theoretically, I take a postmodernist and constructivist, rather than a modernist and naturalist, approach to working with images. Therefore, I see images as constructing, rather than representing, the subject depicted. I ground my analysis in Becker's philosophy that 'pictures represent a small and highly select sample of the real world about which they are supposed to be conveying some truth' (in Goldstein, 2007, p.63). Furthermore, I take my theoretical departure from Goldstein (2007, pp.75 & 64), who posits that 'Every photograph' is 'manipulated' and 'can never represent reality.' Indeed, according to Goldstein (2007, p.65), 'All photos lie.' Thus, I understand images to be constructing certain "truths." I draw on Bresson's theory of the 'decided moment,' which he defines as 'that single point in time,' which is consciously chosen and 'captures some truth, essence, *jene sais quai* about the subject' depicted (in Goldstein, 2007, p.71). Therefore, like Holliday (2007, p.267), I understand the visual materials that this project works with as constituting a self

conscious ‘performance’ of identity, engendering processes of ‘self storying.’ Furthermore, I understand that these visual materials involve a certain amount of, what Back (2004, p.138) calls, ‘impression management.’ Yet certainly no more or less so than representations of the self that are produced through language. Nevertheless, I agree with Back (2004, pp.135 & 138) that images ‘contain voices that are present yet inaudible’ and that we must ‘listen to them with our eyes’ by adopting a position of ‘respectful listening.’ I take this concept of respectful listening to mean the process of going along *with* the narratives that subjects create about themselves as subjective truth statements. Thereby, respectful yet critical listening, I argue, involves tending to this double bind, of respecting the performances of the self that the subject is constructing, whilst remaining aware that there is always a simultaneous process of self narrativisation and image manipulation occurring, in a sensitive manner.

I approached the visual analysis by interpreting, what Goldstein (2007, p.75) terms, the ‘content,’ the meaning constructed through the image, the ‘intent,’ the force of the image, and the ‘context.’ I paid attention to how participants framed images through language, to direct our analytical gaze and understanding through their words and interpretations. In performing the visual analysis, I recognised that images, like language, are ‘inherently polysemic,’ containing ‘complex layered meanings,’ lending themselves to ‘multiple interpretations’ (Knowles and Sweetman, 2004, pp.12, 18 & 20). Furthermore, I acknowledge that pictures, like texts, ‘trigger different insights depending on the different questions that we ask of them’ (Stanczak, 2007, p.9). Therefore, I read the images in context of the talk produced by participants about their photos and collages. Rather than analysing the images on their own, I looked at how they are constructed and given meaning by the speech of participants and how they themselves interpret these images. However, in doing so, I realise that since the images are polysemic, they are thus also open to other interpretations, both by myself and by future readers.

I read the images and the texts on two different levels, always keeping in focus the central research questions and theoretical framework concerning intersecting positionalities and queer feminine disidentificatory orientations. Firstly, I read deeply into the components of individual images or texts. Secondly, I read comparatively across texts

and images, making connections between them. I paid attention to repetitions, similarities and differences, as well as visual and discursive repertoires. In the case of the collages, I tended to ‘the content of the visual material’ and ‘the way that it is laid out, how images relate to each other or speak to each other’ (Mason, 2002, p.115). Images, were, however, always read in context of the talk produced by participants during the interviews and how they interpreted and gave meaning to these images.

With regards to selecting which examples to use and the weighting of interview and textual examples in each chapter, I strove not to limit myself through an arbitrary compulsion of having an “equal” weighting of interview and textual examples in every chapter; instead I took a *substantive* approach in which the examples that I chose for each chapter were simultaneously informed by the chapter focus and were able to inform, illustrate or expand the argument and discussion of the respective chapter in some significant way. This has resulted in some chapters being more heavily informed by interview data, whilst other chapters drew more on textual examples. I am confident that this balance works well as it ensures that the development of chapters were informed by suitable examples intended to *substantively* inform, illustrate or expand the discussion at hand.

xi) Ethics

The project gained approval from the Leeds University Ethics Committee on the 21st of March 2011. The main ethical issue that this project faced is the issue of anonymity. Since I asked participants to include a photograph of themselves to represent their queer feminine identities, I could not ensure the full anonymity of my participants. Therefore, participants were given the choice to be *either* fully anonymised, by excluding their name and picture, *or* to be rendered identifiable, by including their name and picture in the research. This was established through an official consent form. However, some participants did choose to be anonymised by name but not by picture, which I believe is appropriate and agreed to because that was their expressed wish. Leeds University Ethics Committee noted that I should only use first names when identifying research participant, which I have done. Furthermore, the Ethics Committee questioned whether the use of

visual materials in publications resulting from the research could break consent. However, if participants have been fully informed of how their images will be used and full informed consent has been granted by participants for the use of their images, then this ought not to pose a significant problem. Additionally, it was made clear in the guidelines to participants and the consent form that it is the responsibility of the participant to gain verbal consent for the use of any picture that is not already in the public domain, which depict persons from their everyday life who have inspired or informed their own identity in some way, before they include this picture on their collage. No image that is not already in the public domain will be published prior to consent being established from the persons depicted in the image. Where consent could not be established for an image the picture was excluded from visual representation in the research project and all future publications. Where an image is crucial for analysis, select information was reproduced using 'thick description' (Geertz in Seale 2004, p.237) in a way that does not compromise the anonymity of the subject.

The reasoning behind letting participants choose to be identifiable is that members of this subculture may experience this as empowering. Since queer femininity is often invisible as an alternative gender identity, participants may be invested in making themselves visible as queer feminine subjects to affirm this identity. Furthermore, the opportunity for participants to be rendered identifiable in the research, according to Dahl (2010), potentially deconstructs the hierarchy between researcher and participant, since it acknowledges participants as theorists in their own right and can help to contribute to the community building impulse of fem(me) science. It also commits the researcher to providing an accurate and fair representation of participants, since they will be accountable for their interpretations. Again, this empowers participants by ensuring that the researcher is responsibly working for the subjects that they are interested in and benefiting from. Therefore, it partially rectifies the power imbalance between researcher and participant.

This issue of the power that the researcher has over the interpretation of their participants and the research agenda is particularly acute when working with queerly feminine subjects because they have often been misrecognised, misinterpreted and

misrepresented. Therefore, I strive to work in line with the ethics of fem(me) science, to foster a ‘loving, grateful collaboration’ between myself, as a femme researcher, and my queer feminine participants (Duggan and McHugh, 2002, p.169). I interpret “loving, grateful collaboration” to be the act of working *with* how participants theorise their identities, as well as the interpersonal affective work that I performed before, during and after interviews, to ensure the comfort of my participants. This was achieved through the implementation of a flexible methodological framework that is open and responsive to the influences of participants in its focus and structure. I encouraged an ongoing dialogue about queer femininity between myself and my participants. I strove to be respectful of my participants and their perspectives by presenting these in a way that is in line with how they see themselves. However, I recognise that even a femme centred approach, involving loving, grateful collaboration, does not exclude contradictions and alternative views, since these are part of the diversity of femme culture. Whilst performing a discursive analysis there is, of course, also a need for criticality with regards to both the texts and the interview data. In cases of contradictory interpretations and analytical disagreements, I therefore tried to place my interpretations alongside the voice of my participants, rather than completely overriding these in an authoritative manner. In so doing, I strove to create a polyvocal text that represents ongoing contradictions and nuances, by ‘incorporating “multivocality” through “montage” texts that aim to represent a range of perspectives simultaneously without privileging the academic social scientific researcher’s version’ (Mason, 2002, p.185).

Informed consent for taking part in the project was sought in writing before the interviews were conducted, to establish whether they were happy for their information to be used in publications and presentations resulting from the research. Costs of materials and travel were covered by the researcher where appropriate. Interviews took place in a quiet public place, in the city where participants live, or the closest city to their place of domicile, so as to reduce the burden of travel and ensure the safety and comfort of participants. Participation was on an entirely voluntary basis. Participants were not forced to take part or provide any information they did not wish to. Participants were fully informed of what is expected of them prior to their giving consent to take part in the project. Participants were permitted withdraw from the project at any time, till they have signed the final consent form. Data was stored in a locked filing cabinet and participant’s

contact details were kept strictly confidential to ensure data protection. The burden of participants giving their valuable time was hopefully balanced by the benefits they gained through being offered a space to explore their queer femininity. This is especially important for many queer feminine subjects, who, as a diverse subcultural group, have suffered a history of misrepresentation and misinterpretation by feminist discourses, as well as invisibility and misrecognition within queer subcultures and heteronormative society. Indeed, many participants communicated that the experience of having space to explore and articulate their queer feminine gender and sexual identity through visual methods and conversation was positive, creative and in some cases even cathartic or therapeutic.

xii) **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the theoretical rationale behind and everyday practicalities of implementing (queer) fem(me)inist ethnographic research methods for exploring queer fem(me)inine disidentificatory orientations, identities and community (un)belonging. In so doing, this chapter has argued for the significance of employing intersectionality as an epistemological starting point, framework and methodological tool, whilst also discussing issues pertaining to researcher reflexivity and the various ethical considerations involved in researching in a collaborative fashion *with* queer fem(me)inine identified research participants, who inhabit diverse, complex and multiply intersecting positionalities that influence their everyday identity and community orientations. It has also discussed the theoretical rationale behind and practicalities of deploying an innovative combination of visual methods, published femme anthologies, questionnaires and interviews as sources of data, as well as the methods of discourse analysis that this project deployed for decoding these sources and presenting its findings on queer fem(me)inine disidentificatory orientations and community (un)belonging. One important question that was not within the scope of this chapter is, of course, the question of: Who are the queer fem(me)inine subjects that this project is collaboratively researching with and how are queer fem(me)inities defined in this project and, above all, by my participants, as well as the femme editors and contributors of the published femme texts circulating within “our” queer fem(me)inine communities. Therefore, the following chapter elaborates on this question, by discussing the history of the terms femme and queer fem(me)inities that

this project draws on, how the terms queer femininities is defined and deployed within this project, and these key terms are defined and discussed by my research participants and the femme textual voices that this project is strongly informed and inspired by.

Chapter 3: Theorising Queer Femininities: Falling Under and Out of the Sign of Femme

‘If you were to ask a hundred different femmes to define the word “femme,” you would probably get a hundred different answers.’ (Serano, 2013, p.48)

i) Introduction

This chapter focuses on exploring the meanings associated with femme and queer femininities. To understand the complex, nuanced meanings of queer femininities, we first need to understand the historical roots and emergence of femme. Therefore, this chapter begins by exploring the history of femme and queer femininities. The chapter then moves on to a discussion of the meanings and limitations of the terms femme and queer femininities by drawing on femme theory - particularly Rachel Hurst’s (2009) essay ‘But I Can Be A Femme In Track Pants, You Know?’ - the three femme texts - *Brazen Femme* (2002), *Femmes of Power* (2008) and *Visible: A Femmethology* (2009) - and the perspectives of my queer feminine participants. The themes of how queer femininities are defined by my participants and the femme texts, which guide the structure for this chapter, are: 1) queer femininities as ambiguous and resisting definition 2) as a sexual identity that is historically rooted in butch and femme eroticism yet also exceeds this restrictive binary 3) as a gender identity 4) as a subversive style of embodied subjectivity 5) as involving performative Butlerian “failures” 6) as a mode of “doing” or “being” feminine; an identity or gendered performance 7) as a politicised feminist form femininity 8) as involving distinctions between queer femme-ininities and (“normative”) femininity 9) as a collective and personal identity that is (seemingly) open to endless possibilities 10) as an umbrella term intended to be inclusive of differences yet is limited in certain ways. Significantly, the meanings – and, especially, the *limitations* - of femme and queer femininities explored in this chapter, serve to ground the analysis of subsequent chapters. By beginning to point towards “what” and “who” fall under and out of the signs of queer femininities, this chapter lays the foundations for conceptualising *disidentificatory orientations* towards queer, femme and queer femininities.

ii) History of Femme and Queer Femininities

Before delving into a review of femme and queer feminine literature and discussing the significance of this project in light of the already existing literature, let us first reflect on the history of femme and queer feminine identities and communities. The term “femme” originates from USA based working-class lesbian bar cultures from the 1940’s, 50’s and 60’s and is historically most commonly used to denote a feminine lesbian cisgendered woman who typically couples with butches and sometimes with other femmes (Lapovsky Kennedy and Davis 1992, Faderman 1991, Nestle 1988 and 1992, Hollibaugh and Moraga 1983, Munt 1998, Newman 1995, Harris and Crocker 1997, Dahl 2010). To understand the figure of the femme and the queerly feminine, we, thus, need to understand how this identity relates to and emerges out of the history of butch and femme identities. According to Faderman (1991) butch and femme identities existed as early as the 1890s and 1920s in the sexual subcultures of America. Faderman links the emergence of these identities to the sexological discourses, produced by the likes of Havelock Ellis, on the masculine lesbian “invert” who exclusively courts feminine women. Faderman (1991) reports that by the 1940s, butch and femme identities were already extremely segregated. By the 1950s and 60s a strong butch and femme subculture existed as part of an American working-class lesbian bar culture, where it was compulsory to choose to identify as *either* butch *or* femme, to belong to these lesbian subcultures. There was also a strict code surrounding the sexual coupling of butches *and* femmes. Those who did not identify along these strictly segregated lines were often regarded with ambivalence and rejected. According to Faderman (1991), butch and femme identities were largely essentialised, since they were said to express an ontological erotic identity or core gender identity. Furthermore, as Lapovsky Kennedy (1997, p.22) highlights, American butch and femme subcultures were strongly working-class identities in this period, since they acted as an ‘organizing principle for working-class community life’ within lesbian circles. It is also noteworthy that the butch, rather than the femme, became the signifier of lesbian identity. A factor which still influences how butches and femmes are seen today. The 1970s, according to Faderman (1992), saw the rejection of butch and femme identities by lesbian feminists who claimed that these were nothing more than an imitation of heterosexuality. Thus, they were regarded as inherently oppressive and ‘politically incorrect’ identities (Faderman, 1992, p.580). According to Case (1993, p.296), Daughters of Bilitis cast butches as ‘savages’ and femmes as ‘lost heterosexuals,’ who

could be cured by adopting a politically correct androgynous behaviour. In the 1970s butch and femme identities were thus rendered taboo and rejected in favour of a politically correct androgynous gendered style. As far as aesthetics go, according to Ainley (1995, p.150), in the 1970s 'Dress was not supposed to reflect much more than your politics. There was a very narrow range of alternatives.' Whilst this taboo was oppressive to both butches and femmes, femmes arguably bore the brunt since these were further away from the 1970s lesbian feminist androgynous ideal. According to Faderman (1992, p.581), this ideal 'meant that everyone within the radical community looked like what had previously been called butch.' Faderman (1991, p.175) furthermore identifies that there was a class war at play in this rejection of predominantly working-class butch and femme lesbians and middle-class lesbians, since the latter wanted integration, whereas the former did not blend in, in classed, gendered or sexual terms, which led middle-class lesbians to regard them as 'aesthetically repulsive.' Nestle (1988, p.108) supports this view by arguing that butch and femme identities were seen as embarrassing by middle-class lesbian feminists precisely because they 'made Lesbians visible in a terrifyingly clear way,' since 'their appearance spoke of erotic independence,' therefore 'they often provoked rage and censure both from their own community and straight society.'

This radical feminist rejection of butch and femme identities was strongly critiqued by proponents of these subcultural identities. Most notably, Butler (1990), Case (1993) Vance (1992) and Nestle (1988) all argued that the radical feminist idea that butches and femmes are merely imitating heterosexual relations is reductive and homophobic. Indeed, Butler (1990) argues that this is an erroneous claim, since it implies that heterosexuality is "original" and "real," whereas homosexuality is merely "fake" and "derived." Whereas in reality, according to Butler (1991), there is no "original" heterosexual gender identity that butch and femme imitate, since heterosexuality itself is already an imitative, performative, copy without an original. Therefore, these critics reclaim butch and femme as subversive parodic (Butler, 1990) and camp (Case, 1993) performances of gender, that appropriate heteronormative symbols, so as to subvert these from within (Vance, 1992). Furthermore, Nestle (1988, pp.16, 100 & 103) argues that butch and femme identities present 'a defiant statement to dominant culture about female power, visibility and resistance' and reclaims these as 'complex erotic statements,' that have nothing to do with role playing, rather they are authentic expressions of a core

gender and sexual identity. Of course, from a Butlerian perspective, in which sex, gender and sexuality is performatively constituted and discursively constructed, there is no such a thing as an inner core of gender or sexuality that can be straightforwardly expressed. Out of this critique, according to Faderman (1992), came a resurgence of butch and femme identities in the 1980s, as a rebellion against the compulsory politically androgynous style advocated by lesbian feminists in the 1970s. They rejected the principle of homogeneity, which had previously restricted their erotic and gendered expressions, in favour of a proliferation of differences, as well as a sense of playfulness and flexibility in their butch and femme identity. According to Faderman (1992, p.589), these “neo” butch and femme subjects regarded themselves as ‘taboo smashers’ who embodied a ‘protest against the doctrinaire conformity and sexual monotony of radical feminism.’ The 1980s thus marked a change in the way that butches and femmes conceptualised and performed their identities. Faderman (1992, pp.591 & 594) writes that whilst some lesbians advocated the roles of butch and femme with the same seriousness that characterised the 1950s, predominantly lesbians adopted a more fluid style of butch and femme in the 1980s, which allowed for a playfulness and flexibility of identity. In terms of femme identity, the playing with popular feminine stereotypes and a ‘bad ass’ femme identity became particularly in vogue. In reaction to the homogeneity of 1970s radical feminism, butch and femme identities thus became increasingly diverse and complex in the 1980s. The 1980s also saw a move away from conceptualising butch and femme identities as ontological gender identities and towards viewing these as a consciously constructed performance of a flexible and provisional gender identity.

The new flexibility of butch and femme identities was facilitated by several changes in feminist and queer thought and politics. Faderman (1992) argues that this flexibility was the result of butch and femme subjects rejecting the principle of homogeneity that lesbian feminist politics and identity was based on, since they did not want to enforce the same sort of restrictions on each other. Furthermore, Judith Roof (1998) argues that the main change that permitted the resurgence of butch and femme identities was an increasing awareness of the differences between women and the fact that women also oppress each other, catalysed by black feminist thought, through which radical feminism became revealed as a homogenous and oppressive discourse. ‘In an acknowledgement of the possibility of difference,’ writes Roof (1998, p.33), other ‘repressed differences,’ such as those of butch and femme identities, were also able to

resurface. Additionally, Smyth (1998, p.83) claims that the 'elasticity' of butch and femme in the 1980s and 1990s, was influenced by transgender subcultures and politics, the emergence of queer theory and the refusal of the binary gender system. Finally, I would add that the flexible style that butch and femme identities adopted, was also facilitated by the 1980s sex wars and existing BDSM subcultures, since these too challenged the homogeneity of radical feminist politics and provided a space in which the playfulness of identity was explored.

From the 1990s onwards a further proliferation of butch and femme identities occurs and a specific emphasis on rendering femme identity visible as a queer and lesbian identity. With the publication of Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble*, we find a strong emphasis on gender as a performance open to parody in writings by butch and particularly femme subjects. Femme identities in particular subscribed to this style of thinking through and embodying their identities. Furthermore, with the rise of trans* politics and queer theory, we see an uncoupling of femme, not only from butch, but also from the female body and lesbian sexuality, as femmes begin to explore the nuances of how their identity intersects with trans*, male and bi identities. We also see a move away from butch and femme signifying only a female born lesbian identity. With the continuing emphasis on the intersectional differences of identities, we see a further proliferation of butch and particularly femme identity, not only along lines of class and 'race,' but also along lines of differences in sex, gender, sexuality, age, size and ability.

Furthermore, from the 1990s onwards the assertion of femme as an independent gender identity, that is separate from butch, becomes increasingly strong as femmes begin to explore the specificity of their identity in an explosion of writing on femme, which focused largely on exploring the diversity of femme identities, making femmes visible as a lesbian and claiming is as a subversive queer performance of identity. Indeed, femme identity becomes increasingly associated with a subversive performance of gender in the 1990s and 2000s. Conclusively, queer femininities arguably emerge out of the intersection between the neo-butch and femme identities that emerge in the 1980s, the emergence of queer and postmodern theories of gender and identity, as this meets with trans* politics and a growing interest in differences within and between identity categories that comes from black feminist thought, the sex wars and a sensitivity to

classed differences, as well as the third wave reclamation of an empowered femininity and bad arsed riot girl styles of the 1990s.

Throughout, this project draws on a definition of queer femininities as an *umbrella term* which signifies those subjects who self identify with queer femininities, in whichever way they choose to map out this identity and their affinity to queer femininities. Therefore, whilst the history of queer femininities is rooted in the historically lesbian cisgendered femme, furthermore whilst the current circulation of queer femininities as a term of identification does have various situated limitations, which this thesis aims to discuss at length, it is hoped that the future of this term nevertheless remains open to continual revision and reinvention. Indeed, it is precisely through the complex stories and identifications that each and every queer feminine self identified or affiliated subject brings to the theoretical familial table that this continual process of revision, reinvention and the very fleshing out of what experiential possibilities fall under this umbrella term, happens. Furthermore, with regards to definitions, this thesis deploys the term femme in a more bounded manner, given the historical root of the term femme in lesbian, cisgendered female, working-class American contexts, although this root has been problematised and broadened out and the term femme may now include many more subjectivities and may, indeed, function, as it does in many of the contemporary texts on femme under discussion, as an umbrella term like the term queer femininities. However, for the sake of clarity, this project deploys the term femme only to describe those subjects and communities who chose to adopt this term to describe their specific queer feminine identities or affinities. The terms alternative, subversive and “normative” femininities are also used throughout this thesis. Alternative and subversive, much like femme or queer femininities, are used as a) terms of self identification by research participants who define the specific meanings of this term for themselves b) as *strategic* synonyms for queer femininities or femme, as these proved potentially more accessible to certain situated subjects who simultaneously fall inside and outside of the signifiers, communities and identities of femme or queer femininities. However, this is certainly not to say that queer femininities or femme are by default in this project regarded as being synonymous with being subversive or alternative femininities. Since this project sets out to problematise clear distinctions between what is queer, alternative, subversive or “normative.” This brings us to the last term under discussion, namely the term “normative” femininities. Wherever used, “normative”

femininities will be presented in scare-quotes, to highlight critical distance, because whilst the term is deployed in this project to invoke and denote certain situated cultural norms surrounding femininities, the project nevertheless wishes to problematise what is seen as “normative,” “subversive” or, indeed, as femininity played “queer” or “straight,” therefore, the project understands “norms” to be shifting and relational.

iii) Defining Queer Fem(me)inities

Ulrika Dahl (2010, p.146) presents us with a helpful summary of the historical roots and some of the meanings of femme and queer femininities:

In brief, the term femme (or fem) stems from pre Stonewall, Anglo American primarily working-class subcultural contexts and has historically been used in reference to a feminine lesbian most often coupled with a masculine lesbian, the butch (Nestle 1992, Kennedy and Davis 1993, among others). Today’s meaning and use of femme often exceeds that of earlier eras, insofar as self identified femmes are no longer (only) erotically tied to butches (although many are) and they do not always identify as lesbians or ever as women (Volcano and Dahl 2008, Burke 2009). Some femmes, though not all, argue that it reflects a femininity ‘taken back from being the object of the masculine gaze,’ that ‘transgresses expectations of women, but also expectations of femininity (Livingston in Burke 2009, 25). Many state that they intentionally seek to queer femininity. To most femmes I have interviewed, a feminine aesthetic – that is clothing garments, accessories, make up and so on, is central to a femme expression.

Within this extract Dahl highlights various typical ways that femme has been defined and explored, for example, 1) Femme as a historically lesbian femininity emerging from a working-class American context and is historically coupled with butch lesbian masculinities, 2) Femme as a contemporary queer femininity whose meanings have proliferated beyond lesbian contexts and the butch and femme couple. 3) Femme as a transgressive femininity, which is reclaimed from the masculine gaze and patriarchal socialisation. 4) Femme as a feminine aesthetic and material way of embodying, experiencing and expressing femininity. This extract by Dahl thus traces some of the developments in theorising, experiencing and defining femme and queer femininities. The following sections will discuss how queer femininities are defined and experienced by my participants and the texts, to

illustrate further specific meanings, as well as some of the contradictions and complexities, associated with queer femininities.

iv) **Ambiguous and Resisting Definition**

Like with the term queer, there is a certain ambiguity around and resistance towards defining femme and queer femininities. As Dahl (2008, p.23) notes 'there is no universal recipe for making femme or queering femininity.' Equally, the editors of *Brazen Femme*, Camileri and Brushwood Rose (2002, p.12), refuse 'to locate femme in one place.' Instead, Camileri and Brushwood Rose (2002, pp.11-14) 'reject singular interpretations of femme,' by offering 'multiple exposures' that are both 'contradictory and in chorus,' rather than offering a definition of femme 'in one tidy package,' which they deem to be neither desirable, nor possible. They describe femme as 'volatile matter,' as femmes 'dance between locations with ease,' claiming that 'Our terms are slippery and our designs complex,' 'What cannot be seen, what cannot be held or pinned down, is where femme is – she cannot be domesticated.' Similarly, Burke, editor of *Femmethology* (2009, p.11) offers no 'concise or straightforward answer' to the meaning of femme and queer femininity, because a 'definition of femme can't be painted with black and white lines.' Thus, Burke (2009, p.11) claims that, if anything, femme and queer femininities embody an unwillingness to 'compromise on complexity,' or 'occupy a circumscribed space,' since these identities are neither linear, nor 'a definite location' on a gendered or sexual 'map.' Like Dahl (2008), Brushwood Rose and Camileri (2002), Burke (2009, p.12) acknowledges the highly individualised nature of femme and queer femininities, articulating the common acknowledgement that 'my femme is not your femme' and, therefore, an all encompassing definition of femme and queer femininities is not desirable as this would enforce an idea of identity on subjects from the outside. Femme and queer femininities are thus strongly self defined and highly individualised identities, which resist the prescriptive nature of most typical identity categories, emphasising instead that any definition of femme and queer femininities needs to be open and inclusive of various differences. Therefore, there is an acknowledgment that meanings change and are adapted over time as various individuals use these and mould them to suit their own specific positionalities and identities. Whilst there is thus a common consensus that definitions of femme and queer femininity are complex and there is no desire for 'hard' and 'fast

criteria,' a prescriptive 'checklist,' or an exclusionary 'box' for defining femme and queer femininities (Alex Holding in Dahl and Volcano, 2008, p.47), and that it is important to keep the borders of this identity and community open and inclusive (Dahl, 2008, p.182), there are still certain 'common identifying principles,' (e.g. certain attitudes, styles of dressing, conceptualising or embodying queer femininities for example red lipstick, strong, flamboyant) as well as individual 'variety,' that constitute queer femininities (Miss File in Dahl and Volcano, 2008, p.43). What is interesting about the phrase "common identifying principles" is that it hints towards certain norms already being in operation and are actively being constructed through the performative reiterative practices present in queer feminine communities, representations and identities. After all, some performative practices which become visibly femme and thus "identifying principles" must circulate more dominantly than other individual "varieties" for these to become "common" and through becoming "common identifying principles" they become part of a norm actively being constructed by and circulating *within* queer feminine communities. For example, my participant Vikki cited 50s dresses, Vivienne Holloway and vintage clothing as a femme norm she became aware of and described these as 'queer femme uniform' saying 'like everyone wears Vivienne of Holloway (...) it's this really ubiquitous thing.' My participants largely also described queer femininities as an identity or practice that is ambiguous and defined by its resistance towards definitions. For example, in relating her alternative feminine identity through her collage Jess described her collage, femininity and identity as 'kind of vague,' saying: 'I suppose, if it has any kind of theme it's going to be, what femininity can be, I suppose, it's real vague, because I don't think that femininity can really be pegged, there isn't, like, one size fits all.' Similarly, Felix represented the multiple possibilities of their queer feminine identities through including numerous images of themselves, representing the different femme styles and personas that they adopt and play with. Describing themselves as a 'genderqueer', 'slightly fluid', 'more gender-*less* than gender-*full*' 'femme male, boi,' 'crossdressing femme male' and '(rarely) butch female,' who also identifies with androgyny, and is inspired by 'camp, metrosexual, and dandy' styles, Felix is emblematic of the gender ambiguity, extreme precision of self definition and resistance towards sweeping definitions that is so characteristic (and, indeed, an ironically defining characteristic) of queer fem(me)ininie identities, communities and representations.



Figure 3.1: Felix

v) Queer Fem(me)inine Sexualities: Beyond the Butch and Femme Binary

The most typical definition of queer femininities and femme is as a queer or lesbian sexual identity. Specifically, as historically speaking, a lesbian sexuality in which a feminine lesbian woman couples with a butch lesbian. Indeed, this definition was reflected in Hurst's (2009, pp.96-97) interviews where femme was defined as a 'sexual identity' that is 'historically situated' in 1950's and 1960's North American working-class lesbian bar cultures. Yet Hurst (2009, p.97) found that femme could also be defined as an autonomous identity that is 'independent of partner choices' or as a sexual identity that desires in a vast diversity of ways. Increasingly, there is thus a strong move towards uncoupling any definition of femme from butch and, indeed, from biological femaleness and lesbian sexuality. This is particularly true regarding arguments in favour of understanding queer femininities as an independent sexual and gender identity in its own right, rather than as a sexual and gender identity that is tied to the erotic binary of butch and femme. This was strongly reflected in my interviews. Although some participants did identify with more traditional butch and femme sexualities and genders (e.g., Lisa who described her 'queer femme' identity in relation to her butch-boi romantic partner: 'I'm quite obviously feminine in dress (I don't wear trousers, always wear dresses and skirts), but I see my femininity as subversive as I don't think it's mainstream (i.e. heteronormative) and I think that makes it kind of "queer" particularly emphasised when I am with my girlfriend, who is sort of butch-boi.'). However, others like Liz and Vikki,

were critical of this model of queer fem(me)ininity, even though they also participated in and identified with this model to a certain degree. Thus, these femmes also articulated disidentificatory orientations towards traditional models of butch and femme. For example, on her questionnaire Liz both articulated her desire for female masculinities and butch, as well as expressing her criticism of narratives about queer femininity that centralise femme and butch erotic coupling:

I am queer and this informs my femininity insofar as I have found it much easier to situate my feminine expressions as being for their own sake rather than in order to attract men (a sentiment that has been bolstered by my identity as a (third wave, sex positive) feminist). HOWEVER, I find femme as a sexual identity difficult to get my head around. I recently completed a dissertation on the subject of femme identities in twentieth-century literature in which I looked at some Amber Hollibaugh and I found the constant references to femme in relation to butch really annoying. I find female masculinity very attractive but this is something I do not link with my own gender identity; neither do I feel that my gender identity affects the sexual activities I enjoy, as some femmes seem to feel. I can't help but feel like femme is undermined by its seemingly compulsory association with butch counterparts – I want my identity to be seen as my identity, not the product of someone else's, and certainly not a supplement to someone else's.

Within the interview Liz expanded on this critical *disidentificatory orientation* towards and previous literature and models of queer fem(me)ininty:

I think that they're really, really important figures, but there's just a point at which you need to be able to say, this has stopped being helpful, when you start using this terminology, when you talk about a femme and her butch, it's like, yea, because I've got like a fucking girlfriend on a leash and she has to be masculine, like, you know, and she opens doors for me and, but I cook meals for her, and then later on she gets to plough me, like you know, it's just, it's just, so in that way I think, my femme identity really disrupts homonormativity because like even though, I think being outspoken and open about sex and stuff like that is, like, traits that are often associated with femme identity, questioning shit like that, which I partially feel encouraged to do, because of how I identify, that's an imperative part of disruption, not just like by looking troublesome, but by being troublesome and by enacting troublesomeness.

This ambivalence between identifying strongly with butch and femme, yet simultaneously being critical of this model, is also articulated by Vikki. Thus, when discussing how *Femmes of Power* inspires her queer femme identity, Vikki talked about being drawn to the romanticism and nostalgia surrounding femme and butch:

Obviously there is a homage there to queers that have gone before us or kind of queer history in that kind of really romanticised, it's romanticised in a way that I don't want to let go of, I love the nostalgic idea of these like 50s butch femme couples, I love it, *laughter* yea kind of, it's, yea, I think it is an homage to like queer history, as much as it is a kind of playing around with the normative narrative of history and I think a lot of it as well is actually is about image, like, is about pure aesthetics.

However, later in the interview Vikki's critique of this erotic coupling and how queer fem(me)inities are sometimes represented emerges:

Yea, it is a problem for me, I mean I've got, part of the reason that I started doing the research I did when I began my project and it was about exploring non-normative, you know, kind of non-normative femininities and I thought, well, yea, why is it that we only have really certain representations of it? And the biggest pet peeve that I have is the way that it often, you know, femme often is only talked about in terms of Butch/Femme and that's a massive issue that I have (...) I have a huge problem with the way in which femmes are only usually understood in terms of their relationships, you know, I mean kind of if you go to a lot, if you look at queer theory, well not even queer theory but kind of queer books, Joan Nestle, that kind of stuff, about, stuff about femme is always about butch, but there's so much written about butch or about queer masculinities that has nothing to do with femmeness or femininity and there's a really bad imbalance there.

Vikki thus expresses - and represents - an increasing shift away from defining femme in relation to butch or trans* masculinities and towards interrogating queer femininities as an independent sexual and gendered identity with diverse ways of desiring. Furthermore, definitions of femme and queer femininities have increasingly been expanded to include further possibilities of queer sexualities and genders that lie beyond the lesbian butch and femme binary. For example, bisexual femmes and queer heterosexual femininities. Indeed, as Anne Tweedy (in Burke, 2009, p.69) highlights queer femininities can be "straight" in terms of their sexuality, as long as their "bent" in terms of their gendered performance. This acknowledgement of queer heterosexual femininities is important because femme and queer femininities have previously frequently been defined through a binary distinction between "queer" and "heterosexual" femininities. Tara Hardy (in Burke, 2009, p.174) wonderfully expresses this increasing disregard for creating distinctions between queer and heterosexual femininities, by stating: 'I don't care if you got semen or jizzum staining your sheets – femme is knowing what you're doing.' As will be discussed further in Chapter 4, my own queer feminine participants also articulated possibilities for the inclusion of queer heterosexual femininities and provided examples of the increasing

diversity of sexual identities and desiring experiences that can be found falling under the umbrella term of queer fem(me)inities.

vi) **Queer Femininity as a Gender Identity**

Increasingly there has been a shift towards seeing femme and queer femininities as a *queer gender* identity that is often, yet not always, informed by a queer sexuality. Katrin Fox (in Burke, 2010, p.100) very aptly highlights this point in writing: ‘There appears to be no one single definition of femme (...) although the common theme is this thing called “femininity.” Indeed, most of my participants spoke of their queer feminine identities in relation to their gender - rather than their sexual - identity. For example, Liz described how for her: ‘femme is my gender identity (...) or it’s a gender identity of mine and it’s one that I like the most, one that I play with the most and I think that it’s certainly a genderqueer identity, because I don’t think that feminine femaleness is tautologous and, like, it’s, [my partner] described it once as incognito drag.’ As Liz points towards, (queer) *femininity* is a highly elusive and contested term in itself, that is by no means straight forward or self evident and may take many diverse forms: high and low femininities, punk, flika or feral femininities, female femininities, critically cisgendered femininities, female to femme femininities, lesbian and genderqueer straight femininities, visible and invisible femmes, drag and trans* femininities, butchy, macho, dyke, androgynous or tomboy femininities and masculine, gay, dyke or cis male femininities, like dandy, fag, fairy, or queens and many queer combinations of and besides those listed above. Furthermore, as Joshua Bastian Cole (in Burke, 2010, p.137) points out, ‘femme does not necessarily mean feminine.’ However, the significance of Cole’s statement is that femme and queer femininities can involve queer forms of gender identity that may not easily be recognised as “feminine” given that they fall outside of traditional binary gendered understandings of what “femininity” signifies – for example: male, masculine, genderqueer, androgynous or trans* forms of femininity. This idea that femme is a queer form of gender identity that involve aspects of femininity, yet at the same time femininity is neither compulsory, nor does it involve a strict definition of what femininity is, is reflected in my participants discussing the seemingly endless possibilities for what (queer) femininities can be:

Jess: So, I suppose, if it [her collage] has any kind of theme it's going to be what femininity can be, I suppose, it is real vague, because I don't think that femininity can really be pegged, there isn't, like, one size fits all, or whatever, and, I feel the same way about feminism, like, um, it's just, it's just the freedom to do whatever you want.

Lisa: it's not just women that are feminine you got like feminine guys, trans* women, trans* men, people use femininity in loads of different ways (...) and, then, you know, there's female masculinity and like the cross over between femininity and masculinity.

Vikki: I think it's important to make that clear, that you know, femme can be anything and it doesn't have to be, it doesn't have to be about femaleness, it doesn't have to be about femininity, you know, kind of. Fag femmeness or whatever, you know, it can be anything (...) there are so many, there are so many different kinds of femme and femme doesn't have to be, like again it's that slipperiness about femininity, femme, but you know, doesn't have to be even the concept of what we think femininity is, you know, like, you can be macho femme, you can be, you know, so many different things and I think, just kind of keeping, keeping those categories open and allowing, keeping the space for all of the myriad of possibilities that there are is really important.

Indeed, the diversity of gendered possibilities to be found under the terms femme and queer femininities is highlighted by the identifications of my participants, which include yet are not limited to: 'queer femme' (Lisa and Liz), 'gender queer femme' (Vikki and Hedwig), 'female to femme' and femme 'drag queen trapped in a lesbian's body' (Liz) 'camp, metrosexual and dandy' trans* 'femme male' or 'crossdressing femme male' (Franki), 'failed femme' (Heather), 'flexible' (Donna), 'transgender' 'girly boy' (Bobette), 'feminine / androgynous' (Jess), 'masculinised' (Sue), butch, femme *and* 'none of the above' (Hem), 'outrageous' and 'outlandish' (Ali), or simply 'non normative' (Sue), 'feminist', 'subversive' (Sarah), and 'alternative' (Peggy). The above quotes also highlight the strong emphasis on trans* inclusion in queer feminine communities, where (queer) femininity does not necessarily have to be tied to biological female sex chromosomes, or even what is traditionally understood as "feminine" - as the above quote by Cole points out. This is particularly highlighted by my participants, Bobette and Felix, who both identify as trans*. It is also highlighted by those participants who - although not explicitly identifying themselves as trans* - described femme and queer femininities as *genderqueer* identities. For example, Liz claimed her femme identity as being 'gender queer' and 'incognito drag,' and explicated this identity as follows:

I identify as femme and often describe myself as a drag queen trapped in a lesbian's body. I feel that, while I don't identify as transgendered, my femininity is certainly queer and subversive enough for me to not feel like 'cisgendered' is the right word to

describe it. My femininity is constructed and artificial and, when I can be bothered to do it properly, really fucking fun.

Significant, in context of the focus of this thesis on internal dynamics of queer feminine exclusions through oblique norms circulating within femme communities, is that through Liz's statement about doing her queer femininity 'properly,' Liz hints towards the norms circulating within femme communities and the active energy (as well as social capital) which is invested in performatively constructing this identity. Another participant, Hedwig, identified themselves as a 'gender queer femme' and described how whilst they are 'read as bio female' they 'wouldn't directly identify as cisgendered, because that would be a lie, or it wouldn't be completely correct,' by saying:

I'm read as bio female, also straight, I am a gender queer, feminine presenting, somebody, something. If that makes any sense. But playing on a lot of feminist, like feminist is a part of my presentation. Although it's not perhaps the prescribed femininity, you can say that, the feminine is not in direct relation with the bits that I have, the feminine body is not necessarily the femmeness itself.

Here Hedwig is actively disentangling feminine gender presentation from biological femaleness to establish a gender queer femme identity that is critical of cisgendered binaries and articulates an interesting difference between how others (mis)recognise them and how they see themselves. It is also significant that Hedwig's gender queer feminine identity does not follow the 'prescribed' norms of femininity or the inherited lines of the biologically sexed and socially gendered body, since in a lot of ways this dynamic of failing to follow and actively disidentifying with these culturally constructed lines of sexual, gendered and sexed orientation is precisely what makes Hedwig's femininity gender queer. Vikki also described herself as 'Femme and Genderqueer' and as 'assigned female at birth' yet 'critical of my own positioning as "cisgendered" since she is 'weary of being placed unproblematically within the male/female binary.' Vikki elaborated on this point as follows:

Femme and Genderqueer 'my version of Femme is entirely separate from my female-ness and hence for me is associated with the broader definitions of 'genderqueer' as those that question the binary, and trans* identities that are distinguished from cis* identities (which I'm also critical of, again. It's complex as you know!) (...) I find it very important to articulate how I position 'femininity' in relation to Femme, queer, genderqueer and trans* identities. Femininity and my

feminine identity bear no relation to female-ness or being a ‘woman’. I consciously and critically adopt certain traditional markers of ‘femininity’ (including but not limited to styles and modes of appearance and dress, behaviours and activities) in a stylised, theatrical way. This, particularly but not only when combined with my queerness, draws attention to the constructedness and artifice of these markers.

As the above discussion illustrates, queer femininities often disentangle sex, gender and sexuality, in particular they break with the assumed connection between femaleness, femininity and heterosexuality that lies at the heart of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). This is evidenced in the previous quotes by Liz, Vikki and Hedwig when describing their gender queer feminine identities and constructing arguments like: ‘I don’t think that feminine, female is tautologous’ (Liz), ‘the feminine is not in direct relation with the bits [female sex organs and body parts] that I have, the feminine body is not necessarily the femmeness itself’ (Hedwig) or ‘Femininity and my feminine identity bear no relation to female-ness or being a ‘woman’. I consciously and critically adopt certain traditional markers of ‘femininity’ (...) in a stylised, theatrical way’ (Vikki). Indeed, for femmes like Liz, ‘femme is not rooted in female or male and ‘exists beyond femininity and masculinity,’ since she argues that, for her, femme is a ‘genderqueer position’ that stands for ‘questioning’ and ‘refusing to necessarily accept the stuff that we’re encouraged to think (...) about gender.’ In so far as femme is a queer gender identity, what most of these femmes share in common is their essential disidentificatory orientation towards historically, socially, culturally and politically situated binary gendered norms that typically try to define what femininity (and masculinity) is, or is not, in distinct, boundaried, limited and *limiting* ways. They also often - yet not always - share a disidentificatory orientation towards cisgendered centric binaries that would conflate feminine gender expression with a female sexed category, in their genderqueer orientations and trans* spectrum informed disentanglement of feminine gender expressions from (female) sexed categories. As we will see in the next section, queer femininities can also be genderqueer simply by not adhering to and occupying disidentificatory orientations towards specific, socially, culturally and historically situated norms regarding how femininity “should” be performatively embodied and by, thus, subverting these performative gender rules.

vii) Queer Femininity as a Subversive Style of Embodied Subjectivity

In so far as femme and queer femininity denotes a gender identity, it is usually described as a subversive or alternative style of femininity, which is defined by being conscious, reflexive, critical and challenging of feminine gendered and sexual norms and stereotypes, as is exemplified in the talk of my participants. For example, Ali, described her subversive femininity in terms of being resistant, antagonistic and oppositional towards culturally situated feminine norms, saying:

My feminine identity is overtly subversive and I dress and behave consciously against 'feminine norms.' In reality my aim is to be the opposite of what the women in my family were while I was growing up. (I was brought up in a large poor working-class family by my grandparents after the death of my mother when I was 4yrs old and saw at firsthand how the women's lives consisted of staying at home, looking after large amounts of children and looking after the men) (...) I love 'dressing up' and like looking 'outrageous'. Although I do not like to dress and act in the feminine norm, I actually love being a woman and do feel I have a much wider range of norms I can conquer.

Single mother, Nicola, defined her alternative femininity through firstly, her alternative style of feminine embodiment and secondly, through her alternative approach to motherhood and, particularly, her public breastfeeding:

I find my tattoos very feminine despite the fact they are quite large. They are of typically girly things such as flowers and butterflies, unicorns and cherries. I love corsets and am considering corset training. I also have my tongue, bellybutton and clit pierced and a dermal anchor just under my eye, all of which I take to be feminine. (...) Another side to my femininity is my mothering side. I have 2 sons aged 2 and 4. I breastfeed my youngest child still and did breastfeed my older child until his 4th birthday. I also purposely birthed at home with no midwives which made me feel very empowered as a woman. (...) I've always sort of, not really been like the stereotypical sort of girl and I sort of try and raise my sons without gender stereotypes and stuff.

Frequently, participants, including Liz, Vikki and Sarah, described how their queer femininity involved a politics of criticality and questioning - or provoking others to question - norms. For example, when asked what queer femininity means to her, Vikki responded, 'it's about challenging, questioning,' whilst Liz discussed how for her 'femme is fundamentally a critical identity' that involves her being 'politically active' in conversations by 'challenging people when they say things that I think are really problematic.' Furthermore, Sarah described her femininity as subversive, feminist, chosen and politicised in context of her challenging stereotypical meanings attached to femininity:

I'm not throwing out all ideas of femininity, it's that I'm throwing out some of the meanings attached to that. So, I think that, that is one of the most important things for me, the fact that femininity comes with a lot of extra baggage, a lot of extra

meanings that are attached to those symbols. And, my job, the way that I see it in my head, something that I'm passionate about doing, because I think it's important to me ethically is to make sure that people question all of those meanings attached to it. Why am I allowed to wear these clothes, but not allowed to be these other things that I also am at the same time. So, it's about making people question that, I suppose.

Taking a Butlerian, gender performativity and subversive parody approach, Hedwig described their queer femme embodied subjectivity as: 'It is a drag-show, and an ongoing de-construction of whatever femme/femininity might contain.' Yet, whatever precise form their queer feminine embodied subjectivities took, all of my participants described their femininities as involving a combination of an embodied aesthetic with a way of thinking and being a feminine subject that they perceived as to some degree challenging culturally contextual gendered norms.

As a subversive embodied gender identity, femme and queer femininities are often described as excessive, parodic, playful, ironic, glamorous, chosen, intentional, subversive, performance, (re)appropriated, conscious, questioning, challenging, pleasurable, strong or empowered. Indeed, the emphasis on choice is highlighted throughout the critical literature on queer femininities (e.g. Burke 2009, Dahl and Volcano 2008, Dahl 2009, Harris and Crocker 1997, Hollibaugh 2000, Nestle 1992, etc.) and, within the talk of my participants. For example, Liz claimed that what makes femme different from femininity, for her, is that femme is 'a conscious choice. To say "I am femme" to me is like saying "I am a feminist" or saying "I am queer."' Sarah spoke of her queer femininity in context of her desire and agency to be able to 'pick and choose' between different ways of performing her gender identity 'without anybody batting an eyelash' – meaning without judgement from others, indeed, Sarah particularly referenced judgement from other feminists – as this "choice" is something Sarah finds 'fun' because it gives her 'a full pallet of colours to use.' 'Conscious choice' is also a defining factor for Hurst (2009, p.96) whose participants discussed femme as: 'a conscious choice of gender expression that honours and celebrates femininity,' whilst challenging oppressive ideas around femininity. Similar to Sarah and Jess' accounts, Hurst's participants described femme femininity as being about picking and choosing what they like about femininity, whilst rejecting what they did not like. In both accounts, femininity is thus presented as an optional and consciously chosen, rather than a mandatory and enforced gender identity. Furthermore, they reclaimed femme femininity as being distinct from a socialized

femininity - a distinction I will discuss in more detail later on in this chapter - and reclaiming femme femininity as different from a socialized femininity. The embodied power and pleasure often attributed femme and queer femininity is expressed strongly in J.C. Yu's (in Burke, 2009, p.34) definitional statement that 'femme is where I feel a sense of power in my body.' Power is also a key factor for Hurst (2009, p.96), who - drawing on the words of her participants - defined femme as involving a 'manifestation of power' and cites Pratt's definition: 'femme is using femininity to reclaim what [is] strong and honourable and powerful about femaleness.' This emphasis on an empowered femininity is also present in the talk of my participants. Particularly Vikki discussed, for example, how certain loaded symbolic feminine objects like high heeled shoes take on different meanings in context of her queer feminine identity as they 'can be empowering' and about theatricality, artifice and 'trampling on everything,' rather than simply being 'crippling' - as traditional feminist critiques of beauty and femininity would interpret the meanings of high heeled shoes. Similarly, Liz spoke of feeling fierce, empowered and inaccessible when she goes dressed up in, what she calls, 'femme drag.'

Finally, in the sense that femme and queer femininities signify a form of gendered embodiment and subjectivity that is frequently discussed as being subversive, alternative and as transgressing gendered norms, these forms of queer feminine gendered embodiment are often defined by 'a visual signal and an aesthetic' that strives towards queer visibility and recognition (Hurst, 2009, p.99). Nevertheless, femme and queer femininities are also frequently defined as a 'marginalized, stigmatized identity' that is often misread as straight and perceived as 'inauthentic' (Hurst, 2009, p.101). Often this leads to queer femininities being defined as an 'invisible identity' (Hurst, 2009, p.101), since they are often not fully recognised within feminist, queer and mainstream communities. Indeed, these dynamics have provoked a lot of frustration and hurt on the part of femmes. Yet these negative affects have also encouraged the positive flourishing of queer feminine critical, creative and expressive writing, performances and art, as these identities strive towards becoming recognized and understood.

viii) Butlerian Performative Failures

A further factor of queer femininities as a gender identity, is that these often involve a Butlerian performative “failure” to reiterate and, thereby, reinscribe or reproduce, the idealised norms of a socially sanctioned youthful, heteronormative, cisgendered, white, western, middle-class and able-bodied femininity. This is strongly suggested in Brushwood Rose and Camilleri’s (2002, p.13) *Brazen Femme* where femme is defined as ‘femininity gone wrong’—bitch, slut, nag, whore, cougar, dyke, or brazen hussy. Femme is the trappings of femininity gone awry, gone to town, gone to the dogs...We are not good girls.’ This idea of queer femininities as involving conscious and purposive, or sometimes even simply haphazard, failure to perform femininity in line with contextually specific idealised norms is adopted by several of my interview participants. Liz - who wrote her BA dissertation on femme - draws on Amber Hollibaugh, *Brazen Femme* and this notion of ‘femme is femininity gone wrong’ explicitly when describing her own femme identity. Heather also strongly defines her queer femininity along the lines of a productive failure to follow certain mainstream norms of femininity. Interestingly, Heather articulates how she *both* consciously “fails” to live up to sociocultural norms of white, western, middle class, able-bodied and youthful models femininity *and* typical versions of femme femininity. She therefore defines her queer femininity as a “failed femme” by saying: ‘I am a “failed femme” – I dislike and therefore do not participate in most of the requirements of femininity (e.g. showing skin, showing cleavage, shaving legs and armpits), but my manner of dress (in a skirt) is feminine enough that I am not read as butch.’ Included in this definition of queer femininities as involving performative failures are those who opt out of feminine norms. Peggy in particular defined her alternative femininity through this sense of failing to fit into and, subsequently, opting out of competitive feminine norms: ‘Femininity is a competition which, at a very early age, I chose to opt out of. Being tall and far from feminine ‘ideals’ physically meant that adopting an ‘alternative’ appearance has always been easier (for which read ‘more comfortable’). I define my own sense of the ‘feminine’ by clearly, via my appearance, mark myself out as not in the ‘competition.’ Indeed, this definition of queer femininities as involving Butlerian queer failures arguably aligns with Hurst’s (2009, p.98) findings that femme signifies ‘a self-determined space of otherness’ which is described by her participants in terms of ‘something off,’ as being ‘different’ and as involving ‘transgressions’ of ‘straight femininity’ - in the sense of femininity played “straight” (Martin, 1999), that is “normatively,” rather than simply as different from heterosexual femininities.

ix) “Doing” or “Being” Femme: Queer Femininity as Identity or Performance

There is a debate around whether queer femininities and femme signify a *being* or a *doing*; a verb or a noun; an abiding and intrinsic identity or a temporary conscious performance of femininity. To some, like Ariel McGowan (in Burke, 2009, p.144) & Trina Rose (in Dahl and Volcano, 2008, p.172), femme is a *verb* - a doing, an action or a playing, a performance of queer femininity - rather than a noun – a stable identity or a sense of being. Burke (2009, p.11) exemplifies this when she writes: ‘I say I *do* femme as opposed to saying I *am* femme.’ Furthermore, they articulate femme as being only one of many gender identities that they may temporarily adopt. Similarly, Indra, deploys the adjective ‘femmy’ to describe femme drag as a performance of gender that is ‘wonderfully expressive, incredibly hot, sexy, pleasurable, colourful and full of attitude,’ using traditional feminine tropes ‘in a twisted and pumped up way’ (Dahl, 2009, p.53). Within my interviews this discourse of *doing* queer femininities, is articulated by Liz, when she describes how femme is ‘something that you do to express the things that you want to express,’ which for her involves a desire to ‘evoke’ a sense of ‘otherness.’ However, for Alisa Lemberg, Sharon Wachsler and Sassafras Lowrey (in Burke, 2009) femme is a noun that signifies an intrinsic identity. Sassafras Lowrey (in Burke, 2009, p.82) articulates this when she states that, for her, ‘Femme is not something I can take off at the end of the night like faded lipstick and smudged eyeliner (...) Femme is a way of life that has redecorated the chambers of my heart.’ Similarly, Sharon Wachsler (2009, p.41) describes her essential femmeness as a mode of being, rather than a mode of doing femme, in context of her disabling chronic illness:

It’s a truism for any person disabled by chronic illness that constructing a new life means learning how to become a *human being* rather than a *human doing*. As I lost the transformative powers of places and objects that made me feel femme, I had to find the essential femmeness within me. (...) In the end, I cannot say what really makes me femme; certainly there’s little enough outward proof aside from my long hair. I only know that I am; I feel that I have a femme essence or sprit.

Interestingly, femme is often used as a noun by those subjects who feel queer femininity to be a central part of their identity, yet who are not able to access this identity as easily as others or as fully as they would like. In these cases, a model of femme as a noun denoting an essential identity, mode of being and structure of feeling, is invoked. Particularly when the idea of femme as a verb denoting a performance or “doing” of femininity is inaccessible. For example, due to factors like disability (Wachsler 2009) or temporary circumstances (e.g. Alisa Lemberg’s (2009, pp.75-78) travels in rural Thailand) which make “doing” femme as an embodied performance difficult, since this “doing” of femme is largely dependent on capitalism, consumerism, urban life styles and ablebodiedness. Both Wachsler (2009) and Lemberg (2009), thus, *necessarily*, redefine femme as an essential identity - a being, rather than a doing - due to their positionalities and, what I argue in more detail throughout this project, are the silent yet persistently present norms of queer femininities.

x) **Politicised Feminist Femininity**

Queer femininities are frequently defined as feminist manifestations of femininity. In her interviews, Hurst (2009, p.100) found that femme was often defined as a femininity with ‘political agency,’ as well as a personal and political identity that is ‘both individual and socially transformative, challenging mainstream ideas about what feminine people are supposed to be and do.’ To a lot of femmes, as Anne Tweedy (in Burke, 2009, p.37) exemplifies ‘femme is a feminine feminist.’ For Tweedy (in Burke, 2009, p.69) ‘a femme is a feminine person who consciously celebrates her femininity while rejecting the oppression of women and the oppression of the feminine in all of us. Just by her very existence, she challenges traditional assumptions about femininity.’ In many ways, queer femininities and femme are feminist forms of femininity, which strive to positively and powerfully reclaim, redefine, value and celebrate femininity within and against both misogynistic homophobic patriarchal culture, yet also fem(me)ininity phobic feminist and queer contexts (Serano 2007). Indeed, this trend is strongly reflected throughout the talk of my queer feminine participants, all of whom identify as feminist in one way or another and represent their feminism on their collages.



Figure 3.2 Ali's collage, Figure 3.3 Sarah's collage, Figure 3.4: Hedwig's collage: feminist sign.

Sarah defined her subversive femininity as a 'very feminine feminist' – 'a twenty four hour a day feminist but in a low key manner.' Vikki also described herself as being 'very strongly feminist' from an early age and invoked the term 'femme-inism' when discussing her politics. Vikki highlighted how femme-inism is crucial not just for her own queer fem(me)inine identity, but also for the queer fem(me)inine identities of most femmes that she knows:

I like the word play of femme-inism. That it's making a point that femme is not counter to feminism it's actually completely compatible with feminism and almost every, in fact I would go so far as to say every femme identified person I know, identifies as a feminist and ascribes their femmeness to their feminism and connects them very strongly whether that's because they feel that feminism is what gives them, is what has, you know, given them the critical understanding and the empowerment to then be able to perform femininity or whether it's, you know, they have a similar kind of story to me where feminism taught them femininity is wrong and then they had to struggle to work against that and now they can reconcile those two things or whatever I think that, you know, feminism and you know like I said before this kind of fundamental disjuncture I think this mistake maybe that a lot of them made, which was to assume that those, those things that we call feminine just weak and passive, rather than, and to try and realign femininity or femaleness with something else, rather than to revalue or re-understand or redescribe those things that we think of, so that's, that's what femme-inism is to me: *femme-inism*. *emphasis placed on the word femme*

Typically, whilst queer fem(me)inine identified subjects almost always identified as feminist, their individual fem(me)inisms often took on specific situated forms: for example, Liz identified as a queer 'third wave, sex positive' feminist, Jess expressed liberal feminist beliefs through her emphasis on choice, equality and 'the freedom to do whatever you want' and Vikki positioned herself as a queer, (critically) cisgendered,

trans-inclusive, anti-racist, anti-classist and fat-positive feminist. Indeed, Vikki mirrors Dahl's (2008, 21) assertion that her femme participants 'lived theories emerge at the intersection of movements of queer activism and feminism, anti-racism and fat activism' and Hurst's (2009, p.100) findings that femme is not just about gender and sexuality, rather it is a (*potentially*) intersectional identity that is also 'a raced and classed identity.' Furthermore, whilst the queer feminine identified subjects of my texts and interviews did almost always position themselves strongly as feminists, they were nevertheless also critical of various forms of feminist politics and often occupied disidentificatory orientations towards certain schools of feminist thought. For example, whilst Vikki identifies strongly with 'femme-inism', she nevertheless disidentifies with feminist schools of thought that would critique feminine styles of dressing as being mere signs of patriarchal oppression. This is illustrated in Vikki discussing the high-heeled shoes that she wished to depict on her collage to represent her femme identity and how her femme identity is informed by gender theory and her identification with these theories, yet also by her disidentificatory orientation towards certain feminist discourses surrounding femininity. She cites the example of the style of feminism found in works like Naomi Wolf's (1991) *The Beauty Myth*, to establish a distinction between her own femme-inism which affirms the power and politics of feminine stylistic practices and feminist dismissal of feminine beauty practices as a "crippling" marker of "patriarchal" female "oppression."

I was going to do a picture of, I've got this really amazing mad pair of irregular choice shoes, they've got a huge flower collage on the back and they're massive platforms and they're amazing, so I was going to do it, of me wearing, just of my feet, or just of my legs and my feet wearing the shoes kind of, play with the idea that it's, you know, it's kind of about this like really loaded, significant, symbolic object of high heeled shoes, but, what, you know, what else they can, you know, how they can mean that sort of feminist reading of, you know, it's just "crippling" and, you know, that kind of Naomi Wolf, The Beauty Myth idea, but it also, it can be empowering and it can be about, you know, trampling on everything *laughter.*

Similar to the way that many femmes occupy disidentificatory orientations towards femininity as a gender expression, in their simultaneously identifying with femininity yet also disidentify with situated norms surrounding what femininity "is" and how it "should" be performatively embodied, the example of Vikki illustrates how many femmes occupy a disidentificatory orientation towards feminism by simultaneously ascribe to and feel a strong affinity for feminist politics and theories, whilst nevertheless remaining ambivalent and critical to sections of feminist thought that they vehemently disagree with.

xi) Distinctions Between Queer Fem(me)ininitities and Femininity

Queer femininities and femme often involve subjects creating a distinction between queer femininities or femme and femininity. Indeed, this point is also raised by Hurst (2009, p.99) who found that her research participants saw femme as ‘separate from femininity’ and did not use femme and femininity interchangeably and marked out a difference between these terms and ways of being feminine, which often operated along the lines of femininity being regarded as something that is ‘socialized and taken as natural,’ whereas femme is seen as ‘conscious and constructed.’ Within my own research, this trend is exemplified by Liz who speaks about the differences she perceives there to be between queer femininities or femme and femininity:

Yea, no, they are different, I feel like, I read, one of the quotes that I read when I was doing my dissertation was that femme is femininity gone wrong. Like, femininity is something that I think can happen much more subconsciously and much less intentionally than femme. I think femme has to be a choice and it has to be a conscious choice. To say, "I am femme." to me is like saying I am a feminist, or saying "I am queer" or saying like, you know, like I believe that women should have the choice to have an abortion, you know like it's a, it's a politics and to some extent also an ethical position I think, not that I mean to imply that if you're feminine and you're not femme then there's something lazy about it or something unthoughtout about it, but like, my femme identity is something that is under constant analysis and I'm very like critical of it and what it means and stuff like that, I think it's something that I'm quite careful and deliberate with and I think that that self consciousness is really intrinsic to, really not just my femme identity (...) I think femme is fundamentally a critical identity, like, it, it, you know, it wouldn't exist without conventional femininity, because like, not that femme is only a parody of conventional femininity, but I think that's certainly where it's roots are.

These distinctions are also present in my interviews in more ubiquitous ways. For example, they are present in Sue describing her queer femininity as ‘non-normative’ which she interprets as not being like other women around her. This is a characteristic which Sue shares with Ali who also creates a distinction between her alternative ‘outrageous’ punk and feminist femininity and the oppressed conformist femininity present in her family. Heather also describes her alternative femininity through an opposition to the mainstream femininities. Indeed, although Heather recognises mainstream (femininities) to be ‘incredibly nebulous and hard to define,’ she nevertheless constructs a strong oppositional stance and clear distinction when asked to describe what she means by mainstream (femininities). Thus, for Heather: ‘Mainstream is those people

over there who are doing it differently and don't like me... I think obviously that is incredibly nebulous and hard to define and I think in the context of gender identity gender policing I'd see mainstream as represented by things like you know there's Heat magazine there's the Sun, there's Trinny and Susannah, that kind of thing.' As exemplified by Heather's choices of Heat magazine and Trinny and Susanna to illustrate "mainstream" femininities and as is discussed further in Chapter 4, femmes often create explicit or oblique distinctions between queer femininities and heterosexual femininities, in particular. However, although this strong trend exists within queer feminine rhetorics, it is not always the case and some subjects consciously do not wish to inscribe oppositional distinctions at the centre of their queer feminine identity. Within my interviews this is particularly evident in Lisa discussing how she would not wish to create a distinction between queer femininities and ("normative") femininity: 'I don't think I'd draw a line, I don't think that I would be free too.' Lisa articulates that this is because she is aware that 'everyday people are subversive in really ubiquitous ways.' Vikki also articulated a resistance towards creating distinctions, saying:

It was only after I discovered queerness and interestingly at the same time discovered fat activism, that I was able to embrace my femininity and become femme and for me those are very crucial and they're very connected but I think it's also important to remember that they don't necessarily have to be and I think, you know, kind of like I was saying earlier, like, *the radical potential of femininity isn't only if it's queer. And, I think, you know, it's easy often to kind of think, "oh, straight women just do it in a really normative way" and that is, that you know, that's a dangerous thing to think, because it's completely not true*, so I think, for me it's [queerness] a big part of it, but I also recognise that for a lot of people it [queerness] isn't, you know, even, you know, if you think about the people that I've got on here, only, you know, only a couple of them are actually queer, a lot of the women that are on here are heterosexual so, you know, that doesn't make their, that doesn't imbue their femininity with any less radical potential.

Therefore, Vikki emphasised that 'femininity can be anything' and that she 'really want[s] to keep the boundaries open of what it can be' and, thus, does not wish to create distinctions or delineate boundaries, because these can be exclusionary and can produce a negative and unhelpful policing of genders, sexualities and identity categories. Instead, Vikki emphasises the importance of 'keeping those categories open and allowing, keeping the space for all the myriad of possibilities that there are' when it comes to queer femininities.

xii) Queer Femininities as a Collective *and* Personal Identity That is (Seemingly) Open to Endless Possibilities

Another defining element of femme and queer femininities are both a collective identity in sense of the community - shared rhetorics and visual repertoires - that exist around queer femininities and femme and a highly personal interpretation of feminine gender and sexual identities. Therefore, these terms simultaneously denote a sense of *inheritance* from and belonging to a long line of queer feminine history, theorising, identity and community making, which may be conceptualised as a quasi queer feminine familial genealogy. Yet they also denote highly individualised gender and sexual identities that are strongly self-defined that are often significantly informed by various positioned intersectionalities of identity. Thus, the terms queer femininities and femme arguable denote both continuity and breakages; historical indebtedness and contemporary reconfigurations and deployments; inheritance and invention. Furthermore, since the terms queer femininities and femme place emphasis on self defined identities and interpretations of these terms, as well as an awareness of the positioned intersections of identity that acknowledges, celebrates and roles around in the grit of difference and diversity, they often produce highly individualised, hybridised and situated configurations of the term.⁴ Under the “umbrella terms” of queer femininities and femme we thus find specific versions like: “trannyfag femme” and “femme tomboy” (Burke, 2009) or “fierce,” “feral,” “high” and “diesel” femmes (Dahl and Volcano, 2008). Some further terms used by my participants whilst describing their queer feminine identities included: ‘queer femme’ (Liz and Lisa) or ‘gender queer femme’ (Vikki and Hedwig) ‘female to femme’ (Liz) ‘femme male’ ‘cross dressing femme male’ (Franki) ‘failed femme’ (Heather) ‘flexible’ (Donna) ‘girly boy’ (Bobette) ‘feminine / androgynous’ (Jess) ‘masculinised’ (Sue) butch / femme / ‘none of the above’ (Hem). We also find contextually adapted versions of the terms femme and queer femininity, like Kath Moonana’s adopting the white, working class, British term ‘Bird’ or Sofie Wahlström’s adopting the Swedish work *‘flicka* (girl),’ instead of the implicitly American term “femme” (in Dahl and Volcano, 2008, p.68 & 164). This sense of a self defined, identity, is also a trend articulated by Hurst’s (2009, p.99) participants, who defined femme as ‘a personal essence’ in the sense that they understood their definitions of femme as being personal to

⁴ To clarify, I am using the term ‘hybridised’ here in a similar way as Indra Windh and Del LaGrace Volcano (2005) use the term ‘gender fusion’ to signify the combination of signifiers from either side of the binary gender divide. Rather than in the way that “hybridised” is deployed by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) or the way Henri Lefebvre (1991) deploys the term ‘third space.’ I would add that the hybridities to which I am referring may also involve combinations of signifiers that are otherwise not typically aligned.

them, with an understanding that their personal definitions may not apply to other femmes and that any absolute definition of femme is ‘impossible and undesirable.’ Indeed, as Hurst (2009, p.99) writes: ‘Respecting personal definitions of femme is a refusal to accept narrow and restrictive definitions that are racist, sexist, classist, ableist, transphobic, or fat phobic, which challenges conformist and obedient mainstream definitions of femininity as well as any limiting queer definitions of femininity.’ My participants too strongly emphasised the personal nature of their own definitions of queer femininities. For example, Liz emphasised the personal nature of her own definition of femme by recognising that other people may not have the same interaction or definition with the label femme that she does. Liz related how: ‘when I say other femme identities, that's with a recognition that other people are going to have the same interaction with the label femme, as I do, or behaviours that I might code as femme for me.’

Reflecting on the above discussion, it is evident that there is no final or definitive definition of femme and queer femininities located either in the theoretical and subcultural texts or the stories of my participants. Rather any attempt to come to a singular definition of femme and queer femininities is fraught by complexities, multiplicities, differences and outright contradictions. Indeed, if femme and queer femininities were a mode of grammar - as my participant, Liz, suggests when describing her femme concept of ‘the grammar of the wardrobe’ as a set of individually crafted rules which aren’t compulsory, but feel personally good to follow (‘if my clothing was a sentence or a paragraph, I like to make it a really, really well written paragraph and you know, you need grammar, you need good punctuation in order for things to be well written’) I argue that they would be characterised by the excessive use of the ampersand. The ampersand was used by Sue, when she referenced the following line by punk cabaret musician, Amanda Palmer - “I am not going to live my life on one side of an ampersand” - as an influence and definition of her queer sexual and gender identity. Furthermore, I argue that it is through excessively stringing together the realised and as yet unrealised possibilities that lie on either side of the “&” sign that queer femininities may achieve the desire not to exclude the myriad of possibilities that their selves are or might be/come. The essay by Elaine Miller (Brushwood Rose and Camileri, 2002, pp.145–146), embodies this perfectly by providing an endless list of things a femme can be or do. By picking elements from either sides of the binary, selecting elements which are traditionally

associated with (queer) fem(me)ininity (e.g. ‘Bake cookies’) “&” elements which are typically associated with masculinity or butch (e.g. ‘Lift weights’), Elaine Miller creates a definition of femme and queer femininity that is infinite, open, excessive, overflowing with potential “&” perfectly capable of handling complexities. Queer femininities are therefore not neatly and conveniently confined to one side of the binary divide between feminine and masculine, butch or femme. Indeed, my participant, Hem, illustrates this perfectly in defining themselves as being *both* butch *and* femme: ‘for me femme and butch isn't oppositional, it isn't that I choose one or the other, it's both.’ Queer femininities may thus be defined by the structure of the rule “&” the exception (this “&” that) embodied in Margaret Price’s (in Burke, 2009, p.105) conclusion to her own research of what the term femme signifies:

Femmes date butches. Except when they don't.
 Femmes wear dresses. Except when they don't.
 Femmes bottom. Except when they don't.
 Femmes are catty, smart, small, large, tough, butchy, macho, femmey, high, low,
 slutty, slow. Femmes receive. Femmes give.'

Or, like one of my participants Jess proposes, ‘femininity can be anything.’ Therefore, femme and queer femininities, if it were possible to define these terms, might be defined by excessive open-ended and unfinished signification of endless possibilities. Indeed, Liz highlights this idea when speaking about how she purposefully left a bit of her collage blank and unfinished to symbolise the ‘further possibilities that can happen.’



Figure 3.5 Liz's Collage

I left this bit [of the collage] blank because I didn't want it to be finished because I don't, because I, well, on one hand the idea of finished doesn't apply to the way I feel about my femmeness, there's always room for more stuff and like, I guess I wanted it

to represent like, the possibility, the further possibilities that can happen, even when you finish like an outfit for the day, like there's still more that can happen to it.

In this way, through leaving the term open, femmes *strive* towards creating a definition that is as inclusive as possible, to the further possibilities of femme that can happen both within their own identity and through this term, identity and community being occupied by many different types of femme subjects. Moreover, through leaving the term open, femmes, *strive* to create a definition of femme and a term that can *potentially* act as an umbrella under which many different femme persons and meanings of the term femme can gather.

xiii) Queer Femininities and Femme as Umbrella Terms

Like with the term queer itself, femme and queer femininities are *intended* as broad, inclusive and expansive, *umbrella terms*, which ‘welcome self identified femmes of all genders and orientations,’ rather than ‘an exclusionary or restrictive predetermined formula’ with strict boundaries (Atlanta Femme Mafia in Dahl and Volcano, 2008, p.133 & p.20). There are certainly strong attempts towards creating a flexible language and an open community that is inclusive and, where, as Jessica Humphreys articulates, you do not have to ‘fit certain criteria’ to belong, but where ‘anybody who identifies as femme, regardless of what that means to them, is welcome’ (Dahl and Volcano, 2008, p.180). As Burke (2009, p.11) highlights, since queer femininities are in many ways highly individualised identities involving *both* communal similarities *and* ‘unique differences,’ it is therefore necessary for our conceptualisations of queer femininities and our community building efforts to strive towards being ‘inclusive of complex identities that we may not understand’ It is also necessary for our communities and concepts to have ‘open borders’ that allow queer femininities to be ‘a figuration in constant metamorphosis and reconfiguration’ that can ‘never fully be determined’ (Dahl and Volcano, 2008, p.180). However, like with the term queer, these utopian attempts towards inclusivity and expansiveness are not always entirely successful. Therefore, as this thesis argues and explores throughout, there is a strong need to consider the limitations and exclusions created by our historically rooted terminologies and the expansive and diverse - yet also considerably boundaried - nature of our communities.

xiv) **Limitations: Falling Out of the Sign of Femme**

Whilst the rhetorical emphasis on the diversity, inclusion and openness of queer feminine communities is evidently striving to contribute to actively making all those who identify with femme feel welcomed - as a helpful performative speech-act that has the potential of engendering the very inclusion it strives to represent – realistically, all communities exclude to some degree; whether intentionally and explicitly or unintentionally and implicitly. Indeed, all terms automatically create boundaries and exclusions; a domain of what a sign stands for and what it does not; or domains of what signs stand for more frequently, dominantly and recognisably than others - even when these signs are intentionally defined in loose, open, multiplicit and contradictory ways to create spaces for diversity. Signs automatically create performative utterances and silences surrounding what these signs stand for or not – what falls under and out of the sign - by omission, distinctions, oppositions or simply through some meanings circulating more dominantly within our communities than others. Arguably, this is one of the ways that disidentifications with(in) signs occur; when subjects identify partially with certain *accessible* meanings of a sign yet cannot identify with other *inaccessible* meanings associated, which highlights the limits and boundaries existing around signs like queer, feminist or, in this case, femme. Therefore, whilst there is an active desire and striving for creating inclusive, intersectional, femme identities, communities, theories, representations and politics, as *Femmes of Power* cover girl, Maria Rosa Mojo (a.k.a Dyke Marilyn) highlights, these communities and movements can also be exclusionary: ‘There is a femme movement but the problem with groups is that they can also exclude. People who identify as femme shouldn’t feel excluded due to stereotypical attributes considered to be un-feminine’ (in Dahl and Volcano, 2008, p.49). Similarly, Jenifer Clare Burke (2009, p.11-12) articulates her frustration and resistance towards ‘codified definitions of femme and constrained scripts’ - or ‘status quo rules for How to be Femme, How to Look Femme, How to act Femme’ - which she shares with her diverse cohort of contributors, by saying:

As a frustrated femme situated in more than one queer community, I have chafed against the practically codified definitions of femme and constrained scripts I’ve encountered. I have experienced the effects of misogyny and sexism within my queer communities. These ugly shortcomings strongly informed my selections for

Femmethology. I chose essays that stretched the parameters of femme and called the queer community to be tolerant of complex identities and the life situations that may contribute to such identities. (...) As queer femme, I was reassured and relieved by the strong, unique, fearless, complex view-points in these essays. I found peers who couldn't - and frankly wouldn't - play by any perceived status quo rules for How to be Femme, How to Look Femme, How to Act Femme, and so forth. I found individuals who were just as concerned about disability rights, body politics, transphobia, class differences and biphobia. I found writing that dissects the impact of race and national identity on queer politics as well as the politics of marriage, sex work, sexism and misogyny in our communities.

Equally, through my own research on queer feminine disidentificatory orientations and readings of the texts I have found that there are limits around who can identify with, define themselves, become recognised and belong as femme. I have already discussed some of the limits regarding femme as being often linked too strongly to butch, therefore I will not go into further details here. Rather I want to focus on how the terms femme and queer femininities, as terms of identification yet also as lived practices, communities and experiences, do not fall on the horizons (Ahmed, 2006) of all situated subjects equally. Positionalities including 'race,' ethnicity, geographical location, religion, class, age, education, sexuality and disability - as well as the complex ways in which these positionalities intersect and our individual nuanced life journeys and experiences - can all play a role in rendering the terms femme and queer femininities (un)available for identification. Positionalities are important in terms of the degree of exposure, contact and knowledge that certain situated subjects may have of terms like queer femininities, which arguably circulate in dominantly white, currently middle-class yet historically working class, University educated, urban, American yet recently also (Western) European LGBTQ* contexts. For example, I have found that most of my participants who identify with *femme* explicitly have been queer, lesbian and trans* persons, often living in urban spaces, who are middle-class, white, young and educated to University level (e.g. Liz, Lisa, Vikki, Hedwig and Felix). Those participants who occupied working-class, bisexual, heterosexual, rural or smaller city dwelling, educated to college level or older, identify more frequently with the terms queer, subversive or alternative femininities, rather than femme (e.g. Peggy, Sue, Sarah, Ali, Nichola, Bobbette, Jess, Donna). Furthermore, since this project conducts interviews with queer feminine identified persons in the UK, it is also important to note the American roots of femme. Although femme and queer femininities have in recent years, through projects like *Femmes of Power*, begun to circulate transnationally especially in Western Europe, the degree to which persons in the

UK who might identify with femme and queer femininities is limited to the degree to which knowledge about femme circulates internationally.

Limits of access to the terms of queer, queer femininities and femme can also be strongly influenced by sexual orientation. For example, my participant Sarah, who identifies as heterosexual, kinky and submissive, described how she felt that the term queer belonged to other people. She articulated her anxiety - yet also her implicit critique - that she might not be perceived as 'queer enough' or 'subversive enough' to be recognised and belong to this community or even to "qualify" for participation in this project.

Sarah: When I responded to your research thing I noticed that it was queer or subversive femininity and I thought well I don't know if my femininity would be described as being queer because I don't know what you, whether I'm allowed to be.

Alexa: Yea, you approached me at the conference.

Sarah: Yes and I asked because I wasn't sure if I was *subversive enough*.

Alexa: *laughter*

Sarah: Or if I was *queer enough!* And, it's, I suppose it's more the relentless nature of my subversiveness, the fact that I don't really take time off from it and the fact that I refuse to go to extremes, because that is against what I think is useful.

Additionally, Sarah spoke of how she would not identify herself as queer because she would be worried about offending people, yet she would be happy to be described as queer by others:

I wouldn't like to claim the word queer because I think that so many queer people would, would feel affronted by that, in terms of what they stand for. Though, if somebody described it as a queer femininity, I wouldn't say, no it's not, I'm happy for that word to be used as well. I'm, I don't mind, but I would say that it's a subversive femininity, definitely. I don't like using the word alternative, because that to me has come to mean alternative subgroups, which aren't alternative really, it's just another kind of norm. It's alternative to one type of norm, by accepting another.

Interestingly, Sarah articulates an implicit critique of queer and femme as exclusionary and bounded under which some subjects may not be recognised and accepted as "queer enough." Equally through speaking of her anxieties of not being seen as "subversive enough" to be part of a project on queer, subversive and alternative femininities, Sarah articulates an implicit critique of the limiting "*subversivist*" (Serano, 2013) trends present in queer, feminist and femme communities and writing, which can function to exclude various types of femininity - especially heterosexual femininities and femininities which

are not performed in an obviously and recognisably queer, subversive or alternative manner.

When it comes to the intersection of ‘race’ and ethnicity, like with the term queer - which has been theorised by queers of colour as being anchored in an unspoken and unacknowledged white centre (Johnson, 2005, Anzaldúa 1989 & 1991, Cohen 2005, Goldman 1996, Kobena Mercer 1994, Dhairyam 1994), the term femme arguably also involves specifically shaded (white Anglo-American) roots, which can be implicitly - if not explicitly exclusionary - by enabling some positioned subjects (e.g. white Anglo American femmes) to identify with, become recognised as and belong under the - apparently “open,” “diverse” and “inclusive” - umbrella term of queer femininities more than others (e.g. femmes of colour). For example, femme of colour, T. J. Bryan (2002, p.155) highlights the white centric nature of queer femininities through recounting how her experience of being misrecognised as butch by white queers - an experience which is recounted by many femmes of colour as a very common one (e.g. Mason-John and Mojo in Dahl and Volcano 2008, pp.30-34 & 49, Kofi-Bruce 2009, p.46) - ‘forced [her] to think about the roots of [her] Femme(inity).’ This interrogation leads Bryan to question whether femme is a term that she - as a person of colour - can identify with by articulating how femme could just be ‘some bull sounding sweet in another colonizing master tongue:’

Maybe this word Femme ain’t all that. Could be Femme’s just some bull sounding sweet in another colonizing master tongue. Two solitudes or two hundred, it’s all the same to me.

Peut-être je does trouver une autre langue. Quelque chose plus vivante. Fière. Rempli de ma réalité. Rempli de moi. Comprenez-vous mes autre noms? Répétez ceci apères moi: Sapphire. Hoo/chee Mama. Pidgeon. Skeezer. Heifer. Ho.⁵

FEMME? SURE.... I’M A FEMME

Bryan thus points towards how whiteness is a central defining factor and unspoken standard not only in queer communities, but also in femme communities, where definitions and stylised performative embodiments of femme are concerned and where femme of colour histories, roots, idols, communities, experiences and identities are, unfortunately, all too often marginalised, in comparison to their white equivalents (Bryan

⁵ Translation: ‘Maybe I have to find another language. Something more lively. Fierce. Filled with my reality. Filled with myself. Do you understand my other names? Repeat after me: Sapphire. Hoo/chee Mama. Pidgeon. Skeezer. Heifer. Ho.’

2002, Piepzna-Samarasinha 2011, Harris and Crocker 1997, Faderman 1991, Kennedy and Davis 1993, Savitz 2011, Manauat 2013, Lewis 2012).

Another limit to the term queer femininities is how femme is popularly defined as a powerful, pleasurable and subversive femininity can also be an exclusionary way of defining femme. It is important to note that it is not only power, pleasure and subversion that orientate queer femininities, since vulnerability, pain, hurt, shame and anger, can also play a large part, as my participant, Hedwig, explored when asked to describe what queer femininities means to them:

It is a drag-show, and an ongoing de-construction of whatever femme/femininity might contain. As a young person, I was pinned against notions of femininity I could not identify myself with, was told I was not feminine enough, thin enough, pretty enough, kind enough to boys. This made me revolt, not against the idiots, but against myself, struggling with body image, eating disorders and self-doubt, disassociation, etc. I hid myself, behind layers of clothes, not recognizing my own body as mine and tried to hide everything about it. (...) it's a double edged thing, because sometimes it can be really cool to be able to feel strong in, depending on what kind of way you do your high femme, it can. I don't like doing high femme so that I feel completely insecure. I don't like. I wish I had that, like my friends do, that kind of full body explosion, that kind of thing, but I don't feel comfortable with it, because I'm not secure enough in my own skin yet and it's, it's a work in progress, if anything.

As Hedwig points out, vulnerabilities are therefore as much a part of queer feminine identities as power, pleasure, strength and subversion. These vulnerabilities need to be paid due attention in our discursive exploration and construction of queer femininities, if we are not to risk reifying power, pleasure, strength and subversion, as the sole definitional centre of these identities, thereby constructing distorted and hyperbolically idealised caricatures out of everyday lived identities and experiences that furthermore risk establishing certain femininities as “strong” and “empowered” and others as “weak.” Indeed, as is explored in Chapters 4 and 6 it can also risk excluding disabled femmes, femmes with mental health difficulties and femmes with long term health problems like Multiple Chemical Sensitivity or Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome. What all of these queer feminine subjects and examples have in common, of course, is their disidentificatory orientation towards femme identities and their occupying a liminal space of community (un)belonging; the fact that they highlight the limitations of femme by simultaneously identifying and counter identifying with queer femininities, through their (partially) falling *under* the sign of femme due to their affinity with select elements of this sign, identity and community and their (partially) falling *out* of the sign of femme due to

the stopping points that certain marginalised positionalities engender within a community that is unfortunately not as all inclusive as it presents itself. It is this tension between the politics of positionalities, marginalisation, privilege, disidentificatory orientations and dynamics of internal in/exclusions and community (un)belonging that subsequent chapters in this project explore in further depth.

xv) Conclusion

This chapter explored the various nuanced meanings associated with and definitions of femme and queer femininities. It outlined the history of femme and queer femininities as a term, identity and community originating from, firstly, sexological discourses by theorists like Havelock Ellis in the 1890s and 1920s and, secondly, pre Stonewall Anglo American working-class butch and femme lesbian bar cultures of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Historically, the term femme is most commonly used to denote a cisgendered feminine lesbian woman who typically couples with butches and sometimes with other femmes. The chapter charted how butch and femme gendered and sexual identities which were once strictly defined and segregated, became increasingly more flexible and fluid in the 1980s and 1990s through the influence of queer theory, the sex wars and trans* politics, which also influenced the increasing uncoupling of femininity from femaleness, sex from gender, femme from butch, gender from sexuality and associated arguments for the inclusion of trans* femme, bisexual femme and male femme identities, as well as the exploration and assertion of femme as independent gender and sexual identities that should be explored in their own right, rather than as an extension of or sidelined appendix to butch identities. With the exploration of diverse femme identities, as transgressive embodiments of femininity, the meanings and definition of femme proliferated further and it is these diverse meanings that this chapter theorised and challenged. The chapter discussed the meanings and definitions of queer femininities by drawing on femme theory, the three published femme anthologies and the perspectives of my own queer feminine participants, to highlight how queer femininities are frequently defined, discussed and experienced as: ambiguous identities that resist definitions, subversive sexual and gender identities that are historically rooted in butch and femme communities yet also exceed this binary, as a mode of performatively “doing” or ontologically “being” queerly feminine, as a politicised feminist form of femininity often involving

performative Butlerian “failures” and sometimes involving a distinction between queer forms of femininity and “normative” femininities. However, the chapter also highlighted how femmes are increasingly becoming critical of such simplistic distinctions between “subversive” and “normative” femininities, often with the aim of creating an inclusive queer feminine community. It also explored how queer femininities are often defined as a collective and a personal identity that is (*seemingly*) open to endless possibilities and as an umbrella term intended to be inclusive of differences yet is limited in certain ways. The chapter thus finished with a brief outline of the limitations of queer femininities, to highlight some of the ways that queer feminine subjects can simultaneously fall *under* and *out* of the signs of queer femininities and their related identities, communities and experiences. Indeed, I argue that it is these limitations that essentially create queer feminine disidentificatory orientations. Therefore, it is these limitations and their related disidentificatory orientations towards and away from queer femininities, which this project explores in subsequent chapters by attending to the key themes: a) positionalities of queer feminine privilege, b) the art of queer feminine “failure” and c) the politics of righteous queer feminine anger. Finally, the chapter also defined how this project uses the terms femme, subversive, alternative and, particularly, queer femininities - as an *umbrella term* that is open to continual revision and reinvention and encompasses all those subjects who self identify with this term (or related terms) in whichever way they choose to map out this identity and their affinity to queer femininities.

Chapter 4: Rethinking Queer Feminine Privilege, Positionalities and Power Through Disidentificatory Orientations

i) Introduction

Situated and intersecting positionalities of identity play a strong role in orientating the definitions of queer femininities and femme. Positionalities are present in the roots of the terms queer, femme and queer femininities. They are present in the necessary broadening out of the term femme to include various differently situated subjects. Furthermore, they are present in the very necessity of keeping the boundaries of our queer feminine definitions and communities as open and inclusive as possible. Positionalities are, thus, also present in the individual ways that subjects identify with and adapt these terms to construct their own personal definitions of queer fem(me)inities – a dynamic which is arguably indicative of the power of identity norms present even within queer fem(me)inine communities and representation and the simultaneous instabilities of such powerful norms and their subsequent resistance by subjects who (dis)identify with them. Finally, positionalities, privilege and power dynamics between femmes, play a significant role in establishing the limitations and inevitable exclusions that occur *within* definitions and communities surrounding the terms queer, femme and queer femininities. This chapter, therefore, seeks to further explore the significance of intersecting positionalities for the performative construction and orientation of queer feminine embodied subjectivities, as well as for dynamics of power, privilege, inclusion and exclusion *within* feminist, queer and queer fem(me)inine communities. For this, the chapter draws primarily on data from my interviews, including the photographs and collages created by my participants, to illustrate some of the new findings and perspectives this project generated, in particular with regards to rural queer feminine identities, mental health and queer heterosexualities, and how these subjects orientate themselves towards and away from queer fem(me)inine identification, community belonging and representation in (dis)identificatory ways, due to positioned dynamics of power and privilege that establish barriers, limitations and stopping points to their queer fem(me)inine processes of identification and orientation. The chapter begins by exploring why positionalities matter for theorising queer feminine disidentificatory orientations through looking at how

situated and intersecting positionalities are present in the theories of Ahmed (2006) and Muñoz (1999). The chapter will then focus on exploring *three* significant and often overlooked positionalities, namely those of 1. geographical location, 2. (dis)abilities, 3 (queer) heterosexualities and how these orientate themselves in (dis)identificatory ways towards and away from queer fem(me)inities, as well as what this tells us about queer fem(me)inine privilege and internal (sub)cultural community power dynamics. Further positionalities, including those of 'race', ethnicity and whiteness, class, size and trans* gender identities, which - although touched upon in this chapter - will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5 and 6. Thus, this chapter explores the potential for productively proliferating queerness through analysing the lived experiential complexities of rural queer femininities, queer femininities with disabilities or mental health issues and queer heterosexual femininities, who occupy queer fem(me)inine spaces of community (un)belonging and orientate themselves in (dis)identificatory ways due to oblique positioned dynamics of power and privilege present within these communities, constructions of identity and representations, always with the aim of interrogating and disrupting unhelpful binaries, invisible privileges and facilitating the building of further political solidarities, alliances affinities and affiliations, between queer femmes across differences. First, why do positionalities matter and what has all of this got to do with power and privilege?

ii) Why Positionalities Matter

In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) and 'Phenomenology of Whiteness' (2007), Sara Ahmed argues that 'bodies are shaped by what they tend toward' (2006, p.129) or repetitively orientate themselves around and 'the repetition of that tending toward produces certain tendencies,' or patterns of orientation. Furthermore, Ahmed (2006, p.2) claims that 'bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are *reachable*, that are available *within the bodily horizon*,' (my emphasis). In this way, Ahmed (2006, p.8), drawing on Husserl's (1989) 'zero point of orientations' and Schutz and Luckman's (1974) 'starting point' as the present "here" where one is situated and from which subjects orientate themselves, argues that 'orientations are about starting points' - 'about how we begin, how we proceed from "here," which affects how what is 'there' appears,

how it presents itself. In other words, we encounter ‘things’ as coming from different, sides, as well as having different sides.’ I want to hone in on the positioned nature of these starting points and the immediate, present “here” from where we begin to orientate our always, already embodied and located selves, or positioned intercorporeal subjectivities. Ahmed theorises this starting point as the body and its dwelling place. As Ahmed (2007, p.151) writes: ‘The starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the ‘here’ of the body, and the ‘where’ of its dwelling. Given this, orientations are about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places. If orientations are about how we begin from ‘here’, then they involve unfolding. At what point does the world unfold?’ In partial answer to this question of from “what point” - or perhaps from “what plural points” does the world and the embodied subject itself “unfold” - I would suggest that the subject and their sociocultural situatedness would be another way of understanding this dynamic. Bodies and identities are, of course, always, already, positioned entities. Indeed, positionalities are already implied in Ahmed’s (2006, p.5) theorisation of orientations when she pays homage to those ‘Feminist, queer, and critical race philosophers’ - namely Audre Lorde (1984), Adrienne Rich (1986) Donna Haraway (1991), and Patricia Hill Collins (1998) amongst others - that ‘have shown us how social differences are the effects of how bodies inhabit spaces with others, and they have emphasized the intercorporeal aspects of bodily dwelling’ and those ‘generations of feminist writers who have asked us to think from the “points” at which we stand and who have called for a politics of location as a form of situated dwelling’ in her thinking through ‘the “orientated” nature of such standpoints.’ Or, the way that positionalities are involved in orientations.

Positionalities are also crucial in her theory of orientations as becomes evident in her argumentation that orientations, the directions we face, and what is present or absent, near or far, is not casual, rather they are always, already organised. As Ahmed (2006, p.21) writes ‘what is ‘present’ or near to us is not casual: we do not acquire our orientations just because we find things here or there. Rather certain objects are available to us because of lines that we have already taken: our ‘life courses’ follow a certain sequence, which is also a matter of following a direction or of ‘being directed’ in a certain way.’ Thus, according to Ahmed (2006, p.21) ‘The concept of “orientations” allows us to expose how life gets directed in some ways rather than others, through the very

requirement that we follow what is already given to us.’ Indeed, in relation to this sense of subjects following and, thus, reproducing lines that are given to them, Ahmed (2007, pp.154-155) drawing on Marx’s concept of “inheritance” and Merleau Ponty’s concept of “the habitual body,” argues that subjects ‘inherit the reachability of some objects’ – objects that fall within their bodily horizons – ‘we inherit proximities (and hence orientations)’ and ‘we inhaled habit.’ By way of translation, subjects inherit their bodily habits and habitus, proximities to objects and subjects, what is on or off their ‘bodily horizons’ (Ahmed, 2006, p.55), the directions they face, their backgrounds, what is behind them, the objects that are near to hand and the distance that places certain objects or subjects out of reach, as well as the ways in which we are orientated in some ways more than others, and what or how we inherit any of these elements is intimately tied to our positionalities, which are also largely inherited. Ahmed (2006, p.15) elaborates on this organised nature of orientations when she writes that ‘the body gets directed in some ways more than others. We might be used to thinking of direction as simply which way we turn, or which way we are facing, at this or that moment in time. Direction then would be a rather casual matter. But what if direction, as the way we face as well as move, is organized rather than casual?’ Of course, what is inherited and how the body becomes directed, is not only down to life courses or paths, but positionalities that act simultaneously as starting points from which subjects proceed and their worlds unfold, as well as end points, or destinations, that through their being followed and repeated, become performatively reproduced.

Thus, Ahmed (2006, p.55) describes a largely self perpetuating loop, where what we can come into contact with and what embodied subjects can do, or become, is shaped by what they are already orientated towards, by what is ‘reachable’ and what is ‘beyond our horizon,’ largely due to our inherited starting points, positionalities and bodily horizons. Ahmed illustrates this through the example of the ‘bad habit’ of whiteness (Ahmed, 2007, p.149), how whiteness becomes reproduced and her own mixed-race genealogy. Citing these as modes of orientation with specific starting points that have the effect of placing certain things - including ‘physical objects (...) styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits,’ modes of comportment, behaviour and thought – in, or out, of reach (Ahmed, 2007, p.154). Thus, in so far as the things that we orientate ourselves towards and around are not casual, but are influenced by our starting points or

positionalities, which effect what is on or off our immediate bodily horizon and how we relate to these, orientations then are logically about the situated starting points of sex, gender, class, 'race,' ethnicity, age, sexuality and ability, amongst many others. In many ways, positionalities can be argued to be 'orientation devices,' lines that direct us, in and of themselves (Ahmed, 2006, p.11).

However, in theorising the effect of positionality on orientations, we need to remember that this loop, although performatively self perpetuating, is not entirely deterministic. Ahmed (2006, p.19) highlights this point when she argues that whilst 'at one level we do not encounter that which is of course' - away from the often already directed life courses we have taken, the lines we have already followed and are often inclined or called on to performatively reproduce, the paths of orientation, bodily horizons, positionalities or backgrounds that we have inherited - there is nevertheless always the possibility for 'accidental or chance encounters do happen' that can 'redirect us and open up new worlds.' To put this another way, to quote Ahmed (2006, p.61) 'even if what we 'do do' affects what we 'can do' other things remain possible.' In other words, change to the ways that we orientate ourselves is a possible. Thus, this theory of orientations is not entirely deterministic when it comes to the role of positionalities, or starting points, and bodily horizons are never entirely sedimented, as there is always room for deviating, for veering away from well trodden paths, or "*failing*" to make the gesture of return towards the orientations that we inherit. Indeed, it is this veering away or refusal to make the gesture of return that, according to Ahmed (2006), effectively produces queer forms of orientation and existence. Again, failure plays a significant and productive role in Ahmed's (2006), and also Butler's (1990), writing, since queerness is theorised as the effect of a "*failure*" to reproduce, or follow, in terms of orientation, the lines or paths that culture lays out for us and, in terms of performativity, the scripts that culture gives us, as queer lives and subjectivities, according to Ahmed (2006, p.21) 'might be one that fails to make such gestures of return' to inherited lifelines and starting points. One affective mode of (re)orientation that Ahmed (2006, p.19) points towards as potentially leading subjects off the paths of orientation that they are supposed to follow and towards 'unofficial paths' are, of course, 'desire lines.' These implicitly queer desire lines are described as reorientating subjects as lines of "deviation," which 'leaves its own marks on the ground' and, in some cases, 'can even help generate alternative lines, which cross the

ground in unexpected ways. Such lines are indeed traces of desire; where people have taken different routes to get to this point or to that point.’ Ahmed (2006, pp.17-18) elaborates on these breakages, deviations and encounters when she writes that ‘It is not automatic that we reproduce what we inherit.’ Indeed, ‘Some lines might be marks of the refusal to reproduce: the lines of rebellion and resistance that gather over time to create new impressions on the skin surface or on the skin of the social. For it is important to remember that life is not always linear, or that the lines we follow do not always lead us to the same place.’ (Ahmed, 2006, pp.17-18). Similarly, a ‘queer phenomenology,’ and, here I take Ahmed (2006, p.3) to mean both in the lived, identity or experiential sense, as well as in the philosophical or disciplinary sense, is also marked by these breakages, since she argues that this ‘might start by redirecting our attention toward different objects, those that are ‘less proximate’ or even those that deviate or are deviant.’ Therefore, according to Ahmed (2006), the queer subject and body is typically produced through orientations away from what is already on the bodily horizon and an orientation towards that which is off the bodily horizon, or what is on the bodily horizon in queer ways. Of course, what is on or off the bodily horizon of any individual subject, already depends on their specific, intersecting, positionalities. However, one final thing to consider with regards to positionalities and orientations, is that Ahmed also implicitly points towards the relative privilege involved in deviations, productive failures and the generation of new patterns of orientation or tendencies. This gesture is present, for example, in Ahmed’s (2006, p.62) argument that ‘the ‘new’ is what is possible when what is behind us, our background’ - which I am interpreting as our various positionalities - ‘does not simply ground us or keep us in place, but allows us to move and allows us to follow something other than the lines that we have already taken.’

The connection between Muñozian (1999) disidentifications and positionalities has already been explored at length in Chapter 1. However, to briefly explicate these connections, before delving into the data. Firstly, Muñoz’s theory of disidentifications is absolutely and utterly grounded in and dependent on intersectional approaches to analysing positioned - queer of colour - lived experiences and performance art to uncover the *tensions* and *possibilities* that arise when a subject inhabits multiple and often conflicting minoritarian positionalities that are not in easy alignment with the majoritarian sites and ideologies they are asked to inherit, identify with, orientate themselves around

and thereby performatively reproduce. Secondly, this productive “failure” to fully identify with, inherit or inhabit a site and its associated ideology that creates the Muñozian disidentifying subject, is in Muñoz’s work caused by positioned differences or disjunctures between: *firstly*, the site of identification, *secondly*, the ideology that this site inhabits and symbolises and, *thirdly*, the subject who is doing the (dis)identifying. It is this disjuncture in positionalities that prompts subjects to orientate themselves in disidentificatory ways, simultaneously towards and away from the sites, ideologies, signs and communities that they can never fully identify with or belong to, due to these positioned and ideological differences. Thirdly, Muñozian (1999, pp.4 & 8) disidentifications are, of course, ‘survival strategies’ that specifically *positioned* minority subjects - often those ‘who are hailed by more than one minority identity component’ - deploy ‘in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public spheres,’ by neither entirely assimilating or rejecting these dominant *positioned* ideologies. Therefore, since positionalities are crucial aspects of both Muñozian (1999) disidentifications and Ahmed’s (2006) theory of orientations, it is logical to conclude that positionalities are also crucial for analysing queer feminine disidentificatory orientations and community (*un*)belonging, particularly when so much emphasis in queer, feminist and femme theories, communities and politics is placed on rhetorics of difference, diversity, power and privilege. Thus, the following three sections of this chapter analyse the role that positionalities like geographical location, disabilities and (hetero)sexuality, as well as their associated privileges - or lack thereof - play in orientating queer feminine subjects in disidentificatory ways.

However, before we begin, we need to take a look at how power is conceptualised and understood within this chapter. Social positionalities and their related privileges and oppressions are, as we know, fundamentally constituted by structural power. Thus, since positionalities, privilege and oppression are so very crucial for analysing queer feminine disidentificatory orientations, then power too is of fundamental significance. Firstly, this chapter grounds its understanding of power in the work of post-structural feminist theories, as well as intersectional black feminist theories of power and its relation to identity construction, structural privilege and oppression. It understand and conceptualises power through a Foucauldian (1975, 1976) and Butlerian (1990, 1993) theoretical lens as involving normalising discursive practices that constitute and regulate

identities and yet also actively produces disruptive practices of resistance. Thus, it also understands power as being fundamental within the performative discursive process of the social construction of identities and their related categories. Yet it also understands power as being highly contextually specific – operating in specific ways within specific sites and specific relational dynamics. Power is therefore theorised as being structured, complex, relational and always ever so slightly unstable and open to contestation *from within*. It also understands power through the lens of identity politics – especially through a intersectional, black, crip* and Marxist feminist theoretical lens – as being structured along lines of and actively (re)producing positioned forms of privilege, oppression and social inequalities, which need to be challenged, dismantled and redistributed, in order to further the work of social justice.

In relation to this chapter, what is most significant, aside from the fundamental understanding of power articulated above, is the power involved in the constitution and regulation of identities and the way that subjects move through a social world that is suffused with power and social inequalities. Thus, this chapter is concerned with the power involved in the constitutive construction of embodied subjectivities and how these orientate themselves in relation to power, privilege and oppression in sometimes resistant ways, which are of course also actively constituted by power. To ground this understanding of power in Ahmed's theory of orientations, this chapter is also concerned with how *some* privileged subjects are awarded power by following certain specifically situated social of (sub)cultural norms, which propel them forwards – in this case towards queer feminine identities and community belonging – and how *other* multiply oppressed subjects encounter stopping devices which hinder their orientation towards queer feminine identities and community belonging, due to the circulation of oblique powerful norms within our own communities and representations. Yet, in so doing, it also acknowledges the complex intersectional variations in between these seemingly static binaries and polarities, since I acknowledge that most people are marked by a mixture of privileged and oppressed positionalities, as well as a mixture of access to structural, social *and* (sub)cultural power and disenfranchisement from power.

Moreover, to relate this understanding of power to Muñoz's disidentifications, power can be understood as the violent discursive power of discrete identity categories and the power involved in how these discrete identity categories circulate and are performatively (re)produced within social and (sub)cultural sites of representation, politics, activism and community making, which threaten to fragment, exclude and oppress those subjects who inhabit multiple and conflicting marginalised identity categories. The power that calls on complex intersectional identities to fragment themselves into discrete parts and identify with or become neatly interpolated into binary frameworks that call on them to choose one marginalised identity *or* the other – to invoke Muñoz's own example concerning identifying as *either* black *or* queer, in order to achieve community belonging and be able to identify with cultural representations, rather than a complex intersectional combination of both of these marginalised identity positions. However, the violent discursive power of discrete identity categories, like power itself, is also unstable and open to contestation from within, and this is precisely what Muñoz's concept of disidentifications taps into, since disidentifications manifest a positively troubling disruption of the power of discrete identity categories, and normative processes of identification with cultural texts or orientation within the social world.

As we will see, queer feminine disidentificatory orientations are actively constituted by and through power, in the sense that: *firstly*, it is the structural powers involved in positioned forms of privilege and oppression that propel some privileged positioned subjects forwards or act as stopping points for other multiply oppressed queer feminine subjects in the process of their becoming orientated in relation to queer feminine identification and community belonging; and *secondly*, it is the discursive power involved in the production of discrete identity categories, which call on subjects to interpolate themselves neatly within these and become recognisable under them, that actively produces the very excess – that is to say, those identities who cannot fit themselves neatly into identity categories and overflow precisely due to the multiple marginalised and intersecting identity positions that they inhabit yet which are also in conflict – that the concept of *disidentificatory* orientations strives to capture, explore and explain, in relation to those queer feminine subjects who find themselves occupying liminal spaces of community (un)belonging, due to their complex privileged and yet also multiply marginalised positionalities, which simultaneously propel them forwards and stop their

identification and community belonging, in their process of becoming orientated as queerly feminine subjects.

iii) Geographical Location

Situated at the extreme end of rural isolation, Sue, a 39 year old white British working class participant living in the Welsh countryside who suffers from bipolar disorder, describes how her rural geographical positionality - and related lack of power and privilege - orientates the construction and embodied performance of her queer gothic feminine gender identity and produces her (dis)identificatory orientation to (queer) fem(me)inine norms, by simultaneously actively producing her femininity as queer *and* by limiting the extent to which she can *choose* to queer femininity. This sense of her location in the Welsh countryside as actively orientating, constituting, producing and shaping her feminine embodiment and subjectivity as queer is highlighted in her questionnaire where Sue wrote that 'Living in the countryside, it is easier to stand out as non conformist, which feeds into the ease of access of a non normative performance of femininity.' This 'ease of access' to a 'non normative performance of femininity' is furthermore expressed by Sue in her interview where she articulates that 'you don't have to be quite so far out to be outrageous in a small rural community (...) you just don't have to push it as far to stand out in Pembrokeshire.' However, her geographical positionality also severely limits Sue since, through the example of the different reactions she receives when wearing platform shoes in a small city in Wales and the example of the lack of negative reactions she gets for wearing a full length velvet coat to the Albert Hall in London compared to in the countryside in Pembrokeshire, she expresses a necessity to discipline her own gendered performance out of fear of being 'too much,' 'outrageous' or 'ridiculous.' Thus, Sue limits her queer gothic gendered performance out of a fear of ridicule, which is arguably a type of gendered policing that she has internalised to a certain degree, enough to effect her reigning in her gendered expression.

Sue: I don't tend to do the whole Goth thing in Pembrokeshire because people will laugh at you.

Alexa: Really. OK.

Sue: I've come up here [a small city in Wales] to teach and I've been wearing platforms and stuff, fine. Got off the train in Pembrokeshire, not fine. It's too much.

Alexa: OK. So, there's a sense in which you rein it in, with an awareness of, some parts of how you might be perceived.

Sue: Yea. (...) you don't have to be quite so far out to be outrageous in a small rural community, I mean saying that, I used to go shopping with an elderly neighbour and I've worn what you see now and she's fine with it, because it's me and she knows me and she knows I'm a bit odd, you know.

Alexa: Yea, yea, it's interesting; because I can see how what you're wearing now especially would stand out in Pembrokeshire, but if you went to London it would kind of blend in.

Sue: Well, yea, I went to London and I wore a full length velvet coat to the Albert Hall. No worries. You imagine wearing it in Pembrokeshire.

Alexa: Yea, yea, *laughter* okay, yea.

Sue: So, you just don't have to push it as far, to stand out in Pembrokeshire, I think that's probably we're it falls down to, because if you do push it too far, you become ridiculous.

Clearly, Sue feels that in a city space like London, her queer gothic gender identity did not get policed as strongly as in Pembrokeshire. Thus, on the one hand it was easier for her to push the boundaries of gendered embodiment further in London because of this lack of policing, yet on the other hand it is also easy for her to push the boundaries of gender in Pembrokeshire, precisely because, as Sue describes: 'you don't have to be so far out to be outrageous in a small rural community.' However, it is also limiting, as Sue highlights, because if you do push it even just a little bit or 'too far, you become ridiculous' and risk being policed for being different. Thus, her geographical location and a very situated anxiety about what people in her community may think if she is perceived as "pushing things too far," actively shapes how Sue constructs her queer gendered style of embodiment, in limiting how far she can go with her queer and gothic gender identity. It arguably also produces a very different economy of what is visibly queerly feminine. Since what is queer in the countryside or in a smaller city, blends in the big city and may not even appear on the queer visual radar in the context of 'queer Meccas' like London. Sue, thus, orientates herself in disidentificatory ways towards and away from both the sexual and gendered norms present in her rural Welsh community, which acts as a limiting horizon or stopping point in orientating her queer fem(me)inine identity, whilst at the same time actively producing her queer feminine identity and makes her stand out as different, despite her own censorship of her difference to a certain degree in order to avoid negative reactions within her rural Welsh community, and yet this limitation of how far she is willing to subvert gendered norms within a context where her queer gender and sexuality is severely policed, also produces her (dis)identificatory orientation towards queer fem(me)inine identities, communities and representations and an alternative mode

of occupying queer fem(me)ininity that is significantly different from urban centric forms of queer fem(me)ininity.



Figure 4.1 Sue

On the left, Sue, wearing a black dress to demonstrate ‘tailored’ & ‘pumping her guns’ (biceps), related to her desire for strength and to be recognised as strong. On the right, Ali in her bedroom, the pose is intended to embody confidence.



Figure 4.2 Ali

Indeed, an interesting queer feminine mode of embodied subjectivity that is specifically produced by being located in the countryside is presented by Hedwig. Hedwig describes how her orientation towards horse riding during her childhood in rural Sweden, queers her feminine gender embodiment in the sense that it orientates her away from what she describes as a ‘very prim and proper’ (implicitly white and middle class) femininity, and towards a ‘stable girl’ femininity that she describes as ‘not feminine proper,’ since she ‘always smelt of stable’ and didn’t leave ‘the shitty work’ for the boys:



Figure 4.3 Hedwig’s Collage: Horse

This, I think the leaves probably represent where I grew up, which was the countryside, I was the only child and I spent tons and tons of hours and hours in the stable about 4 hours a day, through being a small kid up to late teens in the stable, I was a dressage rider, I spent, I think 4 hours a day in the stable, training, competing for a couple of years and it's something which I think was very good for me, because you learn so much about yourself and you become very strong by being in the stable (...) It was what I did when I didn't have very many friends, I had one best friend but I was within the stable and people couldn't get a hold of me they knew I was out there and I always smelt of stable. I was again not feminine proper, I was a stable girl, which, is, you can be a proper stable girl, but then you have to be very prim and

proper, you have to let someone else do the shitty work, but being a stable girl I think there is a very interesting academic articles about what it does to femininity and also how often it's seen as like oh leaving the horses for the boys, which I never did.

Hedwig thus clearly orientates herself in a disidentificatory way towards and away from rural middle-class feminine norms and this disidentificatory orientation actively constitutes her queer feminine identity within this context. Furthermore, like Sue, Hedwig's rural positionality and disidentificatory orientation towards these specifically situated rural middle-class feminine norms, produces a unique form of queer feminine which is not often represented within queer feminine communities that dominantly focus on urban centric representations of queer fem(me)inine existence.

Reflecting back on the example presented by Sue, Ali who lives in a Welsh city describes a similar experience of her appearance becoming normalised and fading into the background, to a certain degree, when she visits London and distinctively standing out as embodying a very different femininity in her home town, Swansea. Ali also describes an absence of negative reactions to her when visiting London, whereas she receives harassment and gendered policing 'every single day' in Swansea.

It's just really backward, I've lived in Swansea all my life, it was very exciting at the beginning [Ali is referring to her involvement in Punk subcultures when she was a teenager] because you thought oh I'm going to be part of something but when you just realise, as you said, actually it's still like it now were just like years behind everybody else and it does really infuriate me because you know *when I go to place like London although I still get looked at often that's by, you know, people I presume who are visitors or foreigners, not necessarily by people who live in London, you're just so much aware like I've only got to go to town and just, you know, got people beeping and you're just like 'oh my god,' you're just like, it's every single day, then you go to London or somewhere bigger and it's just like I don't get it*, and it is really like, whoa, that's odd, cos you're so used to experiencing that sort of negativity and that's the only thing I don't like about being here, it's **exasperated out breath** I'm just so aware culturally everybody's way behind.

In reflecting on how geographical location orientates her subversive punk feminine gender identity and embodiment Ali also noted how these days, because 'Swansea is so small, everybody knows me now' which simultaneously highlights how strongly she stands out as different in a smaller city, yet is also constituted as different by her geographical positionality due to the limited diversity present in a smaller city, comparatively to a larger city like London. When talking about the punk band the Sluts and how they have influenced her gender identity by showing her that 'I can do that, if somebody else is doing that,' by which she means performing a punk orientated

subversive feminine style of embodied subjectivity, Ali further highlights how the smallness of Swansea made it difficult for her to perform her femininity with a difference. Here, Ali not only points towards geographical space, but also historical and generational time, as a point of orientation, by referring to Swansea during the ‘late seventies, early eighties’ as being ‘absolutely tiny’ and even more limited in terms of cultural diversity.

Ali: My favourite band was the Sluts, they're still my favourite band now, it was the way that they dressed very similar they had big sort of, like big sort of tutee skirts and then with a leather jacket, or like, you know, boy trousers, but with like a girly top and I suppose looking at that, I think that very much influenced the way I sort of thought "oh wow!" I can, you know, I can do that, if somebody else is doing that, although it was very difficult living in Swansea, because, I mean Swansea is small now, can you imagine what it was like in the sort of late seventies, early eighties, it was absolutely tiny, it had nothing, so.

Alexa: And, things aren't really in reach, like, in this part of the world as much.

Ali: No, no, not even now.

Alexa: Yea, yea.

Ali: So, I suppose originally it was very much "oh my god!" this is what's happening in London and London seemed so far away.

In her talk Ali can be seen to be desiring London as a diverse space where exciting things were ‘happening,’ yet also as a space that ‘seemed so far away.’ London, thus, figures on Ali’s horizon as an imagined desired space of diversity that is significantly out of reach for numerous reasons including her age, geographical location and her Welsh working class economic positionality which meant that cities like Bristol and London, which acted as central hubs for the punk subculture that she was engaged in during her youth, felt even further away and inaccessible to Ali when she was growing up ‘because you just couldn’t afford to get on a train and go there.’ When asked whether she felt that these punk subcultures were happening at a distance or whether she was able to bring this closer, Ali replied by explaining how they had a small yet solid subcultural group in Swansea yet also how Bristol and London were very much the out of reach and far away, unaffordable, privileged centre: ‘definitely sort of in the very early eighties, although we were much, like it was London, it was, Bristol was a really big centre, as well, it's weird now to think places like Bristol were far away, you know, but you did, because you just couldn't afford to get on a train and go there.’ The urban space of the big city are thus represented by Ali as a desired space that she is orientated towards in her imaginary. Like Sue, Ali feels the orientating pull of the metropolis, with its cultural diversity and related possibility of anonymity and belonging. Yet it is arguably her classed positionality, with

its related lack of privilege and economic power, which holds her in place, limits and acts as a stopping point for her desired orientation towards the unaffordable metropolis.

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, given the limitations that being situated in the countryside or even just a smaller city as a queer subject and the isolation that being queer or simply different in the countryside can bring, is the queer longing for and appreciation of larger city spaces that this positionality often generates. Sue represents this queer desire and pull towards the imagined possibilities that the metropolis engenders for queer subjects, through the London tube map that she included on her collage to represent herself as ‘a city slicker stuck in rural Wales.’

Alexa: And, what is the tube map about?

Sue: That's because I'm a city slicker stuck in rural Wales. That's what that represents, that, that's where I would like to be.

Alexa: Is there some bit's about like, it would be easier for your identity, that it would be better in a city than a countryside setting.

Sue: Yea. And, you also have the ideas of anonymity around it, which you don't have in a small community.

Alexa: Yea. Or even in a small city. And, is there also something about accessing certain scenes that would be easier in a city?

Sue: That wasn't conscious, but obviously that would be (...) I am very very isolated where I live, because of the public transport situation, so, I don't get to access an awful lot. Probably one reason why I can get into the training as much as I have is because it's about the only thing I can access.

Alexa: Okay. So, is there also a certain sense in which you can't access certain scenes where, which, wherein your kind of performance of your gender identity would be more normalised or you would find people who would be on the same page as you.

Sue: Yea.

Sue, as a city slicker stuck in rural Wales, arguably embodies both an explicit disidentificatory orientation towards the countryside, as a queer feminine subject longing for city spaces in which she feels she would be able to realise her queer identity more easily and implicitly disidentificatory orientation towards queer city spaces as rurally situated queer subject situated outside of belonging and on the margins of queer subcultures.

By comparison, participants like Hedwig and Vikki, who are both white, middle class, in their early to mid twenties, living in London - and therefore possess numerous positioned forms of power and privilege - articulate how their geographical location in

this “queer Mecca” effects their queer sexuality and feminine gender identity in terms of their ease of access to diverse subcultural spaces, belonging and discourses that enable them to explore and construct their embodied subjectivities as gender queer femmes. Indeed, Hedwig describes how on moving to London, where she affectionately describes how ‘there’s perverts everywhere and there’s so many think to explore,’ she ‘started exploring kink,’ which in many ways orientates the queer feminine comportment that she presents in her pictures, taken whilst getting ready for a kink event. When asked to discuss London and how this space orientates her, in terms of access to subcultural spaces and the opportunities that London offers, as a space which render queer and kink identities and practices possible, Hedwig articulated that London provides her with both the financial means, consumer choices and diverse community spaces that facilitate her kinky gender queer femme identity including, work and, thus, an income that allows her access to the kink and alternative sex scenes, which form some of the spaces through which Hedwig realises her gender queer femme identity. However, Hedwig also notes that she is in a very privileged position as a white, northern European, middle class, Swedish passport holding, kinky gender queer feminine bisexual subject, since this means that she feels ‘safe,’ because she ‘can travel, if something goes wrong here, I can take my passport and go home to Sweden and I have a social security and I have something which protects. Which is very much more than many people have got.’

Alexa: What about the, right before we finish, living in London, how does that, how does space orientate your access to subcultures, or?

Hedwig: Very much so. Access to work for example, it's much more likely that I'll get a job, which has better pay than many other people who come here and London it is, there is a false pretence in London saying that everyone kind of, everyone who comes here etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, can do this, can do that, but it's not. But it's very much accepted in the kind of I'm white, and I'm safe, and I'm reliable, and I have a passport, I can travel, if something goes wrong here, I can take my passport and go home to Sweden and I have a social security and I have something which protects. Which is very much more than many people have got.

Alexa: OK. And, then does that come into your feminine identity or your kink identity at all.

Hedwig: Yea, I would say I wouldn't be able to afford many of the things that I would be doing unless I was in the position that I am.

Alexa: So, it's on the level of geographical access and monetary access.

Hedwig: Yea, yea, yea. London is very much also. London is expensive from the beginning. So, just the decision of going here, rather than going to Leeds for example. (...) Or the fact that London is seen as a kind of kink capital, it's got the biggest, like alternative sex scenes in the world. People travel basically from all over the world to events in, not so much as in US, but still, so there is benefits from that.

Evidently, both her geographical positionality in the queer Mecca and ‘kink capital’ of London, combined with her mobility and, thus, security as a white, middle-class, European, Swedish passport holding, young femme, which give her a certain degree of privilege and power, and increase her ability to access certain queer sexual and gendered spaces within the city, render it possible and relatively *safe* for Hedwig to orientate herself towards the kinky gender queer femme subjectivity that she embodies. This privilege and power may not be so easily available to kinky, gender queer feminine subjects outside of the capital, or who do not inhabit the various other positionalities in terms of ‘race,’ ethnicity, age, class and ability. Similarly, Vikki, in relating how London as a city space orientates her queer feminine identity articulates how she is aware of her positioned forms of privilege and power, and feels ‘incredibly lucky’ to be living in London as a queer subject, precisely because of the subcultural spaces, choices, acceptance and support networks that this renders available. Vikki compares the privilege and safety of living in a diverse city like London, which puts her in a powerful position, to her former home town, Guilford, which makes her ‘despair’ when she visits in her adult life as a ‘tourist’, because even though there is a lesbian community present, this is not “diverse enough” in Vikki’s opinion.

Yes, I'm, you know, like we were kind of saying, obviously I'm incredibly lucky and I, you know, I know and I'm very aware of that I'm lucky that I have, that because I'm in London I have the subcultural spaces and the environment and the *choice* to be in certain spaces where all of this stuff is known, is accepted, can be talked about and all of that stuff, I have that support network if I want it, and I, I'm very aware that that stuff is hard to find if it is there, sometimes it is there sometimes it isn't, outside of London, and I've experiences of, you know, where I grew up in Guilford, I, you know, some friends at home I go out, occasionally when I get home I go out on the gay scene there and it's so, sometimes it just makes me despair *laughter* because, I just think, you know you're so, so many of you are so narrow minded and so, I've had conversations with people, like, I said something to, I was talking to a group of lesbians, who, and I said something about, I can't even remember who it was, but I said something about some, either very masculine or some trans man being hot and they were like “oh my god!” and I was like “what?” and they kind of said, oh my god don't tell me that you, basically this woman said something about “if you fancy trans men then I've lost all respect for you” and I was like, “well, I've just lost all respect for you, so see you later,” but, you know there is kind of still that narrowness often and I think, god what would I feel like if I, if I wasn't a tourist in this, if this was my reality and I couldn't be like, oh my god that's hideous, I'm going to go back to my nice safe community where this is all, you know, so I'm very aware of my, my privilege in that, because they're just, because of the diversity of people, because of the, you know, like I said, the fact that people move, it's transient, people move through London all the time there is so much change and difference that there is just I don't think, you get as much in smaller places and I think it can be really hard when you don't have that.

Vikki acknowledges that, for her, the London queer scene offers a 'nice safe community' and she is glad that she only has to visit her home town as a 'tourist' rather than be trapped in that 'reality.' Her account, which also embodies a queer feminine disidentificatory orientation towards the rural, reflects and emphasises the difficulties that white, working class queer subjects like Sue, living in the countryside or in smaller towns, face, as they inhabit the dreaded reality that Vikki is aware of yet would not wish to inhabit because she realises her 'privilege,' through experiential comparison and that not having access to spaces of diversity 'can be really hard.'

Crucially, a further way that the diverse cityscape of London orientates Vikki, and places her in a powerful and privileged position as a queer feminine subjects, as well as being an active force through which her queer feminine identity becomes constituted, is through providing the very community spaces through which she can realise her femme identity. For Vikki discovering femme as a possible gender performance and sexual identification is thus intimately tied to her discovering a London based queer community in her early twenties through 'places like Bar Wotever.' Therefore, London acts as an implicit yet significant orientation point for the very formative moments that actively constitute her identity by enabling Vikki to discover and construct her queer feminine identity through providing her with safe spaces to 'play around' and 'experiment' with her gender and sexuality without 'any expectation' being placed on her to 'stick to one thing.' Just like the countryside acts as an orientation point that limits her horizon and actively constitutes Sue's queer feminine embodiment, the city also acts as a productive agent in opening up her horizon, potentiality for orientation and identification and, thus, the city plays an active part in constituting Vikki's queer feminine identity, however, the degree of their gendered agency and freedom is vastly different and determined by location, amongst other implicit positioned factors and privileges like age, class and ability, which give her access to power. Describing how she came to femme in her early twenties, Vikki related:

When I discovered a queer community, as opposed to just a lesbian one, you know, when I discovered places like Bar Wotever and suddenly I thought, oh my god there's this way of like, you know, when I discovered that I don't, there isn't only this way of being kind of a lesbian that was at Candy Bar, or whatever, and I thought oh my god look at these queer people and they're all sorts and that's amazing and then I also discovered at the same time fat activism and then somehow, I don't know what it

was maybe partly it was a maturity thing, an age thing as well, that I was at a stage where I was ready to break out of expected images that I suddenly thought hei, you know, this is a place where I can play around and be things and I think as well that, like I say that, that flexibility or that, you know, kind of not having to stick to one thing, you can be one thing one minute and one thing another minute, is really significant part of particularly the Wotever kind of ethos, that I think, was significant in having this feeling of okay I can experiment, actually, I can try this and see what it feels like and if it doesn't feel right, then, I don't have to stick to it and there won't be any, you know, that no one's gonna kind of put any expectation on me that I now have to be this thing so I can try putting on a dress and be like do I like this, do I not, am I going to wear a dress next week, maybe, maybe not.

Again, here the city acts as an orientation point that actively constitutes her identity through gifting her a wider horizon of gendered and sexual choices. The 'flexibility' that Vikki is able to engage with and which allows her to experiment, through her discovering safe, diverse and comfortable queer spaces in London, is markedly different from the fixity and restrictions placed on subjects like Sue and Ali, living in the (Welsh) countryside or a smaller (Welsh) city, who express a sense of discomfort, danger and feeling limited by their community, because in their geographical contexts every small difference or deviation becomes an intolerable transgression from gendered and sexual norms. It is perhaps rather unsurprising then that the modes of comportment developed by subjects like Ali and particularly Sue, living in the countryside and smaller towns, with less access to material resources, community, privilege and power and who are more bound by the contextual gendered and sexual norms which restrict them, are in some ways very different to how subjects living in queer Mecca's and who engage in kink and queer communities, like Bobette, Hedwig and Vikki chose to represent themselves. Indeed, the very conditions for this sense of agency and choice or the limitations placed on subjects is strongly orientated by geographical situatedness, amongst other positionalities and their related forms of power and privilege. Thus, whilst queer femininities are often depicted as not caring about what an implicitly heteronormative mainstream thinks of their queer sexual and gendered identities, or as confidently standing out in spite of their marginality - or, in other words, as confidently orientating themselves around femininity in (dis)identificatory ways - and any negative consequences that they may endure because of their queer genders or sexualities. Sue presents us with a different perspective, as a rurally situated subject who speaks of geographically situated anxieties about pushing things "too far" in the countryside - a spatial positionality that she cannot easily move away from due to her other intersecting positionalities as a disabled,

white, working-class woman, and the lack of privilege and power that these positionalities involve, unlike some more privileged mobile or city dwelling white, middle class, able bodied queer subjects. Arguably, these examples point towards the importance of considering queer spatial positionalities, privileges, power dynamics and marginalities, in terms of access to queer sub-cultural community spaces and the affective supports that these can offer, which provide the very invisible, yet foundational, spatio-cultural fertile ground on which certain positioned subjects are able to build their queer (feminine) identities and transnational queer communities. Of course, London's queer scenes are not entirely safe spaces for everyone equally, precisely due to the oblique circulation of positioned forms of privilege and the internal (sub)cultural power dynamics happening here, which render some positioned queer subjects (e.g. white, middle-class, able and young) as safer and more protected within and by these communities, than other positioned queer subjects (e.g. those who are black, older, working-class or disabled). In particular, working class queers, queers of colour and disabled queers can face further systemic exclusions *within* metropolitan queer spaces. However, in contrast to the predominantly city dwelling queer feminine subjects and urban centric approaches of anthologies like *Femmes of Power*, *Brazen Femme*, and *Femmethology* (2009), who are situated in 'queer Meccas' (Dahl, 2008) of America, Western Europe and Australia, the above accounts by my participants reflect on the relative privilege that coming from or living in a big city afford queer subjects, in contrast to some of the complex difficulties and barriers that queer who come from or live in the countryside – or even smaller cities – at times face in terms of their queer and femme gender and sexual identity construction and expression. In the following section I will take this thesis of internal marginality and lack of privilege and how this produces queer feminine disidentificatory orientations further by looking at queer feminine subjects who experience mental health difficulties or who identify as disabled.

i) Disabilities

(Dis)ability is a further crucial positioned intersection, oblique (lack of) privilege and power dynamic between femmes, that needs to be considered in relation to queer feminine (dis)identificatory orientations. Indeed, disabilities - especially mental health disabilities - featured strongly in the accounts of some of my participants, particularly in

context of how these can at times limit certain situated subjects access to typical modes of embodying and conceptualising queer femininities or rendering queer femininities visible, due to a positioned lack of privilege and power, which actively causes their subsequent (dis)identificatory orientations towards queer feminine communities, identities and representations. Their stories highlight an implicit ableist centre, as well as oblique forms of privilege and unequal power dynamics, present in many discourses circulating about queer femininities. Indeed, if queer femininities are typically defined by a fierce display of brazen confidence, the use of certain visual markers or technologies of the body, like red lipstick, as well as a desire and ability to deconstruct femininity through spectacular performative failures, then, arguably, these queer visual or behavioural tropes and performative strategies are already exclusionary of some - specifically situated - disabled subjects, who orientate themselves towards and away from queer feminine identities, communities and representations in (dis)identificatory ways, as a result of these ableist exclusions, oblique circulations of ableist privileges and power. For example, Sarah discusses how class and mental health are intimately intertwined with her queer femininity, as she discusses how her growth in self confidence in performing her femininity is linked to changes in her class status, rising income, power and privilege, as well as a gradual increase in cultural capital and social skills, which are linked to both her class and mental health status.

I am someone that has seen my femininity grow and develop as I have gained more self-confidence. Before, I felt I could not compete on those levels, either in terms of pulling off the 'look' as I had cripplingly low self-confidence and in terms of being aware that I couldn't relate well with other people. I lacked the cultural capital, the knowledge of social norms which would have meant I could engage. Rather than feeling free to be my own person, I realised that not being able to engage with any of the varied different types and ways of representing myself made me feel highly restricted. Since learning that I can be seen as attractive, that I can be seen as interesting, that I can be seen as someone on an equal level to other human beings (I had previously felt like one of a lower caste – naturally beneath people, like it was just the way of things) I have enjoyed playing with my identity. I feel like a whole new world has opened up to me. I must admit that not all of this was to do with internal image, I simply did not have the money to dress differently – I had to make do with what I could afford or was allowed to buy by my boyfriend (not an abusive relationship, but he held the purse strings). Now, through my rising income I am freed on more than one level, as I have become more psychologically free too. It's like walking into a sweetshop.

Furthermore, Sarah describes how her suffering from depression and chronic fatigue syndrome, coupled with her previously lower working class status, orientates what her

body can do physically, but also how she feels about herself emotionally and psychologically, in her actively valuing approval for how she performs her femininity:

my representation of self is contingent on feelings of self worth. Also, I want approval, I want people to say nice things to me, I want people to say “awww you look nice today, I like that dress,” so that I can get that sense of I've done it right, I've done it right, I look nice, I like this too. And, then, it's also you've got something to chat about, you can feel, I'm doing it correctly, I'm not alienated, I've got, I've been able to contact people from across that gulf that mental health can create.

For Sarah, as a subversive feminine subject whose multiple disabilities place her automatically outside of certain norms, approval and recognition for performing her femininity “right” acts as a way of connecting with other people across the alienating ‘gulf’ of her mental health difficulties. Sarah clearly articulates how social norms and conventions can be extremely positive for certain positioned subjects who find themselves to be situated automatically outside of social norms due to their disabilities, because they can act as connecting ‘cement.’ Therefore, subjects positioned in such a way may not wish or be *able* to deconstruct the social norms that they have painstakingly tried to learn, achieve or approximate. Indeed, as Sarah highlights, the purposeful deconstruction of certain norms is a playful performative gendered act that certain able bodied subjects have privileged access to embodying and subsequently deconstructing. Whereas those who, due to their disabilities, lack or power and privilege, are already situated outside of the norm, like Sarah, would perhaps ‘love a bit of the norm,’ which queer subjects who possess privilege related to (dis)ability are perhaps more easily willing and *able* to discard. Reflecting back on the discussion that queer fem(me)inities are typically characterised by a rebellious rejection of gendered and sexual “norms” or a transgressive going beyond such situated social norms, Sarah’s example contributes two crucial insights. Firstly, Sarah highlights the positioned privilege and, indeed, the subcultural normativity and power that is sometimes - yet not always - involved in queer fem(me)inine transgressions of gendered and sexual “norms” – when these dynamics are analysed from the critical vantage point of other situated starting points, such as (dis)abilities and (mental) health. Secondly, Sarah highlights how conforming, rather than transgressing - or, indeed, partially conforming and partially transgression, as might be more typical of disidentificatory queer fem(me)inine subjects, who orientate themselves simultaneously towards and away from queer feminine communities, identities and representations, due to the oblique circulation of positioned forms of privilege and related

power dynamics between femmes - and loving a bit the norm - from the disadvantaged perspective of subjects who occupy further marginalised positionalities and may experience certain community tropes (e.g. queer (femininity) = transgressive or non-normative) as implicitly or explicitly exclusionary - can actually, in some cases, take one beyond these norms. Indeed, through occupying a disidentificatory space between various communities and their related norms, subjects like Sarah may simultaneously move beyond those norms that are circulating within specific subcultural communities and those more ubiquitous norms that circulate within specifically situated sociocultural, historical and political contexts. This is because, as Sarah articulates below, 'the norm is subversive for some people,' who inhabit certain positionalities (for example, in this case working class, disabled and mental health) and who - due to a lack of privilege and power, as well as the oblique circulation of positioned privilege within queer feminine communities and inimical power dynamics between femmes - may find themselves implicitly excluded within certain subcultures, due to implicit subcultural norms or inherited community lines of orientation that they cannot follow and performatively reproduce.

Sarah: (...) I think that social norms and social conventions, there a kind of cement, so when people talk about the normalising effects of *bladibla*, I think that you need to play with norms, I think that you need to remind people, you need to remind people that it's wrong to push people to stay in one, but it can also be used to help people feel like they're not on their own.

Alexa: So you can talk about the normalising *bladibla*, if you're in the norm or you have some sort of, have some sort of an anchor in the norm, but if you're completely outside of it.

Sarah: Then you would love a bit of the norm.

Alexa: Yea.

Sarah: You'd love it, like I did (...)

Alexa: So, Is there a sense in which, you're very much happy with defining what subversive or alternative is because you're kind of saying that almost like *the norm is subversive for some people*.

Sarah: Yea.

Furthermore, Sarah also articulates how, although she recognises that queer femininities are often linked into a sense of not looking for or valuing approval from others, this disregard for approval is simply not a queerly feminine gendered act that is available because of her mental health difficulties: 'I can't push myself, my mental health isn't strong enough, I think that it's something that some people have the luxury to do.' Sarah therefore orientates herself in (dis)identificatory ways towards and away from the

deconstruction of feminine norms within queer feminine communities, as an identity practice that she simultaneously partially identifies with and takes part in – as someone who describes her feminist femininity as subversive – and yet which also exclude and alienate her – as a feminine subject with CFS and mental health difficulties who at times does not feel *able* to take part in the “subversive” queer feminine deconstructive performative game. Thus, Sarah points out how even those queer subjects who disregard mainstream approval, often gain subcultural approval for their queer feminine gendered performances, which can significantly support their gendered subversions:

Sarah: So, I understand and respect when people are doing it purposefully, not for approval, but I think that they will get approval that they are not necessarily looking for. (...)

Alexa: So, you mean subcultural approval?

Sarah: Yea, there is a subcultural approval. (...) And, it still links into getting a sense of approval from people (...) whether you approve of that approval is one thing, but you will probably find that your life is nicer with it. Otherwise it would be a lot harder to do.

Finally, Sarah also orientates herself in disidentificatory ways towards feminine norms as a result of her mental health difficulties, since she expresses how she feels that depression and certain normative, yet also certain subcultural, performances of femininity, like being the ‘happy go lucky’ good time girl, are fundamentally incompatible, by saying that ‘depression doesn't really have a place in femininity.’ When asked to elaborate on why depression doesn't have a place in femininity and what Sarah feels femininity requires, she replied that femininity requires:

Flippant behaviour and sort of happy go lucky sort of behaviour. If you, if you have, if there's seriousness in you, it's best to put that to one side, in a lot of social circumstances. So, I feel like I don't fit sometimes, because this small talk thing I find very difficult and exhausting, and so, so demanding. Small talk terrifies me and you're supposed to be brilliant at small talk, if you're a female. So, like and I'm just not and, it's, it's such a shame. I've always wanted to be able to be, but I'm not. I'd love to be able to be, but it just doesn't work for me. Also, the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, that means that going out and partying and stuff and just kind of getting ready to go out can be too tiring sometimes. So, I'll turn up to places, laden with some bags, because I've been too tired to rush about and like, looking a bit of a mess and just kind of dump myself down and that's the thing, my sort of femininity, it has to be a pick up and put down thing, because I don't have the energy to do it a lot of the time.

In this extract Sarah demonstrates how performatively embodying certain types of feminine identity can be a privilege that some positioned subjects have more access to

than others, through her own example of not fitting in with feminine norms due to her long term physical and mental health problems, which mean that certain types of femininity ‘just doesn’t work’ for Sarah. Indeed, as Sarah highlights, for her femininity has to be a ‘pick up and put down thing’ - a temporary adornment that is donned and discarded - due to the fluctuations of energy that characterise her Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, which in turn orientates how Sarah performatively embodies her own queer feminine identity. Tellingly, Sarah laments her *inability* to “fit” in with (queer) feminine norms, by saying that she has ‘always wanted to be *able* to, but I’m not. I’d love to be *able* to be, but it just doesn't work for me’ (my emphasis). The repetition of the word “able” in this context is particularly apt in the context of her discussion of her CFS. However, if we take as our starting point a social model of disability, which looks at the systemic barriers, negative attitudes and exclusion of disabled people that an ableist society creates, it is, of course, not so much the case that Sarah’s CFS renders her “unable” to performatively embody feminine norms, rather it is the exclusionary narrowness of (queer) feminine norms that actively disable her ability to ‘fit in’ and subsequently actively produce her (dis)identificatory orientation towards (queer) femininities. Similarly, as Sarah highlights, keeping up appearances and performatively embodying feminine norms of behaviour and dressing can be ‘very difficult’, ‘exhausting’, ‘demanding’, ‘terrify[ing]’, ‘tiring’ and, thus, in context of her CFS, actively disabling, in and of themselves.

Another participant, Heather, who also suffers from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, spoke of the effect that her disability has in terms of orientating her queer feminine gender identity in (dis)identificatory ways, describing her queer femininity on her questionnaire as follows:

I am a ‘failed femme’ – I dislike and therefore do not participate in most of the requirements of femininity (e.g. showing skin, showing cleavage, shaving legs and armpits), but my manner of dress (in a skirt) is feminine enough that I am not read as butch (...) I don’t feel strongly identified with femininity, but rather that I perform acts which are gendered by the society around me. For example, long skirts (comfortable) are often read as sub or counter cultural (or sometimes as religious statements). My chronic illnesses have as much effect on my performance of gender as my ‘gender identity.’

In contrast to Sarah who articulates how her desire to do femininity ‘right’ and gain approval is motivated by her previous working class status and her mental health

difficulties, which have both contributed to limiting her access to a ‘normatively’ ‘successful’ performance of femininity, Heather actively describes her identity as a ‘failed femme’ precisely as a result of her CFS, which orientates her in (dis)identificatory ways, away from and renders impossible certain ‘subversive’ and ‘normative’ embodiments of femme and femininity, like wearing clothing for social meaning, rather than practicality, or showing skin. Indeed, Heather articulates how her CFS means that she prioritises comfort and practicality, over style and dressing for sociality or being visibly and immediately recognisable as queer and femme, particularly since one of the lingering symptoms of her disability are that she gets cold easily and, therefore, tend towards wearing bit hats, scarves, jumpers, long shirts and skirts.

I tend to be willing to dress for comfort and practicality over style so for example I had Chronic Fatigue as a teenager and one of the results is that I get cold quite easily, that's kind of one of my lingering symptoms, so I tend to be wearing hats and scarves and jumpers even when other people other people are like "it's way too hot, how can you wear those" and I think, I think people that didn't have that kind of background, absolutely for practically first, might be more inclined than I am to take the jumper off and be socially dressed rather than dressed for practicality.

Not showing skin, wanting to be ‘warm and comfortable,’ not shaving her legs and not getting involved in certain debates about dressing, because of the time and energy that this takes, both of which she is lacking due to her CFS, were further ways that Heather’s disability actively produces her specific ‘failed femme’ embodied subjectivity and (dis)identificatory orientation towards (queer) fem(me)ininites. Moreover, it also strongly shapes how she feels about her body, often ‘frustrated’ by not being able to participate in activities as easily as others can, if at all.

Heather: I kinda I have quite a mixed relationship with my own body I am quite often frustrated with it and that's quite a lot about Chronic Illnesses and kind of you know I can't go out in the evenings, it's not fair, everyone else can do that why can't I. And I think that contributes to deciding you know when you got quite a fatigue syndrome that's basically decided you that you are going to opt out of mainstream kind of exercises and going to the gym and that sort of thing.

Alexa: So it really shapes your body.

Heather: Well yeah it shapes it shapes quite a lot of what you can do actually and I guess you still have quite a range of choices but some of them are much harder than they would be for other people to make.

Alexa: Like what?

Heather: Well like, you know, like exercise, you know, doing whatever. I mean I find that my chronic fatigue shapes what I wear as well for example.

Alexa: And I guess if you can't go out in the evening then there wouldn't be necessarily like the desire to kind of to identify with these adverts.

Heather: And I think you know if you can't go out in the evening there's not very much, your motivation to participate sort of night club culture, if you like, is quite diminished already. Because you aren't going into places where those standards are kind of in operation in the same way though obviously they are in operation in other places as well.

Evidently, not only does CFS actively shape her body, self-representation and how she feels about it, it also limits her access to and places her distinctly outside of certain bodily practices and discursive practices like going to the gym and being easily interpolated into beauty mandates through advertising industry and night clubs, which further removes her from participating in normative feminine styles, aesthetics and bodily practices. In other words, it actively produces her (dis)identificatory orientation towards (queer) fem(me)inities, due to the exclusionary positioned forms of privilege and internal (sub)cultural power dynamics circulating in these communities, representations and identity constructions. Once again, her disability thus actively produces her feminine gender identity and comportment as non normative. Heather thus inhabits a disidentificatory orientation towards both femininities and femme, as a disabled subject who disidentifies with and is not able to engage with femininity for display purposes. Indeed, Heather articulates a (dis)identificatory orientation towards certain (queer) fem(me)inine norms, through her situating herself specifically as a 'failed femme' and describing how she perceives femme femininity to involve:

Well I mean that obviously depends on who you ask and what qualifies as successful femme in the lesbian community might be quite different from what Heat magazine says, I think my general impression really is that I'm not qualified to judge that sort of thing and I think ideally I'd want to say that women get to judge that for themselves but I don't think that's really how it usually works and I think for me the hallmarks of sort of successful femme as its usually defined would be. It's hard to put sort of specifics on I don't want to say you know she wears tights and a short skirt and a blouse that shows cleavage and her fingernails have been done or whatever because any of those things don't make it on their own but I think there's an understanding of effort being put into it there's an understanding of it being what I think of as not practical as being for display purposes you know even if it's for her to admire herself in its for looking at rather than getting on and doing something if you see what I mean and because it's for display purposes it comes under and interacts with all the other narratives of beauty that are around in society at whatever time.

Interestingly, Heather points towards (queer) fem(me)inine "norms" through describing what she perceives as the 'hallmarks' of a 'successful femme' - rather than a "failed femme" as Heather describes her own specifically situated embodiment of queer femininity, which is informed by her CFS. Whilst Heather aptly articulates how these 'hallmarks' are 'hard' to specify, Heather nevertheless highlights how - in her opinion -

the ‘hallmarks of a successful femme’ are that this femininity is characterised by being ‘not practical’ and by ‘being for display purposes (...) it’s for looking at rather than getting on and doing something,’ even, as Heather hints towards, if these display purposes are for a femme to admire, approve of and presumably feel confident in herself. In context of, Heather’s CFS, which means that she prioritises dressing for warmth and practicality - for getting things done with the precious resources of energy that she has available to her – rather than dressing for ‘display purposes’ Heather highlights how a these ‘hallmarks of a successful femme’ are not available to her, from her specific positionality. Therefore, once again, there is a lack of privilege present in this narrative - this time related to disability - that is being highlighted here as a limitation to accessing and performing certain central ways of embodying queer feminine identities. Furthermore, her own (dis)identificatory orientation towards (queer) fem(me)inine communities, representations and identities, which is caused by oblique forms of power and privilege circulating within these, also highlights the power differential between femmes that are constructed along positioned lines relating to (dis)ability. Yet it is simultaneously also a lack of privilege that actively constructs Heather’s personal perspectives and particular ways of embodying her queer feminine identity.

Disability, in particular mental health difficulties, also strongly orientates in Sue in (dis)identificatory ways with regards to her queer feminine gender identity. On her questionnaire Sue wrote about how her Bipolar Disorder is a possible influence on her queer femininity by answering the question of what influences her gender identity with: ‘Possibly bipolar, both the highs and lows have affected my dress and performance, especially feeding into the Goth aspects.’ In her collage Sue included various objects linked to her mental health, such as an empty box of prescription drugs for her bipolar disorder, a stepometer that is partially symbolic for how she controls her calories as an anorexic, a piece of chain mail symbolising protective ‘armor’ and a fluidity of identity, amongst other elements. Interestingly, Sue described how her own *gothic* queer femininity is created through a disidentificatory orientation towards femininities involving delicacy precisely due to her mental health condition, as she describes her femininity as ‘Feminist, Goth, queer, masculine, tailored, strong, quirky, independent, complex, at times angry. I see it as the antithesis of froufrou, frills and delicacy.’ This disidentificatory orientation towards normative femininities (involving delicacy) is linked

to her mental health in context of her adoption of a gothic feminine style – involving ‘lots of black and lots of spikes’ that she says she arrived at after a ‘breakdown’ and is purposefully intended to ‘protect’ her by keeping people at a distance. In relating how Sue came to this style of feminine embodiment and her using particular types of clothing as armor after her mental break down, she says:

That particularly came about when I had a break down and I needed something to separate me off. I needed, like, I closed down and I just couldn't cope with being in close contact with people and I found that if you wear lots of black and lots of spikes, not even townies will approach, cos you just look too damn scary. And, that's where that came from. And, then I discovered that actually I was very comfortable in that, I mean, so big chunky rings and stuff that probably could look quite aggressive, does fit with how I feel. It's back to the anger. But, it ultimately, that particular element, as opposed to just tailored, did come from needing something that would protect me from people. And, then it didn't matter if you saw the clothes, because if you saw the clothes you didn't necessarily see me and I did the same thing when I was teaching at the University, I wore some absolutely outrageous outfits, I taught on one occasion in platform shoes, a tight pencil skirt, a corset, a shirt and tie, which everybody looked at and like, but they didn't necessarily notice me, they noticed the clothes, so again it's the distancing thing.

Sue discussed how her mental health intersects with her queer femininity at length. One of the most interesting and important points that arose from her talk was that Sue demonstrated clearly how not all those who identify as having a queer sexuality or being queerly feminine are able to equally easily able to orientate themselves towards queer feminine identities and communities, or to access and fully inhabit their identities in their everyday life, as other queer feminine subjects who occupy more privileged positions of power. For example, Sue, who is in a monogamous, heterosexual, marriage, describes how she strongly identifies as queer - in fact, as gay - when it comes to her sexuality. However, due to her Bipolar Disorder which critically means that she priorities her need for stability above sexual desire, as well as her working-class status, economic dependence and her geographical location in the Welsh countryside, which positions her as far removed from any ‘queer Mecca’ where she could have the opportunity of exploring this identity and find community belonging, Sue has chosen her relationship with her husband because it is stable, supportive and ‘a very healthy relationship,’ offering her a sense of freedom and control. Mental health becomes a strong factor in orientating her sexuality in (dis)identificatory ways towards her monogamous heterosexual marriage and away from her sexuality as a gay woman, out of a need for stability, since she relates how: ‘I need routine and I’m not very, instability again, I’m not good with instability, I like to know what I’m doing and where I’m going.’ Furthermore,

she links this need for stability strongly to her Bipolar Disorder and other mental health factors:

Alexa: So, how does your femininity work with your queerness and with your being married and this sense of like how others see you and how you see yourself?

Sue: That's probably; the marriage thing is probably what separates the people who know me from my friends, because the people who know me just know me as a married woman who's probably a bit odd. Whereas my friends, know that I'm gay. So (...) it's only people that are in my inner circle that I would talk to on anything other than superficial topics. Who would be aware of that and therefore, as I said, they're all fine, but the people who just happen to know me through one thing or another, like the teachers that I work with, they're not friends, so, as far as I...

Alexa: And, that's a very specific situation as well.

Sue: Yea, so, as far as they're concerned I'm Mrs. [Surname omitted for data protection].

Alexa: I'm kind of intrigued by this, just because...

Sue: I'm married I'm so conventional. [said with tongue in cheek irony, as this section relates to previous discussions we've had]

Alexa: No, I'm not, saying that.

Sue: *laughter*

Alexa: *laughter*

Sue: But it is, it is the most conventional thing about me.

Alexa: Yea, but, no, ok, but I really like this because it's really, it's just, it's really intriguing (...) because you're married but you're married to a guy, but you'd say that you're gay.

Sue: Yes. I decided long ago that all things considered, I was actually in a very healthy relationship, for me. I'm not going to recommend this to any other person in the world, but for me, I'm with a good partner, one who is supportive, but also lets me have the freedom that I need and I don't mean that sexually, because I am by nature monogamous, that's just the way I am, I have no problem with other people doing what they want, but I know I couldn't because I know I can't do it without any emotional attachment. And, if I'm going to get emotionally attached with everybody, then I would be completely screwed.

Alexa: OK. Yea.

Sue: Control.

Alexa: Yea.

Sue: We're back to control. So, for me, that is a relationship and it works, why would I want to throw it away and risk the instability that I know I don't deal with very well. Periods in my life when I've had real instability, this probably, with hind sight, this is probably related to my bipolar, but I didn't know that 10, 15 years ago, so that's why I thought, this relationship works, I'm going to stay with it.

Alexa: So, those needs and those characteristics, top that, sort of...

Sue: Yea, basically, what is important, what, what drives me more: the need for stability.

Alexa: Ok. Yea. Yea

(...)

Sue: '(...) my therapist actually wanted me to go into psychosexual counselling and I said I've done it, I've done the survey, I've read the books, I've read interviews and I know that I am nowhere near the weirdest person on the planet, a gay woman in a straight relationship.

Alexa: Yea.

Sue: I'm fine with that.'

In this extract, Sue highlights how her Bipolar Disorder means that she has a lack of privileged access to the type of security that she feels she needs and this lack of privilege, which is related to her Mental Health status, therefore means that she prioritises elements of her life that bring her this security, such as her marriage, above other aspects of her identity, such as her queer sexuality, that may bring her insecurity. In so doing, Sue articulates her disidentificatory orientation towards not only heterosexual norms, as a queer feminine “heterosexual” subject who identifies as gay, but also towards how others may perceive her and misrecognise her as embodying a “normative” sexuality and gender identity, as is illustrated in the very way that she negotiates the dynamic between us by pre-empting any misconceptions that other people may have about her sexuality and gender identity and setting these misconceptions “straight” by positioning herself as queer. Yet, implicitly, Sue also articulates a disidentificatory orientation towards queer fem(me)inine identity norms and communities, which might equally misrecognise her as straight, thereby excluding her from queerness. Additionally, I would also argue that her working-class status and her location in the Welsh countryside are further positioned factors in creating Sue’s queer feminine “heterosexual” (lesbian) identity, since these pertain to a lack of privilege and power, which limit the possibility for her to veer away from her positionalities and lead a life that would be more easily recognisable as queer, whilst at the same time producing a vastly different economy of what it means to be queer and queerly feminine. In concluding this section, I argue that what my disabled participants highlight is that queerness and queer fem(me)inities can itself be exclusionary and a privileged marginal positionality that contains internal power differentials between differently able, positioned and privileged queer fem(me)inine subjects, and which not everyone has easy access to, since other parts of their lives or identities may take precedence over their sexual orientation or because it may not be easy for disabled subjects to align themselves uncomplicatedly with the implicit expectations of queer (feminine) subcultures, making it challenging to belong to these and leading to queer feminine disidentificatory orientations and alternative ways of being queerly feminine. The next section seeks to tease out and trouble the sometimes all too easy *distinctions* (Bourdieu, 1984) established between lesbian femme, queer femininities and heterosexual femininities. It does so with the aim of proliferating queerness by exploring nuances within and between identity categories.

ii) **Queer(*ing*) Heterosexual Femininities**

As has previously been discussed lesbian femme and queer femininities emerged from 1950s and 1960s working class American bar cultures as specifically *lesbian* genders/sexualities (Lapovsky Kennedy & Davis 1994, Nestle 1998, Munt 1998). However, increasingly these identities have proliferated to include trans, male and bisexual femmes, along with straight sex-workers and “strong” women (Albrecht-Samatasinha 1997, Hemmings 1998, Robertson Textor 1997, Brushwood Rose and Camilleri 2002, Dahl and Volcano 2008, Burke 2009). Nevertheless, throughout writings on lesbian femme and queer femininities we see the creation of distinctions between heterosexual femininities and femme - queer and normative femininities. These include the theorisation of femme as intentional, conscious, empowered, subversive, resistant and chosen lesbian/queer feminist forms of femininity that are neither intended, nor available, for cisgendered straight male consumption.

One significant example of how distinctions between lesbian femme or queer femininities and heterosexual femininities are discursively established, is the following quote by Amber Hollibaugh (1997, p. 215) where she discusses the difference that she perceives between her subversive lesbian femme identity and heterosexual femininity. ‘The difference between myself and many of the straight women that I know is that they think that they are normal and natural. (...) They believe in a gender system that they follow through... But my role models for being femme have been drag queens, because drag queens construct female identity. I look at drag queens and I think, *That’s how I feel as a woman...*’ Here, Hollibaugh orientates herself around (queer) fem(me)ininity in (dis)identificatory ways, since her femme rhetorics consciously orientates her identification with femininity away from heteronormative feminine norms and towards explicitly and obviously queer forms of trans* femininity embodied by the figure of the drag queen, in order to create the distinction between femme identities as “subversive” who supposedly are opposite to and different from heterosexual femininities, which are cast as “normative.” Furthermore, Hollibaugh (1997) identifies femme femininity with the figure of the drag queen and in opposition to heterosexual female femininity, thereby placing femme on the queer and, indeed, a trans* spectrum. However, in so doing, the assumption that Hollibaugh makes is that heterosexual femininity is an entirely homogenous category and heterosexual women are automatically normatively feminine.

Indeed, she assumes that no lacuna exists between the performed gender identity of heterosexual femininity and the way in which these subjects conceive of their femininity and that these do not also orientate themselves towards and away from (heterosexual) feminine norms in (dis)identificatory ways. A factor which, for Hollibaugh (1997), distinguishes the subversive and gender queer lesbian femme from a supposedly normative and gender conformist heterosexual femininity. Simply put, who is to say that heterosexual feminine women do not identify with the figure of the drag queen, are not self aware or imbued with feminist agency and do not perform their chosen feminine gender identity with subversive intent or outright rebellion against heteronormative ideals? Or, that femme identity is always subversive, aware, chosen and agentic? This assumes that heterosexual femininity is gender-straight, rather than genderqueer, simply by virtue of being heterosexual. As if sex, gender and sexuality, really were aligned in a neat continuum. When there is, of course, also potential for the existence of queerness *within* heterosexual femininity, as we Sue's example above evidences.

At the core of femme identity and community discourses, thus, lies an anxiety about being misread as heterosexual and, thereby, potentially excluded by feminist and/or queer communities. Arguably, femmes are anxious to create a distinction between lesbian identity and heterosexual femininity as its oppositional identity, in light of their being accused by radical feminists of imitating heterosexual femininity and being mistaken for straight within queer subcultures. However, if we look at this dynamic through Bourdieu's (1984) concept of *distinction*, we can come to a better understanding of what is at stake in the creation of these oppositional differences. Bourdieu (1984) describes this concept as the construction of a desirable self through effecting an opposition or a difference between it and the undesirable subject position that it wishes to reject. The process of distinction acts as a distancing device between the desirable self that the subject wishes to achieve and the undesirable self that the subject may approximate, embody, or be accused of being. The concept of distinction, as Skeggs (1997) explains in her Bourdieu (1984) inspired analysis of aspiring middle class heterosexual feminine subjectivities, concerns the construction of a respectable subject position, so as to secure cultural capital. In making a distinction between themselves and heterosexual female femininities, I argue that femmes are effectively making themselves respectably lesbian or queer – yet at the cost of disempowering other fem(me)inine identified subjects, including, yet not limited to, heterosexual (queer) fem(me)inities - in relation to

discourses that have frequently posited the femme as possibly heterosexual or normative. Furthermore, in constructing themselves in opposition to heterosexual femininity and by proposing their performance of femininity as subversive, queer femmes are effectively engaged in a process of acquiring, what Thornton (1997) defines as, *subcultural capital* - and the related power that this gives them within subcultural communities to occupy space, define their identities and establish boundaries concerning who belongs within these queer communities and who does not - in order to mark their own belonging within queer and lesbian subcultures and their queer sexual visibility. In aligning themselves with queerness and creating a distinction between themselves and heterosexual female femininity, lesbian femmes become respectably, discretely and visibly lesbian in their sexual orientation and properly feminist in their political alliance. This strategy is entirely understandable in light of femmes being positioned by radical feminist discourses as an imitation of heterosexual femininity and mistaken as potentially heterosexual within queer spaces. In claiming a queer identity, femmes have thus predominantly done so in opposition to cisgendered heterosexual femininity, which becomes discursively constructed as *the* signifier of normative femininity.

Arguably, there are several reasons why these distinctions occur. Firstly, given previous negative connotations between lesbian femmes and heterosexual femininities it is understandable that femmes may wish to articulate distinct genders/sexualities. Secondly, femmes have faced the double burden of femininity itself being devalued by feminists, which may lead femmes to create a line of difference between queer fem(me)inities as different from heterosexual/“normative” femininities. Particularly in light of reason *three*, femmes have suffered from a long history of invisibility and invalidation in feminist, queer and heterosexual circles, which can lead to sexual harassment, violence, discrimination and exclusion. Therefore, the creation of distinctions between lesbian femmes, queer femininities and heterosexual femininities arguably function as a necessary survival strategy for visibility, inclusion, recognition and respect. With this context in mind, this section explores the potential for productively proliferating queerness through the figuration and lived experiential complexities of *queer heterosexual femininities*, always with the aim of interrogating and disrupting unhelpful static or simple binaries established and the intention that this act will facilitate the building of further political solidarities, alliances, affinities and affiliations, between queer femmes and heterosexual femininities. If, as Gomez (1992, p.16), writes ‘femme

often inhabits a stereotypical place in a non-stereotypical way,' I want to explore the possibilities for queer heterosexual femininities who occupy normality abnormally and orientate themselves in (dis)identificatory ways towards and away from heterosexual feminine norms.

Despite these oft articulated distinctions between lesbian or queer femininities and heterosexual femininities, some writings on queer femininities have acknowledged this possibility. For example, Brushwood Rose and Camilleri (2002, p.13) situate *Brazen Femme* as striving to explore femme beyond 'binaries of male/female and gay straight', to expand, exceed and trouble 'the familiar framework of "norms" of lesbian (butch) femme', by amongst other things, including 'straight sex workers' and 'all strong women and sassy men.' Dahl's (2008, p.180) *Femmes of Power* emphasises the need to keep 'open borders' in building femme solidarities, identities, communities and movements, which includes heterosexual femininities: 'The hope for [femme] movements, it seems to me, lies in openness. "Can I be straight and femme?" a student once asked me. "It's up to you," I responded, "you have to work out what femme means to you." Burke's *Femmethology* (2009, p.11) stresses the importance of refusing to 'compromise on complexity,' stretching the parameters of femme and prioritising the inclusion of 'complex identities' in the hope that these 'unique differences can inspire vibrant political rebirth.'



Figure 4.4 Sarah

Here I want to contribute towards pushing things further, by exploring the significance and existence of instances of queer heterosexual femininities. In doing so, I invoke definitions of *queer* by theorists who trouble the binaries between LGBTQ and heterosexuality, like Andrew Parker (1994), L.A. Kauffman (1992) and Michael Warner (1993, p.xxvii) who theorises queer as 'resistance to regimes of the normal', stating: "queer" gets its critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual.' It is also informed by queer and critical heterosexuality scholars like Alexander Doty

(1993) and Calvin Thomas (2000) who theorise the existence of *straight queerness*. I am particularly inspired by Michael Warner's (2000, p.54) critique that 'to be fully normal is, strictly speaking, impossible. Everyone deviates from the norm in some way' and Bidy Martin's (1996, p.14) proposition that 'queerness is not always where we might expect to find it,' and may inhabit unexpected sites or surface in unexpected ways. My thinking is influenced by Cathy Cohen's (2005, pp.24-25 & 37) critique of queer theorising and politics which produce 'monolithic understandings of heterosexuality' through establishing 'simple dichotomies' between heterosexuality and queerness, as well as her call for a 'broadened understanding of queerness' and for building radical intersectional political solidarities across differences and between marginalized subjectivities - including heterosexuals situated '(out)side of heteronormativity.' To move forwards with such a politics of solidarity, I suggest, we might wish to look back at Judith Butler's (1998) proposition of the usefulness and necessity of dismantling heteronormativities from *within*, by muddling the dividing lines between seeming distinct categories and proliferating the possibilities at the centre, as well as the margins. This returns us to the radical act of questioning our understandings of "normative" heterosexualities, by asking whether we have 'unwittingly accepted a unitary and monolithic understanding of normative heterosexuality in order to offer a highly differentiated set of alternatives' and whether 'the distinction between heterosexual and lesbian culture a clear and distinct one?' (Butler, 1998, pp.226-228). Drawing on Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientations and Muñoz's (1999) concept of disidentifications, heterosexual femininities with a queer twist - like their queer feminine sisters - can be understood as occupying normality abnormally through *disidentificatory orientations* towards heteronormativity, femininity, feminism *and* queerness.

However, before we begin, it is important to acknowledge that whilst Warner's (2000) claim that everyone fails to meet social norms to some degree is helpful for opening up the possibility for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which the power of norms operate and are transgressed outside of traditional binary understandings, we still need to acknowledge that norms do affect some marginalised persons more than others and not everyone fails to meet social norms equally or in the same way. This is an important point, because although we need to make space within our queer communities for all of those persons who feel disenfranchised by heteronormativity, we also need to

acknowledge the very real concerns of those LGBT*Q subjects who may feel that the specificity of their oppression and, along with it, their claims to politicised community spaces, voices and identities, could be in danger of being erased by the erasure of these fundamental distinctions between those who fall to a greater extent within or outside of the norm. Indeed, this is also crucial because, whilst Warner's (2000) *The Trouble With Normal* does question certain ideas surrounding normativity, by claiming that everyone fails to meet social norms, it also very much argues acknowledges the persistence of norms as something that queer subjects are troubled by and trouble - to use Judith Butler's (1990) phrase - in their social encounters with heteronormativity. This sense of the violent persistence of norms is also present in Warner's (2000) discussion of gay marriage as a potentially counterproductive LGBT*Q activist move as it could result in becoming a tool for the normalisation of queer life, which will ultimately not lead to the eradication of homophobia or the violent regulation of sexualities and gender identities that society constructs as "deviant," rather this move will result in the shifting of boundaries around what society constructs as "normal" or "deviant" and, thus, in the criminalisation and demonization of other sexualities, which fall outside of this new normative paradigm. So, we do need to be very careful when considering the ways in which the specific power of norms operate in specific contexts and circumstances. In the case of queer femininities, it therefore needs to be acknowledged that whilst an exploration of the way that heterosexual femininities "fail" at performatively reiterating heteronormative feminine norms places them on a queer feminine spectrum, is an important contribution to the field, we must not forget that these subjects do not "fail" at performatively reiterating heteronormative feminine norms in the same way, or perhaps as severely - with all of the violent social punitive consequences that such "failures" often evoke - as queer femininities who are bisexual, trans* or lesbian. It also needs to be acknowledged that (*dis*)identificatory orientations are, of course, fundamentally about a simultaneous movement towards and away from norms, which are most frequently enacted by subjects who find themselves occupying liminal spaces in-between "the normative" and "the transgressive." One foot out of the norm and one foot in. They dance between these polarities. Indeed, this is precisely why an analysis of queer fem(me)inine "heterosexual" disidentificatory orientations is so significant and appropriate within this project, because they manifest this disidentificatory dance between the polarities of normative and transgressive, through experiencing a simultaneous push and pull effect

towards and away from heteronormativity in interesting and unique ways that have previously been under-theorised.

My participants spoke in nuanced terms about their queer versions of heterosexual femininities in ways that were far from the touted “norm.” To introduce how the participants described their genders and sexualities briefly. *Bobette*: a ‘transgender’ ‘girl-boy’ who described his sexuality as ‘Mainly heterosexual, though in effect chaste, and occasionally bi. Submissive and occasionally masochistic.’ *Peggy*: a ‘Heterosexual’ cisgendered woman who described her feminine identity as ‘queer’ ‘alternative’ and as ‘a competition which, at a very early age, I chose to opt out of. Being tall and far from feminine ‘ideals’ physically meant that adopting an ‘alternative’ appearance has always been easier (for which read ‘more comfortable’). I define my own sense of the ‘feminine’ but clearly, via my appearance, mark myself out as not in the ‘competition’.

Jess: a ‘feminine/androgynous’ woman who described her sexuality as ‘Open for discussion! I’m married to a man, but I’d still be with him if he was a woman, so....?’ *Sarah*: a subversively feminine woman who described her sexuality as ‘Mostly straight. - I’ve never had romantic feelings for a woman, but can find them sexually attractive and would consider acting on that if I were in the right situation. To be honest, my sexuality in terms of being into BDSM is what concerns me more than who I go for, though having said that, I don’t know if I would just want “vanilla” sex with another female.’ *Sue*: a ‘queer’ (‘gay’) woman who is in a monogamous marriage with a cisgendered heterosexual man, who wrote: ‘I’ve chosen to work at a conventional marriage, and that frequently defines how others see me, rather than how I see myself.’

What these participants have in common is their (dis)identificatory orientation towards and away from heterosexual feminine norms - their simultaneous pull towards and desire of heterosexuality and femininity and their push away from and critical rejection of traditional sexual and gendered norms that these involve – which manifest themselves in diverse ways. Curious and utterly hooked on these intriguing descriptions, I sought to probe the intersection between queer and heterosexual femininities further, to explore ‘the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically’ (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1994, p.8) occurring *within* heterosexual femininities.

One of the most insightful examples of queer “heterosexual” femininities came from Sue, who describes her femininity as queer because it is ‘non-normative’ and her sexuality as a ‘gay person in a straight relationship.’ Sue poignantly highlighted how, although she identifies her sexuality as gay, her need to prioritise ‘stability’ and ‘control’ due to her mental health difficulties - along with further intersecting positioned factors like her isolated rural location, her poor working class status and strict Christian upbringing - means Sue has actively chosen to stay in a heterosexual monogamous marriage (which she describes as a ‘very healthy relationship’ with a ‘good partner (...) who is supportive’) rather than ‘risk the instability’ that she would severely struggle with, due to the afore mentioned intersections. The example of Sue is significant not only because she is a gay woman in a straight relationship thereby illustrating the diversity of lived experiences that can be situated under certain restrictive categories, but because of the precise positioned intersections – and their related (lack) of privilege and power - which stop Sue from orientating herself in more obviously and explicitly queer ways, by forcing Sue to prioritise the stability of her mental health over her sexuality, highlight the normative privileges that enable *some* queers and not others to fully inhabit their lives, identities and sexualities *as queers*.

Another way of thinking through queer heterosexual femininities is who these subjects choose to sexually orientate themselves towards and how they engage in relationships. One issue that was present in my interviews was that queer heterosexual femininities often, yet not always orientated themselves towards queer or alternative versions of heterosexual maleness. This is not to create yet another hierarchy wherein those heterosexual feminine women who partner with “alternative” straight men are “queerer” or “more subversive” than those who partner with “normative” men. But to open up a space for considering how queer heterosexual femininities *may* orientate towards a gender/sexuality spectrum that includes queer/alternative heterosexual men and whose relationships actively question, challenge and reconfigure heterosexual norms. One example for this is Jess, who emphasises the importance of not being ‘secondary to your husband’ and of being ‘strong in your own right.’ Jess also describes her husband as being ‘accepting’, ‘super feminist’ and ‘not necessarily your traditional man,’ who respects strong women and Jess’s independent choices to do whatever she wants. Indeed, their relationship is one where there is ‘a lot of mutual respect’ and an absence of

restrictive binary gender specific roles or expectations, as Jess describes how neither of them: ‘have ideas of what men are supposed to be like and what women are supposed to be like and how you get married and you have this normal family and you have normal children and everybody has these very standard gender roles.’

Considering that queer femininities are often theorised as possessing active, subversive and empowered sexualities, a further way in which participants spoke about their queer heterosexual femininities is through reference to their active and assertive desiring sexualities. Sarah, who enjoys writing about and playing the submissive role in BDSM presented her sexuality as follows:

I chose to casually hold a vibrator as a signifier of the fact that I am in control of my sexuality, I am happy to take my pleasure in my own hands, and I don't mind publicly saying as much because I think there is too much shying away from talk of sexuality, which leads to people getting anxious about whether or not they are "normal." I also chose to wear my collar from a previous SM relationship and have my ankles tied to show myself as a submissive. This is something I happily define myself as in the bedroom context (...) Being a strong advocate of the acceptance of SM as a healthy way of expressing sexuality is one of the ways in which I consider my femininity to be subversive; being a feminist I have come across a few writings that have suggested people like me are kidding themselves into thinking we are making a reasonable choice, and that we are instead being oppressed. Thus I enjoy playing on such themes, showing my strong sense of agency through a subtly confident posture and gaze at the camera, whilst still showing signs of submission. This is something I find political and fun at the same time.

In the context of queer feminine heterosexualities and queer feminine disidentificatory orientations, Sarah here is expressing her queer feminine heterosexuality not only through her subversive active desire for BDSM relationships and her advocacy of BDSM communities as a normal and ‘healthy way of expression sexuality,’ as well as her actively choosing to occupy the submissive position within these sexual dynamics - thereby Sarah arguably occupies a disidentificatory orientation towards heterosexual norms - but also her disidentificatory orientation towards and critique of certain schools of feminist politics and thought, that typically strip feminist subjects like Sarah - who are heterosexual, submissive and actively choose to pursue BDSM relationships - of agency by arguing that they are, as Sarah puts it ‘kidding themselves into thinking we are making a reasonable choice and that we are instead being oppressed.’ Instead, Sarah emphasises her active choice and pleasure in BDSM sexual relationships through which she feels that she is ‘in control of my sexuality’,

emphasising moreover that these are healthy and normal ways of choosing to be sexually intimate, and highlighting how her sexual preferences and the way that she has chosen to represent these, are simultaneously ‘political and fun at the same time.’ Sarah also described how she navigates following ‘feminist tropes’ sometimes and ‘mainstream tropes’ at other times. Much like many femmes in relation to feminisms that devalued femme erotic desires for butches or femme gendered preferences for femininity, Sarah chooses not to relinquish her desires (including her *assertive* articulation of her *active* desire to be ‘fucked by men’) even if these are not ‘politically convenient’ in certain feminist or queer contexts. Indeed, Sarah emphasises her need for ‘carving out my own little thing’ within *and* against these contexts in the bellow extract.

The rest of my collage, is, I've brought in the fact that I'm, it's not just about the submissive thing, I also generally just like sex and I think that sex is brilliant and I like being fucked also, also by men, that's nice I like it, so I have a phallus here, taken from a durex leaflet. To represent that. Yea, I like being fucked by men if they are nice. Not that I never make mistakes, but preferably they need to be nice. So, I, yea I, I don't mind wearing my sexuality on my sleeve, to a certain degree, as long as it's not making anybody feel uncomfortable. (...) my desires are subversive and queer because I, I take the assertive, but I also take the submissive and I play with those. (...)I don't like the fact that there are these big taboo subjects and they can impact law and say the Spanner case, where people were jailed for BDSM activities, so I suppose that desiring men, well, yes that's more accepted, but sometimes, sometimes my subversion is against certain feminist tropes as well as certain mainstream tropes, it's about carving out my own little thing, you know.

It is through this typical rhetoric of carving out one’s own little niche within and against political ideologies like feminism that Sarah expresses her queer feminine disidentificatory orientation towards heterosexual and feminist norms. A further way that participants (re)presented their queer heterosexual femininities and disidentificatory orientation towards heteronormativity is through a Butlerian (1990) gender performativity paradigm and their subversion of sexed, gendered and sexual norms. The most visually obvious troubling of heteronormativity and gender is presented by Bobette - a heterosexual trans* male ‘girly-boy’ whose femininity is orientated towards teenage-girls clothing and London’s kink, fetish and BDSM scene - who manifests a (dis)identificatory orientation towards cisnormativity, heteronormativity, heterosexuality, masculine and feminine norms, all at once.



Figure 4.5 Bobette 1, Figure 4.6: Bobette 2, Figure 4.7: Bobette 3

Another example of how queer heterosexual femininities occupy disidentificatory orientations towards heterosexual norms, especially those concerning femininity, is presented by Peggy, who defines her femininity as alternative and queer, using the latter to denote ‘the rejection of potentially oppressive paradigms.’ Peggy spoke about how her queer femininity is about breaking, changing and challenging the rules of mainstream femininities - as is symbolised by the above torn up rule book – and her ‘opting out’ of these ‘incredibly exclusionary and competitive’ models of femininity by ‘setting new rules and new standards.’



Figure 4.8: Peggy’s Torn Up Rule Book

Whilst my queer “heterosexual” feminine participants articulated frustrations around not being recognised as queer, or anxieties around not being queer or subversive “enough” and being seen as “appropriating” queer (frustrations and anxieties that speak volumes about the exclusions that *do* occur even as queers organise against these) many of my participants who identified more straightforwardly as lesbian or queer often opened up fertile spaces for the inclusion of queer heterosexual femininities. For example, Vikki, a critically cisgendered gender queer femme, for whom ‘heterosexuality absolutely can fit into queer’, spoke critically of the ease with which straight femininities are sometimes dismissed and the internal queer fem(me)inine (sub)cultural power dynamics that are involved and exposed through this dynamic:

for me, my queerness is a big part of my (...) femininity. (...) but I think it's also important to remember that they don't necessarily have to be

and I think, kind of like I was saying earlier, the radical potential of femininity isn't *only* if it's queer and, I think it's easy often to kind of think "oh, straight women just do it in a really normative way" and (...) that's a dangerous thing to think, because it's completely not true so I think, you know for me it's [queerness] a big part of it [her femme identity], but I also recognise that for a lot of people it isn't.

Vikki - like Brushwood Rose and Camileri (2002) Dahl (2008), Burke (2009), and, indeed, countless femme voices - emphasised the importance of keeping the 'boundaries' of what queer femininities can be 'open' for building inclusionary models of identity and community that we are all hopefully striving for.

iii) Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated some of the ways that positionalities, power and privilege matter for theorising queer feminine disidentificatory orientations. It has shown how being orientated towards or away from privilege and power contributes significantly to the diverse ways that queer feminine identities are performatively embodied and the degree of community belonging that they are able to access – due to how power and privilege circulates within queer fem(me)inine communities - by looking at the underexplored positionalities and identities of rural femmes, femmes with long term physical or mental health difficulties and queer heterosexual femmes. In doing so, this chapter has highlighted how - even within queer feminine communities, representations and theories - certain power dynamics exist through which *some* privilege views and identities are put into critical focus more often and circulate more dominantly than *other* positioned perspectives, which are marginalised. Thus, this chapter has illustrated how certain privileged positioned subjects can inherit or be interpolated by queer feminine community rhetorics more easily than others, who occupy liminal spaces on the margins of queer feminine communities and articulate their orientation towards queer femininities in (dis)identificatory terms, due to internal (sub)cultural power dynamics and oblique forms of privilege that circulate within queer fem(me)inine communities. The first section of this chapter highlighted the unarticulated urban centrism that predominantly structures queer feminine communities and explored the difference that rural isolation and geographical location can make to queer feminine identities, embodiment community

belonging. The second section discussed the difference that mental or physical health difficulties can make to accessing community belonging and being able to performatively embody typical queer feminine tropes, which were revealed as exclusionary norms circulating within our own queer feminine communities. The third and final section of this chapter highlighted some potential pathways for theorising queer heterosexual femininities as “heterosexual” femininities that occupy a disidentificatory orientation towards the sociocultural norms of heterosexual femininities. It also highlighted some potential pathways for productively collapsing unhelpful distinctions between queer femininities and heterosexual femininities, always with the aim of exploring nuances, proliferating queerness and acknowledging those affinities, aspirations and potentials for everyday queer feminine political solidarities that may exist across differences, borders and binaries. There is certainly both scope and necessity for further discussion on the topic of queer heterosexual femininities in the school of *critical femininity studies* (Dahl, 2012). However, in concluding this chapter, I wish to emphasise that the ‘political grammar’ of how we tell queer feminine stories ‘matters’ (Hemmings, 2011) for how we “do” queer feminine solidarities and an inclusive femme community with ‘open borders’ (Dahl, 2008, p.180). Taking my cue from Cohen’s (2005) emphasis on the necessity of interrogating nuances, critiquing simple binaries and building solidarities across differences and Serano’s (2007, pp.434 & 346) emphasis on the necessity of empowering all types of femininity in light of the scapegoating of femininity in both mainstream and queer cultures yet also the ‘subversivism’ present within some queer and feminist cultures, I argue for the necessity to create queer fem(me)inist politics, identities, communities and critiques that actively value, include and recognise the potential for empowerment and nuances within heterosexual femininity, which may have strong *affinities* with queer femininities and femmes. At present, queer femme solidarities and the politics of building radical coalitions, inclusivity and across differences, still exists as a radical potential, rather than an already realised factual reality, which some situated femmes are more easily able to access and inhabit than others, due to the privileged positionalities that they occupy. By paying attention to how we tell queer feminine stories and continuing to do our work on addressing the tensions between the rhetorics and realities of inclusion and exclusion, we may be able to come closer to the inclusive and open communities that we are striving for. For example, we may wish to consider how we tell queer feminine stories that are inclusive and affirmative of rural femmes and the difference that geographical location makes to queer feminine identity, embodiment and community belonging. We

may also wish to consider how we tell queer feminine stories that are affirmative and inclusive of differently abled femmes or femmes with mental health difficulties, for example by exploring the difference that psychological and health related vulnerabilities make to the degree of ease with which femmes can access community belonging and performatively embody their queer feminine identity, rather than repetitively reiterating and, thereby, performatively entrenching, stories of queer feminine power, strength and confidence, which are sometimes circulated at the expense of *other* affective stories, including stories of queer feminine anxieties, shame or sadness. The challenge, in the specific case of (queer) heterosexual fem(me)inities, is twofold. Firstly, we need to consider the issue of how “we” tell queer fem(me)inine stories differently, to actively include heterosexual femininities, rather than devaluing these through a queerified form of ‘gender privilege’ (Serano, 2007, p.349). Secondly, we need to consider how “we” tell stories about heterosexual femininities in a transformative way that recognises the nuances existing within and the potential connections between these categories. One pathway that would be significantly helpful on all levels discussed in this chapter, is certainly the radical queer feminine politics of valuing *all* types of femininity, be it rural femmes, differently abled femmes and femmes experiencing mental health difficulties, or queer heterosexual femmes. To quote Ryn Hodes (in Burke, 2009, p.66), ‘Femme identity is currently dependent upon queerness, upon a queer sexual orientation and identity – but what would a world be like where all complex strong feminine identities and femininities were valued and honoured? Maybe then we could all be femmes.’ Similarly, as this chapter has illustrated, femme identities and communities are predominantly dependent on access to *urban* queer communities and the *ability* to performatively embody their queer feminine identities in recognisable ways, by drawing on commonly circulating femme tropes, that are not equally accessible to all. Indeed, this issue of which positioned subjects can orientate themselves towards queer feminine identities and communities more easily than others who orientate themselves in (dis)identificatory ways and how this relates to the oblique circulation of privilege, (sub)cultural power dynamics and norms, is discussed further in the next chapter, which explores these dynamics in context of queer fem(me)inine “failure” and the impact that positionalities like size, class and ‘race’ have on queer fem(me)inine disidentificatory orientations and community (un)belonging.

Chapter 5: The Art of Queer Feminine “Failure”

i) Introduction

i like to play in femme boxes, but that does not make me a femme (...) i play in multiple boxes, and i break the rules for the boxes i play in. (...) i am not a femme. i know who she is, and i am not her. she is a pearl necklace, and i am a piece of dirt. she is ruby red lipstick and i am always getting smeared on her nice white teeth. she is a painted butterfly and i am just an earthworm who dreams of being a caterpillar who will become a butterfly one day. she is beautiful. i am an earthworm and since earthworms are made of dirt, i am dirt. i get on her shoes when she walks outside. (...) Mistress says i am a dirty little girl, i smile. she is too kind. she knows i am not a girl at all. i am nothing. i worship her because she is everything I cannot be. she in her corset and tall leather boots. she is perfect. i am nothing.⁶ Ariel McGowan (2009, pp.114-117).

Ariel McGowan’s self positioning as a ‘little tranny tomboy’ who has ‘dreams about playing in the femme tomboy box’ and ‘on a good day’ might describe themselves as ‘a kinky tranny tomboi femme dyke,’ whilst on a ‘bad day’ Ariel might describe themselves as having ‘no gender’ and as being ‘nothing,’ especially in relation to the ideals of queer femininity, which are arguably embodied by the figure of the Mistress, speaks volumes about the ambivalent positions that some subjects find themselves in when it comes to identifying or disidentifying with/as femme and queer femininities. Like many of the queer feminine identities and voices that will be explored in this chapter, Ariel simultaneously identifies *and* disidentifies with femme and queer femininities. On the one hand, Ariel adores and aspires towards becoming the perfect femme, as ‘an earthworm who dreams of being a caterpillar who will become a butterfly one day,’ yet on the other hand Ariel expresses a painful disidentification with an ideal of femme that Ariel can never become, as the figure of the perfect femme Mistress embodies, with her ‘corset and tall leather boots,’ is emblematic of ‘everything’ Ariel ‘cannot be.’ Interestingly, through Ariel’s portrayal of the ‘perfect,’ ‘beautiful,’ ‘painted butterfly,’ femme Mistress, with her pristine appearance symbolised by her (*white*) ‘pearl necklace,’ ‘white teeth’ and ‘ruby red lipstick,’ as well as Ariel’s articulation that ‘i adore you, i can only dream of

⁶ Please note Ariel McGowan does not use capitalisation for I or at the beginning of sentences, though McGowan does use capitalisation to emphasise affective tone on certain words to bring across a point, e.g.: ‘I once met a femme who is very Serious about femme. She likes to capitalize it: Femme Gender, Femme Identity, Femme Invisibility.’ This style also embodies a sense of queer age.

being so graceful, gorgeous, sexy, powerful, sex positive, real and immediate,' Ariel poignantly maps out some of the features of embodiment and attitude that are typically rendered visible and recognisable as queerly feminine. Thereby, Ariel exposes some of the hidden norms present within the discourses surrounding femme and queer femininities, themselves. Indeed, these queerly feminine or femme norms are ones which Ariel is simultaneously seduced by, describing themselves as being 'awed and humbled' and as adoring, desiring and *partially* identifying with queer femininities. Yet, these norms of queer femininities arguably also lead Ariel to feeling like an 'earthworm,' like 'dirt' or at best like they are 'nothing' in relation to norms that through the figure of the Mistress are positioned as femme "perfection." Therefore, Ariel also *partially* disidentifies with femme and queer femininities. Indeed, to draw on theoretical models offered by Halberstam (2011) and Butler (1990), Ariel arguably positions themselves as "failing" to performatively "do" queer femininity "right," according to the norms of femme and queer femininities, which have been reiteratively established, circulated and passed down. Ariel "fails" to 'inherit,' to draw on Ahmed (2006), some of the more typical or normative queer feminine ways of orientating themselves. Arguably, this is a productive "queer failure," that Ariel creatively transfigures into a disidentificatory orientation towards queer femininities themselves. In context of these articulations of queer feminine norms and "failures," this chapter seeks to explore what queer feminine "failures" and norms can tell us about queer feminine disidentificatory orientations by drawing on Halberstam's (2011) *The Queer Art of Failure*. Picking up on the thread of the previous chapter, this chapter is organised through the exploration of further positionalities, namely those of class, size and 'race.' The chapter begins by discussing class(ism) in context queer feminine "failures," before moving on to discuss size(ism) in relation of the art of queer feminine "failure." The chapter ends with a critique of the performative reproductions of inherited lines of whiteness *within* queer feminine cultures. This section discusses the idea of failing to fail productively at departing from inherited queer and queer feminine lines of whiteness that arguably result in a normative performative reproductions of a white centre *within* queer and queer feminine subcultures. Focusing on accounts by my participants who *unproductively* fail to fail at inheriting whiteness, this section argues that whiteness often forms the unarticulated background through and against which "subversive" queer femininities emerge. Conversely, it also begins to discuss some of the *productive* ways in which queer femmes of colour "fail" to follow or inherit – and subsequently actively disidentify with – normative lines of whiteness *within* queer and

queer feminine cultures and constructions of identity. In this chapter I chose to focus on the intersections of size, class and ‘race.’ I chose these three intersections specifically because those subjects who are classified or self-identify as fat, working-class or persons of colour often describe feelings of “failure” at performing femininity “right,” according to white, western, sizeist and middle-class standards. Conversely, queer femininity is often discussed as an identity that celebrates the “failure” to perform femininity according to normative standards. Subsequently queer femininity is often heralded as a sanctuary for subjects who are marginalised by normative, white, middle-class and sizeist beauty standards. However, as this chapter argues through focusing on the intersections of size, class and ‘race’ in relation to queer feminine disidentificatory orientations, there are also moments where normative standards of beauty and femininity are reproduced or where these norms circulate obliquely *within* queer and femme communities, thereby giving privileged access to identity construction and community belonging to some, whilst limiting and denying others.

ii) Theorising the Queer Art of Failure

To begin, it is important to note that Halberstam (2011, p.89) acknowledges that Muñoz (2009) has in fact ‘produced the most elaborate account of queer failure to date’ in *Cruising Utopia*, which ‘explains the connection between queers and failure in terms of a utopian rejection of pragmatism, on the one hand, and an equally utopian refusal of social norms on the other.’ Therefore, Muñoz himself is fundamental for Halberstam’s (2011, p.89) conceptualisation of the queer art of failure and his own association of failure with ‘non-conformity, anti-capitalist practices, non-reproductive life styles, negativity and critique.’ In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam (2011, p.3) establishes an inextricable link between queerness and failure, in particular to *productive* failures, by claiming that:

Failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well; for queers failure can be a style, to cite Quentin Crisp, or a way of life, to cite Foucault, and it can stand in contrast to the grim scenarios of success that depend upon “trying and trying again.” In fact if success requires so much effort, then maybe failure is easier in the long run and offers different rewards. What kind of reward can failure offer us? Perhaps most obviously, failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behaviour and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean

boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers. And while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life.

Of course, the negative affects of disappointment, disillusionment and despair are ones that are only felt when one is in some ways invested in the norms of success. Indeed, Halberstam hints towards the potential alternative modes of excitement and unexpected rewards that queer failures might offer. Yet not all those who identify as queer are able to disentangle themselves from the disciplining negative and positive affects surrounding success and failure. Furthermore, the celebration of “failure” within queer cultures can create its own subcultural norms that some situated subjects may fail to follow, thereby creating complex forms of affective and critical relations to both “normative” and queer models of “failure” and “success.” In claiming failure as a particularly queer tendency, yet also a queer talent, and in mapping out the *positive* and *productive* effects (ironically enough - given Halberstam’s critique of neo-liberalism, capitalism, and the ‘toxic positivity of contemporary life’) that artful queer failures can engender, Halberstam (2011) focuses on queers who *fail spectacularly* and encourages queers to *practice more failure*, because these productive failures generate alternative models of success. In Halberstam’s thesis failure has the potential of being joyful, liberating, innovative and pleasurable. Indeed, Halberstam (2011, p.4) highlights that ‘From the perspective of feminism, failure has often been a better bet than success. Where feminine success is always measured by male standards, and gender failure often means being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal ideals, not succeeding at womanhood can offer unexpected pleasures.’ Furthermore, through references to figures like Quentin Crisp, Halberstam (2011, pp.87 & 24) elaborates the queer *art* of failure as a ‘style’ or a ‘practice’ that involves ‘failing well, failing often, and learning (...) how to fail better.’ Halberstam in particular links ‘the art of queer failure’ to the ‘gender trouble of the butch variety,’ a style of gender variance and deviance that Halberstam (2011, p.95) simultaneously perceives *and positions* as being ‘very often at the very heart of queer failure.’ Though a queer art of failure of the queerly feminine kind is acknowledged by Halberstam, it is arguably insufficiently elaborated. Furthermore, whilst Halberstam acknowledges that femmes have often been excluded from queer theoretical paradigms concerning gender subversion, in many ways Halberstam’s insistent focus on butch and masculine styles of queer failure, reinscribes queer feminine subjects in the same invisibility, as implicitly successfully

gendered subjects, that Halberstam acknowledges and critiques. That said, the elaboration of a specifically queer *feminine* art of failure is not the intention of this Chapter. Rather, I want to take the theoretical terms of this debate one step further, by focusing not so much on those queer subjects who fail spectacularly by constructing the simple argument that queer femininities embody a queer art of failure that subverts normative gender paradigm. Instead I want to focus on accounts by those who (*productively*) “fail” to inherit internal queer feminine norms along the lines of size and class and, equally, those who “fail” (*unproductively*) to subvert norms of whiteness in context of their queer feminine identities. As I elaborated in my introduction, failure is a crucial concept for both Ahmed’s (2006) concept of orientations and Muñoz’s (1999) theory of disidentifications. Thus, the concept of “failure” is also crucial for elaborating a theory of queer feminine disidentificatory orientations, as is illustrated in the subsequent three sections which focus on the intersections between queer femininities, size, class and “race.”

iii) Size

Whilst femme and queer feminine identified persons and the literature emerging from this subculture articulate a dominant discourse of fat acceptance, positivity, pride and inclusion, as fat embodiment comes to signify yet another celebrated difference, for some fat embodiment is a crucial point of exclusion from *both* femininity *and* queer femininities. Indeed, as will be argued in this section, fat embodiment can simultaneously produce a disidentificatory orientation towards femininity *and* queer femininities, which are articulated through discourses of a perceived “failure” to fit into various mainstream *and* subcultural norms.

Peggy, for example, talked extensively about how her larger body size is central to her orientation towards an alternative model of femininity. Arguably, she inhabits a disidentificatory orientation towards mainstream femininities due to her “failure” to fit into normative ideals of femininity because of her size, yet later on Peggy also hints at being excluded from an alternative feminine aesthetic. Thus, she also occupies a disidentificatory orientation towards queer femininities, to a certain extent. Peggy talked extensively about how her larger body size is central to her orientation towards an alternative model of femininity. She articulates how she is automatically opted out of the

‘incredibly exclusionary’ ‘competitive’ model of white, western feminine beauty due to her larger size and, consequentially, her being opted out leads to her assuming an alternative feminine embodied subjectivity. Thus, in her questionnaire, Peggy wrote: ‘Femininity is a competition which, at a very early age, I chose to opt out of. Being tall and far from feminine ‘ideals’ physically meant that adopting an ‘alternative’ appearance has always been easier (for which read ‘more comfortable’). I define my own sense of the ‘feminine’ but clearly, via my appearance, mark myself out as not in the ‘competition.’ In her interview it transpired that this dynamic of her opting out and being opted out was strongly linked to her feeling that she could never fit into white, western beauty standards, since she says that:

I think the way I look at femininity particularly in our culture in the UK and America as well, is I regard it as incredibly exclusionary and competitive, you have to appear a certain way, to weigh a certain amount, you have to have particular clothes, and from adolescence really I decided that my version of femininity was about opting out, it was about subverting those roles, cos I knew I could never be petite and blond and therefore for me kind of an alternative femininity came easier but was also more authentic.

By saying that an alternative femininity came “easier” and was more “authentic” Peggy is here referring to the fact that she felt excluded by certain mainstream versions of femininity due to her larger size and the sizeism involved in these modes of gendered embodiment which she feels would have been harder for her to performatively embody and, thus, less “authentic” or fitting. Therefore, we can read more “authentic” as meaning that it physically and socially fits better with both the materiality of her body and her attitudes, in context of sociocultural norms surrounding size and femininity. Furthermore, Peggy frames her opting out as a positive, self preserving and valuing, reaction to her “failure” to fit normative cultural ideals of femininity and how this “failure” to fit effectively *produced* her ‘own set of rules’ for performing an alternative femininity:

I realised that I didn’t fit. So rather than torture myself into some image of conformity, I decided, well I know what those rules are, therefore, I know what rules I don’t want to follow and out of that naturally grow your own set of rules (...) for me femininity is this competitive situation and if you realise that you’re never going to be able to compete then there comes again that term of opting out and setting new rules and new standards.

However, although phrases like ‘I decided’ hint towards her agency in “choosing” to ‘opt out,’ subvert femininity and set ‘new rules’ and ‘standards,’ which she feels she can determine and control it is nevertheless clear that her inherited body size positions her at a

particular starting point for orientating towards certain modes of femininity, precisely because of her exclusion from the ‘competition’ of, so called, normative ideals of femininity. Therefore, her choosing to opt out can be seen as a reaction to and consequence of her being opted out of normative ideals of femininity in the first place, as is clear when she articulates how *‘it’s not just me opting out, it’s me being opted out’* and through the fact that, in the sequencing of her narrative, ‘being opted out’ comes prior to her subsequent reactive decision to ‘opt out:’

It's also how the competition doesn't want me to take part. For example the size of my feet being size 9, as I said lots of women have size 9 feet and it's much easier to get shoes these days, when I was younger it was impossible, it was so hard and people teased me at school about my shoes and it was just horrible, now I've got a massive collection of shoes because for me they represent so much more, it's about me having economic independence, but also being able to participate in a consumer culture and an aspect of it that I couldn't before, because shoes weren't made for my size, but still, if you look at beautiful really desirable shoes they will be available up to a size 6 or a 7, so *it's not just me opting out, it's me being opted out*, so it's designers, you know if I wanted to buy something from Warehouse for example, I think they go up to a 14 or something which isn't going to fit me. I went to a feminist conference in Utrecht a couple of years ago. They had conference t-shirts and I said I'd love one of those, their only available in skinny sizes at a fucking feminist conference (...) *when designers or when other feminists say they can't accommodate you, then I say, well, fuck off I don't want to be accommodated by you anyway, I'll do my own thing.*

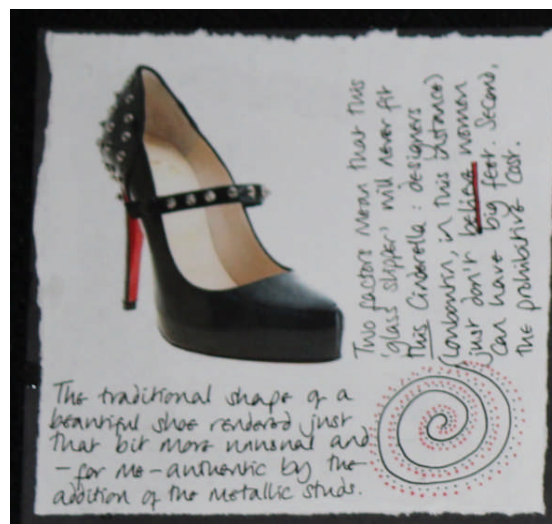


Figure 4.9: Peggy’s shoe

Significantly, it is not just high street clothes shops, but also feminist spaces, which act as exclusionary sites orientated by a sizeist body fascism that refuses to accommodate Peggy’s larger body size under their normative ideas of what femininity, the female body,

or, indeed, feminism, looks like and subsequently lead her to do her own thing with her alternative (feminist) femininity.

Peggy: This I think is an absolutely gorgeous, beautiful, beautiful shoe, but, as I've written I can't ever wear it first of all because it's prohibitively expensive, but also because my feet are real feet, therefore they won't fit, there's an article in the Sunday times magazine yesterday about Louboutin, which is this designer of the red sole, talking about how, if you want to wear it you have to expect the pain and I found that quite interesting, that women are prepared to have the pain for the aesthetic, but I just like the conjunction of the sort of traditional shoe, but also the spikiness and the kind of aesthetic (...) this is a traditional shoe, but it's subverted slightly and I'm never going to be able to wear it.

Alexa: The Cinderella complex?

Peggy: Yea, the idea that designers don't think about women like me, you know I've got, you know, they ought to, but they don't and therefore the easiest thing is to say well in that case I don't want your designer things, but clearly I do because I think that they're gorgeous shoes.

What's curious about this image of a shoe and her description of it as 'this is a traditional shoe, but it's subverted slightly and I'm never going to be able to wear it,' is that, with its feminine shape and metal studded spike, this shoe could easily fall under the rubric of gothic, punk, rock, alternative, subversive, indeed, queer femininity. Yet she feels excluded from deploying the objects of this aesthetic due to size and economic factors. Does this therefore hint towards an implicit sizeist exclusion within queer feminine aesthetics that claim to include queer feminine subjects of all shapes, sizes, colours, and wallets? Finally, in relation to shoes, femininity, fashion and body size as a positioned starting points for orientating queer femininities, Peggy also highlights how her body size was an implicit factor in orientating her towards punk subcultural aesthetics: 'part of the punk aesthetic, as well, was to do with DocMartens, which were unisex and so that was perfect, you know, cos you could wear footwear that fitted, you know, you didn't stand out and you certainly wouldn't be teased.' Here, the very *real* materiality of her body – her size and the fact that she has 'real feet' have a significant material and sociocultural effect on the way Peggy performatively constructs her feminine gender identity in light of certain "choices" being foreclosed or opened up to her due to the very real materiality of her bodily size and the cultural meanings, restriction and opportunities, attached to this. In this latter sense punk subcultural aesthetics, which also often form a central part of queer femininities, literally makes space for her bodily size and positioned alternative femininity, thereby bringing it into being. Bodily size and shape orientates Peggy on numerous levels. Firstly, as an inherited material positionality that renders normative white, western ideals of femininity off her immediate bodily horizon and, thus,

inaccessible as a point of identification and orientation. Secondly, as a material positionality that due to her “failure” to ‘fit’ into normative ideals of femininity orientates her away from the ‘competition’ and towards ‘opting out’ and creating her own ‘rules’ and ‘standards’ for performing an alternative femininity. Thirdly, as a material positionality that orientates her towards certain *very specific* subcultural aesthetics (punk) and cultures of belonging where ‘you didn’t stand out and you certainly wouldn’t be teased.’ Yet, at the same time, Peggy points towards internal exclusions by highlighting how due to her fat embodiment certain objects, modes of consuming and performing her alternative femininity that she desires are unavailable to her.

Another participant, Vikki, also spoke of how: ‘my femininity and my fatness are very interlinked.’ She discussed how her ‘fat embodiment’ orientated her femininity on various levels, by implicitly excluding her from heteronormative femininity and it was only after reconciling and find a space for her larger bodily size with femininity, through fat activism and discovering queerness, that she felt ‘able to embrace my femininity and become femme.’ Thus, Vikki narrates her coming to femme as follows:

in my sort of timeline, my progression of my gender, I spent a lot of time trying to do a very heteronormative femininity, but that never really worked and as I said because of my fatness I always found it really hard and then I gave up and did a very - gendered thing for a very long time and then I came out as a lesbian first and then tried very hard to look a certain way, to fit in, and I had to deny my femininity then and then I kind of discovered queerness and it was only after I discovered queerness and interestingly at the same time discovered fat activism, that I was able to embrace my femininity and become femme and for me those are very crucial and they’re very connected.

In some ways, size(ism), in Vikki’s account - like in Peggy’s - acts as a “stopping” device hindering her ability to easily access “normative” performances of femininity. However, size(ism) also excludes Vikki from being recognised as a gender queer femme and as sexually queer, because of the ‘unspoken fat phobia in queer culture,’ as she relates how her ‘fat embodiment’ means she is misread as a ‘fag hag’:

Vikki: in order to be feminine, you have to be not fat and obviously that's something that I've kind of struggled with a lot, I think *my fatness was a big part of the reason that I found it impossible to perform or to enact a way of being feminine that seemed to work for a long time*, because I didn't because I haven't found a way of doing it that seemed possible for me, and I think, you know, I just think there's so many complicated things about how that is read and how kind of, you know, you can be, you can be fat and masculine and it's alright, but then also that, like I said before, there's this kind of still I think there is a lot of unspoken fat phobia in queer culture, you know, the kind of thing of like, either it's like oh you're fat of course you're a lesbian.

Alexa: So, there's a double stigma?

Vikki: Yea, or it's kind of, oh you're fat and you're feminine, so you must be a fag hag and it's so complicated and I think also on a really practical day to day level, it is, it's hard actually being femme when you're fat, because you can't buy the dresses in most normal shops the same way that other, you know like you don't have the same avenues available to you, and, you have to be a bit more creative and, and I think there can be a little bit of, even within you know kind of amongst femmes, I think sometimes there can be a bit of tension between, I've noticed it from other fat femmes and from thinner femmes, this kind of tendency to like, again sort of dichotomise and be a little bit, oh you know, well they're just, I've known of bigger femme women to say, oh well the thin one's just look down on you and kind of you get stereotyped as a fag hag, you know.

Thus, Vikki narrates how there is a need for femme and queer feminine subjects to tackle fat phobia *within* the queer community and she articulates how being of size often positions fat positive femmes in a critical disidentificatory relationship towards queer feminine identities, subjects and communities, often problematising and posing a barrier to their queer feminine identification, due to their perception that thinness still circulates as a norm even within femme and queer feminine representations, figurations and networks. Indeed, on the one hand Vikki expresses how for her queer femme and fat positive activism, identity and communities are inextricably interlinked, by explaining: 'there is a lot of overlap of queer and fat activism and a lot of the fat activism that I'm involved with is with queer people and queer people who are also involved in queer cultures.' Yet, on the other hand, Vikki articulates how this overlap is at times insufficient for building a fat positive and accepting queer community by saying: 'but I think maybe queer could make a bit more space for fat than it maybe has until now.' Vikki also relates how there is a lot of 'unspoken fat phobia in queer culture', which limits the choices and possibilities of gender identification, performance and embodiment for fat, queer, feminine subjects and even cause 'tension' 'within,' 'between' and 'amongst femmes.' Like Peggy, Vikki also highlights how fat embodied femmes can also be excluded from forms of consumption on offer to thinner femme subjects.

I had an experience a few months ago in Vivienne of Holloway, really well known 50's dresses that are like queer uniform, queer femme uniform, like everyone wears Vivienne of Holloway (...) it's this really ubiquitous thing and my partner wanted to buy me one for my birthday and so we went and they say on their website some bullshit thing about, we use, beware of our vintage sizes, we use vintage patterns, or something, which means that you may be a size bigger than you are normally and we go up to a vintage size 24 and I was like okay, fair enough, like you know, a size bigger, maybe, you know, a 22 or a 24 should fit me, so that should be fine, I'm not that big, there are an awful lot of people that even that just automatically cuts out, but yea, we went and nothing fitted me and my partner got quite upset, like, upset on my behalf, because she was like, oh they're just twats and I was like I know *laughter*

but I said the thing that means I'm not upset I'm angry and I'm angry because I know how 5 years ago that would have really upset me (...) now I make a point that when I wear a 50s type of dress and people say is that Vivienne of Holloway and I say well no, because they're body fascists and like I won't just let it slide, like I have to make a point of telling people.

Through referring to Vivienne of Holloway as 'queer femme uniform' and as a 'really ubiquitous thing,' saying 'like everyone wears Vivienne of Holloway,' Vikki highlights an implicitly exclusionary norm that is circulating very dominantly within queer and femme cultures that is not only body fascist and fat phobic but also classist, since this brand is also extremely expensive. Therefore, like in Peggy's example of the 'prohibitively expensive' designer shoe that she desires, yet cannot fit into or afford, classed and sized intersections are deeply intertwined in Vikki's example, which highlights these implicit queer femme norms and exclusions, even for these relatively well off middle-class queer feminine subjects.

The limited choices available for consuming and performing queer femininity, as well as the damaging stereotypes surrounding fat and femininity is also highlighted by fat activist performers, Abi Slone and Alyson Mitchell (2002), who together form *Pretty Porky and Pissed Off*. Mitchell (2002, p.104) expresses her disidentificatory anger at the negative stereotyping she receives for being fat and femme, by recounting how she is often either misrecognised or dismissed as "maternal:" 'One reason I get called Mom is because I dress like a girl, and another is because of my fat body – which is associated with home and hearth and the comfort of the bosom. This drives me crazy. I'm nobody's damn mother and whenever I get called Mom I feel dumpy and desexualized. I know that there are sexy moms out there, but I definitely don't feel sexy when someone calls me Mom. My boobs are sexy round knockers – they aren't the bosom for comforting the world.' Mitchell (2002, pp.105-106) also discusses the limitations of liberal discourses surrounding choice and queer femininity in a disidentificatory tone, pointing out that here gendered choices are circumscribed by how she is recognised and gendered by others, as is illustrated in the example above, as well as the actual physicality of her fat embodiment: 'A woman with a "womanly" body doesn't have the same "gender choices" that women with less curves have. And in many ways, I wonder if femme is a gender choice or a queer gender assignment. (...) I don't feel like I've had much choice in my gender. As for associations of femme with girly clothing, sometimes it isn't a matter of choice for me. I

have legs like tree trunks and a big belly. A dress often feels more comfortable than pants because of this. Sexy fat-ass slacks are hard to find.' Paradoxically, whilst some femmes highlight how fat femmes can encounter barriers in performatively embodying their queer feminine identities, due to their size limiting their access to certain popular modes of queer fem(me)inine consumption and their encountering damaging stereotypes and misrecognition of their fat femme identities; some femmes, like Mitchell, question whether femme really is 'a gender choice or a queer gender assignment' - a chosen or a prescribed gender identity - since they feel femme may be more accommodating of fat embodiment than, perhaps butchness and especially androgyny, as is illustrated by Mitchell lamenting that 'sexy fat-ass slacks are hard to find.'

A further very poignant contribution to discussions of fat femme identities is a comic strip by Suzy Malik and Zoe Whitall (2002), which discusses fat femme embodied identities, issues, representation, desire and community belonging, recording various registers of queer feminine disidentifications. There are various disidentificatory moments of internal critique happening in Malik and Whitall's (2002) strip. The strip begins with a disidentificatory critique of misogyny, ignorance and hatred of femininities and androgyny or masculine centrism *within* the queer community, embodied by the boy dyke in the opening frames. The second part of the strip is dedicated to a disidentificatory critique of misogyny in combination with fat phobia *within* queer communities, where fat is attributed different values along gendered lines, with masculine fat being more easily incorporated into masculine dyke identities as signifying a desirable sexy 'strength' or 'power', whereas fat is not as easily incorporated into queer feminine identities, as it is once again taken as 'weakness' or at the very least as an attribute which renders femmes undesirable. This point is reiterated on the last page where the author laments the dwindling interest of a lover due to her increased weight: 'She wanted me when I weighed 100 lbs. She was quick to the draw to buy drinks and grind. It's funny how she wanted me when I could barely even walk. Now she doesn't even recognize me.' However, most importantly, the strip depicts a critical disidentificatory take on femme, queer and alternative femininities themselves. If we take a closer critical look at the visual representation and sparse yet illustrative language surrounding the thin femme depicted on the second page of this strip, who is introduced to us with the words 'She's sex on wheels. She's power. She's who I want to be when I throw up my dinner. She's *the*

ultimate in what a femme is *supposed* to look like.’ (my emphasis, Malki and Whitall, 2002, p.143)



Figure: 5.1 Malik and Whitall’s (2002) ‘Fat is a Femme-inine Issue,’ pp.141-144.

In this image we find a disidentificatory take on femme and queer femininities, which is simultaneously identificatory in that the author articulates an aspirational desire to become the ultimate thin sexy power femme (‘She’s who I want to be when I throw up my dinner. She’s the ultimate in what a femme is supposed to look like.’) and a critical exposure of thinness as a powerful norm that, according to this author, does in fact circulate even *within* queer and queer feminine subcultures (‘Go through your high femme social rolodex? Who are they? Probably tall, skinny, with some tattoos and a snap to her strut.’). That thinness operates as a persisting norm or hierarchising standard within queer femininities is given away by tell tale phrases such as the pressure loaded word ‘should’, indicating that thinness is something the author feels they should aspire to in order to look like the sizeist ideal of the ultimate high or power femme, hence her throwing up her dinner, and by the fact that a ‘skinny’ femme is what immediately springs to mind associated with the imagined idea(l) ‘high femme.’ The fact that this thin (white) femme is depicted as a singular figure in this frame, recalling images of advertisements or comic strip heroines, is furthermore significant, as it simultaneously stands for, symbolises, represents and significantly stands critically against, what fat activists Sloane and Mitchel (2002, p.103) articulate as exclusionary singular definitions,

representations and heroic icons of femme and queer femininity, in their situated fat positive statement that: ‘One-size-fits-all tights simply don’t and a singular definition of femme doesn’t even begin to cover the many ways in which fat femmes live and identify themselves.’ Significantly, the authors also make a direct reference to bulimia through the line: ‘She’s who I want to be when I throw up my dinner?’ The authors also allude to Susie Orbach’s *Fat is a Feminist Issue* through their title ‘Fat Is a Femme-inine Issue.’ We could question to what extent the thin obsessed culture Orbach wrote about and its associated disordered eating are circulating within queer communities and the skinny standards of femininity. The epidemic of fat hatred is thus potentially one from which femme and queer femininities are unfortunately not entirely immune, as this simultaneously idolised yet deconstructed representation of thin femme sexiness, confidence and power implicitly articulates. The angle of the image is also interesting, as the viewer who is simultaneously the comic strip writer and the reader, who is asked to identify or empathise with the writers through a shared gaze, is looking up at this femme admiringly. The visual angle from below, therefore, adds to the aspirational, yet also critically disidentificatory and internal femme hierarchy exposing, tone of this strip. Furthermore, the visual layout, with its zigzagged background, which invokes the atmosphere of a cartoon superhero entering the scene, also functions to evoke associations with visibility, heroism, superiority, hierarchy, power, sexuality and dominance. Indeed, simultaneously admiring and aspiringly placing this thin femme on a pedestal and deconstructing that very same pedestal by articulating the discontents and exclusions created in its construction, this image functions in a very similar way to Ariel’s (2009) account of hir idolised femme Mistress, which I discussed in the introduction.



Figure 5.2 Malik and Whitall’s (2002) ‘Fat is a Femme-inine Issue’ pp.141-144.

It is furthermore interesting that this representation of the ultimate sexy skinny confident power femme, with all of the positive effects and values that are inscribed in this image, is followed immediately by an image of fat femme disappointment that is awash with negative affects of sadness and shame at not being desired, or recognised, as a fat femme. Arguably, the word *recognize* here is loaded with double meaning, signifying both her *generally* not being recognised by this desired subject because of her weight gain and a very *specific* form of *femme invisibility* as a fat femme, when, as has been highlighted in the previous image, what is typically rendered visible as and associated with femme - in particular high or power femininity - is this image of the ultimate, tall, skinny, sexy, confident, edgy, power femme, depicted above. Indeed, we could turn to Butler's (1993, 1997, 2004) argument that the realm of representation, what *is* represented or *is* rendered visible as being this or that - in this case as being femme - automatically creates a realm of (further) invisibility, a realm that cannot be fully recognised – in this case fat femme power and desirability. Nevertheless, despite the critical disidentificatory take on misogyny within the queer community and thin normativity within queer femininities, the cartoon ends on an open ended - almost Muñozian utopian – note, by depicting the possibility of variously positioned identities, who stand in solidarity across intersectional differences and who are collectively redefining femme from their positionalities as proud fat femmes, trans* femmes and skinny femmes. The final figures in this comic strip are arguably collectively reclaiming femme for their own situated selves, from *both* the misogyny and fat phobia articulated by some masculine and androgynous queers and the partial representations and definitions offered by any partial, yet universalising, singular über femme representation.⁷

⁷ It's significant that there are three *different* and not one singular thin, sexy, starlet, diva, power femme in this final image.



Figure 5.3: Malik and Whitall's (2002) 'Fat is a Femme-inine Issue' pp.141-144.

If we turn to Miel Rose's (2009) 'Prayer' and the afore discussed essay by Gina de Vries (2009) 'Rebel Girl: How Riot Grrrl Changed Me, Even if it Didn't Fit Just Right,' provide two further examples of disidentificatory queer feminine subjectivities and moments that function along the positioned lines of fat embodiment. On the one hand Miel Rose's (2009, p.119) 'Prayer' records her strong identification with femme identities. However, on the other hand, the issue of being 'judged' as 'way too femme, or way not femme enough' (and how this feeling of inadequacy is tied to positionalities like class, fat and 'race') cuts through Rose's devout homage to femme identities and communities like a sharp critical knife, exposing several norms operating within femme, queer feminine and queer communities at once. When discussing how issues of queer femme recognition, identification, embodiment and belonging, 'are complicated and intersected by body politics, culture, race and class', Rose (2009, p.120, my emphasis) highlights how her fat embodiment, along with her economic and class status, has proved a barrier to performing, embodying and being recognised as femme:

Being fat and on a low income often feels like a stumbling block in my heart to presenting and being acknowledged as femme. When the *most accepted* image of femme is skinny, fashionable by middle-class standards, and beautiful by Eurocentric standards, being anything else adds razors to the wire. This image of what femme *should* be further defines the limited space we have and makes us mistrust and fight each other for resources perceived as finite: validation, attention, acknowledgment, appreciation, and space.'

Interestingly, we find the same language of hierarchised standards and pressure in this essay by Rose in 2009, as we do in the previously discussed comic strip from 2002. These are present in her articulation that the ‘*most accepted* image of femme is skinny, fashionable by middle-class standards, and beautiful by Eurocentric standards.’ Furthermore, they are present in her highlighting how ‘images of what femme *should* be’ actively create circumscribed spaces of being and belonging, which impact on relations between femmes and identifications with femme. These examples also illustrate how this is a persistent problem within femme communities and identities despite significant activism and writing happening within these communities to alleviate this. Moreover, similar to the above comic strip, Rose’s disidentificatory articulations contain a glimmer of Muñozian queer utopian hope for the future, which is articulated in her final section of the piece aptly subtitled ‘Prayer.’ Here Rose (2009, p.122) acknowledges the legacy of femme as being simultaneously supportive (it has ‘laid groundwork’) and problematic (the groundwork laid is in some respects ‘shaky’), in her writing that: ‘Femme is a legacy. Femme is a word that has history in a queer context. It connects us to women who have come before us, who have laid groundwork (however shaky) for this gender space.’ Thus, Rose (2009, pp.121-122) hints towards what has been established and what has been omitted, whilst desiring for femme identities and communities to be increasingly inclusive of those subjects who have felt left in the shadows:

I want you around me now, those who hear this word “femme” and feel it resonate like a bell sounding deep in the gut. This is a prayer for those whose brilliance is consistently ignored, whose talents, skills, hard work, and strength are consistently devalued. Those who often feel out of place wherever we are, who are either too femme or never femme enough. (...) This is a prayer I make with my whole heart to see this space widen, open with enough room to hold all this insane brilliance. To see us loving ourselves and knowing our true value. This is a prayer to see us walking our different paths strongly, with the courage never to be any less than exactly who we are.

The final example of disidentificatory orientations, productive “failures” and critical eruptions within queer femininities from a situated fat femme perspective that I wish to discuss is Gina de Vries’ (2009) ‘Rebel Girl: How Riot Grrrl Changed My Life, Even if it Didn’t Fit Just Right.’ Like her reflections on classed divisions within femme and the disidentificatory relational positionalities resulting from these internal tensions that I discussed above, Gina de Vries also discusses those subtle divisions, exclusions, tensions and disidentifications that occur within femme due to size differences and sizeism.

Although the femme community that De Vries encounters presents an educated, liberal, politically correct and supposedly progressive fat positive front, De Vries is nevertheless critical of ‘what passes for femme solidarity.’ De Vries articulates the tensions she felt as a working-class femmes of size who experienced restrictive limitations in accessing the styles paraded by thinner femmes, along with her feelings of partial belonging and partial identification with femme identity and community in the language of failure, not on her part, but on the part of her community to entirely live up to their radical reputation. De Vries (2009, pp.167-168) writes:

I want riot grrrl to be what saved me, but that’s not the truth. I want the queer community and what passes for femme solidarity to be what saved me, but that’s not the truth. Too many hipster dykes in identical outfits have ignored me or shunned me, discussed femmeness and fatness oh–so–radically, and given themselves pats on the back for being supposedly fat–positive at radical queer infoshops and in women’s studies classes. (...) Those girls are the ones who wear the cool outfits that I can’t (...) Those outfits don’t look good on bodies like mine because those outfits don’t fit bodies like mine. Post–grrrl hipster femme dyke fashion is hell on fat girls. (...) I want my experience to be unique, but these experiences are all too common, even among good feminists, good queers, and good fat–positive, take–no–shit dykes. (...) Riot grrrl and the radical queer youth activist scene really did change my life. Those communities turned me around in amazing ways, helped me look at the world and myself in ways I never had before. But just because something changes your life doesn’t mean it saves you. None of those movements or communities ever completely, wholeheartedly embraced and welcomed me, but they were still better places for me than the rest of the world. As a hopeful, earnest, wide–eyed baby dyke, grrrl culture was the best fit—even if, sometimes, it was an awkward one.

(Riot grrrl) feminism, queer and femme communities and identities are discussed by De Vries as being simultaneously positive, affirmative and even life changing cultures filled with transformative potential and as an, at times, implicitly exclusionary and, indeed, exclusive culture with its own restrictive norms and limitations. This, in context of De Vries’ discussion of size(ism), is articulated through the idea that these queer, feminist and femme cultures proved to be an “awkward fit” for her - as a fat, poor, queer femme. Yet, these cultures are nevertheless positioned as being a “better fit” than “mainstream” cultures. Even as they do not prove to be the “best fit” possible considering the unarticulated thin centrism that circulates within these cultures, according to the femmes of size discussed in this chapter, who (struggle to) straddle the intersection between size(ism) and queer fem(me)ininity and who articulate their *partial* belonging and, thus, disidentificatory orientation to feminist, queer and femme cultures.

iv) Class

Considering the original roots of femme and queer femininities lie firmly in American working-class lesbian bar cultures of the 1950s and 60s (Lapovsky Kennedy and Davis 1992, Faderman 1991, Nestle 1988 and 1992, Hollibaugh and Moraga 1983, Harris and Crocker 1997 etc.), one might expect that working-class femmes ought to have an easy identificatory relationship and a straight forward line of inheritance or orientation when it comes to femme and queer feminine identities and communities. Indeed, many working-class femmes *do* identify in a seemingly unproblematic way with femme, citing this working-class origin and historical lineage of femme identity. Working-class incest survivor femme, Tara Hardy (in Burke, 2009, p.174), for example, positions femme as a brazen working-class femininity heroically poised to fight classism, saying ‘when I spy femme, I spot someone brave enough to swim upstream amid a hailstorm of combat boots, classism, urban cool, and feminist theory books.’ However, there are also some very striking stories of classed disidentificatory orientations and classism *within* queer and queer feminine communities, which should not go ignored. Ones that moreover manifest ambivalent Muñozian disidentificatory subjectivities and moments of internal criticality, which expose further classed norms and privileges circulating within femme and queer feminine communities. One such example is the afore discussed essay by Gina de Vries (2009). De Vries (2009, p.163). begins telling her story of internal classism by comparing her lack of access to the material objects for creating, performing, embodying and displaying her femme identity, to the privileges of her former middle-class high femme riot grrrl friend, Lila, explaining how she thriftily emulated their femme styles on the cheap by recycling materials, yet she was always left feeling painfully aware of their classed differences:

Lila dropped a lot of money on clothes, records and shows like it was no big deal. I saved up for things meticulously. Even though I knew my family wasn’t exactly poor, I felt like a pauper compared to the punk girls to whom Lila introduced me. I learned how to emulate their style by making do with what I had, making every purchase count. I recycled the same three dresses, ripped tights and scuzzed-up boots over and over. They all wore different outfits every time we went to a show, or had a mostly-white discussion about how racism was bad, or ran around the Japantown mall taking photo-booth pictures.

Although consuming and emulating the styles paraded by her middle-class riot girl feminine friends and getting involved in radical zine crafting and queer subcultures made De Vries (2009, p.164) feel at times like she ‘finally belonged,’ later in her life when recalling bitter sweet memories of these times with her working-class riot girl femme of

colour friend Leah, De Vries confesses her awareness that her belonging and identification with riot girl and queer feminine subcultures was always fraught and partial, that she only ever ‘felt like I belonged to an extent’ as these were problematised and inflected by internal class differences and classism. Interestingly, De Vries (2009, p.167) also articulates a classed “failure” to belong, which actually indicated a failure of our own queer and queer feminine subcultural praxis to be fully inclusive of marginalised positionalities *within*, as she describes how she felt like she felt that she ‘was never cool enough,’ saying:

But even with all the sweetness, a bitterness started to surface. “I never felt like I was cool enough,” I said. “I felt like I belonged to an extent, and that was amazing because I’d never felt anything like that before. But I was never cool enough because I never had enough money—and that was so huge. I had no idea that it was classism because my family wasn’t on welfare, and we were so much better off than other people in my neighbourhood. But I had so little compared to those other punk girls. And I was younger and bigger than all of them, which colored so much of my experience.’ Leah nodded and said that at a certain point she’d relinquished riot grrrl for radical people of color spaces because she was tired of dealing with the racist and classist bullshit from the mostly–white, mostly–rich grrrl scenes.

De Vries and her friend Leah thus articulate their partial belonging and disidentificatory relationship with regards to queer feminine identity and community along distinctly positioned classed, sized and raced lines, which, in Ahmed’s (2007, p.161) terminology, *stop*, their full identification with and inheritance of queer feminine identity and community belonging. Instead it creates a disidentificatory orientation towards queer femininities from within. Indeed, both the queer feminine riot grrrl femme community and identity is described by De Vries (2009, p.168). as ‘the best fit’ yet nevertheless ‘an awkward one’, as she could never fully belong to this subculture and performatively embody or identify with femme due to her classed and sized differences and the classism and sizeism that she feels is present within some fractions of the Riot grrrl and queer feminine cultures she encountered:

Riot grrrl and the radical queer youth activist scene really did change my life. Those communities turned me around in amazing ways, helped me look at the world and myself in ways I never had before. But just because something changes your life doesn’t mean it saves you. None of those movements or communities ever completely, wholeheartedly embraced and welcomed me, but they were still better places for me than the rest of the world. As a hopeful, earnest, wide-eyed baby dyke, grrrl culture was the best fit—even if, sometimes, it was an awkward one.

Arguably, De Vries’ (2009) articulations of her partial belonging and partial unbelonging, her partial subscription and partial criticality, take on a distinctly Muñozian

disidentificatory tone. Gina de Vries thus speaks of a personal “failure” to belong, which is in fact a productive “failure” pointing towards the failures of our communities to be wholly diverse and inclusive. However, De Vries is by far not the only femme to articulate a discontented and critical disidentificatory relationship to queer femininity due to their classed position or politics surrounding consumerism, whilst nevertheless still identifying strongly with femme. In ‘Reclaiming Femme’ Caitlin Petrakis Childs (2009) also voices her critique of the centralised role that materialism and consumerism plays in queer feminine subcultures, as these are inflected by classed differences and privilege and, moreover, supported by an exploitative capitalist system. Whilst acknowledging that femmes are historically invisibilised, dismissed and ‘devalued’ within the queer community and that we should ‘celebrate the transgressive and revolutionary potential that conscious femininity can hold’, Childs (2009, p.70) also articulates her critical working-class and anti-capitalist queer feminine disidentificatory orientation towards queer femininities as someone who nevertheless situates themselves very strongly as femme in the following way:

I have also been disappointed in the femme spaces I have been in. There often exists an unspoken link among materialism, consumerism and femmeness. As a femme with few financial resources and anti-capitalist politics, that link bothers me. Of course, I love cute dresses and heels as much as the next femme, but I don’t think that my femmeness can be proven by how many Prada bags I own or how much my outfit costs. The idea that femme identity can be bought alienates poor and working-class femmes and people who see capitalism as one of the main roots of oppression in the U.S. and around the world. When femmes buy into the idea that is sold to us in the mainstream media and U.S. consumer society that femininity is something that is quite expensive and must be bought, are we really subverting the sexist and heteronormative ideals of femininity? Or are we just naming something “queer” while falling into heteronormative, capitalist traps? Is there anything truly queer about this trend in femme identity?

This link between consumption, class and queer femininities is also articulated in Maria See’s (2009, p.71) essay ‘Outfit Separates’, where she highlights that ‘Femme doesn’t come from within. It comes from my debit card. It’s what I can afford.’ Indeed, a link between class, ‘race’ and queer femininities is furthermore drawn by T.J. Bryan (2002, p.155), who critiques white centric queer feminine subcultures, drawing a connection between class, ‘race’ and queer femininities; between being poor, black and femme and not having enough ‘green’ to enable an ‘easy passage through the world’ or to ‘get a piece a the scene’ - which is described as ‘competitive’ and ‘status conscious.’ These situated

intersectional links between queer feminine privileges, marginalisation and disidentificatory orientations are also drawn by Miel Rose (2009, pp.119-120):

Sometimes being femme is about finding power and strength through a devalued kind of vulnerability. But in practice it often feels like wrapping bravado around tender insides, and bravado can only take one so far. When did my bedroom become the only assured safety in enemy territory? How often do I feel like a mythical animal or an antiquated stereotype, even among other queers? How often do I feel on display, judged way too femme, or way not femme enough?

These issues are complicated and intersected by body politics, culture, race and class. Being fat and on a low income often feels like a stumbling block in my heart to presenting and being acknowledged as femme. When the most accepted image of femme is skinny, fashionable by middle-class standards, and beautiful by Eurocentric standards, being anything else adds razors to the wire.

This image of what femme should be further denies the limited space we have and makes us mistrust and fight each other for resources perceived as finite: validation, attention, acknowledgement, appreciation, and space. We exist in a culture that hates women and queers, in a subculture that regards expressions of femininity and feminine sexuality with distrust and contempt. This keeps the razors sharp.

My participants also reflected on how class as economic, social and cultural capital, intersect with their queer feminine identities. Whilst Vikki described Vivienne Westwood (a costly British designer) as 'femme uniform' thereby hinting towards the oblique and often elided classed dynamics involved in queer feminine communities in terms of access to certain typical femme styles of dressing and gender performativity, Liz, a young unemployed queer femme from Leeds, and Sarah, a young research student who grew up below the poverty line, highlight the simple fact that one can only be concerned with investing ones economic and cultural capital in styles of femme gender presentation once the daily necessities of life are taken care of and one is in possession of surplus economic capital to invest elsewhere. Liz illustrated her awareness of how femme identity is embroiled in class privilege and capitalism by discussing her own culturally situated stylistic femme tastes and her access to certain femme identity consumer practices as follows:

In terms of the clothes that I, well, not at the moment, because I really don't have very much money, but, in terms of the clothes that I have had access to, I really like some vintage stuff and I think that's a really white middle-class British thing to be into or perhaps like American or, but it's certainly of a cultural background that is privileged and in terms of the make-up that I buy, I used to just buy the cheapest make-up, that was there but I've become a make-up snob, I've wanted to get lipfinity for the longest time (...) it was only a couple of months ago that I decided to buy it because I needed to get some new lipstick and I was just like why don't I, rather than

getting a load of shit lipsticks that I need to replace all the time, why not get a really good one. The fact that I can spend £13 on a lipstick, that says a lot about my position as a privileged person. And, even though I didn't really, it's not like I didn't have money, because obviously I did have money, but I should have been prioritising other things at the time, but, the fact that I have the liberty to not necessarily prioritise other things at the time, because I had enough food in my cupboards and because like I've got £5 for emergency gas and electricity that I can use and because I'm on jobseekers at the moment, which doesn't allow you the greatest amount of money, but it still means that I'm getting money every two weeks and like I think that one thing that often troubles me about like femme identity is that my femme identity is quite contingent upon capitalism (...) I don't think it's really an identity that can exist in the way that it does for me unless you're in a capitalist hierarchical situation and if you're at the top of that hierarchy, or at the top of a few of those hierarchies anyway.

Despite the historically working-class roots of femme and the fact that a large number of femmes involved in the published anthologies, as well as a number of my participants, come from working-class backgrounds, the ability to engage in the consumption of queer urban spaces and modes of embodiment, or discourses, distinctively marks the centre of queer feminine subcultures as a performance of identity requiring a certain amount of economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), as well as subcultural capital (Thornton 1997) which can be both distinct from as well as related to economic and cultural capital. Equally, to refer to Beverly Skeggs' (1997) work on femininity, class and respectability, the deconstruction of femininity may itself be a very middle-class occupation, since subjects, like Sarah, who grew up below the poverty line and suffers from mental health difficulties, may be less willing to deconstruct a femininity and the respectability that comes with it, if they have only recently gained access to it:

I reserve the right to, I've fought and fought and fought to get where I am and now if I want to spend a stupid amount of money on clothes every so often to treat myself, well fuck it, I will do, because I genuinely get a lot of joy out of it and all those thoughts run through my head that I didn't used to be able to do this and now I can and that is linked to things like feelings of self worth and the fact that I now feel that, that I can look nice.

Sarah's desire to 'look nice,' rather than to perform her femininity with a visible flaw, to do femininity 'right,' rather than performing conscious queer failures, actively wanting approval, rather than being disinterested in approval, mixed with her disruptive performances of femininity embodied in her favourite example of drinking a pint of beer down the pub, wearing a very feminine dress, may thus be

described as markers of a queer femininity where mental health difficulties and poverty act as starting points of disidentificatory orientation. Another way in which class emerges as a point of orientation is that Sue references her working-class background, implicitly, as influencing her outspokenness and, explicitly, as giving her an epistemic point of marginality from which to critique classed exclusions and an attitude that she describes as antagonistic, spiky and ‘bloody minded.’

So, I think for me working-class means, I'm outside enough to be able to say to these people, are you aware of what you have, are you aware of what you've got, are you aware that there's a whole swage of society that cannot even think of entering your world, because they don't have the door key.

Whilst Sue is not referring to queer or queer feminine communities and identities specifically, this metaphor of a missing door key, as well as her situating herself as a working-class outsider in opposition to ‘these’ (implicitly middle class) ‘people,’ nevertheless serves to stand for her own multiply marginalised positionalities as a mental health surviving, working-class, rural, queer subject, as well as standing for those excluded and marginalised subjects who do not have any access to (queer and femme) spaces of representation or community.

v) **Failing to Fail and Failing to Follow: Inheriting and Disidentifying with Queer Feminine Lines of Whiteness**

When it came to the question of how ‘race,’ ethnicity and whiteness orientates the queer feminine identity of participants, many of my predominantly white participants found it difficult to reflect on their whiteness *explicitly* and struggled even more with recognising and discussing *explicitly* how their whiteness intersects with and influences their queer femininity. Indeed, as this section illustrates, whilst many white queer femmes disidentified with whiteness through their talk, whiteness was nevertheless often reproduced in their queer fem(me)inine embodiment subjectivities, visual self representation through dressing, photographs and collages, as well as the inspiring femme heroines, muses, representations, figurations, rhetorics and communities that these white femmes orientated their identification with queer fem(me)ininity around. Thus, white femmes paradoxically fail to fail at inheriting the white norms circulating within queer fem(me)inine communities, whilst at the same time performing acts of disidentificatory

distancing towards the white norms and privileges that they are in the position of being able to afford to rhetorically disown. This is unsurprising given that critical whiteness scholars theorise whiteness as being characterised by an unconscious silence or a wilful ignorance around issues of whiteness and white privilege by white subjects and a sense of the seemingly “natural”(ised), “unmarked,” “meaninglessness” and “invisible” character of whiteness as a racialized category, at least to the white subjects who inhabit it, which leads to persons of colour being marked out and rendered visible as “racialized” “others” and the maintenance of white power and privilege (Frankenberg 1993, Dyer 1997, Ahmed 2007). Simply, whiteness is the often unacknowledged naturalised centre - much like heterosexuality or ability - that is rarely spoken about, outside critical whiteness, ‘race’ and ethnicity studies, as a racialised or ethnic positionality, leading to the othering and racialisation of persons of colour, much like queers and disabled subjects. It is this discursive silence that maintains white power, privilege and whiteness itself as the unconscious cognitive centre of many of our methodological, epistemological, theoretical and institutional praxis. Dyer (1997, p.xvi) theorises this tendency as, ‘the position of speaking as a white person is one that white people now almost never acknowledge and this is part of the condition and the power of whiteness: white people claim and achieve authority for what they say by not admitting, indeed not realising, that for much of the time they speak only for whiteness.’ Frankenberg speaks of the invisibility of whiteness and the self-perpetuating nature of white privilege and power as follows, ‘white people *and* people of colour live racially structured lives. In other words, any system of differentiation shapes those on whom it bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses. White people are “raced”, just as men are “gendered.” And in a social context where white people have to often viewed themselves as non-racial or racially neutral, it is crucial to look at the “racialness” of white experience.’ Critically, Frankenberg (1993, p.1) also highlights that “whiteness” refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed.’ In terms of whiteness and orientations specifically, Ahmed (2007, p.149) highlights that ‘whiteness could be described as an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they “take up” space and what they “can do.’ Ahmed (2007, p.149) theorises whiteness as ‘a habit, even a bad habit, which becomes a background to social action.’ Indeed, this sense of whiteness as “background” to experience or social action, often an invisible one that does the work of supporting white bodies in their privileged positioned and orientated trajectories through the social world and their own identities, is crucial for Ahmed (2007, pp.149-150). She

argues that ‘whiteness gains currency by being unnoticed’ and ‘invisible,’ as ‘a category of experience that disappears as a category through experience,’ a process which falsely universalises whiteness and white experiences. In terms of this sense of whiteness as a supporting and invisible background to social action, Ahmed furthermore states that (2007, p.154) ‘whiteness could be understood as “the behind.” White bodies are habitual insofar as they “trail behind” actions: they do not get “stressed” in their encounters with objects or others, as their whiteness “goes unnoticed.” Whiteness would be what lags behind; white bodies do not have to face their whiteness; they are not orientated “towards” it, and this “not” is what allows whiteness to cohere, as that which bodies are orientated around. When bodies “lag behind”, then they extend their reach.’ Moreover, arguing that ‘whiteness involves a form of orientation,’ Ahmed claims that (2007, pp.150 & 154):

we inherit the reachability of some objects, those that are “given” to us, or at least made available to us, within the “what that is around. I am not suggesting here that “whiteness” is one such “reachable object”, but that whiteness is an orientation that puts certain things within reach. By objects, we would include not just physical objects, but also styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits. Race becomes, in this model, a question of what is within reach, what is available to perceive and to do “things” with. The world too is inherited as a dwelling. Whiteness might be what is “here” as a point from which the world unfolds, which is also the point of inheritance. If whiteness is inherited, then it is also reproduced.

Finally, Ahmed argues (2007, p.157) ‘Spaces are orientated “around” whiteness, insofar as whiteness is not seen. We do not face whiteness; it “trails behind” bodies, as what is assumed to be given. The effect of this “around whiteness” is the institutionalization of a certain “likeness,” which makes non-white bodies feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible and different, when they take up this space.’ Thus, ‘race’, ethnicity and whiteness is central to Ahmed’s conceptualisation of orientations and major starting points, or positionalities, which she discusses throughout *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). To summarise, whiteness strongly orientates white subjects, who are often oblivious too or actively disidentify with - or disown - their own whiteness, its related privilege and profoundly orientating effects. This disidentificatory process can lead to whiteness becoming a background to action and orientation device that is invisible to those subjects who inhabit it unproblematically. Yet this disidentificatory orientation towards whiteness by white subjects can also be alienating to persons of colour to whom whiteness as a mode of orientation is highly visible and frequently alienating to the point where persons of colour disidentify with individuals and communities exhibiting such tendencies.

Turning to the talk of my participants, within their narratives there were five main ways that participants implicitly highlighted their difficulty in connecting their whiteness to their queer femininity. Firstly, some participants were almost entirely unable to recognise or speak about whiteness and how this influences their femininity. Sue, a 39 year old, white working class, British, cisgendered female from rural Wales, for example, describes how her whiteness is difficult for her to reflect on due to her location in the Welsh countryside, which she implicitly describes as being dominantly white, leaving her feeling like she has no way of reflecting on her gender identity through comparison or another perspective because she has ‘nothing to bounce it off’:

Alexa: What about being white and British?

Sue: I live in an area where everybody is white and British, so it's not. I mean I have, I have *two, two* *emphasis created through repetition and stress on tone of voice* ethnic minority friends!

Alexa: Right, yea. That's rural Wales for you.

Sue: Yea, exactly. One of whom has now moved to London.

Alexa: So you don't feel like you can reflect on how your Britishness or your whiteness influences your femininity?

Sue: I have nothing to bounce it off.

Interestingly, Sue refers to the comparison between racialized gender identity that she feels is necessary for her to be aware of how her own whiteness influences her gender identity. Thus, Sue indicates how white subjects can remain relatively unaware of and unable to articulate whiteness, which circulates as an invisible norm within dominantly white contexts, without a (racialized) comparison to act as a relational mirror through which to become conscious of their white identity. Referring to Bryan's (2002, p.155) comments regarding the hierarchising ‘*scourge* of compulsory comparison’ between white and black shades of (femme) beauty, where one is valued more highly than the “other” - in her expressing how ‘Our [sic. black and white femme] beauty is linked. Symbiotic. Tainted by the scourge of compulsory comparison. Inter-reliant. Seems one can't exist without the other.’ - and taking into consideration the ideas of destruction that the word “*scourge*” evokes, the requirement of such a reflective encounter, I argue, is problematic in its objectification of the “other” in this relational encounter, whilst at the same time referring to the everyday relationality of identities. The second way that participants struggled with discussing their queer femininity in context of their whiteness was being able to reflect on and discuss being white and British, *yet* in a way that attempts to disown whiteness and push whiteness away as not really a constitutive part of their identity, never mind their

femininity. This pattern was exemplified by Nicola when she answered the question whether her white British positionality influences her femininity with:

I don't think so as such, no. No, I mean, I sort of, I don't know, I don't necessarily just see myself as being British, like, I just, I know sort of a lot of people moan about you know about like how people are losing their identity, like, what it is to be British, but I don't really think that is the biggest deal in the world to be honest. I think it's good to be a multicultural society and I sort of, I like taking on board things from other cultures, especially like cooking and things and, I mean, with me and my children we sort of, like, do a lot of research on what other cultures eat and stuff and how they dress, we'll sort of have certain weeks where we'll dress and eat like them and learn some of the language and stuff and it's really fun.

The third way that participants (evaded) thinking through whiteness was reflecting on being white and British in terms of discussing the racism of other white British subjects that they disidentify with, whilst not being able to recognise explicitly how whiteness orientates their performative embodiment of queer femininities, or their ideas surrounding these subjectivities. This was particularly evident in how Peggy answered the question of how being white and British influences her femininity: 'I don't know if it's got anything to do with my femininity, but it's something that I think about a lot. Particularly when my husband and I go on holiday because we can't bear white British people abroad, which is horribly racist and ridiculous because we're white British people abroad. (...) But, I don't see it as particularly about gender, for me.' A fourth way that participants (evaded) thinking through how whiteness shapes their queer femininities, was rendered explicit by Heather, who recognised that there are different models of femininity coming 'from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.' However, whilst she discusses Muslim models of femininity briefly as racialized models of femininity, when it came to different models of *white* femininity, which she described as working-class 'X-Factor' model of femininity and a middle-class 'ballerina' style of femininity, these were not explicitly named as white and models of femininity that are also racialized, they remained unmarked in her discourse and whiteness remained invisible.

My class-mates weren't a homogenous group and, so for example, there were, I had quite a lot of Muslim classmates and Muslim models of femininity and what women should be like and wear were one of the things that I was aware of and but also, I had other class mates (...) who were very into particular models of gender identities so you know I suppose the middle-class ones you know when I grow up I want to be a ballerina kind of model and then maybe there'd be more working-class models about, well, some of the working-class dream models about when I grow up I am going to be so beautiful I'm on the television and we didn't have X-Factor in those days but if we did they'd have talked about winning X-Factor, that kind of thing. So, and,

obviously the class markings on those are quite complex but that kind of those were the kind of models I was encountering and trying to work out what to accept and what to reject.

Nevertheless, Heather did recognise later on in the interview how whiteness is a primary formative starting point for her identity, which underpins and forms the background for several of her other identity positioning including her class, by saying: ‘obviously, if I wasn’t white, if I wasn’t British, my family background would be very different and if my family background is different my class positioning would be very different. So I think those things, I couldn’t unpick them I think from the things we’ve said about family and those kinds of things.’ However, Heather does not ‘unpick’ how whiteness informs her gender identity explicitly in terms of things like her inherited orientation towards Quakerism, neo-paganism or Goth subcultures, which are underpinned by whiteness and how these intersect with her queer gender identity and sexuality. The fifth way of (evading) thinking through whiteness and femininity was recognising privilege, yet not explicitly discussing how whiteness orientates their queer femininity or what these privileges are. This was exemplified by Hedwig. Hedwig eloquently stated an awareness of their white privilege in her questionnaire (‘I have a special position due to my many privileges as a white, able-bodied, university educated person who can pass as a straight woman (...). I definitely think this influences my identity, whether I like it or not’). Yet Hedwig did not explicitly discuss how their white privilege orientates their gender queer femininity with regards to access to queer subcultural spaces and discourses circulating within queer academic spaces, as well as white beauty standards and stylisation practices and their (white) queer deconstruction.

Notably those who found it more difficult to reflect on their whiteness inhabited less privileged positions in other respects, like being working-class, older and rural. Whereas participants who were younger, middle-class, white, urban and university educated - often on programmes that involve self-reflexivity, challenging privilege and interrogating oppression - found it easier to reflect on their whiteness, I argue, precisely because they occupied certain other privileged positions that provided them with the critical tools to reflect on their whiteness. Those white participants who were able to reflect on how whiteness orientates their queer identities often talked about queer subcultures and spaces as orientating around a, often unspoken or only partially

recognised, white centre. London based gender queer femme, Vikki, for example, in relating why she chose to include the film *Paris is Burning* on her collage highlighted the white middle-class centric nature and ‘race’ of queer cultures, in articulating how she recognises that ‘race’ and class dynamics are ‘really important’ yet they:

often get sidelined in queer cultures that tend to be very, they tend to be very white and they often tend to be very middle-class and if not middle-class kind of working-class in a way that you can still, you're still functioning, you're still at a level, a socio economic level where you can live and I think it's very, it's very important to remember for how many queer people that is not the case, you know and I think and the ways in which your gender presentation would be a part of that.

Vikki discussed this point further when we were walking to the tube together after the interview, elaborating that through talking with queers of colour she had gathered that many queers of colour prioritise their identities as persons of colour above their sexuality in orientating themselves towards their social or activist circles and that this orientation is often due to feelings of safety or seeking cultural commonality. Felix also talked about recognising the ‘white dominated’ tendency of queer spaces or *noticing* whiteness as an orientation that forms and, indeed, falls into the often unnoticed background of queer subcultural spaces and communities:

Felix: I think that queer cultures are *exceedingly white*, to the extent that you should really question why it's so *white dominated*. I think the whole identity is often, sort of, it *springs to mind white people*, it's of course as a white person I can't really talk about how that affects other people but *I do notice that its very white*, that its, for a scene that's also, that's like, says it's so, you know, so *vehemently anti-racist*, why is it that that space is still *dominatingly*, you know, *overbearingly white*.

Alexa: Yeah.

Felix: For apparently such a progressive space, when there's supposedly less progressive spaces, that we have a problems with that is significant.

Alexa: Do you have any reflections on that?

Felix: No. But I had like, well my girlfriend told me about this, she just like pointed it out to me, cos like, I, she said something a bit racist and I was like “you can't say that”, then she was just like “oh well, it easy to say that, because the people you hang out with, why is it that you're all so white, when, if I'm so bad then how come like, all my, you know, how many non-white people do you know like, all my friends, yet you know you and your group of friends well look at you, you're all white, why is that?” and I was like you got a point there, I don't know why it is, but it's true.

Interestingly, Felix notes the tensions inherent in queer spaces and community that claim to be ‘vehemently anti-racist’ yet are ‘dominatingly’ and ‘overbearingly white.’ This, of course, raises significant questions and critique around the notion of which positioned subjects can enter and feel at home in queer and queer feminine spaces, which has been

discussed at length by many queer scholars of colour (e.g. Anzaldúa 1991, Bryan 2002, Dhairyam 1994, Cohen 2005, Goldman 1996, Gomez 1988, Ferguson 2004, Johnson 2005, Kuntsman and Miyake 1998, Malinowitz 1993, Muñoz 1999, Nero 2005, Suffee 2013).

Further white participants who spoke explicitly about whiteness in context of their queer feminine identities were Sarah and Vikki. Sarah discussed how her whiteness (unlike her other positionalities as disabled and working-class) gives her privileged access to the type of femininity that she is wishing to embody, which she is aware that some persons of colour, particularly those who are also working-class, may not have:

I'm aware of the fact that I've got particularly easy access to a particular type of femininity and that's why I think, it's not one feminism fits all and why I also still support and actively engage in other types of feminisms and don't see them as being mutually exclusive, so, I think that, for example a black Indian mixed-race like middle-classed person could engage in the same type of feminism that I'm using. I think that it's the intersection of class, race, mental health, all these sorts of things, if you come from some positions you can engage in it. From some intersectional positions you can't. I'm in a position where it's relatively easy now that I'm in the correct classed group to be able to do it. So, you wouldn't say that Naomi Campbell couldn't engage in this sort of femininity if she chose to make it subversive, of course she can, but her class means that she's perhaps not the best representative of her racial group, in that feminist sense.

Sarah also highlighted that she is conscious that the feminine norms she is wishing to subvert, challenge or change are those of specifically *white* middle-class femininity. Thus, when asked to discuss ideas around (queer) femininities in context of her whiteness, Sarah responded:

Things to do with appetite and language, you're not supposed to use certain language if you're a female, swear words, things like that, you're not supposed to drink from a pint glass, you're not supposed to do anything that's considered as masculine, so, the acceptance of the feminine is, it's less characteristics in themselves it's more a refusal of the masculine, if it's masculine you're not supposed to do it, that which is left over is the feminine almost and then it's kind of developed into its own thing. I don't know, it's peculiar because there's all the stereotypical things to do with being pretty and to do with being quite delicate, but, I think that they are a reaction to the fact that the men are supposed to have the jobs, that would mean that they aren't dainty and things like that, but then of course this is ignoring the experience of, of black women to a certain degree from the colonial perspective and I understand that I'm speaking from my position as a white female. So I suppose that femininity is to do with delicacy, not being engaged in serious thinking, not saying anything too serious, I have been blocked out of political discussions before, you know, it's, that's something that I've fought against.

Similarly, Vikki too spoke of being conscious of how her white middle-class European background shapes the feminine norms that she experiences and strives to subvert. On her questionnaire, Vikki wrote: ‘I recognise the influence being raised as a girl in a predominantly white middle-class European and heteronormative environment had on my relation to ‘femininity’ as I learnt it and how I choose now to re-appropriate and subvert it.’ Furthermore, in the interview Vikki elaborated on this point, by discussing how her white middle-class positionalities placed certain norms surrounding feminine respectability and comportment on her horizon as inherited lines of orientation that she normatively “should” follow yet Vikki in some ways disidentifies with, productively “fails” to follow and (*partially*) disrupts through her femme performance:

Obviously my upbringing, I experienced a very particular version of what femininity, you know, the normative of what femininity is, yea, I think, often it's easy to think of these norms that we're reacting against as universal, when they're absolutely not and I know that it was a very specific, white, middle class, European version of femininity that I learned, you know, when I was younger, of certain, of you know, of comportment, of a way of being, a kind of respectability, a way of managing sexuality, all of those things that are specific to class and all that.

Vikki also spoke explicitly about whiteness as an ‘invisible privilege that is really important to be aware of all the time and to bring out all the time’ and as a privilege that influences her own experience of the world and the racialized feminine norms that she learned are ‘very particular.’

However, such (*partially*) productive “failures” to follow normative orientating lines of whiteness - thereby producing disidentificatory orientations towards white middle-class norms of femininity - are far from the dominant trend in how whiteness circulates in the account of my participants. Indeed, whiteness, as an inherited starting point and an (in)visible background for orientating my white queer feminine participants, is clearly present, even as it is often unarticulated and implicit, with regards to which heroines are chosen by participants as points of identification, as well as which (*white ethnic*) styles, aesthetics and models of queer feminine beauty are adopted. For example, Jess, a white American participant of mixed white European descent, references the implicitly white orientated aesthetics of vintage, punk and rock stylisations and a friend who she describes as ‘incredibly beautiful’ and compares to the pre-Raphaelites by saying that ‘she's really beautiful in a way that a lot of people aren't anymore, you know, she has that kind of old world beauty thing that you see in fashion drawings from like the 19th

century or, like the pre-Raphaelites, again, I really like their art work, she looks like one of those paintings came to life and put on a pair of jeans, you know *laughter* and what artist wouldn't like that,' as inspirations and anchoring point for her own sense of feminine beauty and her alternative feminine gender identity. Of course, the Pre-Raphaelites are an iconic version of white beauty that is almost standard setting with regards to (white) beauty. Furthermore, Jess's articulation 'and what artist wouldn't like that?' assumes a universality to these unarticulated, yet implicitly obviously white situated aesthetics. Indeed, how whiteness forms the invisible background and starting point for her alternative femininity is also evident in the classical art work by Czech artist, Alfonse Mucha (1860-1939), who was famous for creating art nouveau pieces depicting (white) young women who are considered almost iconically "beautiful," by white centric standards, which Jess chose to represent her being drawn to this sort of old worldly white beauty aesthetic. Also, the picture of Joan Jet that Jess chose to represent her being drawn to a contemporary, alternative, rock punk, androgynous feminine version of attractiveness are also not recognised or articulated as being specifically white!



Figure: 5.4 Jess's collage. Please note the Czech Mucha portrait, top middle of the page, and punk rock musician, Joan Jet, top left corner. Also, the other types of white beauty or aesthetics depicted, e.g. the trans* masculine and femme couple: Buck & April.

Jess describes these two figures as follows: 'You have Joan Jet here and she looks amazing, she's wearing her leather and she has all these tattoos and everything and I still think she's beautiful. But, on the other hand, I have this picture of this Mucha piece, right. So, you have the old fashion kind of draped in silk and jewellery, very beautiful, very feminine,' which Jess also describes as 'romantic' and 'princessie.' Both embody versions of white feminine beauty, from different generations and white, Western geographical locations, the one classical and the other alternative in terms of punk rock

music subcultural aesthetics. They are different and yet the same, where “same” denotes the normative centrality of their whiteness, rather than the marginality or subversion that occurs within whiteness when these, what Jess called, ‘contradictory’ versions of femininity mix. Indeed, it becomes strikingly clear that these white queer feminine participants are orientated by whiteness in a fundamental way when it comes to the styles and aesthetics that they “can” use given that they inherit these and they become available on their bodily horizons as possible “choices” with regards to their comportment. Whiteness is present in Felix’s chosen trans* male femme identity modelled on ‘traditional Britishness,’ which is evident in Felix’s aspirational statement ‘I just want to be a classic English gentlemen’ and talk of a camp debonair style feminine maleness that he wishes to emulate and performatively embody. Whiteness orientates Vikki’s (critical) parodies of white middle-class femininities on stage and it forms the background for Ali’s orientation toward the implicitly white aesthetics of punk. Similarly, it forms an implicit starting point for Sue’s orientation towards gothic aesthetics and Peggy’s perchance for rock aesthetics. And, whiteness underpins Bobbette’s fetishizing consumption (hooks 1992), and racialized queer performance of “other” youthful Japanese femininities, which he incorporates into his performative embodiment of his trans* girly-boy identity. Whiteness, as Jess and countless other participants demonstrate, underpins which models of femininity and feminine muses participants have available on their bodily horizons and are not quite so freely “chosen” for the purposes of identification and emulation. Moving away from aesthetics and towards structural considerations of power, privilege and identity, whiteness is present in the access that many of these participants, including Vikki, Hedwig, Liz, Sarah, Heather and Sue, have to academic institutional spaces where queer theory circulates. Furthermore, Vikki, Felix, Hedwig, articulate how they have access to queer subcultural spaces where these gender identities, sexualities and identity politics are fostered and their whiteness does not stand in between them and their willingness or ability to be interpolated into and claim the terms “queer” or “femininity” as a descriptive language identification, unlike the case for many persons and femmes of colour (e.g. Anzaldúa 1991, Johnson 2005, Bryan 2009 etc). Finally, white privilege orientates the fluidity of transnational nomadic movements of femmes across this international, predominantly western, queer community and the increasingly globalised concept of femme as it travels down its transnational path. Arguably, normative lines of whiteness are thus being inherited and performatively reproduced within queer and queer

feminine communities and not just disrupted through ironic parodic performances or intersectional critiques.



Figure 5.5 Hem's Collage

In contrast to these white participants, Hem, a 'mixed-race' Bengali, Indian, Jewish, British butch femme identified participant, was much more explicitly articulate in reflecting on how 'race' and ethnicity orientates her queer femininity. Indeed, when asked what influences her queer femininity, Hem answered on her questionnaire: 'Woman. Indian. Jewish. Partner to person of indefinite

gender. Sister. Daughter. Profession. Second generation survivor of sexual abuse. Middle aged. Middle class. Spirituality. Political person. *Womanist...*' Significantly two of the first influences that evidently sprang to mind were 'Indian' and 'Jewish' and the last, 'Womanist,' is typically used by and refers to women of colour. Additionally, throughout her talk, Hem's 'mixed-race' positionality features as a primary starting point for orientating her queer feminine identity. Although Hem claims that she finds it difficult to think through her 'mixed-race' identity by stating that 'I would love to be able to talk about what it means to be 'mixed-race,' but I haven't worked that out yet (...) So that's sort of another. It's like an absence, not being able to talk about that,' Hem articulates the relationship between her 'mixed-race' identity and her femininity very clearly throughout the interview. In particular, Hem relates her 'mixed-race' identity to an idea of 'coexistence' 'fluidity' and 'bothness,' which Hem embodies through the combination of her public masculine and private feminine performance of gender identity:

Hem: I think one of the things with it is this idea of coexistence and not choosing and that sort of fits with like [details omitted for data protection, but the idea you can have a partner of any sex/gender] this idea that it's not one or the other, this fluidity is the experience of being mixed-race, so there is a cross over there I guess.

Alexa: That fits this idea of your masculine outer shell and feminine vulnerability as well.

Hem: I think it's a bothness. The idea of bothness comes very much with being mixed-race.

Interestingly, Hem reflects on the ‘cross over’ between being mixed-race and being queer by saying that these identities emphasise the ‘idea of bothness,’ ‘fluidity’ and ‘not choosing’ between either side of a black/white, heterosexual/homosexual, masculine/feminine binary. Hem also links how she came to present her gender identity to her mixed-race identity, ethnic background, her proximity to her Indian family and her feelings of being outside of what is deemed to be “normal.” As a result of her occupying the minoritarian positionality of a mixed-race lesbian woman living in the historically white, heterosexual and male governed British Isles, Hem occupies a disidentificatory orientation towards culturally specific ideals of “normality,” which she feels she can never entirely belong to and fit in with, due to her various different and sometimes competing positionalities. When asked how she arrived at her present gender identity, Hem responded:

Just my life *laughter* the Indian stuff comes from being from an Indian family and looking for identity, that for me, growing up as a kid, I clearly wasn't, wasn't normal, so if you're not going to be normal then you're going to need a touchstone of what you are and that sort of, I think when I was a kid, there was that need to find out about Indian stuff that I wouldn't otherwise know about, you know, when I was forming my first relationships, falling in love with women and not men, that, you know, that's the sort of thing that made me come to it really, just life stuff, I guess, my life took me here *laughter.*

In some ways being a mixed-race lesbian seems to place queer as a term of identification on her bodily horizon, precisely because of its anti-normative standpoint, or, indeed, the terms own disidentificatory orientation towards “normativities” that Hem feels alienated from. However, throughout her talk Hem also discusses the tensions inherent in her orientation towards her queer and feminine identities. These tensions extend to her feeling like ‘there isn’t room’ for her femininity and that femininity as an affective embodied subjectivity, which she associates with vulnerability and availability, does not feel safe for her except in ‘very few, very intimate, relationships.’ Thus, Hem feels that her femininity cannot be recognised by others and, subsequently, since it cannot be recognised, it does not exist. Indeed, Hem’s statement mirrors and affirms Judith Butler’s (2004) theory regarding the importance of recognition in identity construction. On the other hand, Hem also hints towards another type of femininity that ‘isn't about vulnerability,’ yet, ‘is hard to conceptualise.’

Hem: (...) I don't really feel that there is room for my femininity and that may be partly why it's not describable, because it sort of isn't. It's sort of something that I have, but it can't be, because there's no room for it.

Alexa: Why isn't there any room for it?

Hem: I think because it feels, at one level it just feels too dangerous to have that sort of femininity and the other is being recognised. It's only in very few very intimate relationships that I feel that it can be recognised. So, it sort of doesn't exist. When [Hem] goes to work, or when [Hem] is with her family, or with her mother or her brother. Or, even when [Hem] is with her friends, it isn't really manifest. And, that's probably because I'm withholding as much as there is no room, but I'm withholding because I feel there's no room. So, it isn't there.

Alexa: I'm trying to get a sense of what is it that there isn't any room for.

Hem: I think being safe. As long as there isn't room, there isn't safety, maybe that's what I mean. (...) The other thing is recognition, if there isn't room, if people can't make space for it to exist.

Alexa: So, some people wouldn't recognise you as feminine, is that what you mean?

Hem: Or they wouldn't recognise what I'm calling femininity as feminine, yea.

Alexa: OK. Then what would you call femininity?

Hem: For me, or generally?

Alexa: For you and generally, maybe it's good to map that out.

Hem: Yea, I think I find it easier to do it generally. There's a lot of, tolerance isn't really the word, there's a lot of breadth in what people will accept as femininity, but, it's so strongly associated with vulnerability, that a femininity that isn't about vulnerability is hard to conceptualise, and I think. When I say there is a broad span, the obvious images of femininity is about availability, but that's not the only femininity, but then femininity that isn't about availability, is still very strongly associated with consumption, I guess.

Alexa: So, would you associate more with a femininity that is available or isn't about availability?

Hem: Well, I think my femininity is about availability and that's probably why it can only be in really intimate relationships, because that's when I'll be available I guess *laughter.* But availability that's not taking, that's an offering, I think that's one of the problems with femininity that what is being offered and what is being taken don't match, I think that this is part of the vulnerability that feminine women face, that what is offered and what is being taken, well there is violence in what is taken and it is beyond what is being offered and that's what makes it feel unsafe, I guess. *laughter* I didn't know any of this until you asked me.

In many ways, Hem's disidentificatory orientation towards femininity is not only about her mixedness, but about her disidentificatory relationship with white British feminine norms, which render her own mixed-race femininity unrecognisable and make her feel vulnerable and like there is 'no room' for her own culturally specific yet also extremely personal version of femininity, which for Hem is about a mixture of vulnerability and strength, to exist. Hem's concern about safety and feelings of vulnerability were also strongly linked to her identity as a queer woman of colour, as she relates how: 'The world generally doesn't feel safe to me, I feel very vulnerable as a woman, as a person of colour as a Jewish person as a Indian, as a mixed-race lesbian, it's all associated with not persecution, people out to get me, but just inadvertent violence against my identity, and there's being a woman, but you can be without the femininity and being a woman without femininity feels safer than being a

woman with femininity.’ Not only does Hem reference her mixed-race identity as a influence regarding these feelings of vulnerability in association with femininity, but the word “*persecution*” also has a certain “racialized” ring to it, as it could be most easily associated with her being Jewish. Furthermore, Hem elaborates how this sense of vulnerability and the inadvertent violence against her identity, that to a certain degree acts as a stopping device in her orientation towards embodying her femininity comfortably and confidently in any potentially interrelational space other than the safety of her intimate relationships and home, is that she associates femininity with vulnerability and thus availability, which she articulates as a ‘dynamic of people taking what isn’t on offer.’

Alexa: I'm just wondering why specifically that is and what is that inadvertent violence, if it's okay to ask that?

Hem: I think what it is, is partly this dynamic of people taking what isn't on offer that I think I associate with femininity, that if you express femininity it is seen as availability. And, then, there's a lack of respect and boundaries in there that I think, I think with masculinity, there's a sense of a wall, and this is on offer and this isn't. what really appeals to me in writings about butch is the idea of this shell and that the shell gives you the wall, where everything outside of the shell is available - whether you want to make it available or not, it is - and that the shell is something where you put yourself, to project the inside, which for masculinity seems, if you think of masculinity and femininity as opposites, which I am right now, then, that's sort of what's not there for femininity, with femininity I just have a sense of going down, down, down in-depth and there being not like water, but like a solid thing that you can keep burrowing into it and there is no wall or shell, like there is, like you make if you're doing butch, or that masculinity has a sense of a solid core, yea, and it's solid, it's not that there is something else the other side of the boundary, it is just solid and there, yea. *laughter*

Alexa: So, in terms of your identity then, I just want to make sure that I'm understanding this correctly, I get the sense of that there is this side of you that's wanting to project this butchness and then there's this internalness.

Hem: Yea, yea. And, I think I'm trying to keep femininity on the other side of the shell. If I read something like, *Stone Butch Blues* and descriptions of lots of different ways of being butch, they talk about a vulnerability that's the other side of the shell, but I think I'm thinking not just of vulnerability, but actually the femininity has to be the other side of the shell, in order to be safe.

Alexa: So, not available.

Hem: So, not available, but when I choose.

This feeling of vulnerability and the dynamic of only making femininity available when Hem chooses and how this links in with her mixed-race lesbian identity, is furthermore apparent in her *public* butch and her *private* feminine performance of her gender, sexuality and ‘race.’ In her wearing an implicitly white butch lesbian uniform of ‘clunky jackets,’ ‘flat lace up shoes’ and ‘dark colours’ in the public sphere, which also denote this sense of a protective outer-shell, and her feminine Indian clothes, as well as underwear, in her home, which also denote the private, vulnerable and feminine side of

her gender, sexuality and 'race.' When asked to describe how she embodies her gender identity in everyday life, Hem responded:

Hem: Yea, I think there is a bit of a butch uniform that I like, I like to wear clunky jackets, I like to wear flat lace up shoes, dark colours, but then when I'm at home I want to take all that off and wear something different. I like the jeans and the checked shirt look because it gives people a sort of image of me as a woman, whilst at the same time saying I am lesbian, that I am recognisable as something, that it's more like a flag than an expression of me, it's a way I suppose of mediating my interactions with the world, giving a bit of signalling of how I would like to be seen. Although at the same time I want to throw it all away and, you know, I'll wear my jeans and my flat shoes and my shirts with my long hair and my long hair that isn't, isn't really anything, I really could do more with my hair, but I don't and maybe with time I'll work out what that's about, but for now I can't really work out what to do with my hair I just know I need it long and not and not the same look as the shoes and the shirt and the jacket, yea.

Alexa: So, not completely butch?

Hem: Yea, I think as well if I was completely butch it renders, it renders particularly my Indian identity, my Jewish identity invisible, because, you can be Jewish, well I don't know if I know anybody whose Jewish and a butch woman but I've met South Asian women who are butch and they have a certain way of wearing a scarf and they have a certain hair cut, but, I guess also because I feel I'm not genuinely what they are, that they're not mixed-race so they have a very different relationship with that aspect of identity, than I have that I feel I can't claim.

Alexa: What happens when you go home and that point where you want to throw all of that away?

Hem: I like to wear, my Indian clothes when I dress up to go to formal do's, but actually I like wearing them at home, I like, I like the feminine feeling of Indian clothes and I like to wonder around in my underwear *laughter*

Alexa: *laughter*

Hem: And, I like nice underwear. *laughter* And, that's sort of like another side. Yea, that's what I like to wear, yea.

Alexa: That's really interesting again, in terms of public space and the masculine and private space and the feminine.

Hem: Yea, I mean there's something quite powerful in taking off my jacket and hanging it up and taking off my shoes and putting them in the shoe cupboard and it's not just about me being a neat freak, it's about hanging up that and getting on with a different way of being when I'm at home.

Interestingly, as well as highlighting how her femininity is linked to her Indian identity, through her wearing of feminine Indian clothes at home and not cutting her long hair because it signifies that she is not completely butch, whereas being completely butch would render her Indian and Jewish identities inaccessible and invisible, Hem also discusses how her butch identity is implicitly linked to whiteness, as it is the outer-shell that she adopts in a British context to keep her femininity safe and on the inside (for example in the home) and she highlights how that model of gender identity is very

uncommonly performed by Asian or Jewish women and, when it is, it takes on a very specific form. Thus, there is this sense of various “stopping” and “propelling” devices present, which shape her precise gender and ethnic embodied identity, by providing both limitations and possibilities - edges and openings. Furthermore, the mixedness of her gender identity is very interconnected with the mixedness of her ‘race’ and ethnicity, as her butch and femme identity emerges arguably as a mixed identity precisely out of the intersections between her Bengali Indian and Jewish British identities. She cannot be completely butch because she feels this would render her Bengali Indian and Jewish identities inaccessible and invisible, yet she cannot be completely feminine because her femininity is tied up with her Indian and Jewish identities and makes her feel vulnerable in a white British context. Here we find this sense of ‘coexistence’ or ‘bothness’ that Hem speaks about in terms of her ‘race’ and ‘gender’ emerging once again. A further way in which it becomes evident that her private performance of femininity and this sense of vulnerability that Hem speaks of is linked to her mixed-race identity, is through her picture⁸ where she sits naked on her bed with one bunch of hair tied up and the other side is hanging down loosely as she looks over her right shoulder and which she describes as a feminine gesture that she associates with ‘Bengali girls.’ In explaining why she chose this specific snapshot out of the many that she recorded to represent her femininity, Hem explained: ‘I’ve got my shoulder up in that still, which I didn’t have in all of them and that to me is a very feminine gesture to do that, but, I know in Indian culture that’s seen, or Bengali girls do that a lot, yea, so it might be about cultural identity I guess, I don’t know it’s all cultural identity, isn’t it.’ By saying ‘it’s all cultural identity,’ Hem furthermore recognises what many of the white queer feminine subjects don’t; that ‘race’ and ethnicity underlies and forms a major starting point for orientating embodied stylisations and performative modes of comportment. Arguably, Hem recognises what many of my white queer feminine participants don’t precisely because of the silences surrounding whiteness, which circulate as an invisible “norm” and the hypervisibility of mixedness and blackness, which circulates as “difference” in context of a historically white majoritarian and supremacist British culture, in which Hem - as a mixed-race subject - will most probably have been positioned as “different” by a white interpretive gaze and confronted with such reflections more frequently than my white participants, who through blending in with the norm of whiteness remain largely sheltered from being forced to reflect on their

⁸ This picture cannot be shown due to this participant’s wish to remain anonymous.

whiteness or issues of 'race', ethnicity and racism and how these intersect with gendered and sexual styles, aesthetics, identities, role models, access and community (un)belonging.

When it came to which inspirational role models Hem identifies with, she referenced a mixture of influences on her questionnaire, including: 'Fiction where identities of women of colour of marginalised sexualities are explored: Alice Walker Temple of my familiar, possessing the secret of Joy. Stacey Ann Chin the other side of paradise. Nalinaksha Bhattacharyya's Hem books. Love the book Femmes of Power. Also Stone Butch Blues. And Ann Cvetkovitch's chapter in an Archive of Feelings on butch/femme. Hindu goddesses.' Once again, the role played by 'race' and ethnicity as starting points in orientating her towards, primarily, women of colour as points of identification is notable in this list. Indeed, within the interview Hem discussed how she 'can't see any role models for my femininity except in Indian goddesses and then I can see role models of a femininity that is all of those things, that isn't vulnerable.' Furthermore, she links this tendency for orientating herself not only towards Indian goddesses, but also towards a form of femaleness that combines a mixture of strength and softness, to her Bengali family: 'my family are Bengali, the Bengali rendering of gods and goddesses, people in the household worship the female versions, not the male counterparts and they're very fierce and very powerful, but also soft and gentle and creative.' Thus, her relational proximity to other positioned subjects - in this case her Bengali family - act as further inherited starting points of orientation, placing certain objects and subjects on her bodily horizon for identification and not others. Moreover, through the figure of Kali, more specifically, Hem finds a way of expressing and identifying with a representation of femininity that is not about vulnerability or weakness through her claiming Kali as a powerful queer feminine figure:

If you take queer to mean different and challenging the norm, the fact that it comes from a different cultural tradition means in a Western context it is queer, or it can be used as queer, but it's a different, it's a femininity that's associated with power. That then also overlaps with some of the more Western ideas of femininity, I guess and I think there's a lot of censure of femininity that's associated with feminine inconsistency, changeability, which can be viewed as a weakness, but, when it's Kali it isn't viewed as a weakness, that mutability is a central, it's got a lot of value in one way or the other, it just is and it's seen as power.

Hem clearly occupies a disidentificatory orientation towards white British and western models of femininity - as is illustrated in her earlier statement that she 'can't see any role

models for [her] femininity except in Indian goddesses' and in her critical orientation away from Western ideas of femininity that associate femininity strongly with weakness and negative characteristics such as changeability and inconsistency. Yet Hem also actively creates her own meaning of what queer femininity is through drawing on the term "queer" which she reads as meaning "difference." Not just in terms of sexual or gendered difference, but also difference in terms of ethnicity and cultural background. Furthermore, Hem applies this understanding of "queer" as meaning "difference" to her adopting Kali as a powerful version of femininity that Hem is inspired by. Arguably Hem orientates herself towards Kali as an inspiring queer feminine figuration, precisely because the figure of Kali positively (re)configures the negative associations that Western ideas around femininity produce. For example, whilst Western ideas of femininity associate femininity with 'inconsistency, changeability' and 'weakness', these same traits - which Hem disidentifies with - are converted into the positive characteristic of mutability as strength, which Hem evidently strongly identifies with. Thus, it is precisely the cultural differences in meaning making processes - concerning Western ideas of femininity and Hindu, Bengali, Indian ideas of femininity - that prompt Hem's disidentificatory orientation towards certain (white, Western) ways of thinking about and embodying femininity, as well as the precise way that she conceptualises queer femininity for herself. Indeed, Hem expands on this situated idea of a different kind of femininity, which is linked to strength and respect, as well as her experience of what being a Bengali, Indian or Jewish woman means, comparatively to white British femininity:

Hem: I think being an Indian woman, being a Bengali woman is a different way of being a woman and the same with being a Jewish woman is a different way of being a woman and actually being a Bengali woman and being a Jewish woman are fairly close compared to being, I don't know what to call it, a woman in the UK, yea well, I know there are Indian and Jewish women in the UK, but they're not really women in the UK, they're Indian women in the UK.

Alexa: Could you say anymore about those models, what does it mean to be an Indian or a Jewish woman?

Hem: I think strength is really important, the Bengali's I grew up with and they're Hindi Bengali's treat all women as goddesses. When I was growing up and people were saying "oh, women in India are really oppressed" I just couldn't see it in the Indian Bengali's that I knew. I used to have a very close Gujarati friend and it was different in her family than it is in a Hindi Bengali family. And, with Jewish women there is this sense of a matriarchy or there is ways in which Jewish women I think are oppressed by certain role characteristics they are supposed to take on, but at the same time it's also a very empowered identity, empowered in terms of having space, speaking your mind, influencing what other people do, being, both Bengali women and Jewish women being respected, that if you say something there is an expectation that that counts, it carries weight.

Alexa: Right. And, that in contrast with the model of the UK woman?

Hem: Yea, I mean even for *long hesitation* I have a fair number of straight middle class, married, women friends who are respected by their husbands but it's not the sort of respect of power that I feel with Jewish women and Indian women, they're power isn't respected, their power isn't acknowledged, their men listen to them but they don't see their power.

Hem, thus, very clearly articulates different versions of femininity that she experiences around her in terms of white British femininities, Jewish, Hindu, Bengali, Indian and Gujarati Indian - as well as the associated cultural stereotypes - which differ not only *between* but also *within* 'race' and ethnic positionalities. In many ways, as a 'mixed race' subject Hem occupies a space of liminal - or partial - belonging and disidentificatory orientations towards all of these culturally specific styles of femininity to a certain degree, yet particularly towards white British femininities, since she draws on Indian models of femininity most frequently in her discussion of what feminine figures influence and inspire her. The name Hem chose to anonymise herself also has its roots in her Bengali Indian heritage, as it is the name of a character from Nalinaksha Bhattacharyya's fiction, who Hem describes as 'a young Bengali girl who isn't identified as lesbian but if you read it from a Western perspective it's a lesbian book but it isn't really presented that way, it will talk about lesbianism, but they will avoid the word.' Alongside various inspirational figures that Hem orientates towards from her positionality as a mixed-race Bengali Indian, Jewish British, woman of colour, she also referenced *Femmes of Power* and white authored queer academic and subcultural texts as further influences on her queer feminine identity. In particular, Hem articulates how *Femmes of Power* represents the sort of femininity that she can identify with through its mixture of soft, pretty, hard and strong, which, presumably, would be a type of femininity that would not feel as unsafe or vulnerable, because of that element of strength. Hem describes her reasons for choosing *Femmes of Power* as an identificatory point of orientation as follows:

Femmes of Power, it's that way of acting femininity that don't fit with some of what we think about feminine, about softness and prettiness although there is softness and prettiness there but not exclusively. There's soft and pretty and hard and strong all together, but not by doing it in a butch way, but by doing in a way that, that's just different, yea, it's about redefining, redefining femininity I guess in contrast to the messages we get, yea, through films and lesbian culture as well, the sort of new look there. In many ways, her description of *Femmes of Power* is very similar to her description of why she is drawn to Kali as an inspiring figure, as both do not 'fit' with traditional ideals of femininity as denoting *exclusively* 'softness and prettiness.

These features are typically associated with a *white* and *middle-class* femininity. One question that subsequently emerges is: do narratives surrounding femme *both* reinscribe an implicit white centre to the conceptualisation and representation of queer identities and femininities *and*, yet, at the same time, contradicting, offer *another* version of white

femininity through their very representations of white femininity, which represents difference differently and is to some extent at least not quite white or outside of whiteness? Reflecting back on this idea of needing a ‘touchstone of what you are,’ as a strongly situated affective experience, that orientates Hem towards identifying with feminine subjects who are also mixed-race, persons of colour, originate from her proximity to Bengali Indian, Jewish British cultures, or, if they are white, then they usually embody a femininity that is compatible with her mixed-race identity, in the sense that *Femmes of Power* signifies strength and difference from normative ideals of an implicitly white, middle-class femininity. Moreover, reflecting back on the way that my white participants orientated their queer feminine identities primarily towards and around other white feminine subjects with regards to who they identified with as their role models, there is certainly a sense in which whiteness functions in the self-perpetuating fashion that Ahmed (2007, p.149) describes as a ‘bad habit.’ Indeed, despite the involvement of femmes of colour in anthologies on, by and for queerly feminine subjects, the implicit whiteness of this identity category, its idealised muses and, albeit queered, beauty standards, are nevertheless highlighted by many femmes of colour, as illustrated by T.J. Bryan (2002, pp.154-155):

Femme...

As far as I can see the Fatale is silent, not absent. Femme Fatale. Could any other two words have the impact of this phrase? Could any other linguistic grouping bring to mind the oh-so delicately flushed skin? The calculated blush? The spastically flicked hair? The peroxide blonde ambition? The obsessive wet dreamings of so many men and Butch wimmin? Could any other utterance conjure up the implied superiority of such specifically-shaded beauty?

Femme....

Someone chose this word. Designed it. Refined it. Millions heard it and applied it to Monroe, Hayworth, Dietrich, Leigh, Davis, Garbo, Harlow’s Gold. A cataract-colored iris, blue-veined, cream or pink-tipped tittie, fatally Femme(y) glass menagerie. Not necessarily a legacy for me. I KNOW YOUR SHEROES. DO YOU KNOW MINE?

T.J. Bryan offers a poignant critique of the white starting point and normative racialized lines of inheritance circulating in queer feminine subcultures through the use of “iconic” white feminine aesthetics and idols like Marilyn Monroe or Marlene Dietrich who were both cited numerous times in my own interviews as inspirational “iconic” figures for (white) femmes. Critically, Bryan (2002, pp.148-150) also offers black centric roots, history and lineage for femmes of colour which productively “fail” to inherit or reproduce normative queer feminine lines of whiteness, thereby disidentifying with and disrupting

normative inherited lines of whiteness *within* queer feminine subcultures, by situating herself in a long line of often forgotten or sidelined ‘legendary sistas:’

A darker shade’a Femme... I see the making of my Femme(ininity) in history, suppressed and rediscovered. The roots of my Femme(ininity) are real. Passed down to me. Motha to daughta. Sista to sista. And yesss, flamin’ brotha to brotha. My routes lead way back. Cross continents and sears. Stretching, till eventually I find myself touchin’ African Lucy. Essentially the first. The penultimate Femme. The Queen Motha of all who have come since and paled in comparison. Salutations to all bombastic divas of our time. Tough as nails and intelligent too. Legendary sistas I’ll remember, even if others won’t. The importance of their presence has often been denied and I’m fit to be tied. Knowing without a doubt that if those around me can’t see, won’t dream, there’s no way in hell they’re evah gonna respect my version’a Femme.

Here Bryan strategically situates her African descent femme of colour, afrocentric, roots and, indeed, *the* original roots of femme in the figure of African Lucy, whom Bryan casts as ‘Essentially the first. The penultimate Femme. The Queen Motha of all who have come since and paled in comparison.’ In so doing, Bryan invokes an African descent and afrocentric history, roots and culture that femmes of colour *may* identify with better than the white femme idols - like the oft cited figures of Marilyn Monroe or Marlene Dietrich - who circulate so prolifically within white centric femme culture, whilst, as Bryan hints, femme of colour historical, mythical and cultural figurations of femme and femme idols are sidelined or forgotten. Bryan also invokes the feminine lineage of her own family as inspirational models, by situating herself in a queer of colour familial line of femininity starting with her grandmother and including her mother, her sister, her aunt, who pass down techniques of stylisation, lessons and tools for survival in a classist and racist world. Importantly, T.J. Bryan highlights the racialized centre and starting point of queer femininities through disidentifying with and, thus, *productively* “failing” to follow these normative lines of whiteness within queer feminine communities, thereby Bryan furthermore rhetorically produces alternative queer feminine lines of inheritance, history, starting points and points of identification from her femme of colour positionality. Indeed, the way in which femmes of colour occupy resist disidentificatory orientations towards oblique norms of whiteness within queer and femme communities is a point that will be discussed further in the final chapter on *The Politics of Queer Feminine Anger*.

vi) Conclusion

Drawing on Halberstam's (2011) *The Queer Art of Failure* and informed by the fact that the concept of "failure" is also a crucial part of Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientations and Muñoz's (1999) theory of disidentifications - and, thus, a crucial concept for elaborating a theory of queer feminine disidentificatory orientations - this chapter focused on accounts by those queer fem(me)inine subjects who (*productively*) "fail" to inherit internal queer feminine norms along the lines of size, 'race' and class and, equally, those who "fail" (*unproductively*) to subvert norms of whiteness circulating within queer and femme communities, and articulate their queer feminine disidentificatory orientations through these discourses of queer feminine "failure." The chapter focused on the positionalities of size, 'race' and class specifically because these positioned subjects often describe feelings of "failure" at performing femininity "right," according to white, western, sizeist and middle-class standards. Yet, whilst queer fem(me)ininity is often heralded as a sanctuary for subjects who are marginalised by normative, white, middle-class and sizeist beauty standards, this chapter argued that analysing queer feminine disidentificatory orientations, along the lines of size, class and 'race,' highlight moments where normative standards of beauty and femininity are reproduced or where these norms circulate obliquely *within* queer and femme communities, thereby giving privileged access to identity construction and community belonging to some, whilst limiting and denying others. Thus, the first section of this chapter argued that, whilst femme and queer feminine identified persons and the literature emerging from this community articulate a dominant discourse of fat acceptance, positivity, pride and inclusion, as fat embodiment comes to signify yet another celebrated difference, for some femmes fat embodiment is a crucial point of exclusion from *both* femininity *and* queer femininities. Indeed, it argued that fat embodiment can simultaneously produce a disidentificatory orientation towards femininity *and* queer femininities, which are articulated through discourses of a perceived "failure" to fit into various mainstream *and* subcultural norms. Similarly, the second section of this chapter argued that, despite the original roots of femme in 1950s and 60s American working-class lesbian bar cultures and whilst some working-class femmes *do* identify in a seemingly unproblematic way with femme, there are also instances of classed disidentificatory orientations towards queer and femme identities and classism *within* queer and femme communities that should not go ignored. Ones that moreover manifest ambivalent Muñozian disidentificatory subjectivities and moments of internal criticality, which expose further classed norms and privileges circulating within femme and queer feminine communities, particularly concerning the intimate relationship

between queer/femme identities and consumer capitalism. The third and final section of this chapter critiqued the performative reproduction of inherited lines of whiteness *within* queer feminine cultures by arguing that white femmes fail to fail productively at departing from inherited queer and femme lines of whiteness and this failure results in the performative reproduction of a normative white centre within queer and femme communities. Focusing on accounts by my participants who *unproductively* fail to fail at inheriting whiteness, this section argued that whiteness and its associated privileges often forms the unarticulated background supporting the emergence of their “subversive” queer and femme identities. In so doing, it highlighted *five* different ways in which femmes and queers evaded reflecting on and discussing how their whiteness intersects with and informs their queer and femme identities. This chapter also highlighted the *productive* ways in which queer femmes of colour fail to follow or inherit and, thus, actively disidentify with, normative lines of whiteness *within* queer and queer feminine cultures and constructions of identity. Crucially, through these apparent intersectional “failures,” *both* femmes of colour and white femmes *productively* highlight some of the racialised norms operating *within* queer and femme representations, identity constructions and communities. However, whilst this chapter analysed instances within queer and femme cultures where intersectional organising, theorising and being “fail,” like with all the chapters of this thesis, it has done so with the ultimate aims of highlighting those aspects where “we” - as a disparate queer community - can improve and become more inclusive, through being cognisant of these failures and actively working to rectify them. Thus, like all the chapters of this thesis – and particularly the next chapter on *The Politics of Queer Feminine Anger* – any critique is intended to further solidarities between queers and femmes, across intersectional differences, rather than undermine them, by promoting honest reflections and discussions that are intersectionally informed, with the aim of forging political and theoretical pathways forwards.

Chapter 6: The Politics of Queer Feminine Anger

i) Introduction

This chapter explores how the situated and politicised affect of anger informs queer feminine disidentificatory orientations and how orientating disidentificatory angers can, in turn, inform queer feminine theories, solidarities, subjectivities and communities in positive and productive ways. It examines the politics of articulations of righteous femme anger by queer feminine affect aliens who occupy liminal spaces on the margins of feminist, queer and femme belonging. Furthermore, the chapter examines the positioned nature of justified anger at dynamics of oppression and exclusions from *within* our own queer, feminist and femme communities. Thus, it addresses the affective tensions articulated by those queer feminine subjects occupying affectively alien(*ated*) spaces of (*un*)belonging that situate them in between solidarity *and* resistance, as well as the affective loaded states of affinity *and* disidentification. Inspired by Crucially, this article is also strongly informed by Audre Lorde's (1984) 'The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism' in its understanding and exploration of anger as a relational, political, historical and often positioned affect, which articulates a *justified* response to oppression and, thus, holds the productive potential of serving as a powerful source for engendering change. As Audre Lorde (1984, 127) writes: 'Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy, serving progress and change.' It is with the potential that the affect of anger can hold for change, when used responsibly, that this chapter engages. It is also influenced by Lorde's (1984) essay 'Eye to Eye: Black Women and Hatred' in context of this chapter's focus on anger between women, queers and femmes. Yet, crucially, this chapter turns to a critical examination of anger within our own communities always with the hopeful drive of contributing positively towards queer feminine and intersectional feminist political, community and epistemic growth, change and knowledge. A further influence for this chapter is my own contact with the philosophy and practice of Five Rhythms, an expressive dance movement developed by Gabrielle Roth (1989, 1998) in which anger is often considered a vital force for (*re*)establishing integrity, particularly integrity which has been harmed or hurt in some

way. As Five Rhythms Teacher Andrea Juhan wrote in context of her 2013 Ferocious Heart Heartbeat Workshop: ‘Anger defines our boundaries, motivates us, and spurs us into action. It lets us know when we have been hurt, when we are in danger and when we are out of integrity. It is the physical and emotional energy that protects what we hold dear - and without it, we are lost. Yet, we are rarely encouraged to feel or express our anger in a clear and powerful way. As a result, we struggle to be clear in confrontation: we sit on our feelings, and we ask that others do the same. But when we extinguish our fire out of fear of its destructive potential, we cut ourselves off from the heat of our own passion and the nobility of our own integrity’ In exploring the politics of queer feminine anger, this chapter also draws on the work of Sara Ahmed (2004, 2010) for a critical conceptualisation of *femme affect aliens* and, indeed, the *femme kill joy*, who find themselves occupying alienated - and critical - spaces on the margins of queer, feminist and femme belonging, precisely due to various positionalities they inhabit and which intersect with their queer feminine identities. The chapter is also influenced by Ahmed’s (2004) work on the cultural politics of emotions more generally, in its understanding of affects as being a) relational b) positioned and c) political, as well as its consideration of the *orientated* and *orientating* nature of affects and, thus, the affective nature of processes of (dis)orientation. In context of the relationality of emotions, the chapter also draws on Judith Butler’s (1993, 2005) work on the importance of recognition for identity construction and the pain, shame or anger that can be caused by misrecognitions. Through looking at moments where the queerly feminine is devalued or dismissed, thus causing hurt, pain and shame to queerly feminine subjects and communities, and by looking at how these moments are converted through the affect of anger (which enables the establishing of boundaries and can motivate actions) into moments of pride, strength and integrity this chapter locates instances of femme oppression and moments where the affect of anger becomes politically, collectively and individually useful for fighting the multiple intersecting oppressions that queer feminine subjects and communities face. Although the focus of this chapter is primarily on anger as an orientating and orientated affect, I nevertheless recognise and strive to actively work with the interrelated, intertwined and intersecting nature of affects, and work in the knowledge that any orientating anger present is often always, already intersecting with any number of other affects, including shame, sadness, pain, hurt, hatred, desire, love and fear. Thus, other emotions are always, already involved in anger and anger can also be enfolded in other emotions. Indeed, this chapter concerns itself in particular with the relationship between

queer feminine pain or hurt and anger. The chapter begins with by reviewing how anger and emotions are theorised by Audre Lorde (1984) and Sara Ahmed (2004, 2010), as well as by briefly looking at how emotions and anger inform the concept of disidentificatory orientations (Muñoz 1999, Ahmed 2006). The chapter then progresses to a discussion of three areas of disidentificatory orientations and the situated politics of queer feminine anger: 1. Anger as an affective mode that orientates queer feminine subjects through productive disidentifications: this section will also deal with examples of anger at misrecognitions and the conversion of the hurt caused by misrecognitions through the affect of anger into positive assertions of subjectivity and integrity. 2. The politics of queer feminine anger at racism *within* the community. This section draws on a variety of femme of colour voices including Maria Rosa Mojo and Valerie Mason-John (in Dahl & Volcano 2008), Kopene Kofi-Bruce (2009), Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2011) and, in particular, T. J. Bryan's (2002, pp.147-160) essay 'It Takes Ballz: Reflections of a Black Attitudinal femme Vixen in tha Makin.' 3. The politics of queer feminine disidentificatory anger at ableism *within* queer and queer feminine communities This final section draws on two extracts exclusively, namely: Sharon Wachslers's (2009, pp.38-53) 'A Decade Later – Still Femme' and Peggy Munson's (2009, pp.28-36) 'Fringe Dweller: Toward an Ecofeminist Politic of Femme.' Firstly, let us begin by looking at (black) feminist theories of emotions and anger, in particular.

ii) Theorising Anger

Racism. The belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance, manifest and implied.

Women respond to racism. My response to racism is anger. I have lived with that anger, ignoring it, feeding upon it, learning to use it before it laid my visions to waste, for most of my life. Once I did it in silence, afraid of the weight. My fear of anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also.

Women responding to racism means women responding to anger; the anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, or silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-optation.

My anger is a response to racist attitudes and to the actions and presumptions that arise out of those attitudes. If you're dealings with other women reflect those attitudes, then my anger and your attendant fears are spotlights that can be used for

growth in the same way I have used learning to express anger for my growth. But for corrective surgery, not guilt. Guilt and defensiveness are bricks in a wall against which we all flounder; they serve none of our futures.

Audre Lorde's (1984, p.124) 'The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism'

Audre Lorde begins her theorisation of the potentially productive uses of anger with the above introduction. Several important points jump out of this quote that are significant for our theoretical understanding of anger. Firstly, anger is positioned and politicised affect, that some subjects may be orientated towards more than others, by necessity, precisely because of the oppressions that these subjects face. Secondly, anger is positioned as a *justified* "response" to oppressions that may teach us something if we do not fear it. Here, anger is a justified response by (black) women to racist oppression and anger is a justified response to racist oppression that (white) women must respond to appropriately. Thirdly, anger is, thus, situated as a potentially productive, positioned and politicised emotion that, in contrast to guilt or fear, may be used for growth, learning and transformative change and growth that can serve our collective futures. Thus, anger, as Audre Lorde (1984, p.127) rightly states is not simply "useless" or "destructive," rather justified anger (anger that is a response to oppression and which is used responsibly for the promotion of social justice) can be a useful tool for fighting the oppressions that provoke these affects and when used creatively anger may serve as a powerful source of energy for engendering change. However, it is important to note that Audre Lorde speaks of the productive uses of anger as a long term project for the transformation and tool for fighting oppression, not a short term feel good fix. When speaking of anger as 'a powerful source of energy, serving progress and change' Lorde (1984) clarifies that: 'when I speak of change, I do not mean a simple switch of positions or a temporary lessening of tensions, nor the ability to smile or feel good. I am speaking of a basic and radical alteration in those assumptions underlying our lives.' Therefore, whilst unexpressed anger, silence and fear of anger are not useful, in Audre Lorde's view, anger that is expressed honestly, precisely, directly and with the aim for facilitating growth can be a tool for change: 'But anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies. Anger is loaded with information and energy' (Lorde, 1984, p.127). A valid question might thus be, how do or can we use our angers productively to resist and transform oppressions and

move towards effective political coalitions, solidarities and action? Furthermore, what might we learn through epistemologies of anger? However, it is important to note the distinction that Lorde (1984, p.129) makes between anger and hatred, destructive rage and righteous productive anger, when she writes: ‘This hatred and our anger are very different. Hatred is the fury of those who do not share our goals, and its object is death and destruction. Anger is a grief of distortions between peers, and its object is change.’ We must listen patiently to the angers of others and try to understand the information contained within these discursive passions with compassion and critical receptivity. We must articulate our own angers as honestly yet respectfully as possible and ask for others to listen with patience, critical receptivity and compassion. We must learn to tell the difference between justified angers that can cut through injustices like a torch light through the darkness, revealing honest “truths” and be the tools for change and angers that are caused by or create distortions.⁹ Audre Lorde emphasises the ‘precision’ with which we must articulate angers and the need to ‘listen’ intently. Anger can provide ‘insight’, yet Audre Lorde also emphasises that ‘anger’s usefulness’ has ‘limitations,’ for example unharnessed and unproductive rage or the fear of anger. Audre Lorde thus emphasises the necessity of constructively facing and articulating anger by and even between different kinds of situated subaltern subjects, especially. As Lorde (1984, p.131) writes: ‘The angers of women can transform difference through insight into power. For anger between peers births change, not destruction, and the discomfort and sense of loss it often causes is not fatal, but a sign of growth.’ It is to the angers between subjects who are similar *and* different - yet never the same - that Audre Lorde turns. To angers between black women and white women or between women and their variously positioned oppressors (‘Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism’), as well as angers between and amongst black women (‘Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger’). Finally, whilst Audre Lorde (1984, pp.152 & 175) articulates how ‘Anger is useful to help clarify our differences’, she also emphasises how anger has its limitations and emphasises the

⁹ Yet again, I realise that what some see as blind rage or fury others may see as another shade of useful and productive anger. This brings us to the question of: Who judges the appropriateness or usefulness of our emotions? Who polices our emotions and why? Who is allowed to demarcate the boundaries between “acceptable,” “useful” and “productive” emotions or “destructive” and “harmful” emotions? I am questioning the “ethics” of creating such distinctions, in my own writing, as well as the writing, thinking and actions of others.

need for kindness, tenderness, gentleness, as well as clarity, honest and precision in our dealings with one another.

Ahmed, drawing on Lorde, makes similar points on the productive nature and necessity of looking at, so called, “negative” emotions. Deconstructing the distinction between “good” and “bad” or “positive” and “negative” affects (Ahmed, 2010, p.30), Ahmed is critical of the affirmative, for example the turn towards a joyful feminism advocated by Rosie Braidotti (2002), and the contemporary pressure to simply be affirmative. Instead of seeing “negative” emotions as simply “reactive,” Ahmed (2010, p.50) emphasises the necessity of acknowledging how “negative” emotions are steeped in unfinished, situated, histories of oppressions, that we must ethically return to in order to move forwards with our contemporary political projects:

I am not saying that feminist, anti-racist, and queer politics do not have anything to say about happiness other than to point to its unhappy effects. I think it is the very exposure of these unhappy effects that is affirmative, that gives us an alternative set of imaginings of what might count as a good or better life. If injustice does have unhappy effects, then the story does not end there. Unhappiness is not our endpoint. If anything, the experience of being alienated from the affective promise of happy objects gets us somewhere. Affect aliens can do things, for sure, by refusing to put bad feelings to one side in the hope that we can “just get along.” A concern with histories that hurt is not then a backward orientation: to move on, you must make this return. If anything we might want to reread melancholic subjects, the ones who refuse to let go of suffering, who are even prepared to kill some forms of joy, as an alternative model of the social good.

Thus, for Ahmed (2010, p.216), ‘bad feelings are not simply reactive’, rather ‘they are creative responses to histories that are unfinished.’ Indeed, Ahmed highlights how we may achieve solidarities in recognizing our collective positioned alienation from “positive” affects and through the killing of certain forms of joy. Furthermore, when it comes to anger, Ahmed, like Lorde, links anger to righteous judgments in response to social injustice and oppression. Ahmed (2004, p.174) speaks of feminist anger as one ‘form of “against-ness” that *‘gives feminist politics its edge’*, or formative political boundaries, as well as providing a crucial driving force or affective energy, for engaging with histories of injury and present injustices. Ahmed (2004, pp.174-175) maps out feminist and specifically black feminist conceptualisations of anger, as an energy that enables us to react to oppression, using Lorde’s (1984) writing as one starting point:

Here, anger is constructed in different ways: as a response to the injustice of racism; as a vision of the future; as a translation of pain into knowledge; and being loaded with information and energy. Crucially, anger is not simply defined in relationship to a past, but as opening up the future. In other words, being against something does not end with “that which one is against”. Anger does not necessarily become “stuck” on its object, although that object may remain sticky and compelling. Being against something is also being for something, but something that has yet to be articulated or is not yet. As Lorde shows us, anger is visionary and the fear of anger, or the transformation of anger into silence, is a turning away from the future (Lorde 1984: 127). So while anger is determined, it is not fully determined. It translates pain, but also needs to be translated. Feminism, as a response to pain and as a form of anger directed against that pain, is dependent then on acts of translation that are moving.

Anger, therefore, is posited by Ahmed (2004, p.174), drawing on Lorde, as an “energy” that holds the power to “translate” or transform - to “move” us ‘into new ways of being.’ To draw a crucial link here between anger and disidentifications, both are essentially about transformation through actively working with those elements that one is politically against. Additionally, both anger and disidentifications involve a simultaneous being political and ontologically *against* something and a being for something that has yet to be articulated and is currently absent or is at the cusp of coming into being. Thus, both anger and disidentificatory orientations involve a simultaneously movement away and towards the problematic object, in an attempt to manifest change that addresses a gap in the political and ontological state of things, for example a lack of cultural representation. Furthermore, both anger and disidentifications, enfold in themselves a secondary affect, namely that of hurt or pain. a sense of hurt or pain. Indeed, anger and pain are intimately intertwined in Ahmed’s (2004, pp.175-176) reflections, as ‘anger involves a reading of pain’, an interpretation that casts a judgment that ‘something is wrong.’ Indeed, feminist anger is often a response to pain as wrong and a call for social and political action. Moreover, for Ahmed, ‘Anger is creative’ as ‘it works to create a language with which to respond to that which one is against.’

Affects and particularly a positioned and politicised form of anger (that is anger felt and expressed by socially positioned and oppressed subjects in response to social injustices and oppression) are also potently present in José Esteban Muñoz’s (1999) work on *disidentifications*. Particularly in the examples of disidentificatory performances Muñoz uses for illustrating his theories. Examples that are filled with a positioned, transformative, world making and politicised humour and rage, that Muñoz (1999, p.x) describes in one instance - in reference to the work of Jack Smith - as humorous yet

ultimately ‘scathing anti-normative critiques.’ However, although affects, particularly anger, are implicit and referenced in Muñoz (1999) they are not foregrounded or explored explicitly to the theoretical depths that they could be and as this chapter strives to explore. Indeed, anger, I argue, is interwoven in the very fabric of Muñoz’s theory of disidentifications in the frustrating and, at times, infuriating encounters that disidentifying minoritarian subjects face in those oppressive dynamics where cultural sites do not accommodate their identities, through creating space for their identification, expression and community belonging.

What all of these theorists have in common is their assertion that “bad” feelings and feeling “bad” matters. Particularly in the lives and collective politics of queer and minority subjects. As Ahmed (2004, p.201) writes, ‘emotions that have often been described as negative or even destructive can also be enabling or creative.’ They may be pathways towards ‘feeling better’, through their very expression and exploration of ‘feelings of anger, rage and shame as feelings in the present about a past that persists in the present.’ For example, present pasts of racism, ableism, homophobia and sexism. Indeed, one final influence on this chapter is the work of queer theorists like Halberstam, who look at how negative emotions, in this case those accompanying an act of queer failure, emotions of ‘disappointment, disillusionment and despair’ can provide ‘the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life (Halberstam, 2011, p.3).’ Those contemporary regimes of compulsory positivity critiqued by writers like Halberstam (2011), Edelman (2004) and Ahmed (2004 & 2010).

In pursuing the topic of queer feminine disidentificatory anger, this chapter takes as its starting point the *orientated* and *orientating* nature of affects and the affective nature of orientations and the orientating process; the question of how affects orientate subjects and how the orientations that subjects have are affective. Ahmed (2004, 2006) presents affects and orientations as being intimately intertwined. In theorising ‘emotions as intentional: as being “directed” toward objects’ and ‘affect as contact’, Ahmed (2006, p.2) writes of how emotions orientate subjects, since ‘we are affected by “what” we come into contact with. In other words, emotions are directed to what we come into contact with:

they move us “toward” and “away” from such objects.’ Thus, affects are directed towards objects and others *and* affects give us directions by moving us towards and away from physical objects, objects of thought, other subjects or spaces. We feel a certain way (perhaps joy, fear or anger) about objects, others, spaces, thoughts and talk, *and* we are moved, directed, orientated or disorientated by these objects, others and spaces in relation to the emotions we feel about them.

In reflecting on the affective saturatedness of disidentificatory orientations we may consider what are the affective processes of becoming orientated or disorientated, identifying or disidentifying with where, who, what or the persons in relation to whom, we are, or of occupying a disidentificatory space in between. We may consider how whether an orientation sticks, stays and *fits*, or becomes transformed into a disorientation – or another departure from an identity or a place that does not quite fit - is affective. Of course, affects do not stand alone in orientating subjects but are always, already intertwined with positionalities and, thus, are always, already political.

In considering the relationship between anger and queer feminine disidentificatory orientations, this chapter focuses on three dimensions of affects, namely: affects as a) relational b) positioned and c) political. As Ahmed (2004, p.8) writes ‘Emotions are relational: they involve (re)actions or relations of “towardness” or “awayness” in relation to such objects.’ Emotions are positioned, as Sara Ahmed (2004, 2010) and Audre Lorde (1984) illustrate through taking situated examples of emotional states, including those of the reclaimed political figurations of the unhappy queer, melancholic migrant and the angry feminist or black woman. Indeed, the way that emotions are positioned is especially relevant, because as Ahmed (2010, p.215) writes, ‘our access to the causes of pain’ or any other emotions ‘is far from random’, since ‘Some more than others are associated with bad feeling, as getting in the way of the promise of happiness.’ Thus, access or exposure to “positive” or “negative” emotions is essentially unequally distributed and subject to positions of privilege or precarity and vulnerability. Emotions therefore have everything to do with oppression and (in)justice. Finally, emotions are political, as Ahmed (2004, p.12) highlights ‘Feminist and queer scholars have shown us that emotions “matter” for politics; emotions show us how power shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds. So in a way, we do “feel our way.”’ Emotions are involved in both our turning towards or

investing in norms and our turning away from and disidentifying with norms (Ahmed, 2004, 2010). As both Audre Lorde (1984) and Sara Ahmed (2004, 2010) aptly highlight, in being justified reactions to oppression, in providing us with the energy and investment to fight such oppressions or in turning us toward and away from certain schools of political thought and activism. For example, Ahmed (2004, p.171) writes how emotions, particularly pain and anger, are involved in the politicisation of subjects and their turning towards feminism. I also draw on Ahmed's assertions that emotional states involve a) affects 'to be affected by something' b) 'intentionality' – one feels a certain way 'about something' and c) 'evaluation or judgment' – emotional states mean that we appraise something as being good or bad (2010, p.29). For example, anger involves us being affected by something, which causes us to feel angry at something and means that we read, appraise, evaluate and judge something as being bad or wrong. As Ahmed (2004, p.5) writes, 'emotions involve appraisals, judgements, attitudes or a "specific manner of apprehending the world (Satre 1962: p.9), which are irreducible to bodily sensations. Some theorists have described emotions as being judgements (Solomon 1995), whilst others might point to how they involve judgements: the emotion of anger, for example, implies a judgment that something is bad, although we can be wrong in our judgement (Spellman 1989: p.266).' Thus, as Ahmed (2004) highlights, emotions involve ways of reading and interpreting.

Finally, emotions, and the way that we judge, interpret or read these emotions, involve ways of being moved and becoming orientated. Ways of choosing and pursuing a direction. Anger may move us away from certain objects or towards the object perhaps in a confrontational or critical way, or perhaps in a way that ultimately wishes to resolve, forgive or heal, despite the anger caused and expressed. Though shame, pain and hurt, as we will see in the following sections of this chapter, also plays a role in orientating queer feminine subjects in disidentificatory ways. Indeed, various intersecting affects orientate a subject in complex ways at any given moment, as Audre Lorde (1984) notes in her contemplations on the links between anger, hurt and survival. Yet these affects are also strongly intertwined with positionalities. Indeed, in writing about feminism and anger, Ahmed (2004, p.172) notes how anger and pain are deeply intertwined, since 'It is not possible to consider the relations between feminism and anger without first reflecting on the politics of pain.' It is the relationship between positionalities and the affect of anger

that the following three sections focus on in their exploration of queer feminine disidentificatory anger at femme phobia, racism and ableism within queer, feminist and femme communities.

iii) Converting the Harm of Misrecognition Through Disidentificatory Anger into Moments of Queer Feminine Affirmation

Arguably there is a history of queer feminine disidentificatory anger that is inherited, passed down, performatively reiterated and thereby contributes towards actively constructing queer feminine comportment, attitudes, experience and politics. Many of my participants identified with anger as an orientating affect that plays a significant role in shaping how they performatively embody their queer feminine identities. As we will see, the affect of disidentificatory anger - like the more frequently discussed affect of desire (e.g. Dahl 2009 & 2012, Chalklin 2013, Cvetkovich 1995, Gomez 1998, Kraus 1996, Nestle 1992, Hemmings 1998, Hollibaugh 2000, Walker 1998 etc.) – actively shapes queer feminine embodied identities, discourses, politics and communities. Thus, it is not simply the affect of desire which orientates femme and queer femininities but also anger and disidentificatory anger more specifically. Common examples of disidentificatory anger includes anger at *both* heteropatriarchal *and* feminist approaches to femininity which construct femininity as weak, passive, apolitical or stupid, as is exemplified by Brook Bolen (2009, p.61) when she discusses how femininity is constructed within popular feminist imaginary as a disempowering trapping which she ‘vehemently disagree[s]’ with:’

While second-wave feminists such as Betty Friedan widely argued that femininity and its aforementioned trappings are disempowering, even oppressive, I vehemently disagree. Heels, manicured nails, and makeup are what I arm myself with when I meet the world; they are the armour that helps enable me to feel capable of making my way in a wildly unequal world. The unequivocal sense of power I derive from my femininity is significant because the world disempowers, silences, and oppresses those of us with feminine self-presentations; I feel this power even more strongly because I, as a femme, actively select my femininity rather than accept it as a natural or necessary corollary to my female biology. The key to this sense of power is that I consciously choose to present myself in feminine ways. My femininity is my choice and construction; it is not a dutiful response or reaction to a social mandate that dictates that female equals feminine.

The etymology of vehement or vehemence is of course the Latin “vehemēns” or “vēmēns” (meaning violent or forceful and often signifying passionate or intense emotions and, indeed, anger) in this case Vikki is expressing a forceful, impassioned and ardent disagreement with and disidentificatory orientation towards feminist critiques of femininity as a disempowering, which leads Vikki to assert the agentic ‘choice’ involved in her active ‘construction’ of her queer femininity and the ‘unequivocal sense of power’ that she derives from her gender identity, which Vikki furthermore discussed as being a far cry from a ‘dutiful response’ to the ‘social mandate’ of ciscentric binary gendered systems in which ‘female equals feminine.’ There is also anger at sociocultural rules about how one “should” performatively do femininity “right” according to specifically situated normative standards. Within my interviews one of the most potent examples of disidentificatory anger at sociocultural rules regarding the performative embodiment of feminine norms was presented by Ali. For Ali anger actively shapes her queer feminine embodied identity by moving her away from restrictive rules through disidentification. This dynamic was most evident in Ali’s discussion of how her “outrageous” femininity came to be:

I remember when I, I had my first child when I was 21 and when I had him I always remember I went back, obviously showed them, showed the baby and when I went through the door my nana said to me, because I was obviously brought up by my grandmother, she said to me, “right then, is it over now?” as if like, you’ve got a baby now and I thought and I remember going back home and just shaved all the sides of my head and I thought, “right, you’ve had it now, how dare you, can’t you just understand, or like me, this is me!” and it’s almost like with each subsequent baby I’ve got worse *laughter* if possible or I felt I’d done something that made me react, cos I’ve got two grandchildren as well and when my granddaughter was born, eight years ago, I had all my back tattooed, I’d wanted to do it for years, but then I thought, no, no, I’ve had her now, now I’m going to have it. It’s just, I dunno, I react in like really, I’ll go out and have something really sort of, it’s almost to piss people off, who think, you know, “oh she’s a mother now, she’s got three kids, she shouldn’t be doing that” and actually I’ll go out and I’ll purposefully do something that will annoy people or my family, I suppose.

In this extract Ali embodies her disidentificatory anger at her grandmother’s and societies restrictive and invalidating gendered and aged norms through transforming this relational moment of hurt into a permanent marker of self assertion through her tattoos. Ali’s disidentificatory anger thus manifests in a simultaneously boundary setting and boundary erasing way, since her anger establishes a assertive boundary between her sense of self and her grandmother’s identity attacking and boundary eroding critique, whilst at the same time erasing certain boundaries regarding aged and gendered norms. Arguably, due

to her positionality as a granddaughter in relation to her hostile grandmother, which most probably means that she occupies a position of lesser power in this aged and ageist hierarchical dynamic, Ali might not feel that she is able to communicate her anger through words or perhaps her words of anger are futile in this situation. Yet Ali *is* able to communicate her agency over her own body by marking her body with the permanent refusal to obey her grandmother's and societies gendered and ageist rules regarding how a mother - a feminine woman who has reached a certain point in her aged and gendered development - is "supposed" to performatively embody her gendered and aged identity, in the form of her back tattoo. Similarly to Peggy's torn up rule book, which was discussed in Chapter 4 and arguably embodies Peggy's anger at gendered rules, Ali directs her disidentificatory anger at normative rules regarding the "proper" performative embodiment of feminine gender identity. Ali's disidentificatory anger here can be understood as a reaction to ageist and gendered norms, since it is after all a reaction to her family's expectations that her becoming a mother will mean that her rebellious "phase" is 'over now.' Indeed, for a lot of femmes, anger is a core part of queer feminine comportment, like Asha Leong (in Burke 2009, p.71) shows when she describes herself as: 'femme femme like "fuck you" and "hell yeah," the kind of strut down the street that no one messes with. Femme like sweet tea that washes down, leaving one feeling both satiated and full. I love the power my body has when I'm that perfect vessel for my perfect femme.' Indeed, Leong speaks of a boundary setting anger, as this powerful embodied angry femme strut is one 'that no one messes with.' She furthermore points towards this as an "ideal" as this is part of her 'perfect femme.' This style of assertive, confrontational, firm, boundary setting anger is also encoded in the comportment that forms the front cover and title of *Brazen Femme*.

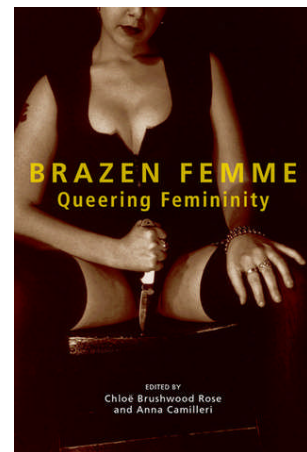


Figure 6.1: *Brazen Femme* Cover

Within femme writing and communities there is also anger at misrecognitions of femmes as performing a "normative" gender identity and there is anger at being misrecognised as heterosexual and having ones queer feminine sexuality utterly disavowed. One such example of queer feminine hurt and disidentificatory anger at

femme invisibility and misrecognition within queer community spaces and, thus, being cast outside of the net of queer kinship and belonging is presented by Lisa R. Papez (2009, p.50, emphasis in original) in her description of her alienating encounter in a lesbian bar as a glowing bride to be on her hen night where she is misrecognised as straight and subsequently shunned:

I was glowing with radiant happiness when I walked into a well-known lesbian bar with my sisters, friends, and fellow femmes, proudly sporting a fun white ball cap with the word “bride” on it and a pink, sparkly “bachelorette” button. Walking into this queer women’s space, knowing I was there to celebrate my upcoming marriage to the love of my life, felt incredible.

“Imposter!” their eyes seemed to shout at me with all the force of their instant assumptions and disgust. The androgynous, blonde bartender turned her back on us with a roll of her eyes the moment we walked through the door, and in that simple gesture, I felt my heart fall to the pit of my stomach. Just two days from that moment, I would be legally wed to my same-sex partner, my butch. In my elation over my upcoming wedding, I hadn’t reminded myself that I would likely not be recognized as queer in this place. The reminder from the women that surrounded me was devastating.

In that moment, I wanted nothing more than to run, to flee with my ridiculous, naive hopes that I would be truly seen billowing behind me. I wanted to scream at them, to make them understand that I was queer just like they were.

Instead, I looked around at the sea of blue jeans, t-shirts, and ball caps, and realized that it was their problem, not mine. *They* were the ones choosing not to recognize that queer comes in all shapes, sizes, colors and styles of dress. (...) This day was just one experience of many, but by that time, at least I had experienced invisibility before and had a slightly thicker skin.

The ‘devastating’ hurt and disappointment that Papez feels at being misrecognised and, thus, having her queer identity invalidated as a femme within her own LGBTQ* community is powerfully present in her description of how her initial ‘incredible’ feelings of ‘elation,’ which she was experiencing in anticipating celebrating her forthcoming wedding in this queer women’s space, plummets through her alienating encounters which construct her as an outsider or “imposter” and, subsequently, prompt her desire to ‘flee’ from a LGBTQ* community space where she expected to belong, feel welcomed and for her future queer nuptial happiness to be validated and celebrated – or at the very least recognized! However, it is through a powerful form of righteous disidentificatory anger served with just a pinch of self protective apathy, as subtle as the raising of an eyebrow and the shrug of shoulders, which is present in her boundary setting realisation and assertion that at the end of the day ‘it was their problem, not mine. *They* were the ones choosing not to recognize that queer comes in all shapes, sizes, colors and styles of dress.’

– that Papez is able to develop a ‘thicker skin’ that can buffer the hurt of invalidating community misrecognitions and alienating feelings of unbelonging that prompted her disidentificatory anger. Syntactically important, here, is the distancing emphasis through italics and repetition that is placed on the word “*They*”, as well as Papez’s highlighting the bigger problem that is present in her experience of misrecognition, namely the sometimes implicitly exclusionary dynamics present in LGBTQ* communities when these do not work intersectionally to make space for queers of all shapes, sizes, colours and gendered styles of embodiment to exist – nevermind feel welcomed, included and celebrated in these supposedly “safe spaces.” In each of these examples, disidentificatory anger serves as an affective force which converts affects of shame, pain and hurt at being misrecognised, misinterpreted and invalidated, into a powerful mode of assertive self validation that serves as a protective boundary around subjective identity with the function of (re)establishing, firming and maintaining personal integrity and identity, as well as communicating self identity to both oneself and to others. It is a rhetorical (re)assertion of self primarily articulated at those who have caused the harm of misrecognition, which is effectively a violent stealing, objectification and potential destruction of a person’s sense of self identity, internal world and their connection to others. Disidentificatory anger in these moments articulates a firm boundary setting refusal to let one’s sense of self be violated by the potentially appropriative and objectifying misrecognition of others. Yet the very need to articulate this boundary signals that this violation has, in fact, already occurred. Nevertheless, the disidentificatory affect of anger and rhetorical assertion of self identity functions to ward against future acts of harmful misrecognition through attempts to educate others about the self. Therefore, these extracts embody a healing conversation of self to self through creating bounded distinctions between what is one’s internal self and what is others’ misrecognitions, through externalising internal narratives, which communicate the story of the harm of misrecognition. Furthermore, through the affective conversion point of disidentificatory anger, they re-establish the boundary between self and other through the affective conversion point of disidentificatory anger, which transforms the hurt or misrecognitions into assertive articulations of identities. Indeed, even though these boundaries between the self and the other can never wholly exist, since we are always, already relational and, thus, to some extent porous subjects – these articulations of disidentificatory anger express an absolutely essential (if somewhat futile) refusal of the self to be objectified and constructed by the gaze of the other.

Another potent example of queer feminine anger was presented by my participant, Hedwig, who related their queer feminine disidentificatory anger at oppressive structural inequalities. Identifying strongly with the character of Hedwig from the film *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* - hence their self chosen pseudonym for this project - Hedwig identifies with this character because 'He does not take any bullshit!' Yet Hedwig the character also articulates the 'very hard time' that Hedwig the participant has with expressing anger. Hedwig also spoke of identifying strongly with the Moomins character: Little Mai, who according to Hedwig is 'often described as the angry one.' Yet Hedwig understands Little Mai as being 'incensed by unfairness.' Hedwig explains how Little Mai symbolises righteous anger at unfairness that reacts by challenging the oppressor, by saying: 'so something is unfair and she will just react to it, she's not afraid of biting the big bad person in the tail and I can very much actually, I can very much relate to that and someone has said that I'm very much like her.' Hedwig goes on to clarify how this righteous anger is not simply an impotent affect - it is "not just anger" - rather it is a potent affect that has "direction" and is "directed" through explaining what anger for Hedwig is about: 'it's frustration and it's not just anger it's also a sense of like, I don't know, it's directed, it has a direction, rather than just being angry.' Hedwig's discussion of a righteous anger at unfairness which has direction and gives Hedwig themselves direction in terms of orientating them towards certain political causes, is highlighted through Hedwig invoking various examples of disidentificatory anger at structural oppressions and inequalities including the *Queer Nations Manifesto*, which speaks of anger at heteronormative structural oppressions of queers. Finally, they present a personal example of anger Hedwig expressed at racism articulated by Hedwig's father around their white Swedish family dinner table. Queer feminine disidentificatory anger, as this short section has demonstrated takes many forms and has many orientating effects. However, it is perhaps all too easy for queer femininities to speak of their own anger against oppression of ourselves and of those with whom we feel we hold a political affinity - indeed, it is all too easy to align ourselves in a Machiavellian style with the political side of "good" against and external "evil" - and it is quite another thing to consider *reflexively* how "we" (oppressed queer feminine subjects) can also be the cause of oppression and righteous anger in others.

iv) **The Politics of Queer Feminine Disidentificatory Anger at *Racism***

There is a strong discourse of “inclusion,” “diversity” and anti-racist politics present within queer and queer feminine communities and writing. This is embodied, for example, in Dahl’s (2008, p.163) positioning of Leslie Mah’s take on femme as: ‘Femme to you is a fuck off to racism and sexism at once.’ There is also a significant amount of critical and creative writing (e.g. Austin 2002, Bryan 2002, Gomez 1997, Harris and Crocker 1997, Keeling 2007, Lewis 2012, Manauat 2013, Oritz 1997, Piepzna-Samarasinha 2011, Sandoval 1997, Savitz 2011, etc.), as well as cultural and historical lineage by, on and for femmes of colour specifically and a significant amount of femmes of colour involved in Femme Conferences and identify strongly with queer and femme. Yet there are nevertheless also significant stories about queers and femmes of colour occupying ambivalent and resistant disidentificatory orientations towards queer and femme cultures, theories and figurations. There are also significant stories containing moments of disidentificatory anger at dynamics of racist oppression and exclusion *within* queer and queer feminine communities. Both of these subaltern strands of queer feminine experience will be explored further in this section by drawing on a variety of black queer and femme voices including Maria Rosa Mojo and Valerie Mason-John (in Dahl & Volcano 2008), Kopene Kofi-Bruce (2009), Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2011) and, in particular, T. J. Bryan’s (2002) powerful and insightful essay: ‘It Takes Ballz: Reflections of a Black Attitudinal femme Vixen in tha Makin.’ Indeed, several further forms of misrecognition and righteous anger at oppressive dynamics within queer and queer feminine communities emerge within these examples. To begin with, T.J. Bryan discusses being misrecognised as butch and masculinised as a black femme in the following extract. This is one of the many events and interactions presented in this essay that lead Bryan to question the implicitly white roots of femme and queer femininities. On being misrecognised as butch, being positioned as masculine and having her intelligent and articulate black femme identity erased and disavowed in a queer community ‘rag’ review of her performance at a Toronto poetry slam, T.J. Bryan (2002, p.147) writes:

Accompanying the article was a picture – my head stuck on the body of a Black, male boxer. I was angered and insulted, but not surprised. ‘This showed me that the person responsible for creating this collage was unable to imagine a brainy and articulate Black person (equated with masculinity?), who was also a Femme (reserved for others?).’

This incident forced me to think about the roots of my Femme(ininity). About culture and aesthetics. About the ways that racism affects Black wimmin and more specifically, about the odd ways it can impact on those of us in Tha Life.

We, Black femmes, can often be masculine(ized) – automatically viewed, treated, and cruised as butches. And even if we are seen as Femmes, we can still be devalued or just plain not perceived as Femme(inine) in any sense but the sexual – not just in the larger world, but also inside of queer/Black/“colored” communities of supposed resistance.

This misrecognition of black femmes as butches or as being excluded from queer and queer feminine recognition is highlighted by several femmes of colour including black queer theorist Dr. Valerie Mason-John (in Dahl & Volcano, 2008, pp.30-34) who speaks of how ‘During my twenties I felt an unspoken pressure to be butch in bed from white women, as if we, black women, had to be sexually dominant.’ Whilst Mason-John (ibid) speaks positively of queer culture as having a ‘huge impact’ in terms of realising the possibility of being ‘femme one day and something else the next’ and femme as ‘a revolution of female identity,’ these positive experiences are not the experience of all black queers or femmes of colour. Indeed, the lack of queer recognition received by femmes of colour is furthermore addressed by Kopene Kofi-Bruce (2009, p.46) when she speaks of how femmes of colour are doubly excluded from ‘the nod’ of queer recognition and related feelings of belonging, comfort and safety when she writes: ‘The nod is a powerful thing. It’s about belonging and comfort and safety. Femmes rarely if ever get the nod, and femmes of colour are doubly excluded.’ Maria Rosa Mojo (Dyke Marilyn) (in Dahl & Volcano, 2008, p.49) also hints towards these racialized exclusions in discussing how: ‘There is a femme movement but the problem with groups is that they can also exclude. People who identify as femme shouldn’t feel excluded due to stereotypical attributes considered to be un-feminine.’ Conversely, as T. J. Bryan highlights, femmes of colour are also routinely hypersexualised within queer culture in ways that invoke oppressive racist, colonial, white, supremacist, patriarchal histories surfacing in contemporary queer cultures in the form of everyday racist remarks. Bryan (2002, p.151) highlights this through a disidentificatory narrative account of how she is often referred to as ‘hot’ by lovers:

IF-ONE-MORE-CURRENT-OR-POTENTIAL-LOVER-DESCRIBES-ME-AS-HOT-I-WILL-SCREAM!

‘Queered long before deviance was considered politically cool, my phreaky sex appeal is mythical. My truth shines through sensually. But is bent out of shape and refracted back to me as predatory, nymphomaniacal, good-to-go. Hot.

The supposed amorous skills of my sistas have been in high demand for centuries. Yet there are still some who can't or won't describe melanin-rich skin, wide noses, generous lips, and complexly textured hair as beautiful, breathtaking, or divine.

Indeed, this is not the only passage in which Bryan highlights the racism circulating in white queer cultural approaches towards black femininities and masculinities, as further on in her essay Bryan (2002, p.152) once again addresses the issue of contemporary and everyday instances of white butch misogyny and racism:

There are some Butches. No mistaking or avoiding them. There will always be those boyz willing for all the wrong reasons. Fecally full of all the wrong information. Crazy-ass Blackophiles. You always wanted to do WHAT with a Black woman? Sure, it's true what they say 'bout colored 'nani and the blackest berries. And all my brethren have big, fifteen-inchers and live to juk white pussy. Stories passed down from shit-scared and intimidated explorer to slaver to slave owner to their children and beyond. Self-serving stories. A collective white foot perpetually stuck in every ignorant ass's mouth. But since these stories don't say much 'bout me and mine, I'll have to be the HOO/chee that got away. The hot pussy, an exotic curiosity, a tarnished and exiting new trophy who decided not to play.

Critically, in both extracts, Bryan aptly highlights the racist white supremacist colonial histories inscribed within and surfacing from these contemporary white queer misconceptions and misreadings of her black femme embodiment, which provoke her righteous, historically rooted and politically motivated, black queer feminine disidentificatory anger towards white queer cultures from within. Again, Bryan is not the only femme of colour to raise the issue of hypersexualisation, as Kofi-Bruce (2009, p.55, my emphasis) also questions the politicised use of sexualised feminine embodiment as a central part of femme politics and community in the following extract reflecting the racial and sexual politics of being a black femme Radical Cheerleader:

We femmes offered up our objectified bodies, adorable in rebellion and seemingly desirous of the attention. The problem was that I didn't enjoy being lusted after by supposedly enlightened men, and I liked it even less from the women in the audience. Five years later, my underwear has little part to play in my identity as an activist, and I look back in confusion at the way we femmes set ourselves up to be viewed: *why do women, and especially brown women, expect to have to show off our bodies, even while protesting?* Though everyone was about healthy sexuality and not giving a damn, the butches and bois among us rarely crossed the line of offering up their bodies for appreciation or inspection.

Along with these reflections on racism *within* queer and feminist cultures, Bryan (2002, pp.151-152) also offers reflections on inherited racist dynamics *within* femme

communities, as is evident in the following extract describing the racist tensions present in her interactions, as a black femme, with other white femmes:

Attending a small event and helping a Sista/Femme/Friend in the process, I agreed to bring a tray of food in from her car. We entered the bar, hands full. One of the white, Femme organizers of the event skipped over to us. Instead of taking a tray or lending a hand in some way, Miss Mistress of the Manor very coyly beckoned us in with cocked finger and then, smiling, pointed to the table where she wanted the food set down.

WRONG!? SO VERY WRONG!

Fixed dynamics, subtextual dynamics surround and abound. Inherited attitudes may feel comfortable for some. Trigger my annoyance. Court my rage. Unexamined behaviours send me back...

Scarlet and Mammy...

Vivien Leigh and Hattie McDaniels. Big screen Femme/unknown supporting actress. Slayer's woman and her Black slave woman (...) Colonizing Femme – her translucent, southern perfection, the centre of attention. Subjugated woman – unknown heart of darkness, serving. Blackness a backdrop, a shadow, not seen. (...)

HOLD UP!

This Attitudinal Vixen is NO house maid. Maid-in-waiting. NOT second best. NOT to be positioned behind the rest.

Bryan's righteous queer feminine disidentificatory anger triggered by and directed at racist oppressions surfacing through 'fixed dynamics' and 'inherited attitudes' between white and black femmes lead to her being 'pissed' and having 'had enuff' of 'the inferior landscaping of the queerified Femme playing field.' Again, recognition, or rather a painful lack of recognition which work along racialised lines - this time between femmes themselves - lies at the molten core of this moment of disidentificatory anger, as Bryan's identity as black femme is partially erased, disavowed and denied, through the misrecognising gaze and gestures of the white femme organiser. Therefore, these enraging everyday microdynamics between white and black femmes arguably lead to Bryan's own disidentificatory orientation towards queer feminine identities and communities, more generally. Her demand for *true* equality is inscribed in the lines:

WE

You and I

Exist eye-to-eye at the centre.

Equal connection.

Questioning privilege and situation.

Sharing power.

WE

You and I

Exist on a par

Or not at all...

Indeed, her writing is reminiscent of and recalls Audre Lorde's (1984) own essay 'Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred and Anger,' in which Lorde discusses the dynamics of hatred, anger and solidarity between black women, who for Lorde occupy relational spaces of both "sameness" and "difference." Here, in Bryan's essay, the problematised "sameness" presented is that of femmeness, whereas the difference is that of continuing dynamics of racial oppression and domination and how these racial histories and continuing legacies are dealt with *within* contemporary queer and femme communities.

Recognition is also crucial in the following extract, again detailing an incident of racialized (white) femme on (black) femme oppression through misrecognition and erasure, this time of black femme identity, culture, history and contribution to (queer) culture. Similar to the extract discussed in Chapter 5, where Bryan highlights the marginalisation of black femme knowledge, history and existence within (white) femme and queer cultures, here Bryan (2002, p.150) takes issue with an incidence between herself and a well-meaning - yet certainly not innocent - white femme who shows both interest in and ignorance of her work as a black femme poet and to which Bryan responds as follows:

Y'KNOW...I'M NOT REALLY SURE IF THE (white) QUEERS I'M MEETING
UNDERSTAND WHO IT IS THEY'RE DEALIN' WIT'.

(...)

LET'S BE CLEAR...
This is a living, breathing Sista Femme,
Not your latest find.
Columbus is dead.
You ain't found me.

(...)

Columbus is dead.
But I'm reading you as his heir.
Betta CHECK yo'self.

(...)

Child of Columbus,
Perhaps you did not see
Because you chose not to.
Not to experience
Not to look beyond your context.
Outside your realm of dominance

Other Femme dimensions,
 Queerly parallel yet autonomous
 Continue
 Unimpressed.
 Daughter of Columbus, I painted my lips,
 Questioned and flirted

(...)

Long before I
 Allowed you
 Into my darkly Femme world.
 YOU'VE BEEN TOLD.

Crucially, racialized lines of oppression and power, as well as racialized lines of historical and cultural inheritance, identification and orientation (Ahmed 2007), are rendered explicit by Bryan as she challenges this everyday racist dynamic of contemporary white ignorance and colonialism by highlighting the colour lines present in the racialized boundarying of white femme knowledge, experiential and cultural horizons and rhetorically subverting these inherited racialized power structures. Along with asserting black femme existence, history and culture, Bryan delves critically into her own (black) femme identity and the (white) culture of femme more broadly, to explicitly question the implicit white centre or starting point orientating femme identities and communities. In the following extract, Bryan (2002, p.150) describes her own relation to femme as a femme of colour in disidentificatory terms, describing femme as an indentifying term that she cannot swallow whole. An indentifying term that has to be used by her as a black femme 'as if' it 'fit' but which can never 'fit completely.' Furthermore, Bryan invokes the metaphor of femme as a garment – which is implicitly positioned as white: note the 'pink pastel' colours which 'clash' with Bryan's own aesthetics - that 'can feel like *someone else's* cast-offs.' Bryan writes:

Now...

Testing the waters cautiously, I critically delve into my Femme(inity). I wanna stand and be counted cuz me and mine done been here long enuff. Moving carefully though. Mindful of the ways I can be seduced into denying the woman I am. Which is easy when everywhere I look I'm reminded that any sort of contentment couldn't possibly be attained from where I stand.

Femme...
 Deep throating every last bit,
 I'd swallow it whole.
 Using the word AS IS...
 If I could. As if...
 It would evah fit completely.

If I could,
 I'd sing it, proclaim it,
 If its rhyme and reason,
 Its pink pastel seasons
 Didn't clash with
 Damn near everything
 I own.
 Sometimes...

Femme can feel like someone else's cast-offs. Another woman's old worn-out frock.

In context of Bryan's critique of femme as a white centric identifying term and line of inheritance which performatively circulates and places certain (white) idols and aesthetics on (white) femme horizons, whilst (sometimes) invisibilising black femme contemporary and historical contributions and existence, it is understandable how "femme" can feel like an uncomfortable, ill fitting, second hand dress for certain situated subjects. Indeed, Bryan's righteous disidentificatory anger provocatively dares and challenges (white) femmes to reject "liberal" race-blind perspectives circulating *within* (white) queer culture and theories and to reflect critically on the racialisation of queer and femme identities: on the question of which positioned subjects are implicitly - if not explicitly - occupying marginalised or excluded positions *within* queer and femme subcultures.

As the First Nations of Turtle Island, Black people, and so-called "People of Color" have struggled and become more skilled at defining our realities and our political goals, a particularly virulent academic/queer agenda has surfaced. Proponents of this school of thought assert that examining identity, insofar as it relates to race, is passe. (...) This conveniently offers white queers an opportunity to dismiss Whiteness and Euro-culture as major defining factors in queer community, queer culture, queer theory and, ultimately, in queer identity. As a result, racialized constructions of white queerness continue to be presented as authentic, central or, even worse, as the (unspoken) imperial standard by which all queer Others are measured.

As a Black-conscious, queer Femme engaged in an exploration of S/M, queerness, and Femme(ininity), this is hugely problematic. It strikes right at the heart of my reservations and threatens to impose even more limits on the contact I have with white queer community. It colors my interactions with Euro-descended Femmes and Butches. (...)

In queer circles where white wimmin's Femme(ininity) often passes for the epitome of female beauty, my dark-skinned and conscious presence poses an explicit challenge.

But in the midst of all this, I've got my own personal work cut out for me. I need to ask myself some tough questions. How will I maintain a sense of self in relationships where my Black Femme(ininity) is so often, too often, blatantly disrespected? What sort of Black Femme(ininity) will I choose to project in/to the world? (...) How can I be silent and therefore complicit when I come together with the femme wimmin whose presence I require?

In context of Bryan's critique of femme as a white centric identifying term and line of inheritance which performatively circulates and places certain (white) idols and aesthetics on (white) femme horizons, whilst sometimes – yet not always - invisibilising black femme contemporary and historical contributions and existence - as well as the examples of disidentificatory anger at racism from *within* queer and queer feminine communities discussed in this chapter - it is understandable how the term and experience of “femme” and queer femininities can feel like an uncomfortable, ill fitting, second hand dress for certain situated subjects. Bryan's righteous disidentificatory anger provocatively dares and challenges (white) femmes to reject “liberal” race-blind perspectives circulating *within* (white) queer culture and theories and to reflect critically on the racialisation of queer and femme identities: on the question of which positioned subjects are implicitly - if not explicitly - occupying marginalised or excluded positions *within* queer and femme subcultures. This is a dare and a challenge that is also articulated by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2011: 286-291) in the infamous “FEMME SHARK MANIFESTO:”

‘FEMME SHARKS ARE OVER WHITE QUEERS’ OBLIVIOUSNESS TO QUEER OF COLOUR, TWO SPIRIT, AND TRANS* OF COLOUR LIVES. WE KNOW THAT WE ARE A CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSE. WE’RE OVER WHITE FEMMES AND BUTCHES WHO THINK THAT FEMME ONLY COMES IN THE COLOUR OF BARBIE. WE’RE OVER BUTCHES AND BOYS AND OTHER FEMMES TELLING US WHAT WE NEED TO DO, WEAR, OR BE IN ORDER TO BE “REALLY FEMME.”

FEMME SHARKS RECOGNIZE THAT FEMMES, BUTCHES, GENDERQUEER, AND TRANS* PEOPLE HAVE BEEN IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOUR SINCE FOREVER. THAT BEFORE COLONIZATION WE WERE SEEN AS SACRED AND WE WERE SOME OF THE FIRST FOLKS MOST VIOLENTLY ATTACKED WHEN OUR LANDS WERE INVADED AND COLONIZED. FEMME SHARKS WON’T REST UNTIL WE RECLAIM OUR POSITIONS AS BELOVED FAMILY WITHIN OUR COMMUNITIES.

(...)

LOVE AND RAGE,

THE FEMME SHARKS’

With love and (righteous) rage, the “FEMME SHARK MANIFESTO” - like T.J. Bryan's powerful essay “It Takes Ballz” - highlight the (often implicit) white standards present in queer cultures - including those of butch and femme - and the absolute necessity of centralising queer and femme of colour perspectives.

v) **The Politics of Queer Feminine Disidentificatory Anger at Ableism**

It is not only lines of 'race,' ethnicity and racism, but also visible and invisible, physical or psychological disabilities and mental health issues, as well as righteous anger provoking forms of ableist oppressions, internal dynamics of exclusions and marginalisation that orientate or disorientate queer feminine subjects in disidentificatory ways towards and away from queer femininities. Indeed, T. J. Bryan (2005) herself foregrounds this intersection in a blog entry on 'Challenging Ableism' where she writes:

moving away from my place of comfort and greater understanding - defining as *the oppressed, the colonized,* is terrifying.

(...) i'm studying what it means to be able-bodied because i need to continue doing my work. part of this is realizing how i walk with privilege and oppression tightly bound at the root inside my skin.

it tastes odd in my mouth when i say: i have *privilege*.

i've been having these conversations with other able-bodied people about us and living in a barrier filled, ableist world where walking is defined as the '*normal*' way of getting from point a-to-b. where seeing, speaking and hearing are narrowly defined according to the experience of those who do these things with ease. where we [able-bodied people] have built a whole world that centralizes our experiences. where we [need to] assume that the privileges we keep for ourselves are universally accessible. through defining disability as '*abnormal*', '*abhorrent*', '*tragic*', '*ugly*', '*undesirable*', '*uncomfortable*', able-bodied people, maintain our minority experience as the imperial measure of what is '*right*', '*good*' and '*beautiful*' in the world.

With admirable political and personal integrity, T. J. Bryan's excerpt recognises that any one subject may inhabit various interlocking and intersecting oppressed and privileged positionalities, simultaneously. Bryan also notes various strategies for combating ableism which mirror those for challenging racism. These strategies include recognizing, acknowledging and interrogating one's own privilege, becoming conscious through engaging in discussion, thinking and listening and using that knowledge or awareness for the politics of dismantling ableism, as this intersects with other, *equally - not more or less - important*, axis of oppression. The final section of this chapter therefore focuses on dynamics of queer feminine disidentificatory anger at ableist exclusions and marginalisation *within* queer and

queer feminine communities. It focuses on analysing two essays exclusively: Sharon Wachslers (2009, pp.38-53) 'A Decade Later – Still Femme' and Peggy Munson's (2009, pp.28-36) 'Fringe Dweller: Toward an Ecofeminist Politic of Femme.' It is noteworthy that both of these examples are of disabled femmes living with multiple chemical sensitivities (MCS) and chronic fatigue immune dysfunction syndrome (CFIDS). I am also writing as an invisibly disabled femme with mental health difficulties including anxiety and depression, who is currently undergoing formal diagnosis for Aspergers (AS). Whilst these essays by Wachslers and Munson offer valuable insights about the intersection of being disabled and femme, I acknowledge that the insights that these examples can offer are limited to the precise disabled positionalities occupied by these subjects and do not include those experiences of femmes who are differently physically or psychologically disabled. Therefore, like with the above section on 'race' and racism, I am in no way intending these to be representative of the experiences of *all* those inhabiting the intersection of disabled *and* femme. However, I believe that these examples can shed significant light onto the intersection between disabilities and queer femininities, as well as the question of why there are not more resources and stories of experiences by disabled femmes that might lend themselves for analysis in this section. Through the examples of Sharon Wachslers and Peggy Munson who (re)imagine queer femininities through their disabled femme positionalities - thus challenging all femmes to (re)think the central starting points for conceptualising queer femininities – this section looks at how anger at ableism within queer and queer feminine modes of identity and community is involved in disidentificatory orientations.

Previously defining as a strong and highly capable 'power femme,' Sharon Wechsler (2009, pp.39-40, my emphasis) speaks poignantly of the disorientating effects that CFIDS and MCS have on (re)orientating her queer femininity in often disidentificatory ways. Thus, on falling into severe illness, Wachslers describes experiencing an initial loss of her femme identity as she knew it and had constructed it, through emulating constructs of femme that were arguably based on an ableist centre, and her eventual reclaiming and reorientation towards a disabled femme identity that can accommodate her illnesses as follows:

My identities as worker, writer, lesbian (or any kind of sexual being) all had to be either discarded or (re)imagined. Among these self-definitions was “femme.” (...) *I had never given much thought to what exactly made me femme. But when I lost the markers of femme identity, I missed them terribly and wondered if I was still femme.*

One of the most upsetting losses was makeup, specifically lipstick. (...) Applying makeup had been the finishing touch of my beloved ritual of getting dressed up to go dancing; I’d “femme out” in clingy club clothes, made up and bejewelled.

Since becoming ill, *that entire experience remains inaccessible to me.* (...) In fact, because of environmental barriers, I cannot attend any “normal” events, be they meetings, political actions, or parties. *I realized that most of my femme identity was bound up in those narrow social contexts - getting dressed up, going out, being among other queer women - and in the “props” of those contexts.* Now that I could no longer enter those surroundings or wear the clothing, makeup, and accessories that went with them, was I still femme? Where is the meaning in being femme if I am absent from the queer women’s community? My hair tangled, my body limp and sore, my skin splotchy, I wondered if I would ever look good again. Was there any point in being femme if I were unattractive and inert?

Interestingly, through describing how she ‘had never given much thought to what exactly made me femme’ till becoming ill, losing the ‘markers of femme identity’ and thereby being forced to reflect on the changes that she had to make to her femme identity due to her illness, Wachslar hints towards how femme (despite its claims of being a highly self-conscious, reflexive, diverse and inclusive identity) can remain relatively unreflexive in terms of what abled bodied and minded features lie at the centre of certain typical constructions of femme identity and community. Wachslar furthermore highlights how on becoming ill ‘the entire experience’ of femme - how she had previously known it and how it is frequently represented in texts by femmes - as well as her ‘role’ as a femme, became ‘inaccessible’ and ‘buried.’ Wachslar communicates her subtle disidentificatory critique of femme from her disabled and often excluded femme standpoint through describing her loss of ways of being, experiencing and embodying queer femininity and the typical signals for being visible and recognisable as queerly feminine and therefore part of a queer femme community. She also articulates her disidentificatory critique through describing her loss of typical ways of socialising and connecting within queer and femme communities, which are experiences and contexts that are rendered explicit as being ‘bound up’ in ‘narrow social contexts’ that are not accessible to all. Indeed, I would argue that the fact that Wachslar has to adapt her femme identity in the first place, speaks volumes of the silent ableist centre that circulates in queer and queer feminine cultures. As well as illustrating how difficult - yet eventually empowering - she found the process of adapting her power femme identity in context of her emerging multiple illnesses,

Wachsler (2009, pp.43-44) also speaks powerfully of PWD (People with Disabilities) as ‘a severely hidden class’ whose marginalisation and ‘invisibility takes a literal form’ in context of PWDs who are ‘locked in institutions (mental hospitals, nursing homes, residential schools), stuck at home (because areas of congress aren’t accessible), or stuck in the homes of caregivers (who may be abusive or neglectful). Other PWDs exist as virtual prisoners either because the outside world is not environmentally, physically, attitudinally, or communicatively accessible or because they’re anchored to home by pain or fatigue.’ Furthermore, Wachsler (2009, p.15) highlights the double invisibility of disabled femmes and the detrimental effects this can have on their identities, connections to queer and femme communities and, of course, their health as a form of “cultural neglect.” ‘I believe the multiple layers of hiddenness disabled femmes suffer – whether the paradoxical hiddenness of stares or condescension or the literal hiddenness of physical or communication isolation - are a form of cultural neglect. In essence, the world is our invalidating environment.’ In light of this detrimental community isolation, which harms both disabled femmes themselves and our own queer and queer feminine communities as we need their vital presence and perspectives for the wider queer and femme movement which strives to stand for social justice for *all* femmes and queers, I suggest that it should be queers and femmes themselves – particularly able bodied allies - who should stand at the forefront of fighting against the multiple marginalisation of disabled femmes and for disabled femme access and inclusion in our queer (*feminine*) communities, theories and culture building projects. Arguably, this double marginalisation makes sense of why there are so few disabled femme voices to draw on for insights into their experiences and for analysis, as Wachsler (2009, p.44, emphasis in original) highlights the double marginalisation and “hiddenness” of disabled femmes: ‘Disabled femmes experience exponential invisibility due to the synergy of combined identities. Thus, the fascinating topic of femme disability remains buried — *due to the factors that cause our hiddenness, as well as to the hiddenness itself*. Likewise, instead of the respect and understanding disabled femmes might receive as a result of such interest, we have been shut down, shut up, and shut away.’ Wachsler (2009, p.45) draws on the ableist, trans* and femmephobic censorship and exclusion of Peggy Munson¹⁰ by Lambda Literary Award in April 2007 to illustrate ‘the insurmountable barriers’ faced by queer writers and ‘the hiddenness of disabled femmes’ which I hope this section and the section in Chapter 4 on disabilities

¹⁰ For more information see: Wachsler (2009) pp. 44-45 and Munson (2009) pp.29-30.

goes some way towards helping to fight against disabled femme marginalisation and to flesh out knowledge and awareness around this intersection. However, I acknowledge that this is just the beginning of the work that needs to be done on the intersection between queer femininities and disabilities.

When it comes to looking at queer feminine disidentificatory anger from a disabled femme perspective, Peggy Munson, herself, presents us with potentially interesting perspectives and reflections on exclusions from *within* queer and queer feminine identities and subcultures. Indeed, in Munson's essay the anger that such excluded subjects feel and how this anger informs their disidentificatory queer fem(me)inine orientations becomes far more explicit and evident than in the previously discussed essay by Sharon Wachslar. As a disabled femme diagnosed with MCS and CFIDS Munson (2009, pp.28-29) describes her existence as a 'fringe outlaw' who is 'homebound and bedbound and often fighting for survival' and how this effects her disidentificatory orientation towards queer femininities as follows:

My requirements for socializing are more extreme than that of any other woman's. My exile has been political, economic, and personal, at times a widespread commercial stoning. Pushed to the margins of chemical culture, I live in an invisible bubble that one butch lover called The Biosphere and another pet named The Compound. I am a fringe dweller staring longingly at the human carnival that taunts me on the other side of a Lethe of industrial waste. Few people ever come in. It's odd to talk about gender presentation from here. (...) I am just as femme stripped down to the organic camisole and outgassed. My relationship to femme is often one of resistance. MCS turns most people into my adversaries. A friend with MCS, who as a survivor doesn't use this word lightly, once said to me, "How do you deal with the fact that everyone has suddenly become your perpetrator?" People can cause great harm to me or kill me by making pedestrian product choices, yet they rarely stop using toxic scented products that erode my life.

Along with her extreme social isolation and exile, Munson (ibid) articulates her disidentificatory anger and orientation towards exclusionary ableist femme constructions and practises through her own 'relationship to femmes' as being 'often one of resistance' and through the positioning of typical "toxic" femme constructions, practices and communities, as potential 'adversaries' or 'perpetrator[s],' from a disabled MCS suffering femme perspective. Munson (2009, p.29) details how her 'extreme' social 'disenfranchisement,' loneliness and exclusion is supported by other people's assumptions that she is making a lifestyle "choice" rather than that she is, as Munson herself puts it, a 'prisoner' in 'chemical exile' who was once 'a vibrant part of the community.' As a result of her exclusion from certain embodied and community practices

of femme, like Sharon Wachsler, Peggy Munson (Burke, 2009, p.29) highlights how her femme (*in*)visibility is complicated and exacerbated by her disability: ‘My attempts at visibility often fall flat. Visibility is a process of call and response - and I’m often yelling into an echo chamber.’ This raises the important question of how do we tackle femme invisibility from further situated marginalised perspectives? Particularly since forms of femme invisibility – as various examples from this project including queer feminine heterosexual, rural, disabled, or femme of colour perspectives have shown - are specific to the precise intersecting positionalities inhabited, as well as the contexts in which processes of recognition take place. Indeed, femmes themselves can collude in the invisibilising and misrecognition of other, differently situated, femmes, both in everyday contexts and through modes of representation - as T.J. Bryan’s previously discussed interpersonal encounters with white femmes and Wachsler and Munson’s experiences with typical (*con*)figurations of femme embodied identities. Munson furthermore details how her exclusion is also caused and supported by others not being aware enough of how they contribute to the causes and effects of MSC or acknowledging that these everyday exclusions are even occurring and taking responsibility for contributing to these exclusions by making changes to their own daily choices, as they continue to use toxic products that exclude Munson, or acknowledging that this exclusion is even occurring. Indeed, Munson (2009, p.31) highlights how within queer culture, her disability is often seen as a ‘political choice’ rather than an oppressed positionality or an *equally* valid and important ‘proletariat’ ‘struggle’ by marginalised subjects. Her answer to *both* mainstream *and* queer ignorance, denial and is through a radical - social model of disability informed - critique of “reasonable” accommodation rhetorics. Munson highlights the relational nature of everyday experiences of disability (oppression) as entailing ‘a contact improvisation between a disabled body and an able body’ in which the ‘burden for change’ should not be put on the (oppressed) disabled subject, but on a ‘public’ and ‘collective response’ towards disabilities (Munson, 2009, pp.30-32). However, Munson does not stop there, rather she directs her righteous disidentificatory anger at disability oppression and exclusion at femme, with the aim of provoking intersectional discussions and encouraging femmes to put their fragrance free product choices where their ableist “queer lip service” to disability inclusion is by actively and reflexively working on cultivating a “bigger container” of what being femme involves, that is more inclusive of differently situated – and in this case differently abled - femmes:

Sometimes I read things written by femmes, and it's like turning on the TV and being inundated with commercials for products that could kill me. One of my MCS friends quietly pointed out that she felt traumatized by such commercials, since they advertise the weapons that had already caused her physical harm. It's not that I don't like talking about shoes, clothes, and lipstick, but most femmes I ask refuse to grant me access by choosing fragrance-free, alternative products. As a femme community, it's time for us to cultivate what Zen scholars call "a bigger container" instead of an empty polemic of inclusion. Sure, girly accoutrements are playful and fun. But giving up chemical-laden, scented products instead of defending them as a privilege of identity takes a stand against toxic polluters moving into the neighbourhoods of poor femmes, celebrates black femmes with natural hair, supports post-mastectomy femmes fighting for a future, and honours femmes who got sick working at Ground Zero. Providing wheelchair ramps, sign language interpreters, and other accommodations should also be standard outreach for any gathering. (...) When I write about what it is to be femme now, I have to explore what it is to be at war with the concept of femme as it has been socially constructed under the auspices of toxic capitalism. But I don't have the luxury of abstract theory. I can suffer permanently disabling consequences from chemical exposures.

Critically, Munson articulates her disidentificatory anger at toxic femme consumerist identity practices that form the *implicitly* exclusionary centre of femme communities, which refuse to grant disabled femmes like Munson access by actively choosing and advocating for fragrance free alternative products for manifesting their queer fem(me)inine embodied subjectivities that furthermore form the basis for a significant amount of femme community building, fem(me)inist theorising and relational connections between femmes. Indeed, Munson articulates her righteous disidentificatory anger, antagonistic positionality and disability inclusion advocating politics through the metaphor of her 'being at war with the concept of femme as it has been socially constructed under the auspices of toxic capitalism.' Moreover, Munson also articulates her righteous disidentificatory anger at the implicit ableist privilege that those femme subjects who do 'have the luxury of abstract theory' when it comes to femme subjectivities, embodiment and communities, which Munson does not possess as a disadvantaged and excluded disabled femme whose bodily materiality, disability and health issues form the concrete and inescapable foundations of her own queer eco-fem(me)insist politics, theories and everyday practices. Importantly, Munson's intersectional awareness and agenda in advocating for "a bigger container" instead of an empty polemic of inclusion' when it comes to queer feminine identities and communities, which is present in her highlighting that 'giving up chemical-laden, scented products instead of defending them as a privilege of identity' is not only an act of solidarity with disabled femmes who are suffering from MCS, but it is also a potential act of solidarity with other social disadvantaged and excluded femmes, such as 'poor femmes,' 'black

femmes with natural hair,’ ‘post-mastectomy femmes’ and ‘femme who got sick working at Ground Zero.’ Thus, whilst Munson’s queer eco-fem(me)inist agenda originates from her own personal and politicised disabled positionality, Munson admirably reaches beyond this to other positioned subjects who may be differently disadvantaged yet similarly excluded, in order to propose a way of moving femme identities and communities towards a future beyond abstract theory, polemics of inclusion and toxic capitalism, towards a more truly intersectional model of femme inclusion. Munson (2009, p.30) goes on to powerfully critique queer “diversity,” “inclusion” rhetorics as being ‘at best, half-built ramps’ and at worst ‘remarkably clueless’ by saying:

Efforts toward inclusion are, at best, half-built ramps that triage out the really sick and allow a few, not-so-sick people to the party. A few old-school dykes might have a half-assed fragrance-free event that is little more than lip service inclusion, since the participants don’t understand that fragrance-free means giving up all scented products for a period of time—not just perfume for a day. Then this good-faith effort might result in people associating “scent-free” with political correctness rather than disability access. Queer folks are remarkably clueless when it comes to disability and how it relates to inclusion rhetoric.

One example of this is Munson’s exclusion from Lambda Literary Awards, which has been previously discussed and I shall not go into further detail here. Another example provided by Munson is through her experience of dating and the barriers she encounters due to discriminatory ableist stigma and assumptions. Munson (2009, p.31) recounts her experience of dating a ‘femme-loving transguy’ who – behind her back – told her femme friend: ‘that he would never date someone as disabled as I am (which was presumptuous anyway – I did not particularly want to date him).’ Munson subsequently choose to ‘educate’ this ‘supposedly politicized dude’ by ‘angrily’ suggesting he attend a reading by Toni Amato of Sharon Wachsler and Peggy Munson’s (ibid) ‘manifesto about fragrance-free access’ through which further ableism and ‘queer lip service’ about inclusion and accessibility *within* the queer community emerges:

The event was billed as fragrance-free and disability accessible, but Sharon and I knew this was queer lip service. We had included an exercise in the manifesto that asked the audience to stand up as a group, and then mentioned scented items they might be wearing, and asked those who were not fragrance-free to sit down. By the end, two people were standing—two fragrance-free people at a fragrance-free event. After that, the transguy did write me an apology, which was big of him. Still, I don’t know why I have to go to such great lengths to educate one supposedly politicized dude.

Disidentificatory anger emerges in the choice of words regarding ‘queer lip service’ paid to disability inclusion and accessibility, as well as the repetition and emphasis of the word

“two” - in context of the “two fragrance-people at a fragrance-free event” - which illustrates the hypocrisy of this “inclusive” event. Disidentificatory anger also emerges in the sarcastic and ironic tone in the final sentences concerning the ableist – or at least disability clueless actions – of the “supposedly politicized” femme-loving transguy whom she educates. Yet, Munson (2009, p.32) also continues to direct her righteous disidentificatory anger against ableist oppressions at queer femininities from her own positionality as a disabled femme, through her critiques of, what Munson describes as, a capitalist and consumerist “narcissistic” model of femme, when she writes:

So what does this have to do with being femme? Well, femmes have the option of cultivating a narcissistic aesthetic of “impersonal glamour” or digging deeper for a gender that embraces a larger body politic and access for all. We don’t have to stop talking about lipstick and other girly products as gender insignia, but maybe it’s time to talk about where to buy sexy, natural, fragrance-free lipstick (if only for the fact that lip cancer is deadly and common, and perhaps using untested chemicals on our lips is senseless). In my experience, most conscientious people reading this essay will feel a twinge of guilt, followed by a wave of rationalization. It’s overwhelming to think about what I’m saying, that I’m talking about a rejection of all chemical artifice, a stripping away of self down to the trembling, vulnerable core. (...) So where are my ecofeminist femme sisters? Can’t we start our own makeup parties where we mix beeswax, shea butter, and sparkly mineral pigments from Bioshield Paints and *talk about a zero-harm policy of femme inclusion?*

Intersectional queer and femme liberation, solidarity and inclusion, as Munson suggests, does indeed need to begin in our own backyards through an increase in awareness, reflexivity and conversations, as well as practical changes to address these issues in the way that we represent and organise ourselves as femmes, with the aim building femme solidarity through working on not oppressing and excluding each other. In fact, Munson (2009, p.34) concludes by challenging femmes to ‘go on girls: give it up’ on toxic products and by giving various suggestions for being gendered or sexually femme without the use of toxic products as a way of queers and femmes building a truly inclusive and intersectional community, as well as intersectional solidarities between femmes across differences and similarities. Interestingly, her argument to “give it up” could be mistaken for coming close to fem(me)ininity phobic “radical” feminist perspectives and imperatives regarding how feminist liberation involves the stripping of the (female) self of, so called, “false” feminine “artifices” - which are conflated with patriarchal oppression - to its, so called, “natural” core. But this is not what is meant here. What Munson - speaking from a disabled femme perspective - means is the reconfiguration of femme identity and community practices that moves us away from an ableist and

exclusionary centre, towards a *true* – and, indeed, *truly intersectional* - queer feminine politics of inclusion and diversity. As Munson (2009, p.33) writes:

The queer community can do better than lip service around disability: without this, we lose the vulnerable somatics of queer experience. Most conversation about body marginalization and visibility does a disservice to what we put our lips around, the actual flesh of the argument (...) Inclusion can't be done with remote rhetoric but has to be this personal. It has to be riveted and riveting. It's about the people we fuck, and whom we reach with our ramps, whose grit we're willing to roll around in. The conversation about femme has to go beyond artifice to the pheromone-laced ether of the body.

Like T.J. Bryan, Munson is issuing an explicit challenge - a dare - to queer and femme individuals and our communities. Yet importantly these critiques and challenges are coming from within queer and queer feminine communities and from femme voices, themselves. It is a challenge, a dare, that this project has set out to partially tackle by bringing these issues of the rhetorics and realities of queer feminine inclusion and exclusion to the forefront through the analysis of moments of disidentificatory queer feminine orientations. However, like with any project, thought, conversation or piece of writing, this ending and these reflections really is only another beginning, leading to the unfurling of further questions yet to be answered.

vi) Conclusion

Analysing moments of righteous and situated disidentificatory femme anger articulated by queer feminine affect aliens who find themselves telling stories of internal exclusions and occupying liminal spaces of (un)belonging on the margins of queer, feminist and femme communities brings to light a host of poignant issues *within* “our” queer, feminist and femme communities that require further significant critical and political work. This chapter has brought to light some of the affective, political and theoretical tensions present within these communities by looking at instances of explicit and implicit femmephobia, racism and ableism. Through the examples of femmes of colour and disabled femmes who articulate their righteous femme anger at some of the more “toxic” aspects of femme identity constructions, practices and communities, and their relation to capitalism, ableism and racist white supremacy, from the positioned intersecting starting points of femme, eco-fem(me)inism, ‘race,’ ethnicity, disability, chronic illness and anti-capitalism, this chapter has addressed some of the underlying and uncomfortable tensions present within “our” queer, feminist and femme communities. In so doing, this

chapter – and, indeed, this thesis - has challenged liberal rhetorics circulating within queer and femme communities with the ultimate aim of pointing towards potential new directions in scholarly and activist engagement. These new directions could, for example, address problems like how queer and femme identities, practices and communities could be (re)configured and (re)imagined through the theoretical paradigm and political practice of intersectionality to make these more truly inclusive, accessible and diverse. We might wish to rethink the starting points and central, hegemonic, ways of conceptualising, representing, living and coming together as femmes, in ways that challenge various positioned and intersecting forms of oppression, including yet not limited to those of racism and ableism. Indeed, since anger, according to Audre Lorde (1984, 127), is an affect that when ‘focused with precision’ has the productive potential of becoming ‘a powerful source of energy, serving progress and change,’ the righteous expressions of situated femme anger explored in this chapter might thus serve as spotlights for exposing and as tools for eventually transforming dynamics of femmephobia, racism, ableism and other situated forms of oppressions present *both* within *and* outside of our communities. To conclude, I wish to suggest that such changes may be engendered through a combination of practices of reflexivity, learning and action that strives towards interrogating contemporary queer and femme rhetorics and realities of community dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, privilege and oppression with the ultimate aim of building intersectional queer and femme solidarities across differences. Finally, although such reflexive politics and praxis may require the killing of a certain degree of queer, feminist and femme joy (Ahmed 2010) – particularly regarding celebratory “liberal” rhetorics concerning queer and femme intersectional “success,” “diversity” and “inclusion” – these politicised practices of strong reflexivity combined with compassion are nevertheless absolutely necessary for queer, feminist and femme efforts towards political and theoretical, as well as community and individual solidarity and integrity.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This project developed a critical perspective on queer femininities from *within* through exploring the concept of queer feminine disidentificatory orientations (Ahmed 2006, Muñoz 1999), which was developed through analysing articulations by subjects occupying spaces *in-between* queer feminine identification and belonging. Through this concept of disidentificatory orientations the project discussed moments of community (*un*)belonging with a specific focus on the rhetorics and realities of inclusion and exclusion occurring within queer feminine identities, communities and representations. Thus, the project strove to answer the research question of how and why disidentificatory orientations are experienced by various differently positioned queer feminine subjects and what can queer feminine disidentificatory orientations tell us about dynamics of inclusion, exclusion and (*un*)belonging *within* queer feminine communities and representations? For this, the project developed an intersectional approach that explored queer feminine disidentificatory orientations and community (*un*)belonging through various positioned perspectives. The project illustrated the complexities, politics and cultures of femme subjectivities and the ranges of (sub)cultural capitals and related positioned privileges that one has to either be invested in, to actively invest in, or else to navigate, in order to access queer feminine identities, recognition and community belonging. Thus, the project argued for the continued necessity of engaging in positioned reflexive work on the lived experiences of minority subjects *within* our own queer, feminist and femme communities. Through productively “failing” (Halberstam 2011) to become entirely orientated, or to entirely inherit and inhabit, typical constructions of queer feminine figurations, queer feminine disidentificatory subjects articulate possibilities for vitally necessary positioned critiques of queer, feminist and femme communities by becoming neither fully aligned with, nor entirely rejecting of the internal ideologies present within this dispersed subculture and its related spaces and texts. Indeed, it is precisely through these articulations and experiences of queer feminine disidentificatory orientations, which I argue are also present in key critical texts on femme arguing for the opening up of the identity category and community of femme to include male femmes, trans* femmes or bisexual femmes.

To summarise the project findings and contributions. Chapter 1 introduced the reader to the project and the theoretical framework of disidentificatory orientations that this project deploys to analyse queer feminine community (un)belonging, as well as situating the important contribution that this project makes within the existing literature on queer fem(me)inities. It highlighted the damaging effects that community exclusion and unbelonging can cause to individuals and collectives and argued that we need to go beyond tokenistic liberal rhetorics of “inclusion” and “diversity” towards true intersectional engagement with the exclusions that our own queer, feminist and femme communities can and do create. It also argued for the usefulness of analysing queer feminine disidentificatory orientations as the first step in achieving this nuanced understanding of queer feminine identities, representations and communities, with the ultimate aim of contributing to building strong(er) queer feminine movements that operate on a “leave no femme behind policy” by acting on the insights gained through paying attention to various interlocking intersections of identity and oppression, as these occur within our own communities. Chapter 2 outlined the theoretical rationale behind and everyday practicalities of implementing collaborative intersectional queer fem(me)inist ethnographic research methods for exploring queer feminine disidentificatory orientations and community (un)belonging. Chapter 3, *Theorising Queer Femininities: Falling Under and Out of the Sign of Femme*, developed fresh critical understandings of definitions surrounding queer femininities and which positioned subjects fall under and out of these signs and their related community belonging. It began by outlining the history of the terms, identities and communities associated with queer femininities by tracing these lines of historical lineage and inheritance from the 1890s and 1920s sexological discourses, through 1950s and 60s American working-class lesbian bar cultures where butch and femme identities thrived and the expansion of these identities in the 1980s and 90s when they became more flexible and came to include bisexual, male and trans* femmes, right up to present day understandings of femme, which this chapter discussed at length and which included, amongst other things: queer femininities as subversive sexual and gendered identities that are historically rooted in butch and femme communities yet also exceed this binary, as ambiguous identities that resist definitions (to some extent). Crucially, the chapter argued that although queer femininities are often defined as a collective and a personal identity that is *seemingly* open to endless possibilities and as an umbrella term that is *intended* to be inclusive of all positioned differences, these terms and their associated communities are nevertheless limited in specifically positioned ways. Thus, the

chapter highlight some of the ways that queer feminine subjects can simultaneously fall *under* and *out* of the signs of queer femininities and their related identities, communities and experiences and argued that it is these limitations that essentially create queer feminine disidentificatory orientations that this project explores. Chapter 4: *Rethinking Queer Feminine Privilege, Positionalities and Power Through Disidentificatory Orientations*, extended this argument by illustrating why and how positionalities and privilege matter significantly in orientating queer feminine subjectivities and the degree of community belonging that they are able to access. It analysed the underexplored positionalities and identities of rural femmes, femmes with long term physical and mental health difficulties and queer heterosexual fem(me)inities to argue that queer feminine identities and communities are often obliquely urban centric and thus exclusionary of rural femmes; dependent on a recognisably queer sexuality and thus exclusionary of heterosexual femmes; and based in certain performative visual and attitudinal identity tropes that are not accessible to all femmes and which create exclusionary boundaries for femmes with mental or physical health difficulties. In so doing, this chapter also problematised distinctions that are created in femme writings and communities between what is “normative” or “subversive.” Thus, this chapter argued that certain privileged positioned subjects are able to inherit or be interpolated by queer feminine community rhetorics more easily than others, who occupy liminal spaces on the margins of queer feminine belonging and articulate their orientation towards queer femininities in disidentificatory terms. Chapter 5 on *The Art of Queer Feminine “Failure”* analysed accounts by queer fem(me)inine subjects who (productively) “fail” to inherit internal queer feminine norms along the lines of size, ‘race’ and class and, equally, those who “fail” (unproductively) to subvert norms of whiteness circulating within queer and femme communities, and articulate their queer feminine disidentificatory orientations through these discourses of queer feminine “failure.” This chapter argued that although queer fem(me)ininity is often heralded as a sanctuary for subjects who are marginalised by sizeist, white, middle-class and cisgendered feminine beauty norms, analysing articulations of queer feminine disidentificatory “failures” highlights moments where sizeist, classist and racist feminine beauty are performatively reproduced by circulating obliquely within queer, feminist and femme communities, thereby giving privileged access to these identity and community formations to some situated queer feminine subjects, whilst limiting or denying other positioned subjects. Finally, Chapter 6 on *The Politics of Queer Feminine Anger* analysed moments of situated righteous

disidentificatory femme anger at some of the more “toxic” aspects of femme identity construction, political praxis and communities, articulated by queer feminine affect aliens - including bisexual femmes, femmes of colour and differently abled femmes - who find themselves telling stories of internal exclusions, as well as femmephobic, capitalist, ableist and racist oppressions, which lead to them occupying liminal spaces of (un)belonging *within* “our” own queer, feminist and femme communities. In so doing, this chapter and this thesis as a whole, challenged liberal rhetorics circulating within queer feminine communities regarding “diversity” and “inclusion” with the ultimate aim of encouraging queers, femmes and feminists to be attentive to the ‘political grammar’ (Hemmings, 2011, p.2) of how we theorise and story queer feminine identities and communities, as well as how we practice queer feminine solidarities and build intersectional femme communities with ‘open borders’ (Dahl, 2008, p.180) and, indeed, displaced hierarchical centres. Thus, this thesis has highlighted these internal community tensions with the ultimate aim of pointing towards potentially fruitful new directions in scholarly and activist work that could further enable intersectional queer feminine theory, community and movement building across differences through a combination of collaborative reflexivity, learning and action, as well as by becoming cognisant of community “failures” and transforming this knowledge into productive tools for building inclusive communities.

Of course, like with any research project, this project encountered some significant limitations in its theoretical framework and methodological approach, which need to be acknowledged and, indeed, which highlight exciting opportunities for further research and theorising within the emerging field of critical and queer femininity studies (Dahl 2010) specifically and gender, queer, feminist and intersectional studies more broadly, as well. Firstly, in terms of methodological limitations and considerations for future research directions and practices, we have the issue of the central focus within chapters being on individuals as main units of analysis. Specifically, the limitation here lies in the danger of generalising out from the individual to make arguments or assumptions about a group who supposedly share similar characteristics or experiences, thereby potentially obscuring further diverse perspectives. Thus, what may potentially be missed by this approach is the extreme diversity and messiness that may exist within one category, which no single individual can ever represent, especially not when we are discussing the complexities of intersecting categories and the unique experiences and

insights gained through this. However, this of course does not invalidate the arguments that this project has made around the important insights gained from analysing queer feminine disidentificatory orientations and the accounts of those who find themselves occupying liminal positions within our own communities - because this would effectively reinforce the marginalisation of subjects who already experience a deep sense of community disenfranchisement, marginalisation, silencing and exclusion - but it does highlight that further research is necessary to map out further complexities and the specific situated relational dynamics in which they are intertwined. On a similar note, a further potential epistemic and methodological limitation is the precise way that this project pursued an intersectional analysis, by structuring the thesis through focusing on exploring one positionality at a time, typically within the data unit of one individual participant at a time, whilst looking across to various interlocking systems of oppression, which some extent reinforces distinct categories and static positionalities, rather than analysing and emphasising the complexities, overlaps, dissonances, resonances, temporalities and relationalities, of the precise ways that we experience our identities from one specific relational and situated moment or encounter to the next. A different approach that might generate a more dynamic, relational account, rather than one that implicitly reinforces more distinct and static categories or positions would be to change the focus from analysing one positionality at a time and focus either on a unit of analysis – like a group or individual - or better still on a complex relational situation, event or dynamic, where multiple oppressions are seemingly in unresolvable conflict with one another - in order to explore in detail the complexities of how the specific dynamics of intersecting positionalities and oppressions play out within this case study, which would pay attention to temporality, context and relationality, to see, for example, which precise dynamics propel subjects forward into the comforting arms of community belonging and which precise dynamics establish barriers, liminality and the alienating feeling of unbelonging. One could also take a thematic approach to working a intersectional analysis, for example, by focusing on concepts of complexity, overlapping dissonances and resonances, relationalities, temporalities or contexts. This brings me to a further limitation, which is the fact that the project could have more thoroughly situated its analysis of the data within specific social contexts, including national, political, temporal and geographical contexts. This is especially important because the data originates from and attempts to work across various contexts, since the interviews were based in the UK and the anthologies originate from the USA, Canada and Western Europe. Of course,

there are many differences between these contexts, politically, culturally, economically and especially in the history of LGBTQ* identities and their contemporary meanings, as well as the ways that various positionalities play out within and between these contexts. Thus, a comparative approach between these data sources, texts and contexts, may unfortunately obscure some of these very important contextual differences between the expressions of queer femininities in the UK versus elsewhere. Indeed, we may also run the risk of using certain specifically situated rhetorical or visual frameworks as our invisible and naturalised reference point for “recognising” what queer femininity “is” that may obscure or render unintelligible or unrecognisable “other” forms of queer femininity emerging “elsewhere.” As was highlighted when discussing the importance of geographical positionalities for orientating queer feminine subjects, location matters significantly for how queer femininities are produced, consumed, performed and conceptualised. Therefore, there is most certainly a need for further studies on these specific located trajectories, meaning making rituals and performative practices of selves, bodies and communities, which are produced within certain contexts and may vary so very significantly that they can challenge the very constructed yet taken for granted “nature” of what one situated group may consider to “be” queerly feminine as opposed to how another, differently situated group, might construct this. Linking in to this emphasis on situating individual identity practices within broader social contexts, a further important context that could have generated fruitful analytical insights, and which will certainly be exciting to explore in future research projects - is the context of capitalism and neoliberalism. The question of how these “diverse” and “subversive” or “resistant” identity practices and communities are situated *within* and are actively shaped by - and, indeed, to a certain degree reinforce - the broader social contexts of capitalism and neoliberalism, at the same time as they make claims to be resisting or subverting these to a certain degree. Here it would be fruitful to investigate the paradoxical rhetorics involved in queer feminine subjects claiming that their identities are agentic and liberated because they are “chosen” as a speech act that simultaneously argues against radical feminist demonization of all things feminine as a sign of female domination and collusion with the patriarchy, whilst at the same time feeding into and reiterating problematic neoliberal rhetorics - systems of thought, speech and being in the world - since, as we know, no “individual” “choice” is ever entirely agentially made in a sociohistoric, cultural, economic and political, vacuum free of larger systems of power. Thus, it would be interesting to explore how these queer feminine rhetorics, identities and community

practices may actually be a product of and actively reinforcing neoliberalism's apparent embrace of "diversity", "divergence" and "subversive identities," which are appropriated and exploited for the purpose of expanding niche markets and generating new consumer communities. We might want to begin by asking why these rhetorics are used, for what purpose, in which contexts, what are their limitations and might it be useful to theorise queer feminine identities otherwise, and if so, then how? Indeed, it would be interesting to look at how the practices and rhetorics of capitalism and neoliberalism actively shape, influence, constitute and consolidate the norms present within queer feminine identities and communities, which paradoxically claim to resist the very systems of thought and being on which they ultimately depend for their own rhetorics of resistance and subversion. This brings me to the important question of future research directions and where can we go from here, if we take both these important limitations and the significant insights gained through analysing queer feminine disidentificatory orientations as our starting point for mapping future research journeys?

Looking back at this project, analysing moments of situated queer feminine disidentificatory orientations articulated by femmes who tell stories of internal exclusions from *within* queer, feminist and femme communities, raises a host of issues that this project has explored in depth, yet which could also form the centre of further research projects on queer, feminist and femme communities, politics and identities. Firstly, there is the issue of how exactly can (and do) queers, feminists and femmes commit to fighting situated and intersecting forms of oppression when these dynamics are often present – yet not quite so often acknowledged – within our own communities. Secondly, there is the task of figuring out exactly how "we" (queers, feminists and femmes) can (re)imagine the starting points (Ahmed, 2006) and ways of conceptualising, representing, living and coming together as femmes, particularly when some of "our" current models of queer feminine identity and community making can be implicitly – if not explicitly – exclusionary to certain situated queers, feminists and femmes. Here, we need to consider how "we" tackle issues like queer femme (in)visibility from further situated marginalised perspectives. We may also wish to consider whether queer femme (in)visibility should even be prioritised as an issue for queer femmes. Perhaps there are other (minoritarian) queer femme issues that could be foregrounded. For example, like this thesis has highlighted, we may want to focus on issues of inclusion and exclusion within our own communities, by developing and practicing, what Peggy Munson (2009) calls, "zero harm

policies” for queer femme identity, politics and community making. Indeed, we may want to consider what such policies might look like or mean for various differently situated queer feminine subjects. We may also wish to consider the issue of what happens when our oppressions intersect and how we can work productively with such situated and relational complexities both within and outside of our own communities. Is it even possible to conceptualise “zero harm policies” when it comes to any cultural, community or identity formation? To this extent, “we”, as queers, feminists and femmes, may wish to consider what strategies we can deploy for raising awareness around internal dynamics of exclusion and external dynamics of oppression, as well as how such strategies may further “our” collective commitment to affirming queer feminine identities and advancing social justice on *all* situated levels through our individual and collective queer, femme and feminist identities, communities, politics, representations and everyday praxis. Thirdly, there is the task of considering what challenges “we” face along the way, as “we” strive towards building intersectional queer femme movements and communities and what transferable tools, approaches and models of best practice can “we” build through looking at these challenges with the view to overcoming them and, always, with the aim of building strong collective - *intersectional* - queer, feminist and femme communities, identities and movements.

I suggest that such vital topics - which this thesis has opened up for further exploration, through discussing queer feminine disidentificatory orientations and highlighting internal issues of marginalisation - could be explored through further ethnographic work on queer, feminist and femme communities. This work, I argue, should have as its aim not only the development of theoretical insights into the issues highlighted through analysing moments of disidentificatory orientations, but it might strive towards developing practices of strong reflexivity, that combine learning with action and an ethics of accountability, respect, care and compassion. Thus, with regards to the future directions that this project could now take. Considering that the life of this thesis began with rather broad questions concerning how queer feminine subjectivities are lived, experienced and embodied in everyday life and the processes of orientation that produce specific forms of queer femininities, I believe that further targeted interviews with members of queer feminine communities around their experiences and insights on dynamics of internal tensions and exclusions would be beneficial. Furthermore, there are other cultural sources and mediums that could be analysed, for example: blog entries,

ethnographic work at femme conferences or events, creative work by femmes e.g. poetry, targeted interviews with key actors and community organisers, as well as those occupying marginal spaces within and outside of these communities. These different mediums and sources would allow further insights, perspectives and voices to be included in our analysis. Thus, they could effectively push our thinking, organising and politics further with the ultimate aim of gathering conceptual and practical tools for building stronger intersectional allegiances across differences and tensions that may cause collective and individual fragmentation, alienation and disidentification. They may also help to prevent the silencing or marginalising of further subaltern voices, perspectives and experiences *within* our own communities, by developing *both* forums for expression *and* tools for resolving or preventing internal conflicts. In pursuing such a pathway I would be particularly interested at looking at the difficulties that are articulated concerning the actual everyday doing of “inclusion” and “intersectionality” and everyday experiences of marginalisation. By working in and through the tensions of internal disidentifications and their related affective, practical and political dimensions, I argue, that we may effectively move beyond saying “intersectionality”, “diversity” and “inclusion” and towards engaging with the fruitful mess that these terms simultaneously evoke yet at the same time cover up. Whilst such tensions have been highlighted by numerous studies (including, yet not limited to, works by: Davis 1981, Lorde 1984, hooks 1984, Anzaldúa 1989 and 1991, Frankenberg 1993, Dhairyam 1994, Goldman 1996, Kunstman and Miyake 1998, Collins 2004, Ferguson 2004, Cohen 2005, Johnson and Henderson 2005, Wachslar 1999, McRuer 2006, Hall 2011, Kafer 2011, Goldman 1996, Skeggs 1997, Cohen 2005, Taylor, 2007, 2009, 2010, Calvin 2000, Serano 2013), the specific contribution that I would hope to make through future projects and research would be the gradual collaborative construction of practical toolkits, as well as theoretical knowledge, designed to actively address problems of internal exclusions within various communities. Indeed, such a conceptually focused turn to the work that this project has performed and initiated may provoke a broader analysis - beyond queer femininities and femme communities - that looks at what rhetorics of diversity, inclusion and intersectionality exist within feminist, queer and other minority identity based activist communities, representations and movements, and which realities these rhetorics reveal or hide. In so doing, future projects could systematically investigate what defences exist against the ugly “isms” circulating within our own communities and, crucially, what strategies can be deployed to productively dismantle these, in order to nurture space for those who feel

alienated within or from “our” own communities and to prevent community, movement and identity fragmentation. Crucially, further research and activist community work could involve interrogating those complex, relational and dynamic moments when our oppressions overlap in seemingly irresolvable ways, when our intersecting positionalities are in conflict or even those sticky moments when the intersections that are evoked can themselves function as rhetorical strategies that hold the potential for cloaking nuanced realities.

Such further focused projects, reflections and community actions, which this project has initiated and discussed in detail, yet for which there is also certainly further room for discussion, may foster the creation of spaces for fruitful dialogue that strives to openly discuss those difficult tensions that are present within “our” communities rather than brushing these under the carpet or pushing voices, persons and perspectives to the margins of “our” communities all together. Indeed, such fruitful dialogue might mean a mixture of reflections on theory and practice, taking place in activist, academic and community spaces, that centralises the subaltern perspectives which would typically be marginalised, silenced or unarticulated. Furthermore, instead of just asking difficult and provocative questions or highlighting issues without offering resolutions, which may lead to fleeing to a suspicious moral highground, I would be interested in looking at the practical and discursive solutions, as well as the issues that we face when trying to implement such solutions. Thus, these kinds of reflections may lead to the development of toolkits for good, better or best community practices that may be of use not only for queer, feminist and femme subcultural spaces, but also for other community spaces and interactions including yet not limited to: conferences, research, educational or work spaces and specific relational situations between individuals or groups. Through such research we may look at the difficulties of doing diversity, inclusion and intersectionality within and across queer, feminist and femme communities and representations, as well as the annunciations of rhetorics of “success stories” and any actual realities of good practice that we can draw on for inspiration or as models. To this extent we may ask the simple question of what practices are working and which are not working or, indeed, which practices serve as tokenistic cover-ups for internal “isms” that can point towards the “goodness” of “our” research, politics and community making, without offering actual solutions. This approach would also give us an entry point into looking at how subjects are invested in certain images of themselves as “good” radical, political and community

subjects and the distinctions that are constructed by these “good” subjects and those “bad” political subjects that are always, already distanced as being someone else, somewhere, elsewhere, other than ourselves and in our own backyards. Furthermore, it could help us to look at how such dynamics displace problems, responsibility and the need to reflect, change or act, in *sometimes - yet not always* - unhelpful ways. What investments do queer, feminist and femme subjects make in being “good” or “better” radical, political and community subjects, who are supposedly distinct from other “bad” subjects who are supposedly always, already someone else who is elsewhere? In this respect, we may wish to return to looking reflexively at articulations by white queers, feminists and femmes who make claims of being, working and making communities in anti-racist fashions that are supposedly distinct from or “better than” other political subjects who are positioned as racist and analysing what investments are at play here and, indeed, what purposes and effects these investments are intended to - or actually - serve. Indeed, whilst this project has discussed how whiteness orientates queer feminine subjects and communities in some depth, there is certainly further work that can be done on this particular intersection. That said, when analysing dynamics intersectionally, we also need to consider that we are multiple, shifting, and relational subjects.¹¹ Therefore, we may wish to think beyond the potential theoretical block of binary approaches to theorising dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, at the *complexities* of *specific* situated, relational, moments that can shift, change and be multiple, revealing different “truths” depending on which angle we start from, look through and at. We may also wish to look for answers beyond positionality and intersectionality. This is not to invoke a sense that we are “post” intersectionality or positionalities. That we are somehow “over it” and that these elements do not matter. Rather by beyond I am inviting reflections on what other elements we can consider as part of our analysis and practices that may not be immediately to do with positionalities or intersectionality. A further future research direction would be to look at the spaces *between* positionalities, for example, when persons of similar positionalities are expressing differing perspectives and experiences. Additionally, future research could look between the axis of intersecting positionalities themselves to critically interrogate the potential fusions and frictions caused by those moments when we are allied or when

¹¹ I would like to acknowledge Shona Hunter’s presentation, ‘Pedagogic Affects: The Relational Politics of Loving/Hateing Enactments’, delivered at the recent *Affective Technologies Workshop*, Leeds University, May 2014, as the inspiration for these reflections on the complex, shifting, relational and multiplicit dynamics of intersecting positionalities and interpersonal relations occurring in the space between subjects.

we are in conflict. Indeed, this final pathway would be one that I would be most interested in investigating further, in order to critically consider those moments when our positioned needs, oppressions and privileges intersect and the strategies we may develop for dealing with such moments productively in ways that help us to learn from the tensions and oppressions occurring within our own communities with a view to changing these for the positive. One final crucial potential future research pathway that this project has opened up, through its analysis of queer feminine disidentificatory anger, are the negative affects present in queer feminine narratives, identities and communities. Particularly the negative affects of shame, loss, disillusionment, feelings of inadequacy or jealousy, hurt, pain, resentment, anxiety or trauma could certainly become fruitful pathways for insightful further research and analysis.

More specifically, in the future, I hope to address some of these issues by conducting a large scale, transnational, research project that uses innovative collaborative participatory action research methodologies and intersectional approaches to investigate internal dynamics of exclusions within communities of minority subjects and activist social justice movements, situated in the USA, Western Europe and Central Eastern Europe. The ultimate objective of this project would be to build both theoretical knowledge and practical toolkits that aim to have a positive impact on these communities themselves, by productively addressing divisions and promoting solidarity and cohesion across differences, and to enhance our understanding of these activist communities and social justice movements as social scientists. The project would take a three tiered approach to addressing these issues of internal community exclusions or tensions, which I envision to be divided into the following key stages.

The first stage of this research project would involve initial research on internal tensions within communities through conducting thorough literature reviews of existing academic enquiries into these issues, qualitative interviews and ethnographic research in collaboration with individuals who are affected by issues of internal community tensions and exclusions or individuals who are members of communities where they have witnessed such issues affecting other individuals (who may not be able to come forward to speak for themselves), as well as analysis of various online sources (e.g. blogs or discussion forums) and other printed publications (e.g. creative or autobiographical work). This stage of the research would focus on the key research questions of: What internal

tensions are present within different minority communities; who is excluded, how, why and how can we resolve these tensions and work in solidarity across differences?

The second stage would involve disseminating the initial research findings in relevant community spaces or conferences, in order to gather feedback and initiate discussions through which further insights and data can be generated. It would also involve engaging in further collaborative participatory action research methods; for example by running focus groups and workshops - or even longer residential events, a conference, study group or summer school - with community organisers, theorists, activists and individuals, to discuss the research findings and to *collaboratively* work on devising initial toolkits for addressing these issues. This stage of the research would focus on the key research question of: What is this data telling us about our communities and the specific problems that we need to address and what practical toolkits can we devise for addressing these problems?

The third stage would involve further participatory action research with a smaller group of dedicated academics, activists, practitioners, community organisers and individuals, who are committed to working intersectionally towards fostering community cohesion and resolving issues of internal exclusion or tensions within their communities. This focus group would work collaboratively to a) devise concrete toolkits for addressing issues of internal community tensions b) create an open access website through which these toolkits can be widely disseminated in a largely accessible manner c) write publications on specific issues arising from the research project, always keeping in mind the overarching goal of promoting community cohesion through actively addressing internal community tensions via both theoretical insights and practical strategies, wherever possible. If necessary and possible, members from this focus group may wish to work collaboratively to devise further projects and related funding bids, in order to develop any sections of the project requiring further work. This final stage of the research project would ask the key research question: What are the overall findings of this research project and what toolkits will be helpful for our communities? What further research do we need to conduct or what further action can we initiate to help to resolve internal community tensions?

Thus, in completing this research project and looking towards further openings, pathways and opportunities that may fruitfully develop the conceptual tools and insights

gained through an analysis of disidentificatory queer feminine orientations for the benefit of femme theorising, crafting and organising, I wish to simultaneously end and begin by invoking three further conceptual tools that we may take with us on our journey to inform our queer and fem(me)inist academic and community practices. These are Sara Ahmed's (2004) conceptualisation of the politically vital affect of *hope*, Angela Davis' (2013) discussion of the constant struggle that is involved in our political striving for freedom and, finally, Kimberlé Crenshaw's (2014) reflections on the continuing importance of intersectionality in context of what she termed our contemporary "age of post-everything." Indeed, I argue that in a contemporary political climate that claims to be, as Crenshaw puts it, "post-everything" and where "diversity," "equality" and "inclusion" rhetorics circulate profusely - yet frequently serve as empty vessels that mask the continued existence and deep entrenchment of structural inequalities - these concepts are absolutely crucial tools that have emerged from and informed this project on queer fem(me)inine disidentificatory orientations and community (un)belonging, and which will certainly be of use for future projects along this vein.

For Ahmed (2004, p.184) 'politics without hope is impossible, and hope without politics is a reification of possibility.' Furthermore, hope is positioned by Ahmed (2004, p.184) as crucial for political activism as an affect that centralises joy in the engagement with political work and the changes that are being initiated. Hope signals 'the idea that things can be different and that the world can take different forms' (Ahmed, 2004, p.184). Returning to the question of anger, for Ahmed (2004, p.184) 'hope is what allows us to feel that what angers us is not inevitable, even if transformation can sometimes feel impossible. Indeed, anger without hope can lead to despair or a sense of tiredness produced by the "inevitability" of the repetition of that which one is against.' In many ways, then, Ahmed's conceptualisation of hope can potentially take us beyond the impasses and limitations of the politicised affect of anger that are highlighted by Audre Lorde in 'Uses of Anger' and 'Eye to Eye' (1984). However, hope, as Ahmed (2004, p.184) suggests, cannot simply be about 'possibilities of the future implicit in the failure of repetition', rather hope must be present focuses as an affect which 'requires that we must act in the present, rather than simply wait for a future that is always before us.' In this way 'hope is intentional and directed towards the future only in relation to an object that is faced in the present' (Ahmed, 2004, p.184). Such a politicised form of hope, I suggest, may thus be conceptualised as a gradual, step by step, process of persistent

reflexive thinking and action *in the present*, which is striving not so much for an impossible utopian future or a happy ending that may fall on our distant horizon as a desired object that is always just out of sight or out of reach, but for grounded positive changes in the present now. Femmes need to draw on this concept and practice of *hope* as a vital fuel that enables us to continue our work of building queer feminine movements, theories, creative expressions, community spaces, politics and identities, despite the difficulties highlighted by expressions of queer feminine disidentificatory orientations. Particularly those subjects expressing disidentificatory orientations towards femme, queer and feminist spaces, theories and politics, need this concept and practice of hope as it may anchor us in ways that allow us to stay with those difficult and alienating moments where we feel the sharp sting of unbelonging, whilst desiring the comfort of belonging, for long enough to hopefully make a difference or a positive intervention in the practices that alienate us. Like Ahmed's (2004) concept of hope, Davis' (2013) conceptualising of *freedom as a constant struggle* is a positive future orientated concept. Through her critique of closure and her favouring of openings and continuities when it comes to our political battles, Davis' concept of freedom as a constant struggle is grounded firmly in the present and invokes a keen awareness of historical oppressions persisting in the present now and, potentially, in the future. Both concepts sound utopia, yet they are certainly not naive. The final concept that I wish to invoke is, of course, Kimberlé Crenshaw's term intersectionality. In particular I draw on Crenshaw's (2014) recent reflections on and revitalisation of the term "intersectionality" during her recent London School of Economics lecture entitled 'Justice Rising: Moving Intersectionally in the Age of Post-Everything.' Here Crenshaw critiqued what might be described as the "post-intersectional" turn in critical thinking, theorising and political organising, by arguing that we are not "post-intersectional," but that we are, in fact, "pre-intersectional." Intersectionality and the related social justices that this term stands for (particularly with regards to "race"(isms) yet also other positionalities) have yet to arrive. Thinking with a critical pessimism regarding the desired yet (un)achievable utopia of the truly "post-intersectional" moment, I would argue that intersectionality may never "arrive" as such, but might only be glimpsed in specific situational and relational practices. Going back to the discussion at hand, I would also argue that intersectionality has not truly "arrived" in queer, feminist and femme theories, politics and communities. Rather like the concepts of hope and, in particular Davis' reflections on "freedom" - which one might read as

actually meaning “the work of social justice,” the practice of intersectionality is a *constant* struggle.

Thus, I conclude by proposing the concepts of hope as a positive and generative drive, freedom as a desired state that we strive towards through the constant struggle of social justice work and the engaged practices of intersectionality, as key concepts, tools and affective states, that have emerged from and informed this project and will certainly be of use for continuing our positioned reflexive critical interrogations of the lived experiences of minority existence *within* our own queer, feminist and femme communities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Introducing the Queer Feminine Participants



Figure A.1 Ali

Ali is a 45 year old, white, Welsh, currently middle class, but formerly working class, bisexual, woman, from Swansea. Ali describes her femininity as: ‘My feminine identity is overtly subversive and I dress and behave consciously against “feminine norms.”’

Bobette is a 48 year old white British middle-class male courier company owner and fetish club promoter from London, who describes his sexuality as ‘Mainly heterosexual, though in effect chaste, and occasionally bi. Submissive and occasionally masochistic’ and his gender as a ‘transgender’ ‘girly-boy.’



Figure A.2 Bobette



Figure A.3 Donna

Donna is a 34 year old bisexual female foster carer from Newcastle who describes their gender as ‘predominantly female but flexible,’ their class as ‘part under class, part working-class and part middle class’ and their ethnicity as ‘mixed race white British.’ Donna described her feminine gender identity as ‘flexible.’

Felix is a 21 year old white British middle-class 'FAAB [Female Assigned At Birth]' who recently graduated from University, but was unemployed at the time of the interview. Felix describes their feminine gender identity as 'Genderqueer as a broad term. Slightly fluid. My base state is more gender-*less* than gender-*full*; similar to Androgyny. In order of occurrence I also have identity as femme male, boi, crossdressing male, and (rarely) butch female.' In terms of sexuality, Felix positioned themselves as 'Queer. I don't bother trying to understand it anymore. It's an essay in itself, and then like a molecule that changes simply by being observed. . I simplify it to Bi or Unlabelled for less enlightened people.'



Figure A.4 Felix



Heather is a 25 year old cisgendered, bisexual, white British middle-class disabled (chronic fatigue syndrome) female PhD student and teaching assistant. She described her gender identity as: 'I am a 'failed femme' - I dislike and therefore do not participate in most of the requirements of femininity (e.g. showing skin, showing cleavage, shaving legs and armpits), but my manner of dress (in a skirt) is feminine enough that I am not read as butch.'

Figure A.5 Heather

Hedwig is a 24 year old female, gender-queer-femme, who positions their sexuality as queer, their class as 'upper middleclass – educated at university' and their ethnicity as 'white, Swedish/Finnish.' Hedwig describes their gender-queer-femme identities as: 'It is a drag-show, and an ongoing deconstruction of whatever femme/femininity might contain.'



Figure A.6 Hedwig



Figure A.7 Hem

Hem is a 41 year old middle-class cisgendered lesbian female, who defines her ethnicity as a ‘Person of colour/Mixed race Bengali-Indian and Jewish/ British.’ Hem described her femininity as involving an energy and a sense of power, which for her is embodied by Kali and which she feels is most present when she is ‘gender free.’



Figure A.8 Jess

Jess is a 25 years old ‘historically lower-middle-class’ white female writer and editor of cult magazine, *The Antagonist*, who has lived in America, Wales and England. Jess describes her gender as ‘feminine/androgynous.’ She is married to a cisgendered man. However, she describes her sexuality as ‘Open for discussion.’

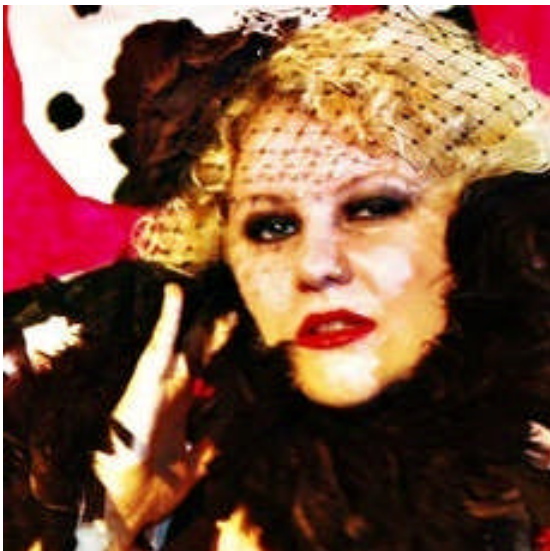


Figure A.9 Liz

Liz is a 23 year old white British, female, who describes her gender as femme, her sexuality as queer and her class status as ‘pretty much middle-middle.’ However, at the time of the interview Liz was unemployed. Liz has completed a degree in English Literature where her dissertation focused on femme. Liz is one of the key founders of the Leeds Femme Collective, established in 2012.



Figure A.10 Lisa

Lisa is a 28 year old ‘queer-femme-lesbian’ cisgendered woman from Tunbridge Wells, near London, who defines her ethnicity as ‘white-other’ with ‘some Jewish ancestry’ and her class as ‘upper-middle-class with working-class and lower-middle-class roots.’ Lisa is a PhD student, as well as founder and community organiser of ‘Lez Girls.’



Figure A.11 Sarah

Sarah is a 26 year old, working class, disabled, white British female who positions her feminine gender identity as subversive and as ‘a very feminine feminist.’ Sarah describes her sexuality as ‘Mostly straight (...) my sexuality in terms of being into BDSM is what concerns me more than who I go for (...)’



Figure A.12 Sue

Sue is a 39 year old white British working-class cisgendered female, who lives in the Welsh countryside, suffers from and persistently survives long term mental health issues, including bipolar and described her sexuality as ‘queer’ on the questionnaire and gay in the interview, despite her monogamous heterosexual marriage to a cisgendered male. Sue described her femininity and gender identity as: ‘Feminist, Goth, queer, masculine, tailored, strong, quirky, independent, complex, at times angry. I see it as an antithesis of froufrou, frills and delicacy.’



Figure A.13 Nichola

Nichola is a 24 year old white British, working class, bisexual, cisgendered female. Nichola describes her femininity as alternative. Her role as a single mother is a central influence on her alternative femininity.

Peggy is a 42 year old white British, heterosexual, cisgendered female, University Lecturer who describes her class ‘middle’ and ‘intelligentsia.’ For Peggy, ‘Femininity is a competition which, at a very early age, I chose to opt out of. Being tall and far from feminine ‘ideals’ physically meant that adopting an ‘alternative’ appearance has always been easier (for which read ‘more comfortable’). I define my own sense of the ‘feminine’ but clearly, via my appearance, mark myself out as not in the “competition.”’

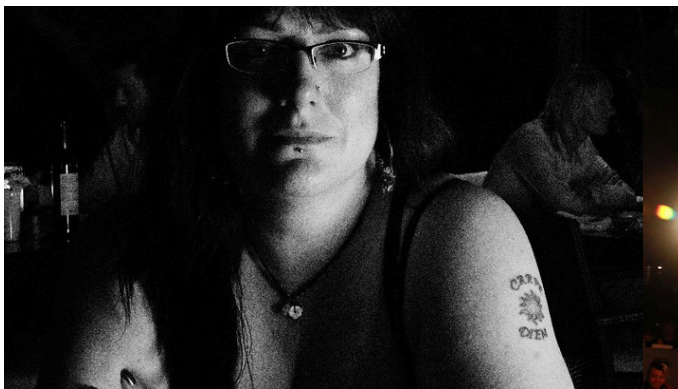


Figure A.14 Peggy



Figure A.15 Vikki (© Absolute Queer Photography)

Vikki is a 26 year old ‘(critically) white European’ and ‘(critically) middle class’ academic and femme performer from London, who completed her PhD thesis in 2012 on ‘Performing Queer Selves: Embodied Subjectivity and Affect in Queer Performance Spaces Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever World.’ which involved interviews with femme performers. Vikki describes her sexuality as ‘queer’, her sex (critically) cisgendered female and her gender identity as ‘Femme and Genderqueer.’

Appendix 2

Interested in Being Interviewed for a Research Project on Queer, Subversive and Alternative Femininities?



I am a PhD student at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies, Leeds University, who is working on a project about queer femininities.

I am looking for participants, who identify as being feminine in an alternative, subversive or queer way, to take part in interviews on the topic of feminine identities.

I would like the project to be as diverse and inclusive as possible and hope that it will be a creative, interesting and fun experience for all involved.

What is involved?

You will be asked to create between one and three collages on the topic of your feminine gender identity. You will also be asked to take a picture of yourself that represents your feminine identity and self representation. These visual materials will be discussed in a one hour interview.

Contact

If you are interested in getting involved or if you just want to know more about the project, please feel free to contact me:

alexaathelstan@hotmail.co.uk

Appendix 3: Information Sheet

Queer Femininities: Theorising Queer Feminist Modes of Feminine Embodiment and Subjectivity

Hi

You are being invited to take part in a research project on queer or alternative femininities. Before you decide if you want to take part it is important that you know why the research is being done and what is involved. Please read this information sheet carefully and take some time to decide whether you want to take part.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or if you just want some more information:

Alexa Athelstan
Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies
Leeds University

alexaathelstan@hotmail.co.uk

The project explores alternative or queer forms of femininity. It is interested in the question of what makes a style of femininity queer, alternative or subversive, how people arrive at this gender identity and how diverse alternative modes of femininity are.

You have been chosen to be 1 out of 15 people who will be interviewed for this research project. You are being asked to take part because the responses that you provided on the questionnaire were interesting and I would like to talk to you about your identity and your ideas about alternative or queer forms of femininity.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. It is entirely up to you whether you choose to take part or not. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After this, you will still be able to withdraw from the research project at any time. You do not have to give a reason, but it would be helpful if you could let me know via email.

If you choose to take part in this research project, you will be asked to create between one and three collages about your feminine gender identity. If you use any pictures of people whom you know personally in your collages, you will need to ask them for permission to use their picture on your collage. You will also be asked to take a photo of yourself that represents your alternative femininity. We will talk about your collages, photo and perspectives on femininity, in a one to two hour interview.

You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and it is entirely up to you how much information you give. Interviews will be recorded using a dictaphone and transcribed into writing. Although selected quotes may appear in any presentations or publications resulting from the research, no one outside of the research project will have access to the original recordings or transcripts.

I will provide the basic materials for creating the collages and further guidelines. But you are free to engage with the materials in any way that you want to and to communicate your feminine identity and ideas about queer femininity in as creative a way as you wish.

Interviews will take place in a quiet public space in the city where you live, or the closest nearby city, so that you do not have to travel too far. Your travel expenses to and from the interview will be paid for. And, I will be more than happy to buy you coffee or lunch whilst we chat.

The possible disadvantage of getting involved in this research project is that the activities will take some time to complete. However, the advantage of taking part is that this will hopefully be a creative, fun and interesting experience.

You will be given the choice to be anonymised or to have your name and picture included in the research. It is entirely up to you. If you want your name and picture to be included in the research, you should be aware that these may appear in presentations and publications that result from the research. In any case, your personal contact details will be kept confidential at all times.

The information that you provide may be used for presentations and publications connected to the research project or they may be used in further research projects. If you want to have your name and picture included in the research, you should be aware that these may appear in presentations and publications resulting from this research. If you want your answers to be anonymous, I will ensure that you will not be identifiable in any presentations or publications.

Thank you for reading!

I look forward to hearing from you, if you want to take part in this research project.

alexaathelstan@hotmail.co.uk

Appendix 4: Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions in as much or as little detail as you wish.

Name:

Age:

City:

Email address:

Telephone:

Occupation:

If you would like your responses to be anonymised, please provide a pseudonym:

Sex:

Gender:

Sexuality

Class

'Race' / Ethnicity / Nationality:

Can you describe your feminine identity in more detail?

Describe any other parts of your identity that influence your feminine identity:

Are you involved in any specific subcultures or are you interested in any specific literature surrounding your feminine identity?

Why do you want to be involved in this project?

Are you happy for me to contact you about the possibility of being interviewed for this project? Yes No

Thank you!

Please email the completed questionnaire to:

alexaathelstan@hotmail.co.uk

Appendix 5: Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Queer Power Femininities: Theorising Queer, Feminist Modes of Feminine Embodiment and Subjectivity.

Name of Researcher: Alexa Athelstan

Tick the box if you agree with the statement

1 I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet provided, dated 18th of February 2011, explaining the above research project and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about this project.

2 I understand that my participation in this research project is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. I understand that I do not have to answer any questions that I do not want to answer. If I do want to withdraw from the research project, I will let the research know by email: alexaathelstan@hotmail.co.uk

3 Please tick the box next to the statements that you agree with:

I agree for my name and picture to be included in the research, and for myself to be rendered identifiable within the research project, as well as any publications or presentations resulting from the research project.

I do not agree for my name or picture, to be included in the research. I want to be anonymised and for my responses to be kept confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified in any reports that result from the research.

I have gained verbal consent from anyone, whose pictures are not already in the public domain, for me to use these pictures in my collages.

- 4 I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research and for this data to appear in any publications and presentations resulting from this research.
- 5 I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the principal investigator should my contact details change.
- 5 I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the principal investigator should my contact details change.

Name of participant Date Signature
(To be signed and dated in presence of the participant)

Lead researcher Date Signature
(To be signed and dated in presence of the participant)

Appendix 6: Guidelines for Making Visual Materials

Hi

Here are some guidelines for making your collage and the photograph for this project. I hope these are helpful. If you do have any more questions please feel free to contact me:

alexaathelstan@hotmail.co.uk

This information pack contains basic materials for making the collages including: A3 paper in the colours you chose and glue. For the photograph of yourself, you will need your own camera or to borrow one. If you can't get hold of a camera, just let me know before the interview and we can take a picture on the day of the interview.

There is no right or wrong way to make the collage or your photograph. Just do what feels right for you and works best for representing your feminine identity and ideas about queer, alternative and subversive femininities.

Your Photograph

The photograph is intended as a visual representation of your style of femininity. You can use clothes, poses, objects and settings to represent your style of femininity. Feel free to get creative and have fun with the photo shoot and represent your queer, alternative or subversive style of femininity in a way that works best for you.

You will need to make **one** photograph, so that we can talk about this in the interview. But, if you feel that your feminine or gender identity is plural and you need to take more than one photograph to represent this, then feel free to do so.

Please bring a copy of the photograph to the interview. It would be great if you could also send a copy of the photograph to me by email: alexaathelstan@hotmail.co.uk

Your Collage

You will need to make **one** collage that we can talk about in the interview, but you can make up to three, if you have time and feel like doing this. The collage that you create

will also act as a visual representation of your feminine identity and your ideas about queer, alternative and subversive femininity.

You can use pictures, symbols, words, quotes from songs, films or books, fabrics, textures, colours, scents or anything else that you can think of to represent your feminine identity and perspectives about queer, alternative and subversive femininity, for creating your collage. Please use the following questions to guide the creation of your collage:

- What makes your femininity queer, alternative or subversive?
- What does queer, alternative and subversive femininity mean to you?
- How did you come to this identity?
- How do you create this identity in everyday life?
- What symbolises your identity?
- What do you feel drawn to?
- What do you not feel drawn to?
- What objects do you use to create your femininity?
- What styles of dressing do you like?
- Who are your heroines?
- Who do you identify with?
- Who don't you identify with?
- Who do you desire?
- What else is important to your feminine identity and ideas about queer, alternative or subversive femininity?

You can focus on as many or as few of these questions as you like. There is obviously no right or wrong answer. The questions are just intended to guide you. The important thing is that the collage represents your identity and the way that you think about queer, alternative or subversive femininities as fully as possible.

Please bring your collage to the interview. We will use the collage and the photograph to talk about your identity and ideas about queer, alternative and subversive femininities. I will take the visual materials with me after the interview. But, I can send you a copy of them by email, if you like.

I'm really looking forward to meeting you for the interview and hope that you enjoy making the visual materials!

Have fun!

Appendix 7: Interview Schedule

1. Describe your queer feminine identity.
2. What makes your femininity queer, subversive or alternative? What makes your femininity, femme? Is your femininity different from other types of femininity? How?
3. How did you come to this identity? Was there a certain point in time or a particular event, or person or book that led you to identify in this way, or is this something that has developed over time, or what inspired, led or influenced you to identify as this?
4. How do you embody this identity in your everyday life? Are there particular styles of dressing that you feel drawn to or people who inspire you? What do you like? What don't you like?
 - Further questions specifically tailored to individual participants and emerging from their questionnaires. These always included reflections on how positionalities intersect with, influence and impact on their femininities.

Appendix 8: Malik and Whitall's (2002) "Fat is a Femme-inine Issue"



I SEE A DEEPLY CUT SPLIT ALONG GENDER LINES.



GO THROUGH YOUR HIGH-FEMME SOCIAL ROLODEX.

WHO ARE THEY?

PROBABLY TALL, SKINNY, WITH SOME TATTOOS AND SNAP TO HER STRUT

SHE WANTED TO FUCK ME WHEN I WEIGHED 100 LBS. SHE WAS QUICK TO THE DRAW TO BUY DRINKS AND GRIND.

ITS FUNNY HOW SHE WANTED ME WHEN I COULD BARELY WALK. NOW SHE

DOSEN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE ME.



HERE WE GO AGAIN...



HEY THERE LITTLELADY

DEEP INTO THE BOTTOM OF MY DRINK, MY HEART SINKS I'M SO TIRED, RE-WIRED HOW BORING IT IS TO SEE SEXISM DRIP FROM YOUR FAKE MUSTACHE. GIVE ALL THE FEMMES AROUND YOU EXTRA MUSCLES, EXTRA CLEAVE, DO YOU STILL BELIEVE, THEY ARE THE ULTIMATE WOMAN - DO YOU WANT THEM TO HOLD YOU DOWN SLICELY?

AND MY FEMININE MEN, MY DRAG QUEEN SISTERS, GETTING BLISTERS ON THEIR HEARTS FROM THE MASCULINE STRAIGHT-ACTING BUFF FAGS WHO SCORN THEM.



FEMININE IS THE LAST QUEER FRONTIER.



So THIS IS MY BRAVADO, MY PIERCING FUCK YOU BUT WILL I SUCKIN MY STOMACH WALKING OFF STAGE?

WATCH ME.