

National College of Art and Design

School of Visual Culture

**Dismantling the Brotherhood: Female Masculinity,
Queerness and Strength within Women in Blue-Collar
Trades, 1978-1981.**

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I declare that this research project is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Date: 14.02.2022

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Glossary

Blue Collar

The term “blue-collar” refers to a type of employment. Blue-collar jobs are typically classified as involving manual labour and compensation by an hourly wage. Some fields that fall into this category include construction, manufacturing, maintenance and mining. Those who have this sort of job are characterized as members of the working class.

<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/bluecollar.asp>

Gender identity

A person’s innate sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else (see non-binary below), which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth.

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/faqs-and-glossary/list-lgbtq-terms>

Homophobia

The fear or dislike of someone, based on prejudice or negative attitudes, beliefs or views about lesbian, gay or bi people. Homophobic bullying may be targeted at people who are, or who are perceived to be, lesbian, gay or bi.

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/faqs-and-glossary/list-lgbtq-terms>

Lesbian

Refers to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/faqs-and-glossary/list-lgbtq-terms>

LGBTQ+

The acronym for lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning and ace.

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/faqs-and-glossary/list-lgbtq-terms>

Queer

Queer - a person whose sexual orientation or gender identity falls outside the heterosexual mainstream or the gender binary

<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/queer>

Working-class

Working class is a socioeconomic term used to describe persons in a social class marked by jobs that provide low pay, require limited skill of physical labour. Typically, working-class jobs have reduced education requirements. Unemployed persons or those supported by a social welfare program are often included in the working class.

<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/w/working-class.asp>

Introduction

The thesis will examine the photographs taken by Martha W Tabor. Throughout the 1970s-1990s in the Washington, D.C area of the United States, Tabor worked as a manual labourer, activist, union organiser, photographer, and known artist. She serves as an avenue through which I will explore the diverse lives of lesbians who worked as manual labourers during that period in the United States. Due to the political climate in the United States, from the women's liberation movement to the emergence of LGBTQ rights, this thesis focuses specifically on that period. As well as influencing American society, these movements also influenced the rest of the world.

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a passionate analysis that represents and explores the lives of the forgotten queer individuals of the labour movement, with huge focus being on the lesbian experience. In regards to the language I will be using throughout, It is important to mention the following – I will at times be using the terms “blue-collared work” and “manual labour” interchangeably, as well as using the words “queer” “woman” and “lesbian” correspondently. I will be using these terms interchangeably due to the lack of content that was at times available regarding the lesbian experience within the manual labour world. It is important to mention that I am aware that the lesbian identity is so multi-faceted, and that I am aware that all lesbians do not identify as women. In my glossary there are definitions of any queer language that could be misinterpreted.

Through-out my many months of researching for this thesis, I began to realise that there are an endless amount of forgotten histories of working-class, lesbian subcultures. The idea of a lost history, a lack of working-class studies truly motivated me, and I feel this need to represent and provide source material will continue to influence me throughout my academic

career. The series of photographs by Tabor, titled *Women in Blue-Collar Trades*, 1978-1981 now exists as a part of the University of Maryland's Archival Collection. I believe these women that are present within Tabor's photos to be the backbone of the women's labour movement concerning the manual labour industry, also referred to as "blue-collar work" (Digital Collections, University of Maryland, 1979). Their uncommon, unspoken experiences are immensely important to the political change we as a society have made, and I feel as though we owe it to them to illustrate their resistance in clearing the path of the inequality that existed within the world of manual labour.

Despite the significant change I feel these lesbians have made, there is still an immense amount of action to be taken in regards to the percentages of women that exist in manual labour. The amount of women who exist within the industry globally is stated here in the article *Women in Construction: The State of the Industry in 2022* "...women make up 47% of all employed individuals, this means that the construction industry is only benefitting from about 1.25% of women in the workforce" (BigRentz, 2022). By the outcomes of this study, over 80% of the industry are men. This overwhelming figure provides insight into the male-dominated space that the industry truly was and is, and allows understanding towards how oppressive the environment was for not only heterosexual women, but the oppression and hatred that lesbians experienced.

Below I will display a select few relevant photographs from the series by Tabor that I will consistently refer back to and use as inspiration throughout this thesis. This is done with the objective of immediately initiating the conversation of representation that will flow throughout this thesis, and to also have the images seen together, what I believe Tabor would have wanted.



Fig.1 – Photograph titled ‘Linda Butcher, ship-fitter, Neville island, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1979’. By Martha Tabor from the University of Maryland, Digital Collections.



Fig. 2 -Photograph titled 'Lillian Lightbourne, welder at a fabrication shop, Washington, D.C., 1979'. By Martha Tabor from the University of Maryland, Digital Collections.



Virginia Powell + crew of labourers - Wash, D.C. construction site - 1980 Martha Tabor - '81

Fig. 3 – Photograph titled ‘Virginia Powell and crew of labourers, Washington, D.C, 1980.’

By Martha Tabor from the University of Maryland, Digital Collections.



Deborah Johnstone, truck driver - landfill - Amesbury, MA

Martha Tabor 1979

Fig. 4 – Photograph titled ‘Truck driver Deborah Johnstone working in a landfill, Amesbury, Massachusetts, 1979.’ By Martha Tabor from the University of Maryland, Digital Collections.



Ani Durst, Carpenter - Hart Senate Office Building - 1978 Martha Tabor

Fig. 5 – Photograph titled ‘Ani Durst, carpenter, in the Hart Senate Office Building, 1978.’

By Martha Tabor from the University of Maryland, Digital Collections.

Evidently within the photographs, there is a general re-occurrence of masculine appearing women. Alongside discussing the general oppression these women suffered from for simply being women, I will also explore the ways in which their identities, as lesbians, were ongoingly scrutinized. I believe the exploration of female masculinity is an important element in the writing of this thesis, as evidently from Tabor's photographs, these women existed outside of traditional femininity roles in all areas of their existence.

The decision to focus this thesis primarily on the experiences of lesbians was further motivated by my own lesbian identity and being surrounded by manual labourers growing up. Due to my experience of being a member in the lesbian community, I will be freely using old and new forms of lesbian slang to discuss the different components of lesbian identity and experience within this time period in The United States. I understand that some readers may find some of the language dated, but it is in no way my intent. There will be references made to gender theorists such as Miriam Frank, Jack Halberstam and Leslie Feinberg. I will use their ideas to critique and argue the presence of lesbianism within some of Tabor's images that haven't specifically been cited as lesbian, the images that may not have had publications attached to them. There will also be some references made to like-minded individuals who were similar people to Tabor, such as labourers, writers and women's activists who also dedicated their time to documenting these women's lives.

Lastly, my finishing chapter will focus on the ways in which these women coped and built communities together outside of the manual labour industry, and how they continued to fight for equality. I will discuss the history of the underground lesbian bar scene and how these bars were a response to toxic male dominated spaces, alongside exploring the ways in which these women communicated to each other through the publishing of 'lesbian, feminist

periodicals' (Gilbert, 1993). I aim to provide insight into the oppression and social-isolation of lesbians in the manual labour industries, and to honour their solidarity, strength and love towards one another. An important glimpse into the lesbian subculture that existed within this time, all written through a representational analysis.

Chapter 1 – The Lesbian Experience of Manual Labour

This chapter will have four parts and will outline the experiences lesbians had within the manual labour industry. Firstly, it will examine the meaning and idea of ‘the union brotherhood’ and the ways in which I believe this cultural organisation created an atmosphere of toxicity from within towards women (UAW, n.d.). This chapter will also function as a form of discussion surrounding the history behind forms of female masculinity, and how these masculine identities were ways in which the rest of society could actively segregate these lesbians. I will also be referring to multiple informational interviews of lesbians within the industry, and will end the chapter with discussion surrounding Miriam Frank’s theory of ‘dyke-baiting’, a theory that will be inherently relevant throughout this thesis (Frank, 2001, p. 26).

1.1 Lesbianism in the Union Brotherhood

The Brotherhood, within this context, refers to the male dominance that existed and still to this day exists in the manual labour industry, and stems from my knowledge of the organization The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. (Washington Post, 2004). This union brotherhood was originally formed as a response to the lack of stable conditions that existed within the construction industry in the 19th century, and carried on to become one of the largest unions in the United States. I believe it is crucial to mention the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners when discussing the labour movement in the United States, as their influence was like no other union at this time. It is also important to mention that the first woman who joined the union brotherhood was Margaret Elling's in 1935. (UAW, n.d.). Elling's membership in the union does not, in anyway, counteract the abuse and inequality that thousands of women suffered. A handful of women in a union of thousands of men does not negate the unfair gate-keeping of the industry, especially when internalised discomfort and violence towards women who fight to live outside of traditions exists. (Sisters in the Brotherhood: Mission and Action – United Brotherhood of Carpenters, 2022).

Out and proud lesbian and welder Linda Butcher was interviewed in 1979 by Martha Tabor. The interview was published in the women's radical news-journal *Off Our Backs* (1979). At the point in time when this interview took place, Linda Butcher had been working as a manual labourer for several years, yet was still “one of 4 or 5 women in a workforce of 500 men” (Tabor, 1979). Butcher found herself in the industry through frustration with the discrimination a female friend of hers was ongoingly experiencing. Through this anger, Butcher began to apply for jobs on construction sites and received multiple rejections, but never gave up. Butcher filed a discrimination complaint against one company that refused to

hire her because she was a woman, which at this time, was illegal under the civil rights act. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, an act created to prohibit any discrimination against anyone due to sex, race or sexuality was in place. The act had been passed years prior, but the majority of employers still had the power to ignore the act. Despite the legal aspect of women being allowed to work, it was still extremely culturally unaccepted, especially in this male-dominated, physically intense industry. The only people who showed solidarity to women in this industry were other women, and sometimes, Black men also showed support to their women co-workers. Butcher describes this as Black men recognizing that they 'are in the same boat' and the reasoning behind their solidarity is that 'they recognise we're in it together. They can empathize with us in our oppression and vice-versa, and that feels really good' (Tabor, 1979). Of course there is rarely any justified correlation between racism against Black people and white women's issues, but it is interesting that Butcher experienced this form of unity with Black men, and that they were only people, besides women, that she truly connected with throughout her multiple workplaces. It is common for oppressed groups of people to exhibit solidarity with other oppressed groups of people, despite them being oppressed for very different reasons, they usually tend to come to some form of understanding with one another. Unsurprisingly, it was the white men who exploited, dominated and hegemonized these lesbians and Black men. (Hooks, 1986)

In relation to the industries consensus on lesbianism, Butcher is a prime example of the rejection and 'isolation' lesbians experienced within the brotherhood if they were open about their sexuality (Frank, 2001, p.26). Butcher was consistently questioned and doubted, bullied by the men she spent hours upon hours with every day. I believe that the men she worked with experienced more denial towards her sexuality rather than anger, and that this was a general conflict that existed. Men at this time could not begin to understand the idea of a

woman desiring another woman, it was impossible to them. Butcher states in her interview with Tabor that the men she worked with ‘didn’t want to accept it because it’s too threatening...so they say, If I were a woman working here, I’d say the same thing because I’d want all these guys to stay off my back’ (Tabor, 1979). There are multiple accounts of precautions female manual labourers took to lessen the potentials of emotional and sexual abuse, one of them being to deny their sexuality, to submit to the men who were the majority. They despised women like Butcher in particular as she was an “out lesbian”, they could not understand why she would be proud, why she would be open, how she could live her life in such a shameful way. Butcher, despite the constant dismissal and on-going abuse she received, began to openly critique her workplace’s ethics and sentinel brotherhood, as she wanted more women to be allowed to work alongside her, and wanted to acquire more skills in the industry.

“I applied for an iron-worker’s job and they blocked me. I pushed hard and went to the union officials and read the contract and found they had to let me be an ironworker”.

Butcher refused to be treated unfairly, and ensured that she was aware of all of the laws that were in place to guarantee she knew her rights, and continued to fight against the brotherhood (Tabor, 1979).

1.2 Female masculinity and the butch lesbian identity



Fig- 6. “Linda Butcher, ship-fitter” Neville Island, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1979. By Martha Tabor. University of Maryland, Digital Collections

In (Fig. 8), we see Linda Butcher at work. Butchers identity within the lesbian community would be described as being a butch. A butch lesbian is a female who dresses in men’s clothing, has short hair, has traditional “male” mannerisms and is sometimes mistaken for being a cisgender man, depending on how masculine their features are. The specific identity of being butch within the lesbian community is one of the main identities that exists under the multi-faceted term female masculinity. Due to societal expectations of how women should exist, butches faced a lot of discrimination and rejection in the more traditionally female work-places, such as sales jobs, care jobs or secretarial positions. This came down to their masculine appearance. Unfortunately due to their masculinity, they were not seen as real

women, and were barely seen as human. Their unique experience of womanhood was rejected, which is what led many butch lesbians into becoming manual labourers, and in general following non-traditional career paths. It is believed that butches chose to enter the male-dominated manual labour industry due to this discrimination they faced within traditional women's work, but I will also argue that it was out of passion for the skill of craftsmanship, and the desire to be seen as strong and powerful. I will also argue that construction work was at this time considered a rite of passage for butch lesbians due to cultural stances that existed within the lesbian community. A lot of butches were radical feminists due to the hardship they and their community suffered, feminist ideas provided them hope for their future and allowed them to begin the journey of establishing equality within the working world, and specifically within world of manual labour. As Linda Butcher described it;

“My feminism and involvement in blue-collar work is related to my sexuality and my relationship with my parents. You can't separate them. Having a strong mother made all the difference in the world. My mother waitresses and my father is an alcoholic and I went through some traumatic experiences with him seeing him beat my mother up. Things like that had some influence on my development” (Tabor, 1979).

Referring back to my above description of the butch identity, Jack Halberstam, in his book *Female Masculinity* greatly theorises the multitudes of masculinity and how it can be expressed. Halberstam states that ‘masculinity is not the social and cultural and indeed political expression of maleness’ (Halberstam, 1998, p.1). Halberstam greatly theorises the idea of existence outside of traditional masculinity while still performing masculine traits. A question asked by Halberstam that is relevant in relation to the understanding of the union brotherhoods stances;

‘To recognize how completely we have ignored female masculinity as a culture, consider the following questions: Why is there no word for the opposite of “emasculatation”? Why is there

no parallel concept to “effeminacy”? (In fact, these two words mean exactly the same thing!) Why shouldn't a woman get in touch with her masculinity?' (Halberstam, 1998, p.269).

Continuously throughout society we have ignored women's desires and needs, and it is in no way surprising that the desire for one to be 'in touch with their masculinity' has been shunned. It has been psychologically drilled into society that women may only exist as women, and anything outside of this is unnatural. It is only now, in the year of 2022, that there has been actual efforts made in regards to women existing in the ways they want (Halberstam, 1998).

1.3 Black and Butch Working-Class Lesbians

There were multiple black, butch lesbians who existed within the manual labour industry. I believe it is important to dedicate recognition to these individuals, not only for fighting against misogyny and homophobia, but for consistently fighting against racism. From the ideas and works of the Black, lesbian activist Audre Lorde, a “triple oppression” results in silence and fear. Audre Lorde is relevant to this time in American history as she was a vocal activist in the United States, and ongoingly confronted the inequities of racism, sexism and homophobia towards Black women (Lorde, 1984). The following quote by Audre Lorde, from her book titled ‘The Masters Tools Will Never Dismantle The Masters House’ is extremely relevant within this sub-section-

"For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support" (Lorde, 1984)

(Fig. 2) and (Fig. 3) are Tabor’s only photographs that present Black and butch women in manual labour. The women present in the photographs are Lillian Lightbourne and Virginia Powell. These photographs by Tabor provide great representation of the strength and resistance that existed within these women. Despite the lack of information regarding the two’s sexual orientation and personal experience of being manual labourers, does not negate the possibilities and physical representation of lesbian identity and experience. I would also like to place further emphasis on my mention of these photographs being the only photographs I could find of Black women manual labourers, and this discovery furthered my need to dedicate a section of this thesis to these women.

In (Fig.2), Lightbourne is standing strong with a masculine stance and confidence that is hard to fake. Her cigarette in mouth, white collared jacket and masculine features confidently provide me with proof of her existing within the butch subculture. Alongside Lightbourne's evident masculinity, Powell, who is present within Fig. 3, provides a similar yet different representation. Powell evidently has softer, feminine features, but still exists within the classic lesbian cultural item of clothing, the white vest. Vice article, *Unveiling the Ultimate Lesbian Accessory* by Daisy Jones quotes the white vest as a 'subtle lesbian signal'. I believe this furthers my argument of items of clothing within this time being specifically used as forms of subtle representation. Within the article, Jones interviews Emma Hope Allwood, the head of Fashion at DAZED. DAZED is a critically acclaimed, queer dominated online magazine. Allwood describes the white vest through mentioning it as a form of resistance against gender stereotypes, and not just as a cultural indicator –

“Whether working class fetishization or a rejection of the artifice associated with the traditionally feminine, these things speak to a certain kind of masculinity- one that's practical, unpolished – that has been attractive for gay, bisexual, and queer women to claim ownership of” (Jones, 2020).

I believe Allwood's point of 'working-class fetishization' is relevant within the specific context of this thesis, as another form of oppression these women suffered was class oppression. Another element to the reasons why lesbians ended up working manual labour jobs, was due to lack of education and skills. Traditionally, most manual labour jobs have been seen as un-skilled work, and it is only within the last few years that the cultural stance surrounding this has changed. I believe this stance has changed due to more working-class representation in the media, and people feeling less ashamed, and more proud of their ethnicity and cultural background.

1.4 Hostility, Violence and Dyke-Baiting

“I’ve been called a lesbian when it’s not true and it’s not fair, and I’ve been called a lesbian when it was true and they’re gonna kill you if they find out.” Trees tells the story of how she and another woman (who was straight as an arrow) wanted a shanty where they could change their clothes in privacy. The steward cursed her, but after a series of complaints to the local, the order came to “send the bitches down to build the shanty”. When the women completed the task, “the men shit in the shanty and wrote on the door “Lesbians Local 69”” (Frank, 2001, p.29).

Queer activist, researcher and writer Miriam Frank provides an interesting insight into the experiences of lesbians who worked in the manual labour field and the abuse, hostility and violence they all experienced. Similarly to Tabor’s article on Linda Butcher, Frank’s article, ‘Hard Hats & Homophobia: Lesbians in the Building Trades’, focuses on providing information through interviewing lesbian women. Frank’s article was published through the leftist journal *New Labour Forum*, and interviews the lesbian Connie Ashbrook. Ashbrook is a feminist and ‘like many other feminist tradeswomen, she is also a lesbian’ (Frank, 2001, p.25). Ashbrook worked in the industry for several years and ‘covered a variety of union experiences: she has been a school bus driver, a truck driver, and a carpenter’. By the end of her career, she had worked as an elevator mechanic and was an important member of ‘Portland, Oregon’s local 23 of the International Union of Elevator Constructors’ (Frank, 2001, p.25). Ashbrook states in her interview with Frank that there is a ‘disproportionately high number of lesbians in the building trades’ and that it ‘derives not from any specific data, but from her many years’ experience in non-traditional labour, from networking in local lesbian communities, and from involvement in local and national tradeswomen’s organizations that for decades have provided support and self-help to women doing non-traditional work’ (Frank, 2001, p. 25).

Within 'Hard Hats & Homophobia: Lesbians in the Building Trades' Frank mentions the theory of dyke-baiting and states that almost all experiences of women in manual labour are also synonymous with experiences of sexism, abuse and harassment.

'Dyke-baiting pressures straight women to prove themselves as "real" women, and it pressures gay women to stick to the closet, thereby weakening female solidarity. As a form of sexualized intimidation against the entire female minority employed at the construction workplace, dyke-baiting conflates sexism with homophobia, and so diminished the status of all women, gay and straight' (Frank, 2001, p.26).

Due to the on-going dyke-baiting that existed within the manual labour field, many lesbian labourers stayed in the closet, and did not mention their sexual orientation. I imagine this secrecy to be not only difficult on the job, but I imagine it brought fear into daily life outside of the industry. I will argue that the lack of personal information attached to photographs and interviews of women in the manual labour field at this time is a result of dyke-baiting, and of course a general gate-keeping of the union brotherhood. These women lived in fear and a lot of the time could not trust anyone in their workplace. Below I have provided an example of closeted lesbians and supposed straight women supporting each other, but I imagine this sort of solidarity rarely existed, and was more so present within workplaces with unions (despite their issues) and places where there was a large enough female workforce, as put by Frank

"Most of the lesbians were closeted. All the women used to take their break together. We mysteriously had to go to the bathroom together at the same times, and we would hand out and just share stories, say how our days were going. There were many times when there would be ten women in the bathroom. Eight of us would be lesbians and the two non-lesbians might be making some homophobic crack and none of would say anything!...It was so horrible, so closeted, the fear of giving the guys one more bit of ammunition...' (Frank, 2001, p.29).

The oppression of lesbians was so extreme due to men's hostility, that even women were afraid of them.

Chapter 2 - The Creation of Lesbian Communities And How They Were Influenced by Second-Wave Feminism

This chapter will have two sections. Firstly it will focus on the creation of lesbian communities outside of the prominent heteronormative society that existed throughout the 1970s-1990s in The United States, mainly focusing on how manual labour lesbians connected outside of the union brotherhood. I will discuss the history of the underground lesbian bar scene, and how these spaces acted as forms of escape for lesbians who existed in the industry. The second section of this chapter will be dedicated to the idea of community outreach through the publishing of primarily left, lesbian feminist periodicals and different forms of activist writing. I believe both the underground lesbian bar scene and the publishing of periodicals are tied, and will argue that certain topics that existed within periodicals came into existence through the act of networking and finding a sense of belonging in these intertwined lesbian subcultures. The specific periodical I will discuss in this chapter is *Off Our Backs*, a revolutionary periodical that Tabor frequently wrote in alongside publishing her photographs from the series *Women in Blue-Collar Trades*, 1978-1981. To end the chapter, I will discuss the importance of second-wave feminism and how it influenced the creation of the two.

2.1 The Underground Lesbian Community

Throughout the 1960's-1980's in the United States, members of the LGBTQ+ community had no choice but to create their own community spaces. The community found each other through these underground spaces that mainly existed in secretive bars in urban neighbourhoods. It is important to mention that these spaces were kept hidden, and how members of the queer community found out about the spaces was purely by word of mouth. Jen Jack Giesecking (2020) states in their article, 'Mapping lesbian and queer lines of desire: Constellations of queer urban space', that gay liberation has been 'narrated' through these community spaces, and is still, in ways, how a lot of queer people, specifically lesbians, find each other. I place emphasis on how important these spaces were in relation to not only lesbian love, but lesbians finding their way in life. The bars have been described as being a then "safe" space for queer people. I place quotations on safe spaces as I believe they only existed as safe spaces for moments in time, due to the high volume of homophobic attacks that would regularly take place. The bars were raided by the police force frequently, and most people who would attend as regulars experienced some form of police brutality more than once. The police would continuously attempt to shut the bars down as a way to isolate the community, and believed the lack of community space would force them back into heterosexuality. Leslie Feinberg's novel, *Stone Butch Blues*, endlessly described as 'one of the most influential pieces of literature in the queer canon,' focuses on the life of its butch lesbian protagonist, Jess Goldberg (Bendix, 2018). It is suspected that Goldberg's life is based off Feinberg's own personal experience as a lesbian and manual labourer. *Stone Butch Blues* is the first queer novel ever written that realistically represents what it was like for working-class lesbians and other queer folks who existed in the manual labour industry. The novel has multiple references of lesbian bars, and the protagonist's first experience of entering a lesbian bar is described as being a 'tear releasing' experience, and that the women they saw

were ‘the handsomest women’ they had ever seen. (Feinberg, p.24, 1993). Feinberg provides an immensely passionate account of the reality lesbians faced- it describes the loneliness, the isolation, the hurt and misogyny that existed throughout The United States during this time of intense homophobia. The novel also describes the love they had from their community, and the resistance these underground bars allowed them to have.

A moment that furthers the importance of the underground lesbian bar is mentioned within an article I discuss in chapter 1, *Hard Hats & Homophobia: Lesbians in the Building Trades*, by Miriam Frank. Ashbrook, Franks subject tells us

‘...All of us, we would go to the bar after work, and there would be a lot of eye-rolling, talk about our ambivalence and hard feelings about not saying anything, feeling tempted to say something but also being scared’ (Ashbrook, quoted in Frank, 2001, p.29).

This quote furthers the significance of the community space the lesbian bar was. It allowed these lesbians to talk freely about the harassment they were experiencing, and allowed them a space to openly discuss what could be done about it. It also provided them a space to decompress after the workday, to exist apart from the misogynistic mind-set they were surrounded by day after day.

2.2 Lesbian, Feminist Periodicals

Throughout the Women's Liberation Movement, periodicals were made to allow women from all over The United States to move as one, and in the words of Jennifer L. Gilbert, 'feminist and left periodicals helped create a community of women, bound by their desire to fundamentally alter the way American society treated them' (Gilbert, 1993, p.2). This brings us to the importance of *Off Our Backs*, the periodical that was extremely influential towards the writing of this thesis.

The radical and feminist news-journal was continuously published from 1970-2008, making it the longest surviving feminist newspaper in the United States. *Off Our Backs* was based in Washington, DC and had multiple writers, all being women, who would correspond to the political climate and interview women for the journal on a regular basis. *Off Our Backs* focused on portraying the hardship women faced every day, the aim being to 'create vehicles for public discussion that were controlled by women, created by women, and used by women' (Gilbert, 1993, p.18). The journal has had thousands of interviews and made sure to have an array of experiences, always ensuring that the voices of disabled women, gay women, migrant women and women of colour were heard. *Off Our Backs* was determined to be accessible to all women and queer people, regardless of class and occupation. Due to *Off Our Backs*' accessibility, which was truly evident as copies of the news-journal cost as little as 1c, I believe the organization was not only involved in documenting change that was happening for women and queer people throughout this time in history, I too believe *Off Our Backs* played a huge part in encouraging radical change. *Off Our Backs* published a vast amount of the articles relating to women's and queer peoples experience in manual labour, and provides a multitude of experiences, with most of these women experiencing the issues they wrote about.

In 1962 percentages of women in the labour force increased significantly due to second-wave feminism, a era of feminism that focused on dismantling the institutionalised hatred of women. Constance Grady (2018) describes exactly what second-wave feminism fought against in her VOX article ‘The Waves of Feminism, and Why People Keep Fighting Over Them’,

“The second wave cared deeply about the casual, systemic sexism ingrained into society- the belief that women’s highest purposes were domestic and decorative, and the social standards that reinforced that belief- and in naming that sexism and ripping it apart.”

Due to second-wave feminism, The Equal Pay Act was passed in 1963, which was a tremendous deal. However, this did not stop the oppression that women faced in the labour force every day, especially for any woman who still existed outside of traditions, specifically Black and lesbian women. Due to this prominent oppression, the culture of trade unions became a huge importance, and thankfully, Off Our Backs has an incredibly rich archive of women who unionised, and made efforts to dismantle the union brotherhood. The Coalition of Labour Union Women was the first organization that consisted of all women trade unionists. (UAW, n.d.) The Coalition of Labour Union Women was founded by multiple women, but one of the more important founders of the union was the famous Olga Mada, who was ‘the first woman to serve on the United Auto Workers International Executive Board’ (UAW, n.d.). Evidently throughout this thesis, the societal stance on women in trade unions was individualistic, and no laws were followed, which was a result of gate-keeping from higher up government officials and their own personal disbelief in women. I believe that publicising these inequalities is what furthered the immense radical change, and this is relevant to my point of the true importance feminist periodicals had in not only a way of community solidarity, but publishing the inequality these lesbian, Black, working-class blue-collared workers suffered.

Conclusion

This thesis used the series of photographs, *Women in Blue-Collar Trades, 1978-1981* by Martha Tabor as a starting point in representing the subculture of the lesbian experience in blue-collar work that has been silenced throughout time. The photographs used to explore the subculture from a historic standpoint and provide information regarding the relationship between trade unions and the Women's Liberation Movement. It is important to mention that this subculture existed throughout this movement but is rarely ever mentioned in discussions surrounding the history of women's liberation. I believe this is due to institutionalised homophobia and a need to disregard LGBTQ+ history in certain forms of academia. The thesis challenges this systematic issue.

Furthermore, the thesis explores how women's queer identities dismantled the union brotherhood, as well as a deep exploration into female masculinity, how it is represented in blue-collar trades, and why it was formidable. Alongside using the series of images, the thesis explored many interviews in which the lesbians are given a voice and represent in detail their raw experiences. It investigated the coping mechanisms of lesbians throughout this oppression and provided insight into their communities and how important they were in their survival. This thesis delivers an analysis on the extent of class oppression and explores the triple oppressive system, 'racism, sexism, and homophobia' (Lorde, 1984) through the exploration of the photographs. There is further examination into the three oppressive systems through the observation of feminist periodicals and the ways in which they provided community and forms of solidarity for these lesbians, and how they can be seen as proof of how much these lesbians suffered.

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