
Liminal: The Second Annual Critical Femininities Conference

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To be liminal is to be in between or in transition; on the threshold of the sensory, the liminal may produce both hauntings and longings. We present the concept of “femininity” as liminal or palimpsestic itself, inseparable from the ongoing echoes of cisheteropatriarchy, colonization, white supremacy, capitalism, ableism, and fatphobia that interpellated it (Brownmiller, 1984; Bordo, 1993; Davis, 1980; Deliovsky, 2008), as well as animated by the simultaneous reverberations of feminist, Black, Indigenous, racialized, trans, and queer interventions which create more capacious futures for femininity (Lorde, 1984; McCann, 2018; Muñoz 1999; Nash, 2011; Rice, 2009; Shraya, 2018). Julia Serano’s (2008) foundational work on transfemininity reveals femininity’s impermanence and malleability, both socially and scientifically (re)constructed. These critical undertakings permit an understanding of femininity as an embodied site of many assemblages and temporalities, transforming it (as well as gender writ large) from a modality of imperial domination into a place of past-present-future becoming and a practice of transgenerational kinship. How might we understand femininity as nonlinear, transitory, and transformative? How might patriarchal phases of femininity be contested or reclaimed?

The field of critical femininities, too, is liminal; still an emergent discipline, critical femininities draws from multiple sites of knowledge and knowledge-production. Femme

theory springs not from academia but from the lineage of femme and queer feminist life-writing, often in memoir or edited anthologies that include a range of forms—essays, poetry, art, and photographs (Lorde, 1984; Schwartz, 2018; Brightwell & Taylor, 2021). The year 2022 presented an opportunity to reflect on the lineage of critical femininity studies; it marked 20 years since the publication of *Brazen Femme: Queering Femininity* (2002), edited by Chloë Brushwood Rose and Anna Camilleri, and follows the passing of prolific Black feminist bell hooks, whose writing on feminism, belonging, and love gets to the heart of what motivates the generation of critical femininities. The present is an eternally liminal space, caught between past and future; between settler colonialist-white supremacist-cisheteropatriarchal-capitalist histories and the worldings of radical love and transformation still possible.

The works included in this collection were all originally presented at *Liminal: The Second Annual Critical Femininities Conference* at York University in the summer of 2022 and they all respond to these notions of liminality.

Though all of these pieces consider the liminal in ways that defy neat categorization, this collection is divided into three major sections: Bodies and Identity; (In)Visibility and Representation; and Through the Ages. The research papers, personal reflections, visual art, and poetry included in these proceedings consider the liminal in-betweens and possibilities of a

critical femininities reading of bodies, borders, media, histories, and futures.

This kind of critical feminist thought is always a collaborative effort, and it would not be possible without many generous contributions. We would like to thank all the presenters, workshop facilitators, keynote speakers, and attendees who make the conference possible and the authors whose contributions fill these pages. Thank you especially to Seren-Rose Sonell for the cover art for these proceedings. We would like to extend thanks to Dr. Andi Schwartz and Sarah Redikopp for originating the Critical Femininities Conference at York in 2021; especially to Andi, who has continued to lead the conference through its thematic iterations: *Excess*, *Liminal*, and *Irreverence*. Thank you to the other members of the Liminal Conference planning committee, Dr. Jade Da Costa, Kathleen Cherrington, Ruth O'Sullivan, and Hannah Maitland. Thank you to Mackenzie Edwards and Maisha Mustanzir, who joined the committee for planning *Irreverence: The Third Annual Critical Femininities Conference*. We would also like to thank the Centre for Feminist Research (CFR) at York University, including CFR coordinator Dr. Elaine Coburn, for hosting *Liminal* and for their ongoing support of the Critical Femininities Conference. Thank you to the LA&PS Postdoctoral and Graduate Student Research Events Fund for providing financial support for the creation of the conference and conference proceedings.

And finally, we would like to thank all of our transnational and transgenerational kin in considering the past-present-future becomings of critical femininities. The artists, activists, and writers who have all added to the palimpsest of our thinking and inhabit the liminal spaces both before and after us.

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