

Episode 1: “Still Brazen: Revisiting the Foundational Text *Brazen Femme* Twenty Years Later”

- 00:00:01 [Music: Still Brazen Theme Song]
- 00:00:15 **Andi Schwartz:** Hi, I’m Andi Schwartz, and you’re listening to “Still Brazen: 20 Years of Queering Femininity,” a podcast celebrating the 20th anniversary of the publication of the foundational femme anthology, *Brazen Femme: Queering Femininity*.
- 00:00:31 I am speaking to you today from Toronto, Canada, also known as Tkaranto, which is the traditional territory of many Indigenous nations, including the Anishinabek, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat. The treaty holders of this land are the Mississaugas of the Credit.
- 00:00:49 This is the place where *Brazen Femme* was envisioned by editors by the Chloë Brushwood Rose and Anna Camilleri. The anthology was published in 2002 by Arsenal Pulp Press, but I didn’t encounter the text until after its second printing in 2010, which was, luckily, around the time I started understanding myself as queer. But even then, in the early 2010s, it wasn’t that common, at least in my circles, and certainly not popular to be femme. In most of the other cis women I knew, queerness was marked by their aversion to femininity; femininity and being femme was still, often, the butt of the joke. So finding language in books like *Brazen Femme* and on Tumblr that reclaimed femininity, that insisted on the queerness of femme experience, that defied the minor and major tenors of femmephobia that many of us experienced, was so huge. It was like finding friends, and a whole new world. These experiences made femme really central to who I was, and it became central to the work that I still do in the world. Soon after getting my first taste of femme literature and history, I went to grad school to study femme cultures in digital spaces, and I was so lucky to have Chloe, one of the editors of *Brazen Femme*, as my supervisor. She introduced me to Anna’s work, and the work of so many other femmes — many who will be featured on this podcast.
- 00:02:15 My own work on femme so far has been inspired by the femmes creating digital culture; it’s a very different context in a lot of ways than the work created and included in *Brazen Femme*. I’ve written a lot about softness, for example, about embracing vulnerability and emotionality when being tough, hard, and brazen is no longer possible or desirable for femmes, when femmes are exhausted from being tough for so long. But I think there is still a toughness to being soft. Like embodying any kind of femininity in a misogynist and femmephobic world, it still takes courage. After all this time, being femme is still, in the words of Anna and Chloë, a brazen posture.

- 00:02:57 I am excited by the possibility that we can begin to mark out different generations of femme thought and culture, and that’s what this podcast is all about. I’ll be putting contributors to the original *Brazen Femme* collection into conversation with some of my femme contemporaries: emerging writers and scholars working and writing in the same areas. We will hear from poets, writers, and academics about femme as it intersects with race, nation, sex work and sexuality, fatness, disability, aging and spirituality, and about what has changed about femme, and what still persists. And of course, we will talk a lot about the impact of *Brazen Femme* on all of this, and all of us.
- 00:03:39 To me, one of the greatest legacies of *Brazen Femme* is the shift it invited to think about femme on its own terms, meaning outside of the butch/femme duo and dynamic. I think this has really opened up so many different ways of thinking about femme, in addition to thinking about it as part of a queer, erotic relation. I think this shift has helped us to understand femme gender more deeply and more capaciously, to think about how femme identity can and does intersect with race, ability, body size, and more. I also think this shift has allowed us to think about femme as its own culture and community, and certainly to think about the complexities and richness of femmeship, or friendships and solidarities among femmes.
- 00:04:24 For me, *Brazen Femme* and all the other ways I have formally learned from Chloe is also really central to how I understand femme theory. The anthology brings together visual art, poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and academic writing to get at the heart of femme experience. And this still informs how I think about femme theory, as necessarily combining life-writing, art, and more traditional theory. I think this is where we can locate the radical potential of femme theory, and I think it’s what mounts a valuable, queer, and feminist challenge to the way we do things in the white, Western, masculinist, neoliberal university and how we understand knowledge production and expertise. So, the form of *Brazen Femme* is really important. Not only was it an anthology, so bringing together many different voices, but it also brought together many different forms—I see both as critical to femme theory now.
- 00:05:19 I also want to highlight a small tragedy. Over the course of creating this podcast, I found out that *Brazen Femme* is now out of print. It’s no longer available from the publisher, Arsenal Pulp Press. Considering the impact that this book has had, not only on femme thought and culture that I’ve been gesturing to, but on all of the people—contributors and readers—that we’ll hear from throughout the podcast—this really is a tragedy. But it is also more cause to re-visit and celebrate this wonderful text. So, I hope you will keep listening to this podcast, and to the conversations that we’ve captured.

- 00:05:58 I have a lot of people to thank for supporting this project: The Director of the Centre for Feminist Research at York University, Elaine Coburn, for greenlighting this project. Sarah Coysh and Digital Scholarship Centre and Media Creation Lab at the Scott Library at York, Alison Crosby and Sue Sbrizzi from the School of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies at York University, Nick Mulé and the Sexuality Studies Program at York, Chloë Brushwood Rose and the Gender, Feminist, and Women’s Studies Graduate Program, Natalie Coulter and the Institute for Research on Digital Literacies at York, and Markus Reisenleitner and the joint program in Communication and Cultural Studies at York University and Toronto Metropolitan University. And, finally, Michael Fong and Logan Recorders. Thank you all so much for your support.
- 00:06:45 I also want to say thank you to all the femmes who have shared their time, energy, expertise, and joy with me while revisiting *Brazen Femme* for this podcast and who have made this project possible. Thank you. It has been so joyful and so fun and so enlightening to engage with you all. If you want to know I’m talking to, well... you’re going to have to keep coming back. Thank you for listening.
- 00:07:10 [Music: Still Brazen Theme Song]