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Femmephobia: The Role of Anti-Femininity and Gender Policing in LGBTQ+ People's Experiences of Discrimination

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Abstract

Since the 1970s social science researchers have documented the cultural devaluation of femininity and its impact on experiences of discrimination among sexual and gender minorities. Yet, despite the continued and accumulating evidence demonstrating the role of anti-femininity (or femmephobia) in these experiences, little research has specifically examined femininity as an intersecting component of discrimination. Using in-depth interviews with sexual and gender minorities ($N = 38$), the current study explores the intersecting role of femmephobia in experiences of discrimination. Under the global theme of "femininity as target," 5 key subthemes were identified: femininity and passing, regulating sexualities, masculine right of access, biological determinism, and the feminine joke. Participants illuminated femmephobia as a regulatory power within LGBTQ+ communities and society at large, as well as how femininity itself operates as a target in their experiences of gender policing and discrimination. By turning attention toward femininity, the current paper provides a clearer understanding of what may possibly lay at the heart of many social issues surrounding discrimination and violence. These findings have implications for the study of social inequalities, as well as strategies for remedying the pervasive devaluation of femininity.

As social equality takes a step forward, it seemingly takes two steps backward. Recent years have witnessed momentum in LGBTQ+ legal rights; while, at the same time a serial killer targeted Toronto's gay village (Hunter 2019) and the Pulse nightclub was hit with one of America's largest massacres since Wounded Knee (Segarra 2017). Concurrently, the LGBTQ+ community's own slogan "love is love" (Lu 2016) is undermined by Grindr (a geosocial dating app geared toward queer men) profiles specifying "no fats, no fags, no femmes" (Miller and Behm-Morawitz 2016). Meanwhile, positive representations of trans women have begun to surface in television shows such as Orange is the New Black (https://www.netflix.

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com/title/70242311), yet the rates at which trans women are murdered remain ever-rising (Human Rights Campaign Foundation 2017), and bathroom bill propaganda continues to caution the public that inclusion comes at their own personal risk. All the while, the 58th U.S. presidential election witnessed the most qualified candidate to ever run for presidency losing against the most under-qualified (Blair 2017). A year later, a man purposefully drove his white van into pedestrians on a crowded street in Toronto, reputedly citing an "incel rebellion" and his rage toward the women who have sexually rejected him as motive (Mezzofiore 2018). Amidst these tensions, individuals around the world, across identities, are screaming "me too" in solidarity and in hope of bringing to bare the alarming prevalence and normalization of sexual violence (Wexler et al. 2018). Call it homophobia, misogyny, transphobia, sexism, or rape culture but, perhaps, they are one in the same. The tensions of our time seem to be rising but are we continuing to overlook the pink elephant in the room?

Perhaps our attention is best cast toward an underlying component across these issues: femininity, feminization, and anti-femininity. For decades sociologists, philosophers, feminist

theorists, linguists, and psychologists have documented the devaluation of femininity (Hoskin 2017a; Oliver 1994). Even in the early days of psychotherapy, the fear of the feminine—femininity's characteristic lack (i.e., castration and penis envy) and subsequent inferiority—was a pressing topic of interest (Kierski and Blazina 2009). Oftentimes, particularly among second-wave feminists, this societal devaluation of femininity was wrongly interpreted as femininity itself being the source of oppression (Hoskin 2017b) —otherwise known as the scapegoating of femininity (Serano 2007). The *scapegoating of femininity* refers to the tendency to place blame on femininity itself for patriarchal oppression rather than what femininity has come to symbolize under the discursive power of patriarchy. The failure to examine the multidimensionality of femininity has resulted in an oversight in the theorization of social inequalities (Serano 2007; Hoskin 2013).

Femininities and Gender Theory

According to gender hegemony, the relationship between femininity and masculinity is characterized by complementarity, as well as the hierarchical position of masculinity over femininity (Schippers 2007). Because femininity is subordinated in society, Connell (1987) argues that a hegemonic femininity does not—or cannot—exist. Instead, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 848) use the term "emphasized femininity" to describe femininity that is defined by its compliance with subordination and accommodation of male desires, which they consider central to men's dominance over women (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Schippers (2007) disagrees with Connell (1987), arguing instead that hegemonic femininity does exist, but that it is not an equivalent structure to hegemonic masculinity. For example, hegemonic femininity does not wield an authoritative power but, rather, regulates power relations among women (Schippers 2007).

Femme scholars are also critical of describing emphasized femininity as necessarily performed for a masculine gaze (Hoskin 2017a). For example, many femmes perform a hyper or emphasized femininity, yet this expression is neither compliant nor done for a masculine gaze (Brushwood Rose and Camilleri 2002; Hoskin and Hirschfeld 2018; Volcano and Dahl 2008). Whereas the term femme has historically referred to feminine lesbians who are attracted to or in relationships with butch women (Kennedy and Davis 1993; Levitt et al. 2003), femme has since come to reflect diverse identities (Blair and Hoskin 2016) and encompass a variety of meanings (Coyote and Sharman 2011). Taking femme politics and embodiment into consideration, Hoskin (2017a, p. 99) describes "patriarchal femininity" in similar ways as Connell's emphasized femininity, but teases apart dimensions of sexuality while remaining cognizant of agential feminine expressions.

Patriarchal femininity refers to normative feminine ideals as they cut across dimensions of sex, gender, race, ability, and class. The term patriarchal femininity encompasses concepts such as normative or hegemonic femininity, but specifically refers to the regulatory power and gender policing used to maintain normative femininity (Hoskin 2017a, 2018). In contrast to patriarchal femininity, contemporary femme scholars use femme to describe femininity that veers from any one of patriarchal ideals, whether it be normative Whiteness, cisnormativity, heteronormativity, able-bodiedness, the cult of thinness or sexual appetite (Hoskin 2017a; Blair and Hoskin 2015). As a femininity that does not "articulate a complementary relation of dominance and subordination between women and men" (Schippers 2007, p. 98), femme could be equally described as a form of feminine resistance marked by non-compliance (Connell 1987).

Femininity that strays in one or more ways from the confines of patriarchal femininity, or does not perform in complementary ways, is regulated by femmephobia. *Femmephobia* refers to the systematic devaluation of femininity as well as the regulation of patriarchal femininity. Femmephobia operates by policing feminine transgressions as they relate to race, class, sexuality, ability, and so on. For example, patriarchal femininity requires adherence to particular norms, such as White heterosexual able-bodied individuals who are assigned female at birth. In other words, femmephobia is composed of containment strategies that function to maintain the proper boundaries of patriarchal femininity and, in turn, gender norms. Thus, femmephobia not only maintains femininity's subordinated status, but is also a regulatory power used in the maintenance of gender hegemony (Hoskin 2018).

Contemporary femme scholars use femme in similar ways to queer, ranging from an identity to a theoretical framework (Hoskin 2017a; Blair and Hoskin 2015). This theoretical framework is devised by centering femme identities; what Schippers (2007, p. 95) might describe as "pariah femininity." *Pariah femininity* refers to a set of characteristics that are perceptibly subordinate to hegemonic femininity because they deviate from normative rule and contaminate the relationship between masculinity and femininity (i.e., complementarity and distinctiveness) (Schippers 2007). Put succinctly, pariah femininities are characteristics that are simultaneously stigmatized and feminized when embodied by women. Although similar to pariah femininities, femme refers to deviations from the rules of patriarchal femininity (Hoskin 2017a). Moreover, although the concept of hegemonic femininity is akin to patriarchal femininity, where they differ is that patriarchal femininity regulates relations across intersecting identities via femmephobia.

Theories of Discrimination and Inequality

Gender policing refers to the regulation and enforcement of gender norms that target an individual who is perceived as

transgressing normative rules or the heterosexual matrix. The heterosexual matrix refers to the ways in which gender is dichotomized and maps out corresponding qualities, characteristics, embodiments, and desires (Butler 1990). Typically, normative gender rules are governed by the gender binary, and gender policing is often discussed in relation to cross-gender transgressions—for example, an individual assigned female at birth who is masculine or another assigned male who is feminine. Thus, gender policing stigmatizes expressions that are unsanctioned, which in turn upholds the gender binary. But gender hegemony is not simply dichotomous and complementary (i.e., a binary); it is also characterized by ascendency of masculinity over femininity (Schippers 2007). In other words, gender policing maintains both binary gender division as well as the subordinated status of femininity. Although the directionality of gender policing that maintains masculine ascendency is given far less attention, an overview of gender-based discrimination demonstrates how it is specifically the feminine side of the binary that receives the brunt of gender policing.

Recent years have witnessed a proliferation of terms to describe discrimination rooted in femininity. To name a few, terms such as anti-femininity (Eguchi 2011; Kilianski 2003; Miller 2015), trans-misogyny (Serano 2007, 2013), effemimania (Serano 2007), femi-negativity (Bishop et al. 2014), benevolent sexism (Glick and Fiske 1996), sissyphobia (Eguchi 2011), anti-effeminacy (Sanchez and Vilain 2012), femiphobia (Bailey 1996), slut-shaming/bashing (Tanenbaum 2015), and misogynoir (Bailey 2014) target specific social groups (e.g., trans women, gay men, Women of Color), and share the overarching theme of feminine devaluation.

These concepts are propped-up by over 30 years of psychological research documenting how feminine gender transgressions (i.e., deviating from patriarchal norms of femininity) are policed more severely (Grossman et al. 2006; Kilianski 2003;) and contribute to greater experiences of discrimination, violence, and mental health disparities (Aggarwal and Gerrets 2014; Fagot 1977; Harry 1983; Taywaditep 2001). Within LGBTQ+ communities, feminine devaluation can be evidenced within gay culture (Miller 2015; Taywaditep 2001), lesbian communities (Blair and Hoskin 2015, 2016), and trans people's experiences (Blair and Hoskin 2018). Despite the accumulating evidence to warrant the deliberate consideration of femininity, there has been a continued neglect of femininity as an important intersectional axis. However, the recent addition of femmephobia to the literature brings together the various mechanisms of feminine devaluation to propose an overarching system of feminine-based oppression (Blair and Hoskin 2016; Hoskin 2017a).

In particular, this growing body of research highlights the need to incorporate femmephobia within intersectional analyses. The term intersectionality originated from critical race theory and Black Studies, and it was intended to critique single-axis frameworks (Combahee River Collective 1983;

Crenshaw 1989). For example, intersectional analysis demonstrated how sexism cannot be examined in isolation, but must also include how sexism is influenced by racism. Now championed as one of the major contributions of feminist studies, intersectional analysis has grown into a multifaceted analytical approach that considers how various axes of privilege and oppression inform lived-experiences (Carbado et al. 2013; McCall 2005). Consequently, by offering a more complete perspective of social inequality, intersectional analysis also makes new solutions imaginable.

The Present Study

Considering how the embodiment of masculinity has widespread cultural and social effects (Connell 1987; Schippers 2007), what then does it mean to occupy the feminine—to be *perceived* as occupying the feminine or, more specifically, pariah femininity and femme? Thus, a primary focus of the current paper is to explore the characteristics and practices defined as feminine that are stigmatized across identities and regulated by femmephobia. Additionally, given the accumulating evidence to support the presence of femmephobia, in the current paper I sought to explore the complexities of feminine devaluation as it manifests across sexual and gender minorities' experiences of discrimination. Therefore, central goals of my paper are to illuminate how instances of femmephobia connect across identity and to better understand the use of femmephobia as a regulatory power.

Method

Design and Participants

I used a semi-structured interview design to examine LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) individuals' experiences of gender expression and discrimination. Interviews were conducted by the author, who identifies as a queer, crip (e.g., person with a disability), femme of Jewish descent. The Queen's University General Research Ethics Board approved all procedures and materials for the study. Identification as a sexual or gender minority, internet access, and fluency in English were requirements of participation.

Participants who had previously completed an online survey hosted on Survey Gizmo were invited to complete an interview study. Convenience sampling and snowball methods (Braun and Clarke 2013) were used to recruit participants to an online survey about gender expression and experiences of discrimination. Additionally, participants were recruited through online advertisements, email listservs, and on-campus announcements (recruitment materials available on the Open Science Framework). Interested participants were

directed to an information page that provided details of the study and an informed consent agreement. Consenting participants, 18 years of age or older, were forwarded to an online survey to complete a series of quantitative measures (not discussed here). Participants were asked if they wanted to participate in an in-depth interview. Those interested were later contacted by email to arrange a time for the interview.

Following 226 expressions of interest from the survey, a diversity-sampling principle (Patton 1990) was employed as a means of ensuring a breadth of experiences. Interview invitations were sent out weekly, and attempts were made to invite participants who would diversify the sample. A total of 122 respondents were invited to an interview through this process, of which 60 agreed and 38 followed through. Selection was based on availability, expression of interest, and ensuring representation of a diverse sample of sexual and gender minorities (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, and queer individuals who are both cisgender and transgender).

A total of 38 participants of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities took part in an in-depth interview related to their experiences of gender expression and discrimination. The mean age of the participants was 29.7 ($SD = 8$), ranging from 18 to 52. The majority of participants were from Canada (58%, $n = 22$) or the United States (31.5%, $n = 12$), with a minority from the United Kingdom (8%, $n = 3$), and Iceland (2.5%, $n = 1$). Participants identified as women (63%, $n = 24$, including 6 transgender women, 1 intersex woman, 17 cisgender women), men (24%, $n = 9$, including 2 transgender men, 1 crossdresser, 6 cisgender men), or non-binary or gender queer (13%, $n = 5$, including 1 Two-Spirit person). A majority identified as queer (50%, $n = 19$, including pansexual and sexually fluid), whereas others identified as lesbian (18.4%, $n = 7$), gay (10.5%, $n = 4$), bisexual (13%, $n = 5$) or asexual (5%, $n = 2$), with one participant identifying as straight (2.5%). Participants identified as White (82%, $n = 31$), mixed-race (11%, $n = 4$) or American Indian/Alaska Native (5%, $n = 2$); one participant declined to respond. On average, participants had 17 years of formal education ($SD = 4$, range = 5–25), with 43% ($n = 16$) falling below $50,000 in household income. The sample was also diverse in able-bodiedness. Although the question of able-bodied status was not specifically posed at any point during the study, 5 participants self-disclosed their disability during the interview.

Procedure

Interviews were conducted through Userlike, a text-based encrypted chat software program. After scheduling the interview, participants logged onto Userlike where the author facilitated the interview. The central question to the semi-structured interview was: "How does your gender expression impact experiences of discrimination and oppression?" In addition, the interview was guided by a set of 12 open-ended questions, which were used to focus the central question. (For the full interview guide, see the online supplement).

The interviews ranged from 2 to 3 h in length and observed two credibility checks to ensure the strength and credibility of the data. First, at the end of the interview, participants were asked if there was anything else they wished to discuss or revisit. Second, upon completion of the interview, participants were given the option of downloading the transcript of the interview and elaborating/clarifying any points over the coming weeks. These credibility checks enabled participants to "consider their interviews and to provide information to the researchers that may have otherwise been omitted" (Levitt et al. 2018, p. 371). This method of inquiry aligns with feminist-informed research (DeVault and Gross 2006; Hesse-Biber 2007). It is also useful as a method of culturally safe interviewing for sexual and gender minorities because it enables participants to have greater autonomy in constructing their self-actualized identities, particularly for those whose voice or visual appearance may undermine their authentic selves (Wilson and Neville 2009). Saturation was reached after 36 interviews. This was indicated by new themes or categories no longer developing from the interviews, which suggests a comprehensive and robust dataset (Glaser and Strauss 1999).

Analysis

Thematic analysis was used, which looks through the data set to find repeated patterns of meaning and helps systematize large amounts of textual data. Additionally, I used a modified approach to thematic networks to examine the relationships between themes. The thematic analysis was conducted over six phases: (a) familiarization with the data, (b) generation of initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report (Braun and Clarke 2006). I used two theoretical frameworks to identify key concepts as coding categories in my analysis of the data: gender theory or gender hegemony and femme theory. Gender hegemony theorizes gender relations as operating through the interconnected subordination of femininity that simultaneously upholds hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987). In particular, my analysis was informed by Schippers (2007), who offers a reworking of Connell's (1987) gender hegemony in ways that do not tether gender to sex and that situates femininity within gender hegemony. In addition, I used femme theory as a theoretical framework, which places feminine intersections as central to understanding the ebb and flow of power, particularly in relation to social inequalities (Blair and Hoskin 2016; Hoskin 2017a, 2018). Dual-coding deductive-inductive thematic analysis was used (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). In

other words, themes were driven by the data and evolved through the coding process, but were also developed from theoretical interest and to answer the research question (Braun and Clarke 2006; Pope et al. 2000). This coding process allowed for theories to develop organically, while paying specific attention to those relating to femininity.

A latent level of analysis was used in order to examine underlying ideas, assumptions, and ideologies, which shape and inform the sematic content of the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). I utilized a flexible and open coding system throughout the analytical process that enabled open engagement between data and literature (Pickens and Braun 2018). Such an approach allowed for the analysis of surface sematic data content as a means of producing latent patterns and themes (Braun and Clarke 2013). After developing initial themes and obtaining theoretical saturation, I devised a coding scheme. The transcripts from the text-based interviews were transferred to the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA12 for the coding and sorting of data and to build thematic narratives.

Results

Interviews with participants of varying of sexual and gender identities (see Table 1) were used to identify one thematic network based on 795 meaning units (see Table 2). The overarching theme of femininity as target refers to how femininity, or the perception of femininity, is policed across identities and thus functions as a regulatory power. Within this overarching theme, I identified subthemes of regulating sexualities, biological determinism, masculine right of access, the feminine joke, and femininity and passing.

A resounding response from participants demonstrated how femininity operates as a target for discrimination, and how this target not only manifests differently across multifaceted sexual and gender identities, but also functions as a type of gender policing that maintains the boundaries of normative gender constructs and the heterosexual matrix more broadly. This theme operated as an organizational theme for subsequent themes, all of which illustrate the complexities of femmephobia and support my overarching finding that the perceived presence of femininity operates as a target across sexual and gender identities.

Table 1 Participants' characteristics

Pseudonym	Race/Ethnicity	Sexual orientation	Gender identity	Age
Amelia	White	Lesbian	Cis Woman	19
Alex	Mixed-race	Queer	Genderqueer	27
Becky	White	Lesbian	Cis Woman	30
Ben	Native	Gay	Trans Man	24
Carly	White	Queer	Cis Woman	22
Chelsea	White	Queer	Cis Woman	44
Dan	White	Queer	Trans Man	24
Eli[a]	Indigenous	Two-Spirit		44
Emmett	White	Gay	Cis Man	34
Eugene	White	Gay	Cis Man	25
Hannah	White	Queer	Cis Woman	30
Harriet	White	Bi	Cis Woman	22
Hugo	White	Bi	Trans Man	32
Jamie[a]	White	Pansexual	Genderqueer	30
Jeff	White	Gay	Cis Man	18
Jennifer[a]	White	Lesbian	Trans Woman	32
Jessica	Mixed-race	Lesbian	Cis woman	25
Jo	White	Queer	Genderqueer	Decline
Kristen	White	Bi	Cis Woman	30
Laura	White	Gay	Cis Woman	23
Logan	White	Straight	Trans Man	31
Mackenzie	White	Pansexual	Cis Woman	28
Max	White	Asexual	Androgyne	Decline
Natalie	White	Queer	Trans Woman	29
Pat	White	Sexually fluid	Non-binary	21
Paula	Mixed-Race	Pansexual	Cis Woman	29
Quin	White	Lesbian	Trans Woman	34
Rebecca	White	Asexual	Trans Woman	25
Richard[a]	Decline	Queer/Cross-dresser	Cis Man	52
Sarah	White	Bi	Cis Woman	31
Sash	White	Queer	Cis Woman	46
Siobhan	White	Bi	Cis Woman	38
Sophia	Mixed-race	Queer	Cis Woman	24
Tamara	White	Queer	Cis Woman	24
Tegan	White	Queer	Cis Woman	30
Ulrika[a]	White	Lesbian	Trans Woman	28
Veronica	White	Queer	Trans Woman	46
William	White	Queer	Cis Man	21

[a] Denotes participants who self-identified as having a disability

Table 2 The major theme and its subthemes, their description, and example quotes

Theme Subthemes	Description	Example quotes
Femininity as target	This is the overarching theme under which all other themes are organized. This theme illustrates how femininity, or the perception of femininity, is made target across identities and functions as a regulatory power.	"Feminine folks—whether people gendered as female, or people gendered as male but viewed as feminine anyway—are often seen as weak and in need of protection and easy to prey on […] I think femininity, in itself, is synonymous with weakness." (Max)
Regulating sexualities: Slut-shaming, Virgin-shaming, and Victim-blaming	The heterosexual matrix is regulated using femmephobia. Femmephobia regulates sexualities through coercive language and other containment strategies (e.g., slut-shaming, virgin-shaming and victim-blaming).	"There's this perception that bisexuality is an attention-getting thing for the benefit of men.. .. I think femininity plays into it because the way that we present our gender almost determines whether we're 'actually queer' or if we're just hooking up with women to titillate men, so queer women who are more feminine are seen to be the latter." (Carly)
Morphology and biological determinism	Femmephobia is a tool used in the regulation of biological determinism by maintaining femininity as female, inherently weak, and naturalizing gender roles.	"I criticize my inability to move heavier weights […] I chalk that up to estrogen. I don't look at myself without clothes on. I haven't in a long time—I see a female body." (Logan)
Masculine right of access: Bodies and spaces	Femininity is thought to be done for the purpose of attracting a masculine or male other across sexual and gender configurations. Masculinity is given symbolic and literal access to both spaces and bodies. Femininity is thought to signify masculine right of access, which undermines feminine subjectivity.	"I have a friend who is a feminine straight man, and a lot of people assume that he's gay.. .. I think it speaks to the assumption that femininity is directed toward male consumption. Because he is seen as more feminine, people assume—like they assume with me—that he is interested in getting male attention." (Harriet)
The feminine joke: Feminine trivialization	The subordinated status of femininity is maintained through trivialization as well as its use as an insult or a comedic device.	"Sometimes I worry that I'll be taken advantage of or not taken seriously as a scientist because of my feminine gender presentation." (Kristen)
Femininity and passing	Femininity interacts with issues of passing by disqualifying individuals from being accepted as their gender identity or sexual orientation, or misidentifying individuals in ways that make them target for discrimination.	"[Because of my femininity] I'm read as a cis gay man, but am not any of those [things]" (Dan)

Regulating Sexualities: Slut-Shaming, Virgin-Shaming, and Victim-Blaming

Femmephobia regulates sexualities through coercive language and other regulatory practices including slut-shaming, virgin-shaming, and victim blaming. These containment strategies (Stone and Gorga 2014) function to maintain patriarchal femininity as complementary and subservient to masculinity, which subsequently upholds gender hegemony.

Participants described a plethora of simultaneously feminizing and stigmatizing terms used against them such as slut, bitch, sissy, Sally, faggot, whore, squaw, or prude. Illustrating the use of dog or bitch as femmephobic regulatory language, Hannah recalls walking down the street with her partner and being "barked at" like dogs or bitches. Siobhan illuminates Hannah's experience, explaining that "Women are supposed to accept advances… not act independently of men. That's proper femininity. Those who do not comply and accept are bitches." In other words, lesbians are dogs or bitches because their sexuality is independent of men, which is a departure from patriarchal femininity. Thus, a woman who asserts herself or her sexuality is not masculine, rather she is a bitch: feminine, undesirable, and a contaminate to gender hegemony (Schippers 2007).

Dog and bitch have long been used as an insult, with particular reference to "someone whose behavior was improper or transgressive" (Franco 2014, p. 81). In its earliest use, bitch referred to promiscuous female sexual behavior (Hughes 2006), and has since secured the "persistent symbolic connection" that reaffirms women's inherent subordination (Franco 2014, p. 4). Modern adaptations of bitch are used to describe sexually brazen or bossy women, in addition to subordinate or submissive men who have sex with men. In each use, however, bitch serves as a form of gender policing against deviations from patriarchal feminine norms while also securing gender hegemony.

Illustrating a second prominent use of coercive language, Siobhan recounted how her ex-boyfriend would get angry and call her a slut, which she described as deeply "steeped in biphobia." Siobhan continued to describe how "when [slut] is used in a context as abusive and manipulative, as it was for me, it's intended to shame the person [… to make them] become even more submissive." Like Siobhan, many participants described being called a slut or slut-shamed. Coercive language is used to re-feminize the failed subject via the cultural use of shame, to police people back into the confines of patriarchal femininity, and to disqualify those who push

against their ascribed subordination. In other words, the feminine is to accept sexual advances, but not act independently. As prescribed by patriarchal femininity, those who do not comply are bitches, whereas those who pursue their own desires are sluts.

Sasha described patriarchal femininity as that which "serves to oppress or dominate an entire sex." It is smiling when told, being quiet, reserved, looking pretty, wearing appropriate makeup, and presenting oneself as simultaneously sexually available without being sexual (Brownmiller 1984). These characteristics all hinge on the performance being "done for the benefit of the dominant sex" (Sasha), which Connell (1987) would describe as emphasized femininity. By contrast, queer femininities (pariah or femme femininities) challenge normative femininity through their self-actualized feminine expressions and by transgressing normal coordinates of sex, gender, and sexuality (Hoskin and Hirschfeld 2018). For example, Sasha explains how "femmes transgress [patriarchal femininity] by not being straight, which is expected of feminine looking women." Queer femininities also transgress the imperative that femininity makes itself sexually available, but not sexually desirous.

To be feminine is to be a passive recipient of male pleasure (Connell 1995; Kavanaugh 2013; Yarvorsky and Sayer 2013). Thus, sexual assertiveness and desire could be classified as "practices and characteristics that are stigmatized and sanctioned when embodied by women"—or by individuals who are feminine (Schippers 2007, p. 95). For example, when embodied by a feminine subject, characteristics that are typically understood as masculine, like sexual appetite, constitute a "refusal to complement hegemonic masculinity in a relation of subordination and therefore are threatening to male dominance" (Schippers 2007, p. 95). Therefore, femmes, like sluts, are feminine folks who seek sexual pleasure for themselves in ways that are deemed culturally unacceptable. As Paula explains: "I think it's just part of that deeply ingrained idea that women shouldn't be that interested in sex and that if they are interested in it beyond pleasing a man then there's something wrong." This "something wrong" largely relates to an individual's failure to adhere to patriarchal femininity's ascribed servitude and, more specifically, the idea that femininity is to serve masculinity.

Slut-shaming is "decidedly feminine" (Schippers 2007, p. 95) and an integral component of feminine gender policing that impacted participants' experiences of discrimination within and outside of LGBTQ+ communities. Mackenzie related how, after being called a slut and a whore, she felt she had been "more discriminated [against] because of [her] sexual openness than [her] identity [as pansexual]." A number of participants spoke to the gendered dimension of slut-shaming, such that those considered masculine do not experience the same level of judgment for their sexual choices. In other words, the parameters drawn around sexuality are specific to femmes and feminine

queer women or feminine men and tend not to apply to individuals presenting as androgynous or masculine. Whereas feminine folks are sluts, those who are masculine and androgynous are considered "studs" (Sasha). Carly noted:

I know some andro people who definitely self-identify as sluts, but as far as I know, no one has a problem with the way they act sexually. The double standard seems [to privilege] people who present in a more masculine way. (Carly)

Carly continues to explain how masculinity is congruent with having multiple sexual partners, which is seen as a good thing. However, feminine folks with multiple sexual partners transgress patriarchal feminine norms, which claim feminine sexuality as masculine property.

Conversely, Laura illuminated the opposing side of the Madonna/Whore dichotomy: the experience of being a virgin. Laura describes encountering "virgin shaming way more than... homophobia." According to the Madonna/Whore dichotomy, those who are assigned female at birth (AFAB vs. AMAB) are called sluts if they are perceived to be sexual, whereas on the other hand called prudes and ridiculed if they do not make themselves sexually available (Bordo 1993). Those who are perceived as feminine must walk the fine line between slut and prude and are blamed for the outcome of their deviations (Attwood 2007).

Richard explained how "it seemed [that LGBTQ+ communities] blame homophobia on the feminine ones. They thought the feminine ones created an image problem offending the mainstream." Similar to the victim-blaming that occurs with slut-shaming and rape culture, men who are perceived as feminine are blamed for provoking homophobic discrimination. In both instances of victim-blaming, the blame lies solidly in the victim's perceived feminine transgression. For example, Dan noted:

[In school] I would be called things like faggot daily with no intervention from the administration. When I did ask for help it was often put on me to "be the better person" and to "just walk away" as if I had some control over how and why people were awful toward me. It was like the message to me was if I changed—if I stopped acting in a way that is perceived to be feminine—that that sort of stuff would stop. (Dan)

Whether expressed by someone AFAB or AMAB, the perceived failure to adhere to patriarchal feminine norms works as a justification for slut-shaming, virgin-shaming, sexual violence, and homophobic harassment, as well as both in-group and out-group discrimination. In this way, feminine gender policing functions as a regulation of sexualities across identities.

Morphology and Biological Determinism

Participants illustrated how femmephobia regulates the heterosexual matrix and gender hegemony via the perpetuation of biological determinism. Femmephobia maintains biological determinism, such that femininity is equated with female, which participants describe as being taken to indicate particular roles and abilities. As Jamie explained, although things like breasts, hormones, and secondary sex characteristics are claimed within the realm of "sex, these things are read as feminine or masculine and change how we are read when they are combined with clothing," leading to how gender is perceived.

Biological determinism, essentialism, and femmephobia overlapped in how participants experienced limitations imposed by others. For instance, as Siobhan described, there is an assumption that a perceptively feminine "curvy body" disqualifies someone from being physically strong. Similarly, Max described their gender fluidity and how, because they are physically small, they are often misgendered as the "weak fem." Dan also described how being "generally smaller than other guys" contributed to him being perceived as feminine by others. Because men and masculinity are characterized as strong, femininity is characterized as weak. This assigned weakness maintains hegemonic relations and, in particular, feminine inferiority. Thus, participants illuminated how bodily signs of femininity were taken to signal a weakness/ limitation and vice versa.

Biological determinism and essentialism played integral roles in the regulation of patriarchal femininity. To be feminine is to be female-bodied, and vice versa—while normative feminine aspirations are expected to follow. The role of biological determinism, specifically related to morphology and femininity, was particularly salient among non-binary participants' experiences of the medical industrial complex. Alex explained:

> So I have tried for a very long time to get an ablation or hysterectomy and have had several negative experiences with doctors being dismissive. [I recall] one male doctor sitting me down and telling me that as a female I will definitely and absolutely at some point want children. (Alex)

In this way, via the regulatory power of femmephobia, sex as assigned at birth and corresponding feminine gender roles posed a barrier to non-binary participants' ability to access medical needs. This barrier stems from the biological imperative of femaleness necessitating femininity, as well as patriarchal femininity's scripted childbirth and motherhood. Consequently, the feminine imperative of motherhood and childrearing disqualified those AFAB from accessing their gender-affirming medical needs.

Masculine Right of Access: Bodies and Spaces

Gender hegemony and the heterosexual matrix define femininity as signifying masculine right of access. Participants illuminated how being perceived as feminine was equated with being sexually available to men, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. This assumption had a number of consequences in participants' lives: from symbolic erasure and invisibility to sexual harassment, discrimination, and the regulation of public spaces.

For many of the women in the current sample, sexual harassment overshadowed their experiences with homophobia or transphobia. Although being invisible as transgender or a sexual minority affords feminine queer women some element of safety, it magnifies sexual harassment, cat calling, and everyday street harassment (Yarvorsky and Sayer 2013). As Veronica recalls: "I don't get nearly as much slur-worthy aggression these days. A lot of sexual harassment [though]." For others, experiences of sexual harassment were naturalized to the extent that it did not occur to them as worthy of discussion. These experiences demonstrate how the fear of attack takes a markedly feminine shape: to be feminine is to "negotiate the possibility of attack on a daily basis" (Dahl 2017, p. 42; Yarvorsky and Sayer 2013). Consequently, participants across identities who expressed or identified in some way as being feminine felt particularly vulnerable in public spaces. For example, Veronica explains how "Mr. Man owns the public domain, and when [she's] in it he gets to say what's on his mind."

Veronica's description of public space aligns with previous research chronicling the gendered dimension of space allocation. The private realm has been established as the primary location of violence against women, causing previous scholars to argue that public fear (or fear to be in public, rather) is but a tactic to produce feminine docility (Pain 1991). The division of public and private spheres is a product of the gender binary—masculinity as the public and femininity as the private (Tetreault 2001). Therefore, participants' fear while in public is not only a product of gender policing to keep femininity in the private realm (Pain 2001) but also a disciplinary tool of femmephobia that targets femininity transgressing patriarchal norms—in this particular case, the norm of remaining in the private realm.

The discrepancy between spatial locations and fear is a product of everyday (sexual) harassment in public spaces, which imposes the internalization and normalization of threat within public space (Pain 1991). These experiences of harassment evoke fear of more severe attacks through "routinely creating a state of insecurity and unease" among feminine and feminized folks (Pain 1991, p. 421). Moreover, gender norms are bound by heteronormativity and are secured through internalized and externalized means, including sexual harassment (Yavorsky and Sayer 2013). Fear is thus not only a tool of feminine gender policing, it also is used to constrict

femininity's social and physical movement by perpetuating the myth that they must be dependent on men for protection (Yavorsky and Sayer 2013).

Perhaps as a consequence of this routinization, when asked about their experiences, many femmes and feminine queer women in the current study stated that they had never experienced discrimination or oppression—that they were privileged to pass as straight or cisgender women. Yet, many of these women did not feel safe to walk alone or within public spaces and had faced sexual harassment in and outside the workplace, corrective rape, slut-shaming, sexual violence, and other forms of feminine gender policing. However, the naturalization of femmephobia allowed these experiences to remain unidentified as experiences of oppression (Serano 2007). For example, although Carly had initially stated that because of her "femme-ness" she is "almost never harassed because of her queerness," she later disclosed:

> About a year ago I was raped by a man who fairly clearly thought that because I was bisexual, I wanted to cheat on my girlfriend . . . the idea of bisexual women (especially feminine ones) as slutty definitely played into what happened. (Carly)

A number of femmes and feminine queer women did *not* identify everyday harassment, sexism, street harassment or even sexual assault as experiences of oppression or discrimination. For example, when asked about experiences of discrimination, Ulrika asked, "Does street harassment count?" Tamara also struggled to answer the question, stating: "Nothing jumps out at me. I feel like I come from a pretty darn privileged background." She then continued to recount street harassment and sexual harassment in her place of work.

Pain (1991) explains that because there is a cultural tendency to trivialize sexual harassment, those who experience it struggle to label their experiences as oppression. Similarly, Harriet initially stated that she has never "felt unsafe or treated unfairly on account of [her] sexuality." Harriet later disclosed that she had been sexually assaulted, and asked "Wait. Ah, does sexual harassment count as oppression or discrimination?" She revealed:

> I kept saying "No, I have a girlfriend," but he just said "Come on, all I need is 30 minutes and you'll realize how straight you really are." . . . I felt like I led him on. . . . He really made me feel like my outfit and my makeup was an invitation, and I kind of believed that. (Harriet)

Harriet's experience illustrates the naturalization of masculine right of access over femininity and how feminine fear is a regulatory power whose internalization is akin to the panopticon. Borrowed from observations of architectural designs of prisons in which the building itself creates the

sense of an omnipresence of the jailers, Foucault (1975) theorized that the panopticon creates an internalized surveillance resulting in the self-regulation of behavior.

The assumption that femininity is performed for men informs experiences across sexual and gender identities. Femme and feminine queer women are assumed to be straight whereas masculine women are assumed to be lesbians, regardless of their self-described sexual orientation. Conversely, feminine men are assumed to be gay, whereas masculine men are assumed to be straight. Each of these assumptions operates on the imperative that femininity is done for the purpose of attracting men. Assumptions circulating around bisexuality also draw on masculine right of access. For example, Sarah is an androgynous woman who identifies as bisexual. As she is masculine/androgynous in her appearance: "people think [she's] really a lesbian" (Sarah). Conversely, feminine bisexual women are never believed to be authentically queer and are assumed to be really straight (Huxley et al. 2013; McLean 2008). Here, two feminine tropes are in operation: that femininity is performed for men and that femininity is inherently deceptive or inauthentic (Hoskin 2017b; Serano 2007). Arguably, the assumption that femininity as a product *for* masculinity is produced through hierarchical and complementarity of gender relations (Schippers 2007). In other words, masculinity is socialized to take and femininity is consequently to be taken. Likewise, masculinity acts whereas femininity appears (Berger 1972). Thus, femininity is a mere sight to be taken in by the male gaze (Mulvey 1975).

For example, Ben explains how, in the eyes of an acquaintance, his sexual orientation disqualified him from being seen as a real man, having made himself vulnerable and therefore feminized. The acquaintance questioned how an individual could like both men and women (e.g., bisexuality). Ben then describes the woman stating that she "could never be with a man who had been with other men because whenever [she's] with a man [she] needs him to be a real man." Similarly, William explains how "there's still a large sense in the [U.S.] Midwest that gay men are feminine and not considered 'real' men." Previous research has described how gay men define themselves as "real men" in relation to a feminine other: straight acting in relation to femmes; bears in relation to twinks [attractive, boyish-looking, young gay man]; or tops in relation to bottoms (Schippers 2007). Arguably, Ben's experience can be understood through the concept of subordinate masculinities (Connell 1987). Subordinate masculinities are often conflated with femininity, are measured against a hegemonic masculine ideal, and "serve as the inferior Other" (Schippers 2007, p. 87). Their otherness ensures a system in which hegemonic masculinity is secured atop the gender hierarchy.

As scripted by patriarchal feminine norms, femininity is done to entice or attract the male gaze. This norm produces a culture in which masculinity is granted access to all that is

perceived to be feminine. Consequently, the purpose of femininity is to serve and please men. This cultural imperative was evidenced in participants' experiences, particularly of coming out and being in public spaces. For example, Hannah recalls walking down the street with her partner and a stranger yelling at them, calling them dykes and that they should "make [themselves] useful and suck his dick." Hannah continues:

> We are two women—pleasing to the eyes of men who are engulfed in the ideals of lesbians as their personal sexual pleasure. . . . They want us to know our place. On our knees, in the kitchen, serving them. Queer women like us do not serve cis men, we are useless to them. (Hannah)

The cultural imperative of masculine right of access and the idea that femininity signifies a willingness to serve men also impacted Harriet's experience. Harriet recalls her ex-partner's hesitation with her femininity: that if she "was truly gay and didn't care about getting male attention, then [she] wouldn't want to dress the way [she] did." Further, when Harriet came out, her parents were shocked because she "didn't look like a lesbian. [She] wore dresses and makeup." Her mother described Harriet's sexuality as "such a shame because [Harriet] was so pretty." To her mother, Harriet's beauty was "supposed to be directed at a male gaze and the fact that [she] wanted women meant that [her] beauty was put to waste" (Harriet). She continued to explain:

> I really think that it comes down to the idea that femininity is meant for the male gaze/male consumption. So when a woman appears so feminine, it's a social assumption that she presents herself that way to attract the attention of males. (Harriet)

Mackenzie echoes this experience, describing how outside the LGBTQ+ community she receives comments like "you're too pretty to be a lesbian," again indicating how feminine beauty is synonymous with masculine right of access. In other words, feminine beauty is reduced to a product for the purpose of male consumption.

The assumed masculine right of access gives way to a new feminine dichotomy: that femininity is consumable or disposable. Paradoxically, Veronica describes how femininity is seen as attractive while simultaneously being met with equal amounts of "disdain or hatred." She continues to express how, when walking alone in public, she does not "know whether [the men she sees] want to fuck [her] or kill [her] or both," concluding that she "think[s] this fear is common to women and femmes" (Veronica). This consumable/disposable dichotomy is echoed in Natalie's experiences as a sex worker, finding that aggression and flirtation walk a fine line. As a

feminine person, Hannah described how she is reduced to a "piece of meat. .. either fuckable or not." Similarly, Jessica recalls the polarity of being "hollered at for holding [her] girlfriend's hand in public. .. that's hot or that's disgusting." A similar discourse was also found in the LGBTQ+ community, as Carly describes how "[the lesbians she knew] nicknamed their pretty long-haired friend 'prey.'" Similar to Carly, Max describes meeting people who "simultaneously try to prey on and protect the feminine." Max's experience could be understood through the concept of benevolent sexism, which is the belief that women are to be cherished, protected, and valued (Glick and Fiske 1996). Although seemingly positive, benevolent sexism marks women and, by extension, those who are feminine as innately vulnerable and in need of protection.

Conversely, Sophia recalls her ex-partner's friend commenting about how the next time he "eats sushi," he will be sure to inform the ex that he "eats [has oral sex with] Japanese too." Thus, while patriarchal femininity is characterized as vulnerable, it is also marked by an invisible Whiteness. Consequently, the vulnerability and need of protection afforded to patriarchal femininity is not extended to Femininities of Color, whose femininity is constructed as wild, animalistic, and unrapeable (Bordo 1993). Racially minoritized femininity is compounded by exoticization and fetishization, which further props up the discourse that femininity is something to be consumed by men.

In these instances, femininity is "a product, and more masculine individuals are the consumers" (Harriet). This is also evidenced by Natalie, who explain how she is assumed to be "a sex worker by the general populace because [she is] a trans woman." In other words, because Natalie presents as feminine, her gender is interpreted as a commodity or consumable. Whereas Tegan relates this consumability or entitlement to "toxic masculine ideals that feminine bodies are theirs to own/possess/objectify," Jessica attributes male entitlement over the feminine to the historical legacy of women as property:

> [Male entitlement] comes from the long history where women were treated like property of men and even post-sexual revolution. . . . Women's bodies are constantly on display for the benefit of the beholder and these images are created with that hetero-male gaze in mind. I think that strongly contributes to some men assuming any woman, myself and my girlfriend included, is for them and their enjoyment. (Jessica)

The imperative of masculine right of access also influences the experiences of masculine-of-center women who date femmes and feminine queer women, which challenges male entitlement. Amelia describes being at bars and having strangers, most of whom were men, tell her that the "very feminine

looking girl" she was with was "too cute" for her and that her girlfriend "shouldn't be with a disgusting butch dyke." While Jessica's experiences highlight how two feminine or femme women are hot and appealing to the male gaze, Amelia demonstrates how masculine women appear to have claimed ownership over that which hegemonic masculinity has deemed its property.

The combination of hegemonic masculinity and masculine right of access over the feminine also informs heterosexual male responses to gay men. For instance, Ben describes how his straight male friend suddenly became uncomfortable with Ben's sexuality. During their annual skinny-dip ritual with his classmates, Ben's good friend suddenly became aggressive:

> When I approached him it was from the front and it was playful just like it was with everybody else. He all of a sudden got this look in his eye. Like he was scared and he kind of said "Hey, back off man." (Ben)

In this experience, Ben attributes the sudden change in his friend's disposition to feeling feminized and vulnerable as a result of being naked in the presence of a gay man and that this vulnerability functioned to emasculate his friend. His friend became aggressive because, as Ben describes, he is a man who is "attracted to men," and that makes men feel as though they are being viewed "the way that they view women, which is primarily as a sex object." His friend's alleged emasculation is a product of how femininity and feminization are understood as signaling masculine right of access and availability.

In this way, regardless of sex, if a subject is perceived as feminine or feminized, they are assumed to sexually orient toward men or be the sexual property of men: gay men are stereotyped as effeminate (Jewell and Morrison 2012, p. 359); cisgender feminine women are assumed to be heterosexual, regardless of their sexual orientation, as is the case for femme and lipstick lesbians (Blair and Hoskin 2015); transgender women are assumed to have transitioned (i.e., adopted femininity) as a means of luring men (Natalie); and both trans men and butch/androgynous women who are perceived to have feminine qualities are called faggots. This finding moves beyond previous articulations of men's entitlement to women's bodies (Pascoe 2007), suggesting that these phenomena might be more accurately described as femininity signalling masculine right of access.

The ability to be seen as one's authentic sexual identity requires compliance with a dichotomous set of rules, enforced by a hegemonic heterosexual system of meaning that upholds the notion that femininity is necessarily performed to entice a male subject—or male gaze (Mulvey 1975). Gender expressions that stray from the current structures of meaning are met with femmephobia, which retracts femininity in order to maintain femininity as a signifier of female-bodied heterosexuality over which masculine ownership lays claim. Masculinity lays claim not only over bodies, but also over spaces and geographies. For example, whereas masculinity socializes entitlement over taking up space, femininity requires permission (Alexandrowicz, 2017). Thus, masculine entitlement over space and people contributes to the hegemonic heterosexual imperative of difference between, yet complementarity of, femininity and masculinity (Schippers 2007) and is maintained by the regulatory power of femmephobia.

The Feminine Joke: Feminine Trivialization

One of the many mechanisms that maintains femininity as a signifier of subordination is naturalizing its use to insult, humiliate, or dehumanize others (Blair and Hoskin 2015; Hoskin 2017a). Participants illuminated how "the feminine joke" is a femmephobic tool used to discursively produce femininity's subordinated status. For example, Pat recounts a "stereotype [that] butch women are masculine in public, hitting on [women and taking them] home," but that it is all for show and when they "go home with someone... they start to show their true desires which is to be bottom." This on-going joke within queer women's communities ridicules butch lesbians for being "butch in the streets, femme in the sheets" (Pat). The punch line not only hinges humor on the subordinate status of femininity but also reifies femininity's association with deception, passivity, and something worthy of closeting. Femininity is the backbone or brunt of jokes and is used to invalidate or diminish a person. Arguably, the feminine joke is a product of viewing femininity as subhuman or an artifice, which gives way to its perception as being deceptive or its reduction to an object or performance (Serano 2007).

The perception of femininity as an artifice or commodity is also evidenced by drag culture, whereby drag queens are seen as the face of drag, while "drag kings aren't as nearly loved" (Amelia). The entertainment lies in the performativity and consumability of femininity, specifically the commodification of and cultural preoccupation with presumably male adaptations of femininity. Despite the commodification of male femininity, participants illuminated how it is strictly relegated to the stage, the screen, a Halloween costume or the brunt of a joke. William explains the "guy in a dress joke" as a trope commonly found in both LGBTQ+ communities and dominant culture:

> One of the common "jokes" at the pageant is for a guy to come out with bad makeup and in a dress… The "guy in a dress" joke is still a common one here. It's usually among the same groups who are uncomfortable and against transgender identities and it's an easy way for them to believe and degrade a community they dislike. We've had to struggle frequently against guys who want to wear dresses as a joke for improv skits in the theatre because, to groups that already devalue feminine

identities and mock transgender ones, there's some absurd humor in juxtaposing masculinity with the "bad" femininity of a dress. (William)

Arguably, this comedic device lends itself to the artificialization of trans-femininity. For example, Logan explains how "trans femininity is not [seen as] real. It's seen as pretend and make believe. It's just looked at as crossdressing."

Perhaps the feminine joke and its subsequent artificialization serves as a defense mechanism in appeasing the cultural fear of femininity—the stage (commodity, joke, or performance) drawing boundary distinctions of selfhood. In other words, to laugh at that which produces cultural fear and anxiety is to attempt to disarm its power. For example, although a drag queen on stage compels both "pleasure and applause, the same [drag queen] on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence" (Butler 1997, p. 410). Illustrating this point, when asked where he felt most vulnerable, Richard responded with "being around seemingly unfriendly people at night more so in dresses." Although Richard's discomfort is certainly understandable, the contrast between Richard's experience and William's "guy in a dress joke" is worth noting: How can the same combination of gender expression and sex be a comedic device in one setting and put an individual at risk in another?

Illustrating how femininity is used to ridicule, Jeff described an interaction at a party: "They just kept constantly saying that I was gay and making jokes about it, and using their tone of voice to indicate mockery of it." This sentiment was echoed by Tegan, who recounts how "the feminine is scorned, questioned, mocked, devalued in our society," both in queer spaces and by the dominant culture. Yet, whereas some participants note how popular representations of LGBTQ+ communities have come a long way and, in fact, appear to celebrate femininity, these celebrations are often reductive, performative, and homonormative representations that are palatable for a heteronormative public—presenting femininity as artifice, entertainment, and gay men as the sassy brunt of jokes.

In Emmett's experience, gay men are "ignored or sneered at because they [are] 'too femme,'" which William attributes to the wider cultural phenomenon of mocking or devaluing of femininity. At the core of these jokes, femininity remains the "object of ridicule, scorn, hatred," and an embodiment society has deemed worthy of contempt (hooks 1992, p. 146). As such, the feminine joke gives an acceptable form of public expression to cultural misogyny and greater societal disdain for femininity (hooks 1992). Similar to hooks' (1992) argument that Black male comedians strategically adopt/perform femininity to condone their contempt for women as a means of garnering male privilege, among gay men the repudiation of femininity may be an attempt to secure a seat at the table (Pascoe 2007).

Due to femininity's utility as an insult or a joke, it is trivialized within the workplace. Sasha explains how "preconceived ideas [about femininity] steps into the room right about the time [her] first heel does" because femininity signifies that someone is neither "intelligent" nor to be taken seriously. Illuminating Sasha's experience, Jamie describes how masculinity is seen as logical and scientific, whereas femininity is "mad," irrational, and emotional. These perceptions of femininity contribute to sexual harassment, targeting for homophobia violence, and the mediation of passing, but also to career advancement. For example, Jo describes how their "flamboyancy can be a barrier" to them in the workplace, particularly when trying to impart knowledge. As an androgynous woman and engineer, Sarah also finds this to be true, explaining "that if [she] dressed more feminine, [she] would be disrespected more" than she already is (Sarah).

The disqualification and trivialization of femininity within the workplace can also be evidenced within academia. Siobhan is treated differently depending on whether she is wearing conference attire, which she characterizes as being more masculine, versus her everyday feminine clothing. When in her conference attire, she is treated with more respect, "taken seriously [and treated] like an intelligent person" whereas with the latter, she is treated like a "girly girl," compliant and sweet (Siobhan).

This function of femmephobia is also echoed within the research, which illustrates how femininity impacts workplace experiences across sexual and gender identity and is compounded by racial minoritization (Eguchi 2015; Gilbert 2006). For example, feminine bodies do not conform to patriarchal notions of power and authenticity upon which respect is built (Eguchi 2015). To be masculine is to be rational (Benevedes 2015). Instead, femininity signifies an immaturity that disqualifies individuals from competency (Eguchi 2015; Forster 2017). This is particularly evident in male- and masculine-dominant fields such as the sciences where feminine appearance is often taken to interpret that an individual is not well suited for the job (Banchefsky et al. 2016; Forster 2017).

Femininity and Passing

This theme particularly highlighted the importance of incorporating femininity within intersectional analysis, such that femininity intersected with issues of passing across sexual orientation and gender identity. Participants also described how the relationship between femininity and passing contributed to feelings of inauthenticity and invisibility.

Passing typically refers to one's ability to remain unidentified as a minority, and it stems from the contested concept of racial passing (Ginsberg 1996). As such, passing involves visibility and authenticity, which not only inform in-group membership and insider/outsider social status but also

heighten out-group discrimination and exclusion. Passing is complex, and although for many it is important for survival and validation, for others it is invalidating or simply not relevant.

For trans women in the current study, passing was influenced by femininity such that participants had to negotiate dominant cultural ideals of femininity to be validated as women. In other words, to be recognized as women, trans women needed to conform to heteronormative gender rules (Yavorsky and Sayer 2013). For example, although cosmetics can help to make trans women like Quin "feel less dysphoric," to be feminine also comes with the weight of cultural meaning. Trans women illustrated how expressing femininity can be validating, but they are simultaneously policed for their femininity and also for not presenting femininely enough. For example, Quin explains how she despises that "trans women are expected to be super-femme in order to be validated. Not femme enough you're not trying hard enough, too femme you're a caricature." Natalie also speaks to the duality that trans women face and the parameters drawn around appropriate femininity. Natalie describes herself as "acceptably trans" in that she can negotiate and navigate the parameters of femininity.

For femmes and feminine queer women more broadly, invisibility and passing as either straight or cisgender was equally complex, straddling both privilege and oppression. Although passing as cisgender or straight can afford participants a certain level of safety, passing on the feminine spectrum was also met with exclusion, femmephobia, and sexual harassment. For example, Tegan reports being ignored within LGBTQ+ communities—"people refusing to talk" to her or "turn[ing] away" when she attempts to talk to them. To this end, participants like Chelsea described how passing and invisibility were exhausting and required them to "perpetually come out."

Although passing may shield sexual or gender minorities from out-group discrimination, for femmes and feminine queer women like Carly, passing as straight and their invisibility as sexual or gender minorities exposed them to homophobia, transphobia, and microaggressions to which they otherwise may not be subjected. As Natalie explains, passing does not necessarily result in the absence of discrimination. Although Natalie passes as a cisgender woman, she is also queer, which she says makes her "beholden to all the nuanced homophobia that society has to offer" (Natalie).

Invisibility also produced a type of minority stress whereby participants constantly had to question the multiple intersections of their identity in relation to the person with whom they are interacting. Sasha relates this experience to feeling like a "proverbial 'faggot in a football locker room.'" Speaking to multiple consciousnesses, Sophia recounts her thought process of "what if they're queerphobic AND a racist AND a fatphobe AND a sexist" (capitalization added for emphasis). Similarly, participants felt the pull of their intersecting

identities in how potential discrimination may manifest; the majority of these pulls tethered on their perceived femininity and were made salient by the invisibility of their minority identities. Hannah feels the pull of her intersecting identities, particularly as a product of her social world. She describes: "If I'm feminine and alone, I'm targeted as a woman. If I'm feminine and with my partner, I'm targeted as a dyke" (Hannah). Further exemplifying the contextual and gendered nature of passing, particularly as it relates to street harassment, Sarah described:

> People who know I am a cis woman think I'm a lesbian, people who can't tell what gender I am, either think I'm a [feminine] gay man or a lesbian. . . . Walking alone at night I'm afraid of being gay bashed and/or sexually assaulted. (Sarah)

Although passing "may grant reprieve from the social stigma and potential danger of ambiguous gender expression, as well as access to social and material resources granted only to particular group members, this access and these reprieves are often tenuous, context specific, and revocable" (Pfeffer 2014, p. 11). For example, although passing often afforded femmes cisgender-privilege or femme-privilege, Jessica describes how it does not "erase the sexism, misogyny, homophobia [she experiences] in the world at large." Additionally, although passing allowed femme lesbians entry into heteronormative culture, it was only insofar as they remained passive and attractive sexual objects: "We are often invisible as queers to heteronormative culture and still regarded as objects of desire by straight cis men—and beholden to the same mistreatment as other feminine women" (Natalie). Similarly, Becky explains:

> I feel accepted by mainstream culture but not included. They accept me because they perceive me as one of them, but I know I'm not one of them and often don't feel like I relate well to non-queer people. (Becky)

Perhaps as a consequence of their invisibility and experiences of exclusion, many of the femme women in the current study actively resisted and lamented their closeting. For example, Becky describes feeling proud of her queer identity, the importance of having her queer identity recognized, and wishing "people could guess it just by looking" at her. Femmes and feminine queer women expressed a yearning to be seen and recognized as LGBTQ+ community members. For many, passing as heterosexual meant the denial of an important element of their identity—the revoking of symbolic and literal space in addition to a void where they felt more masculine members were able to access support, inclusion, and gain recognition. Participants who described being made to feel inauthentic, invisible, and excluded because of their

femininity also described a need to be validated as community members. The failure to acknowledge participants' identities or to be seen as their authentic selves caused many participants to feel perpetually pushed back into the closet by both community members and dominant culture.

There was an overwhelming response from femmes and feminine queer women that their femininity disavowed their belonging in particular spaces and that their presence was "taking space away from somebody else. .. [or] infiltrating a space that wasn't [theirs] to occupy" (Tegan). As Hannah explains, if you are feminine within these spaces, people question if you "are sure you're in the right place." Whereas femmes and feminine queer women minimized their experiences of symbolic violence, erasure, and experiences of exclusion in contrast to the more tangible violence experienced by others in the community, Dan describes the exclusion and erasure of identity as nevertheless "harmful." This was the case for Harriet, who states that invisibility causes her "anxiety" and feeling as though she is "constantly being shoved back into the closet" after so ardently fighting to assert and claim her sexuality.

Harriet elaborated to explain how these experiences also contributed to social anxiety and how having to constantly out herself resulted in attempts to further isolate herself from exhausting and stressful social interactions within which she felt perpetually thrown back into the closet. Carly notes how these assumptions also impact the quality of healthcare she receives, such that the health concerns specific to queer people go unattended due to her invisibility and because doctors "don't bother to ask." These narratives illustrate how "queer visibility remains culturally synonymous with social perceptions of female masculinity and male femininity" (Pfeffer 2014, p. 33). However, it is important to distinguish that queer visibility only translates into queer social capital insofar as it is masculine.

Discussion

In response to the research question of how femmephobia connects across intersecting identities, the themes I identified in the current paper demonstrate how femmephobia regulates bodies and sexualities as exemplified by masculine right of access, biological determinism, and passing, each of which is held up by femininity's inferiority and perpetuated through ideologies such as the feminine joke. To this end, participants demonstrated how femmephobia culminates across identities, bringing to bear how the societal devaluation of femininity regulates particular bodies and manifests as a target for discrimination. Indeed, perhaps one of the most striking of these themes is how femmephobia functions as a regulatory power precisely *through* its manifestation as a target. This finding was evidenced across themes which, taken together, showcase

not only how femininity functions as a target but also how it is used as a form of unidirectional gender policing.

As I noted in my literature review, gender policing tends to focus on a cross-binary regulation of sex and gender embodiment. For instance, cross-binary gender policing is concerned with how feminine men or masculine women face gender policing for transgressing the gender binary. The finding that femininity functions as a target also introduces femmephobia as a novel form of gender policing that does not focus on cross-binary transgressions per se but, instead, considers how cultural ideologies, regulation, and policing of femininity impact people of various identities. Consequently, my paper highlights the importance of dislodging the idea that gender policing itself relies on binary transgressions to instead examine the direction of gender policing as it manifests within and across identities. For example, the themes illustrate how the norms of femininity (i.e., patriarchal femininity) map onto gender hegemony and how these collective assumptions play out in the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ participants.

A particularly compelling finding is the idea that femininity is interpreted as signalling a masculine right of access. This finding is at the core of feminine gender policing, and it ultimately contributes to gender hegemony by perpetuating femininity as being done for the consumption of men. Reducing femininity to a product for the consumption of men characterizes femininity, as well as perceptively feminine individuals, by servitude, objectification, and lacking agency. Consequently, the regulation of femininity via masculine right of access ensures that femininity and masculinity are distinct, complementary, and hierarchical.

Despite the growth of masculinities, far less attention has been paid to the investigation of femininities (Hoskin 2017a; Schippers 2007). Indeed, many sociologists highlight the need for further theory and research devoted to femininities (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Schippers 2007). In response, the current study begins to remedy this gap and illustrates the importance of examining femininities, particularly femme or pariah femininities, as a means of identifying features of gender hegemony—or even hegemonic masculinity. Although masculinity is often described as fragile by social media (Myketiak 2016), it simply does not elicit the same magnitude of gender policing or regulation that is placed on femininity. For example, psychosocial literature highlights the different consequences for gender transgressions, such that feminine individuals who were AMAB (assigned male at birth) face more bullying and exclusion and are more heavily policed than are those who were AFAB and masculine (see Hoskin 2017a, for an overview). Rather, masculinity is specifically made fragile when it is threatened by feminization (Kimmel 1997). Again, the different consequences, as well as the particular threat of feminine transgressions, highlight the importance of examining femininity (versus cross-binary gender policing) and femmephobia in particular.

Despite how societal attitudes toward femininity reduce femininity to a target, many participants in the current study viewed their own feminine expressions differently than as dictated by gender hegemony. To them, femininity is a self-expression and a source of power. It is the cultural understanding of femininity as inferior that has taken their source of power and turned it into their oppression. This juxtaposition begs the question of what lessons might be gained from researching those for whom femininity is empowering and of value, and how might we use their insight to revalue femininity more broadly?

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the current paper had a diverse sample of sexual and gender minorities, a majority of participants identified as White. Feminist scholars have written extensively on the intersections of femininity and race/ethnicity and how benchmark femininity is not only marked as heterosexual and cisgender, but also White (Sharpley-Whiting 1999; Keeling 2007). Produced within a colonial imperial context (Dyer 1997; hooks 1981), patriarchal femininity is maintained by the invisibility of Whiteness (Frankenberg 1993), compulsory heterosexuality (e.g., women as bearers of the White race), and its juxtaposition against Femininities of Color (Deliovsky 2010; LeBlanc 1999; Rich 1980). Consequently, patriarchal femininity relegates Femininities of Color to the bottom of the gender hierarchy and maintains femininity as being at the disposal and service of men (Deliovsky 2008; Hoskin 2017a). Given how race/ethnicity and racialization influence perceptions of femininity and gender more broadly, as well as the legacy of colonization on gender roles, future research should examine experiences of femmephobia among racial/ethnic minorities. Although the intersection of racialization and femmephobia is of theoretical interest, it is also a pressing social justice issue that warrants scholarly attention.

The purpose of the current study was to examine how experiences of discrimination connect through a central tenant of femmephobia as a means of gaining greater insight into the systematic devaluation and regulation of femininity. Because LGBTQ+ individuals face gender and sexual prejudice, this population was a good sample on which to begin such an exploration. Although I explore femmephobia across LGBTQ+ identities to examine their interconnectivity, each specific sex and gender configuration warrants its own individual study. By looking across the diverse identities composing the LGBTQ+ community, in the current study I was able to illuminate how femmephobic patterns connect with one another across difference. Future research should consider in-depth analysis of specific identities that fall under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. In addition, because the current study focused on sexual and gender minorities, future research

should consider how femininity functions to regulate individuals who identify as both heterosexual and cisgender.

Practice Implications

The finding that femininity intersects to inform experiences of discrimination is important for researchers, particularly those studying issues of social inequalities through an intersectional lens. It is imperative for researchers, clinicians, and activists to increasingly fine-tune their intersectional lens and incorporate a holistic understanding of social inequalities. Such an approach provides a clearer understanding of what may possibly lay at the heart of many social issues and will aid in the development of future interventions. For example, although interventions are important, they can only be effective if researchers are targeting the proper underlying construct. What if researchers have been examining the wrong constructs and should, instead, direct their attention to societal views about femininity?

By turning attention toward femininity, this article also contributes to the emergent field of critical femininities and to the growing understanding of femininity as an intersectional analysis worthy of consideration. Research focusing on gender policing or gender-based discrimination should consider the direction of gender transgressions and how they might be impacted by femmephobia. For instances, those accounted for by the Transgender Day of Remembrance (the annual day to memorialize transgender people who have been murdered) are nearly entirely women (Namaste 2005). Not only are trans women disproportionately murdered, trans Women of Color are at an even greater risk of interpersonal violence. Consideration for how the regulation and devaluing of femininity contributes to trans-misogynistic murder might provide useful insight to help the LGBTQ+ community's most vulnerable group.

As I demonstrate in the present article, an examination of femininity can reconfigure how gender- and sexual-based prejudices are understood. Such a shift in perspective can provide new avenues to remedy some of the pressing issues continuing to plague contemporary society. If sexism, rape culture, trans-misogyny, homophobia, biphobia, misogynoir, and even hegemonic masculinity can be connected through the way society sees and regulates femininity, perhaps re-envisioning femininity itself can offer a fruitful strategy to tackle discrimination. Clinical applications and activism should center around re-learning—or unlearning—what it means to be feminine, focusing on the value of feminine qualities and cultivating acceptance for the parts of ourselves deemed feminine.

Conclusion

In her TED talk entitled "A woman's fury holds lifetimes of wisdom," Black-ish actor Tracee Ellis Ross (2018) explains how we live in a culture of "men helping themselves to

women" and how the seemingly innocuous acts of every day sexism or misogyny are what "make space for the horrific." Extending Ross's perspective, my article illustrates how such a phenomenon is not simply fueled by rape culture and misogyny, but also by a culture that does not afford bodily sovereignty to the feminine, that reduces the feminine to an object or sub-human status and that makes femininity a target. The innocuous is dismissed, and the horrific is seen in isolation. What is lacking is an analysis of the spectrum itself. Arguably, it is the spectrum of feminine devaluation that carves such a pathway from normalization and innocuous to the horrific. Researchers need to start understanding the spectrum itself—to begin placing behavior on this spectrum and to make the connections between social phenomena rooted in the ways we see and devalue femininity. Developing an explicit consideration of femininity allows for a deeper analytical lens into how sexual violence, as well as other forms of discrimination and harassment, function.

Just as contemporary feminists provided an alternate framework for defining and interpreting sexual violence in order to better understand sexual violence as the spectrum commonly known as rape culture (Donat and D'Emilio 1992), researchers must begin to craft alternate frameworks for understanding femmephobia. By making connections between the way femininity is used to regulate sexuality across identities, places limitations on subjectivity and spaces, lays masculine claim of ownership, and is routinely the object of ridicule, the current study facilitates such an endeavor. "Time's up" (https://www.timesupnow.com/) on viewing sexism, misogyny, transphobia, rape culture and homophobia in isolation. Scholars need to look beyond patriarchal femininity's sole purpose as an instrument of oppression to instead consider how femininity is constitutionalized and operationalized in such a way that deems sexual violence natural, murder permissible, and disqualification expected.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Research Involving Human Participants and Informed Consent The current study was conducted in compliance with ethical standards for research involving human participants and informed consent was obtained from each participant. The Queen's University General Research Ethics Board approved all procedures and materials for the study.

Conflict of Interest There are no potential conflicts of interest to be addressed.

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