

bleached blonde bimbos



sex radical philosophy for everyone
february 2004

1. Introduction

Bleached Blonde Bimbos is my effort to engage my friends and my community in a conversation about 2 things: (1) Queer misogyny and (2) The love that's missing from our lives and our whole little homo/gender queer subculture.

Not too long ago the movie Venus Boys had its theatrical release here in NYC. Seeing the publicity about this movie brought back a bunch of memories for me. The experience I had seeing the debut of Venus Boys at the GLBT film festival about two years ago was one of the first steps on the path which led me to write Bleached Blonde Bimbos.

When I first heard about Venus Boys, a documentary about drag kings and trannies, I was so excited to see some queerly gendered people on screen. I bought three tickets in advance, for myself and a certain two girls with whom I associate. The girls were as excited as I was about this movie and we waited eagerly in an impressive crowd, just the kind of crowd that you'd expect to turn out, only much bigger. When the movie got started, it became clear within the first few minutes that it would be too heart breaking to bear, to hear so much contempt for femininity from the mouths of the very same people we consider our community. The girls wound up leaving after about a half hour. The final straw for them was when one supposedly liberated gender queer declared righteously that not everyone can be blonde haired and ditzzy. The laughter of this huge auditorium packed with queers, so delighted in their shared disdain for femininity, was just painful. The girls left to get a few well deserved drinks, but I stayed through the end of Venus Boys. And although I saw many genders resembling my own affirmed and even glorified, I left the auditorium feeling utterly dismal.

So here we go. In the following pages it may seem as though I've got all kinds of criticism for my own community. Rest assured that all of this criticism is coming from a place of confidence—confidence that we can do better than this, that we can be better than this. Queer people have been involved in just about every progressive movement in the

last century. I am not about to sit by and watch us become complacent consumers, alienated from ourselves and from everything but our marketplace niche identity. Those of us who think things are unbearable in this culture are not crazy. Through my zine I hope to reach my friends of every sexual persuasion, and spark a dialog about everyday resistance, about how we can disrupt misogyny, about how we can interrupt alienation with intimacy, about how we can talk about social justice in a way that is powerful yet not so heavy handed as to crush our tenuous grasp of it.

2. Queer Movies

Venus Boys was all about heroism and individualism. Sure, it is brave to face the cruel, bigoted world as a masculine female. We may need a certain degree of smugness and self congratulation in order to survive the contempt of the world at large. But there is no place for this smugness and hero worship within our own community. There is no need for us more masculine queers to affirm our masculinity by deriding girlishness. As far as I'm concerned, it's brave for femmes to persist in a community full of people who think femininity is a joke, who think femmes are less queer. (Have you ever seen a documentary about femmes?) It's brave for femmes to persist in their support for butches and trannies who could comfortably sit down and name a thousand different gender queer, masculine sub-identities but would experience serious discomfort at the thought of sitting down and having a long conversation about the meanings and complexities of expressing one's femininity.

And I should know because I experience that discomfort myself. In my own coming out process, I earnestly contemplated "butch" versus "faggot butch" versus "stone butch," settled on plain old butch, and then congratulated myself for dealing with my gender. And yet now (years later) I know that after all my feminism, after all my gender theory, after filling my head with Judith Butler, Leslie Feinberg, Kate Bornstein and Patrick Califia, I still have barely begun to explore and understand what being this butch gender means for me in terms of living in my own skin.

But there is one thing I know for sure: it has become increasingly obvious that my own path demands a much closer examination of my relationship to femininity than the queer community has ever asked of me.

3. Bleached Blond Bimbos

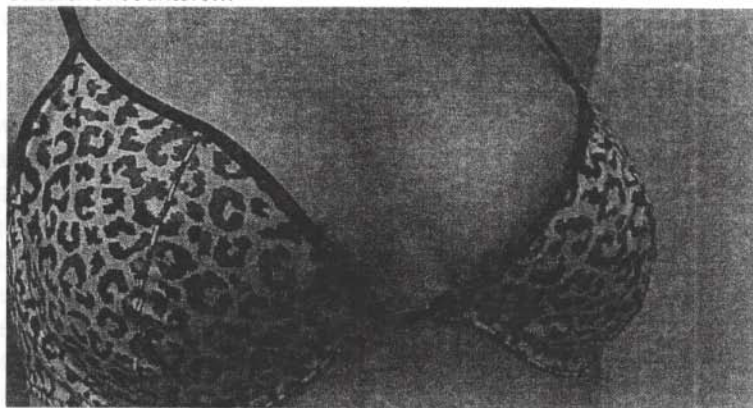
And that's why "Queer Sex Revolution" got renamed. The new title serves many functions, one of which is to keep present in all of our minds the need to confront misogyny in the so called radical queer community. After encountering countless disparaging references to femininity in queer and sex positive media, I feel nauseated but not surprised that queers can be so misogynist and proud of it. While these so called radicals congratulate themselves for deconstructing gender, they fail to see that the only genders they are really interested in are the more masculine ones.

I am overwhelmed by the way femininity is scorned by homos whether it is exhibited by dykes or by fags or by trannies. Sometimes I think being queer at this point in time means being masculine, whether you are a butch fag or a butch dyke, masculinity seems to be the only way to go. At least judging by the personal ads, the people you see in Chelsea or the East Village, and the theme nights at so many homo bars.

But BBB is not just about gender. It is about forming a revolutionary sex radical culture, where the lack of love and the lack of humor are to be approached from a new perspective. Bleached Blond Bimbos are a symbol to me, a symbol of the fun, brash, overtly sexual, passionately engaged revolutionary sex radicalism that made me want to become a homo when I was just a lonely, confused, uncomfortably masculine teenaged girl. Because it surely was not masculinity that drew me into the life! The first gay boys I knew were far from masculine. And the first girls I thought were hot were the very same ones all the boys desired--but also feared.

The Bimbo identity evokes strong feelings when ever it appears. I think you can tell a lot about people by how they react to highly sexualized women, by what they think of Madonna or Pamela Anderson.

The idea to contemplate the Bimbo as an illuminating persona occurred to me in stages, not just through Venus Boys but through several cultural encounters...



4. Queer Books

Often in the queer media I see references to Female Masculinity, Judith Halberstam's tribute to butches, trannies, and drag kings. I was so excited when this book came out (despite the obnoxious cover art). The topic itself is certainly close to my heart. Yet the book left me with little more than the impression that masculine identities are blessed with liberation and nonconformity and courage. Liberation at what cost and whose expense? Why can't the author be bothered to interrogate all the complex reasons it is liberating to take on a masculine gender in a sexist culture? Expressing our masculinity may free us, but this freedom is colored by the sexist culture that makes it possible. Don't they talk about this stuff in grad school? The book also fails to pay much attention to one really important source of my own butch identification: femmes.

Here are a few sentences from the book capturing what I am trying to get at: "Scholars have long pointed out that femininity tends to be associated with passivity and inactivity, with various forms of unhealthy body manipulations from anorexia to high heeled shoes. It seems to me that at least early on in life, girls should avoid femininity. Perhaps femininity and its accessories should be chosen later on, like a sex toy or a hairstyle." Can you imagine if somebody came out with a book containing the suggestion that butches and FtMs could hold their gender at bay, perhaps deciding to take it on later in life as an accessory? Can you imagine the anger that would provoke in the gender queer community? (Not to mention conflating high heels with anorexia. That's not even good feminism, let alone good gender theory.) I know my masculinity consists of more than my haircut and strap on. All genders, including feminine ones, come from a deeper place than that. Underneath this suggestion that femininity be avoided by girls is the old fashioned notion that masculinity is natural and femininity is something you put on. Masculinity comes from within, and femininity comes from what you wear. I think we owe femmes and femininity more respect than this. I've never met a femme who suggested I could have kept my butch-ness at bay until I was old enough to handle its potential negative side effects.

Additionally, Female Masculinity made me feel angry with the kind of smugness it expressed and angry with myself for relating on some level to that smugness. Not just the smug satisfaction of how being butch is so noble and brave, but the smug academic lingo which serves primarily to ensure that no one can understand your work until they've read all the same books you have read. I'd speculate that this book is unintelligible to many of the folks whose experience it attempts to describe, which seems to me to defeat its very purpose, though maybe it really is only an effort to claim a place in an existing academic niche. It certainly didn't speak to my experience.

I got more validation from just a few pages in Amber Hollibaugh's book, My Dangerous Desires, where she briefly describes and discusses her butch lovers, than I did from Halberstam's entire book, which is supposedly all about genders like my own. Hollibaugh's writing about

butch-femme relationships from a femme point of view covers more in a few pages than anything else I've ever read about being butch. Allow me to quote her:

"When I found butch/femme, it was like rediscovering my heart through my cunt."

5. Queer Porn

I've seen just a few too many earnest and grateful letters to lesbian porn sites and magazines, thanking them for not portraying lesbians as bleached blonde bimbos with long fingernails. I've seen it in *On Our Backs*, but right now I am thinking of a certain queer website that published a quote from a letter. The letter praised them for leaving out a specific gender identity—one the writer felt was too trashy or too straight-seeming or reminded her that straight men are often turned on by lesbians. Why does representation of "realistic" lesbians need to be at the expense of any other set of women, especially any other set of actual lesbians?

I've often seen this kind of gratitude for "realism" in the queer porn I really want to respect, and it makes me feel so... straight. I head back to straight porn mag *Leg Show*, where sex is fun and dirty and not so serious, where no one writes letters to complain about the model's gender presentation, or praise the absence of women they don't like. *Leg Show* is just the lifeline I need, full of fancy, sexy, powerful girls. If being a lesbian means loving women, I'd love to see lesbians stop complaining about the kind of women I love... or at least just recognize for once that femmes really are queer people too.

6. Queer Poetry

Finally, I have had all I can stand from queers like poet Alix Olsen, decrying the evil of high heels. Miss Jennifer and I attended a drag performance at a women's theater, and fell silent at the cheers and laughs this poet received for declaring her refusal of oppressive high

heels, tools of the patriarchy, etc. (What is this obsession with high heels, anyway?) Yet another instance of being in a queer space and feeling utterly alienated, while some homo is getting cheers for being defiantly, individualistically, heroically, beyond gender. It's always the audience reaction that is so hard to take.

Girls I love found their sexuality in high heels, as powerfully as I found mine in the right boots and belt buckle, but there is no room for their sexuality in that audience.

And why does being "beyond gender" always seem to be so much more on the masculine side of things? I don't think I will ever be beyond gender. Gender has been plaguing me, turning me on, and keeping me awake at night since I was just a miserable kid, horrified at being mistaken for a boy all too often, while simultaneously obsessing over how to better hide my breasts...

Anyway, I'm tired of queers' outright dismissal of femininity as silly, or worse, dismissal of femmes as aping patriarchy and succumbing to cultural pressure.

I'd like to let these folks in on a little something about patriarchy—hating any set of women is a lot closer to the designs of patriarchy than any of the shoes in my girlfriends' closet could be.



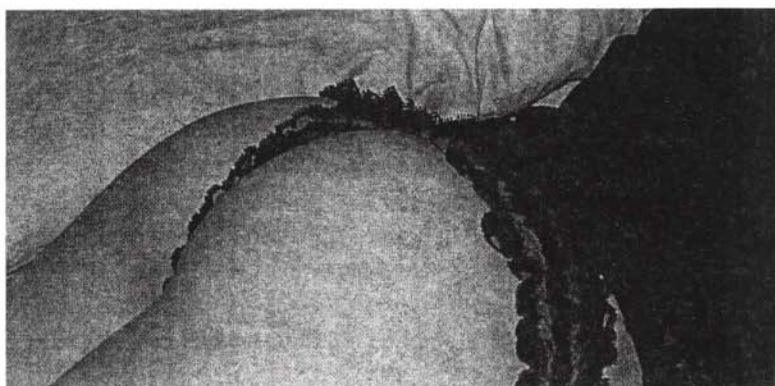
7. Tangent about Me

In the interests of honesty, you should know where I am coming from, so I am going to acknowledge some of the experiences which have informed my perspective.

Somewhere, somehow, during my coming out process which spanned slowly and gradually through the 90s, I got the distinct impression that queer sexuality was something that belonged primarily to masculine people. I learned that sexy queerness meant hanky codes and tea rooms and glory holes, and I loved it. Homos I met, variously gendered, idolized rough queers, trade, hustlers, bears, tops and bottoms. It seemed like everyone I met was seeking either a daddy or a boy. This is what queer sexuality came to mean to me. I will never know for sure whether I found this ideal because I was subconsciously seeking it or because it was the most powerful queer thing out there at the time, or both, but I know that identifying with specifically masculine sexuality was the one and only entryway for me toward being a sexual person at all.

I never formed a clear thought about it at the time, but I had a very clear impression sexual freedom could be attained through accepting and coming to revel in my own masculinity. Where did that impression come from? I am not exactly sure. But I can definitely trace some of its cultural roots, to queer porn, books, movies, poetry... not just the examples I have discussed here, but all the stuff I encountered at the time, the stuff that wasn't directly misogynist but instead formed a whole sexual culture around the exclusion of femininity. I'd be the last person to suggest narrowing masculine options for female born people, but I'd also be the first to point out that shutting down feminine voices is hurting all of us. We are consumed by gender but there still isn't enough of it for so many of us. Surely I needed to accept my masculinity, and I still have work to do in this area. But I also need to be secure enough in being butch that it does not need to come at the expense of anyone else's feminine gender expression, occasionally including my own.

I am left wondering what the consequences are for me, the consequences of spending years coming to terms with my masculinity and considering masculinity the gateway to my sexuality. I am wondering what sexual possibilities I have been unable to allow into my consciousness, what shortcuts I have taken, and what I may have missed. The word "stone" still casts a long and heavy shadow over my personal sexual landscape and experiences.



8. What We're Missing

It should go without saying that the struggle for empowered femininity is a part of the whole struggle for gender liberation. Owning your own body, putting words to your desires, claiming your own gender as valid, is a struggle, no matter where that struggle lands you. B3 is about my respect and adoration for girls, whether their femininity is fancy or trashy, cute or slutty, all natural or a work of art. It's a reminder of their right to a feminine gender identity, and their right to have that gender respected.

The lack respect for femininity is a source of pain for many individuals, and a loss for the community as a whole.

B3 reminds us to pay attention to how our community responds to girlishness, because it's very, very telling.

I wonder how long this boy craziness can go on? We're missing a major source of strength from our collective psyches, something overlooked, dismissed, silenced. We're missing our femininity and for us to continue in all honesty to go on and on about gender liberation, we need to take a good hard look at which forms of gender we approve of liberating, and which ones are still a source of shame, which ones we'd rather not talk about and really don't care if they are represented or not, in all our big talks about who gets representation. As Taylor Mac summarized in a song, "The revolution will not be masculinized."

Even if we were to judge solely on the basis of people's adverse reactions, we could see that femininity is deeply powerful, powerful in ways we cannot afford to ignore.

9. Future Conversations

This is an open call to anyone reading this, please send me anything you've thought about, written about, created art about, etc, the following subjects. Anything that can be photocopied. I don't want to write this all on my own. Besides, the only reason I like to create zines is to get a dialog started. I am making a commitment to publish at least eight more issues of B3 on each of the following themes. So please send me everything you've got about:

1. Feminism.
2. Polyamory.
3. Liberation of the body through gender and sexuality.
4. Compassion.
5. Community.
6. Consumerism and it's relationship to meaning.
7. Healing and Resistance.
8. Love.

We've fallen into a rut in our conversations about gender, but I am not willing to give up talking about it. I just want to have a different conversation than the one that's been going on.

10. Conclusion

B3 will be designed as an entry way into a larger view of sex/gender/body liberation. A symbol of the love that's missing from the movement, the common sense approach of down to earth, un-cool, kinda obnoxious and very sexy girls who speak what's on their minds and in their hearts. In other words, it's about the kind of girls I love and the vital role they have to play in the creation of an inclusive sex radical community. They're a catalyst for confronting all kinds of psychic shit, because they provoke such strong feelings, one way or another.

Anyone can be a bimbo. We just need to tune into the multiple meanings of that voice, often the voice that cuts through the bullshit, that says the wrong thing at just the right time to illuminate hypocrisy. Being a bimbo is explosive, and dangerous to all nearby assumptions. Feminine genders are powerful stuff. It is about time for the queer community to start paying attention.

I write to let all my friends know what's been on my mind. My goal is to write about life as it is lived through joy and pain, suffering and ecstasy, in a ways that matter not just to me but potentially to everyone I care about too.

But I am not just writing to express myself. The real purpose of this first issue of B3 has been to open a space for dialog. This conversation is better suited to face to face contact, with more voices than my own involved. It is all about connecting with others after all. So please consider everything you have just read as little more than a long winded invitation to open a dialog with anyone and everyone who is interested.

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Rocko's beloved affiliations include the House of Freak, Queer as Fuck, Busty Fetish Girls, and the (slowly but surely developing) Bent Stiletto Social Club. Thanks to J. and F. for their insights, comments, and images. Thanks to the people whose work I have criticized here, for giving me something worth responding to. Thanks to everyone who told me they would really like to see a zine dealing with queer misogyny. And thanks to everyone who has indulged me in conversations about love.

This is dedicated to everyone who has ever felt excluded from the queer community and longed for something better, something more powerful, something that really mattered.



Ladies Who Punch

The action stars of yesteryear (Arnold, Sly, Jean-Claude) have given way to small-screen counterparts who pack a little more estrogen. Indeed, TV's four leading ladies of action kick higher and punch harder, all the while maintaining whirlwind social schedules, hectic love lives, killer wardrobes and double identities. But which one would prevail in a showdown? To find out, *Strong* analyzed two randomly selected episodes of each program. Here's our scorecard.

—Kim Peterson and John Layman

ALIAS



BUFFY



Sydney Bristow

college grad student/
government double agent

Buffy Summers

college undergrad/vampire
slayer

WHO THEY ARE

WHO PLAYS 'EM

Jennifer Garner

Sarah Michelle Gellar

SOUND BITE

"He was the one part of my life I couldn't stand to be a lie." (about dead fiancé)

"C'mon, rush me. It'll be funny." (to muggers)

BAD GUYS DISPATCHED PER EPISODE

4.9

2

BIKINIS PER EPISODE

0

0

WHY THEY WIN

Mistress of disguise

Slayer heritage

TYPICAL SOUND EFFECT

Boot-clad foot striking against villainous heads and torsos

Cries of night creatures

LOVE CONNECTION

Earnest agent and nebbishy newsman

Bad-boy bloodsuckers

FAMILY TIES

Dad is a fellow CIA double-agent

Little sister may follow Slayer's footsteps

ROGUES' GALLERY

Terrorists, traitors, schemers, counter-spies

Vampires, demons, the unholy, the undead

CREDIBILITY

Challenges logic

Cheats death

PHOBIAS

Losing passport

Changing networks—again

BOTTOM LINE

TV's biggest (and best) adrenaline rush

Outduels the competition with verbal repartee

DARK ANGEL



Max Guevera

bike messenger/genetically-engineered warrior

Jessica Alba

"You tell me in five seconds or I'm going to introduce your face to your colon." (to stoolie)

1.8

0

Feline DNA

Snores from audience

Housebound hacker

Long-lost brother an amnesiac T2 knock-off

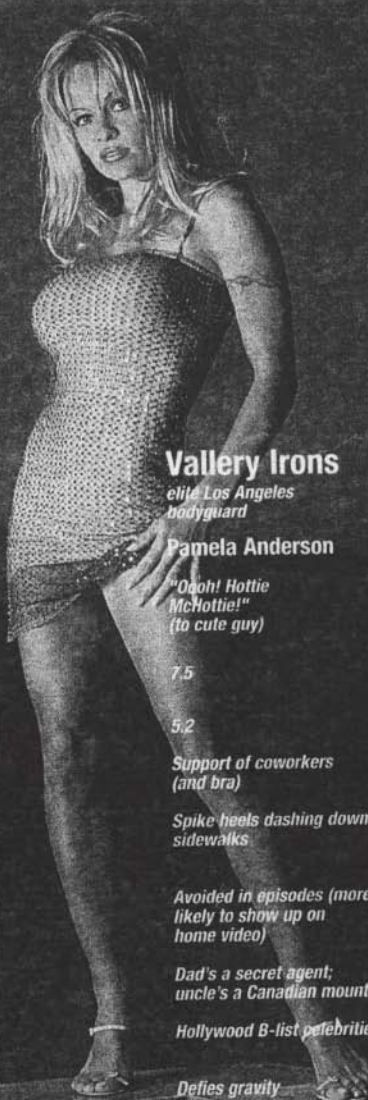
Mutants, man-beasts, freaks and future-creeps

Defies biogenetics

Declining ratings

Most derivative of the bunch, but nice catsuit

VIP



Vallery Irons

elite Los Angeles bodyguard

Pamela Anderson

"Oooh! Hottie McHottie!" (to cute guy)

7.5

5.2

Support of coworkers (and bra)

Spike heels dashing down sidewalks

Avoided in episodes (more likely to show up on home video)

Dad's a secret agent; uncle's a Canadian mountie

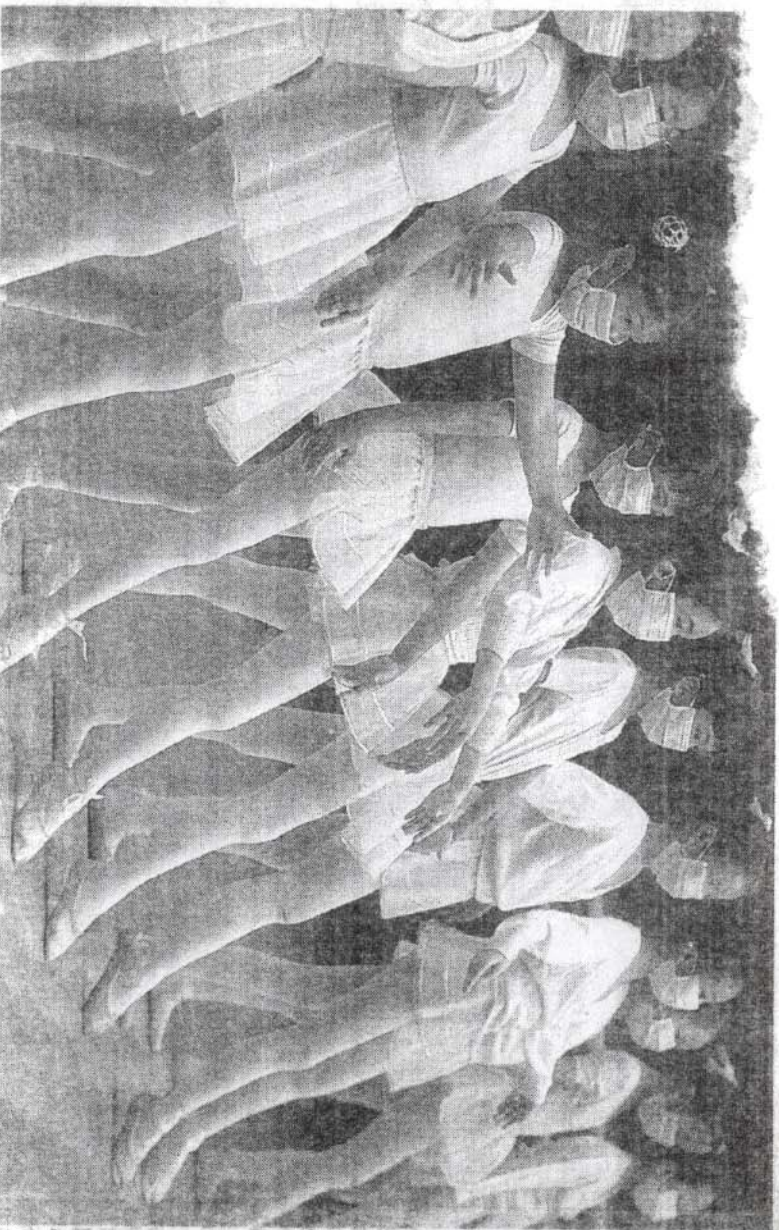
Hollywood B-list celebrities

Defies gravity

Sagging

What she lacks in fight, she makes up for in camp

government does
"we'll figure out some way," Dr.
Frieden said.



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