

SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

**DISRUPTING PATRIARCHAL NORMS AND LANGUAGES: NARRATIVE
AND RHETORICAL ANALYSES OF BI AND PANSEXUAL FEMINIST BLOGS**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
DOCTOR MADELEINE ESCH**

**SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES**

**BY
JENNIFER A. FALLAS**

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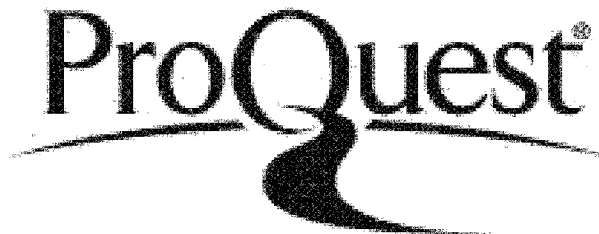


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Finally, for CJF—you're on every page.

PREVIEW

Jennifer A. Fallas

Abstract:


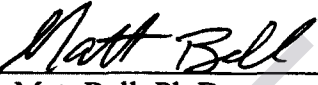



(Dissertation) **DISRUPTING PATRIARCHAL NORMS AND LANGUAGES: NARRATIVE AND RHETORICAL ANALYSES OF BI AND PANSEXUAL FEMINIST BLOGS**

This dissertation asserts that existing definitions of gender and understandings of sexuality need to be reworked in order to compose more holistic senses of both identifications. To accomplish this, this research highlights how some feminists are using Internet communications (specifically blogging) to revamp contemporary understandings about gender. Additionally, it explores how some feminists are more purposefully incorporating bi and pansexual feminist perspectives into feminist conversations which, in turn, can potentially mitigate harmful monosexual and patriarchal dialectics that constrain personhood. There is continued need for careful scrutiny and analysis of hegemonic forces working against females and, more specifically, those who identify within marginalized sexualities. This project delegitimizes suppressions of gendered and/or sexed constructions of self by deconstructing the languages and norms working against females and femaleness (whether these come from outside of or from within the feminist community itself). This dissertation examines how ideas about identity construction (specific to the idea of “female”) within bi and pansexual-feminist blog writing can remedy, add to, and widen existing feminist political and ethical theories.

SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE STUDIES

This dissertation of **Jennifer Fallas** entitled **"Disruption of Patriarchal Norms and Languages: Expanding Feminist Dialects through Bi and Pansexual Feminist Blogs"** submitted to the Ph.D. Program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Salve Regina University has been read and approved by the following individuals:

Reader:	<u></u>	<u>2/2/12</u>
	Dr. Patricia Combies, Ph.D.	(Date)
Reader:	<u></u>	<u>2/2/12</u>
	Matt Bell, Ph.D.	(Date)
Mentor:	<u></u>	<u>2/2/12</u>
	Madeleine Esch, Ph.D.	(Date)
Director, Ph.D. Program:	<u></u>	<u>2/2/12</u>
	Michael A. Budd, Ph.D.	(Date)
Provost:	<u></u>	<u>2/2/12</u>
	Dean de la Motte, Ph.D.	(Date)

PREVIEW

Business Analysis

CHAPTER ONE: BLOGGING AS A CRITICAL JUNCTURE IN FEMINIST THEORY AND PRAXIS

*"Staying in the closet, whether it's a lavender closet or a leather closet or a gender closet just doesn't work. Our enemies ferret us out. They won't allow us to be hidden. We have a choice between becoming more public and fighting for our right to exist, or being marginalized until we are dead or invisible."*¹

Overview

Contemporary feminist writings show a continuation of the long historical trend of including self-reflexive pieces couched within scholarly work. This dissertation reflects my embodied and scholarly experiences from within my perspective as a self-identified female pansexual feminist.² This is not only pertinent to the motivations behind this project, but likewise situates my academic pursuits in such a way as to purposely attempt to blur the boundary between scholar and subject (something for which feminism has long been criticized). By displacing supposed "privilege" of academic feminism and manipulating traditional boundaries inherent within the scholar position, I intend to illustrate that individuals (the scholar and the subject) do not occupy only one given subjectivity at a time. Likewise I mean to point out that understandings of identity formation are continuously evolving. My work represents an ongoing examination of how other self-identified pan or bisexual female feminists construct voice

¹ Pat Califia, "Wings of Desire," *Diva* June (1996): 28.

² Uses of the words "female," "bisexual," and "pansexual" will be fully defined in the "Working Definitions" section of this chapter.

and create agency specifically within online feminist communities of “the femisphere.”³

Blogging is one of the latest communication technologies and is particularly interesting because it allows the author to choose her own degree of self-disclosure and preferred identity/ies. These same concepts led to this dissertation’s consideration of bloggers’ attempts to gain recognition for their personal perspectives, relevant to and inclusive of their preferred identities. Additionally, many of the blogs throughout the third and fourth chapter, draw connections (implicit and explicit) to Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender/sexual-Queer (LGBTQ) and feminist activist purposes and efforts. Even in the Digital Age where possibilities for empowerment and equality across all gender and sexuality expressions seem boundless, there are, as one Cyberfeminist notes, very real “prescriptive and divisive forces that structure access to embodied queer women’s communities [and eventually] are reproduced in online interactions.”⁴ As one of the results of such reproductions, the epistemologies, identity constructions and articulations of Queer females within the online world remain underrepresented and under-examined. It is my contention that expressing a bi or pansexual feminist identity is “disruptive”; such expressions have the potential to undo hetero-privileged and masculine-favored normatives which structure most, if not all other social discourses. To justify my attention to blogs versus other areas of interest to feminists (e.g. reproductive health, electoral politics, etc.) it is useful to consider that “the activity of blogging could

³ Femisphere is defined as feminist-generated pages within the blogosphere. This project defines “voice” as the articulation of one’s epistemology and subjectivity, through the use of language toward constructing identity and creating power. Accordingly, it will investigate how the use of voice in itself, as well as how it is connected to other agencies, acts as a form of activism for “females,” and “females” as bi and pansexuals.

⁴ Mary Bryson, “When Jill Jacks In: Queer Women and the Net,” *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (November 2004): 240-241.

be a potential site for thinking about queer identity, electronic identity, and liberal discourses of identity based on individual agency, unity, and the primacy of individual experiences important to many in the western world.”⁵ This work is, in part, a contribution (through my examinations, research and critiques of feminist blogs and interviews of bloggers) toward the creation of real, meaningful, diversified, and expansive feminisms. I assert that reading such blogs as contained in (but not limited to) this project and writing about feminist blogging constitute a valuable form of feminism.

However, because of oppressions and systematic attempts to delimit female persons and their sexual identities, there are clear continuing needs for the type of feminist critique such as I offer.⁶ Throughout this dissertation, I examine both mainstream and radical feminisms (throughout the Waves in Chapter Two, throughout four larger feminist blogs in Chapter Three, and throughout a general discussion of bi and pansexual blogs in Chapter Four). One academic blogging feminist notes, “My feminism is material in the sense that I believe that the body is irreducible ...I believe that what [gender] differences there are have been vastly exaggerated by social conditioning, and I reject essentialism.”⁷ The blogger’s comment reflects a central point of this investigation when considering subjectivities: true understanding cannot occur without acknowledging that the experiences of females are fundamentally different than those of males and are typified by historical and systematic oppressions based on this gender. This is echoed by

⁵ Julie Rak, “The Digital Queer: Weblogs and Internet Identity,” *Biography* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 166.

⁶ I write from the standpoint of a university-level rhetoric and composition instructor; a point explored and developed more fully in the Afterword.

⁷ Bitch Ph.D., “Feminisms,” *Bitch Ph.D.*, (entry posted April 17, 2005) <http://bitchphd.blogspot.com/2005/04/feminisms.html> (accessed August 7, 2011).

a radical feminist blogger (also featured in Chapter Three) who notes that in very real senses, when “one encounters, in the course of her daily flailings, anything untoward, unjust, illogical, wrong, asinine, violent, destructive, or mediocre, there can be no doubt that patriarchy is at the root of it.”⁸ Patriarchal forces limit awareness, expressions, and understandings of females. This blogger further states that blogs hold “a lot of promise for the feminist voices that are marginalized, co-opted, or simply silenced in the traditional mainstream media” because blogging allows females a way to counteract and disrupt this otherwise oppressive hetero-privileged, male-dominated presence.⁹

I write from within Third Wave feminism and most identify with the current Wave because of its inherent malleability and its emphasis on plurality (an aspect of the Wave discussed more fully in Chapter Two). However, while this is where I primarily draw influence and inspiration from, I do not dismiss the efforts of past feminisms. Often, I echo tenets of Second Wave throughout my examinations. That is to say that I identify under the particular label of “Third Wave,” but I also frequently emphasize similarities between my position and those of previous Waves. In short, my work represents a continuation of many past feminist calls for action and change, so it is never wholly removed from that history. I also stipulate that Third Wave is not the “best” possible feminism, but it is the one most suitable to address contemporary issues, especially concerning the bi and pansexual females I investigate. Likewise, I privilege radical feminisms over mainstream feminisms because the latter frequently internalize

⁸ Jill Posey Smith, “Little Miss Muffet,” *I Blame the Patriarchy*, (entry posted October 19 2010) <http://blog.iblamethepatriarchy.com/2010/10/19/little-miss-muffet/> (accessed July 15, 2011).

⁹ Read: male-centered, hetero-privileged mainstream media features and outlets.

similar norms and illustrate that they do so by reproducing (perhaps unwittingly) many hetero male-privileged discursives. By no means do I assert that this is unilaterally the case with mainstream feminisms, but do stipulate that they often exhibit the qualities of having been co-opted and mass reproduced into “acceptable” (and thereby non-threatening to and unlikely to change patriarchy) feminist speech. I argue in this work that radical feminisms are often the sites of uncomfortable and disruptive voices (especially from marginalized females); this branch of feminism, because it critiques these normative structures (even when other feminisms exhibit them), offers the most hope for true change and equality for females.

Several new media studies about gender performativity and identity construction online have been done wherein female users create versions of *self* that may or may not be similar to their offline identities. *Instant Identity: Adolescent Girls and the World of Instant Messaging*, while about young girls (admittedly not the focus population of this study), addresses female use of messaging systems and how identity is forged in that technology.¹⁰ *Figures of Fantasy: Internet, Women, and Cyberdiscourse* examines how the Internet assists in the creation of women’s online identities.¹¹ The text additionally uses Donna Haraway’s symbolic cyborg figure alongside cyberfeminisms to examine how women use (in the broadest terms) the Internet and how they create feminisms

¹⁰ Shayla Thiel Stern, *Instant Identity: Adolescent Girls and the World of Instant Messaging*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

¹¹ Susanna Paasonen, *Figures of Fantasy: Internet, Women, and Cyberdiscourse*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

online.¹² *Women, Feminism and Media* explicates how women construct online narratives (such as or similar to blogs) and which online narratives form and impact their subjectivities.¹³ Similarly, Elizabeth Lane Lawley's work "Computers and the Communication of Gender" focuses on how gender is articulated online and how it is communicated between people and which technologies they use to do so.¹⁴ Finally, Mary Bryson's "When Jill Jacks In: Queer Women and the Net" examines how Queer women participate in online writing and how they use online writing tools.¹⁵ Bryson stipulates that though there are democratic possibilities to these digital spaces, power relations are still pertinent concerns, even in the digital realm. These texts are useful in constructing this dissertation insofar as they illustrate an ongoing interest in contemporary feminisms and gender and sexuality studies.¹⁶ Additionally, each touches on both gender and sexual

¹² For information pertinent to the figure of the cyborg as it was originally created, see Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, by Donna J. Haraway, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149-181.

¹³ Sue Thornham, *Women, Feminism and Media*, (Edinburgh: UP, 2007).

¹⁴ Elizabeth Lane Lawley, "Computers and the Communication of Gender," *Itcs.com*, (entry posted April 1993) <http://www.itcs.com/elawley/gender.html> (accessed 21 October 2010).

¹⁵ Bryson, "When Jill Jacks In: Queer Women and the Net."

¹⁶ For studies regarding gender and online technologies, see: Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); Lynn Cherny and Reba Weise, eds. *Wired Women: Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace*, (Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 1991); Mary Doane, "Technophina: Technology, Representation and the Feminine," in *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, eds Mary Jacobs, Evelyn Fox Keller and Sally Shuttleworth, (New York: Routledge, 1991): 163-176; and Janet Morahan-Martin, "Women and The Internet: Promise and Perils," *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, 3, no. 5 (October 2000): 683-691. For studies specific to queer sexualities and technologies, see: Sue Ellen Case, *The Domain-Matrix: Performing Lesbian at the End of Print Culture*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996). Donald Morton, ed. *The Material Queer*, (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1996); Sally Munt, Elizabeth Bassett, and Kate O'Riordan, "Virtually Belonging: Risky Connectivity and Coming Out Online," *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*, 7, no. 2, (June 2002): 125-137.

identities as they appear within online media. This dissertation will show (echoing similar points within the aforementioned studies) that online mediums (specifically the blog) allow users spaces in which to create and play, which permit them to separate bodily and performed identities, or to mesh them in new ways. This dissertation is set apart from those studies because it examines specific sexualities (bi and pansexual) in reference to understandings of gender (“female”) that do not fit within traditional binary thinking and categorizations.

I assert that current definitions of “female,” as used by wider culture and many mainstream feminisms, are far too limited and these frequently treat *femaleness* with derision.¹⁷ Existing definitions need to be reworked (as this project attempts to do) in order to compose a more holistic sense of this gender identification. Despite historical and contemporary feminist efforts that sought to equalize citizens (specifically women) in every possible facet of daily life, social constructs and resulting biases continue to confine and inhibit their abilities to participate in social domains. These harmful ideologies are formed through patriarchal value systems which prize males above all else and attempt to delimit gender in ways that restrict meanings of “female.” These prejudices consistently ensure that people who identify themselves as female occupy a secondary status and that they are continually viewed as others or things; any “female” identification is treated with derision. Judith Butler has stipulated that gender is a construct, characterized by normative assumptions; because women are taught how to *be*

¹⁷ See the-f-word.org for commentary on pop-culture treatments of feminism as an “F-word ... which strike fear into the hearts of so many.” Rachel, “On Turning 29,” *The-F-Word*, (entry posted May 09, 2008) <http://the-f-word.org/blog/index.php/about-the-site/> (accessed June 10, 2010).

female through popular discourses, their subjectivities are often heavily influenced by these.¹⁸ I assert that difficulties arise when considering who qualifies as “female,” and that these complexities exist between and within wider social understandings and feminist discussions about gender. Taking cues from Butler, I look (throughout this dissertation) at: how females perform their self-identified gender, what the label of “female” means to them, how they share their identity through their blogs, and how they mean for these identity claims to be received. Simultaneously, I draw on Donna Haraway’s work which claims that gender arises from the forces Butler mentions, but that gender (in Haraway’s case seen through the ironic figure of the cyborg) can also be a seat of change. Therefore, while gender emerges in large part from social constructions, I maintain that the bi and pansexual bloggers interviewed for this study (found in Chapter Four) often play with, flaunt, and have the power to manipulate ideas about gender. I attempt to illustrate that while a person may not have been born with the genetic makeup or genitalia of traditionally understood females, she may still self-identify under the “female” label for a variety of reasons and motivations. Therefore, in an ongoing attempt to stay true to and honor how individuals within this study self-identify, I utilize “female” as opposed to “woman” throughout the remainder of this study. While “female” is also admittedly an imperfect term replete with its own assumptions and definitions, I use it to

¹⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 122.

illustrate how concepts of gender are so incredibly malleable that they necessitate this type of acknowledgement and validation.¹⁹

Sexuality is also a matter of production wherein females are systematically taught how to normalize and thereby control their desires and behaviors. To address this facet of the study, I rely heavily (though not solely) upon Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*.²⁰ Due to the binary nature of Western language use and social constructions, there is a clear reliance on monosexual languages and norms; that is: either heterosexual *or* homosexual identities. Historically, heterosexual norms and language patterns have been dominant in the U.S.; contemporarily though, an increasing acceptance of homosexual identities has led to visibility of homosexual expressions of selfhood within wider culture and throughout a variety of mediums. Though marginalized sexual identities have opportunities for articulation, more so now than ever before, social dialectics, as well as the larger body of feminisms, still largely rely on a monosexual dichotomy wherein one is understood as either straight or gay. Bisexuality is not represented to the same degree as is being gay/lesbian or straight, and pansexuality is now only beginning to emerge as a sexual identity category.

Femisphere writings challenge such normative ideas of gender and sexuality and offer contrasting viewpoints. To offer one possible remedy to these wider issues and resulting biases, this project looks at contemporary American culture's responses to

¹⁹ There are also persons within this study who prefer pronouns other than "she." Such cases are treated and addressed according to those persons' preferences. For such an example, see Chapter Four's discussion of Jiz Lee. Similarly, qualifications of the terms "bisexual," "pansexual," "queer," "cisgender," "gender queer," and "transgender" are offered in this chapter's "Contested Terms" section.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

female gender and sexuality—and-how new definitions can assist in reframing salient arguments. I contend that remaking definitions of gender and sexuality will help create a more holistic, encompassing, and cohesive set of feminist theories that serve to empower female individuals. Gender and sexuality are central to individual identity productions and as Judith Butler notes, are concerns that should be central within feminisms because

any feminist theory that restricts the meaning of gender [and sexuality] in the presuppositions of its own practice sets up exclusionary gender norms within feminism, often with homophobic consequences... feminism ought to be careful not to idealize certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion... [T]hose regimes of truth that stipulated that certain kinds of gendered expressions were found to be false or derivative, and others true and original.²¹

This study, as a descendent of her work, looks to critique constructions of gender and sexuality as part of its central foci. There is continued need for careful scrutiny and analysis of hegemonic forces working against females and marginalized sexualities. Additionally, since these facets are core to how individuals construct their identities, they must be acknowledged as integral to the human condition and what it means to be human in the age of technology. I consider these components as potential sources of further empowerment and strength for feminists especially if feminism seeks to free the public from oppressive norms and dialectics. To address these elisions, this project delegitimizes suppressions of gendered and/or sexed constructions of self by deconstructing the languages and norms working against females and femaleness (whether these come from outside of or from within the feminist community itself). Such concepts rely on traditionally-held views of what being “female” means—most often

²¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, vii-viii.

thought of in terms genetic gender and/or gender of birth. These ideas are inadequate when considering the full range of potential identities that are ever-expanding and shifting. As such, this dissertation asks: how can ideas about identity construction (specific to the idea of “female”) within bi and pansexual feminist blog writing remedy, add to, and widen existing feminist political and ethical theories?

Need

Work conducted in this dissertation serves as an entry point toward examining important dilemmas surrounding females, and females as bi or pansexuals. Written from within Third Wave feminism, this work provides opportunities to acknowledge, develop, and apply alternative readings and interpretations to social dialectics, norms, and understandings of how gender and sexuality function in reference to and independently from each other. Marginalized sexualities remain stigmatized by wider culture and as such require continued attention in terms of research (such as this dissertation) in addition to activist efforts. Even more specifically, new media (blogging in the case of this dissertation and social media as a whole) represents a burgeoning component of contemporary daily life; therefore, it is imperative that feminists examine and engage its complexities, especially in relation to females of marginalized sexualities. My work articulates some ways in which bi and pansexual feminist voices can and should be incorporated into larger discussions and activism(s) (both on and offline). It also explicates how this voice can be viewed as an attempt to reframe feminist and bi and pansexual positionings, and, in that way, voice becomes forms of agency and activism. Throughout my writing I emphasize the importance of larger varieties of voices that can enhance understandings of the current state of feminism(s).

Internet communication, especially blogging, is a key site of feminist activism in the 21st century. The bloggers within my research are both subjects and agents of feminist conversation and likewise of social constructions of gender and sexuality. It is necessary to study these blogs to illustrate how individual articulations of personal and political experiences bring others (from outside of as well as from within feminism) into feminist discussions; these “conversations” of sorts have the potential to not only challenge patriarchal discourses and monosexual norms, but also represent challenges to insufficient mainstream feminisms. Despite contemporary emphasis on individualism and widespread rejection of metanarratives, there are clear cases within social discourses and even within feminist theorizing, wherein females and femaleness are conceptualized through stereotypes. The liberal context of the U.S. is rife for the types of writing and self-articulation that occur within the blogs of this study. Yet, while the context of postmodern U.S. culture favors individuality, prevailing social views of females derive from inherited language systems that do *not* typically take into account individual uses of language. The rhetoric involved in blogging (and perhaps especially feminist blogging) is also largely liberal. Most of the blogs throughout Chapter Four are single-user focused and employ first-person narratives; the emphasis on personal experience takes precedence and further enriches liberal discourse.²² The blogs I investigate are written from within

²² The communally produced blogs in Chapter Three also periodically utilize first-person points-of-view. See also: Marilee Lindemann, “The Madwoman with a Laptop Notes toward a Literary Prehistory of Academic Fem Blogging” *Journal of Women’s History*, 22, no.4 (Winter 2010): 209-219; Catherine O’Sullivan, “Diaries, On-Line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives: Or, Blogs, and the Blogging Bloggers Who Blog Them,” *American Archivist* 68, no.1 (Spring/Summer2005): 53-73; Carrie Hamilton, “Feminist Testimony in the Internet Age: Sex Works, Blogging and the Politics of Witnessing,” *Journal of Romance Studies*, 9, no.3 (Winter 2009): 86-101; Leslie Regan Shade, “Whose Global Knowledge? Women Navigating the Net,” *Development* 46, no.1 (March 2003): 218-220; and Gary Browning, Abigail Halcli, and Frank Webster, eds. *Understanding Contemporary Society: Theories of the Present*, London:

“the broader context of a societal turn toward exposure ... and toward a contemporary flouting of the perceived Puritanism of prior feminisms ...”²³ It is my position that the blogs I examine challenge sexist language uses in a number of ways. Additionally, they expand existing language frameworks as they work toward a more just world.²⁴

Popular culture conceptions of bisexuality are often framed throughout dominant U.S. media through one trope: the drunken and/or temporary moment of experimentation. Female bisexual instances in popular culture are treated in off-handed manners.²⁵ Little credence or attention is given to individuals who wholly and openly self-identify as bi. Bisexual interactions are depicted as brave experiments but not central to selfhood or one’s core subjectivity. So while instances of bisexuality are somewhat present on popular culture, they are disastrous to bisexual theory and identity because they lead audiences to believe that bisexual identities are frivolous and ephemeral. To complicate matters, most instances of bisexual behavior within popular culture examples are framed within hetero-normative contexts, usually heterosexual women experimenting with lesbian relationships. The female-female encounter occurs within the context of an otherwise hetero-informed moment and is thereby additionally impacted by the male

Sage, 2000.

²³ Jane Bailey, “Life in the Fish Bowl: Feminist Interrogations of Webcamming,” in *Lessons from the Identity Trail: Anonymity, Privacy and Identity in a Networked Society*, eds. Ian Kerr, Valerie Steeves, Carole Lucock (Oxford: UP, 2009), 284.

²⁴ For further discussion of this, reference Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: UP, 1989); and James Hersh, *Poeticized Culture: The Role of Irony in Rawls’s Liberalism* (Lanham, MD: UP of America, 2005).

²⁵ A majority of the time they involve two women. Though the presence of bi and pansexual males in popular culture is increasing incrementally, it is not handled or exploited in the same ways that female bi and pansexuality is.

gaze. Thus, the moment is constructed as a hetero-male fantasy rather than as a lesbian/bi and pansexual intentionality. It is in this way that feminist sensibilities are assaulted as well; the women's actions depend (almost solely) upon male gaze, male approval, and male arousal. These moments are created in such a way that they either rely entirely on the dichotomy of homo-hetero, and/or on the male gaze; the female does not choose to behave for her own sexual pleasure, but instead acts to pleasure *only* those people. Thus, these portrayals are problematic because they negate female agency and sexual identity.

Aside from popular depictions of bisexuality, there is rarely any concept of what bisexuality is or means (largely outside of specialized groups, conferences, and or scholarly research that is), never mind the even more closely-defined discussion in this study regarding pansexuality. Because American culture depends on binary oppositions (male-female, gay-straight) to inform its productions, bi and pansexuality represent a gray area in which there is largely no clear understanding of bi individuals, theories, or practices.²⁶ In his seminal work *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault proposes that since the 19th century, Western society has seen a surge in focus on and remedies to sexuality outside of a constructed heteronormative. He charges that since that time, common understandings of sexuality have been clouded by “moral obstacles, economic, or political options, and traditional fears ... It is as if a fundamental resistance blocked the

²⁶ For a refutation of the term “gray area,” see Chapter Four’s interviewee Emma Frost who notes “both transgender and bisexual people ... [are] sort of like in that colorful area in between. I don’t call it ‘grey’ because to me it’s anything but grey. It’s hot pink, aqua, lavender, it’s bright spring green. It’s very colorful.” For further discussion about bisexuality see Aaron Devor and Nicholas Matte, “One Inc. and Reed Erickson: The Uneasy Collaboration of Gay and Trans Activism, 1964-2003,” *GLQ* 10, no. 2 (November 2004): 179.

development of a rationally formed discourse concerning human sex, its correlations, and effects ... the aim of such a discourse was not to state the truth but to prevent its very emergence.”²⁷ Foucault highlights many core points of this dissertation: sexuality is typically understood and treated (specifically in the case of the U.S.) within a very narrow framework and deviations outside of that framework complicate people’s understandings.

Although there is an increased awareness of homosexuality (as exemplified throughout popular depictions and portrayals), I maintain that bi and pansexual individuals face different challenges than monosexuals (hetero or homo). Bi and pansexual individuals are often judged not only by straight communities, but by Queer as well because bisexuality can be seen as an uninformed, nascent, indecisive, infantile state, and pansexuality is not seen at all.²⁸ LGBTQ (and its variations) is often used as an umbrella term. Though it can be quite useful in terms of identifying itself within a well-defined community, focus typically falls on lesbian or gay persons, rarely bisexuals, and perhaps almost never takes pansexuals into account. In practical terms, being openly bi or pansexual asks people to see the *invisible* and accept it as a valid way through which to interpret the world. Foucault writes that sexuality is a crucial part of identity that needs to be expressed.²⁹ In terms of this work, my argument is that bi and pansexual identities require open expression as both a means to validate the self as an individual and as a way

²⁷ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 55.

²⁸ Hemmings, Clare and Warren J. Blumenfeld. “Reading ‘Monosexual’,” *Journal of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity* 1, no.4 (January 1996): 311-321.

²⁹ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 62.

to form communities with others (bi and pansexual feminists in this case) who identify in similar ways. Furthermore, blogging provides unique opportunities for doing so because of its dual nature as simultaneously public and private.

Purpose

This dissertation examines the ways that bi and pansexual female feminists (re)create feminist activism through the use of weblogs.³⁰ A range of “activisms” contained within the blogs are looked at; these may include discussions of general awareness-raising efforts that emerge through provocative post topics and relevant links that bloggers insert into their works. Many studies have been done on blogging patterns (Lenhart and Fox), content (Rebecca Blood), identity (Miller and Shepard, Julie Rak, and danah boyd), and combinations thereof.³¹ These works will be incorporated into this discussion, but need expansion in order to consider how bi and pansexual feminists use this format. These (re)creations of feminist activism are important to examine in order to illustrate how feminism continues to evolve in a variety of ways (sometimes unanticipated ways), and, more specifically, how bi and pansexual feminisms are becoming *visible*. Furthermore, it shows how contemporary bi and pansexual female

³⁰Also termed and interchangeable with “blogs” throughout the remainder of the dissertation.

³¹ Respectively: Amanda Lenhart and Susannah Fox, “Bloggers: A Portrait of the Internet’s New Storytellers,” (entry posted 2006) *Pew Internet and American Life Project*, (accessed October 10, 2010) http://www.pewtrusts.org/our_work_report_detail.aspx?id=21106 ; Rebecca Blood, “Weblogs: A History and Perspective,” (entry posted September 07, 2000) *Rebecca’s Pocket* (accessed May 1, 2010) http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html; Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepard, “Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog,” (entry posted 2004) *Into the Blogosphere*, Laura Gurek et al, eds. (accessed November 01, 2010) http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/blogging_as_social_action_a_genre_analysis_of_the_weblog.html; Rak, “The Digital Queer: Weblogs and Internet Identity”; and Danah Boyd, “Facebook’s Privacy Trainwreck: Exposure, Invasion, and Social Convergence,” *Convergence* 14, no.1 (February 2008): 13-20.