

Queer Feminine Affect Aliens: The Situated Politics of Righteous Femme Anger at Racism and Ableism

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This article explores 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. The article examines the positioned nature of justified anger at dynamics of oppression, misrecognition, and exclusions from within our own queer, feminist, and femme communities. 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 affectively loaded states of affinities and disidentification.

Introduction

This article explores 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. The article examines the positioned nature of justified anger at dynamics of oppression, misrecognition, and exclusions from *within* our own queer, feminist, and femme communities. 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 affectively loaded states of affinity *and* disidentification. Inspired by Jose Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications* (1999) and Sarah Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), this article explores queer feminine disidentificatory anger in context of the concept of *disidentificatory orientations*. This concept combines Muñoz's work on disidentifications and Ahmed's work on orientations to understand how queer feminine subjects—particularly those inhabiting multiple marginalised positionalities—may *simultaneously* identify *and* disidentify with, or orientate themselves *both* towards *and* away from, femme representations, icons, models of identity, politics, and communities. Crucially, this article is also strongly informed by Audre Lorde's "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" (1984) in its understanding and exploration of anger as a relational, political, historical, and often positioned affect, which articulates a *justified* response to oppression (e.g. racism, sexism or ableism) and, thus, holds the productive potential of serving as a powerful source for engendering change. As Lorde 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" (Lorde 1984, 127). In exploring the politics of queer feminine anger, this article also draws on the work of 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 the various positionalities they inhabit that intersect with their queer feminine identities.

The first section follows Lorde's own emphasis on examining justified anger at racism, by drawing on the *politicised figure*—rather than the racist stereotype—of “the angry black woman,” reclaimed and (re)conceptualised by black feminist theorists like Lorde, bell hooks, and Ahmed, to discuss issues pertaining to the intersection of “race,” ethnicity, whiteness, and racism *within* queer and femme communities. The second section takes Lorde's conceptualisation of anger as a justified response to oppression and Ahmed's figure of the affect alien in a new direction to discuss the perspectives of the political figuration of “the enraged queer crip femme” who is (implicitly, if not explicitly) denied access to *certain* typical forms of queer and femme identities, representations, communities, recognition, and belonging. The larger project on which this article draws for its discussion explores queer feminine identities, representations, and communities from various positioned and intersecting perspectives. I use queer femme-inist ethnographic approaches involving qualitative interviews and visual materials conducted with a diverse sample of queer feminine participants in the UK, as well as a discursive analysis of three contemporary femme anthologies on from the USA and Western Europe: Chloë Brushwood Rose and Anna Camilleri's *Brazen Femme* (2002), Ulrika Dahl and Del Lagrace *Volcano's Femmes of Power* (2008) and Jennifer Clare Burke's *Visible: A Femmethology* (2009). In particular, I discuss T.J. Bryan's essay, “It Takes Ballz: Reflections of a Black Attitudinal femme Vixen in tha Makin'” (2002), and Peggy Munson's essay, “Fringe Dweller: Toward an Ecofeminist Politic of Femme” (2009). It is noteworthy that while these essays and figures offer valuable insights about the positioned experience of being a femme of colour or disabled and femme, I acknowledge that these insights are not representative of *all* those inhabiting these positionalities. However, these examples can shed significant light onto these intersections and take our critical conversations concerning queer, feminist, and femme identities and representations into politically vital and productive directions.

i) Let's Talk About Racism

There is a strong discourse of diversity, inclusion, and anti-racist politics present within queer and femme communities and writing, embodied, for example, in Dahl's positioning of Leslie Mah's take on femme: “Femme to you is a fuck off to racism and sexism at once” (in Dahl and Volcano 2008, 163). Furthermore, there is a significant amount of critical and creative writing by, on, and for femmes of colour and, indeed, a significant number of femmes of colour identifying strongly with femme, as well as being involved in femme communities and organising. However, there are nevertheless also significant stories about queers and femmes of colour occupying resistant disidentificatory orientations towards and ambivalence about identifying with queer and queer femininities. There are also significant stories containing moments of disidentificatory anger at dynamics of racist oppression and exclusion *within* queer and queer feminine communities. This subaltern strand of queer feminine experience is explored further in this section by drawing on a variety

of black queer and femme voices including Valerie Mason-John, Kopene Kofi-Bruce, Maria Rosa Mojo, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, and in particular T. J. Bryan's powerful and insightful essay, "It Takes Ballz: Reflections of a Black Attitudinal Femme Vixen in tha Makin." In her essay, Bryan reflects on various relational dynamics of racism that she has experienced within queer and femme communities as a black femme. Sometimes these are explicit forms of racism, yet more often than not they are implicit. Indeed, often these instances involve various forms of misrecognition. Bryan opens the essay by telling a story of being misrecognised as butch and masculinised as a black femme. On being misrecognised as butch, being positioned as masculine, and having her intelligent black femme identity erased and disavowed, Bryan writes:

In early 1997 I did a poetry slam in a Toronto boxing ring. I was up against a bunch of male poets and one other woman. I came dressed for success: red lips, kohl-lined eyes, beyond-skin-tight black dress, high-heeled black boots with big silver buckles, white, lace-topped, little girl angle socks, black gloves, leather wrist cuffs and collar.

Sometime during the next few weeks the city's queer community rag printed a write-up of the event. The reviewer referred to me as (and I'm paraphrasing here) "powerful and brilliant." Which was cool. However, there was something that did not sit right with me at all. 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 masculin(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.' (Bryan 2002, 147, my emphasis)

Importantly, 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. 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: "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" (in Dahl and Volcano 2008, 30-34). Whilst Mason-John 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. Furthermore, Kopene Kofi-Bruce addresses the lack of queer recognition received by femmes of colour 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: “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” (Burke 2009, 46), Maria Rosa Mojo (Dyke Marilyn) also hints towards these racialised exclusions: “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” (Dahl and Volcano 2008, 49). Conversely, T.J. Bryan highlights how femmes of colour are also routinely hypersexualised within queer culture in ways that invoke oppressive racist colonial white supremacist patriarchal histories that surface in contemporary queer cultures in the form of everyday racist remarks. Bryan 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. Seems like just yesterday...

We were societally force-fornicated to produce a biologically colonized labour source of millions. Mulattos. MULES by any other fuckin’ name. Colonizers constructed characteristics. Defined away our humanity. Pathologized our pain. Explained away their insanity. Normalized their depravity. Our psyches defiled. Denigrated. Bestial natures penetrated female bodies. Fist-fucked female minds. Hot (pussy)...

An unwilling foil for their feminine ideals. Poor things. Sacrosanct yet cursed. Worshipped above all others, but burdened with an awesome and awful responsibility—the preservation of a heterosexist, pahllocentric, white supremacist society’s purity... (Bryan 2002, 151)

Indeed, this is not the only passage in which Bryan highlights the racism circulating in white queer cultural approaches towards black femininities and masculinities. Further on in her essay Bryan 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, I'll have to be the HOO/chee that got away. The hot pussy, an exotic curiosity, a tarnished and exciting new trophy who decided not to play. (Bryan 2002, 152)

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—that provoke her righteous, historically rooted, and politically motivated black queer feminine disidentificatory anger towards white queer cultures from within. Kopene Kofi-Bruce also questions the politicised use of sexualised feminine embodiment as a central part of femme politics and community, reflecting the raced, gendered, 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. [...] Why do women, and especially brown women, expect to have to show off our bodies, even while protesting?” (Burke 2009, 55). Whilst the hypersexualisation of queer femininities might thus function as an effective strategy for subverting white and middle class forms of (queer) femininities—traditionally constructed as desexualised, meek, modest, and demure creatures—this strategy of subversion can sit uncomfortably for some working class or black (queer) femininities that are often already hypersexualised by mainstream (as well as subcultural) racist and classist cultures.

Along with these reflections on racism *within* queer and feminist cultures, Bryan 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 white femmes:

SOMETHING THAT WILL NEVAH HAPPEN AGAIN:

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, a subhuman. Play-acting their roles. Living out their roles. No question of their pre-ordained roles.

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.

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...

[...]

No mistaking or avoiding it, these are the sour grapes of a colored girl who's had enuff. Enuff of working ten times as hard for one-fifth the adoration. Always striving to be ten times as skilled. Ten times as gorgeous. Now ten times as pissed with the inferior landscaping of the queerified Femme playing field.

FUCK IT. (Bryan 2002, 151-152)

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 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 micro-dynamics 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...

(Bryan 2002, 152)

Indeed, her writing recalls Audre Lorde's own essay "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred and Anger" (1984), in which Lorde discusses dynamics of anger and solidarity between black women, who for Lorde occupy relational spaces of both "sameness" and "difference." In Bryan's essay, the problematised "sameness" is that of femmeness, whereas the difference is that of the continuing dynamics of racialised oppression and domination and how these racialised histories and continuing legacies are dealt with *within* contemporary queer and femme communities. Recognition and misrecognition is crucial in these incidences of racist dynamics of (white) femme on (black) femme oppression through the erasure of black femme identity, which also extends to the erasure of black femme culture, history and contributions. These dynamics of a lack of recognition of and for black femmes is also highlighted by Bryan in the following discussion of (white) femme icons and aesthetics, as well as the implicit whiteness present in the term "femme" itself:

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? (Bryan 2002, 154-155)

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, is nevertheless highlighted by many black femmes. Bryan offers a poignant critique of the white starting point and normative racialised 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 are frequently cited as inspirational "iconic" figures for (white) femmes. Critically, Bryan (2002) 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. She situates herself in a long line of often forgotten or sidelined "legendary sistas" and invokes the feminine lineage of her own family as inspirational models, whom she speaks of as passing down techniques of stylisation, lessons, and tools for survival in a classist and racist world. Importantly, Bryan's essay highlights the implicit, often silent, and (in)visible racialised (*white*) starting points, centre, and performatively reproduced lines of inheritance present within *certain* situated queer femme communities and representations, despite their liberal claims of "diversity" and "inclusivity."

Crucially, Bryan renders explicit racialised lines of oppression and power, as well as racialised lines of historical and cultural inheritance, identification, and orientation as she highlights the colour lines present in the racialised boundarying of white femme knowledge, experiential and cultural horizons and rhetorically subverts these inherited racialised 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 describes her own relation to femme as a femme of colour in disidentificatory terms, an identifying term that she has to use 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,

It’s rhyme and reason,

It’s 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. (Bryan 2002, 150)

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, while sometimes but not always rendering invisible 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 Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha also articulates 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 POSITION AS BELOVED FAMILY WITHIN OUR COMMUNITIES.
[...]
LOVE AND RAGE,
THE FEMME SHARKS (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2011, 286-291)

With love and (righteous) rage, the "FEMME SHARK MANIFESTO"—like T.J. Bryan's powerful essay "It Takes Ballz"—highlights 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.

ii) Let's Talk About Ableism

Visible and invisible disabilities and righteous disidentificatory anger at ableist oppression, involving internal dynamics of exclusion and marginalisation, is another important situated experience which can have the effect of alienating femmes from and from *within* our own queer, feminist, and femme communities. Indeed, T.J. Bryan herself foregrounds this intersection in her blog entry "Challenging Ableism":

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

i've studied my own identity as it stands in opposition of the power and privilege of others so deeply that it's much easier for me to read myself and others who

are sitting in similar places of resistance to oppression. who's struggling with what elements of their blackness and keeps cutting off their hair. who's got issues with their queerness and compartmentalizes their life so they don't have to deal. who's got class issues and can't tell the difference between being raised poor and becoming financially insolvent because you can't tolerate being around your well-off family anymore... etc. etc.

moving from that comfort place of self-knowing is about growing. i can give myself permission to learn more about who i am because i want to keep growing not stagnate. and since i'm here to learn and to challenge myself even as i offer this space to you, 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.

as a black woman who spent most of her twenties learning to recognize racial dominance, who learned to speak to it and to fight it, i'm recognizing so many, too many of the attributes i used to ascribe to white folks who didn't want to deal with their white skinned privilege, in myself as i struggle with recognizing what it means to live in a privileged body. (Bryan 2005)

With admirable political and personal integrity, T.J. Bryan's excerpt recognises that any one subject inhabits various interlocking and intersecting oppressed and privileged positionalities simultaneously. Bryan also notes various strategies for combating ableism that mirror those for challenging racism: 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 important*, axes of oppression. This section therefore focuses on dynamics of queer feminine disidentificatory anger at ableist exclusions and marginalisation *within* queer, feminist, and queer feminine communities. One poignant example of queer feminine disidentificatory anger at ableist oppression and exclusion from *within* queer, feminist, and femme communities, from a disabled femme perspective is presented in Peggy Munson's essay "Fringe Dweller: Toward an Ecofeminist Politic of Femme" (2009, 28-36). As a disabled femme diagnosed with Multiple Chemical

Sensitivities (MCS) and Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome (CFIDS), Munson 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 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 femmes 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. (Munson 2009, 28-29)

Along with her extreme social isolation, Munson 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 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” (2009, 29). Her exclusion is also caused and supported by others not being aware of how they contribute to the causes and effects of MCS and by not acknowledging that these everyday exclusions are occurring and not taking responsibility for contributing to these exclusions by making changes to their own daily choices, as they continue to use toxic products that cause chronically ill subjects, like Munson, significant harm. Indeed, Munson 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 a marginalised subject (2009, 31). Munson’s answer to *both* mainstream *and* queer ignorance, denial, and oppression is through a radical critique of “reasonable” accommodation rhetorics informed by a social model of disability. She 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 rather on a “public” and “collective response” towards disabilities (2009, 30-32). Furthermore, Munson directs her righteous disidentificatory anger at disability

oppression and exclusion at femmes, 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, one 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, girlie 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 honors 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. (Munson 2009, 30, my emphasis)

Here Munson's disidentificatory anger is directed at an exclusionary model of femme that centralises toxic capitalist consumption above disability awareness and inclusion, leading Munson to feel “at war with the concept of femme” as a disabled femme who is actively writing and fighting for a (*re*)imagining and (*re*)construction of femme identities, communities, and representations that could potentially be more inclusive and accessible. Subsequently, Munson goes on to critique rhetorics of queer “diversity” and “inclusion” as being “at best, half-built ramps” and at worst “remarkably clueless”:

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. (Munson 2009, 30)

One example of this is, of course, Munson's exclusion from Lambda Literary Awards. Another example Munson provides is her experience of dating and the barriers she encounters due to discriminatory ableist stigma and assumptions. Munson recounts her experience of dating a "femme-loving transguy" who 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)" (2009, 31). 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 "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. (Munson 2009, 31)

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 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 a capitalist and consumerist "narcissistic" model of femme:

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?* (Munson 2009, 32)

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 of building femme solidarity through working on not oppressing and excluding each other. In fact, Munson 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 (2009, 34). 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. However, what Munson—speaking from a disabled femme perspective—actually 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 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. (Munson 2009, 33)

Interestingly, Munson is not calling for a stripping of the artifice of femme, nor a dictation of what femme should or should not be, but rather an erotically and disability-informed adjustment in what those artifices are and what femme might mean. Furthermore, like T.J. Bryan, Munson is issuing an explicit challenge 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 differently situated femme voices themselves. It is a challenge, a dare, that this article has set out to try to tackle by bringing these issues to the forefront through an analysis of moments of situated disidentificatory queer feminine anger and the figure of the *femme affect alien* who is the product of internal as well as external marginalisation.

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 *within* queer,

feminist, and femme communities brings to light a host of poignant issues within “our” queer, feminist, and femme communities that require further significant theoretical and political work. This article has brought to light some of the affective, political, and theoretical tensions present within these communities by looking at instances of explicit and implicit racism and ableism. Through the examples of femmes of colour like T. J. Bryan and disabled femmes like Peggy Munson—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 article has addressed some of the underlying and uncomfortable truths present within “our” queer, feminist and femme communities. In so doing, this article 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 reconfigured and reimagined 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 but not limited to those of racism and ableism. Indeed, since anger, according to Audre Lorde, is an affect that when “focused with precision” has the productive potential of becoming “a powerful source of energy, serving progress and change” (1984, 127), the righteous expressions of situated femme anger explored in this article might thus serve as spotlights for exposing and as tools for eventually transforming dynamics of racism, ableism, and other situated forms of oppression 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—particularly regarding celebratory “liberal” rhetorics concerning queer and femme intersectional “success,” “diversity,” and “inclusion”—they are nevertheless absolutely necessary for queer, feminist, and femme efforts towards political and theoretical, as well as community and individual, solidarity and integrity.

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