

Original Article

**AN EXAMINATION OF EVOLUTIONARY THEMES IN 1950s-
1960s LESBIAN PULP FICTION**

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Abstract

Darwinian literary analysis is a way to examine texts and arrive at conclusions about evolved human behaviors, motivations, and emotions (Carrol, 1995, 2011). That is, by analyzing texts, it is possible to indirectly analyze human nature. Recently, scholars have examined the works of Jane Austen (Strout, Fisher, Kruger, & Steelworthy, 2010), Harlequin romance novels (Fisher & Cox, 2010), and folktales (Gottschall, Martin, Quish, & Rea, 2004) for this purpose. Although this prior work has been informative, it has only included heterosexual relationships. Symons (1979) noted that lesbian and gay populations are a vital group to gain insight into evolutionary sex differences, as their relationships involve only same sex individuals, thus highlighting dominant female and male mating behaviors. Therefore, in this paper, our primary goal is to analyze lesbian pulp fiction to better comprehend women's evolved mating strategies. We also consider the era that these books were most popular and explore the cultural climate in relation to the characters in the novels. In general, the way the characters are described and their relationship dynamics are consistent gender stereotypes concerning masculine versus feminine women.

Keywords: Darwinian literary analysis, lesbian, mating psychology, evolution, pulp fiction

Introduction

Over the past few decades, there has been an emergence of a field termed *literary Darwinism*. According to the founding scholar in the area, Joseph Carroll, in an interview (DiSalvo, 2009):

Literary Darwinists integrate literary concepts with a modern evolutionary understanding of the evolved and adapted characteristics of human nature. They aim not just at being one more "school" or movement in literary theory. They think that all knowledge of human behavior, including the products of the human imagination, can and should be subsumed within the evolutionary perspective.

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The main tenet of literary Darwinism is that one can study human nature, defined as the “genetically mediated characteristics typical of the human species” (Carroll, 2011, p. 4; see also p. 16-18). This can be used to produce and consume literature as well as other arts. Researchers in this area argue that human nature interacts with specific environmental conditions and typically focuses on human universals (Carroll, 2011, p. 6). Moreover, the premise is that the characteristics that compose human nature are “so firmly grounded in the adaptive logic of the human species that they exercise a constraining influence on every known culture” (Carroll, 2011, p. 17). Thus, those working within literary Darwinism focus on how people, everywhere and across time, have created novels with similar themes, or art that portrays particular emotions or scenes, for example.

Therefore, by focusing on a text and analyzing it for characteristics related to human nature, one is peering into the evolutionary history of humans. In this way, researchers can investigate evolved human behavior, emotions, motivations, and mating strategies (Carroll, 2011). This framework has been successfully applied to various literary genres; for example, scholars have examined the works of Jane Austen (Strout, Fisher, Kruger, & Steelworthy, 2010), Harlequin romance novels (Fisher & Cox, 2010), and folktales (Gottschall, Martin, Quish, & Rea, 2004) for this purpose.

Despite the recent attention paid to several genres of literature, one area that has received significant neglect is that of lesbian pulp fiction. There are at least two reasons for this oversight. First, a cursory examination of articles published within the last five years in *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *Journal of Social, Evolutionary and Cultural Psychology*, and *Human Nature* clearly shows that homosexuality is less studied than heterosexuality by those relying on the evolutionary framework. Second, pulp fiction refers to literature that was published for a limited time, such that the novels do not have the pervasive interest of readers, such as seen in the work of Jane Austen.

In the current study, we analyze lesbian pulp fiction and try to discern women’s evolved mating strategies, emotions and motivation, using the framework of literary Darwinism. We also consider the era that these books were most popular and explore the cultural climate in relation to the characters in the novels.

What is Lesbian Pulp Fiction?

Pulp fiction is a label that designates a vast amount of imaginative writing that spans from the early 1900s to the mid-1900s (Haining, 2000). The term pulp fiction acquired its name as a result of publishing companies printing the books on cheap pulp paper. The books were very affordable, costing ten cents per book, which increased their availability to a large audience (Haining, 2000). The low prices of the novels allowed diverse groups of people including the working class, teenagers, and young adults to be able to purchase the books (Haining, 2000). Although the paper inside was of low quality, the book covers were often vibrant and showcased provocative images such as scantily clad women (Haining, 2000; Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992).

Indeed, the covers were envisioned to lure readers to the books (Haining, 2000; Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992). Casual observation shows that the covers of the books immediately indicated that they were lesbian-themed. Covers often were campy, showing scantily clad women, and suggesting a relationship between the women. For example, some covers portrayed women leering at one another, undressing in front of another woman, or showing two women holding hands. Moreover, the covers portray the

formulaic nature of the novelline; the books were similar to romance novels today in that they had a writing formula (Keller, 2005; Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992). For example, in many of the lesbian pulp fiction novels one of the women was a *femme*, meaning she outwardly appeared very feminine, wore feminine clothes, and wore make-up (Keller, 2005; Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992). The other female often was then portrayed as *butch*, meaning she wore more masculine clothing, did not wear make-up, and was androgynous (Forrest, 2005; Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992). The covers often portray this dichotomy.

Once the novel was purchased, readers were confident the novel that would allow them to escape everyday life and to lose themselves in the novel (Chambliss & Svitavsky, 2008; Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992). Due to the fact that many lesbians felt the need to hide their sexual orientation in the 1940s to the 1960s, escapism was vital for coping with feelings of loneliness and isolation. By reading the novels, lesbians grew to realize that other women were like them, and they were not alone (Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992).

During the 1940s and 1950s, pulp fiction novels were very prominent and blanketed newsstands (Haining, 2000). There was a considerable array of genres including Westerns, crime, science fiction, and lesbian-themed books (Chambliss & Svitavsky, 2008). Although each of these genres is presumably worthy of study, we focus on the last, as this topic was politically interesting in the given time period (i.e., they faced censorship issues) and the focus on sex and romantic relationship dynamics allows them to be more readily explored using an evolutionary lens.

Lesbian pulp fiction novels were a popular form of literature in the 1950s and 1960s (Keller, 2005). The books were widely distributed in Canada and the United States; however, there were censor issues with many publishers because the lesbian content was regarded as morally unacceptable (Forrest, 2005; Keller, 2005; Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992). Often, the publishers would insist that one of the characters in these novels have something cataclysmic happen to them (Forrest, 2005; Keller, 2005; Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992). Two common endings are that one of the women would be shipped away to a different part of the world, or both women would tragically die (Forrest, 2005; Keller, 2005). Publishers insisted on unhappy endings, possibly so that they were able to appear as though they did not support the lesbian content of the books, as lesbianism was viewed by mainstream culture as immoral during that time period (Forrest, 2005; Keller, 2005; Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992).

It is important to again note that although many of the early lesbian pulp fiction novels had tragic endings, the endings eventually did become more positive in general. Over time, the censors began to relax rules towards lesbian fiction, and the publishers, in response, commenced the publication of books with less tragic endings (Forrest, 2005). Despite the early censorship, though, some prominent writers such as Ann Bannon and Vin Packer did not adhere to the tragic endings formula and started to write positive novels about women in the lesbian community. Bannon (1992) noted that after she was dropped from her publishing company she was able to write as she pleased, as she no longer had to adhere to the writing formula that the publishers required (Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992). Authors such as Bannon and Packer wanted to reach out to isolated lesbian women and they were successful in their endeavor (Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992).

Authors and Readers of Lesbian Pulp Fiction

There are discrepancies as to who actually bought and read the books. Reports indicate that millions of copies were sold between the years 1955 and 1969 (Forrest,

2005; Keller, 2005). For example, *Women's Barracks* sold four million copies and *Spring Fire* sold over a million copies (Keller, 2005).

As for the identity of the authors, there is evidence that many of the books were written by men as well as women (Forrest, 2005; Keller, 2005). Keller's (2005) investigation into lesbian pulp fiction indicates that although we know that many of the authors were writing the novels for other lesbian women, there is not enough information to conclusively answer who were the primary consumers of lesbian pulp fiction (Keller, 2005).

In addition, the readers of the books are conjectured by some scholars to have been men as well as women (Hermes, 1992; Keller, 2005). However, a documentary that examined lesbian life in the 1950s and 1960s entitled *Forbidden Love* includes interviews with many women who read lesbian pulp fiction. The women in the film reflect on purchasing the material and they speculate that many lesbians and women who were curious about lesbianism were primary readers (Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992). They also discuss that although these books were sold on newsstands, they felt the books had to be purchased in a covert manner as a result of the conservative cultural climate of the era.

Lesbian Mate Preferences

Before comparing lesbian romantic literature with that of heterosexual women, it is useful to review the literature on lesbian mate preferences. Research has shown there are different lesbian mate preferences depending on one's self-reported level of masculinity. For example, masculine lesbians rate younger women as more attractive (Jankowiak, Hill, & Donovan, 1992) and place a premium on youth and vitality more than non-masculine lesbians (Kenrick, Keefe, Bryan, Barr, & Brown, 1995). Also, masculine lesbians generally preferred visual stimuli when masturbating compared to non-masculine lesbians (Kenrick et al., 1995).

Further, masculine lesbians are not concerned about a partner's resources (Kenrick et al., 1995) but seem to be concerned with their personal ownership of resources. For example, masculine lesbians become jealous of a rival female who has resources compared to non-masculine lesbians (Kenrick et al., 1995).

These findings on women who describe themselves as masculine correspond to the research on the mate preferences of heterosexual men. Generally, heterosexual men find women who are younger (i.e., in their fertile years) most attractive (Buss, 2004; Schmitt, 2003). Men prefer visual stimuli more than heterosexual women do, as opposed to imagining an erotic scenario when masturbating (Buss, 2004). Further, men generally do not ascribe "resources" as a characteristic they find attractive in women, and are concerned about rivals' resources (Buss, 2004; Schmitt, 2003).

With that being said, studies on lesbians who are not masculine reveal different findings. A premium is not placed on youth by many lesbians (Deaux & Hanna, 1984). Lesbians generally prefer long-term mating, and often, it is the ideal that they ascribe to (i.e., a lesbian couple after having dated briefly will commit to each other and live together). Generally, there is not a "femme/butch" dynamic where one of the women is extremely feminine and the other very masculine (Johnson, 2004).

The Evolutionary Psychology of Heterosexual and Homosexual Romance Fiction

Previous work (Cox & Fisher, 2009; Fisher & Cox, 2010) has examined romance novels looking for Darwinian themes in relation to women's evolved mating psychology. Their work indicates that the titles of novels sold by Harlequin Enterprises, a global publisher of romance fiction, reflects women's evolved mate preferences and desires for a long-term, monogamous relationship with a man with resources and status. The titles also, however, reflect a preference for mates who are athletic and adventurous. Their later work on character description in Harlequin novels showed that heroines are vaguely described and change very little during the novel, whereas the hero is described in exact terms and changes from being a somewhat cad-like to a dad-like individual. Although these studies are informative, they are entirely based on a heterosexual paradigm, as does most of the work within this area.

One noteworthy exception is Salmon and Symons (2003) who investigated *slash fiction*. Slash fiction is a type of romance fiction where the main characters are two fictional men from television programs, movies, and other types of mainstream media (Salmon & Symons, 2004). Slash novels first appeared in the 1970s where women began composing romantic tales written about the love and friendship between Captain Kirk and Spock from the *Star Trek* television series. Slash fiction depicts the men as heterosexual, but then the characters realize that they are in love with one another. The genre has extended to include varying male dyads from television and movies. Some examples are Batman and Robin and Superman and Lex Luther. Slash fiction cannot be written and distributed because of copyright laws; therefore, slash fiction is shared and accessed through the Internet.

Similar to romance and lesbian pulp fiction novels, slash fiction is primarily written by women with an intended audience of women readers (Salmon & Symons, 2004). Slash fiction often includes depictions of graphic sex; however, it does not solely focus on it (Salmon & Symons, 2004). Instead, it focuses on the emotional relationship between the male characters (Kustritz, 2003; Salmon & Symons, 2003, 2004).

The love between the male dyads is based on deep emotional friendship that has endured trials and tribulations (Kustritz, 2003; Salmon & Symons, 2004). The men in the dyads are described as friends who know each other very well (Kustritz, 2003; Salmon & Symons, 2004). Akin to romance novels, slash fiction generally has a happy ending where the couple enters into a long-term monogamous relationship, and the union lasts forever (Kustritz, 2003).

To summarize, as a result of female authorship, the themes throughout slash fiction mirror the general pattern of women's evolved mating psychology. Slash novels portray intense emotionality in relation to sex. The characters end up bonded together in a monogamous relationship. They realize that they are soul mates, and would sacrifice everything for the other. Portrayals of these characters and what they desire in a pair bond mirror findings on the evolved mating preferences of women (Buss, 1989, 2004; Schmitt, 2003).

Although slash fiction and lesbian pulp novels are similar in that they are about the romantic (or sexual) relationship between same-sex individuals, they may have been written for different reasons. The former involves novels about men's relationships that are read by women who might be trying to fulfill a need to be more active, and less of the passive woman-in-waiting, as compared to traditional romance novels (Salmon & Symons, 2003). Meanwhile, lesbian pulp fiction was created, in part, to be read by the

same sex as talked about in the novels; the primary consumers match the relationship demographics of the characters in the novels (i.e., are lesbians; Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992).

The Present Study

Analyzing lesbian pulp fiction not only allows for an exploration of evolved mating psychology in women, it also enables researchers to assess the social climate that the books were written. Note that we are relying upon Unger's (1979) distinction, whereby sex is biological designation of male or female (or intersexed), and gender refers to one's femininity and masculinity.

To the best of our knowledge, there has been no examination of literature that is oriented towards a lesbian community. Thus, using this literature, our goal was to examine themes related to women's evolved mating strategies. One might wonder how it is possible to use an evolutionary framework, based on sexual reproduction and the propagation of one's genes into future generations, to study sexual relationships that are not based on individual fitness. There are two answers to this issue. First, it is possible that the novels talk about lesbian relationships using the same language as one might expect from a heterosexual relationship; they might focus on the characters as though they are male and female, and with the ultimate goal of having a sexual relationship that would otherwise produce a child. One way of documenting this possibility is if the novels rely on a highly masculinized "butch" character, with her partner being a highly feminized "femme" character, who perform very heteronormative actions based on their gender (e.g., the masculine character behaves like a typical man, while the feminine character behaves like a typical woman). If so, this undermines many lesbian relationships, in that in reality, the focus is removed from reproduction. Second, relationships involve far more than simply reproduction; they involve emotional bonding, alliances, companionship, and love, for example. One area arguably neglected within evolutionary psychology is that of lesbians; to date, there have been only a handful of attempts to understand the evolutionary basis of female same sex behavior (e.g., Roughgarden, 2004; Diamond, 2008). Therefore, novels involving same-sex relationships might highlight issues other than reproduction, which may assist in future researchers' understanding of non-heterosexual relationships.

Given that the novels portrayed in lesbian pulp fiction cover a wide range of issues, we felt it was necessary to limit our analysis to three key issues. Thus, we narrowed our search, to gender roles, character descriptions and descriptions of sexual experience.

Method

We used an anthology of lesbian pulp fiction edited by Katherine V. Forrest (2005) that included 22 novels, 15 of which we analyzed. We realize that we did not engage in representative sampling, as we instead used one person's collection via an anthology. However, Forrest gathered the best selling and most popular lesbian pulp fiction novels for the anthology. Moreover, it is difficult to find lesbian pulp fiction, and we were unable to find a method that would enable us to use a more representative approach. Most novels in the anthology, as far as we know, were written by women, for

women. The anthology contains novels written between 1950 and 1965. See Table 1 for titles of the novels (and their authors) that we used in our analysis.

Using a qualitative analysis, we examined all the novels in the anthology to select the ones that included information pertaining to gender roles, sexual experience, or detailed character descriptions. Many of the excluded novels were brief, and lacking in sufficient detail about one of the characters involved. Once we established that a novel fit our criteria, it was examined in detail according to how gender roles, sexual orientation and the characters were described. A list based on these three dimensions was created after reading two novels, and a reiterative process occurred, such that the next novel would be read, new words added to the list (i.e., that dealt with gender roles, sexual orientation or character description) and then the first author returned to the earlier novels to see if they were included. In the end, she looked for situations and words that were similar in all texts. For example, if a character was described as “masculine,” she recorded which novel and the context. The same pattern was used when searching for themes in all explored works. Half of the novels were then read by the second author, with the finished list, to ensure that there were no missing themes.

Table 1. Titles and Authors in the Order of Table of Contents

Title	Author
<i>Women’s Barracks</i>	Teresa Torres
<i>Spring Fire</i>	Vin Packer
<i>Summer Camp</i>	Anne Herbert
<i>These Curious Pleasures</i>	Sloane Britain
<i>The Third Street</i>	Joan Ellis
<i>Chris</i>	Randy Salem
<i>The Third Sex</i>	Artemis Smith
<i>The Girls in 3B</i>	Valerie Taylor
<i>Return to Lesbos</i>	Valerie Taylor
<i>The Strange Women</i>	Miriam Gardner
<i>The Flesh is Willing</i>	Dorcas Knight
<i>Three Women</i>	March Hastings
<i>The Dark Side of Venus</i>	Shirley Verel
<i>Twilight Girl</i>	Della Martin
<i>Edge of Twilight</i>	Paula Christian

Note: Some author names are pseudonyms

Results

We found seven prevalent themes that relate to gender roles, sexual experience, or characters’ descriptions. We provide examples by way of brief excerpts relating to each theme in Appendix A.

Theme 1: Masculinity and Androgyny

The first theme we found was one of masculinity or androgyny, where one of the women in the central relationship was described as being either more masculine or androgynous compared to the other woman (note that the two terms are not synonymous,

in that androgyny usually means high femininity and high masculinity such that the individual is gender-neutral; Bem, 1974). Eleven of the fifteen novels contained a woman who had an androgynous (or potentially masculine) name. Some examples are “Chris,” “Mitch,” and “Terry.” These women were often described with words generally associated with a masculine appearance; for example, they are portrayed as physically muscular, athletic, and lean. Character descriptions of these women included words that are generally associated with personality traits of men. For example, one woman was described as having a “hardness to her personality.”

Theme 2: Femininity

The second theme, potentially related to the first, was that one woman in the relationship was described in very feminine terms. Nine novels had characters with very feminine names such as “Violet,” “Barby,” and “Caroline.” In each of these novels, these characters were described as having a feminine personality. Often the feminine women would make the masculine or androgynous female “lose control” because of their overpowering femininity. The masculine or androgynous women described these feminine women as “ideal.” Physically, the feminine women were portrayed as having large breasts, small waists, voluptuous hips, soft skin, and long and flowing hair. These features describe characteristics of a woman who is of fertile age, and fertile women are generally the most attractive to men. The masculine and androgynous women in the novels both prefer women who possess these features and who dress in a stereotypical feminine manner.

Theme 3: A Dyad Composed of a Younger and Older Woman

The third theme was that of the dyad being composed of an older woman and a younger woman, rather than two women of similar ages. This pattern of an older with a younger woman was observed in eight novels. It is important to note that the older woman was on average 4 to 6 years older, and they were generally described as career oriented. Older women were portrayed as wanting to please the younger woman financially and sexually. Often the older woman did not have the means to take care of the younger woman financially, but, if she could, she would do so willingly. The younger women were presented as more innocent, and they wanted to be taken care of financially and emotionally. They were also described as “sweet” and as an “idealist” who are positive and hopeful about life. Younger women were also portrayed as sexually teasing, especially if they were feminine. Feminine women often sexually teased older, masculine women knowing they had power over them. Teasing was used to convince or try to make the older woman comply with the younger woman’s requests. In many novels, it seemed that these women knew that they had sexual power over the masculine women because of their femininity and age.

Theme 4: High Emotionality

The fourth theme was that women in the novels were very emotional with each other. This theme of high emotionality was observed in every novel that we analyzed. It did not matter if the women were masculine or feminine or older or younger. Generally, all the women listened to each other and talked about their feelings at length. The women

wanted to be listened to when needed, and to be told that they are loved. The women communicated with each other openly and did not hide their feelings and thoughts from each other. If something was wrong with the character, the other woman would instantly know something was not right.

Theme 5: Women as Receipts of Care

In general, the women wanted to be taken care of by their partner emotionally, physically, and financially. Six novels had a theme of women wanting to be a recipient of care. Often, both women wanted to take care of the other, but they also wanted to be cared for by their partner. Masculine women were portrayed as wanting to take of their partners financially, while feminine women wanted to attend to their partner's emotionality and comfort. If the characters did not have the means to take care of the partner financially or emotionally, they typically at least expressed a desire to do so. For example, if the younger woman in the relationship did not have adequate finances (because of the era they lived) it was the older partner's intent to take care of her financially to the best of her ability. Further, the younger woman wanted to take care of the older woman by cooking, cleaning, and engaging in domestic chores.

Theme 6: Perfect Sexual Experience for Both Women

All the novels we examined contained the theme of a perfect sexual experience for both women. The sexual experience for women was portrayed in overly romantic terms. The sexual and emotional needs of both partners were always met during a sexual encounter. Further, both women always achieved an orgasm in response to the sexual interaction. The descriptions of romance and lovemaking ranged from slow and tender, under the moonlight, to losing control of the self (like an animal) during sexual encounters. Emotion was directly tied to the sexual encounters, and the characters often cried with happiness after the lovemaking experience.

Theme 7: Preference for Long-term Relationships

Overall, the women desired long-term, monogamous, romantic relationships, and they expressed the desire to stay in love with each other. Eleven novels included women preferring long-term monogamous relationships. Frequently, the characters declared their undying love for each other, and asserted that nothing could tear them apart (except external circumstances like the culture of the time). The women expressed a strong desire to be with each other if they could do so; if the women did not end up together, they spoke about how much they wanted to be together. In general, there was a strong preference for long-term mating, where an individual's emotional and physical needs were satisfied by one particular person. Both women, whether feminine or masculine, younger or older, desired safety, security, long-term prospects, and monogamy from each other.

Discussion

Much of the lesbian community during the golden years of pulp fiction writing spanning the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s adhered to the ascribed gender roles that

saturated North American society (Hermes, 1992; Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992). Many lesbians felt that they had to either be a femme or a butch lesbian mirroring the gender roles of heterosexual women and men. Indeed, lesbians often had to decide if they were going to be butch or femme (Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992). If a woman was a femme, she ascribed to a feminine gender role and, consequently, she looked and dressed very feminine, wearing dresses and high heels, wearing make-up, acting cheerfully, and engaging in traditional “female” activities. Femmes also acted coy and flirty and expected butch lesbians to pursue them and treat them chivalrously (Hermes, 1992; Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992). If a woman was butch, she ascribed to a physically masculine gender role where she was described to dress like men, wearing pants and suits. Butch women typically had shorter hair than feminine women and did not wear make-up. Personality characteristics of butch women were described as “hard” or “abrasive” compared to femme women. As we reviewed, there was a strong dichotomy between characters who adhered to a feminine stereotype, and characters who were either more androgynous or masculine. This distinction is in keeping with a femme/butch dichotomy, although arguably, some of the androgynous characters were not as masculine so as to warrant the label “butch.” Numerous authors of lesbian pulp fiction, and indeed many lesbians of the era, were displeased at the strict butch/femme dyads observed at known lesbian hang outs that mirrored the pervasive, heterosexual, masculine/feminine gender role dynamics of mainstream society (Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992). By eventually writing novels that relaxed butch/femme roles, the authors were expressing their objection to the overall rigid gender roles that were potentially enforced by mainstream heterosexual society. Lesbian women did not always want to be butch or femme and often did not fit with the polarized groups, nor did they want to conform to this dichotomy (Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992).

Some of the themes we uncovered in the anthology of lesbian pulp fiction coincide with research on women’s evolved mating psychology. The first theme discussed was one of the women being described in masculine or androgynous terms, whereby they were attracted to women who are portrayed as extremely feminine. Conversely, the feminine women are described in terms that are related to their peak fertility (i.e., low waist-hip ratio, buxom bust). The portrayal of the masculine female (and less so, the androgynous female) versus the feminine female coincide with studies on heterosexual men and women’s evolved mating psychology. Masculine (and androgynous) lesbians had preferences akin to heterosexual men, and feminine lesbians were like heterosexual women. There is research demonstrating a distinct difference between lesbian women who are masculine and lesbians who are non-masculine (Singh, Vidaurri, Zambarano, & Dabbs, 1999). Masculine lesbian women share comparable mating preferences to heterosexual men (Singh et al., 1999). Similar to the masculine lesbians portrayed in the anthology, masculine lesbians prefer women who are more feminine and are most attracted to women who look fertile (Singh et al., 1999). In addition, masculine lesbians are more likely to want to financially support a feminine lesbian, and are threatened by rivals who may compete with them (Buss, 2004). We saw in our analysis that many masculine or androgynous women did want to take care of a younger, feminine women financially.

When we look at current research on feminine lesbians, the findings do not coincide with what is portrayed in the anthology, particularly with regards to investigations on appearance. Many of the feminine women extenuated their femininity and used it to attract other women. Further, butch women made it known that they were

very attracted to feminine women. Both feminine and masculine women placed a high premium on physical appearance via flaunting their physical appearance or desiring feminine looking women. In a study of personal advertisements of heterosexual men and women, and homosexual men and women, lesbians mentioned their physical attractiveness less often than all other groups and expressed emotionality more than men. They also requested photographs of potential partners the least and mentioned specific physical characteristics (e.g., weight, eye color, body build) less frequently than all other groups (Deaux & Hanna, 1984). These findings are in sharp contrast to masculine lesbians who place a high value on physical attractiveness (Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Singh et al., 1999). Most women in the personal advertisement study were feminine lesbians seeking the same, thus highlighting that many lesbians do not couple in a butch/femme dynamic as portrayed in the many lesbian pulp fiction novels. However, similar to the novels, lesbians did mention emotionality, such as wanting to find a life partner and looking for love more than men.

Our central point is that in both the lesbian pulp fiction novels and the existing scientific literature, there is a distinct difference between masculine lesbians and feminine lesbians, but we propose that the *degree* of this difference has been wrongly inflated. The two themes of a younger/older lesbian dyad and a butch/femme dyad as being the typical relationship standard, as reinforced by the novels, is *not* supported by current research (Levin & Blitzer, 2006; Walker, Golub, Bimbi, & Parsons, 2012). Most lesbians do not adhere to a butch/femme dynamic and often view the terms as passé and, at times, insulting (Levin & Blitzer, 2006). These discrepancies most likely attest to the gender norms that existed when the novels in the anthology were written. We do not know how many lesbians of that era felt constrained by the terms, but we do have examples of narratives where many lesbians did not like the butch/femme dynamic and rebelled (Pettigrew & Fernie, 1992). It may be no surprise that in America at the end of the golden age of lesbian pulp fiction (i.e., the 1960s) the women's movement, gay rights movement, and racial movement rapidly rose to the consciousness of the world, thus allowing lesbians who were once constrained by stringent rules to be able to be who they really felt that they were, rather than ascribe to stereotypes.

As predicted by evolutionary theory, our analysis of lesbian pulp fiction showed that women who were portrayed as very feminine desired the resources of the women who were older and more masculine. The theme coincides to studies that find that heterosexual females prefer older men compared to younger men and men with resources compared to men who do not (Buss, 1989, 2004; Schmitt, 2003, 2005). However, some research shows that lesbians who are non-masculine do not desire resources from potential partners; lesbians are thought to be generally more egalitarian, as compared to heterosexual couples (Levin & Blitzer, 2006).

Likewise, there is a strong desire for long-term mating among all women in the novels, with monogamy as the ideal, which is congruent with the literature on sex difference in desired relationship length (e.g., Buss, 1989). Research has demonstrated that cross-culturally, females compared to males, prefer long-term mating to short term mating and adhere to this mating strategy (Schmitt, 2003; 2005). Along with monogamy, most women felt that their emotional needs could be satisfied by one person, and both of the women desired safety and security from each other. In light of our discussion on masculine women and how they are generally portrayed as having a male-style mating preference, there is a discrepancy in the novels because these women were portrayed as desiring a long-term, monogamous relationship, with safety and security, and want to be

taken care of by their partner, yet research on masculine lesbians does not support this conclusion. Masculine lesbians often desire a variety of sexual partners and do not desire monogamy; they often feel that they do not need to be taken care emotionally or otherwise (Singh et al., 1999).

To summarize, our study of lesbian pulp fiction and women's evolved mating strategies revealed that the novels and research findings at times overlap, yet in several instances, there are discrepancies. The primary cause of the discrepancies seems to stem from the fact that masculine lesbians are portrayed in the novels as following a female evolved mating strategy (e.g., desiring monogamy), yet the research shows they tend to follow a male mating strategy (e.g., desire sexual variety). The masculine women in the novels portrayed in the anthology did have some characteristics that are supported by research as being similar to a male-typical reproductive strategy; these characters were usually older, wanted to take care of a feminine partner, and desired a younger and presumably fertile female partner. In contrast to male-typical mating strategies, however, the masculine women in the anthology novels also desired monogamy or long-term mating, safety and security from their partner, and they want to be taken care of emotionally. Interestingly, these characteristics of butch women are not supported by research on contemporary masculine lesbians. Moreover, the novels we analyzed described lesbians who were in older/younger couples and in butch/femme couples, which are patterns not supported by research findings. The typical marriage pattern in the 1950s-1960s was a nuclear family where women and men ascribed to "typical" female and male gender roles. Some of the novels had characters that shadowed the heteronormative gender roles of the era. Most lesbians who are not masculine are in relationships with women of a similar age and not in a butch/femme dynamic that was very prevalent the anthology. We found some characteristics that are a testament to women's evolved mating strategies. All women in the anthology desired monogamy (as mentioned above even the butch women) and long-term mating. This finding coincides with research that demonstrates that, cross-culturally, women more than men desire long-term mating and monogamy (Buss, 2004).

There are a few noteworthy limitations to our study, with the foremost being the selection of the novels. Due to the lack of available lesbian pulp fiction novels in today's market (either used novels or reprinted), we had to rely on an anthology, and consequently, we were unable to select a random sample. As a result, the themes we found might represent a skewed sample based on the unknown selection process used by the anthology editor. However, the anthology did include the best selling and most popular lesbian pulp fiction novels, so it is unlikely that the sample is weakly representative of the greater body of published work. Another limitation concerns our methodology, in that we had two coders who analyzed the content for the words and descriptions that described the themes in the text. It may have been beneficial to include additional coders, naïve to evolutionary psychology, so that we could ensure that the coding system was valid and results were accurate. A third limitation concerns our inability to ensure the authors of the novels were women. Although Forrest (2005) expresses her confidence that most of the novels were written by women, for women, we do not know for sure how many were written by men. Thus, our findings may be affected as a result of this shortcoming.

Darwinian literary analysis is a burgeoning field of research that contributes to the understanding of evolved mating psychology of women and men. The majority of Darwinian literary analysis uses heterosexual sources, however, as is demonstrated in this

paper, examining slash fiction, lesbian pulp fiction and modern text that feature lesbian and gay themes can also highlight evolved differences and similarities in the mating psychology of women and men. More studies are needed on lesbian pulp fiction; however, future research could examine gay male pulp fiction from a Darwinian analysis to highlight men's evolved mating psychology. The lesbian pulp fiction genre that expanded from the 1940s to the 1960s allows for a very interesting research endeavor not only from a Darwinian perspective, but also from a cultural perspective. As we found, rigid gender roles were employed throughout the lesbian pulp fiction novels. Generally in the novels we examined, what heterosexual men generally prefer in terms of female attractiveness and personality parallels what the masculine women generally find attractive. Conversely, what feminine lesbian women found physically and emotionally attractive parallels what heterosexual women find attractive. However, most lesbians are not in a so-called butch/femme relationship or are paired together in an older younger dyad. It would be interesting to parcel out how much the cultural climate influenced how the women were portrayed in the novels. Further, a comparison of modern lesbian writing and the lesbian pulp fiction genre may highlight the evolving cultural changes from the mid nineteenth hundreds to present day.

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Appendix A

Excerpts from Lesbian Pulp Fiction Stories in Relation to Themes

Theme 1: Masculinity and Androgyny

There was something strong about Kim, but it wasn't an unpleasant strength like a man's strength was; it was an assurance and a protectiveness that seemed very natural and soothing. (*Third Sex*, p. 126)

The young men at the bar were actually robust girls completely manly in their posture and actions. So these are the "butches" Toni was telling me about, Val thought silently. (*Edge of Twilight*, p. 320)

Theme 2: Femininity

Alison was the kind of woman most men looked for all their lives and never found. Warm, loving, intelligent, beautiful, charming and completely feminine. And she was in love with me. (*These Curious Pleasures*, p. 69)

Theme 3: A Dyad Composed of a Younger and Older Woman

"Don't deny it Beth. I may be a kid, but I know you want me as much as I want you, and maybe more." Quote by Peggy, a younger woman speaking to an older woman. (*Summer Camp*, p. 49)

Theme 4: High Emotionality

"Be strong for two. The words on the storybook she'd had as a child came dancing on the scene of her mind: "Now We Are Two." (*Spring Fire*, p. 36)

"I'll die if I can't kiss you." (*The Third Street*, p. 99)

"You're a different person, primitive, uninhibited and so completely mine. And the things you say at that time! Like they came from deep inside you where your sincerest feelings are." (*These Curious Pleasures*, p. 76)

"Then, in a voice that was heavy with desperation said, "I love you so much. Too much." (*These Curious Pleasures*, p. 73)

Theme 5: Women as Receipts of Care

“Would you want me to go on ahead and get dinner ready?” Warmth encircled her. She felt needed, appreciated. “I could have everything ready by the time you get home.” (*The Third Street*, p. 94)

“Mmm.” Pat was off at the closet, reaching in for a hanger for a coat. “You’re spoiling me like crazy.” (*The Third Street*, p. 95)

“Ursula wanted only one thing, to keep this refuge forever, this warmth, this security.” (*Women’s Barracks*, p. 17)

Theme 6: Perfect Sexual Experience for Both Women

“And then she lost track of separate sensations, conscious only of softness, of sweetness, of wave after wave of spreading small shivers that carried her along their crest.” (*The Strange Women*, p. 174)

“Sex was like an ascent to the clouds.” (*The Flesh is Willing*, p. 207)

Theme 7: Preference for Long-term Relationships

“I love you because of what you are and not just because I need to love. I love you and nothing in this world is more important than being with you.” (*These Curious Pleasures*, p. 85)

“Somehow I feel that there must be something evil in my wanting to have you be the center and meaning of my life. Sloane, I want that so very much. God help me, I adore you.” (*These Curious Pleasures*, p. 74).

“Every time I leave you, I feel like the original Christian martyr. I love you so, Cori, that whatever feelings I’ve had for anyone else are completely eclipsed by it.” (*The Flesh is Willing*, p. 210).