

Episode 1: Intro: What are feminist restaurants?

[ambient restaurant sounds with a drum beat]

[restaurant bell]

Welcome to Feminist Ingredients for Revolution: A Food and Queer History Podcast! Thank you for listening! I'm Dr. Alex Ketchum. I'm a scholar of food, gender, feminist, and tech history and the author of the book *Ingredients for Revolution: A History of American Feminist Restaurants, Cafes, and Coffeehouses*. This is the first episode of the podcast.

[Music plays, vocalists sing "Feminist. Ingredients. For Revolution! A Food. and Queer, History Podcast!"]

[restaurant bell]

I wanted to tell you a little bit about what to expect from the podcast and go over some key concepts and terms that will recur throughout the podcast... such as what even is a feminist restaurant?

So first things first. What will this podcast look like? It will be a limited run of episodes in which I discuss feminist food history, especially the history of feminist restaurants, cafes, and coffeehouses, many of which were run by lesbians and queer women. These histories will be accompanied by interviews with other scholars of feminist and LGBTQ+ food histories. The goal of the podcast is to make food, feminist history, and LGBTQIA2S+ history scholarship more accessible.

All episodes will be released with accompanying transcripts that will be available on the same day that the episode is released.

Some episodes to look forward to include:

- a discussion of what is feminist food
- what is a feminist nexus
- Thirst Space: a discussion of lesbian and gay bars
- feminist, queer, and women's cookbooks
- generational differences between feminists
- and feminist food futures!

Let's get started.



(alt image caption: The image is the cover of Mary Watkins' Something Moving record. Mary Watkins sitting at the counter of the Brick Hut cafe. Watkins faces the viewer, holding a coffee cup. 3 customers sit on stools and 2 workers are behind the counter. The Olivia Records logo is in the top right corner).

Segment of song plays: Mary Watkins' Brick Hut from 1978
(32 seconds to 1:16)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDGp2Oluyzo>

You just heard a snippet of Brick Hut by Mary Watkins, written in 1978. It is the third track on Mary Watkins' 1978 album "Something Moving." Watkins, wrote the song

about the feminist restaurant, the Brick Hut Café of Berkeley, California which was in business from 1975- 1997. The cover of the album shows Watkins sitting at the counter at the first location of the Brick Hut Café, which lasted from 1975-1983, until the owners had to relocate. I've included a photo of the album cover in the transcript. If you look closely at the album cover you can see the original menu was small. It was painted by Peggy Mitchell of the all woman rock band BeBe K'Roche, on a board attached to the hood above the stove. The lesbian feminist record company, Olivia records, produced both BeBe K'Roche and Watkins' albums.

[a few notes of electronic music]

The Brick Hut was located around the corner from Olivia Records, the feminist record company that was responsible for producing most of the “women’s music” during the 1970s and 1980s— don’t worry in future episodes we will talk more about what actually is and was “women’s music.”

What you need to know for now is that The Brick Hut was so closely linked to the Bay Area’s lesbian and feminist women’s music scene that lesbian poet and Black Panther Pat Parker co-wrote with Mary Watkins “The Brick Hut Song” as part of Watkins’s first album with Olivia Records, *Something Moving*. Stars Vicki Randle and Linda Tillery are also featured on this album and they frequented the cafe. As Pat Parker and Watkins’s lyrics explain, “It’s always crowded, got to wait for a seat / but watching the people is some kind of dream.” The original collective that started the Brick Hut was Cheryl Jones, Claudia Hartley, Helen McKinley, Karen Ripley, Marshall Berzon, Randi Hepner, Sharon Davenport, and Wendy Welsh. By 1976, the collective included Joan Antonuccio, Cynthia La Mana, and Teresa Chandler. The Brick Hut was the place to be in Berkeley, California.

So I’ve now said multiple times that The Brick Hut Cafe was a feminist restaurant.

What is the definition of a feminist restaurant? (especially within the American and Canadian contexts)

For the purposes of my research and work, feminist restaurants were self identified -- I wasn’t interested in saying what was or wasn’t feminist but I was interested in why a restaurant’s owners and founders would identify their space as feminist. To avoid policing who can call themselves feminist and to make the project the most manageable, I decided that a restaurant must be identified as feminist in either its title, in flyers, in interviews, or in descriptions in feminist restaurant reviews, magazines, or periodicals. Within these parameters, a central tenet of the restaurant owners and

operators' philosophy was a focus on the needs of women and feminists above all other goals. My work examines intentional feminist spaces and is interested in why owners would choose to call their restaurant "feminist."

[a few notes of electronic music]

These restaurants acted as spaces that challenged the status quo around cooking and consumption, and fulfilled the desire for geographies apart from men. The founders felt that they needed spaces separate from male dominated establishments in order to escape oppressive formal restraints that regulated female socializing. Some were women only. Some were not. Although many were not closed to men, they focused on women. Here again we can see this theme and tension of what the word "women" means. Did it mean all women? Did it mean lesbian women? Was it trans inclusive? Feminist restaurants served what they deemed to be 'feminist food': food that was usually vegetarian and represented their feminist and environmentalist values.

In order to challenge the hierarchies of many restaurants, feminist restaurants would often have windows open so you could see the people working in the kitchen. This was prior to the popularization of the open kitchen concept. Customers would often grab their own food and dishes. Tipping was usually banned. Within the restaurant organization themselves, they were often run by collectives with members rotating positions. The restaurants often would have sliding scale menu items to make the costs more accessible. Some functioned as clubs with membership fees. A constant challenge was trying to pay the workers living wages, pay farmers and food producers living wages, and have affordable prices for a clientele of primarily women, often lesbians, who were paid significantly lower wages. Trying to maintain this balance usually failed and led to burn out and overwork and tension in collectives.

[a few notes of electronic music]

Some of these restaurants started prior to the passage of the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (ECOA) in 1974 in the United States, which meant that loans couldn't be denied on the basis of sex or race. While Canada does not have equal credit opportunity legislation, per se, human rights legislation passed in 1977 offered similar protection as the ECOA. However, in practice, many women still could not get a line of credit in their own names and still needed a husband or father to have his name on the loan- as they

did prior to the passage of the ECOA. This was made further difficult as many of the women who started these restaurants were lesbians, a significant number of whom were Jewish. Women starting these restaurants faced discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, religion, race, and class. Feminist restaurants sometimes could get loans from the Feminist Credit Unions that began to pop up around this time, but the founders often relied on donations-- or crowdfunding as we might call it today.

Since women of color and lesbian women of color faced further barriers to getting loans, many created coffeehouses which were like pop-up events in which there was food, drinks, music, dancing, and entertainment. By not requiring a permanent space, hosting feminist coffeehouses was more accessible to working class lesbians and many women of color.

Feminist restaurants and cafes engaged with their communities by sponsoring guest speakers, concerts, poetry meetings, and art shows—engaging their community through audio, written texts, images, and textures. Feminist restaurants, cafes, and coffeehouses served as cultural and social centers for feminist and lesbian feminist communities. These businesses served as concert venues for musicians like Watkins and lesbian folk singer Alix Dobkin and locations where women could work as out-lesbians.

These restaurants provided economic opportunities both for the people working there and affiliated businesses and artistic and cultural ventures. Importantly, they were sometimes one of the few places where people could be “out” at work- as lesbians or as feminists- and at least in ideology, working outside of the patriarchy. The owners of these businesses wrote cookbooks and produced other cultural ephemera. Importantly they flipped the narrative of the kitchen as an inherent site of women’s oppression and showed the empowering potential within cooking.

Okay, it has been fifty years since Dolores Alexander and Jill Ward founded the first (lesbian) feminist restaurant in the United States, Mother Courage of New York City in 1972. From 1972- 1989 there were around 230 of these spaces in the United States and Canada. You could find them in large, medium, and small cities– and in college and university towns. They existed in most US states and Canadian provinces. Coffeehouses didn’t need as large of a population to support themselves and could exist in even more rural areas. Especially around the 2000s there was a revival of new feminist restaurants, cafes, and coffeehouses (especially after 2015). You can see a map of these spaces at my website, thefeministrestaurantproject.com

[electric guitar plays]

Feminist restaurants, cafes, and coffeehouses raise some important questions. Some of which we will be addressing throughout this podcast:

- What does it mean for a restaurant or business to be lesbian? queer? Feminist? What does it mean for food to be lesbian? queer? Feminist?
- What are some of the financial challenges for these businesses?
- What strategies and forms of resilience have feminists and LGBTQ+ folks used to overcome these financial challenges?
- What can historical LGBTQ businesses teach us about LGBTQ finances/ starting + running businesses, particularly focused on food, today?
- Are there generational differences between feminists and LGBTQ+ businesses of the past (especially lesbian and queer women's spaces) and the queer businesses of today?

And of course, what do we mean when we are talking about feminism?

There are many types of feminism. I am not interested in imposing a single prescriptive definition of feminism when discussing these restaurants, cafes, and coffeehouses— and the same goes with the rest of the podcast. The feminism of this podcast, in the broadest sense, is about the social, political, and economic equity of all sexes and genders. The feminist framework of this project seeks to create a socially just world and combats the forces of sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, racism, classism, ableism, and colonialism, while taking environmental concerns seriously. Feminism is not static; rather, feminism is an ideal that one is striving towards. It is a process.

When looking at the history of these restaurants, we can also see that activism takes many forms, depending on how you define activism. Sure, activism can be a march or a protest or a boycott. But activism can also be art. It can be creating community spaces. It can be about making new kinds of businesses such as new kinds of restaurants, bookstores, credit unions, and more! In this podcast I'm going to use this expanded version of activism. For reasons such as people having various mobility disabilities; chronic illness; being unable to get childcare; having to work multiple jobs; not being able to risk arrest because of immigration status; and more, many people cannot go to marches, but they can still do activism. Social movements also have tensions. Activists have disagreements. Different people have more or less power within activist groups, even a group of marginalized people. The same goes of course with feminist activism. In this podcast, we will be looking at how feminism intersects with food— and how that can be a form of activism.

[electric guitar plays]

Contemporary feminist restaurants, cafes, and coffeehouses build upon the work of earlier generations; some owners of more recent feminist eateries even have a direct connection to the past. There is sharing between generations. Contemporary feminist restaurants and cafes continue to grapple with similar challenges that plagued the restaurants founded between 1972 and 1989, while also reflecting the characteristics of feminist movements today. Despite generational differences, the human need for finding community spaces where one feels accepted and supported continues, and the desire to create spaces that reflect their founders' feminist values is as true today as it was in 1972. Food can be key in this process.

[restaurant bell]

Feminist Ingredients for Revolution: A Food and Queer History Podcast will explore all of this and more over the course of the following episodes. Please follow the podcast to be notified of new updates. All transcripts are available at:

thefeministrestaurantproject.com

My book *Ingredients for Revolution: A History of American Feminist Restaurants, Cafes, and Coffeehouses* is coming out Fall 2022 from Concordia University Press. You can receive 20% off pre-orders with the discount code KETCHUM20. I've included the link in the shownotes and the transcript

(<https://www.concordia.ca/press/ingredients.html#read>). An open access version will be released a bit later.

[restaurant bell, then ambient restaurant sounds with a drum beat]

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And of course, thank you all for listening!