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SO, WHO FEELS PRETTY?: NEGOTIATING THE MEANING OF FEMININITY IN A NONHETEROSEXUAL COMMUNITY

by

AMY PALDER

Under the Direction of Ralph LaRossa

ABSTRACT

In a heteronormative society where hegemonic masculinity prevails, beauty is often synonymous with, and presented as, feminine. For example, pictures of tall, thin women with perfect teeth and perfect skin gloss the covers of magazines and other forms of media as representative of some beauty ideal. This "ideal" is the barometer by which, on many levels, all women are judged. While some women may choose to ignore these messages, few women can always escape comparison. Our society constantly informs us that appearance matters. More specifically for women, a feminine physical appearance is often considered "ideal."

But what exactly does this construct, feminine, signify? Fundamentally, femininity is not static. To speak of it as a logical, simple construct is problematic for it means different things and is expressed in different ways in different environments. Furthermore, to assert one definition by which all others will be measured is difficult in that it presumes a homogenous population and/or idealizes one specific representation.

In this research project I conducted in-depth interviews with 43 non-heterosexual women to discern how they constructed "femininity." What did it look like? What meanings did it connote? When was it important and how was it negotiated? Applying a cognitive sociological

lens and using grounded theory methods, I describe what femininity, or arguably femininities, look(s) like within this subpopulation.

This project contributes to and extends the literature on gender, sexuality, and appearance. It does this by demonstrating the importance of analyzing non-heterosexual women's experiences and understandings of femininity within a patriarchal society that valorizes hegemonic masculinity. Most literature contemplating appearance and related misogynistic messages emphasizes a heteronormative perspective. However, feminine and femininity uniquely impact non-heteronormative women. Non-heterosexual women must negotiate both misogynistic *and* heterosexist messages concurrently. By simultaneously addressing this "double" subordination or marginalization, this research endeavors to provide a more comprehensive overview of meanings and ramifications of appearance choices.

INDEX WORDS: Appearance, Beauty, Beauty Myth, Complicit Misogyny, Feminine, Femininity, Heteronormative, Heterosexism, Homosexism, Identity, Lesbian, Male Gaze, Misogyny, Negotiation, Nonheterosexual, Patriarchy, Presentation, Salience, Queer, Visibility

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By

Amy Palder

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Georgia State University

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by

Amy Palder

Committee Chair: Ralph LaRossa

Committee: Elisabeth O. Burgess
Wendy Simonds

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Bubbles, Rhoda, and Caron Palder. Their unconditional support made my dream possible.

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I would like to thank my dissertation advisor, Ralph LaRossa. He gave so much of his time and effort helping me with this project. I am deeply grateful for his thoughtfulness and mentorship and for pushing me--even when I did not want to be pushed. His dedication to this project has been invaluable to my development as a sociologist, researcher, and writer. Without a doubt, the dissertation is stronger, clearer, and more developed as a result of his mentorship.

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I want to acknowledge all my friends who have been with me throughout the process. There are too many to list but you know who you are.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> "*Women who complained about the beauty myth were assumed to have a personal shortcoming themselves: they must be fat, ugly, incapable of satisfying a man, 'feminazis' or—horror—lesbians"* (Wolf 2002:2).

Several years ago, after a recent romantic break-up, I was sitting at dinner party with some female nonheterosexual friends. Wanting to console me, they inquired as to my "type" so that perhaps they could assist in finding me a new mate. This conversation occurred before I began studying sociology. Therefore, I assumed my innocuous answer would go unchallenged, and initially it did. I stated simply, "I prefer feminine women." I assumed that the word feminine had the same meaning to everyone. This answer was met with approval and everyone at the table expressed that they shared my preference. However, as I looked around the room and thought about their dating partners, I immediately realized that we were not all talking about the same thing.

I began to query what they meant when they said feminine. Each woman provided a slightly different explanation. For some, it was as simple as "passing" as a heterosexual or not looking "gay." For others it was a specific type of look, such as wearing makeup or dressing in particular clothes. For this group, a feminine presentation directly related to physical appearance and seemed to be conflated with perceived attractiveness. While they did not agree on *a* look, they all agreed that looks mattered and apparently a feminine appearance was good.

After I left the dinner party, I got home and immediately got online. I went to a then popular lesbian dating site to see how women described themselves. Did they even use the word feminine and if so in what context? I noticed that many used terms like "feminine woman seeking same." However, when I clicked on the link to view their picture, few would have satisfied *any* of the definitions I had heard earlier that evening. While the term feminine was

used consistently to describe women, the interpretation of what constituted a feminine presentation was not. Thus, by the end of the night, I still could not articulate a definition of feminine due to the myriad of representations I had both seen and heard.

I realized my dinner partners, when contemplating a look, expressed what they thought women should look like using very heteronormative terms, although at the time I did not employ such terminology. When I went home to look at the website, I too used this measure. Why? As I thought about it more, I became curious as to why nonheterosexual women reinforced hetero-normative ideals and sometimes with greater vehemence than their heterosexual counterparts.

As I heard how militantly some women articulated, "women should look like women," while others women suggested less strident definitions, I began to realize what was going on. When defining "feminine," a minimum of two key considerations were contemplated concurrent-ly for this group. First, as *women* they processed external messages regarding how to appear; and second, as *nonheterosexual* women they contended with a marginalized sexual identity. These two "concerns" worked in concert to inform how *nonheterosexual women* understood and explained their presentation choices.

AS WOMEN: THE ROLE OF MISOGYNY

Regarding the first "issue," women are constantly bombarded with images of "beauty." For example, symbols of physical perfection, "supermodels," gloss the covers of many magazines. They are super thin, super tall, and dressed in super high-heels. Supermodels must be at a minimum 5'8" tall, weigh between 108 and 125 lbs, and typically are between the ages of 15 and 22.[1] Compare this to the *average* American woman. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services (1999-2002), the average American woman's height

[1] Average provided by soyouwanna.com, a website about the fashion model industry.

is just below 5’4” and she weighs approximately 152lbs. Thus, the images presented do not reflect the average woman or what many “average” women could even achieve, should they desire to do so.

Regardless of attainability, these ubiquitous messages constantly tell women what society views as the physical ideal. While the “ideal” has changed over time, the notion that there is “a” normative ideal has not. For example, today we idolize thinness. However, historically our society venerated corpulence as an indicator of higher class. What is valorized has changed, but the idea that *something* is valorized has not.

Most women recognize they will never be supermodels. Many do not even try. Some even attempt to completely ignore the messages. In any case, few can always escape comparison. For instance, even Katie Couric, supposedly valued for her news skills rather than her looks, had her photograph doctored to appear thinner and younger. During her first week as anchor on the CBS news, her looks received as much, if not more, scrutiny than her news skills. This seems to affirm that, for women particularly, *looks matter*.

Thus, as women are often judged based on their physical appearance, patriarchal capitalism offers products to assist in the achievement of an “ideal” image. Annually, women spend billions of dollars to look thinner, younger, and simply “more attractive.” Women buy high heels to make their legs look sexier, cosmetics to make their faces “prettier,” and some solicit the aid of surgeons to make their faces younger and their bodies thinner.

Women are constantly sold images of beauty and youth and some women “buy” it more than others. These omnipresent misogynistic messages inform articulations of femininity. The messages suggest that how a woman is naturally, without the aid of purchased products, is not quite “good” or feminine enough. Fundamentally, a *woman should be feminine* and to be

feminine she should exhibit some concern with physical appearance that complies with heteronormative understandings.

To varying degrees women consider these misogynistic beauty messages of what a woman should look like into their definition of femininity. Some incorporate the myriad of messages that they receive regarding presentation, often asserting femininity and physical appearance are inarguably and inextricably linked.

However, not all women succumb to these misogynistic beauty messages. Some women reject the notion of allocating time and money to try to satisfy an arbitrary "ideal" feminine look. While all women *can* reject conforming to an illusive beauty ideal, the *ramifications* of rejection *vary* contingent on the individual.

AS NONHETEROSEXUALS: THE ROLE OF HETEROSEXISM

Ramifications of violating heteronormative "expectations" vary contingent on one's position within society. Age, race, class, gender, education, ability, and sexual identity all can influence rights and privileges in a society that privileges some and marginalizes others. For example, a white woman may combat sexism but does not have to concurrently confront racism, as does her African American counterpart. Similarly, a heterosexual woman does not have to contend with heterosexism, as does her nonheterosexual counterpart.

Though all women can critique misogyny, some women risk sanctions when doing so. Specifically, in a heteronormative society where hegemonic masculinity prevails, beauty is often synonymous with, and presented as, feminine. Therefore, women rejecting *external* markers of femininity *may* have their sexuality questioned. For example, a woman may choose to eschew wearing makeup and high heels. Additionally, she may cut her hair extremely short, dress in "men's" clothes, or simply indicate little concern with creating a feminine presentation. In a

heteronormative society, women presenting in this manner may be perceived as “gay.” However, if this “unfeminine” woman couples, or is seen with a man, this may counter perceived non-heterosexuality and any related marginalization. Basically, while still considered “not beautiful,” and arguably unfeminine, she escapes stigmatization based on her sexual identification. The presence of a man serves as a marker of her heterosexuality.

Those who do not partner with men, *and* reject a feminine appearance, may be perceived as “not heterosexual” and risk marginalization based on sexual identification. This *risk*, contending with heterosexism, does not affect heterosexual women. Therefore, nonheterosexual women must carefully contemplate the consequences of appearance choices, as “looks” serve as a “marker” for sexuality. Essentially, if achieving and sustaining the male gaze validates a woman’s femininity, and simultaneously her heterosexuality, arguably not achieving the male gaze negates femininity and calls her sexuality into question.

MISOGYNY, HETEROSEXISM, COMPLICITY, AND SELF CONFIDENCE

Presentation is a reaction to existing expectations and physical appearance choices may reflect a desire to blend in, stand out, or some combination thereof. Furthermore, individuals may draw seemingly symbolic boundaries, contingent on such things as “degree of outness,” relationship with family, career, or friends, and literally modify their look contingent on the situation. Simply, presentation, and related physical appearance, need not be static. For example, a woman may fear being “read as gay,” and, therefore, she may make sure to wear make-up and skirts to work in an attempt to present a feminine image, while dressing completely differently at home where her sexual identity is not an issue.

Thus, presentation, and specifically one’s “look,” can serve to affirm or reinforce heteronormative “standards.” Consider the “trappings” of femininity—cosmetics, styled hair,

shaved legs, and high heels, to name a few. While some women may engage in such rituals to deflect issues related to sexuality, they concurrently are supporting patriarchy and heteronormativity. Arguably, such actions indicate complicity in perpetuating the misogynistic messages that oppress them. For example, women who fear marginalization due to sexual identification *may*, in exchange for heteronormative acceptability, reify gender roles and appearance.

Not everyone desires heteronormative acceptability or fears being "read as gay." Case in point: Many butch/femme communities openly articulate rejection of heteronormativity, either in presentation, sexual expression, or both. However, rejection of heteronormativity does not necessarily indicate rejection of a heteronormative feminine appearance.

Thus, presentation can be viewed as a way to express where we see ourselves belonging *or where we want to belong* and a "normative" feminine look, or rejection thereof, is *a* way to visibly articulate this. Some individuals naturally "fit" into their community of choice. Others must engage in more active negotiation. How one negotiates, and understands the negotiation process, influences individual's self-confidence. For example, women who are aware of misogynistic messages and resent them, *yet still conform* to them to gain heteronormative acceptance, demonstrate more issues regarding self-confidence. Essentially, those who work to achieve some externally imposed criteria may achieve membership to their "desired" community but at some personal cost.

THE ANALYSIS OF FEMININITY

So what is femininity? Chapter four provides a typology that I use throughout the analysis. This chapter does not consider whether women considered themselves feminine. Rather, the typology emphasizes individuals' understandings, and relevance, of physical

appearance, while also considering the importance of traits. This chapter presents a deconstruction of the construct—“feminine.”

Specifically, the typology addresses what, if any, misogynistic messages women internalized. As women are barraged with messages telling them *appearance* or *looks* matter, some women incorporated these messages into their definition of feminine. Alternatively, other women suggested *traits* or *internal characteristics* served as the indicator of femininity—that femininity emanated from within, not without. Thus, rather than emphasize a heteronormative appearance, these women focused on heteronormative behavior.

However, not all women accepted “traditional” heteronormative understandings and rejection was demonstrateed in different ways. Some women embraced the construct “feminine,” but rejected a clear dichotomy between masculine and feminine. These women created their own definition of femininity that suggested greater fluidity. Essentially, one could still be feminine without conforming to any preconceived masculine/feminine binary.

Other women expressed a clear grasp of misogyny. Finding such messages both problematic and constraining, they *articulated* rejection of anything they perceived as imposed on them and even the term “feminine.” Importantly, articulating an understanding of misogynistic beauty messages did not necessarily connote personal lack of conformity. I will elaborate on this distinction/connection.

The typology offers six definitions of femininity *and* the related relationships with the term—meaning that, some expressed femininity positively, others negatively, and still others ambivalently.

The following chapter incorporates specific issues related to sexual identity and internalized heterosexism. For example, if a nonheterosexual woman internalized misogynistic

messages, *and* she expressed a degree of discomfort with her own sexuality, she may engage in specific strategies to mitigate any potential marginalization due to her sexual identification. Fundamentally, *if* femininity serves as a marker of sexual identity, *and* a woman perceives femininity as directly related to physical appearance, she *may* attempt to modify her look to conform to heteronormative understandings, so as to avoid being read as "gay." Essentially, she may "look like a girl" or act submissive to mitigate the risk that she will be seen as nonheterosexual.

The aforementioned two chapters contend with issues related to misogyny and hetero-sexism, sequentially. However, these two issues do not occur in isolation and clearly not all women process the messages in the same way. Therefore, the next chapter incorporates both misogyny and heterosexism concurrently when discussing the relationship between their constructions of femininity and self-confidence. Fundamentally, if beauty messages oppress women, as I assert, what are the personal ramifications of expressed conformity or rejection? At the end of the day—who feels "good enough" and why?

This exploratory research, based on forty-three in depth interviews, contemplates how women make sense of femininity, their sexual identity, their place in society, and ultimately how they explain and feel about their personal presentation choices. This research matters as presentation choices reflect power and agency (real or imagined) within a heteronormative structure. How women *feel* about themselves depends on how they contend with a society that bombards them with both misogynistic and heterosexist messages.

CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Within Western society we constantly organize groups into dichotomous categories: male/female, young/old, rich/poor, white/nonwhite, abled/disabled. How we categorize has implications, for each bifurcation reinforces difference—either this/or that. Fundamentally, we create arbitrary delineators and then reify these boxes as if they were created by something external to us (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Sometimes, this segregation does not *seem* problematic. For example, many take biological sex as undeniable fact. Individuals are either male or female. However, not everyone neatly fits into these two categories (e.g., intersexed). Rather than modify our reified understandings of biological sex, many suggest we modify individuals to fit better into one of the two existing boxes. While not everyone subscribes to this thinking, often those who do not fit risk marginalization. This same marginalization occurs when contemplating sexual identity. Those who do not neatly fit into a socially accepted box may suffer a deviant or stigmatized status.

While all nonnormative, or "others," may share a marginalized status, not all share marginalization equally. Some individuals may be marginalized based solely on their sexuality, while others suffer multiple oppressions based on such factors as race, class, age, and gender. Therefore, when contemplating inequality and oppression, one cannot look at one variable, such as sexual identity or gender, in isolation. Rather, one must contemplate interlocking systems of oppression to fully understand individual narratives informed by their unique perspectives (Collins 2000, 2004; hooks 2000). Fundamentally, no two individuals see the world from the same vantage point. Our views are shaped by our position/location within society. Each perspective and location has unique privileges and problems.

Applying this understanding of interlocking systems of oppression, nonheterosexual women are at minimum doubly oppressed. First, as *women* living in a patriarchal society, they are socially subordinated. Second, as *nonheterosexuals* they are socially marginalized. Contending with both sexism and heterosexism concurrently, in a society that privileges masculinity and heterosexuality, these women have to negotiate both subordination and stigma (Brekhus 2003).

However, just as biological sex is problematic so too are the discrete categories, nonheterosexual and woman. Nonheterosexual women are not a monolithic group with one shared identity. Rather, they represent a diverse community. Cognitive sociology provides a means of analyzing this varied population.

PLAN OF ANALYSIS

As I was essentially interested in what informs how these nonheterosexual women *think*, I employed a cognitive sociological approach. Cognitive sociology examines the space between individualistic and universalistic thinking. Cognitive *individualism* focuses on cognition that occurs primarily at the individual level. Although valuable in some respects (each individual does think differently), by itself cognitive individualism is problematic because it fundamentally ignores the social component—the idea that individuals are social beings.

Conversely, cognitive *universalism* moves away from isolated individual thinking and searches for more universal truths in how *all* individuals think. For example, when seeking to understand how infants think, how they instinctively know things across cultures, cognitive psychology often employs a universalistic approach with great success. However, this paradigm also has limitations. There are not always universal answers to some of our questions. Sometimes, we want to understand both commonalities *and* differences among people and *why* these differences exist. Cognitive sociology, essentially, bridges the gap between individualism

and universalism by introducing the social component (Zerubavel 1997). Fundamentally, how individuals process information, or even what they process, is directly influenced by their social location.

Cognitive sociology "tries to explain why our thinking is *similar as well as different from* the way other people think" (Zerubavel 1997:5). Fundamentally, we think as individuals *and* as humans, not just as one *or* the other. Furthermore, the communities in which we have membership directly influence how we think. Such "thought communities" are not static and individuals do not belong to only one. For example, we may be children, siblings, scholars, philanthropists, parents, Christians, femmes, and lesbians all at the same time. Each group, or community, influences how we think or stated alternatively what "sociomental" lens we use.

Sociomental refers to which community matters most, or more specifically is most influential in our thought process, at any given time. Which "lens" influences us often depends on many things such as where we are, whom we are with, when we are processing, and what we are processing. For example, nonheterosexual Christians may "think" differently at church than at a Gay Pride celebration. This does not suggest they "think" homosexuals are "bad" when at church and Christians are the enemy at Gay Pride celebrations. Rather, the emphasis may be on different things in different situations. Essentially, individuals do not negate membership to any thought community—they are still Christians when at Gay Pride celebrations and nonheterosexuals at Church—however, one membership *may* take precedence depending on the situation. Thus, *all* thought communities in which we have membership influence how we think, yet individuals, cognizant or not, choose the appropriate lens for each given situation. Understanding these different thought communities, and related lenses, facilitates a deeper

understanding of taken for granted constructs and is a central feature of a cognitive sociological perspective.

> [I]dentifying the various *cognitive subcultures* that exist within a given society is one of the most important tasks of cognitive sociology. . . . [and] helps remind us that the way we happen to organize the world in our minds is neither naturally nor logically inevitable. Just as instructive, in this regard, are *cognitive battles* over contested memories. Such battles are typically between social "camps" rather than individuals. . . . At the same time, the fact that they even exist helps remind us that the way we happen to process reality in our own minds is by no means universal (Zerubavel 1997:12).

Arguably, nonheterosexual women represent a thought community. Essentially, "being lesbian" can inform how one sees the world. For example, Stonewall represents a shared history and a key moment in gay rights. In 1969, after repeated harassment by police in New York City, the non-heterosexual community rioted—indicating they would no longer tolerate police abuse. While for many this event, the Stonewall Riots, has great positive significance, not all people think about Stonewall similarly or view it as an event that should be celebrated. Thus, Stonewall can be viewed as a cognitive battle as this one event can be interpreted and remembered, or thought about, in a myriad of ways.

Nonheterosexual women are members of a variety of thought communities, many of which do not pertain directly to their sexuality. Therefore, while nonheterosexual women share two commonalities, nonheterosexuality (sexuality) and woman (gender), these may be the only two commonalities that they share. Additionally, how they *think* about their sexual identification and gender also may vary, as the various communities to which they belong inform their *thoughts*. Thus, just as Stonewall is subject to various interpretations, as a result of multiple memberships, so too are other taken-for-granted constructs.

The term femininity is one such taken-for-granted construct. Femininity connotes different things to different people. To discern different meanings and analyze the social construction of femininity, I used a cognitive sociological framework.

Cognitive Sociology divides thinking into six major cognitive acts: perceiving, attending, classifying, assigning meaning, remembering and reckoning the time. Each act informs how different individuals, essentially, *think* (Zerubavel 1997).

The Six Acts

The first cognitive act, perception, emphasizes how individuals mentally process their environment. Individuals do not process alone. Rather, the society, community, or groups with whom we interact, influence our perception. Fundamentally, perception uses the "senses" but incorporates a social component. For example, a home baked pie may smell "good." The odor of the pie may be perceived as positive because it reminds us of our childhood when grandma came over for a visit and everyone was happy. Conversely, sitting on a public bus in Kenya may elicit a different reaction. The body "odor" of a local Kenyan may offend the sensibilities of some Americans. However, a local may "smell" nothing. The "odor" is real. How it is processed reflects perception. If we stop thinking like "Americans," take off that lens, we might not find the bus odors so offensive (Zeruabevel 1997).

An example of perception, as it specifically relates to this study, could be—*what is fat*? A mother who weighs 105 lbs and is 5'5" may constantly say, "I am fat, I am fat" in front of her daughter. That daughter's *perception* of what constitutes "fat" is influenced, and arguably distorted, by her mother. What the daughter "perceives" as fat is mediated through a lens provided by her mother. Obviously, individuals have many "lenses," as there are a myriad of things influencing their perspective—other family members, friends, school, media, etc.

While *perception* reflects essentially how we view the world, *attending* refers to what exactly enters into our consciousness in the first place. Fundamentally, what do we deem as relevant or irrelevant? For example, an architect and her husband may be looking at a building in Chicago. The architect may *focus* on the curved architecture, the historical relevance, the way the building complements the skyline, and the intricate detailing on the columns. The husband, on the other hand, may pay little attention to the building but focus on the sandwich shop on the bottom because he is hungry. Both are *looking* at the same building but both are focusing on, or attending to, different aspects. Concurrently, both are *ignoring* some components of the building so that they can attend to other components. This attending and ignoring occurs all the time and frequently without awareness. A woman could walk into a room and one person may see an old friend, or a celebrity, or great clothing. Another person, perhaps the one whose mother keeps saying, "I'm fat, I'm fat," might simply focus on the fact that this woman is "overweight." Some indicators enter our foreground and others are relegated to background. Again, not everyone attends to the same things. Rather, *focus* is something we learn from those around us (Zerubavel 1997).

Classification, the third cognitive act, refers to how we lump and split the world. Essentially, where do we draw boundaries? Where do we indicate "us" versus "them," or "public" as compared to "private," or "fat" opposed to "thin?" While the boundaries are arbitrary, often they seem fixed and impenetrable. Classification reflects our desire, or arguably our need, to compartmentalize, and is informed by the communities to which we belong or aspire to belong. For example, that same mother that keeps saying, "I am fat, I am fat," may be a size 2. Additionally, her daughter may read fashion magazines, and other pop culture outlets, and see girls who are size zero. These images influence how she draws lines between fat and thin. Furthermore, maybe

she wants to be a model, thus, *for her*, a size four may be "overweight" and size zero is the marker of achieved "thinness." This *boundary*, size zero, is arbitrary. Rather, it is a way for her to lump people into two categories—thin and not. These boundaries are neither unique nor universal (Zerubavel 1997). This is of great relief to many women who are larger than size four and would rather not be considered fat.

Symbolizing, the fourth cognitive act, reflects meaning. In the United States, and other cultures, "fat" may be associated with "bad," "lazy," or worst of all "ugly." Thus taking the construct ("fat") and imposing significance ("ugly") takes something that is arbitrarily defined and imposes meaning. Symbols have great importance when discussing issues related to "beauty" and identity. Consider the suggestion that "fat" is "bad." Conversely then, "thin" may be "good." Thus, what would a woman do to be "good?" How does she feel if she is not? What significance does not meeting "the good standard" have for her?

The final two cognitive acts, Social Memories and Standard Time, reflect how we think about past events and refer to events that have transpired. Regarding memories, no two people typically "remember" things the same way, no matter how "universal" the event. Again, the "story" of Stonewall has been repeated many times in many texts; however, often the accounts of what "really" happened vary. How a person "remembers" the event (Stonewall) is neither an individualistic act nor reflective of some absolute truth. Regardless, these *memories* become an integral part of a person's identity and influence how she processes events. Furthermore, these memories may be so vivid that they also sway future behavior—whether the "memory" was accurate or not. For example, the daughter who *remembers* her mother never telling her she was pretty may make conscious efforts to flatter her daughter.

Standard time is closely related to social memories. Fundamentally, we have our memories and then we essentially "time/date stamp" them. Stated alternatively, we "place" the events somewhere in our history (Zerubavel 1997). To do this, "actual" time and dates have *some* importance. Comments such as, "I came out of the closet at 23," may have meaning for people, as age seems an acceptable barometer. However, even this simple statement includes a cognitive component—what exactly does "23" *mean*? How are we measuring this number? Is it on the date of one's birth—*exactly*? What happens 12:01 a.m. the next day? However, for the most part, we all appear to agree on this seemingly "universal" measure—if I say "23," most people understand, at least generally, what is meant (Zerubavel 1997). Thus, social time, or where we "place" things, refers to *more than* numerically chronicling events. An example of this could be, "I stopped wearing lipstick after I came out of the closet." The event, "lipstick wearing," is placed before the time she came out of the closet. This sense of "time" has relevance to more than just the individual talking about the act—whether she is talking about the date on the calendar, or the appropriate behavior after coming out of the closet.

Understanding these six cognitive acts, and using them as the framework for analysis, provided a means to deconstruct the taken-for-granted construct feminine and contextualize its' meaning to women of different races, classes, ages and other demographic indicators.

> Language has its origins in the face-to-face situation, but it can be readily detached from it. . . . The detachment of language lies more basically in its capacity to communicate meanings that are not direct expressions of subjectivity. . . . In this way, language is capable of becoming the objective repository of vast accumulations of meanings and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to following generations. (Berger and Luckmann 1966:37)

Thus, by studying language, as social construction requires, I critically assessed the construct feminine to discern its meaning to different women. I consistently asked the question,

what is going on here? I examined how these individuals constructed their social realities by analyzing this one key concept—femininity (Berger and Luckman 1966).

Particularly, I wanted to understand their articulated "reality" as it related to relationships between femininity, gender, sexuality, and ultimately self-confidence. To discern this information, I focused much attention on presentation of self.

Presentation of Self

Presentation, like most everything, does not occur in a vacuum. Rather it is an inter-actional process that necessitates negotiation. Micro theories, such as symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and dramaturgy provide means for analyzing the interactive process. Herbert Blumer (1969), who coined the term "Symbolic Interaction," provides three axioms for analyzing social processes: (1) humans act toward an object in the world in terms of the meaning it has for them; (2) such meanings are not inherent in the object but develop through social interaction; and (3) the meanings applied are neither automatic nor unproblematic but rather subject to interpretation and internal conversation. Therefore, the significance of things is not simply levied by individuals but rather negotiated via interaction with others and can be fluid and variable based on, among other things, time, place and individuals involved. Importantly, individuals must agree, more or less, as to the meaning of things and connotations change contingent on a host of factors. Essentially, taken for granted words/constructs need to be analyzed in context, as words do not always indicate the same thing in all situations. For example, while girls may be socialized and expected to be feminine, the construct feminine may be interpreted and presented differently at work, at home, at school, or on a date. Additionally, feminine may look different at different ages or different regions. Much the same as there are multiple masculinities, some more hegemonic than others (Connell 2005), so there are multiple

femininities. Therefore, while there may be agreement in a heteronormative society that femininity is ideal for women, there is not *one* femininity with *one* perfect presentation. How then do women negotiate how they present in this society?

Charles Horton Cooley offers the idea of the dialectical relationship between the "self" and "society," and asserts that the delineation is somewhat ambiguous. "A separate individual is an abstraction unknown to experience, and so likewise is society when regarded as something apart from an individual . . . 'society' and 'individuals' do not denote separable phenomena but are simply collective and distributive aspects of the same thing" ([1902]1922:36-7). Cooley offers the concept of the "looking glass self" to articulate how individuals engage in a negotiation process. Essentially, the individual contemplates what others see, assesses the others' opinion, and finally negotiates appearance based on perceived reactions. This "mirror" represents an apt metaphor when contemplating physical appearance.

However, there is no one "other person." Rather, the mirror has many faces looking back and the resulting "imagination" is contingent on the audience for whom the presentation is intended. Erving Goffman, among other theorists, contends there are multiple selves. In "On Face-work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction" (1955), Goffman asserts that individuals wear masks to present the right face to the right crowd. While the crowd dictates the wearing of a mask, the individual has some agency as to which mask to wear (Lemert and Branaman 1997). Regardless of mask chosen, of significance to Goffman is the idea that the self is merely a social construct or, alternatively stated, a negotiated being. While individuals may make some choices as to how to present and manage, or arguably manipulate, identity, the significance of self is only relevant as part of the dialectical process between an individual and society. Thus, there is no unique inner or inherently human self, but rather a self that is produced

as the result of the relevant scene for a particular audience (Lemert and Branaman 1997). While Goffman (1959) equates presentation with performance, performance does not necessarily mean conscious manipulative acting. Some individuals, however, are more cognizant of their performance. Often, it is because they possess a stigma.

A stigma indicates the possession of an attribute deemed undesirable and inconsistent with societal expectations. Goffman (1963) ponders the implications of negotiating such a stigmatized or "tainted" identity. Fundamentally, those possessing a stigma risk discreditation. Discreditation merely refers to losing status or some position in a group. Stated more simply, you are not what people thought you were *and* arguably what you are could be viewed as less desirable. For example, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's image as a strong and powerful President *could have* been compromised by the fact he had polio and needed assistance to walk. Those who deviate from normative expectations often must engage in negotiation with "normals" for acceptance. FDR negotiated by engaging in clever tricks to hide his inability to walk without assistance in order to maintain his strong leadership image to the American people.

Not all stigmas are the same or easy to mask. Some stigmas are visible, such as paralysis or blindness, while others are not. Invisible stigmas are attributes not readily apparent but rather visible only upon *disclosure* by the "tainted." Essentially, no one would know, if the possessor of the "stigma" did not say anything. As disclosure is arguably a choice—a matter of to tell or not to tell—individuals must contemplate the ramifications of disclosure (Goffman 1963). For some, nonheterosexuality represents such an invisible stigma.

Possessing a stigma often relegates individuals to an outsider status. As such, individuals may not have the same rights and privileges afforded those with insider status. For example, in many states, those who engage in nonheterosexual partnerships are denied the right to be married

or adopt children. Furthermore, many nonheterosexuals are not protected in the labor market, as sexual orientation or sexual identity is typically not considered a protected class. In an effort to achieve some of the same privileges, or mitigate potential discrimination, those *tainted* must determine how best to manage their *spoiled* identity. Fundamentally, if they want membership, they must figure out how best to fit in to the relevant community standards. For some, this simply means, "don't tell and blend in with the 'normative' community." For others, it can mean rejecting societal norms altogether (Goffman 1963).

According to Goffman (1963), stigmatized individuals may dedicate much energy to managing perceptions. Fear of rejection and or disapproval results in some stigmatized individuals removing themselves from interacting within normative society. Others engage in daily negotiations. Regardless of the strategy employed, the stigma often becomes the individual's master status, basically dictating identity.

Identity management may become essential to stigmatized individuals. Goffman (1963) distinguishes between "actual" and "virtual" identity. What society projects onto an individual comprises their virtual identity. If there is disparity between actual and virtual identity, this creates the aforementioned "discreditable" situation. Thus, failure to disclose a stigma results in a discreditable situation. It should be noted that discreditable and discredited are not synonymous. One indicates *potential* discreditation and the other represents actually being discredited. Furthermore, invisibility does not connote normalcy. However, it does provide an option not afforded many other stigmas: the potential to pass.

Goffman introduces the concepts of "passing" (1963:42) and "disidentifiers" (1963:43). Essentially, these are methods of hiding/managing societally viewed negative attributes. The stigmatized individual attempts to conform to normative expectations. Information dissemination

helps the stigmatized to essentially control perception. Some nonheterosexual women cognizantly avail themselves of this strategy. In an effort to manage their stigma and "pass," conscious effort is given to the "appropriate" feminine presentation of self. Taking clues from a heteronormative society, women engage in such rituals as growing out and coloring their hair, painting their face and nails, and wearing feminine clothing.

Goffman (1963) asserts that others reject this tactic and find comfort within a community that seems to share their "affliction," thus further placing emphasis on the importance of the stigma. *Affiliation* within a community requires that members share a common attribute. This alternative (nonnormative) community does not afford its members the same rights and privileges as those not afflicted, but rather provides a haven removed from the dominant ideology. Within this community, information management becomes less relevant. In this situation, nonheterosexual women may be less concerned with feminine appearance and present themselves as masculine or butch. As more masculine or butch, their looks serves as an identifier to this marginalized community.

This analysis suggests that nonheterosexual women *use* femininity to mark community membership. Those who embrace femininity and conform to normative standards gain acceptance, while those who reject femininity and find their own communities may be viewed as deviant. In Goffman's terms, the choices are clear—acceptance *or* deviance.

However, not all nonheterosexual women consider sexual identity their master status or a stigma requiring negotiation. Articulating a nonheteronormative sexual identity as a stigma and a master status immediately reduces gender to subordinated status. Not all nonheterosexual women share this ordering (Stearns 1995; Stein 1997).

Many nonheterosexual women do not don a “womanly” appearance to pass but rather view their gender expression as either unrelated or merely separate from their sexual identity. Thus, being feminine does not automatically connote managing stigma. Some women embrace “woman” while rejecting “heterosexual,” as they see gender and sexuality as two distinct constructs to be separately, and arguably equally, negotiated. A “femme” identity can provide one such example.

There are many femme *identities.* A femme identity does not indicate any one particular sexual identity or any one particular gender presentation. Rather, a femme identity is a rejection of heteronormative thinking and can be presented in many forms. Fundamentally, the manifestation of a femme identity rests solely on the individual. For some, such manifestation results in seemingly gender appropriate expressions, while others offer different presentations. Those who look feminine by heteronormative standards clearly state their presentation *does not* reflect a hiding of their sexual identity. However, while a femme may see this distinction between gender presentation and sexual expression clearly, such demarcation is not always readily apparent to others.

Many femmes express that their sexuality is rendered invisible because of their normative gender appearance. The consequence of normative presentation and a nonnormative sexual identity creates a unique type of negotiation. As their presentation does not clearly mark them as nonheterosexuals, they are often denied access or acceptance in *nonheteronormative* communities. Essentially, they experience the reverse of those who consider their sexuality a stigma to be negotiated. Being femme may render their sexuality invisible, which for this group *is not* the goal. Therefore, femmes may naturally pass in a heteronormative society, despite their lack of interest in doing so (Harris and Cocker 1997; Rose and Camilleri 2002).

Thus, femininity and sexual identity have an interesting relationship. Femininity, and a feminine presentation, or even more specifically a feminine *look*, is often perceived as an indicator of sexuality. The question becomes, does one *do* femininity to manage a stigmatized identity or for some other reason? If to pass, does she do so cognizantly? If not to pass, why would a woman engage in rituals that historically have been used both to oppress and control her?

Controlling women via their body is not a new concept (Bartky 1990; Bordo 2003; Brownmiller 1984). The mind/body duality within Western culture, equating masculinity and men with the mind, and femininity and women with the body, has a long history (Bordo 2003; Brownmiller 1984; Hesse-Biber 1996; Weitz 2005). Chinese foot binding and constrictive corset wearing provide two clear examples of how culture can and does control women's bodies (Hesse-Biber 1996). While these two examples may seem antiquated, the mind/body dichotomy still exists today and possibly is more insidious (Bartky 1990; Hesse-Biber 1996). External physical constraints were replaced with internal pressures to conform (Bartky 1990; Hesse-Biber 1996; Weitz 2005). While no longer overtly dictated via legal sanction such as sumptuary law, other less overt sanctions remain in place. For example, women are expected to be thin, wear make-up, be young, and dress appropriately. [2]

Essentially, in our hegemonic masculine culture, "woman" is synonymous with "feminine," and feminine typically entails appearance management. Women are inundated with images of an unobtainable beauty ideal (Barky 1990; Bordo 2003; Brownmiller 1984; Chapkis 1986; Chernin 1992; 1994; Etcoff 1999; Goodman 1995; Hesse-Biber 1996, Jeffes 1998; Scott

[2] Sumptuary law is defined in Webster's as "a law regulating personal habits that offend the moral or religious beliefs of the community." Or "a law regulating personal expenditures designed to restrain extravagance, esp. in food and dress."

2005; Tseelon 1995; Weitz 2005; Wolf 1991). Such images have led to increases in anorexia and bulimia (Bordo 2003: Cash and Pruzinsky 1990; Chernin 1992; 1994, Hesse-Biber 1996; LeBesco 2004). Concurrently, the diet industry, cosmetic industry, hair industry, and plastic surgery industry have all profited from selling these hegemonic and arguably misogynistic messages (Bartky 1990; Bordo 2003; Hesse-Biber 1996; Weitz 2006). However, while many researchers contemplate the implications of these messages to heterosexual women, few thoroughly consider the ramifications for nonheterosexual communities (Abraham and Beumont 1982; Gettleman and Thompson 1993; Herzog, Neuman, Yeh and Warshaw 1992; Brand, Rothblum and Solomon 1992; Striegel-Moore, Tucker and Hsu 1990; Striegel-Moore, Silberstein and Rodin 1986). While this is changing, lesbian, queer, bisexual and other nonheteronormative identified women are often subsumed under the construct woman and subsequently contemplated only by gender. This is problematic in that such conflation implies a homogeneous marginalized population.

While all nonheteronormative women share marginalization due to a nonheterosexual identification and subordination as a result of patriarchy (Crowder 1986), lumping this group together is inaccurate. For example, feminine or “lipstick” lesbians *may* seek to disassociate from “butch” or masculine lesbians as not representative of them. Similarly, butch or masculine lesbians *may* find feminine lesbians offensive for succumbing to heteronormative ideals. However, members of each community might have no animosity toward the other. Rather, they may seek out their “opposite,” lipstick lesbian or butch, for purposes of partnering.

Whether embraced or rejected, femininity has unique meaning to this community. Femininity may serve as a divider between visible and invisible stigma (sexual identity negotiation) or butch and femme (gender presentation negotiation).

To assert this innocuous term, feminine, has one universal meaning and there is *a* femininity, is problematic, as this construct is not static but rather socially mediated. Thus, a better understanding of the term, using nonheterosexual women's voices, may not only benefit nonheterosexual women but also heterosexual women as well. As articulated by Luzzatto and Gvion (2004:45):

> By looking for particular concerns of the lesbians it would be possible not only to bring the body into the sociological discourse, but to liberate both the lesbian and heterosexual women from the patriarchal discourse that measures the body through heterocentric glasses.

Analyzing both misogynistic *and* heterosexist messages, how they work separately and in concert, illuminates the power of social control over *all* women in a patriarchal society. Essentially, many nonheterosexual women still don heterocentric glasses, even though they contain the wrong lens.

Thus, deconstructing femininity, and what misogynistic and heterosexist messages their definitions incorporate, informs how and why this sub-population *thinks* about misogyny *and* its role in presentation of self.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

My research interest revolved around what women felt pretty and why. To discern this information, I focused on three key areas: (1) Gender and Related Misogynistic Issues; (2) Sexuality and Related Heterosexist Issues; and (3) Femininity and Related Confidence Issues. Fundamentally, women are constantly bombarded with both misogynistic and heterosexist messages. I wanted to know what women successfully negotiated nonheteronormativity and still demonstrated self-confidence. As neither gender nor sexuality exists in a vacuum but rather together inform how nonheterosexual women think about their environment, I interviewed women who satisfied both criteria.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING

I had four criteria for selecting participants. Every participant had to identify both as female (sex) and woman (gender). Additionally, they could identify as anything but heterosexual, and they must either currently be partnered or seeking to partner with biological women. Gaining access to and faithfully representing this nonheterosexual community can be challenging, given the sensitivity of the subject matter (Acker, Barry and Esseveld 1983; Denizen 2000; Denizen and Lincoln 1998; Denizen and Lincoln 2000; DeVault 1996; Fine 2000; Gamson 2000; Gergen and Gergen 2000; Hesse-Biber and Yaiser 2004; Jayaratne and Stewart 1991; Naples 2003; Reinharz 1992; Stombler et. al 2003). Additionally, the more a group deviates from the heteronormative ideal, the more strategic a researcher need be in finding the community. For example, feminine nonheterosexuals can hide their “stigmatized” status, by not overtly indicating their sexuality. Therefore, finding participants may be difficult, as they are not readily ascertainable.

Initially, I posted an advertisement on a listserv that specifically targeted this nonhetero-sexual population and placed a notice at a locally owned bookstore. I also personally contacted women via email who fit my criteria and/or knew women who would fit my criteria and asked them to forward my flyer. (See Appendix C for Recruitment Flyer.) The listserv and the email proved the most fruitful. Some individuals contacted me to determine whether I could interview them via the phone. As I was doing qualitative interviewing coupled with photo-elicitation (discussed below) this did not seem feasible. I stored their contact information but limited myself to women residing in or close to one major metropolitan city in the southeastern United States. While geographically I traveled no more than 40 miles for any interview, my participants came from all over the United States. One participant grew up in the Caribbean.

Participants were recruited via convenience and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling coupled with "networking" or snowball sampling (Henry 1990:65) enabled me to cast a wider net. While this method provides excellent access to a hidden population, issues related to the representativeness of the sample arise. Finding a member of the community does not connote access to the entire population. The sample proves only as good as the network ties and is somewhat limited because of the network chain (Lee 1993). Aware of these concerns, I made sure my first three scheduled interviews came from different "network chains." Throughout the process, I kept a master file of interviews conducted to ensure maximum representativeness. The spreadsheet included demographic information such as age, race, and socioeconomic status. For example, I tracked age (under 30, 30-39, 40-49, and 50+), and never interviewed more than three in a row within the same age bracket. Concurrently, I recorded race and socioeconomic status. This resulted in an age diverse sample that was equally dispersed by decade. Additionally, each decade contained at least one "nonwhite" participant and people of different socioeconomic

statuses. To ensure diversity further, as interviews progressed, I split “decades” into 5-year periods. When I bifurcated the decades, except for the 20-29 age bracket, the sample remained evenly distributed.

Table 1. Distribution of Sample by Age Grouping

Age Grouping	*# of Participants*
20-24	3
25-29	6
30-34	5
35-39	6
40-44	8
45-49	6
50-54	5
55 and over	4
Total	43

Clearly, some networks proved more fruitful than others. My tracking of demographic information helped minimize skewing and improved representativeness. A more detailed account of the demographic “split” is provided in Appendix A.

The most difficult group to gain entrée to was the “nonwhite” group. This may be a result of my being a white researcher with fewer “nonwhite” convenience samples from which to start a chain. While my “nonwhite” participants articulated enjoying the process and the interview, I

was reliant on them to “snowball” and gain me more interviews. Despite the fact that many women did offer me access to their network chains, few chains in this demographic came to fruition. It took longer to access individuals who did not identify as white. Therefore, I increased my sample to 43 from 40 in order to achieve my goal of a minimum of one-quarter nonwhite participants. I acknowledge that “lumping” and “splitting” this demographic into one population of “nonwhite” is problematic and somewhat arbitrary (Zerubavel 1997). Regardless, inclusion of this nonwhite population served to offer competing narratives to those who have benefited from the privilege of “whiteness.”

Each interview lasted between one and two hours. As my experience increased, so did the length of the interview, from an average of one hour and fifteen minutes to closer to one hour fifty minutes.

INTERVIEW PROCESS TIMELINE

My goal was to interview a minimum of 40 participants. I began the interview process late November 2006 and interviewed on a fairly consistent basis, completing 43 interviews by the first week in May 2007. My interview schedule was aggressive. From November to February, I interviewed one or two participants a week and made sure transcriptions, which initially I did myself, occurred within 72 hours. Transcribing the interviews allowed me to hear the quality of my recordings, assess quickly my performance as an interviewer, and make any necessary adjustments to my techniques and/or my interview guide. This tactic proved effective. While highly critical of my interview style initially (I did far too much talking), I quickly remedied the situation. Additionally, as I did my own transcriptions early on, I made notes on what seemed to be standing out. Essentially, I did some coding and memo writing while transcribing. I made notes of types of more generative questions to ask during the interview

process. For example, after my first two interviews I heard an articulation of a clear awareness of societal standards of femininity and I was beginning to process what they did with that information. I wrote a note in my second memo: "*Is there a relationship between self-esteem and rejection or acceptance of societal standards?"* I then included in my interview guide questions related to self-confidence, which ultimately became a major component of the story.

While initially the time I allotted for completing the interviews seemed daunting, in the final analysis it worked to my advantage. As I never had major gaps in interviewing, I was very comfortable and familiar with the interview guide. I was clear as to when to probe to solicit more information. I made sure not to engage in too many interviews consecutively so that my questions seemed fresh and I had time to analyze the data collected. After the 20th interview, I hired a professional transcriber who made achieving my target end date possible. As I engaged in grounded theory methods, my systematic gathering and analysis were very effective. I made sure my concepts were relevant across different demographics and knew when to include additional probes to discern dimensionality.

DATA COLLECTION

Photo Elicitation

I used photo elicitation coupled with in-depth interviews to deconstruct and determine how lesbians saw "femininity." I asked participants to bring a photograph of a woman whom they saw as representative of feminine or "femininity." Initially, I only asked for a representation of feminine but after three interviews it became clear that some women, but not all, differentiated between the two terms. As I did not want to impose my definitions of these terms on my participants, my request was intentionally left ambiguous. When asked, "what does that mean?" My response was always "Whatever that means to you."

Photo elicitation is often used in ethnographic research. Researchers, armed with a camera, engage in an almost a photojournalistic endeavor. While visually stimulating, this methodology suffers in that what is chosen as relevant is what the ethnographer records. Further, what is recorded may be biased as it reflects the ethnographer's perspective and not that of those observed (Ball and Smith 1992; Collier and Collier 1986; Harper 2002; Prosser 2004). In an effort to ameliorate this situation, the photographs contemplated in my study were not those provided by the researcher but rather supplied by the participants. My goal in employing this strategy was to enable the participants to frame femininity rather than analyze a preset and arguably biased representation.

As misogynistic beauty messages emphasize that women should literally *look* a certain way, the photographs provided an effective tool to see if the women internalized and accepted the messages. Simply, the photographs were used to illuminate not only how "feminine/-femininity" is constructed but also literally what "it" looks like. While the request for a photo-graph was always mentioned, I also stated that it was optional. Of my 43 interviews, 33 did bring photographs. Some women brought more than one photograph, either of the same woman in different poses, or of separate and distinct women. If photographs were originals they were returned; otherwise, if amenable to the participant, I retained them for future reference.

In the beginning of the study, I was less comfortable with my interview guide and where the interview would lead. In early interviews, I introduced the photo-elicitation rather quickly after basic background demographic questions and their coming out story. The photograph served to give us both something on which to focus and a transition from one topic to the next. However, as I got more comfortable with my guide and had begun the coding, the photograph seemed of more interest to them than to me. As many of my respondents were obtained via

“snowball” sampling, they had heard of the “interesting interview using photographs,” and they indicated that was what got them most intrigued. This component of my interview seemed to get people excited, engaged, and, equally as relevant, eager to participate.

When participants presented their photograph, I simply asked, “Why did you choose this one?” I tried to discern if it was the actual photograph and the person’s physical appearance in it, or were they focused on the person regardless of any particular pose. For example, some women talked specifically about the way the woman was standing or dressed, while others said things like, “You can’t see it in this picture but Sue moves in a very feminine way.” Therefore, asking this simple first question proved effective, interesting, and frustrating, as it was sometimes hard for them to articulate why exactly a particular picture was selected. Regardless, I never wavered from this initial question throughout the process, as it served to give the first indicator of whether they were focused on the physical in assessing femininity or some other less tangible quality. This became key during the coding process.

Qualitative Interviewing

The bulk of information was obtained via qualitative interviewing. Qualitative interviewing allowed me to infuse many perspectives, as I had a diverse sample. (See Appendix A.) As a feminist researcher it was paramount that I provide my interviewees with voice. While there is no “one” feminist “methodology” (Acker, Barry and Esseveld 1883; Denzin and Lincoln 2000; DeVault 1996; DeVault 2004; Hesse-Biber, Nagy and Yaiser 2004; Jayaratne and Stewart 1991; Naples 2003; Reinharz 1992), semi-structured and unstructured interviews enabled me to achieve my goal. As stated by Hilary Graham in Reinharz (1992), “The use of semi-structured interviews has become the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives” (p. 18).

I gained an understanding of how people constructed femininity, when they presented themselves as “feminine,” and what informed their constructions. I was able to “bridge intersubjectivities” and develop a “holistic description” (Weiss 1994:10). These last two accomplishments were particularly relevant. As Hesse-Biber, Leavy and Yaiser (2004:22) stated regarding feminist researchers,

> They view research holistically--as a process, and thus pay attention to synergy between context of discovery and the context of justification. Feminists have changed conceptions of what truth is, who can be knower, what can be known. By creating situated and partial knowledges, by attending to the intersection of gender and other categories of difference such as race, class and sexual preference in its analysis of social reality, feminist research is open to knew knowledge-asking new questions.

Initially, I thought the focal point would be the photographs to discern definitions of femininity. As I got further into the process, significantly more time than I had anticipated was spent discussing “coming out” narratives. While the interview guide itself only changed minimally, the focus of the probes changed to accommodate their desire to discuss their stories. (See Appendix B.)

The “coming out” narratives were invaluable, as they demonstrated where they were regarding their sexuality. We discussed such topics as, but did not limit ourselves to, when and where they disclosed their sexuality, and who influenced their journey. Some articulated the process as seamless and uneventful; others as dramatic and exhausting; and for still others, the process was ongoing. Coupling these narratives with their understanding of femininity became the story.

A research interview provides one of the few opportunities for interviewees to talk at length about themselves. This is exceptionally relevant when contending with such sensitive matters as sex, sexuality, and/or sex practices. Being forced into a “secret” community makes it

more likely that a participant may “cross boundaries” during the interview process. This was particularly relevant for those participants who remained “in the closet” or were still struggling with some issues related to their sexuality. While a participant may conflate the concept of researcher with confessor, therapist, mentor or friend, this concern did not come to fruition. My participants were forthcoming. While some shared very intimate details of their lives, at any point where I felt they were getting too far away from the specific subject matter, I redirected the questions back to the interview guide. This happened very infrequently and was more a result of the open-ended structure employed during the interview than a need to confess or require therapy. This means of interviewing provided rich and detailed information, as the participants felt liberated to lead the dialogue where they wanted it to go. The conversational tone seemed to put the participants at ease and on only one occasion did I feel I needed to extract information via direct and consistent questioning. Overall, the participants effortlessly shared information. I viewed myself as facilitator and guide while empowering them to be the storyteller.

Along with benefits, qualitative research also has some inherent concerns. While some qualitative research methodologies advocate complete objectivity, an arguably impossible position, a feminist qualitative researcher does not share this goal (Reinharz 1992; Hesse-Biber et al. 2004). Complete detached objectivity is neither possible nor desired. Therefore, I maintained a balance between being a researcher and a participant who shared similar issues and concerns. I did not disclose any opinions until the close of the interview in an effort to avoid leading the participants to follow any particular research agenda.

GROUNDED THEORY METHODS

To deconstruct the language, I used grounded theory methods (GTM). LaRossa (2005:838) offers five principles for interpreting GTM: (1) “Language is central to social life”;

(2) “Words are the indicators upon which GTM-derived theories are formed”; (3) “Coding and explanation are built upon a series of empirical and conceptual comparisons. The construction of variables . . . depends on classifying concepts and infusing dimensionality into the theorizing process”; (4) “. . . theories are sets of inter-related propositions whereas propositions state how variables are related”; and (5) “There is value in choosing one variable from among many variables that a grounded theoretical analysis may generate and making that variable central when engaged in theoretical writing.” Using these five principles, I employed open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, as offered by Glaser (1978), Strauss (1987), and Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998) and articulated by LaRossa (2005), to analyze the data. Essentially, I used GTM to analyze the data word by word to arrive at a theoretically grounded and well-crafted story.

GTM begin with the open coding process. The objective of open coding is to develop variables or dimensions. In order to develop variables, I read the data word-by-word, line-by-line, and paragraph-by-paragraph to ascertain potential indicators. Indicators refer to words or phrases in the text. I constantly compared indicators to other indictors to see if they could be subsumed under abstract concepts. Concepts were then compared and grouped to form variables.

Whereas open coding emphasizes the construction of variables, the next “phase,” axial coding, contemplates such things as “causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions” (LaRossa 2005; see also Glaser 1978, Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1998). Essentially, at this point I achieved an even higher level of abstraction by creating theoretical propositions. Basically, the linking of variables provided a means of understanding such things as why femininity is enacted or rejected and the ramification of those actions.

This ultimate “story” developed during the selective coding process. It was during this “phase” that the core variable was selected. The core variable essentially is the variable that,

among other things, seems most centrally relevant and appears most frequently in the data. It represents the highest level of abstraction and under which the other variables can be subsumed. Selective coding also encourages formal theorizing. Thus, while my study was substantively about how nonheterosexual women perceive femininity, in the end I addressed subordination in general and how it is both negotiated and socially constructed.

For example, when first reading my second interview I noticed this exchange[3]:

> *Are you out?* NO, and it's a bone of contention for me and like every day I am like is this the day I am going to come out? *Why?* I am tired of the duplicity. Not duplicity, the duality in my life. I have a work life . . . and a life in the rest of the world. I was out at my old firm" (Carole).

Initially, I coded this segment under "Performance," a concept I had identified in my first interview. The respondent seemed to be engaged in a type of performance, had an awareness of her audience, and put on the appropriate mask (Goffman 1955).

However, as the coding continued, this concept evolved. Throughout the process, as GTM require, I would ask myself generative questions such as, *"When do you perform?" "Have performances change over time?" "What triggers different performances?" "When do you feel least like you are wearing a mask or disguise?"* Continually asking questions and documenting my thoughts via memos, I realized that "Performance" needed to be transposed into a variable. Fundamentally, while "performance" was still relevant, I realized that performances were *contingent* on, among other things, how they both defined femininity and their reaction to misogynistic messages. I continued to code my interviews and write memos, asking questions such as "*Do you use physical traits or "inner beauty" to describe feminine?" "Could someone be feminine and not look feminine?" "Do you consider yourself feminine?" "Does being feminine matter to you—when and where?" "How and when do you 'do' feminine?" "Is*

[3] Italics indicate interviewer question or probe.

feminine a choice?" "Is feminine static or fluid?" As I continued to query, my coding evolved into the variable, Types of Femininity.

For example, one type, the Comprehensive Conformist, articulated femininity as indicated by both certain actions and physical appearance. Comprehensive Conformists frequently suggested feminine as some oppressive construct they had to abide by in order to maintain membership in a heteronormative society. Conversely, Mobile Nonconformists suggested femininity as emanating from an individual, instead of being imposed on her by a society. Therefore, rather than view femininity as some negative construct, as did Comprehensive Conformists, Mobile Nonconformists expressed femininity in only positive terms. Both interpreted societal messages similarly, but reacted to the messages quite differently. This reaction resulted in markedly different definitions of femininity. Furthermore, understanding how the women defined femininity, illuminated when and how they "performed" femininity. Ultimately, I arrived at six types in my typology. Understanding the different types enabled me to then revisit and contextualize performances.

During the interviewing phase of this project, coding and interviewing occurred simultaneously. This means I did not complete all my interviews before I began the coding process. I began the open coding and memo writing immediately. Because of the simultaneous nature of this process, I engaged in theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling occurs when the interviewer notices something in the data not previously contemplated, yet seemingly valuable. For example, as I began to discern different types of femininity, I wanted to understand what *informed* femininity and the role of sexual identity. Initially, I only asked basic demographic information such as: what is your date of birth, how would you describe your race or ethnicity, where are you originally from, and what was your last year of education? As the process

continued, I began to ask questions such as: *"What causes matter to you most?" "If you were to describe yourself, what adjectives would you use?" "Do you use those descriptors in any particular order or does one "identity" matter to you most?" "How important is your faith?" "How much do you think your sexual identity influences you and when?"* These questions provided insight as to how great, or small, the women considered the importance of their sexuality when interacting within society, and ultimately informed Sexual Identity Salience, another variable.

I continued to group indicators under concepts until no new significant insights were added. There is no predetermined number of indicators required to achieve a saturated concept. To take concept to variable requires another level of abstraction. Fundamentally, variables involve an array of concepts and thinking in terms of dimensions. For example, using the concept "sexual identity," I would pose questions such as *degrees* of "relevance," and *context* of "masking." A variable must include a minimum of two concepts.

It should be noted here that problematic in any discourse regarding GTM are the seemingly sequential nature of the steps. For purposes of explaining my process, I have tried to segregate the steps. Realistically, however, many steps happen concurrently and are not so clearly delineated. The memos were an essential element, as they allowed me to link indicators, concepts and variables, crystallize ideas and facilitate telling the ultimate story.

During the final "phase," selective coding, I determined that my core variable was "Complicit Misogyny." Linking "Misogynistic Beauty Messages," "Personal Beauty Compliance," "Sexual Identity Negotiation," "Sexual Identity Salience," and "Self-Confidence" enabled me to tell the story of why and for whom these women made certain presentation choices, what femininity looked like to them, and ultimately, how they felt about themselves.

CHAPTER FOUR: WHAT IS A FEMININE WOMAN?

> *Despite the fact that each woman knows her own belabored transformation from female to feminine is artificial, she harbors the secret convention that it should be effortless.* (Chapkis 1986:5).

Books such as *Beauty Secrets* (Chapkis 1986*), The Beauty Myth* (Wolf 1991), and *Femininity* (Brownmiller 1984) depicted images of "attractiveness" used against women. Fundamentally, these books and others demonstrated the burden of beauty on women and how women contended with these arguably "misogynistic" messages (Brownmiller 1984; Chapkis 1986; Etcoff 1999; Hesse-Biber 1996; Wolf 1991). The authors asserted that imposing beauty on women proved problematic in that such messages were controlling and relegated women to a subordinated status, as they emphasized "looks" rather than other, arguably more pertinent, issues (Brownmiller 1984; Etcoff 1999, Wolf 1991).

Additionally, in a patriarchal heteronormative society, "beauty" has often been used in tandem with "feminine," as if the two constructs are inextricably linked. For example, consider a "masculine" presenting woman. She may be considered handsome, attractive, or even striking. However, few conjoin masculine and beautiful, as they are typically presented as mutually exclusive within a heteronormative society.

What specifically *is* beautiful may be contestable but the idea that there is a construct "beautiful" remains. Concurrently, just as illusive is the definition of feminine. For many, the epitome of femininity is this almost mythical objectified beauty ideal--some snapshot of physical attractiveness or outer beauty. However, not everyone articulates beauty as the ultimate objective or feminine as synonymous with, or related to, a look. This chapter explores the relationship between various misogynistic messages, such as those that emphasize outer beauty, and individual interpretations of femininity.

Many women, both heterosexual and not, internalize misogynistic messages. Internalized misogyny refers to the acceptance of sexist/misogynistic messages *and* the incorporation of such messages into their lives—willingly or not. For example, a woman may say physical appearance does not matter to her and she does not care how others view her, yet she will not leave the house without putting on lipstick. In this example, the actions do not support the statement—thus suggesting internalization.

While beauty ideals and physical appearance are my primary concern, misogyny includes more than these "external" characteristics. "Internal" characteristics or traits may also reflect misogynistic messages. For example, "feminine," for some, suggests passivity, submission, or weakness, while "masculine" conveys power and strength. This interpretation of femininity perpetuates masculine privilege and subordinates women (Brownmiller 1984). Fundamentally, reinforcing feminine and "masculine" as gendered behavior creates boundaries, which serve to marginalize both "masculine" women and feminine men in a society that valorizes hegemonic masculinity.

Using both external and internal misogynistic messages as my guide, I created a typology of femininity. Ultimately, six types emerged. In the next sections, I explain this typology of femininity. First, I present an overview of the typology and provide a table depicting the relationship between identified variables. Following this general explanation, I elaborate on the specific types created.

OVERVIEW OF TYPOLOGY: THE TABLE

The six types created include: Beauty Reifiers, Comprehensive Conformists, Inner Beauty Conformists, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, Mobile Nonconformists, and Pseudo Nonconformists (See Table 2). The development of these six types emerged from two variables

that were looked at conjointly (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland 2006; Strauss and Corbin 1999). I will elaborate on the significance of my naming strategy in the individual sections following. First, I will explain the variables used to create my typology.

The first variable, Misogynistic Beauty Messages, reflects what I considered a macro-level articulation. Fundamentally, when creating a definition of femininity, how did the women demonstrate their reaction to the "beauty myth" and related messages? Simply, what did they say about how women should be judged? Did they indicate that looks or physical appearance mattered? The second variable, Personal Beauty Compliance, refers to how they actually or individually reacted to the "beauty myth." That is, did they do something to modify their personal appearance? Ultimately, I contemplated whether their words, as expressed in variable one, match their actions, as stated in variable two.

Table 2. Typology of Femininity

		Personal Beauty Compliance	
		No	Yes
Misogynistic "Beauty" Messages	*Acceptance* (It is what it is.)	Beauty Reifiers	Comprehensive Conformists
	Questioning (It is what it is; however, perhaps it could be this?)	Inner Beauty Conformists	Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists
	Rejection (It is what I say it is.)	Mobile Nonconformists	Pseudo Nonconformists

The women I interviewed responded to the first variable, "Misogynistic Beauty Messages," in one of three ways: acceptance, questioning, or rejection. Acceptance indicates not interrogating the idea that women are judged by their looks *and* physical appearance serves as a key marker of femininity. Acceptance does not necessarily connote awareness of this expression.

Rather, it refers to how they incorporated these misogynistic beauty messages *in their stated definition of femininity*—not their cognizance of doing so. Both Beauty Reifiers and Comprehensive Conformists expressed acceptance of the messages that said women are judged by their looks.

Those who are questioning express awareness of misogynistic beauty messages but attempt to articulate definitions that suggest greater agency. Both Inner Beauty Conformists and Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists stated that women might be judged by their physical appearance but were questioning if this external measure should serve as the barometer of achieving "femininity." Questioning entails neither completely accepting nor completely rejecting ideas conveyed in the literature. Fundamentally, they recognize the social relevance of physical appearance but struggle with its importance.

Rejection, as the name suggests, indicates clearly and unambiguously rejecting misogynistic beauty messages. Both Mobile Nonconformists and Pseudo Nonconformists found such messages oppressive. For Mobile Nonconformists, rejecting these misogynistic messages meant creating a new feminine definition, which discards, or rejects, their understanding of society's definition. Pseudo Nonconformists rejected the entire construct, "feminine." Regardless, whether continuing to use the construct or creating a new term, all definitively expressed rejecting anything imposed on them and articulated tremendous agency.

The second variable, Personal Beauty Compliance, refers to what the women personally did with beauty messages. Beauty Reifiers, Inner Beauty Conformists, and Mobile Nonconformists all expressed the relationship between misogynistic beauty messages and femininity differently, as indicated by the first variable. However, all definitively said that external expectations had no bearing on their personal appearance choices. Fundamentally, they did not

allow the misogynistic beauty messages to dictate how they personally looked.

For Comprehensive Conformists, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, and Pseudo Nonconformists, the reaction was a little more nuanced. Comprehensive Conformists unequivocally offered that they personally conformed to "beauty" messages as a perceived requirement for membership to a heteronormative community. Both Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists and Pseudo Nonconformists were also personally influenced by misogynistic beauty messages, despite expressing their questioning or rejecting them (variable one). For example, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists said that physical appearance did not matter when discussing beauty and/or femininity. Rather they emphasized the importance of traits or "inner beauty." However, while Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists *wanted* internal attributes to be the key component of femininity, they ultimately emphasized physical appearance in their definitions and personally conformed to a feminine "look." Hence the name, *Pseudo* Inner Beauty Conformists, reflecting desire to be focused on traits or "inner beauty," but not quite succeeding. Pseudo Nonconformists expressed rejection of misogynistic messages related to appearance per variable one, yet personally often mirrored what they purported to reject. Both Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists and Pseudo Nonconformists contradict their initial expressed definitions, in different ways and in varying degrees, and offered reasons for their choices. Stated alternatively, both saw and expressed "outer beauty" as problematic, yet both still tried and wanted to be "beautiful." As the term *pseudo* suggests desiring to be something, the term is applicable to both of these types.

The following sections elaborate on the six types included in the typology to illuminate how these nonheteronormative women contend with misogynistic messages and both understand and employ the term "feminine."

BEAUTY REIFIERS

According to the aforementioned literature, messages articulated in a heteronormative society suggest a woman *should* be concerned with how she looks and appears. While the literature concluded such messages were insidious, Beauty Reifiers did not recognize any potential danger. As the name suggests, Beauty Reifiers incorporated the idea that physical appearance—*what they saw*—mattered. As Catherine stated:

> Describe someone that's feminine? I would think someone is feminine is someone that is—someone that's feminine is some woman that is concerned with their appearance. And they're—I'm not sure that the word hygiene is right, but they're—from their— *Grooming?* Yeah, grooming. That they're concerned with their grooming. *Okay.* And that, as far as feminine, I do think someone that does wear some minimum make-up, takes care of their nails, something like that is probably more feminine. *Okay. Can you—so it's a look?* Uh-huh. Yeah, femininity is more of a look.

While not always overtly reifying oppressive presentational messages, Beauty Reifiers consistently emphasized the importance of physical appearance and, furthermore, they did so unproblematically and unemotionally. Almost a quarter of a century after Chapkis wrote *Beauty Secrets* (1986), and Wolf wrote *The Beauty Myth* (1991), Beauty Reifiers did not express any awareness of beauty ideals imposed on them. Instead of viewing a feminine presentation as compulsory, Beauty Reifiers suggested feminine represented a *fact* and some women just simply were feminine.

Thus, while not all Beauty Reifiers considered themselves feminine, or made efforts to look feminine, all asserted unequivocally that a feminine woman would. Furthermore, although the actual embodiment of a feminine woman varied among this group, the idea that feminine was tied to physical appearance did not.

> *So how would you describe— did you actually bring a picture?* Let me see if I can find it. I love Nancy Wilson. That's my—*Who?* Nancy Wilson. *Oh, okay. So tell me why you pick her as a representation of femininity?* I don't know if I'm articulating. She is beautiful. *Is beautiful feminine?* Yes. She is not just feminine

> but elegant and classy and—elegant. *So—elegant is high up there on what makes someone feminine?* Yeah. Because you see—you could see folks like—what's that hip hop guy? Russell Simmons. His wife. I think she's pretty, I think she's feminine, but I think she's a little too bling bling. That's not attractive to me. That's not feminine to me. The understated sort of clean lines and natural beauty does it for me. I like that salt and pepper on Nancy Wilson. She doesn't put on a whole lot of dangly, clingy, clangy, shiny stuff. *She just is?* She just is. And I think if she put it on, depending on what you put, it might take away from her beauty. But you know if you have to keep adding to yourself to make yourself feminine and beautiful—*So you either are or are not feminine just naturally?* I think so. *So if you don't have it, you can't fake it?* I don't know if I'm going to be that black and white about it. But one of the people that I probably get it from is my mom. My mom is beautiful. I just remember when I was a little girl, I just used to look at her and go, "Wow." She's a beautiful chocolate and when her gray was coming in she wouldn't color it. And she was so—she made her own clothes. I just remember there was this one dress I just loved. It was, she had the one shoulder out. And then it would come across, and it was real sexy seeing just the shoulder. And it would come across there, and then the dress not only gathered there but then it was sort of like from that point a little scarf that went off the length of the dress. And when she walked, it would play in the wind. And my mom wasn't big on make-up. You know, she might put on a little eyeliner, a little lipstick. She was just beautiful. That's probably where I get it from. So when I see women like that—*So is your mother an example of a feminine ideal?*—maybe. She's seventy-eight now. She don't care how she dresses now. *Is it because she doesn't care how she dresses, or just because at a certain age you just stop being it?* She just gave up. (Laughs.) She has given up…We take her shopping sometimes. I buy my mom some nice stuff. She won't wear it. Or these nice shoes—was it Ellen Tracy or something... with a cute little belt high up. We were in the store, "Oh I like that!" And I love long dresses on women. I don't think they look good on me, but. Not always to the floor, but maybe like down to there with a nice little open shoe. And so I bought her one of those. She won't wear it. She'll put on her little house coat . . . (Toby)

Toby, a self identified masculine looking woman, rearticulated the idea of concern with physical appearance as the determination of femininity as originally suggested by Catherine. While neither offered one specific "look," both conveyed an underlying supposition that we all will just know it when we see it and *seeing* it was key.

Thus, a woman may wear make-up or not. She may dress in skirts or wear shorts. The exact appearance was irrelevant. What was repeatedly stated throughout the interviews was, "she just *is* feminine," thereby reinforcing gender normative constructions and utilizing appearance as

the gauge. *What* was gender normative varied slightly; however, the idea that there *was* a gender normative appearance *and* that it served as an indicator of a feminine woman did not. While Beauty Reifiers differed regarding images of what femininity exactly looked like, their desire to be feminine, and their attraction to feminine women, all unabashedly stated that looks mattered when defining femininity. Additionally, when questioning this group as to what was a feminine woman, the idea that it could be something other than "a look" seemed unfathomable.

Misogynistic beauty messages informed their articulations but the Beauty Reifiers avoided selecting iconic figures such as "super models" as emblematic of femininity. Rather, examples included: mothers, other family members, and celebrities such as Princess Diana, Blythe Danner, and Nicole Kidman. Arguably, many of these women were beautiful by conventional standards. The commonality throughout was the emphasis on looking "soft," and "classical."

Beauty Reifiers depersonalized their accounts. While they emphasized external physical markers as the indicator femininity, such understanding did not necessarily influence their own appearance. Therefore, while rearticulating the beauty myth and misogynistic messages in their definition (variable one), they did not view these messages as something to which they personally must obey (variable two). Fundamentally, femininity was something out there and measured by some taken-for-granted external barometer. Moreover, rather than reject this physical measure, as articulated in the beauty myth, Beauty Reifiers unquestioningly accepted the messages and the notion that a feminine woman was her looks—nothing else mattered.

COMPREHENSIVE CONFORMISTS

Both Beauty Reifiers and Comprehensive Conformists accepted the idea that looks matter when contemplating femininity. However, that is the only commonality between these two types.

Comprehensive Conformists consistently reiterated what they perceived as negative normative societal messages. They are considered “comprehensive” because they understood and accepted that misogynistic messages related to both physical appearance *and* personal traits. Additionally, they seemingly incorporated *all* these messages into their lives. Essentially, Comprehensive Conformists accepted the idea that women are judged by their looks and the idea that women were expected to be submissive. Comprehensive Conformists articulated understanding misogynistic messages and simultaneously expressed frustration with such oppressive definitions imposed on women. For example, when discussing the picture brought by Lisa:

> *So what about her body?* Slightly that one shoulder is down. One is up, it's almost like coaxing. It is inviting more to men, it's more sexual to men. It's softer. It has a softer "I am vulnerable, protect me" look. Rather than if you had one of an athlete, probably the arms wouldn't be as close to the body, the legs probably wouldn't be as close, or tucked in neatly together. It would say, "I don't need you to protect me." That kind of takes that femininity away. *So is feminine, does that conjure either positive or negative feelings in you?* Kind of negative. (Lisa)

For Comprehensive Conformists, femininity denotes images of willfully vulnerable women presenting themselves to appeal to men. Unlike Beauty Reifiers, Comprehensive Conformists stated an *awareness* of misogynistic messages suggesting that a feminine woman should present and behave a certain way. Beauty Reifiers indicated no such awareness. This understanding, and subsequent compliance, resulted in Comprehensive Conformists viewing feminine as a negative and personally oppressive construct. While such cognizance was frequently expressed with resentment, and their relationship with femininity antagonistic, they indicated no agency to modify the construct or their relationship with it.

For Comprehensive Conformists, femininity reflected externally imposed standards, constantly reinforced in a patriarchal, heteronormative society. Relevantly, Comprehensive Conformists consistently expressed the importance of “mainstream” acceptability. They wanted to “fit in” or “belong” and viewed compliance as a requirement of membership.

Comprehensive Conformists would be most likely to articulate doing “drag.” Doing drag entails wearing and/or behaving in accordance with their understanding of heteronormative expectations of a feminine woman. “Drag” connotes such presentation may not be reflective of how they want to present (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Throughout the interview, Lola stated she wanted to be a boy and dress in boy’s clothes.

> Yeah. I knew I had a crush. I always wanted to be a boy. *You did?* Umm hum. *From what age to what age?* Umm. *Are we still there?* We're still there. If I could choose, I would have been a guy. *Okay, why?* Umm, I like things that are for guys. *What does that mean?* Like I feel like . . . I would always like cars . . . and like that stuff but I just have always wanted to be a boy . . . and when they took our picture for the school book they thought I was a boy. *Did you want your hair that way or did your mother cut your hair that way?* I wanted my hair that way. *Did she care?* When I went into sixth grade she said “you have a choice—a flowered shirt, a girl's shirt, or clips in your hair.” *So, she was a little concerned you might be confused for a little boy?* Yeah. *And*—And I don't know why she did that. But, I had a choice. So I wore the clips and took them out when I got to school. *Good thinking.* Yeah. *I bet she wasn't so amused when she saw the picture.* I put it on for the picture, but I didn't wear them in school. *Oh, you just*—But I wore the clips in the picture. *Got ya. So, your mom's trying to make you a little more girly and you just really didn't want any of that? . . .* Right. *That didn't feel like what you should be doing?* Right. *But she was still the mom so you had to do it.* Right. (Lola)

Unlike Beauty Reifiers, femininity was not something someone naturally was but rather something one must *do* to belong. Thus, while Lola’s story might initially seem like a mere childhood act of rebellion, similar instances were recounted throughout the interview. Lola, and other Comprehensive Conformists, constantly did something to appease or conform to others expectations, even if it caused them some discomfort. Essentially, Comprehensive Conformists understood their audience and presented appropriately (Goffman 1955). Thus, while not all Comprehensive Conformists engaged in “doing drag,” and many only situationally engaged, *all* articulated an understanding of some societal message that said they should.

Comprehensive Conformists emphasized physical appearance as important. More than any other type, they found these external barometers oppressive. They found all feminine performances constraining. This group provided an interesting reference point as they, in many respects, clearly illuminated the misogynistic messages bombarding women and how women internalize the messages. Instead of creating positive, empowering, and inclusive definitions of feminine, they reiterated misogynistic messages resentfully. Additionally, while they despised the confinement of femininity, they did nothing to challenge the construct, as they perceived themselves as having no agency.

> Yeah, Mom was a—had two personas. It was the one that she showed to the outside world, and the one that was really going on. *How did they differ?* Well, to the outside world she would appear spotless. Always dressed to the hilt—perfect makeup. Always stressing to me, "Well, you've got to wear makeup because you don't know who you're going to meet." And everything inside the house was between you, me, and the fencepost. And inside the house was the pile on the floor, and cobwebs, and the untidy rooms or whatever. . . . *So, that's why she wanted you to look like a good little girl, outside the house because it was part of the façade?* Yes. It was definitely a facade outside the house. *So she wanted you to look like you were supposed to look just because that's the way it is?* That's the way you did it. (Lisa)

The epitome of femininity offered by Comprehensive Conformists included such icons as Marilyn Monroe and Pamela Anderson. The “pin-up” of whatever generation served as the personification of femininity. This was in direct contrast to other types. While many types suggested the “pin-up” as a *heteronormative* iconic representation, all but Comprehensive Conformists rejected the “pin-up” as a representation of *their* definition of femininity.

Both Beauty Reifiers and Comprehensive Conformists emphasized, and unquestioningly accepted, physicality as a key component of femininity. However, Comprehensive Conformists viewed femininity as oppressive while Beauty Reifiers did not. Additionally, Comprehensive Conformists considered traits and actions when articulating a definition, whereas Beauty Reifiers

did not express anything other than a physical look. Finally, Beauty Reifiers did not allow their understandings to influence their own presentation—Comprehensive Conformists overwhelmingly did.

INNER BEAUTY CONFORMISTS

Inner Beauty Conformists emphasized traits or “inner beauty” as *the* barometer of femininity. That is, Inner Beauty Conformists articulated femininity emanates from *within*, not projected from without, and rejected physical appearance as the marker of femininity.

> My first thought, really, was—my first thought was really kind of a feminine feminine. Blonde hair, pink dress. But that's really not at all what I think is feminine. *Okay, what do you think is?* More of a, umm— probably more of a feeling, thoughtful, softer—being. *So it's more of an inside thing than an external thing?* Yeah. *So you can be feminine and not look feminine?* Yes. *Can you look “masculine” and still be feminine?* Yes. *Is there a cutoff point where you suddenly are like, "No, not feminine anymore."* I think it's more about energy. I think it's more about feminine energy and masculine energy for me. *Can you think of a—I was going to say, can you think of a public figure but it's hard to know what their real energy is— If you were to describe feminine to a blind person, what would that description be like?* Well. Hmm. I think the men that I like the best right now—the men that I like have a lot of feminine energy. Or what I describe to myself as feminine energy. . . . I think it's a caring, not high testosterone. It's a spirit. It's listening, it's caring, it's nonmale. I don't know. *So can men be feminine? They can be feminine?* But not effeminate . . . *So do you think feminine counts as a positive?* Definitely . . . *Is there feminine energy in the workplace, and what does that look like?* Gentleness. Not horribly aggressive, but not passive either. Well, see, I think definitely the whole, so I want to say the right amount of aggressiveness. Listening is a part of it. Not masculine. I keep getting back to that opposite of, which is not good. *So do you view masculine as a negative?* I think I might . . . *Do you consider yourself feminine?* I do . . . *What's feminine about you, and what's not feminine about you? Or what, if there is anything?* Oh yeah, there is. When I'm thinking, I'm thinking positive and negative, and that's really not it either . . . the real feminine thing is this kind of helpless . . . and that's not me. I like to do the more, the masculine side of things, like fixing it, looking on the inside of it, knowing how to be able to do things. I don't want to be helpless. And so I guess I kind of see the negative part of feminine as being that helpless, somebody has to do it for me . . . I'd rather just go do it myself. (Andrea)

Unlike Beauty Reifiers and Comprehensive Conformists, Inner Beauty Conformists did not express femininity as some incontestable physical construct that provided no room for agency.

While they never completely rejected misogynistic beauty messages, they questioned their importance. Inner Beauty Conformists relegated physical presentation as subordinate to actions and interactions.

Inner Beauty Conformity represented a deliberate transition—coming from one type to this one. All Inner Beauty Conformists said that they previously viewed femininity as negative, imposed on them, and something to which they had to conform. However, realization of their prior conformity did not occur until they became Inner Beauty Conformists. Fundamentally, to maintain membership in a heteronormative society Inner Beauty Conformists said they *formerly* had little agency in either their look or behavior. *Becoming* Inner Beauty Conformists represented reclamation of both femininity and agency. No longer viewing femininity as negative, or a mandated physical appearance, femininity now represented an internal essence, with little regard to the external manifestation.

While no longer stressing imposed upon external messages, Inner Beauty Conformists still availed themselves of stereotypical gendered language. For example, a feminine woman was caring, gentle, and a good listener. Also, a heteronormative feminine woman was helpless. Masculinity referred to strength, aggression, and power. Thus, Inner Beauty Conformists still employed dichotomous thinking, masculine *or* feminine, and reinforced patriarchal and essentialist constructions of gendered traits.

Inner Beauty Conformists questioned the idea of a feminine woman as either subordinated or negative. While not rejecting gendered language, Inner Beauty Conformists suggested a feminine woman *could* possess *both* masculine and feminine traits. A woman was considered feminine if she had more feminine energy than “masculine” energy. How much

energy indicated a feminine woman? What exactly was “masculine?” Once again, the answers were subjective and difficult to articulate.

Inner Beauty Conformists attempted to create positive definitions that explained their relationship with femininity. Simply, they considered themselves feminine, originally viewed femininity as oppressive, and therefore, created a more permissive, and arguably more powerful, definition. Misogynistic messages *originally* unquestioningly informed their definition and dictated prior conduct and appearance. However, Inner Beauty Conformists expressed modification of formerly repressive understandings. When asked for an example of a representation of femininity, invariably they offered themselves. They suggested what they looked like no longer mattered. Although they never completely rejected heteronormative external markers, when constructing their definition, as indicated by the name, a woman’s inner beauty determined her femininity.

PSEUDO INNER BEAUTY CONFORMISTS

Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists felt that feminine was much more than a physical look. Fundamentally, they stated that they did not want to reduce a woman to the sum of her external parts. Despite an apparent concern for the superficiality of this measure, after probing, they fell back on using the exact measure to which initially they tried so hard to avoid—physical appearance.

Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists and Inner Beauty Conformists were very similar in their desires of what they wanted femininity to be and thus initially expressed similar definitions of femininity. However, they diverged in the end result. While both emphasized traits over looks, only Inner Beauty Conformists succeeded in making these “internal” markers the barometer of femininity. Ultimately, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists focused on physical attributes, a “trap”

Inner Beauty Conformists avoided. Arguably, Inner Beauty Conformists succeeded in moving away from physical appearance while Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists did not, despite the desire of both types to do so. Hence, why I refer to this group as "pseudo."

For instance, in the beginning of the interview, Sue stated confidently that a feminine woman was "*independent, self-confident, social, beautiful, umm, and just a gracious good doing person – but I am thinking those are all just very simple qualities we have a beautiful person.*" This type of language was commonplace. Feminine conjured up extremely positive images that transcended physical presentation. However, when prompted to contextualize or personalize this "ideal" of what they seemingly *wanted* feminine to be, societal impositions typically interfered.

> *Do you have an opposite to feminine then if it is not masculine*? I guess it would be masculine but I am not saying that all…yeah… just to be really superficial, if you go to Pride and you see a bunch of women in oversized jeans and flannel shirts, then that is not feminine. (Sue)

Sue's progression, suggesting a feminine woman is simply a beautiful person inside changed to incorporate physical appearance.

For Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, a "feminine woman" elicits very positive images. None of the women in this category articulated any ambiguity regarding the "goodness" of femininity. Initial descriptors provided by Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists indicated qualities that almost anybody would want to possess, such as intelligence, strength and kindness. Unlike Beauty Reifiers and Comprehensive Conformists, they questioned the importance of physicality and their understanding of heteronormative constructs. Invariably, goodness *regardless* of physical appearance became subsumed into goodness *and* physical appearance.

> What you said just made me think of something, the first public woman I thought of was Hillary Clinton. I do not consider her feminine. *Why?* I am sure she has feminine traits but when I look at her I don't think feminine. *But she possesses those other traits you said*—I know—but maybe it is because she is lacking the physical. (Sue)

Initially appearance may have seemed inconsequential. However, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists ultimately cannot escape mention of physical attributes when explaining what is a feminine woman, despite the desire to do so.

Like Beauty Reifiers and Comprehensive Conformists, Carole embraced a "traditional" or "classical" presentation when she offered Patricia Clarkson as her representation of femininity. However, she diverged from Beauty Reifiers in that she incorporated "trait" or "internal" markers into her definition, reflecting her questioning of external beauty as *the* barometer of femininity.

> What I like about it is—because she usually has her hair kind of done and she seems kind of mysterious. She is talking and when she is talking she has a husky voice which I think is really sexy but also commanding. And she is incredibly intelligent person at least by what I have read about her and what I have seen. And I think she is pretty. Which is—and I struggle, kind of, with femininity in that do I just mean woman and to me femininity means more, just, kind of the attributes of feminine women? *So she is feminine because of those things you've just stated.* Mmmhmmm. *Okay.* It is kind of just everything—her intelligence, her voice, her umm, she is very elegant. She is very elegant she is very I don't know demure in some respects, pretty, has a nice figure. *The fact that she is in a dress with long hair—does that make her feminine or is that just*—Yeah 'cause the images in my mind, when I started thinking about what I wanted to I went through a lot of things of what I thought was representative of femininity from art that I have seen, to objects, to people, and, umm, in my mind she was always in an elegant gown and it is not that its elegance or wealth but for some reason it always stood out to me. *Okay.* And I think for me, femininity is much more a style than anything else. (Carole)

Carole used concepts such as "elegant," "demure," "pretty," and "has a nice figure" while concurrently offering "intelligence" and a "commanding presence." Her definition of feminine included the definition provided by Beauty Reifiers, but she desired to expand it. Fundamentally, for Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, the epitome of a feminine woman struck a balance between not only "looking like a woman," as offered by Beauty Reifiers, *but also* carrying oneself with confidence and exhibiting intelligence and strength, as suggested by Inner Beauty Conformists.

> I think it's styled because it is not so much short hair versus long hair to me. I think styled, I think somebody who is put together. I guess in the end it is just the embracing of your womanness. But not—not afraid to be attractive to the world. Of either sex. And maybe that goes back to how I feel about more masculine women I think it is kind of telling half the world, "screw you if you are not attracted to me." (Carole)

Thus, while Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists incorporated powerful attributes to avoid reducing femininity to some societal driven external criterion, ultimately they could not escape the importance of physicality.

Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists were cognizant of the imposed nature of physical attributes and viewed those outer constraints as oppressive. Despite this awareness and an initial "macro" definition expressing the primary importance of inner beauty, ultimately they granted physicality primary importance and subordinated traits to a secondary measure.

Common to all Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists was the articulation that femininity is both positive and personal. They initially endeavored to make femininity about inner beauty and not outer beauty. However, ultimately, heteronormative physical barometers influenced their own appearance choices and how they viewed others.

Again, misogynistic beauty messages informed articulations. Internalized misogyny was evident in their inability to reject the physical, despite their desire to do so. They resorted to images that *exemplify* ideas conveyed in the myth. For example, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists offered celebrities such as Joan Jett, Salma Hayek, Patricia Clarkson, and Sela Ward as indicative of femininity. All of these women have been listed on various top ten "sexiest" or "most beautiful" women lists, and thus clearly satisfy heteronormative ideas of beauty. However, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists asserted their selections were not based on physical appearance but almost in spite of their beauty. For example, Salma Hayek was chosen because she could both be sexy on the red carpet and convincingly portray Frida Kahlo. Fundamentally,

Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists consistently selected “beauties” with “depth,” with the desire to dimensionalize a beautiful woman as more than just another pretty face.

MOBILE NONCONFORMISTS

I considered these women “mobile” because if their femininity is not in compliance with the heteronormative community, rather than modify either their physical appearance or behavior, they moved to a new heteronormative community. Essentially, rather than articulate one “global” heteronormative community, as the other types suggested, Mobile Nonconformists indicated multiple communities. Thus, they did not reject heteronormative society, but rather they rejected the idea that this society is one monolithic entity. Instead of changing aspects of themselves to “fit in,” they merely changed the group to which they sought membership.

> *What is your definition of a feminine woman?* A feminine woman? Oh, that’s interesting. This is funny, because when you told me what you were going to talk about—I don’t know what that answer is . . . And you know what? I can’t even come to it in my own mind. It started to make me think, and then I thought, “What is a freaking feminine woman?” And so I thought about looking at people who I thought were feminine, and people who weren’t feminine, and people who might say they’re feminine, and then started thinking, well, damn, why do they say that’s feminine but I don’t say that’s feminine? You know so—it’s real funny. So, you know, I thought—you know, let me put it this way and I’m gonna get to my answer, in somehow—in this process. *All good.* Okay. So, if you asked me who I thought was feminine I would say, you know, I think Helen Mirren is feminine. I think Katharine Hepburn is feminine. I think Indira Ghandi is feminine. I think Maya Angelou is feminine. Umm, you know—I could—then I thought, let me look at modern day. Well, those are modern day. Maybe let me look at maybe, uh, Britney Spears. I don’t think Britney Spears is feminine. *Why?* Umm—because I think she does not have—and that’s what brought me to why—umm, because I think there’s something about a sense of knowing who you are, and how you yourself might define who you are. Let me go here, OK? . . . How do you find who you are, right? *Uh-huh.* So—but—and that you know that, and whatever that is you are confident in it, regardless of what the world says. And that you can exhibit it with grace, honesty, and yet a vulnerability, and a beauty that I think only women can do. Umm, and I—it’s hard for me to even say that they are ladies. I can tell you that—umm, and examples of strength. And I don’t see Britney as being a strong person. I don’t see her being—those types of things don’t come to me. So that sort of umm,—sort of my thought. (Courtney)

Courtney rejected femininity as being something you wore or how you appeared. When asked if she considered herself feminine, she responded that, *by her definition*, she did. Although in so stating, she clearly articulated that her definition did not conform to a patriarchal, hetero-normative societal definition. Such awareness indicated cognition of the difference between a definition imposed *on* women and a definition created *by* women with a clear delineation between the two. This bifurcation suggests rejection of both the beauty myth and internalized misogyny. Mobile Nonconformists represented the polar opposite of Comprehensive Conformists. Both types considered gender normative articulations, regarding appearance and actions. However, Comprehensive Conformists accepted and incorporated such understandings into a negative definition of femininity to which they must comply, while Mobile Nonconformists rejected negative messages by creating an arguably empowering definition.

Like Inner Beauty Conformists, Mobile Nonconformists embraced "positive energy." However, Mobile Nonconformists rejected using binary classifications. For example, instead of suggesting "strength" and "power" as representative of "masculine" traits, Mobile Nonconformists suggested that traits were not *inherently* masculine or feminine; rather it was what one did with the traits one possessed that served as a marker of "achieved" femininity.

Similar to a queer ideology, Mobile Nonconformists disavowed the uncontested categories: masculine and feminine. However, those who support a queer ideology may contend that Mobile Nonconformists resembled assimilationists, as they did not reject the term feminine as inherently flawed. Rather than reject the construct, Mobile Nonconformists rejected any negative connotations associated with it. Both Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists and Inner Beauty Conformists espoused similar messages. However, neither of the "Inner Beauty"

Conformists completely achieved their goal as they invariably reinforced normative physical appearance and/or traits using binary language.

Mobile Nonconformists suggested a woman is, by definition, feminine. Only when she succumbed to external pressures did she negate her femininity. Thus, a woman may present herself however she chooses. As long as her external presentation is an "authentic" manifestation of her internal desire, as opposed to a performance dictated to or imposed on her, she successfully achieves "femininity." Thus, like both Beauty Reifiers and Inner Beauty Conformists, external pressures do not influence their personal appearance or how they view others. Examples offered by Mobile Nonconformists included Hillary Clinton, Indira Gandhi, and Maya Angelou. Femininity, to this type, included women who had achieved success and broken boundaries.

PSEUDO NONCONFORMISTS

The final type was Pseudo Nonconformists. Unlike all the other types, Pseudo Nonconformists suggested no desire for mainstream acceptability. Hence, the name "nonconformists." Furthermore, they passionately expressed their rejection of heteronormativity. However, while they vehemently expressed rejection of all things heteronormative, their actions often suggested something different. For this reason, I refer to them as *Pseudo* Nonconformists.

> *What is your definition of feminine then?* Feminine sounds like feminine napkins, you know? Feminine, it sounds like this very sort of like, I don't know, I mean I know that feminine is the opposite of masculine sort of like, not the opposite but counterpart. So it is kind of that in itself but I think that femme to me sounds stronger. So, feminine is more passive . . . I don't think that the body is really that important. It is the makeup and the, umm, for me when I think about it, femme is enacted by like the hair, usually the big hair, the eyelashes, pushing right past that feminine look and pushing it further, not clownish, just past the point where you look respectable. *So could someone genderqueer, if they put on big hair and makeup, be femme?* Yes. I think, well, I think femme is more than just what you look like but I think, like drag queens to me are femme. Something you put on, not necessarily who you are. *So feminine is a—it doesn't push the envelope, femme*

> *pushes the envelope to a degree of exaggeration?* Yeah, feminine to me is just something that is put on you that is passively sort of accepted. Femme is what you do . . . *How would you explain feminine to a blind person. How would you describe what feminine looks like?* That is hard. All I can think about is like clichés, you know like soft. Boring. Umm, neat like, ah, retiring. I don't know feminine. I don't know how to describe, well obviously a blind person cannot see so you can't describe how it looks but how it acts so I would say - passive. *It sounds like feminine, to you, has a negative connotation?* Yes, feminine I know that it can have a more neutral connotation in different contexts but in the context of say my queerness, or my thoughts on femininity or "femme-ness," femininity feels like a trap and femme feels like a tool. *So you don't consider yourself feminine?* No. *But you consider yourself a femme?* Yes. (Dolly)

Dolly considered her "femme-ness" a major part of her identity. Dolly eschewed normative presentation both for herself and her partner—a self-identified genderqueer. Despite her fervent rejection of patriarchal heteronormativity, her "look" appeared gender normative, as she had long styled hair, wore make-up, and was considered by many as both attractive and feminine. Regardless, she adamantly rejected such a label.

Like both Comprehensive Conformists and Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, Pseudo Nonconformists expressed a feminine appearance as something both imposed on, and oppressive, *yet* they seemingly physically complied. Additionally, like Comprehensive Conformists, they viewed femininity as overwhelmingly negative.

Both Mobile Nonconformists and Pseudo Nonconformists articulated rejection of some arbitrary beauty ideal. However, rather than move *within* heteronormative society, as Mobile Nonconformists suggested, Pseudo Nonconformists formed a new "queer" community. Despite their reaction to femininity and a feminine presentation, many Nonconformists "looked" gender normative *and* such physical appearance seemed relevant and important in their new queer space. While they *looked* gender normative, they articulated agency in deciding to do so.

> Okay—umm, my relationship to feminine has changed a lot based on the fact that when I was growing up thinking I was straight, I viewed feminine as something very negative. I mean, something I did not want to be because I thought from the way my parents defined it and the way society defined it—it is someone who is

> petite and weak and who had small feet and you know could grow up and be a ballerina or a you know . . . things that I knew I could not do naturally, some of it, because of the physicality and some of it because I just couldn't cope with it so therefore, I totally rejected it. So when I was younger I was much more of a tom-boy, umm, always wore jeans, played tons of sports, was really proud of my physical prowess and, umm, you know if it was my choice and not my mother's I would have worn sports bras all the time and had my hair up in a bun or whatever, umm, and you know she was always pressuring to show off my figure, umm, which I never really knew what that meant since I wasn't feminine to begin with—what her definition of it was—like why would I be doing that. Umm, and I hate HATED my father saying, "don't do that, that isn't lady like," because it seemed like extra restrictions on me. It was just absurd and I remember having lots of arguments with him like, "if I do it, isn't it automatically ladylike? Aren't I a lady automatically? " It seemed like something you had to earn but it was something I couldn't earn. I hated the word feminine. It meant something very negative to me. And it was usually used when I was being reprimanded for doing something outside of what feminine is defined to be. Like "that is not feminine" was something I heard much more than feminine used in any sort of positive way . . . I arm wrestled everyone in my grade and won before the boys got stronger and I was extremely proud of that and when I told my parents umm their reaction was I was going to wound the boys egos and that is not the feminine thing to do. And the other thing I was thinking earlier today when I was thinking about this was how when I was younger I used to be so proud of my shoes because I thought it was so cool to have big feet and my mom every time I was excited about that, she was like, "you know, you shouldn't be excited about your feet. It is not very feminine . . . I remember her saying that and when I think back on it, it is just crazy that those things are being enforced. But it leads to how I view feminine my whole life . . . But then when I started identifying as a queer woman then, umm, feminine became something totally different. And it represented power, it represented, umm, beauty and confidence and things that had never been associated with it before, umm, like inherent respect . . . Meaning like I felt I could put on a pair of high heels and feel confident and not feel like I looked awkward or something or I could get dressed up and wear makeup and worry about my appearance and look quintessentially girly and, umm, let myself be taken care of a lot more than I ever did when I was dating men . . . I can be dominant if I want. It is something I am choosing. *Choice versus it being imposed is what I hear you saying?* Yeah—absolutely. (Elizabeth)

Pseudo Nonconformists embraced a Queer ideology. Blurring lines and boundaries were the bedrock of the Pseudo Nonconformist type. The construct feminine was rejected and replaced with an arguably more empowering and self-defined expression. Fundamentally, femininity represented lack of agency whereas "femme" provided agency. The end result often *looked*

similar but the reasoning differed. Therefore, even though they expressed rejection of perceived heteronormative constraints, their physical appearance frequently reflected its influence.

Like Inner Beauty Conformists, this type described a transition from what they previously viewed as oppressive. Arrival at a Pseudo Nonconformity was in direct response to a negative reaction to both femininity and a heteronormative society. Examples provided by Pseudo Nonconformists included Dolly Parton, Deta Von Tease, and "genderqueer" partners. These women were selected for one of two reasons. The celebrities selected took femininity to an extreme and made it their own, essentially mocking or overdramatizing feminine constructs. Dolly Parton, with her excessive make-up, oversized proportions, and self-identified "trailer trash" style, has often been recognized as the epitome of "taking feminine too far." Genderqueer partners were offered to demonstrate the ambiguity suggested by the Pseudo Nonconformist—meaning they wanted it unmistakable that they were *clearly not* reifying appearance. Despite their expressing the irrelevance of physicality in their definition, misogynistic beauty messages directly influenced their personal presentational choices. The ramifications of this combative relationship with imposed femininity will be elaborated on in a later chapter.

CONCLUSION

This chapter offered a typology of what nonheterosexual women considered feminine, how they expressed their relationship with the beauty myth, and how they personally contended with misogyny.

Beauty Reifiers accepted the beauty myth and all appearance related misogynistic messages without question. Their definition focused solely on the physical, with no expressed concern regarding anything else. They found these messages as neither imposed on nor

oppressive. Simply, some women naturally satisfied the definition and others did not. However, acceptance of the myth did not connote influence on personal presentation choices.

Comprehensive Conformists *vehemently* saw feminine as a negative construct. They included both internal and external characteristics in their definitions, and viewed both as imposed on and oppressive to women. Despite awareness and understanding the misogynistic messages, Comprehensive Conformists both accepted and conformed to perceived societal expectations. Comprehensive Conformists asserted no agency. Femininity represented something they accepted and internalized. Fundamentally, femininity influenced both how they personally looked and behaved, as they saw doing femininity as the way to maintain membership in a heteronormative society.

Both Inner Beauty Conformists and Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists shared similar interpretations of the construct. Each questioned the beauty myth, and related physical measures, as the major determinants of femininity. Additionally, both expressed the importance of considering inner beauty when creating a definition. Inner Beauty Conformists and Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists expressed feminine as both a positive construct and something they *desired* to be, as opposed to something imposed on them. However, while Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists allowed the beauty myth to influence their own presentation and how they judged others, Inner Beauty Conformists did not. Both types suggested the relevance of traits, however *only* the Inner Beauty Conformists succeeded in using traits as the barometer of femininity. Despite the desire to create their own empowered definitions, and challenge the beauty myth and other misogynistic messages, both still reinforced dichotomous categories through usage of stereotypical gendered language.

Mobile Nonconformists may agree with Comprehensive Conformists' perception of what a patriarchal heteronormative society considers feminine. However, rather than accept it, they made a conscious decision to reject a heteronormative definition that reified boundaries. Instead, they created their own, arguably more empowering, definition. Therefore, femininity indicated something positive and something to which they aspired. While Mobile Nonconformists understood societal expectations, rather than allow such expectations to influence their presentation, they found communities that accepted them—regardless of how they chose to look or act. Essentially, Mobile Nonconformists engaged in no self-modification to gain acceptance. They simply *moved* until they found a more welcoming environment.

The final type, Pseudo Nonconformists, viewed everything related to femininity, looks and actions, as negative and oppressive. Pseudo Nonconformists definitively stated that they rejected all things related to both femininity and heteronormativity. Instead of conforming to a patriarchal heteronormative society or attempting to find a more welcoming heteronormative environment, perhaps less patriarchal, they created a new space—a queer space. The new space suggested a matriarchal nonheteronormative community. However, despite the rejection of imposed upon misogynistic messages, their appearance choices were in direct reaction to them. Fundamentally, while not overtly accepting the beauty myth, they could not escape its influence.

In principle, each of these types could be applicable to all women and are not nonhetero-sexual specific. Fundamentally, all women have *some* relationship to femininity as members of a society that uses such verbiage. However, nonheterosexual women must contend simultaneously with issues related to their marginalized sexuality. As *women* my participants must contend with misogyny. As *nonheterosexuals* they must also address heterosexism. Therefore, the following

chapter addresses issues related to a nonheteronormative sexual identity. Specifically, using my typology of “femininity,” I consider the relationship between femininity and heterosexism.

CHAPTER FIVE: FEMININITY AND SEXUAL IDENTITY

> *[F]ew heterosexual women were willing to let go of their "heterosexual privilege"—what Charlotte Bunch (1976) called, the "actual or promised benefits for the woman who stays in line"*(Adam: 1995:100-1).

As discussed in the last chapter, not all women shared the same understanding of what constitutes a feminine woman. Furthermore, not all women expressed a desire to be feminine, regardless of the definition they provided. To dimensionalize the construct (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland 2006; Strauss and Corbin 1999), I looked at two variables simultaneously: (1) Misogynistic Beauty Messages, and (2) Personal Beauty Compliance, and I used them to create a typology of femininity (see Table 2). This analysis illuminated *women's* understandings of misogyny—both related to physical appearance and related "gendered" behavior. Ultimately, six types emerged: Beauty Reifiers, Comprehensive Conformists, Inner Beauty Conformists, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, Mobile Nonconformists, and Pseudo Nonconformists.

However, misogynistic messages and "appropriate" gendered behavior can be applied to all women. Missing from the discussion, thus far, are specific issues related to *nonheterosexual* women arguably possessing a marginalized sexual identity. Specifically, just as there are a plethora of examples of misogynistic messages that oppress women (Brownmiller 1984, Bordo 1993; Chapkis 1986; Chernin 1981,1985; Etcoff 1999; Hesse-Biber1996; Scott 2005; Weitz 2004; Wolf 1991), so too are there a plethora of heterosexist messages that oppress nonhetero-sexual individuals.

For instance, in the United States, politicians seeking election must contend with individuals who demand a return to "family values." Such values can include creating a constitutional amendment to define marriage as between one man and one woman, prohibiting same-sex couples from adoptive or foster parenting, and limiting sexuality education to

“abstinence only” until marriage. Under the guise of protecting families, these requests privilege heteronormativity and marginalize those who deviate. Essentially, these efforts serve to codify or attempt to codify heterosexual behavior as superior and nonheterosexuality as deviant.

Thus, in a society that privileges not only men but also heterosexuality, nonhetero-normative women must negotiate *both* a subordinated gender *and* a marginalized sexual identity. Fundamentally, they must contend with misogynistic *and* heterosexist messages concurrently.

As indicated previously, some women may eschew femininity and/or a feminine physical appearance as conveyed in misogynistic beauty messages. This rejection may mean wearing no make-up, cutting one’s hair very short, not shaving one’s legs, or wearing men’s clothes. How-ever, in a patriarchal heteronormative society, these choices may be “read” as “gay.” Comments such as, “she looks that way because she does not want to attract a man” suggest that lack of “conformity” *can* serve as a marker for sexual identity—not just a marker of *a* sexual identity, but a marker of a *marginalized* sexual identity.

Such statements demonstrate how misogyny and heterosexism work in concert to control women. Fundamentally, if a woman does not conform to the “appropriate” appearance, she risks being *lumped* into a marginalized group. Partnering with a man changes this sexual identity marginalization. Essentially, a nontraditional looking heterosexual woman may still be critiqued for her physical appearance but not have her sexuality as frequently questioned.

Thus, the ramifications of appearance choices have unique meaning to nonheterosexual women. The primary concern is whether they care if people know they are *not* heterosexual? How they look *may* reflect the answer. This is particularly true if they share the view that a feminine appearance equates with *indicating heterosexuality*. *If* appearance serves as a “marker” of sexuality *and* a woman is “in the closet” or views her sexual identity as a stigma to be

managed, she may opt for an “appropriate feminine appearance” to mask her sexual identity. To “look straight” is to be perceived as “straight.”

However, some nonheterosexual women comply with heteronormative understandings but are not “in the closet” and do not view their sexual identity as a stigma to be managed. These women still engage in feminine rituals that focus on physical appearance but say they do so for themselves and not to mask some stigmatized identity.

Both groups incorporate misogynistic beauty messages, but for different reasons. Still other women ignore misogynistic beauty messages, either despite or because of their marginalized sexual identity. In other words, while some women use appearance to blend in or hide their sexuality, others use physical appearance as a point of resistance (Bordo 2003; Crowder 1986).

This chapter explores some of the reasons for incorporating or ignoring misogynistic beauty messages. Specifically, I link understandings of femininity, using the aforementioned six types, to sexual identity. To discern the relationship between sexual identity and femininity, I introduce two new variables: Sexual Identity Negotiation and Sexual Identity Salience. (See Table 3.)

The first variable, Sexual Identity Negotiation, contends with internalized heterosexism. As heterosexism refers to viewing nonheterosexuality as “lesser than” heteronormativity, *internalized* heterosexism addresses whether nonheterosexuals internalize, or on some level accept, these heterosexist messages as true. If women engage in specific strategies to mask or hide their sexual identity, if they negotiate, this suggests they engage in or they internalize heterosexism. Fundamentally, stating that this aspect of their identity could be, or should be, modified implies something is wrong in the first place—that they possessed a *stigma*. Beauty

Reifiers, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, and Comprehensive Conformist all expressed possessing a stigma that required *negotiation*.

Table 3. Relationship of Sexual Identity to Sexual Identity Salience

Sexual Identity Negotiation	Sexual Identity Salience		
	Low	Medium	High
Negotiable/-Stigmatized	Beauty Reifiers	Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists	Comprehensive Conformists
Nonnegotiable/Not Stigmatized	Mobile Nonconformists	Inner Beauty Conformists	Pseudo Nonconformists

Conversely, sexual identity—nonnegotiable suggests not possessing a stigma that required negotiating. Mobile Nonconformists, Inner Beauty Conformists, and Pseudo Nonconformists all described their sexual identity as nonnegotiable or not stigmatized. Thus, these three types did not demonstrate internalized heterosexism or consider their sexual identity as a stigma to mask.

To understand more fully the relevance of sexual identity, negotiable or not, I created a second variable, Sexual Identity Salience. Social-Identity Theory has a long history of demonstrating a strong tie between identity and behavior (Callero 1985; Laverie 2000; Stryker 1968). Essentially, the more salient the identity, the more that identity influences actions and interactions. However, expressing similar saliency does not connote similar behavior. For example, both Beauty Reifiers and Mobile Nonconformists indicated low salience by repeatedly stating the relative unimportance of their sexual identity. Thus, both relegated their sexuality to a subordinated status requiring only minor attention—meaning other identities took priority. However, Beauty Reifiers *did* engage in some stigma management, while Mobile Nonconformists did

not. Accordingly, contemplating salience without concurrently addressing internalized heterosexism tells only half the story.

Therefore, looking at negotiation and salience *conjointly* informs how and why women present the way they do. Individuals who viewed their sexuality as *negotiable* and for whom sexual identity was more salient (medium or high) were more likely to engage in actively "masking," or trying to "pass." Those who viewed their sexuality as *negotiable* but *less* salient (low), less actively engaged in "masking" or trying to "pass." Finally, those who did not view their sexual identity as a stigma did not "mask" their sexuality *but* that did not mean their sexuality was irrelevant in their lives.

Understanding the relationship between sexual identity, as expressed via Sexual Identity Negotiation and Sexual Identity Salience, *and* femininity informs how nonheterosexual women make sense of their place within a society that valorizes hegemonic masculinity and hetero-sexuality. The following sections explore that relationship. Building on the six types and their interpretations of femininity, this chapter specifically addresses how *nonheterosexual* women contend with misogynistic messages. Essentially, adding "negotiation" and "salience" to the aforementioned typology illuminates how and why these women managed their "stigma," or whether they viewed it as a stigma at all.

"THE NEGOTIATORS"

Beauty Reifiers

As stated previously, Beauty Reifiers expressed acceptance of misogynistic beauty messages and focused solely on *a* presentation or look as *the* indicator of femininity. While they did not question misogyny, they also did not modify their physical appearance to conform to any misogynistic societal expectations. Essentially, acceptance that women were "judged" by their

physical appearance did not indicate incorporation of those messages into their personal presentation choices. However, ignoring misogynistic beauty messages did not connote rejection of heteronormative ideals. Beauty Reifiers still indicated acceptance of, and desire for, interaction with a heteronormative society.

Beauty Reifiers suggested that femininity pertains purely to some incontestable physical look. While they varied on specifics, each clearly stated that they would know it when they saw it and *seeing* it was the key. Furthermore, while some women might engage in some ritualistic feminine performances, such as wearing make-up or dresses, and this might *soften* their appearance, for the Beauty Reifiers this did not equate with achieving "femininity." Beauty Reifiers basically stated if you did not have "it," you really could not flaunt or fake it.

Beauty Reifiers indicated that appearance served as a marker of sexuality. Thus, those who satisfied their definition of feminine would be perceived as heterosexual. Concurrently, those who did not "appear feminine" might have their sexuality questioned. Therefore, Beauty Reifiers suggested that femininity signifies the ability to "pass."

Discussing "passing" does not automatically indicate internalized heterosexism. However, *doing something* to pass does. Both self-described "masculine" and feminine presenting Beauty Reifiers expressed their sexuality as something to manage. The idea and subsequent doing of "management" reflect internalized heterosexism.

Beauty Reifiers indicated that they did not modify their appearance to conform to societal expectations. Therefore, neither masculine nor feminine looking Beauty Reifiers ever engaged in "masking" or "hiding" or "modifying" their physical appearance to distract from their sexual identification, even though they desired mainstream acceptability. Because femininity served as a marker for sexual identity *and* represented a static attribute, Beauty Reifiers engaged in

“information management” as *the* means to negotiate membership into a heteronormative community and minimize potential marginalization. Fundamentally, Beauty Reifiers relegated sexual identity to secondary status (low salience) and controlled who had access to that information. How individuals negotiated, or disseminated information, varied, contingent on the individual engaging in the act—were they themselves feminine or not?

Catherine, a self-identified *feminine* woman, never disclosed her sexuality to her parents, now deceased. When Catherine started working with her employer, she was in a long-term relationship that subsequently ended in a dramatic break-up during her second year at work. Despite the long-term partnership and subsequent “divorce,” Catherine never told her coworkers or parents about her romantic life. At work, Catherine neither discussed dating nor brought partners to company events. As the second highest ranked executive in the company, she spent significant time with her boss, a single heterosexual male. While she did engage in playful banter with her boss and they openly discussed *his* dating life, she remained quiet about her romantic interests. She drew “soft” boundaries around “public” and “private”—*soft* because while she avoided divulging personal information, she did welcome listening to others.

As a feminine looking professional woman, Catherine was able to avoid probing questions for several years. Her elevated position in the company made it inappropriate for subordinates to inquire as to her personal life. Her passive negotiation strategy of “Don’t Tell Until It is Safe” entailed never lying or overtly deceiving. Rather, she opted simply not to share. However, this nonvolunteering negotiation strategy, without hard boundaries, has one key inherent risk: People *might* ask questions.

> We've just become friends. . . . He's single and very open about his personal day and life. And we—and of course, you know, we kind of quiz each other on that and he was always just very curious because at that time I was 39 or 40, working for him, becoming pretty close with him, talking about personal life. And he was

> very inquisitive. "What are you doing tonight? I'm going to bring—I'm going to take a security van, park outside your, your house and figure out what's going on with you." (Catherine)

Catherine's soft boundaries enabled individuals who ultimately got closer to her to query regarding her personal life. At first she would simply share some personal stories but omit things regarding her sexuality. This passive strategy differs from other negotiation strategies, which entail drawing "hard" boundary lines such as "work is work" and "personal is personal" and neither should overlap. Catherine did not establish such a definitive line.

This situation demonstrates the privilege of a heteronormative feminine appearance. Catherine, a feminine presenting Beauty Reifier felt no threat that someone would immediately "suspect" her sexuality. Therefore, her strategy entailed never offering, never lying, and simply waiting until someone would ask, and then engaging in deflective and evasive strategies. As was common with Beauty Reifiers, and as was evidenced above, Catherine waited for her boss to initiate the dialogue. Beauty Reifiers typically waited for some indication of acceptance and/or curiosity before engaging in *any* sexual identity disclosure. However, when asked if she viewed herself as "closeted," Catherine stated "no." Rather, she asserted, she had always viewed her sexuality as not something she hid, but simply something that seemed irrelevant to work and not very important in her everyday life.

This "wait and see" attitude and bifurcation of "public" and "private," offered by Catherine, indicates internalized heterosexism. Essentially, Beauty Reifiers resisted openly sharing sexual identity, as they viewed sexuality as tantamount to a stigma. However, despite engaging in negotiation, indicating stigma management, Beauty Reifiers unequivocally expressed such negotiation unproblematically. They simply "accepted" heterosexism, much like they "accepted" misogyny, and navigated accordingly. Additionally, relegating their sexuality as something only marginally important (low salience), they found bifurcating identities so

practiced that it became effortless. While they *expressed* no internalized heterosexism their actions indicated to the contrary.

For those *feminine-looking* Beauty Reifiers, sexuality represented an *invisible* stigma. However, not all Beauty Reifiers were feminine or could rely on using the same passive negotiation strategy.

For Catherine, as a feminine woman, her sexuality was infrequently questioned. Thus her passive strategy and soft boundaries were successful. Not until she got older and formed bonds did anyone ponder her sexual identity. Conversely, Toby indicated her more masculine appearance required more deliberate negotiations. During her youth, she brought "boyfriends" home to dispel questions. When she got older and moved out of her childhood home, her mother directly asked about her sexuality. Although initially she answered honestly, the response was met negatively, so she retracted her statement and more actively guarded her "stigmatized" sexuality.

Just as Catherine viewed her sexuality as immaterial in work environments, so did Toby. However, for Toby, the boundary was more definitively drawn. She clearly delineated "public" from "private" and entertained *no* personal inquiries. While Catherine maintained playful banter with coworkers, Toby engaged in *none*. As a successful attorney, she found her work life easily separable from her personal life. She felt that her only responsibility at work was to be a good legal representative and expressed no desire to be anyone's friend. She said her sexuality as irrelevant in all but intimate relationships.

Interestingly, Toby stated that at one point her mother revisited the topic, apparently more amenable to the prospect of having a nonheterosexual daughter. Toby, however, no longer welcomed that dialogue and it remained a topic not up for discussion. For her, the clear separation of what she considered "public" and "private" proved impenetrable. The hard

boundaries had been definitively drawn. Thus the privilege of “flexible” or soft boundaries dissipates the more sexuality may be questioned because of how one looks.

Neither Catherine nor Toby rejected her sexual identity by changing or modifying her sexual behavior. However both engaged in some type of negotiation strategy to maintain “membership” in a heteronormative community, as this membership mattered to Beauty Reifiers.

As sexual identity was relegated to secondary status, and thus of minimal importance, internalized heterosexism caused Beauty Reifiers little discomfort. Recognizing their sexual identity did pose a discreditable situation, they bifurcated and subordinated their sexual life—unemotionally and unproblematically. While they internalized heterosexism and expressed awareness that others may not accept their sexuality, this cognizance caused little concern. Rather, the separation was articulated much like their definition of femininity—matter-of-factly.

Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists

Beauty Reifiers discussed both femininity and sexuality unemotionally and unproblematically. However, not all women felt such discourse could be expressed as dispassionately or segregated “public” from “private” so effortlessly.

As previously stated, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists struggled with misogynistic messages when articulating a definition of femininity. They found femininity, as offered by a patriarchal heteronormative society, oppressive and imposed on women. Resenting the idea of femininity as an imposed on physical ideal, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists attempted to create a more liberating definition that included empowering behavioral characteristics. Despite their attempts, they ultimately resorted to articulating femininity as primarily a physical construction. Regardless of Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists “struggling” with the term, they still espoused femininity as a positive construct.

Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, like Beauty Reifiers, viewed femininity as a marker for sexual identity. Essentially, those who "looked feminine" simultaneously "looked straight." However, unlike Beauty Reifiers, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists did not feel femininity was static. Specifically, Beauty Reifiers viewed femininity as fundamentally inherent. Because a woman could not modify her "femininity," she could not "mask" her sexual identity via some type of physical appearance modification. Therefore, Beauty Reifiers engaged in information or disclosure management to mitigate any potential marginalization because of sexual orientation. Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists did not share Beauty Reifiers' construction of femininity. Rather, they viewed femininity, and related presentation, as a reaction to a situation. Thus, rather than engage in information management, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists utilized *appearance* management to minimize any potential perceived stigmatization.

While Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists emphatically articulated no discomfort with their sexuality, they simultaneously asserted, "I don't want my sexual identity walking in the room before I do." When questioned what they meant, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists invariably articulated that they would modify their physical appearance to make their sexual identity less identifiable. Such comments provided clear indication of an awareness of the manipulability of a feminine look and a relationship between appearance and sexual identity.

> Umm, when I was growing up as a child I was told often that I was really pretty. I had long hair, you know, I had dimples and everybody was like, "Oh you're so pretty. You've got such cute dimples." I got so tired of feeling like that's all people saw . . . I shaved my head. *Bald?* Bald. I was a little tipsy and I was really tired of my hair and it was a little ratted out from having it permed. And so I just shaved it. I had someone shave it. I kept it shaved for six months. And it was one of the most liberating things I have ever done. (Joan)

Joan remembers being pretty and viewing prettiness as confining. Therefore, she engaged in rebellion. However, this "liberating act" occurred before her awareness of her "homosexual lifestyle" and thus provides an example of heteronormative privilege. As a "heterosexual"

woman cohabitating romantically with a man, Joan felt enabled or empowered to reject imposed on misogynistic beauty messages and the related “traditionally feminine” presentation. However, her narrative changed as she became involved with a woman and did not want to lose her “main-stream” acceptability. Initially, a bald head suggested power and freedom but ultimately represented potential marginalization. Therefore, she eventually modified her presentation to conform to perceived heteronormative expectations.

Not all Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists demonstrated such radical transformations. However, all Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists stated they always “pass” unless they do something specific to signify their sexuality (e.g., shave their head, hold hands with a woman in public). Essentially, they *are* feminine unless they *actively negate* their femininity.

Sue, a former dancer, never had her femininity questioned. Both men and women perceived her as attractive and arguably feminine. When Sue offered her definition of femininity, like all other Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, she included terminology that suggested a feminine woman as more than a “body.”

Sue articulated an awareness of the misogynistic messages imposed on women. However, she also struggled with internalized heterosexism. Thus, while she perpetually suggested powerful traits as indicative of feminine women and resented objectifying women, when threatened with marginalization because of her sexual identification, she reverted to exaggerating her own feminine appearance. Fundamentally, when presented with a potentially “heterosexist” environment to which she *wanted* to belong, such as family or work, she made conscious decisions to present in a manner so that others would not question her sexuality. Like Joan, to maintain conformity, she emphasized her femininity, and femininity related specifically to

physical appearance. Essentially, if she "looked like a girl," others would not think she was "gay."

Carole also exhibited internalized heterosexism via conscious presentation modification when she perceived a potentially heterosexist environment.

> *Are you out?* No, and it's a bone of contention for me and like, every day I am like, is this the day I am going to come out? *Why?* I am tired of the duplicity. Not duplicity, the duality in my life. I have a work life—and a life in the rest of the world. I was out at my old firm—let me qualify that; I was out to all the lawyers, not the paralegals. Not all the paralegals at least. They were all very conservative. . . . You need so much out of paralegals . . . and its not so much I want to use them I just didn't want to change the dynamics of the relationship. We had a very trusting relationship. . . . They tended to come to me when they had problems with the other lawyers . . . I could have easily told all of them but I just kind of felt like I didn't want to go there. It was also somewhat of a superiority thing. I didn't feel like I had to tell them about my personal life. You know? We had a business relationship—I don't know. . . . I've got a new job and I am working for a very male dominated group. Very machismo type of atmosphere and . . . although the company is very open and supportive of gays, I am not out yet. *What does that mean—open and supportive?* They say they are . . . we had a symposium at the national conference of GBLT. Which was widely publicized on the intranet . . . and emails etc., which I think was very supportive and they had pictures and quotes of people in GLBT within the company so it is definitely kind of a supportive—"If you are in this we are supporting you." Umm, and senior level people, I was surprised and comforted by it, were quoted in the article, and oh, we have same sex—well as much as federal laws will allow us, we have same sex benefits . . . I think it is a culture that they don't really care what your sexuality is but they just don't want it in their face. (Carole)

Carole did not "discover" her sexual identity until in her late thirties. Prior to that, she described herself as a conservative, Catholic, Republican with ideas informed by family, faith, and her heterosexual lifestyle. As she became aware of her sexuality, she left her "conservative views" behind. Her present girlfriend was the only woman with whom she had been intimate. Carole considered herself in a long-term monogamous relationship and intended to marry her partner within the year, regardless of the absence of legal sanction for the union. Despite professing the importance of her sexuality, she relegated it to a subordinated, or secondary, status when she perceived that it might cause a potential problem. While she did bifurcate her "public" life and

“private” life, unlike Beauty Reifiers, such boundaries seemed frustrating and constraining. For example, when discussing her company’s Christmas party, she spoke dejectedly of leaving her “fiancé” at home so as to not cause any professional issues.

Joan, Sue, and Carole emphasized similar presentation strategies, and remained “closeted” in certain situations. While not all Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists thought of themselves as “closeted,” or exhibited the same degree of internalized heterosexism, all used their femininity to mitigate their perceived potential marginalization. They mediated their interactions even in welcoming, or perceived judgment-free, heteronormative environments.

Beauty Reifiers and Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists shared many commonalities. Both desired to minimize any perceived “difference” between themselves and the communities to which they desired to belong *and* their communities of choice reflected hegemonic hetero-normative ideals. Both types viewed physical appearance as an indicator of their sexual identity, and expressed concern that being “read” as gay may result in such things as reduced oppor-tunities and/or ostracizing. Therefore, both engaged in some type of “management” strategy when they perceived that a situation might result in marginalization. Finally, both groups viewed their sexual identity as “negotiable.” However, they differed in how to negotiate.

For Beauty Reifiers, negotiation referred to when, where, why, and how to share their “deviant” status. Beauty Reifiers viewed both their sexuality and their femininity as inherent traits and saw neither as modifiable. Therefore, to maintain membership in a heteronormative community they made cognizant decisions to suppress information regarding their sexual identification.

Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists considered themselves feminine. This perhaps explains their view that a feminine woman must be intelligent, have a strong presence, and carry herself a

certain way while still looking like a woman. They found emphasizing “looks” constraining, yet they nonetheless emphasized physical appearance. Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists often conflated femininity with sexual identity. That is, they focused on appearance more whenever they perceived that their sexuality could be questioned. Their strategy entailed maximizing their femininity to minimize the “visibility” of their sexual identity.

Comprehensive Conformists

Comprehensive Conformists expressed femininity in negative terms and something to which they felt they *must* conform. The reasons for such emotional articulations became apparent when deconstructing their relationship with their sexuality. While Beauty Reifiers viewed sexual identity unemotionally, of secondary relevance, and easily bifurcated from other aspects of their life, Comprehensive Conformists spoke passionately of the primary relevance of sexual identity and consistently conjoined femininity and sexual identity. This differs from Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists who only conflated gender/femininity and sexual identity when they perceived a potentially heterosexist environment. Comprehensive Conformist viewed *all* environments as heterosexist.

Lisa articulated an awareness of her sexual identity as far back as her childhood. However, awareness did not signify comfort with the realization. Instead of exploring her sexual identity, Lisa referred to her cognizance of same-sex attractions as an immediate indicator that “something was wrong.” Attending an all women’s college did little to encourage her to explore. Even upon “confessing” to a college friend that she “may be gay” *and* being encouraged by the friend to experiment, Lisa still repressed her same sex feelings. Lisa ultimately did take action, her negative associations only moderately diminished. Common among Comprehensive Conformists was both a hypersensitivity to their perceived difference and a concurrent

overwhelming desire to blend. Most Comprehensive Conformists had an awareness of "difference" at a very young age, which influenced how they interacted with others.

When defining femininity, rather than attempt to create a definition that may be more empowering, Comprehensive Conformists internalized misogynistic messages and attempted to conform to those understandings. The reason for struggling to conform to that which they found objectionable related specifically to their relationship to sexual identity and related internalized heterosexism.

> Umm, I have known ever since I was little. I mean as long as I can remember ever walking and talking I had always felt like something was wrong with me—not wrong but I remember as young as far back as I can remember always wanting to—like if I would see a man and woman walking down the street I wanted to be that man—but I didn't know why. I don't know why. I didn't know what gay meant. I didn't even know it existed . . . I was very young so, umm, I used to tell my mother and father that I would never get married and that I was going to be 6 foot tall, be flat chested and have a big foot. I wanted to be a man. So that never—I didn't mind being around boys or playing with boys but as far as them getting close to me or anything like that there was no desire whatsoever. (Teresa)

Unlike Beauty Reifiers, Comprehensive Conformists did not easily bifurcate femininity and sexuality and view them as constructs to be separately negotiated. Nor did Comprehensive Conformists relegate sexual identity to a "secondary" status.

Like many nonheterosexual women, Teresa realized that something "was different" from a very young age. Her mother also recognized something different about her. In an effort to ameliorate the difference, Teresa's mother tried to get her little girl to *look* more like a little girl. This effort, and Teresa's related discomfort, crystallized Teresa's desire to be more like a man. The idea that a woman had choices regarding presentation, as a woman, seemed unfathomable to her. Fundamentally, the more her mother reinforced a feminine appearance and tried to impose it on her, the more she valorized and idealized a masculine appearance.

As she got older, she became aware of her sexual identification. The epiphany was met with extreme disapproval from her mother, and she was sporadically kicked out of the house and ostracized. The reaction to her sexual identity resulted in extreme internalized heterosexism. Not wanting to be rejected, she attempted to minimize her "deviance" by donning a more feminine or gender appropriate appearance.

Comprehensive Conformists viewed a feminine "look" as often antithetical to how they wanted to present but imperative to maintaining community membership. Fundamentally, they traded appearance for acceptance. Thus while donning more feminine attire might feel unfamiliar and often contrary to their look of choice, they did so in an effort to fit into a community that they were convinced would otherwise at best judge them and at worst reject them.

Many articulated either having wanted, or still wanting, to be a man. Not to be confused with transgender or transsexual, this articulation emanated from a desire that life would simply be easier as a heterosexual. The idealization of masculine originated from a desire to be heterosexual or more specifically a desire *not* to be a lesbian. They viewed their sexual identity as a stigma that would have been avoided had they been men.

Comprehensive Conformists found their sexuality exceptionally salient. Their discomfort with their sexual "deviance" and their extreme internalized heterosexism dictated their actions and interactions with all others. Thus, their negotiation strategy was twofold: (1) appearance management and (2) information management. Fundamentally, while Comprehensive Conformists clearly stated an awareness of misogynistic messages, they found themselves incapable of violating perceived expectations, as such breach would result in calling attention to their "stigma." Furthermore, out of fear of negative reactions to sexuality, they clearly bifurcated their "gay" life and isolated their romantic relationships—resentfully. Comprehensive

Conformists expressed extreme isolation. They created a boundary around “heteronormative society” and resented their need to comply with those perceived expectations. They exerted tremendous energy negotiating their sexual identity and allowed their perceived difference to influence all aspects of their lives.

“THE NONNEGOTIATERS”

Mobile Nonconformists

When defining femininity, Mobile Nonconformists articulated no internalized misogyny. However, refusal to internalize misogynistic messages did not suggest obliviousness to their existence. Thus, rather than internalize, Mobile Nonconformists rejected perceived oppressive or imposed on messages.

Rejecting the message did not mean rejecting the patriarchal society from which they came. Mobile Nonconformists consistently expressed both desire to belong to a heteronormative society and concurrently espoused many heteronormative ideals—wanting a monogamous partner, children, and a financially successful career. Additionally, not only did they express these desires, most achieved them.

A key distinction between Mobile Nonconformists and the other types is the idea that there is not just *one* heteronormative society to which to belong. Rather, there are multiple communities from which they could choose. This is important in that Mobile Nonconformists neither modified their presentation nor hid their sexual identity in order to gain membership to any one community. Finding a place that “felt right” became their only challenge. This searching for a good fit and not viewing any membership as static were the hallmarks of Mobile Nonconformists.

Courtney was raised in a Pentecostal family. Her childhood consisted of living in a mansion, going to kindergarten in a limousine, and constantly being surrounded by bodyguards. She later understood the reason for such high security and so much money when her father went to prison for being a major drug dealer. Her mother, involved in the "family business," avoided conviction. However, the family lost all their financial means and moved to a small townhouse where her mother became a maid to support them. Courtney stated they went from fine dining to dumpster diving in record time.

As an adult, Courtney became estranged from her immediate biological family. At first she joined the military to finance her education and get away. Courtney had a highly successful military career. She loved being in the army, she loved being a decorated officer and having the power that went with the rank, and she loved the travel. However, she did not love the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy and, just as she had "moved on" from her family when that no longer fit, so too did she leave a career where she had flourished.

> Yeah, oh, so they had an advertisement for a, umm, an executive, umm, executive training in health care, but they were looking for only Rangers; former officers that were Rangers. And the ad offended me because you see, now I'm really aware in life, right? *Uh-huh.* It offended me because the only people that could be Rangers are men. Right. And I thought, this really ain't—this is a national company, saying they only want to hire men? (Courtney)

Whether in the military or in the public sector, Courtney thrived on challenges and breaking boundaries. She got the health care job, located in a small town in Kentucky, and brought her partner to all events. When I queried if she had any problems regarding bringing a same-sex partner to events, she replied—unemotionally—no.

Courtney, like other Mobile Nonconformists, consistently asserted she simply "did not engage." This meant, while cognizant of difference, she felt no need to acknowledge or validate difference. For her, her femininity, her sexual identity, her race, her age, and other identity

characteristics were not for her to negotiate or discuss to put someone else at ease. If it became an issue, then she would remove herself from an arguably hostile environment.

Mobile Nonconformists expressed their sexual identity as having low salience. Mobile Nonconformists indicated sexuality represented but one component of their entire identity—no bigger or smaller than anything else. While not naïve to others' perceptions, Mobile Nonconformists adamantly refused to concede to someone else's "prejudice." Fundamentally, modifying presentation to appease someone else was a concession Mobile Nonconformists were not willing to make. Mobile Nonconformists consistently expressed the view that no one was superior simply because of some physical, emotional, behavioral, or sexual marker.

Beauty Reifiers, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, and Comprehensive Conformist arguably reinforced boundaries and engaged in reifying societal "standards" to achieve/maintain heteronormative membership. Conversely, Mobile Nonconformists challenged any and all societal constraints and rejected communities that did not accept their chosen expressions. Mobile Nonconformists did not bifurcate their identities to placate any one community. Rather, they consistently expressed "I am feminine if I live my life authentically." For Mobile Nonconformists this indicated a type of integrity that was nonnegotiable.

Inner Beauty Conformists

Inner Beauty Conformists did not quite achieve the Mobile Nonconformists' expressed level of autonomy. Andrea had been married earlier in life to a man and had two children with him. Not until her youngest child left for college did she and her female partner of many years openly share a bedroom. Andrea frequently referred to her "prior" self as submissive and passive. Comments such as "been there and done that," coupled with an eye-roll, peppered the interview.

Inner Beauty Conformists' definition of feminine was personal. Andrea spoke in frustrated tones when discussing her former life and, in many ways, her former self. She resented former partners (male and female) who dictated to her how to be, how to look, and how to act. As a woman, growing up in the South, she said she had limited opportunities to meet or see other women who did not conform to a heteronormative lifestyle and she felt incapable of actively seeking out alternative communities, as she wanted to protect her children from potential ostracism for having a nonheterosexual mother. Therefore, she spent years living a more isolated life, intentionally not disclosing, and actively hiding, her sexual identity. Her actions and interactions indicate the high salience of her sexual identity and the presence of internalized heterosexism. However, what made Inner Beauty Conformists unique was that, as they aged, both internalized heterosexism and sexual identity salience reduced.

Now living in a more "progressive" neighborhood, surrounded by other "gay" families, Andrea no longer was on the outside looking in but rather relished her position on the inside. For example, Andrea at one point abandoned institutionalized religion, as it did not represent a community to which she felt she belonged or could belong. Now, Andrea has been asked to be a Deacon in her church, a position she both welcomed and expressed with a sense of pride. When asked how she dressed for church, Andrea stated she dresses to exhibit respect for the place, but not for the congregation. She elaborated, stating she dresses for herself and God and really did not care if people thought her gay, straight, or otherwise.

> I see people, men that look like they want to be women, and women who look like they really want to be men. I don't want to be either one of those. I want—and I don't want to offend them—I want them to be who they are. So I guess it's okay that they do that. But I'm very happy being exactly who I am, and that started out in my head much more profound than it ended up, but . . . (Andrea)

Andrea *saw* difference but articulated no internalized heterosexism—*today*. Isolated and removed from a nonheterosexual community for most of her life, she originally thought all

nonheterosexual women must look the way they were depicted in the media—butch. Fearing people becoming aware of her own sexuality, she distanced herself from those who *looked* "nonheteronormative." However, as she started to meet more women, she realized that many *looked* just like her.

Before her youngest child left for college, she actively negotiated staying closeted. Her partner of many years maintained a separate bedroom. She lied about herself in the workforce. Early on, after her divorce from her husband, she went on dates with men. Often on such dates, she double dated with the woman with whom she was sleeping. As she got older, her active management of both information regarding her sexual identity and presentation dissipated. Fundamentally, once her children were out of the house and aware of her sexual identity and she got settled into her career, she felt she had nothing left to hide. Her sexual identity was no longer something to manage or negotiate and it became less salient, no longer ruling her actions and interactions.

Rhonda recounted a similar journey. Married at a very young age and raised in a home where she was to be seen and not heard, she struggled with finding her place. Rhonda spoke at length about her religious upbringing. Her church openly advocated the subordination of women to men. Additionally, "homosexuality" was not discussed, as the "sinful nature of such engagement" was clear in the Bible. She stated unmistakably that she accepted both misogynistic and heterosexist messages *without question* because she was afraid and did not know any better.

However, as she got older, her views towards both women and nonheterosexuals changed. Of primary relevance, she became involved with another woman. Married with a child, she hid her affair. Her job required travel so her absence from home received little question. Initially, she left neither the church nor her husband, despite neither fitting into her new lifestyle.

Like Andrea, she waited until her child went to college to begin a somewhat more open existence.

Ultimately Rhonda did leave the church, divorced her husband, went to therapy, and began to leave some of the misogynistic and heterosexist messages behind. Thus, when asked to define femininity now, she delineated what she used to think from what she thinks today. No longer focused on appearance and subordination, she stated femininity is a "role model" of whom she aspired to be.

Both Andrea and Rhonda *arrived* at viewing femininity as a positive and their sexual identity as empowering. Fundamentally, their articulations were deliberate, as they wanted to express the difference between who they are from who they were. Only Inner Beauty Conformists and Pseudo Nonconformists, to be discussed below, expressed such a clear reaction and progression from one understanding to another, arguably more empowering one.

Andrea and Rhonda now celebrate "diversity" as a direct result of homogenous and isolated beginnings. As both women offered a definition that did not require a feminine physical appearance, they avoided "othering" those who did not conform to their definition, merely because of how they looked. Thus, while both may state they did not always understand different presentations, they did not articulate any internalized heterosexism. Interestingly, both used the term "frou-frou" to describe women who spent an inordinate amount of time and money on appearance. Andrea and Rhonda sought to distance themselves from that articulation more than from a woman who might wear a man's suit.

Becoming an Inner Beauty Conformists is a response to extreme patriarchal hetero-normative conformity in their past. This clearly distinguishes them from Mobile Nonconformists. Essentially, their current definition was a direct and cognizant result of rejecting their prior

understandings. Inner Beauty Conformists attempted to convert misogynistic messages into a more positive articulation. With regard to both gender *and* sexuality, Inner Beauty Conformists articulated the idea: if you are happy, I am happy.

As Inner Beauty Conformists gained comfort in their sexuality, they no longer viewed it as a stigma requiring any type of negotiation, nor maintained such rigid boundaries as once served to confine them. They did not engage in managing information dissemination or modifying presentation to conform to any perceived heteronormative standard. Rather, their sexuality simply was part of them—no longer defining or controlling how they moved within the world.

Pseudo Nonconformists

Pseudo Nonconformists articulated an emotional reaction to femininity. Nonconformists stated they rejected femininity as the product of a heterosexist, misogynistic, patriarchal culture. However, rejection did not denote "failed" femininity. For example, Dolly clearly stated throughout the interview that she was often "read" as straight and had trouble finding a "queer" space that would accept her. Because of her normative physical appearance, she often received unwanted male attention. Arguably, achieving the male gaze indicated a degree of feminine success. While such attention was often desired in a heteronormative society, and/or by those wanting to "pass," Dolly did not equate this attention with anything positive or see it as an indicator of any type of accomplishment.

Pseudo Nonconformists articulated a negative definition of femininity that was similar to that stated by Comprehensive Conformists. Both Comprehensive Conformists and Pseudo Nonconformists equated feminine with a hyper-feminine heteronormative presentation, to which Comprehensive Conformists begrudgingly attempt to comply. While many Pseudo

Nonconformists willingly embodied the heteronormative epitome of a feminine "look," they passionately said this external appearance resulted from their own agency rather than from some imposed standard. Both Comprehensive Conformists and Pseudo Nonconformists viewed their sexuality as a highly salient, and a primary component of their identity. Furthermore, both viewed their physical appearance and their sexual identification as inextricably linked. For the former, their sexual identity represented a stigma necessitating negotiation to maintain membership in a heteronormative community. Thus, Comprehensive Conformists engaged in appearance and information management to mitigate any perceived deviancy. Simply, they actively desired to hide their sexuality and this goal dictated much of what they did and how they did it. Pseudo Nonconformists viewed the invisibility of their sexuality problematically. Contrary to Comprehensive Conformists, they sought acknowledgment of their "deviant" sexuality.

> No, nobody believed us. It was hard to get a drink. The bartenders would ignore us. Yeah. So, that sucked, you know. I would go out and I think because of that kind of treatment, a lot of queer femmes sort of toned down their "femmeness" to go out and be in lesbian spaces to achieve that kind of acceptance and validity in that space. So for me, when I would walk in, in my knee-high stiletto boots and mini-skirt and giant hoop earrings and crazy mask make-up and big, black curly hair, I was asked if I was a drag queen. I was like, "Obviously, I am genetically female. Like, hello?" So, I would try to bring friends with me. *So when this happens you're feeling anger, pissed off?* Yeah, I'm annoyed. (Diane)

Not all Pseudo Nonconformist's took their physical appearance to such a "feminine extreme." Regardless, while presentation choices might vary, the desire for *nonheteronormative* acceptability did not.

As other types suggested varying degrees of internalized heterosexism, or awareness of a stigma requiring some kind of management, Pseudo Nonconformists often suggested the reverse—internalized *homosexism.* Instead of viewing their sexuality as some type of flaw or deficiency, they repeatedly asserted that those who conformed to an oppressive society suffered the flaw. Therefore, despite their often *looking* the same as a heteronormative woman, they

fervently expressed their difference. Furthermore, their interaction with biological males was at best indifferent but sometimes hostile.

> *Okay, what's your relationship with biological men?* I don't really have any . . . *Do you work with any men?* Yes . . . There's one guy who has the office next to mine and then I have three assistants and one of them is male, but he's gay and he's a femme. All three of my assistants are femme. So the straight male that I work with is not very present in the office. He is very rarely there so my interaction with him is very limited. The director of my department is male and, once again, our interaction is very limited. I think, on both our parts. I don't think he really wants to deal with me anymore than I want to deal with him . . . The last time I had any interaction with a guy—I sort of had this hobby of dating sorority girls. So, I was out with a sorority girl and she and I had gone to dinner and then went to this bar . . . there were a lot of men around. All of whom were very interested in talking to my very hot date. There was one guy who was not so easily scared away as the rest. Generally I can look at a guy and make him go away. This guy was, I don't know if he was too drunk or, you know, too small brained or whatever, but he didn't get it that I wanted him to go away and that it was in his best interest to go away and was insistent on talking to us and at one point, he was like, "Why are you being such a bitch? Why can't I talk to you?" and I was like, "Thank you for asking that question. Let me list for you the following reasons: number one, you are older than my mother, number two, you are wearing flip flops, number three, you are wearing cargo shorts, number four, you are male, number five, you don't listen very well because I have told you several times to go away, and number six, you're drinking a Miller Light which I think is disgusting." . . . He walked away. I said it loud enough that most of the men in the general vicinity could hear me and so nobody bothered us for the rest of the night. (Diane)

Pseudo Nonconformists repeatedly articulated their need to both mark and defend their territory. As someone who might be perceived as feminine and attractive, they resented that men understood this as a signal that they should approach. For Pseudo Nonconformists, straight biological men had little to no relevance in their life. Therefore, while the boundaries differed from those drawn by many of the "conformists," lines were drawn nonetheless.

The commonality of this group seemed to be an impassioned plea for visibility *on their own terms.* They often stated that they felt dismissed as feminine, and refused to compromise their feminine appearance in order to achieve visibility and respect. Their sexuality was not only nonnegotiable but highly salient, dictating how they acted and interacted with those around them.

CONCLUSION

Misogyny is a dislike of or prejudice against women. Therefore, it seems counter-intuitive that nonheterosexual women would have this word applied to them. Yet this chapter demonstrated that many women not only incorporated misogyny into their daily lives but also were active gatekeepers, in that they reinforced appropriate feminine appearance and behavior by "othering" those who did not comply.

Their reason for "othering" related directly to their relationship with their sexual identity. Those who indicated internalized heterosexism (Beauty Reifiers, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, and Comprehensive Conformists) all engaged in "othering" those who did not conform to their understanding of a "normative" feminine appearance. Fundamentally, to Beauty Reifiers, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, and Comprehensive Conformists, *not feminine* suggested *not heterosexual*. Therefore, in order to avoid being "read as gay," they often distanced themselves from "nonfeminine" women.

This practice of "othering" reinforced arbitrary boundaries of what constitutes a feminine woman. Therefore, internalized heterosexism can be viewed as bolstering misogyny. How they othered, or their reaction to others, was contingent on the salience of their sexual identity.

Mobile Nonconformists, Inner Beauty Conformists, and Pseudo Nonconformists all indicated their sexual identity was not a stigma that required negotiation. Thus, "othering" those perceived as different did not factor into how they contended with a potentially marginalizing sexual identity. Thus, this group did not *use* femininity to mask a stigma. However, this does not necessarily mean they avoid misogynistic messages altogether.

This brings the dialogue full circle to the ubiquitous beauty messages and arbitrary "feminine ideal." Based on how the women understood feminine (chapter four), and how they

felt about their sexuality (chapter five), how relevant are misogynistic beauty messages on self-confidence? Simply, chapter six addresses the question—can any woman feel good about herself after navigating a minefield of misogynistic and heterosexist messages?

CHAPTER SIX: SO, WHO FEELS PRETTY?

> *The Beauty Myth, like many ideologies of femininity, mutates to meet new circumstances and checkmates women's attempt to increase their power.* Wolf (2002:7).

In a heteronormative society, the seemingly innocuous term *feminine* can be used to perpetuate both gender subordination and sexual marginalization. Regarding gender, femininity reflects a heteronormative discourse that frequently conveys misogynistic messages. For example, women in magazines are presented as tall, thin, and beautiful, which is not reflective of most women in society. Therefore, these images and related messages reinforce some unobtainable feminine ideal and often leave women feeling "not good enough." Additionally, women are not only bombarded with images of some physical ideal, but also told they should *be* "sugar and spice and everything nice."

Women who do not comply with these "conventional" standards, for whatever reason, may be considered to have "failed femininity." Furthermore, those who fail femininity risk being read as "gay," as femininity is often used as marker for sexual identity. Women who are not gay or do not care if people perceive them as gay have little to fear. However, in a society that marginalizes deviant sexuality and uses femininity as a gauge of heterosexuality, many women give great thought as to how they present themselves in order to maintain or achieve mainstream acceptability.

This chapter revisits the six types, their relationships with misogyny and heterosexism, and specifically addresses the relationship between understandings of femininity and self-confidence. Fundamentally, if misogynistic messages serve to render women inadequate—as a woman can never truly achieve some idolized standard—and heterosexism perpetuates feminine conformity, how do these nonheterosexual women reconcile "a" hegemonic femininity with their

own presentation choices? Exploring which types succumb to feelings of "inadequacy" informs how social control works, who escapes it, and why.

FEMININITY, AGENCY, AND A HETERONORMATIVE DISCOURSE

Some women accept, some women question, and some women reject misogynistic and heterosexist messages. This does not suggest that all women have equal agency or that those who "accept" misogynistic messages all appear or behave in the same way. Similarly, while some women may reject perceived heteronormative expectations, what this "looks" like and the ramifications of rejecting vary, contingent upon the individual engaging in the act.

For example, wealthier women may not *need* to conform to a "gender appropriate" appearance to *achieve* a position within society—they already have it. Therefore, they may dress "gender inappropriately" without fear of reprisal or loss of status. However, poorer women who desire upward mobility may not have the same degree of freedom. Thus, while they may physically look similar to their higher socioeconomic counterparts, the results may differ. Essentially, as a consequence of their "nonheteronormative" appearance, these women may encounter sanctions, such as lost economic opportunities or perhaps even social ostracization, things wealthier women may be able to avoid. Basically, some women can "afford" to *seemingly* transgress "heteronormative" expectations with few if any consequences, while others cannot. I emphasize "seemingly" because a rejection does not necessarily denote a transgressive act (Foucault 1990).

Thus, femininity *may* be used as a point of resistance *or* compliance to perceived hetero-normative expectations. Furthermore, physical appearance may represent intentionally or unintentionally conforming to a perceived hegemonic discourse. This feminine discourse arguably subordinates women and marginalizes nonheterosexual individuals. Why some women

succumb to this discourse, and the personal ramifications of the choices made, are the subjects of this chapter.

COMPLICIT MISOGYNY

In this chapter, I introduce the concept, "complicit misogyny." It is important to note that complicit misogyny is *not* synonymous with the term "personal beauty compliance" offered in chapter four. While five types indicated complicity in various ways, only Comprehensive Conformists, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, and Pseudo Nonconformists *internalized* the messages. Internalizing refers to personal beauty compliance or incorporating beauty myth messages into personal presentation choices—as if there is no agency to reject conforming. (See Table 2.)

Complicit misogyny refers to *perpetuating* the aforementioned feminine ideals—intentionally or not—*not the actual physical personal incorporation*. Any woman who reinforced "gendered" terminology regarding appearance or behavior arguably engaged in "complicit misogyny."

For example, Mobile Nonconformists rejected *both* "appropriate" gendered appearance and behavior. This rejection applied to how they *expressed* their relationship with misogynistic beauty messages and their refusal to incorporate the beauty myth into their personal presentation choices. (See Table 2.) Additionally, Mobile Nonconformists rebuffed dichotomous "gendered" behaviors. Rather than see some traits as inherently masculine or feminine, Mobile Nonconformists asserted all traits possessed by women *are* feminine. Only when a woman succumbs to some external pressure to be something unauthentic does she lose her femininity.

Of the six types, *only* Mobile Nonconformists exhibited *no* complicit misogyny. Both Beauty Reifiers and Inner Beauty Conformists also did not *personally conform* to beauty myth

messages in practice (Table 2 [Personal Beauty Compliance-*No*]). Beauty Reifiers, while not *personally* incorporating beauty messages, literally *reified* gendered *appearance* as evidenced by their "acceptance" of misogynistic beauty messages (Table 2 [Misogynistic Beauty Messages-*Acceptance*]). Beauty Reifiers suggested that feminine connoted "a look" and expressed this as an incontestable fact. While Inner Beauty Conformists did not reify looks, they consistently reinforced gendered *traits* using terminology such as "masculine" and feminine *energy* or *behavior*. Because these feminine traits typically implied something weak, Inner Beauty Conformists' gendered language can also be viewed as misogynisitic.

The remaining three types (Comprehensive Conformists, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, and Pseudo Nonconformists) are the most obvious "supporters" of misogyny, as all three types incorporated "the beauty myth" into their *personal* presentation choices (Table 2 [Personal Beauty Compliance-*Yes*]).

Pseudo Nonconformists vehemently rejected all things heteronormative—hence the name "Nonconformists." Specifically, Pseudo Nonconformists repeatedly indicated a desire to transgress *all* heteronormative expectations, as they consistently suggested such expectations were oppressive. To combat such oppression, Pseudo Nonconformists attempted to form their own nonheteronormative ("queer") community. However, despite their *articulated desire* to transgress, many Pseudo Nonconformists were still major "consumers of femininity." Essentially, Pseudo Nonconformists were some of the biggest purchasers of products that made them look "more like a girl" and appear "pretty." Furthermore, for many, this presentation served as a key marker of their identity ("Femme"). Therefore, while the goal may have been transgression, the result was somewhat paradoxical. As "complicit misogyny" refers to the idea of perpetuating

oppressive feminine “ideals” or a heteronormative discourse, even Pseudo Nonconformists satisfied this criterion—intentionally or not.

Comprehensive Conformists and Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists also purchased products that supported misogynistic feminine ideals. While the *reasons* for purchasing products varied among those who internalized the beauty myth, their actions nevertheless suggested complicity.

Thus, if beauty messages and gendered terminology suggest misogyny and misogyny serves to render women inadequate or subordinated, would it then follow that *only* Mobile Nonconformists exhibited high self-confidence, as this type alone rejected *all* misogynistic messages? No. It is *not* simply “complicity” that creates feelings of inadequacy. Rather, it is what individuals do with misogynistic messages *and why they do it* that inform how they “feel” about themselves. Essentially, misogyny *alone* does not render women feeling “lesser than.” It is a woman’s position in society, the intersectionality of identities, which illuminates how she “feels” about herself and why.

FEMININITY, SEXUALITY AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

When the literature discusses the insidiousness of “beauty messages” and being feminine, the emphasis is typically on women, subsuming nonheterosexual women under this construct (Brownmiller 1984; Chapkis 1996; Etcoff 1999; Hesse-Biber 1996; Wolf 1991). However, non-heterosexual women have unique issues, as they arguably possess a marginalized sexual identity. Thus, to understand the role of femininity in the lives of the women I interviewed, I had to look at the relationship between misogyny *and* heterosexism.

Some women, as discussed in chapter five, conformed to some arguably misogynistic understandings of femininity as a way to mask their marginalized sexual identity. Essentially, be

feminine in order to be read as "straight." The idea that their sexual identity *required* some type of negotiation (see Table 3) suggested a stigma that needed to be managed. This stigma management indicated *internalized* heterosexism.

Including sexual identity in the analysis, we see that Mobile Nonconformists did not view their sexuality as a stigma necessitating negotiation. Thus, not only did Mobile Nonconformists reject misogynistic messages (see Table 2) but also they "rejected" heterosexist messages (see Table 3). This consistent "rejection" suggests that *external influences* had minimal impact on Mobile Nonconformists' self-confidence.

Fundamentally, Mobile Nonconformists created a positive definition of feminine that did not incorporate any misogynistic or heterosexist messages. As no external measure dictated "feminine success," Mobile Nonconformists' confidence was entirely within their control. Thus, self-confidence was *internally* generated. You cannot make someone "feel badly about themselves" if they do not subscribe to those measures of self-worth in the first place. Rejecting both misogyny and heterosexism placed Mobile Nonconformists in a powerful and unique, position. Courtney recounted a story about her grandmother:

> She was a domestic, and somehow for being a domestic, she figured out how to save enough money to buy her own little row house, to open up a little eatery . . . because she realized the guys had to eat. She would do their starch in the bathtub to make extra money. Then from that she was able to open up a little dry cleaners downstairs. And nobody thought when she died, in that darn row house . . . that when she died, I had a freaking trust fund from a woman who made jack shit so I could go to college. Twenty-six thousand dollars. Think about the timeframe . . . so that I could go to college—so that I could go to college. That, to me, is like strength. I can't even—oh, you make me cry. This is—it's just—it's just amazing. And I see that, um . . . I love African-American women, who are single mothers, who are grandmothers, who are Maya Angelous, who are Harriet Tubmans, who are as—as my model—my role models, as my—That's what it's about. They're strong women who'd have figured it out because they have had to. Um—[regardless] of the situation, of the circumstances,—they've figured it out . . . You've done what you've had to do to take care of your business . . . And your head is up high. And your head is up high. (Courtney)

What makes this group able not to succumb to *any* negative messages? Of the four women whom I classified as Mobile Nonconformists, three were African American and three came from families where either a father was not present or the mother was the "care provider" *and* "breadwinner." A commonality throughout the narratives was the suggestion of overcoming some marginalization, either race or class or both. Looking at the intersectionality of identities, these women relegated sexuality to almost irrelevance, fundamentally asserting that, as women *already on the margins*, sexuality was not "the" obstacle to overcome. This explains the low salience of their sexual identity. (See Table 3.) Furthermore, as products of women-centered households, gender suggested power and not subordination.

Mobile Nonconformists confronted sexism and heterosexism much as they confronted racism and classism—as things that just made them stronger. Instead of feeling oppressed or marginalized, Mobile Nonconformists consistently articulated a strong sense of self. While understanding external "ideal" barometers (*white, thin, heterosexual*), Mobile Nonconformists recognized this narrative as an impossible achievement. Therefore, Mobile Nonconformists viewed this narrative as inapplicable to them and thus dismissed it. They rejected external barometers as indicators of their own self-worth. Femininity represented "authenticity" and these women all saw themselves as authentic.

Thus, it is not simply "internalization" or "complicity" or "rejection" of heterosexist or misogynistic messages that indicates self-confidence or lack thereof. Rather, it is how women *negotiate* the meaning of femininity that reflects confidence levels. As Mobile Nonconformists expressed little need to reconcile a hegemonic understanding with their own, they consistently indicated high confidence. Essentially, Mobile Nonconformists' understandings of femininity

corresponded with their lived experiences—*unambiguously*. This consistency enables Mobile Conformists to "feel pretty."

Self-confidence and One End of the Spectrum

With misogynistic messages and heterosexist messages working together to maintain a heteronormative status quo, *and* only Mobile Nonconformists rejecting both, how did the other five types fare? Does a person *already* have to be so far on the margins (race, class, other) to negate the influence of misogyny and heterosexism? Furthermore, does one's ultimate understanding of femininity serve to liberate or oppress?

Beauty Reifiers articulated both misogynistic and heterosexist messages unproblematically. Rather than view either message as oppressive, or imposed on them, they incorporated both matter-of-factly into their lives.

> *Overall how do you feel about your presentation?* I feel fine with it. I mean I don't have self-esteem issues. I don't have negative self-esteem issues, umm ,I don't have a huge ego. I think I am confident. Or, I think I have been told that enough to where I believe it. It must be true. I don't think I have any confidence issues, maybe when it comes to talking to girls is where I fall short (laugh) but ah I—yeah so—I—cause I don't care much . . . I don't care really what other people . . . (Rocky)

Arguably, Rocky "fails" femininity as a masculine looking woman. However, this failure did not translate into any negative self-perceptions. *If* misogynistic messages serve to perpetuate gender subordination and feelings of inadequacy as the literature suggests, *and* Rocky accepts misogyny, how does she escape the "trap" of feeling "not good enough?"

Of primary importance, Beauty Reifiers did not *internalize* misogyny. (See Table 2.) It was not something they must *do.* Rather, femininity just *is*. As femininity was viewed as something inherent, not an achievement, it did not cause discomfort or feelings of failure. Essentially, you cannot fail that which cannot be "achieved."

Beauty Reifiers did not need to "measure up" to some arbitrary barometer. Therefore, Beauty Reifiers engaged in *minimal reconciliation*. Thus, taken for granted constructs were just that—*taken for granted*. Beauty Reifiers did not attempt to modify any misogynistic messages (Table 2 [Misogynistic Beauty Myth-*Accepted*]). Additionally, they did not allow such messages to influence their presentation choices (Table 2 [Personal Beauty Compliance- *No*]). Fundamentally, they understood and accepted what constituted a feminine woman but never felt it was something they must, or even could, do. This was evident by the fact that there were self-professed masculine looking women comfortable with their appearance and their relationship with femininity. Not one Beauty Reifier modified her appearance to "mask" her sexuality (Table 3 [Sexual Identity Salience-*Low*]). Like Mobile Nonconformists, while for very different reasons, Beauty Reifiers did not require any external validation to indicate they had "achieved" some feminine ideal.

Thus, rather than view messages as oppressive and something to which they must comply, Beauty Reifiers merely saw the construct, "feminine," as an *essentialized* fact. Essentializing the construct feminine *liberated* them from grappling with the term. To Beauty Reifiers, feminine was no different than black/white, high/low, or dog/cat. Feminine represented a category that helped create order and did not possess any inherent good or bad value. Fundamentally, Beauty Reifiers' reaction to femininity was ambivalent. The simplicity of their understanding, while sociologically problematic, enabled Beauty Reifiers to escape feeling subordinated and/or oppressed even though they arguably perpetuated subordinating and oppressive terms. Stated differently, they are actively complicit in perpetuating misogynistic messages but escape incorporating any negative feelings of self-worth.

Of the 14 women identified as Beauty Reifiers, four were “masculine” looking and *all* suggested they had “masculine” traits.

> Yeah. That’s how I process. I worked through life more like a man, and I guess that’s why, you know, in the boardroom I’m very focused on strategizing, with other men . . . *So you think that your physicality is very feminine . . . but your mental processing is often more of masculine nature?* Yeah . . . (Lena)

Lena refers to working with “other men” as if in this scenario she is one of them. *All* Beauty Reifiers indicated this unemotional way of processing. All 10 who were *not* masculine looking were highly educated, over 40, and highly compensated professionals—either self-employed or high-ranking officers in a company. Each woman said she had tremendous job security. Those who were “masculine” looking tended to be younger and engage in employment where their appearance would not be an issue.

Thus, *all* Beauty Reifiers were in positions of power where they did not have much fear regarding negative consequences related to their sexual identification. While they did express some internalized heterosexism (Table 3 [Sexual Identity Negotiation-*Stigmatized*]), they clearly and unemotionally bifurcated their lives relegating sexual identity to almost irrelevant (Table 3 [Sexual Identity Salience –*Low*]).

An Inner Beauty Conformists would suggest that Beauty Reifiers could not be feminine as their *energy* or *traits* were masculine. However, as "energy" was not factored into a Beauty Reifiers’ definition, they did not feel their “strength” or lack of emotion negated any possessed “femininity.”

It is just this unemotional reaction to external stimuli that enabled them to accept misogyny and heterosexism without letting these messages subordinate or marginalize them. Therefore, while they may be arguably one of the *most* complicit of the six types, this complicity did not manifest in low feelings of self-worth. Misogynistic messages did not influence how they

felt about themselves or their place in society. I identified more Beauty Reifiers than any other type. This was not surprising as Beauty Reifiers viewed femininity much in line with "main-stream" society. Therefore, this group most reflected heteronormative hegemonic thinking.

The Other End of the Spectrum

Comprehensive Conformists. Comprehensive Conformists differed from Beauty Reifiers in two key respects. They *knowingly* modified their presentation to *mask* their sexual identity, *and* they resented having to do so. While Beauty Reifiers were at worst ambivalent about "femininity," Comprehensive Conformists articulated unambiguously that femininity was a *negative* construct imposed on them to which they *must* comply.

This lack of perceived agency resulted from the idea that "were they not gay," they would "be like everyone else," and they *desperately* wanted to be like everyone else.

> Never was I just like swept away and never, you know, I had a boyfriend. I had several boyfriends. I dated another guy long-term and I dated him for probably about a year, and it was just like work. He was the nicest guy. I dated another guy for a couple years and . . . Doing it to conform and fit it, and again I want that—marriage and children and all the other things that go along with it. (Donna)

The high saliency of a marginalized identity (Table 3 [Sexual Identity Salience-*High*]) required Comprehensive Conformists to exert significant energy to mitigate this perceived stigma (Table 3 [Sexual Identity Negotiation-*Stigmatized*]). Unlike Mobile Nonconformists and Beauty Reifiers, who exerted *no* energy "conforming" and required no external validation, Comprehensive Conformists exerted tremendous energy trying to belong.

> No, I don't like attention. I like to blend in. Which is why I was terrible at bars. *Do you enjoy attention from men or affirmation from men?* Yeah. But I didn't get it much. I think something in my personality was putting out flags—don't approach me . . . I don't want to draw attention to myself with people thinking, "Ooo." I don't want them going, "What was she?" (Lisa)

The low self-confidence expressed by Comprehensive Conformists should not be surprising. Fundamentally, Comprehensive Conformists internalized *both* misogyny (see Table

2) and heterosexism (see Table 3). Therefore, Comprehensive Conformists consistently succumbed to messages that informed them that they were never "good enough" and were filled with self-loathing and insecurity. Fundamentally, as they saw themselves as different and assumed others would reject them, they remained isolated. Comprehensive Conformists were both physically isolated—socializing minimally—and emotionally disengaged from those around them so as to not "red flag" their stigma.

Comprehensive Conformists consistently spoke of homosexuality as a negative and drew definitive boundaries—"*us and them,*" "us" being those who "passed" as heterosexual and "them" being those who did not. As Comprehensive Conformists craved "normalcy," they reinforced negative lesbian stereotypes in order to assert "I am not that *and* look how normal I am."

> Yeah—I told them I was out of it—I was out of it. So I led that lie until I was probably early 30s—I think I think during this time there was a lot to things that my mother got to see . . . her daughter didn't grow up to be a tattooed tongue piercing titty slingly lesbo in the middle of the gay pride parades touting their "I love being gay" kind of thing. She met a lot of my friends. She saw, umm, I was able to take care of myself financially, physically. She met a lot of my friends, male and female, gay and straight. Whether she knew it or not I don't know but I think it helped her to see that I didn't grow up in the typical, what you would picture a very masculine dyky lesbo world. Right? She didn't see that, and she didn't see my friends that way, and I was taking care of myself. I was doing well financially. I was doing well in my jobs. I was taking care of myself. I was not into drugs and that kind of stuff. I think some of that helped. (Teresa)

This extreme acceptance of negative stereotypes and concurrent need for their own acceptance/approval resulted in tremendous energy exerted in achieving/maintaining "conformity." Thus, Comprehensive Conformists did not engage in appearance rituals because it made them feel better, or prettier, but rather because it gained them their much sought after acceptance.

This negative perception of their sexuality, their inability to "naturally" be feminine or pass, and their constant need for external validation/approval resulted in Comprehensive Conformists providing the embodiment of the issues suggested in the "beauty myth"—they never felt good enough.

Only 3 women of my 43 were *currently* classified as Comprehensive Conformists. I say "currently" because 6 of 11 Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists and 4 of 5 Inner Beauty Conformists all *passed through*, and sometimes *lapsed back to*, a Comprehensive Conformist *stage*. Essentially, Comprehensive Conformity, for some, represented a transitory stage en route to greater acceptance of their sexuality.

Thus, of the 43 women in my sample, 13 *at some point* could have been classified as Comprehensive Conformists. Fundamentally, many women expressed that *during* their "coming out" process they felt isolated, ashamed, and scared. They articulated extreme internalized heterosexism and would do anything to "be like everyone else." However, once they found a nonheterosexual community, or at least other nonheterosexuals, their internalized heterosexism dissipated. As internalized heterosexism dissipated, their need to engage in misogynistic rituals, such as wearing make-up and dressing to pass, subsided as well. As both internalized heterosexism and misogyny had less relevance in their lives, their feelings of self-worth increased. Examples of transitory Comprehensive Conformists are provided in the relevant sections.

Why were some women *transitory* Comprehensive Conformists and others *stagnant* Comprehensive Conformists? I could find no one specific reason for the difference. Of the three women who remained Comprehensive Conformists, all were middle aged, mid-level professionals and white. Therefore, the statement regarding their sexuality being the only differentiator ("but for my sexuality") seemed applicable. While Beauty Reifiers had job

security, Comprehensive Conformists considered their employment tenuous; they felt that continuous employment necessitated masking their sexuality. Comprehensive Conformists consistently conveyed that discovery of their sexual identity would serve as an impediment to financial success *and* financial success served as an indicator of "normalcy"—which they desperately desired. This desire for normalcy and the fear that their sexuality would reduce economic opportunities was true of *all* Comprehensive Conformists, stagnant and transitory. Thus, it follows that as some women felt more confident in their professional life and other aspects of their lives as well, they stopped masking their sexuality.

Finally, it was not surprising that only three of the women I interviewed were still considered Comprehensive Conformists. As my research study focused on sexuality, something with which Comprehensive Conformists intensely struggled, those still identified as this type may have been more difficult to find and been less willing to talk. However, this does not negate the importance of this group, as many women passed through Comprehensive Conformity as part of their "coming out" process.

Pseudo Nonconformists. Unlike Comprehensive Conformists, Pseudo Nonconformists indicated *no internalized heterosexism*. Furthermore, they stated that internalized heterosexism had *never* been relevant. Therefore, Pseudo Nonconformists did not "pass through" a Comprehensive Conformist "stage." However, this group, too, struggled with self-esteem and more than any other, its members indicated struggling with body image issues.

Comprehensive Conformists expressed "acceptance" of misogyny and extreme internalized heterosexism. They understood femininity as something they *must* do to achieve mainstream acceptability. For Comprehensive Conformists, a highly salient sexual identity manifested as internalized heterosexism. This highly salient identity required constant

negotiation to demonstrate their "normalcy" and achieve mainstream acceptability. Conversely, Pseudo Nonconformists rejected mainstream acceptability and created an alternative community *defined by* their "marginalized" sexuality—a queer space.

As Pseudo Nonconformists militantly rejected all things heteronormative *and* saw heteronormativity as misogynistic and oppressive, one might think Pseudo Nonconformists avoided succumbing to the negative misogynistic beauty messages that so influenced Comprehensive Conformists. However, while Pseudo Nonconformists *expressed* rejecting misogynistic messages, they incorporated misogyny into their own appearance. (See Table 2.) Essentially, both Comprehensive Conformists and Pseudo Nonconformists indicated *internalized* misogyny, albeit *for very different reasons*.

While Comprehensive Conformists suggested that a feminine look felt unnatural *but* was something that they must do, Pseudo Nonconformists embraced a feminine *appearance*—just not the construct "feminine." This acceptance of a "look" and rejection of the construct had both significance and ramifications.

> Yeah—ever since I can remember I was classified as a chubby kid. By my parents—but I think legitimately I probably was when I was little . . . but I do have very early memories of telling my mom I wanted to be a ballerina and she would say, "Honey you are not going to be built for that" or like talking about how I had inherited my dad's love handles or something like that—so there was always that—oh and she encouraged me to be on a diet when I was in 5th grade. Things that I can look back on and say—you know that is just not right . . . She would put snacks away when I was eating them—that kind of pressure, yeah. Then when I was in 6th grade I had anxiety problems and woke up every morning and threw up and was nervous about school and just had no appetite and lost weight and I received a HUGE amount of positive reinforcement when I lost weight. And I proceeded from 6th grade to 9th to not gain any weight even though I grew 6 or 7 inches or something . . . (Elizabeth)

Pseudo Nonconformists expressed their *initial* understandings or interactions with feminine elicited *negative* memories. *No other group shared this vivid memory*. While both Pseudo Nonconformists and Comprehensive Conformists expressed feminine as a negative construct, for

Comprehensive Conformists this reflected issues related to their *sexuality* while for Pseudo Nonconformists this reflected issues related to their gender. Stated alternatively, the former relates to heterosexism and the later to misogyny.

As Pseudo Nonconformists gained awareness of misogynistic messages, they rebelled. They rejected all things feminine and modified their appearance in an effort to demonstrate their rejection of misogyny and the "beauty ideal."

> Umm, I think I used to be much more preoccupied with either trying or not trying to be feminine. It was on my mind more than it is now because of that, umm, I would do things like wear sports bra because I didn't want to try in the first place or I wanted to be a tomboy. You know, I couldn't fit into feminine and I wanted to reject it. Or I would feel extremely self-conscious around other girls in high school . . . who were smaller than I was or you know . . . it usually was in relationship to how I felt the boys perceived me—like whether I was too tall or too big. (Elizabeth)

However, unlike Comprehensive Conformists, Pseudo Nonconformists did not view a feminine appearance as "unnatural" or done as a way to "pass." Thus, Pseudo Nonconformists struggled with rejecting misogynistic messages while enjoying a feminine appearance. While cognizant of misogyny, Pseudo Nonconformists felt that donning a more *masculine* appearance felt *unnatural*. Therefore, they reembraced a feminine look, while removing themselves from a misogynistic and heterosexist environment.

> Oh yeah—I definitely feel like I have to look all . . . and there have been a few times—like on a given day I'll dress feminine or not—sometimes I'm just not in the mood to wear pink underwear and high heels, things like that. And there have been a few times where those days have coincided with queer group events and I'll override how I naturally feel with what is expected of me and that kind of annoys me because that is exactly the opposite of what we are supposed to be doing. (Elizabeth)

Thus, while it might seem that *understanding* and *awareness* of the negative consequences of misogynistic messages would provide liberation from its oppression, such is not the case.

The reasons for a feminine presentation changed. Furthermore, the appearance choices were done for a different audience. However, Pseudo Nonconformists never completely escaped the "beauty ideal," and the related negative consequences, no matter how they tried.

> I don't know for so many years I had been able to starve myself and then suddenly I couldn't go a few hours and my body—I think I kind of messed my body up a little bit because I have blood sugar issues now where I have to eat every 3 or 4 hours or I start to feel faint. So anyway, I was trying to diet again and it wasn't working and it was really frustrating. But, ummm—*when I asked you if it matters to you to be perceived as attractive, you said not particularly.* Did I? No, it matters to me. It matters to me to be perceived as attractive but I don't believe them when they tell me I am. *Do you like the attention—from men or women or both?* It is not that I—okay—so when you were asking me if I liked the attention—is that the question? See, this is the problem. See, I don't like the attention but I would rather—it is very confusing, it confuses me it is like—I don't NOT want to have the attention but it makes me very uncomfortable and nervous because I think people are lying to me and they are just saying it to make me feel better and then I just get into this downward spiral of self loathing. A*re you very influenced by things in pop culture—like magazine and what not?* Yes. Yeah, yeah. (Dolly)

This group was comprised of the youngest demographic with four of the six under age 30. Of the six, five expressed having body image issues. However, it is imperative to note that while this group expressed the most body image issues of all six types—all *unequivocally* stated they felt better and had more agency then they did prior to claiming a queer identity.

Pseudo Nonconformists struggled tremendously with wanting to reject heteronormative conformity *and* wanting attention for looking "heteronormative." Essentially, they expressed wanting the attention *but* on their own terms. This vehement rejection of misogynistic messages and equally powerful internalization of the messages resulted in constant struggles with body image and self-esteem. They wanted validation for achieving something they personally found problematic.

Somewhere in the Middle

Inner Beauty Conformists. Inner Beauty Conformists struggled with misogyny (Table 2 [Misogynistic Beauty Messages-*Questioning*]) but refused to incorporate "beauty" messages into

their personal lives (Table 2 [Personal Beauty Compliance-*No*]). Essentially, while they were complicit in using “gendered” language, they did not feel they had to live a “gender appropriate” life.

Women were not “born” Inner Beauty Conformists. Unlike Mobile Nonconformists, who were always on the margins, and Beauty Reifiers who never questioned the “naturalness” of femininity, Inner Beauty Conformists transitioned to this “type” by way of Beauty Reifier or Comprehensive Conformist.

Unlike Comprehensive Conformists, Inner Beauty Conformists did not feel “but for” their sexuality they would be just like everyone else. Rather, Inner Beauty Conformists were tired of being like everyone else *for* everyone else. Inner Beauty Conformists *previously* masked their sexuality to achieve mainstream acceptability. However, as they aged and gained comfort in their sexuality, they no longer engaged in hiding their sexuality.

> The things I like about lesbians—you see it is that independent self-confidence. What I don't like is when I see somebody that's like I used to be. I don't want any part of that but I don't identify that as feminine as much as I identify it as somebody who needs to get rid of bad habits . . . *Have you ever been made to feel not feminine?* . . . I have three good friend that I went to high school with. Two of them I went to elementary school with. The four of us get together on a regular basis. And I'm different from them and part of it is they're all married to the same person they married forty years ago. Part of it is the independence part. *Are they more feminine than you?* I was just trying to think about that. I think so. But then it's going to become kind of a negative thing in my head, because the things that make me different from them, if I call those things feminine, then it's more negative . . . a little bit dependent, a little bit helpless, a little bit soap opera-y. I mean they watch a lot of stuff on TV. That's not fair, but it's sort of true. And that has nothing to do with gender I don't think. *So you feel less feminine but . . . you don't perceive it as a negative?* No, it's very positive, really. *How do you think they view you? Do you think they view you as feminine?* I would love for you to ask them. I'd like to know what they'd say. (Laughs.) Then again, I'd probably be pissed if they said, "Yeah, she's not . . ." They cannot win. They say "She's feminine" and I'd say, "What the hell are you talking about?" And if they say "She's not" then I'd go, "What the hell are you talking about?" (Andrea)

Inner Beauty Conformists suggested that a "heteronormative" definition would connote something weak. Interestingly, Inner Beauty Conformists indicated their sexuality *liberated* them from oppressive misogynistic messages and succumbing to some passive definition of femininity. Essentially, having spent much of their lives existing in a heteronormative society, Inner Beauty Conformists recognized a distinction between how they *used to* construct femininity with how they *currently* constructed the term.

However, bifurcating the two, past and present, did not necessarily connote complete rejection of all things heteronormative. Rather, they continually *aspired* to leave oppressive understandings behind.

> Yeah, recently gaining like 60 pounds after I broke my ankle. *Oh, you gained 60 pounds?* Yeah. So, that's a lot. *How tall are you?* 5'1". So it's a lot. So, I do have to take that off. It isn't healthy and I understand all that and I would feel better about how I look and what I could wear and what I could buy and all those kinds of things. I get all that. I spent a lot of money on fat clothes to look good! (Laughs) I have to go to the fat lady shop but there's a part of me that's just like, hey! You know? So I'm not svelte or whatever but you know I am healthy! *So, it doesn't affect your self-esteem or how you feel about yourself?* No. *Overall how would you say your self-esteem is? High, medium, low?* I think my self-esteem is pretty high. *It sounds pretty high.* Yeah, it's pretty high. *Unless you are a big fat liar.* No, it's pretty high. *You can be a big fat liar. I'll never know.* Yeah, well it's hard to be a liar and be Catholic I can tell you that! Cause you are always like BOOM! (Cheryl)

While Inner Beauty Conformists understood what it meant to be *pretty*, those misogynistic messages did *not* oppress Inner Beauty Conformists. Essentially, they understood misogyny *but* did not exert much energy, if any, complying with some unobtainable ideal. Their self-confidence no longer required much, if any, external validation.

Of the five women classified as Inner Beauty Conformists, two had been married and all were 47 or older. In fact, my three oldest participants (55-61) were Inner Beauty Conformists. Inner Beauty Conformists did not succumb to misogynistic beauty messages, as one of the requisites of the "ideal" is *youth*—a requisite they all violated. However, *none* of the women

expressed any concern with aging or doing anything to mitigate looking older. For example, none colored her hair or would entertain having any cosmetic surgery to make herself look more youthful. Yet *all* expressed a relatively strong sense of self.

Inner Beauty Conformists escaped the "trappings" of femininity because *they had been trapped.* As they no longer found their sexuality negotiable or something to mask, they found a peace that concurrently freed them from misogynistic messages. While they occasionally still heard a little voice telling them to "look pretty," such concerns were fleeting and not a major component of the way they moved throughout society or ultimately how they felt about themselves.

Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists. Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists were very similar to Inner Beauty Conformists. They too struggled with what feminine meant (Table 2 [Misogynistic Beauty Messages-*Questioning*]) and how salient their sexuality was in their lives (Table 3 [Sexual Identity Salience-*Medium*]). However, the key delineator between the two types was while Inner Beauty Conformists escaped internalizing either misogyny or heterosexism, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists internalized both.

Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists indicated their sexual identity was moderately salient *and* negotiable. This suggests that they *would* mask their sexuality if presented with a hetero-sexist environment. However, unlike Comprehensive Conformists, they *rarely* feared they would be "read as gay." Thus, while they *would* modify presentation, they infrequently needed to engage in much modification. Essentially, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists had the privilege of often being read by heteronormative society as naturally feminine and attractive.

Even though Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists needed validation, as suggested by their internalized misogyny, they did not want to admit the relevance of "beauty" or femininity in their

lives. Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists struggled with the importance of appearance and it affected different Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists differently.

> *What would you say your self-esteem is?* A work in progress. *Has that always been the case? Was it ever high growing up, or have you always been sort of—* No, I've always—I've never really had high self-esteem. *Do you have any idea where that comes from?* My mom. No, I don't know. I mean, I know that my parents were always complimentary and all that, but I guess that they just expected so much that . . . *Like what?* Just like, athletic-wise, academic-wise, everything. There wasn't a lot of room for error, so there was just a high expectation. And so that's what it was, so I was expected to perform at a certain level, so when I did, it wasn't anything extraordinary, you know what I mean? So it was when I'd perform below that that I'd hear something about it. So it was kind of tough. *I can understand that. What about attention for your looks? Did you ever get attention for being cute, or for being*—Yeah, I always had boyfriends, and I was in Homecoming, and all that stuff. I don't know, but I never really, it never really sunk in. I don't know. I hate being thought of that way, or looked at that way . . . I don't know, see I feel like if you look a certain way, then you're limited to—or if people think you're attractive or whatever, that they automatically assume there's not a lot more there. You know what I mean? *Mm-hmm.* I don't know, so I don't—I've never really seen myself that way. *Does it matter to you if you're perceived as attractive?* I mean, a little. I would think it's a positive thing, or it helps with self-esteem, when other people think you're attractive or what not but I don't know—it's tough. *So you do get some attention for it, but you feel like it's a double-edged sword for you?* Yeah, I kind of do. I mean, I've never seen myself that way. Or I don't receive compliments well or anything like that. I just kind of brush it off. *Do you not believe them or you're just uncomfortable hearing it?* Kind of both. *Okay. When I said attractive, is there any one particular group you want to be attractive to, or have them be attracted to you?* Not now, not in particular. Just the general public . . . *Does it matter to you if men find you attractive?* I know I did, but I'm not necessarily seeking their attention anymore. (Sydney)

For many years Sydney expressed extreme internalized heterosexism. Her self-loathing manifested in excessive drinking and random male sexual partners. Sydney feared her family would disown her if they discovered her sexuality. However, Sydney eventually partnered with a very “out” women, became more comfortable with her sexuality, and no longer felt her sexuality was something she needed to mask. Now Sydney is “out” everywhere.

Sydney embodied a woman who went through a *transitory* Comprehensive Conformist phase. Six of eleven Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists went through a *transitory* phase. All six

sometimes struggled with their self-esteem. Fundamentally, those who went through an internalized heterosexism phase and had viewed feminine as a negative oppressive construct *still* let external influences affect their self-confidence *at times*. Thus, *wanting* feminine to mean more than something appearance related did not absolve them from having to contend with old appearance issues.

However, the remaining five Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists felt their femininity indicated power and *never* felt feminine suggested anything weak. This latter group used their feminine presentation to their advantage.

> *When do you feel most confident?* That's interesting. I mean I feel like there's—You know, honestly I feel like, when I'm wearing the sweatshirt and sneakers, I feel like I have, there's a certain kind of bravado or just brashness that I feel really, really comfortable in. But then when I'm really dressed to the nines, I have that kind of confidence but much more based on my looks. You know? Much more like, I'm like, "Oh. You can't touch me." Like, you know, you're going to stutter, that's okay. You know what I mean? *So it matters that you're perceived as feminine, or does it?* . . . I've always been perceived as feminine. *Are you out everywhere?* It depends. It kind of depends. I feel like—I—like to anybody that I have a conversation with, I'm never going to not say it, you know what I mean? I'm never going to not, when the opportunity presents itself, talk about the people who I'm dating or whatever. But there have been some times where I've like, you know, like—I'm actually having this whole thing right now, because I am planning a special event for my organization, and having to work politely with music industry folks. You know, like managers of restaurants and stuff like that. And they're all men, and they all flirt with me. . . . but to them, like I'm not trying to be their girlfriend. I'm definitely just letting them read me as straight . . . it doesn't feel good to me, but I also feel like that, it's not really an option for me to correct them. So I think that, you know, that that's definitely, it's always like I tend to, every time I step out my door like that, I'm kind of thinking about it. You know, like the way I'm read and how to correct that for folks, and then sometimes how I do use that to my advantage. *Using being read as straight to your advantage?* Yeah. (Jade)

This latter group of Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists was typically younger than the former. Four were under 30. Additionally, all came from feminist households. For example Jade's mother worked with women subjected to domestic violence and identified as bisexual, whereas Sydney's mother was a Southern Baptist Republican.

Thus, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists who were younger and had more “liberal” parents struggled less with their self-confidence than those that expressed they had to “break free” from a more oppressive or patriarchal family dynamic. As a group, they demographically resembled Pseudo Nonconformists—as if both types struggled with many of the same issues, but Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists were not willing to completely reject heteronormative society.

Outliers. Not all women neatly fell into one of the six types. The types represent the best fit while contemplating all variables concurrently. For example, Denise, a woman I classified as a Beauty Reifier, preferred for people to perceive her as both feminine and attractive. When asked on a scale from zero to ten how she would “rank” her own femininity (zero equaling masculine) she stated “probably a six, sometimes a seven.” Thus, while not viewing herself as über-feminine, she did unequivocally state that it mattered to her to fall “past five.” As a Beauty Reifier, her femininity directly revolved around her looks. Her confidence or self-esteem also revolved around her appearance.

> I would say I almost always think I can control my own self-esteem. *All right.* It's because I, if I'm not feeling well, it's because I'm being lazy or stupid. *Okay.* Not taking care of myself. That's interesting. I've never thought about that. I guess some people just have poor self-esteem, and there's nothing they can do about it. . . . I have the potential to think I'm the greatest person in the world. Everything's going right, things are going the way I want them to go, I'm in control of what I'm doing. But I also have the potential to get really, crummy, if I'm not taking care of myself, and I'm not in control of my schedule, and my diet, and my workload and everything. Then I, or, or, just don't' feel like I'm taking care of myself or things aren't going the way I'd like them to go, then I have poor self-esteem. *So are you in control of your self-esteem or is it [that] external forces can affect your self-esteem?* I can actually be, I think, in more control of my self-esteem. . . . That's right. In fact, this will demonstrate for you and you'll appreciate it. There's this new song they keep playing on the radio. It's called “New Shoes” and it's about this guy who feels like shit, and he goes and puts on his new shoes, and suddenly, his whole life is a party. And I can be like that. I mean, I can literally, if I need to go buy a new pair of shoes, it can change my whole outlook. So, yes, I do think I can, I have control of my own self-esteem . . . If I'm feeling low self-esteem because I look like crap, then I can go to the gym, and I can get my hair cut, and I

> can do my nails, and I can get some new clothes. And then I'll feel better. (Denise)

While *most* Beauty Reifiers clearly expressed ignoring misogynistic beauty messages, Denise suggested that she did not. However, I still categorized her as a Beauty Reifier because that is where she lined up regarding all other variables. The idea that her appearance was malleable made this categorization imperfect. However, her strong sense of self, the idea that her confidence or esteem was totally under her control, the low salience of her sexual identity, the idea that she did find her sexual identity somewhat stigmatized, and most importantly, the inflexibility that feminine connoted a look and nothing else, all suggested Beauty Reifier as the best fit.

Elizabeth, a Pseudo Nonconformist, also represented an imperfect fit. While she passionately articulated the importance of her "femme" identity, unlike other Pseudo Nonconformists she indicated *some* internalized heterosexism.

> *Are you out to your colleagues?* Ah, I am out to maybe 4 of 40 . . . Umm, well, I mean I am a young teacher at a private school. They can dismiss you for any reason. They don't have to really state why. Umm, and there have been issues at the school before where a faculty member was out and as soon as he was out a parent claimed that the student the said she was making her uncomfortable in class and like and things that could lead to very dangerous situations since so many people confuse homosexuality with pedophilia and it is really very alarming. So being out could lead to a situation like that they would just blatantly dismiss me or something but I would be treated very differently. Umm, I would be judged on a daily basis. . . . *So, your family still doesn't know?* No my family does not know. I mean I am willing to tell them if they are willing to deal with it, cope with it, and be supportive, but I mean I came back from Christmas break and was reaffirmed yet again that they are just not almost at the maturity level to deal with it umm, and I really don't see it as a necessity, umm, it is not inhibiting how I live my life at all. My sister knows. (Elizabeth)

Arguably, as Elizabeth remained in the closet in certain circumstances, this could negate classification as a Pseudo Nonconformist. For this reason, I included her as an outlier. However, despite her not being forthcoming regarding her sexual identity in *certain* situations, the extreme relevance of her "queer" identity, her intense issues with gender performativity, and her

passionate negative reaction to the construct “feminine” made her classification as a Psuedo Nonconformist rather straightforward.

CONCLUSION

As misogynistic beauty messages often render women feeling never “good enough,” which women avoid succumbing to these messages and evade low feelings of self worth? The answer: It depends on the individual’s relationship with and understanding of femininity.

For Mobile Nonconformists, their construction of femininity meant that they rejected both misogynistic and heterosexist messages. Essentially, Mobile Nonconformists understood a “heteronormative” definition of feminine but discarded this definition as inapplicable and irrelevant to them. Rather than internalize negative messages, Mobile Nonconformists created their own positive and powerful definition of femininity to which they could comply. As Mobile Nonconformists never attempted to measure up to some external criterion, or some arbitrary beauty measure, Mobile Conformists consistently expressed high self-confidence.

While this “type” indicated the most “empowerment,” this finding seems somewhat problematic. Fundamentally, Mobile Nonconformists represented a demographic already marginalized. This suggests that the only way to avoid complicit misogyny *and* succumbing to misogynistic and heterosexist messages requires already being excluded from, or arguably failing, the heteronormative narrative. Fundamentally, Mobile Conformists could not “fail” femininity if they never were included in the first place. Therefore, exclusion from the narrative seems to have liberated this “most marginalized” demographic.

Similarly, Beauty Reifiers did not view feminine as an achievement—however for different reasons. Beauty Reifiers’ definition of feminine differed from that of Mobile Nonconformists. While Mobile Nonconformists created a new and empowering definition of

feminine, Beauty Reifiers accepted misogynistic beauty messages unquestioningly. Essentially, Beauty Reifiers subscribed to the idea of femininity as "natural." As such, they viewed femininity as in incontestable fact. Since it was a fact, and not an achievement, Beauty Reifiers escaped feelings of inadequacy—again, you cannot fail that which cannot be achieved. Essentially, while still complicit in perpetuating misogynistic beauty messages, such messages did not serve to oppress them.

Members of this type neither viewed their gender nor their sexuality as something to either subordinate or marginalize them. However, Beauty Reifiers typically could "afford" this view. Fundamentally, Beauty Reifiers consistently said that membership in their chosen community was not at risk as a result of their sexual identity. Thus, freedom from "oppression" resulted from either a high socioeconomic status and economic and professional security or physically removing oneself from locations where "appropriate" gender appearance matters.

Comprehensive Conformists did see femininity as both an achievement *and* required. Essentially, femininity was something they must "do" in order to gain and maintain membership in a heteronormative community—where they desperately wanted to belong. Concurrently, Comprehensive Conformists articulated extreme internalized heterosexism, as evidenced by the negotiability of their sexual identity and high sexual identity salience. Fundamentally, femininity represented a mask that they *must* wear to hide their marginalized sexual identity. Therefore, Comprehensive Conformists said that femininity was something put on and unnatural, but *necessary*. This "requirement" fueled their need to succumb to misogynistic beauty messages. As Comprehensive Conformists internalized both misogyny and heterosexism, this manifested in expressions of low self-esteem. Simply, if a woman internalizes or incorporates and negotiates messages that reinforce her inadequacy, eventually she believes it.

Comprehensive Conformists rarely succeeded in being comfortable with being feminine. However, they felt femininity was mandatory in a perceived heteronormative society. Therefore, Comprehensive Conformists spent a great deal of time in isolation. Simply meaning, to avoid having to perform, and related discomfort, they only socially interacted with small intimate circles already familiar with their sexual identification. This self-imposed isolation fostered feelings of resentment and insecurity.

Pseudo Nonconformists, like Comprehensive Conformists, described femininity in overwhelmingly negative terms, however for different reasons. Rather than desiring to "fit into" some heteronormative community, Pseudo Nonconformists rejected heteronormativity. Pseudo Nonconformists saw their sexuality as highly salient yet frequently invisible. Basically, they often looked straight and were read as straight and despised it. While Pseudo Nonconformists rejected "femininity," they still frequently struggled with misogynistic beauty messages. Fundamentally, they arrived at Pseudo Nonconformity because they had extreme negative experiences with being "feminine" and thus they rejected the term. While today many of them perhaps still "looked" heteronormative, they stated unambiguously that their current incarnation indicated greater agency. Looking gender "normative" now represented a choice, not an imposition. However, despite this agency, Pseudo Nonconformists frequently struggled with reconciling their old "issues" with femininity. Thus, while they rejected the term, the related feelings of inadequacy did not automatically disappear.

Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists shared with Comprehensive Conformists and Pseudo Nonconformists the incorporation of misogynistic beauty messages into personal presentation choices. However, while Comprehensive Conformists and Pseudo Nonconformists unequivocally offered femininity as a *negative* construct, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists

struggled with the term. Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists acknowledged that a heteronormative definition might be oppressive (and misogynistic). Therefore, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists *attempted* to modify the definition and create a more positive articulation. Thus, even though Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists *wanted* femininity to be something based on traits or "inner beauty," they never quite escaped reinforcing the importance of a feminine "look." This can be explained by the fact that Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists never indicated having their femininity questioned. As they were naturally feminine, by heteronormative standards, Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists wanted this construct to mean something more than just possessing some physical attribute.

Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, unlike both Comprehensive Conformists and Pseudo Nonconformists, did not consistently indicate issues revolving around self-esteem. Only Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists who transition from being a Comprehensive Conformist expressed having battles with their self-confidence. Thus, even though they "naturally" satisfied a heteronormative look and received positive affirmation for their appearance, their former issues with their sexuality manifested in sometimes struggling with body image and self-esteem.

The remaining Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, having never struggled with their sexuality *and* naturally satisfying a heteronormative feminine look, indicated high self-confidence and few body image issues. However, this does not suggest that Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists did not need external validation. They did, *but* they frequently received it, thus avoiding feelings of low self-confidence. Fundamentally, confidence was contingent on their maintaining their current position.

Like Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists, Inner Beauty Conformists questioned misogynistic beauty messages. However, they differed from Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformists in that

they neither personally incorporated the messages nor expressed any internalized heterosexism. Inner Beauty Conformists did not require any *external* validation—*anymore*. Rather, they held themselves to a very high standard. Essentially, femininity was a positive goal, but only they could determine if it had been achieved. Thus, their self-confidence was internally generated, not contingent on external validation.

Finally, it was not the acceptance or rejection of misogyny that resulted in these women's feeling confident or feeling like a failure—rather it was how they processed the messages *and* the saliency of sexuality in their lives that informed how they moved throughout society and how the felt about themselves. Fundamentally, the greater effort exerted negotiating meanings, the greater the toll on self-confidence. Stated alternatively, the less they struggled with the term, the better they felt about themselves.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

> . . . the extremes of femininity are harmful only—only!—to women themselves in the form of self-imposed masochism (restraint, inhibition, self denial, a wasteful use of thought and time) that is deliberately mistaken for "true nature." (Brownmiller 1984:236)

As this dissertation began with a discussion of a dinner party, I feel it fitting that it concludes the same way. Several months ago, I was at a birthday party at a great Southwestern restaurant. I was catching up with old friends, many of whom I had not seen in some time as dissertation writing is *rather* time consuming. People inquired about my "book report," a "cute" term my friends employ for my dissertation. At this point I had just finished what I *thought* was the final draft of chapter four, the typology of femininity.

Heading to the dinner party, I feared that I had lost the ability to socialize. I honestly felt incapable of having a conversation about most anything other than my dissertation as this "book report" had *consumed* my existence for over six months. Furthermore, I was convinced that no matter how passionately I spoke about femininity, others would be bored listening and this would be the last dinner party to which I would be invited. So, when I was asked to explain what I was doing, I took a breath and thought, "Well Amy, if you can sell this typology to this group of nonheterosexual, nonacademic women, you might just have something."

My dissertation chair told me to write as I teach, so people can follow what I mean with minimal effort. With that in mind, I approached this dinner party discussion like an informal classroom. I explained each type methodically with examples. From the very first "type," they were engaged and said, "What is another type?" I was shocked, excited, impressed with myself, and reengaged with my project that was beginning to drain me. It was clear that I was on to something to which people could relate and my insecurities began to dissipate.

The conversations were hilarious. One woman said indignantly as I was midway through the second type, “what else could feminine be other than a look? I don’t understand.” Her partner pointed and said, “*She* is a Beauty Reifier,” although the name of the type was different at the time. At that moment, *that exact moment*, I smiled. I knew I was onto something and this book report might just be okay. The conversation had the tone of a parlor game. Everyone was trying to figure out their own “type,” invariably claiming one confidently, followed by looking around the room for approval and validation. Oddly, no one wanted to claim being a Comprehensive Conformist, although I know there was one in the room.

More time has passed, and frankly, I often do not want to discuss anything related to femininity, misogyny, or heterosexism. Even though my book report still consumes me, I want to discuss politics, world events, and—okay—American Idol. However, invariably, whenever I am out, the “what type are you” becomes the game people want to play. As my types have gotten more developed to include more issues related to sexuality, the conversations have grown more interesting. So, even though I would prefer other topics of discussion, my typology and related issues seem to have struck a nerve. I am thrilled that this book report resonates with so many people and relieved that I am still invited to dinner parties.

ISN’T THIS TOPIC JUST A LITTLE OUTDATED?

Okay, it is great that this is a fun little game and people want to talk about it, but really, isn’t this topic a tad dated? As I write this final chapter in Spring 2008, Hillary Clinton is the first serious female contender for president of the United States. More women are in boardrooms than ever before—a not so difficult achievement as the past has been rife with the conspicuous absence of anyone not white and not male *but* an achievement nonetheless. Similarly, we see women wearing space suits, flying planes, catching criminals, putting out fires (literally and

figuratively), and working in a myriad of other occupations that previously their working in seemed unfathomable. Today, as in years past, little girls are being told that they can be, and do, anything. However, unlike for prior generations, this promise seems plausible.

Additionally, Ellen Degeneres has become a beloved talk show host, winning several Emmy Awards. While overwhelmingly popular now, she spent years struggling professionally after her public "coming out." Jodie Foster, a two-time Oscar winner, recently thanked her female lover of over a decade, with whom she parents two children, in a public acceptance speech. There had been whispers about her sexuality for years; however, it was previously something never publicly discussed. Both of these public examples *seem* to signal that a marginalized sexual identity no longer serves as a barrier to "acceptance" by a heteronormative community and the "closet" is not the prison it once was.

So, why am I still asking the question—who feels pretty? Isn't it time to move beyond the idea that women are judged and that women judge themselves by the sum of their external parts? While many advances are obvious, I assert that the same boundaries confine women that always have, and they are arguably even more insidious. Much like "color blindness," the idea that we no longer see race while racism still exists, "beauty blindness" suggests society no longer judges women as harshly by their physical appearance, *but it does.*

Simply, women's bodies and concern with physical appearance still represent a way to maintain social control (Bordo 1993). Essentially, no matter how far women come, *many* still think they should look good doing it. Even when such messages are exposed *and understood*, women cannot always break free. Furthermore, the more marginalized an individual may be, the greater the susceptibility to the message—*if* they desire to "fit in." Thus, while there are always examples provided to disprove "the rule," just as I say to my class, Oprah does *not* signal the end

of racial or gender inequality, and Ellen does *not* signal the end of heterosexism. Importantly, it is just these types of visible nonnormative images that make racism, sexism, and heterosexism more difficult to see. The exception is often cited to indicate the out-datedness of the rule, and *that is exactly the problem,* as the reality seems very much to the contrary.

Dove's "campaign for real beauty" shows images of women who have physical curves and are *not* a size zero. The purpose of this advertising campaign is to acknowledge the rise in body image issues and show "real women" as beautiful. The women serve to demonstrate that beauty is more than some unobtainable ideal and one need not be anorexic to be attractive. The campaign has been highly praised as an indicator that times are changing. *Really?* While the *goal* may be to demonstrate you can eat and still be beautiful, magazine covers still show icons such as Paris Hilton, Keira Knightly, and other waif-like women.

Thus, while we may recognize that not all women meet some unobtainable criteria and we more openly and visibly critique the beauty myth—an *idolized* beauty barometer still exists. Little girls typically do not say *"I want to look like the Dove model"*; rather they chant, *"I want to be just like Paris Hilton."* While older women, hopefully, select a different iconic role model, the sentiment of wanting to be "beautiful," "thin," and "glamorous" remains.

Clearly there is greater awareness of how problematic the images can be, and we now see some alternatives. Nevertheless, despite the offering of these alternative images, many women are still held in check and constantly told *physical appearance matters*. Women are still praised when they "look pretty," or have "lost weight," or simply when they have made some "positive" change in their appearance. While the messages may not always be as overt as they once were, women still often struggle with never quite being "pretty" or "thin" or "good" enough.

Furthermore, one could argue that it is even harder today for women to feel "okay," as they are expected to do and achieve more.

Misogynistic beauty messages *still* serve to control women and heterosexism supports that goal. For example, comments such as "I never would have thought her to be a lesbian," or "she does not look gay," suggest that "passing" indicates some type of success and being told one "looks straight" should be received as a compliment. Furthermore, right or wrong, looking feminine often allows nonheterosexual women greater "mainstream" acceptability.

IMPLICATIONS OR WHAT IS NEW HERE?

The idea that women are, and have been, controlled via their bodies is not new. Brownmiller (1984), Bordo (1993), Chapkis (1986), Chernin (1981, 1985), Hesse-Biber (1996), Weitz (1998, 2003), and Wolf (1991), among others, have addressed issues of power and control related to the female body. Typically, however, these discussions relegated sexuality to either a subordinated status or reduced it to a butch/femme discourse.

This study specifically addresses that gap. While contemplating the construct "feminine," this study illuminates the role of misogyny *exclusively* in a nonheteronormative community. Clearly, the overarching theme still relates to the misogynistic messages constantly being negotiated *and* the effect of misogyny on self-confidence. This aspect of my research embraces prior studies.

However, it is the complexity of *this* particular community, nonheterosexual identifying women, and the relevance of the intersectionality of identities, that adds to the existing research. While the lesbian body has been contemplated theoretically (Crowder 1986), the narratives in my study provide lived experiences that demonstrate how some women still not only struggle with misogyny but also heterosexism. This sample reflects the pervasiveness of heterosexism and how

it serves to bolster misogynistic messages. Case in point: Some women seemed immune to misogynistic beauty messages *until* their sexuality came into question.

Therefore, not to investigate misogyny rigorously within this subpopulation misses the interconnectedness of heterosexism and misogyny in subordinating women. Not to deconstruct how this marginalized group *thinks* about femininity and *why* misses the opportunity to understand the myriad ways misogyny works in various thought communities, even those communities that might seem impervious.

In many ways, some findings seem counterintuitive. For example, as nonheterosexuals, the women in my sample did not want to partner with men. On the surface, this may seem to give them greater agency to reject misogynistic messages. Fundamentally, often when discussing misogynistic messages, the assumption can be that women do it for the male gaze and to partner with men. Arguably, removing men from the equation should liberate women. However, as demonstrated, it did not. Rather, the coupling of misogyny and heterosexism arguably renders nonheterosexual women with *less* agency than their heterosexual counterparts. Essentially, the structure is so firmly in place that women often police themselves regardless of their differing objectives (Foucault 1977).

It is just this policing that seems to reinforce gender inequality, even by those arguably most marginalized. Thus, while we often hear that with knowledge comes power, and if we understand oppression and see how it works we can combat it and arguably change it, my findings suggest the contrary.

This study indicates that knowledge *does not* necessarily connote power. Many women saw and understood misogynistic messages, yet remained complicit in perpetuating them—some willingly, others combatively, and still others obliviously.

However, while most women were complicit, not all suffered "feeling not good enough." Thus, misogyny alone, complicit or otherwise, does not "predict" feelings of self worth. Things such as where these women were in the coming out process, how much they disclosed and when, and relationships with family members, all factored into how they thought about femininity and why. How they thought about femininity, what *informed* how they understood the construct, and how much they negotiated to satisfy it—these indicated how they ultimately felt about them-selves.

Therefore, while misogyny did serve to hold women "in check" and heterosexism supports this goal, not all women felt trapped or inadequate as a result of the messages. Thus, while misogyny seems entrenched in the structure, and few could escape complicity, the ramifications of these messages clearly vary. Therefore, subsuming nonheteronormative women into a discourse about women ignores the unique complexities of possessing a marginalized sexual identity and the importance of these women's unique lived experiences.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

I conducted 43 in-depth interviews. The women were honest and forthcoming. The stories were funny, heartwarming, tragic, and engaging. However, my research methods have some limitations. As I studied only a small sample of women, the generalizability of my findings to the larger "nonheterosexual" population is somewhat limited.

Understanding this limitation, I plan on conducting, in the future, a quantitative analysis, with a larger and more representative sample. Adapting the myriad of existing quantitative assessment tools that assess body image and related issues (Cash 2000; Cash and Fleming 2002; Cash, Jakatar, and Williams 2004) will further illuminate body image issues specific to this underrepresented population and increase generalizability.

Another limitation revolves around my sampling technique. My use of convenience sampling resulted in some issues related to diversity. Fundamentally, when using convenience sampling some networks are more fruitful than others. As a consequence, "women of color" are underrepresented in my sample. Furthermore, as a consequence of convenience sampling, the women of color interviewed tended to be of a higher socioeconomic status. While these women did serve to offer competing narratives to those that have benefited from the privilege of "white-ness," this community requires more analysis. Therefore, another area of future research requires simply expanding my sample size to explore more fully "nonwhite" narratives.

Additionally, I relied on literature for the narratives of heterosexual women. Admittedly, I might have benefited from incorporating narratives from self-identified heterosexual women. I did informally present my types of feminine to heterosexual women and found them supported, but a formal inclusion of heterosexual women's narratives might further bolster my typology and the role of misogyny in all women's lives.

Finally, I only interviewed women living in one geographic region of the United States. While many were born in other locations, it would be interesting to deconstruct femininity in cultures that are considered more "feminist" and/or proactive towards gay rights. A comparative analysis would illuminate the issues that Western, and particularly American, women face regarding gender subordination and sexual identity marginalization.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I went to the doctor a few years ago and found out I had really high cholesterol and high blood pressure. I began to realize that perhaps as I was aging my diet should include something not ordered through my car window or delivered to my door—domesticity is *not* my strength. While I realized I should eat more healthily, I had no idea what a balanced meal looked like. My

parents had recently done a popular diet that is about balancing food groups, so I tried that. I ate proteins and vegetables and exercised like crazy and found myself feeling better and losing weight. It felt good and people started to tell me I looked good. I had never thought of myself as heavy, but clearly I must have had weight to lose to garner such positive attention.

When studying for my comprehensive exams, another lovely part of the Ph.D. process, I lost more weight. I was ridiculously stressed and the pounds just seemed to fall off of me. More people told me I looked great. I started dressing to accentuate my new body. My mother was thrilled with my new "girly" appearance. I was thrilled that she was thrilled. So, I kept it up. I was getting attention in ways I had never received before. My sister told me not to lose any more weight because I was getting too thin, but I figured that was because for the first time in my life, I was the thinner sister, so I rationalized it away. I became obsessed with losing weight and having people, men and women, tell me how great I looked.

Enjoying the attention I received, and feeling so out of control in other aspects of my life, my body became the one thing I could control. I felt insecure about my ability as a sociologist, and I was convinced I would flunk my exams. However, I felt great about how I looked.

Then I had surgery and I could no longer work out obsessively. I also passed my exams, and my stress level decreased. Some of the weight came back. I am typically a size 2, often a 0, so I *know* I am not fat but I miss the, "what have you done, you look great" comments. I cringe inside when people talk about how great and thin someone else looks and I think *do I still look okay*?

I struggle almost daily with body image issues more today then I did before I ever lost the weight. The affirmation and validation became like a drug that I craved. That is how the "beauty" myth works. We often praise and validate women for losing weight, buying a new sexy

outfit, or getting a stylish new haircut. Some women are more susceptible to these messages than others, for a myriad of reasons. Regardless, the messages are there.

Thus, in a society that often equates nonheterosexuality with *failed* femininity, those of us who do not want to be failures struggle. As attractiveness and beauty are often seen as the ultimate compliment, working on one's appearance is one way nonheterosexual women can prove they still belong. Whether they should want to belong to a community that marginalizes them is a completely other matter.

So even though I know the insidiousness of the message, this does not completely free me from its grasp. Rather, I constantly work to negotiate what I want femininity to be and what I sometimes think it is. While I do not hide my sexual identity, I still am flattered when people do not presume me gay. *Why do I still care?*

I care because that is how misogyny and heterosexism work—in tandem to keep women in check. I try to chastise friends and family members who are critical of women's appearance. However, I am often guilty of doing the same thing, especially to myself.

The only way for women to ever "feel pretty," or "good enough," is if we let go of antiquated ideals of what pretty/feminine means. Mobile Nonconformists seem to have the right idea: If my external appearance matches my internal desire, I have achieved authenticity and I am a feminine woman. If only we did not have to be so far on the margins in the first place to understand this.

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APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHICS

Name	Type[4]	Race Identifier	Age
Andrea	IBC	White	61
Rhonda	IBC	Nonwhite	55
Beth	IBC	Nonwhite	47
Harriet	IBC	White	56
Cheryl	IBC	White	55
Teresa	CC	White	43
Lisa	CC	White	50
Lola	CC	White	40
Sue	PIBC	White	30
Carole	PIBC	White	43
Joan	PIBC	White	33
Chelsea	PIBC	White	36
Robin	PIBC	White	36
Betty	PIBC	White	54
Sydney	PIBC	White	26
Caren	PIBC	White	37
Jade	PIBC	Nonwhite	25
Ann	PIBC	White	21
Joanne	PIBC	White	22
Mia	PIBC	White	37
Angie	MN	White	50
Roberta	MN	Nonwhite	48
Maya	MN	Nonwhite	39
Courtney	MN	Nonwhite	48
Missy	PN	White	37
Elizabeth	PN	White	24
Kitty	PN	Nonwhite	32
Mary Alice	PN	White	29
Dolly	PN	White	26
Diane	PN	Nonwhite	27
Lena	BR	Nonwhite	49
Donna	BR	White	42
Max	BR	White	25
Rocky	BR	Nonwhite	31
Gabriele	BR	White	41
Toni	BR	White	30
Danni	BR	White	43
Toby	BR	Nonwhite	43
Sarah	BR	White	45
Nannette	BR	White	49
Catherine	BR	White	44
Sharon	BR	White	53
Holly	BR	White	40

[4] The 6 Types: IBC (Inner Beauty Conformist); CC (Comprehensive Conformist); PIBR (Pseudo Inner Beauty Conformist); MN (Mobile Nonconformists); PN (Pseudo Nonconformists); BR (Beauty Reifiers).

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Section 1

1. When is your birthday?
2. Where were you born?
    a. How long did you live there?
    b. Where else have you lived and for how long?
3. How would you categorize your Race/Ethnicity?
4. What is the last year of school you completed?
    a. What did you study or what is your degree?
5. What type of work do you do?
    a. What are the people there like?
    b. Do you socialize with them?
    c. Are you "out" at work?
6. Where are you out?
7. When and how did you come out?
8. How much do you think your sexual identity influences your life? Please give me your initial reaction to this question.
    a. How does it influence your life?

Section 2

Now let's look at the picture you have brought.

1. Tell me why your selected this picture?
    a. I noticed you focused on _____, is that something you think is necessary for a feminine presentation?

2. How would you explain feminine to a blind person
    a. You focus on _____ do other things contribute or detract from femininity and what are they?
    b. Can you be feminine and not look feminine – how?
    c. Can you apply that explanation to why you selected this picture
    d. Do you still consider the photograph feminine?

Section 3

Now let's discuss your presentation

1. Do you present yourself similarly today as you did 1 year ago? 5 years ago? Other?
    a. Was there a time when you presented differently?
    b. Why do you think it has changed or why did you make a change?
    c. When did it change?
    d. How specifically did it change?
2. Do you consider yourself feminine?
    a. What is and what is not feminine about you?
    b. If the picture you brought is a 10 how do you rank yourself?

        i. Can you compare yourself to it? What causes the difference?
3. How do you think others perceive you using the same scale?
    a. Does it matter that you are perceived as feminine?
        i. When and why?
        ii. What do you do to achieve that perception?
4. Can you describe your “usual” routine of how you get ready in the morning
    a. When (or do you) change your “getting ready” routine and how?
5. Can you describe your “usual” routine of how you get ready for bed – any “beauty” rituals?
    a. Does it ever change – when and why?
6. Overall – how do you feel about your presentation? Please be specific.

Section 4

7. Would you say your mother is feminine? Sisters? Other family members?
    a. How does your presentation compare to the other women in your family?
    b. How do you think they feel about your presentation?
8. Are you currently in a relationship?
    a. How long?
    b. Where did you meet?
    c. Can you describe her?
        i. Do you consider her feminine? How so?
    d. What made her attractive to you?
    e. Does she resemble other women you have dated?
        i. How?
    f. At different points in your life, have you been attracted to different types of women?
        i. When?
        ii. How were they different?
        iii. How were they alike?

The last questions I have relate to income and expenses. In this section I want to gauge how much income is devoted to presentation.

1. What was your total personal income last year?
    a. Under $20,000
    b. $20,000 to $39,000
    c. $40,000 to $59,000
    d. $60,000 to $79,000
    e. $80,000 to $99,000
    f. Over $100,000
2. How much money do you think you spend annually on your presentation (e.g. clothes, cosmetics, diet aids)?
3. What class (e.g. upper, middle, lower) do you think your parents are a member? Siblings? Friends?
    a. What does that class mean to you?

4. What do you think is the percentage of income they devote to “presentation” expenses?

Is there anything I haven’t asked that you think would be relevant to this topic?

Thank you very much for your time.

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT FLYER

WHAT DOES
FEMININITY LOOK LIKE?

If you:

1. are a *woman* who presently partners exclusively with other *women* (you can identify as lesbian, gay, homosexual, queer, same-gender-loving, fluid, or anything at all) and,

2. are interested in participating in a *research* study to determine what femininity looks like then,

3. please contact Amy Palder,
   Georgia State University
   Doctoral Candidate, at

amypalder@gmail.com or
leave message at 404.651.4554