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Dressing the Part

Costuming of Lesbian Identities in
Contemporary Film and Television

Fiona Elizabeth Cox

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Film and Television Studies

University of Warwick

Film and Television Studies Department

June 2013

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Declaration

This thesis consists entirely of my own work. It has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Content from Chapter One concerning *The L Word*, as well as from Chapter Three concerning *The Kids Are All Right*, is due to be published as a contribution to the forthcoming collection:

Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (eds), *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis* (Revised edn.; London: Routledge, 2013).

Abstract

This thesis examines lesbian costuming and dress in contemporary British and American film and television, offering analyses of sartorial constructions of gay female identities in modern media. It uses close textual analysis and interviews with producers and consumers to examine the production, texts, and reception of selected representations, outlining current social rituals of lesbian style. Interviews were held with Cynthia Summers, Lesley Abernethy, Niamh Morrison, Catherine Adair, Janie Bryant, Tina Scorzafava and Mary Claire Hannan about their designs. Spectators answered questions and responded to photographs and a transcript. The thesis argues that the modern-day designer of lesbian costuming is subject to a contradictory triangle of demands, encompassing the need for costume to support character, resistance to stereotypes, and the recognition and perceived positive politics of identifiable lesbianism. Chapters covering *Lip Service* and *The L Word*; *Desperate Housewives*, *Deadwood*, and *Mad Men*, and *Gillery's Little Secret* and *The Kids Are All Right* examine differing results of these pressures. The thesis argues that while anxiety over 'butch' stereotypes and heteronormative mainstream demands for assimilation play a part in the overwhelming 'femininity' of many examples, an increase in lesbian visibility has also paradoxically instigated a shift away from specificity in media representations through dress because lesbianism is no longer seen as a 'story'. It suggests that lesbian authorship and using real-life lesbian styles as costume inspiration may offer a way out of the stereotype vs. 'authentic' imagery *impasse* without erasing recognisably lesbian iconography. Finally, the thesis concludes that the production, text and reception of contemporary lesbian images at times comprises a complete circuit of communication, with production decisions and everyday practices of lesbian dress both echoing and informing one another.

Introduction

What price visibility?

Historically, lesbian representation in the media has been largely characterised by invisibility. Overviews and analyses of gay and (in particular) lesbian content on television and in film in Western cultures—such as Vito Russo's pioneering *The Celluloid Closet* (1981), Richard Dyer's *Now You See It* (1990), Andrea Weiss' *Vampires and Violets* (1992), Tamsin Wilton's edited collection *immortal, invisible* (1995) and, more recently, Steven Capsuto's *Alternate Channels* (2000)—often recount how gay women were consistently underrepresented in mainstream broadcasting and cinema for decades, even when compared to the scarcity of depictions of gay males.¹ In her formative 1980 article theorising the ways in which society enforces 'compulsory heterosexuality', Adrienne Rich argued that 'erasure of lesbian existence... in art, literature, [and] film' is both a manifestation of male power and an ideological attempt at 'control of consciousness', perpetuating patriarchal and heterosexual norms.² Ten years later, Karin Schwartz, then public affairs director for LGBT media watchdog Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) declared the severe lack of images of lesbianism in Western culture a form of defamation, reasoning that underrepresentation contributes to 'poor self-image of lesbian youth', and 'supports an antilesbian legal and legislative environment.'³ 'Lesbian invisibility' was thus a rallying cry for activists and commentators from the 1960s up to the early 1990s.⁴

On the rare occasions when lesbians were depicted during these years, they appeared in overwhelmingly negative roles. Late-nineteenth century gender-inversion theories of homosexuality—best characterised by the work of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Karl Westphal and explicated in more detail in my earlier work on the costuming of lesbian identity in Hollywood cinema, 'Closet Cases'—assumed strict gender binaries and a

¹ Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harpers & Row, 1981), p.5; Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 236; Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film* (New York: Penguin, 1992), p.1; Tamsin Wilton, 'Introduction: On invisibility and mortality', in Wilton (ed.), *immortal invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image* (London & New York: Routledge 1995), p. 2; Steven Capsuto, *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television* (Ballantine Books: New York, 2000), p. 103, 342.

² Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (eds), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 234.

³ Karin Schwartz, quoted in Capsuto, *Alternate Channels*, p. 343.

⁴ Capsuto, *Alternate Channels*, p. 102, 342.

heterocentric correlation of biological sex and desire.⁵ The concept had variable results for representations of gay men and women within mainstream media. Gay male representation saw its fair share of disturbed and violent roles, such as the murderers in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (Warner Bros., USA, 1948) and the gay killer storyline of *Cruising* (William Friedkin, Lorimar, USA, 1980). Yet the effeminate male, as what Russo calls 'a rank betrayal of the myth of male superiority', could be written off as being like mere women and thus a lesser man: framed as eccentric but ultimately sexless and harmless.⁶ Played for laughs, the potential threat of the gay male was often dismissed in 'sissy' roles such as those in RKO's 1930s cycle of films starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, with the suspiciously woman-like mannerisms of Edward Everett Horton and Eric Blore's lisping performances in, for example, *Swing Time* (George Stevens, RKO, USA, 1936), *The Gay Divorcee* (Mark Sandrich, RKO, USA, 1934), *Top Hat* (Mark Sandrich, RKO, USA, 1935), and *Shall We Dance* (Mark Sandrich, RKO, USA, 1937).⁷

Masculine women in film and on television were often far more sinister, their symbolic threat to patriarchal order rendering them highly disturbing. Prior to the late 1990s, lesbians were often depicted as predatory perverts and psychotic killers, playing a series of sadistic women. Examples include Jo Courtney (Barbara Stanwyck), a cruel madam in love with one of her prostitutes in *Walk on the Wild Side* (Edward Dmytryk, Columbia USA, 1962), and a trio of lesbian murderers in 'Flowers of Evil'—a November 1974 episode of *Police Woman* (NBC, USA, 1974-1978)—who kill vulnerable elderly women and steal their money.⁸ Janet (Lynn Loring) is styled as the most femme, with her long hair curled and flowing loose, and is not coincidentally the 'most likable' of the three, 'portrayed as a young innocent led astray by older lesbians' (Fig. 1).⁹ Gladys (Laraine Stephens) has her blonde hair pulled back in a ponytail and wears a button-up, masculine shirt in a still available from the episode, while the leader and least sympathetic member of the trio is the butch Mame (Fay Spain), whose breasts were bound and hair was cut for the role, and who was directed to speak in a low

⁵ Fiona Cox, 'Closet Cases: Costuming, Lesbian Identities and Desire, Hollywood Cinema and the Motion Picture Production Code', *The International Journal of the Image* 1:4 (2011), pp. 43-56.

⁶ Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, p. 4.

⁷ For more on 'sissies' see Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*.

⁸ See Stephen Tropiano, *The Prime Time Closet: A History of Gays and Lesbians on TV* (Applause: New York, 2002) p. 68-9.

⁹ Capsuto, *Alternate Channels*, p. 110.

voice and use 'masculine' mannerisms in order to render her character suitably menacing (Fig. 2).¹⁰



Figure 1: Janet (Lynn Loring) in *Police Woman* episode 'Flowers of Evil'



Figure 2: Gladys (Laraine Stephens) and Mame (Fay Spain) in 'Flowers of Evil'

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

In the 1980s and '90s, lesbian filmmakers attempted to intervene in the history of negative images of vicious and murderous gay women by making independently produced films. *Desert Hearts* (Donna Deitch, Desert Heart Productions, USA, 1985), in a move later echoed by *Go Fish* (Rose Troche, Can I Watch Pictures, USA, 1994), reproduced mainstream tropes, presenting two women overcoming obstacles in the journey towards a relationship. Such films offered positive images of gay women by, as Lisa Henderson argues, investing 'romantic capital—long used to affirm characters as worthy—in unions that are elsewhere symbolically and socially excluded.'¹¹

The 1990s saw a marked increase in representations of lesbians in Western media. Primetime programming and soaps introduced sympathetic lesbian characters, such as Carol (Jane Sibbett) on *Friends* (NBC, USA, 1994-2004), Kerry Weaver (Laura Innes) on *ER* (NBC, USA, 1994-2009) and Beth Jordache (Anna Friel) on *Brookside* (Channel 4, UK, 1982-), with the first ever pre-'watershed' lesbian kiss on British television. Male writers and directors incorporated lesbian roles and themes into their films; *Heavenly Creatures* (Peter Jackson, UK/Germany/New Zealand, Fontana, 1994), *Bound* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, USA, Dino De Laurentiis Company/Spelling Films, 1996) and *Chasing Amy* (Kevin Smith, Too Askew, USA, 1997) were all successful films that featured lesbian characters. The increase in lesbian visibility occurred not only in fiction, but also encompassed a few newly out lesbian celebrities, including musicians k.d. lang and Melissa Etheridge. *Vanity Fair* put lang on its August 1993 cover in drag, receiving a wet shave from supermodel Cindy Crawford. The nature of lesbian representation had also clearly changed. Gone were the ugly, hated criminals; bursting into the mainstream in what was quickly dubbed the era of 'lesbian chic', gay women were now hot, in both senses of the word.

The most significant moment of lesbian visibility in the 1990s was the coming out of actress and comedian, Ellen DeGeneres, in 1997. Her outing caused a scandal when it was leaked to the press that DeGeneres, then starring in primetime US sitcom *Ellen* (ABC, USA, 1994-1998), was due to repeat the act on air, with her character Ellen Morgan also realising she

¹¹ Lisa Henderson, 'Simple Pleasures: Lesbian Community and *Go Fish*', *Signs* 25:1 (Autumn, 1999), pp. 37-64.

was gay that same year. A lesbian lead character on primetime television—played by an openly gay actor—was a significant first in media history, and was not welcomed by all. DeGeneres' pioneering visibility left her vulnerable to criticism, and conservative Christians in particular were unimpressed: former media activist Reverend Jerry Falwell 'came out of retirement... to attack "Ellen DeGenerate" and put pressure on potential advertisers' to boycott the show.¹² Nevertheless, Morgan came out to herself, her therapist, and her close friends in the much-publicised 'The Puppy Episode', and to her parents the following week in 'Hello Muddah, Hello Faddah'. The series dealt with Morgan's own internal homophobia and explored issues of heterocentrism, as when Ellen and her girlfriend attempt to book a room with a double bed in 'Escape From L.A.' but are given two singles because they are both women. *Ellen* even dealt with the topic of the closeted celebrity, with Emma Thompson guest starring in 'Emma' as a secretly lesbian version of herself. ABC network executives objected to the focus the writers placed on Morgan's sexuality, criticising the show for being 'gay every single week.'¹³ The task of managing a gay character while appeasing the network proved difficult; *Ellen* steadily lost viewers, and ABC cancelled the series in 1998.

Kelly Kessler has pointed out that the increase of lesbian visibility on western screens can be likened to Clint Wilson and Félix Gutiérrez's work on the phases of representation of racial minorities.¹⁴ Wilson and Gutiérrez's project, although concerned specifically with race and mass-audience news coverage, is highly relevant to a study of lesbian portrayals in the media because it traces how images of marginalised groups tend to be affected as they move from a dearth of representation to more prominent inclusion in the mainstream. Wilson and Gutiérrez describe sequential phases including exclusionary, threatening-issue, confrontation and stereotypical selection. The exclusionary phase aptly describes lesbian invisibility, assuming excluded parties are 'not an important consideration to the well-being of society'.¹⁵ The threatening-issue stage begins when minorities appear in media coverage because they are 'perceived as a threat to the existing social order', clearly visible in the

¹² Capsuto, *Alternate Channels*, p. 391-2.

¹³ Robert A. Iger, Interview with Diane Sawyer, *Primetime*, ABC, USA, tx. 6 May 1998.

¹⁴ Clint C. Wilson, II & Félix Gutiérrez, *Race, Multiculturalism, and the Media: From Mass to Class Communication* (2nd edn.; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 152-3.

ubiquitous murderous lesbians of the 1960s and '70s.¹⁶ In the confrontation stage, the media depicts conflict between the majority and feared minorities.¹⁷ For Wilson and Gutiérrez's theory of news coverage, this involves merely 'covering the response' of the majority, although we can see traces of this in *Ellen*'s fictional explorations of homophobia and heterocentrism.

The outing of both Ellens combined two central features of the lesbian chic phenomenon: mainstream lesbian representation and the figure of the lesbian celebrity. Yet DeGeneres' slightly androgynous appearance and insistence on exploring the specificities of lesbian life in her sitcom did not match the favoured conventionally feminine apolitical 1990s lesbian. Tellingly, media coverage of the time featured transparent attempts to fit DeGeneres into the mould of the acceptable lesbian of the era. Efforts to downplay DeGeneres' symbolic threat to hegemonic norms reveal lesbian chic as something akin to Wilson and Gutiérrez's stereotypical selection phase: a 'post-conflict period' in which coverage aims to both 'neutralize' and accommodate the presence of minorities within mainstream representations, reassuring audiences that minority groups remain 'in their place' or that 'those who escape their designated place' by, for example, playing lead characters on primetime television, 'are not a threat to society because they manifest the same values and ambitions as the dominant culture.'¹⁸ Crucially, many of the negotiations that aimed to stem the confrontation surrounding DeGeneres' sexuality were worked through on the level of clothing and appearance.

On *Ellen* and off-screen, DeGeneres' style has long been characterised by a casual, slightly boyish look. Favouring loose jeans and slacks, maybe blazers and button up shirts, loose T-shirts or plain, baggy, long-sleeved tops, un-styled hair and trainers, the actress generally steers clear of excessive make-up or items of clothing traditionally regarded as exclusively female garments, such as skirts and dresses. In short, DeGeneres avoids femininity. Cragin has argued that the entertainer was 'not able to fulfil the sexualized function of most

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 153.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 156-7.

chic images' partly because of her childlike persona on *Ellen*.¹⁹ Tellingly, DeGeneres' inhabitation of a boyish look associated with gay women, as discussed in Chapter One, also precludes her from a very specific sexualised function: one which is designed to appeal to heterosexual males. Her preference for slightly masculine attire is also uncomfortably close to stereotypical costuming of lesbians in earlier years, echoing, for example, the button-up shirt worn by Gladys (Laraine Stephens) in 'Flowers of Evil'.

A 1997 *20/20* interview with Diane Sawyer that aired prior to 'The Puppy Episode' evidences a lot of anxiety over DeGeneres' clothing. Sawyer's voiceover segues from talking about the way costumes on *Ellen* set Morgan apart from the 'typical sitcom girl'—by which we can obviously read 'the straight sitcom girl'—to introducing shots of DeGeneres' wardrobe filled with trousers and flat shoes. The actress was required to defend her style and, stressing personal embarrassment about her size and shape as the reason behind her baggy clothing and trousers, insisted that she simply doesn't 'feel' feminine. In contrast, Ann M. Ciasullo has noted that when DeGeneres appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, publicly admitting her sexuality for the first time with the headline 'Yep, I'm gay', the comedian wore jewellery and noticeably more make-up than was typical for her. This, Ciasullo writes, 'illustrates... the sanitizing of the lesbian through her feminizing (or, conversely, the use of the feminine to sanitize the popular conception of the lesbian).'²⁰

A similar thing happened when the entertainer returned to television with her daytime talk show *Ellen: The Ellen DeGeneres Show* (NBC, USA, 2003-). In the first month on air, viewers wrote in to demand that the host underwent a make-over. DeGeneres resisted at first, then succumbed with what Malinda Lo calls 'obvious wariness' to three distinctly feminised make-overs during the sweeps month of November (when ratings are judged), wearing tighter clothing and heels on chosen audience members' suggestions.²¹ DeGeneres' non-glamorous day-to-day appearance apparently required management,

¹⁹ Cragin, 'Lesbians and Serial TV', p. 200.

²⁰ Ann M. Ciasullo, 'Making Her (In)Visible: Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s', *Feminist Studies* 27:3 (Autumn, 2001), p. 584-5.

²¹ Malinda Lo, 'Making Over Ellen: Femming Up the Sorta-Butch', *AfterEllen.com*, (November 2003), <<http://www.afterellen.com/archive/ellen/TV/ellen-talkshow2.html>>, accessed 28 September 2011.

whether through apologetic justification or feminised alteration, in order to be deemed acceptable within mainstream Western media in the 1990s.



Figure 3: Ellen DeGeneres in jeans, button-up shirt and blazer.

It is now sixteen years since both Ellens publically announced their sexualities, and those post-scandal years form the period of investigation for this thesis. The title of *AfterEllen.com*, a website aimed at lesbian readers and dedicated to media news about gay women, reveals the significance Ellen's dual outings are felt to hold for representations of lesbians within Western society. DeGeneres and Morgan's near-simultaneous admissions marked a shift in mainstream visibility, ushering in an era of increased lesbian representability devoid of the resistance and scandal that dogged the star and series in 1997.

In the dawning years of the twenty-first century, lesbian representation is more widespread than ever before. In 2004, US subscriber channel Showtime gave the world an entire community of gay women in the racy, glossy television series *The L Word* (Showtime, USA, 2004-2009). Following that was BBC Three's *Lip Service* (UK, 2010-2012), which also focused on a number of lesbians, this time a group of friends and lovers living in Glasgow. Slightly more isolated lesbian characters and couples have appeared in starring roles on series like *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, USA, 2005-) and *Skins* (Channel 4, UK, 2007-) or as less featured roles in, for example, *The Wire* (HBO, USA, 2002-2008), *Desperate Housewives* (ABC, USA, 2004-2012), *Deadwood* (HBO, USA, 2004-2006) and *Mad Men* (AMC, USA, 2007-). Independent lesbian filmmakers continue to manufacture products on a modest scale, with films such as *Finn's Girl* (Dominique Cardona & Laurie Colbert, Cardona-Colbert Production, Canada, 2007) and *Gillery's Little Secret* (T.M. Scorzafava, Liquid Filmworks, 2006). Major Hollywood stars have played lesbians in widely distributed movies, for example Jada Pinkett Smith in the 2008 remake of *The Women* (Diane English, Picturehouse Entertainment, USA) and most recently Annette Bening and Julianne Moore, who portrayed a long-term couple in *The Kids Are All Right* (Focus Features & Gilbert Films, USA, 2010).

As in the 1990s, representation is not limited to the fictional arena; more well-known personalities have come out of the closet in recent years. Actors have labelled themselves as lesbian or simply been visible in same-sex relationships: Portia de Rossi, a former *Ally McBeal* (Fox, USA, 1997-2002) cast member who more recently appeared in *Arrested Development* (Fox, USA, 2003-2013) and *Better Off Ted* (ABC, USA, 2009-2010) has been public about her lesbianism since around 2004 when she began dating DeGeneres, giving an interview about coming out to *The Advocate* in 2005.²² The two have since married. Troubled former child star Lindsay Lohan had a well-publicised relationship with DJ Samantha Ronson until their break-up in 2009. Rosie O'Donnell spoke out about being a lesbian and a parent on US national television in March 2002—interviewed by, once again,

²² Michele Kort, 'Portia Heart and Soul', *Advocate.com* (13 September 2005) <http://web.archive.org/web/20090223013952/http://www.advocate.com/issue_story_ektid20037.asp> accessed 17 January 2013.

Diane Sawyer on long-running ABC news magazine programme *Primetime* (1989-)—to protest anti-gay adoption laws. In the UK, comedian and presenter Sue Perkins has been out since around the turn of the century. Mary Portas, star of British reality show *Mary Queen of Shops* (BBC, UK, 2007-2009) entered a Civil Partnership with Melanie Rickey, fashion editor for *Grazia* Magazine, in 2010, and openly gay television presenter Clare Balding came to further prominence in 2012 on the BBC's coverage of the London Olympics. It is this hyper-visibility which attracted my interest.

The project of Dressing the Part

Foucault's theory of a 'technology of sex' contends that society produces 'a whole series of different tactics' designed to regulate both sexual practice and ways of thinking about sex.²³ Applying this concept to gender, Teresa de Lauretis proposes that cinema, for example, forms part of what she calls a technology of gender. Lauretis also argues that '[t]he construction of gender is the product and the process of both representation and self-representation.'²⁴ Similarly, homosexual identities can be understood as both the product and process of representation in cinema (as well as television and other mass media), as well as the product and process of self-representation by gay people themselves. Sympathetic writing on gay and lesbian topics has often touched on representation and self-representation through appearance, outlining the importance of style in creating images deemed either detrimental or favourable to the community. Writing on this topic has typically focused on the damaging effects of stereotyping or the political necessity of inhabiting certain real life 'types', as well as the pitfalls or benefits of *not* telegraphing homosexuality through dress.

The strange attention Sawyer paid to DeGeneres' clothes in 1997, as well as Cragin, Stein and Ciasullo's reading of feminised 'lipstick lesbians' as troublingly apolitical underlines the significance of costume and dress in media representations of gay women. Given the

²³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Robert Hurley (trans.), (New York: Pantheon, 1978), p. 146.

²⁴ Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 9

relatively new and prolific era of lesbian representation in film, television and other visual media, I was keen to investigate sartorial constructions of gay female identity across a range of texts, including the 'text' of lesbian self-representations. This thesis aims to answer the question of what kind of visibility exists in this post-Ellen era, investigating the current state of these particular technologies of lesbianism.

Dressing the Part uses previous work on costume as well as gay and lesbian images in film and on television to situate an exploration of how dress is used to construct lesbianism in contemporary media. In addition, this project investigates the responses of lesbian subjects to such images and, although not in great depth, questions firstly whether and how lesbian subjects might make use of visual representations of lesbian identity in the media and secondly whether this might in turn affect further media representations. It was important to me from its inception that this thesis would not rely only on textual analysis. I am not denying the centrality of close study in the explication of how film and television texts (and indeed costumes) make meaning. As David Morley and Charlotte Brunson, both pioneers of audience research projects from their time at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in the late 1970s, argued in 1999:

We would, after all these years, still wish to maintain that most texts do indeed impose a preferred reading, with which most audience members enter some kind of negotiation—and that textual analysis designed to identify the preferred reading of the text in question retains an important place in any audience research project.²⁵

Consequently close analysis designed to tease out the 'preferred reading' of texts is critical to my work, central to the arguments in Chapters One, Two, and Three. However, I was also intrigued by the way in which a) the social context of each production, as understood by creative personnel, b) the aims of the film and television texts in question, and c) the personal opinions of designers might affect representations. I was equally concerned with investigating how sartorial constructions of modern gay female identities are regarded by gay women other than myself, partly to check my close analysis – there is always the risk, of course, that without consulting others the 'preferred reading' we apply to texts may only be

²⁵ Charlotte Brunson and David Morley, 'Introduction. The *Nationwide* project: long ago and far away...', in Morley and Brunson, *The Nationwide Television Studies* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.15.

our own subjective interpretation. A further aim was to investigate whether media representations, as a technology of lesbianism, might be influential in modern lesbian lifestyles.

In a recent overview of the history of television studies, Brunsdon deemed the ambition 'to encompass the whole of the "circuit of communication" (production, text, and reception)' as 'unachievable', given the nebulous nature of what we still call television in the digital age but which has altered immeasurably from a time when it was 'roughly the same thing in most living rooms in each country.'²⁶ Yet I would argue that Brunsdon's additional remark that such projects are today 'difficult to conceptualize outside very narrow frameworks' leaves room for research which aims to achieve this task on a small scale.²⁷ This thesis represents such an attempt. In the narrow framework I have conceptualised for the purposes of my research, I have aimed to tease out particularly interesting uses of costume via textual analysis. I have also undertaken interviews with costume designers of the films and television series under consideration, as well as interviewing twelve self-identified lesbians, some of whom were spectators of some of the texts studied. *Dressing the Part* is therefore a small-scale study of the production, text and reception of select lesbian representations in the early twenty-first century. One question I sought to answer in my research is whether this particular narrow 'circuit of communication' is indeed a circuit. Are lesbian audience members' self-representations influenced by costume designs for televisual and cinematic lesbians, and do these self-representations in turn affect designers in their construction of onscreen lesbian identities?

It seemed that the best way to assess questions of perceived social context, textually inscribed intentions, and the contribution of personal opinions to costume designs would be to speak with costume designers—and, in their absence, other producers of lesbian representations—directly. The personal interviews I conducted with creative personnel involved with each of the seven case studies in this thesis were invaluable to my research and analyses. I spoke with five designers, one director and one make-up designer. The

²⁶ Brunsdon, 'Is Television Studies History?', *Cinema Journal* 47:3 (Spring, 2008), p. 132.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

insights offered during these conversations would have been impossible to garner through other methods and have had immeasurable impact on my chapters, complementing my analyses of texts undertaken before each interview. The creators (interestingly, all were women) with whom I spoke were: Cynthia Summers, costume designer for *The L Word*; Lesley Abernethy and Niamh Morrison, costume designer and hair and make-up designer, respectively, for *Lip Service*; Catherine (Cate) Adair, costume designer for *Desperate Housewives*; Janie Bryant, costume designer for both *Deadwood* and *Mad Men*; Tina Scorzafava, writer, producer and director of *Gillery's Little Secret*, and Mary Claire Hannan, costume designer for *The Kids Are All Right*. Initially, I chose my case studies prior to contacting designers, having found what I felt would be particularly fruitful examples of lesbian representation. However, the matter of which designers were available to interview affected the final shape of the thesis; I made the decision to retire the analysis I had undertaken regarding the remake of *The Women* because costume designer John Dunn's work on *Boardwalk Empire* (HBO, USA, 2010-) coincided with my research trip to California to interview other costume designers, meaning I was unable to arrange a meeting.

In order to answer questions about the effects of contemporary images of lesbianism on gay women, I undertook interviews with a cross-section of self-identified lesbians. This was partly to gauge reactions to my chosen images of lesbian representation, testing and comparing my own readings of case studies to check their validity and perhaps curtail idiosyncratic analyses. I was also interested in the reception and ramifications of modern images of gay women in the media by and for lesbians, and sought answers in these interviews. The project was not a 'spectator' study, per se, as better represented by work such as Ien Ang's research on *Dallas* (CBS, USA, 1978-1991), for which Ang invited Dutch viewers of the popular television soap to write to her about the series.²⁸ The women with whom I spoke were not necessarily viewers of the case studies in my chapters, and I did not show interviewees episodes or clips from any example. The materials responded to in interviews were a transcript of a discussion (about how to spot a lesbian from her external appearance) which took place in an episode of *The L Word* ('Let's Do It') as well as

²⁸ Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (New York: Methuen, 1985).

photographs of each character analysed in my thesis, one photograph of Ellen DeGeneres, another of DeGeneres and de Rossi on their wedding day, and two of Sue Perkins. See Appendix 1. for the transcript. Those images which generated useful discussion will be displayed in the relevant chapters.

I deliberately aimed to spread consumer interviews over a range of respondents. In gathering the views of lesbian women of varying ages, educational backgrounds, geographic locations and ethnicities I am not claiming to offer a definitive response of all gay women to contemporary lesbian images, but have instead aimed to build a picture of various responses of twenty-first century lesbians to the Western-produced, overwhelmingly white images examined in this thesis. I met with seven women in person between August 2011 and May 2012. Owing to the production contexts of many of my case studies, I deliberately sought out American participants and, as this stage of the research took place after my trip to California, a further three interviews with women living in the U.S. took the form of email conversations over a similar time scale to the in-person interviews. Two British-based women with whom I was unable to meet were also interviewed in this way, with some follow up questions taking place over email after in-person interviews.

I asked respondents to fill out an optional 'census' form at the time of our interviews, indicating age, describing ethnicity and so on. To give some idea of the variety of women whose responses contributed to this research, the answers (at the time of interviews) of the twelve interviewees who kindly gave of their time and minds are contained, in no particular order, in Table 1, below. I worked to take into account differences between these women. Not all responses became relevant in my analyses, for example I do not spend time considering the responses of interviewees as affected by level of education, profession, or place of birth or residence. Differences of generation did seem to affect responses, and I explore the effects of age on interviewee reactions in some of my chapters as well as my conclusion. In using a range of women I aimed to acknowledge intersecting aspects of subjectivity, representing a small but purposefully not entirely homogenous group of women with one primary unifying aspect of identity other than gender: lesbian sexuality.

'Name'	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Place of Birth	Current Place of Residence	Highest Formal Qualification	Profession
Felicity	25- 35	White	South Wales	London	BA (Hons)	Marketing
Una	67	White	Stratford- upon-Avon	Birmingham	Social Work qualification (two years at degree level)	Retired
Ophelia	35- 45	Black mixed heritage, with both European and African ancestors	London	Stratford- upon-Avon	MA	Theatre Practitioner
Charlotte	25- 35	White	West Midlands	West Midlands	GCSEs, with partial study for A levels (one year)	Sales
Hannah	55- 65	White	Stoke-on- Trent	Birmingham	BA (Hons)	Civil Servant
Irene	45- 55	White	North Wales	Birmingham	Degree	Civil Servant
Tabitha	25- 35	African- American	Texas (Raised in Queens)	London	Postgraduate Degree	Medical Diagnostic Imaging
Leanne	25- 35	British	Birmingham	Birmingham	BA	Human Resources
Amy	35- 45	White	Reading	Reading	BTEC	Sales
Ruby	35- 45	White	Maryland	Los Angeles	Two years of college	Stage and Office Production Assistant (Television)
Emily	23	Mixed- race ²⁹	Boston (raised in Plymouth, Mass.)	Los Angeles	BA	Associate Producer (Television)
Phoebe	25- 35	White	Paris	Los Angeles	Degree	Post- production (Cinema)

²⁹ Emily described herself as: 'Half black and half white. My biological father is Jamaican and my mom was Irish, Black Irish, Scottish, North American Indian, and English (she looked very Irish).' Email to author, 27 January 2013.

Table 1: Consumer Interviewee Data

Owing to the imbalance of my interview sample towards white participants, comparing responses along racial divides was not entirely practical, although notably it was interviewee Ophelia, who is of European and African mixed heritage, who remarked upon the overwhelming whiteness of my film and television case studies used in chapters, pointing out 'I don't relate to most TV programmes as they are about the experiences of white lesbians.'³⁰ While Bette (Jennifer Beals) in *The L Word* is of mixed heritage (African-American and white), and Carmen (Sarah Shahi) is presented as Latina (although is in fact of Iranian and Spanish ancestry), unfortunately John Dunn's unavailability meant losing another non-white example, and the remainder of my case studies are indeed white.³¹ This in itself is a revealing structuring bias of contemporary lesbian representation in the media (and, of course, not merely lesbian representation), and is also briefly dealt with in Chapter One.

Ophelia also drew attention to the very notion of the identity 'lesbian' as a primarily Western concept, directly comparing it with traditional Igbo culture in Nigeria. She expanded:

In Nigeria a woman might identify as a lesbian and dress in ways that lesbians in London might recognise as lesbian style. Or a woman might have a wife, as in Igbo culture for example. She might dress in very traditional Igbo garments but may well not recognise the word 'lesbian' though she has sex with a woman and is in a committed relationship with her which is recognised and accepted by the whole community in a way that has been that way long before Europeans ever used the word homosexual or lesbian.³²

It is worth acknowledging the Western focus of both the concept 'lesbian' and of the examples in this thesis. This bias has shaped the content of my research for practical reasons of limiting breadth to attain depth in my analyses, as well as sticking to those areas of culture that are both better understood by and most easily accessible to me.

³⁰ Ophelia, email to the author, 26 June 2012.

³¹ Shauna Swartz, 'The Other L Word: Representing a Latina Identity', in Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (eds), *Reading The L Word: Outing Contemporary Television* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 177.

³² Ophelia, email to author, 26 June 2012.

It is also interesting to note—although I do not have the space to consider this in any depth—that the opinions of Ophelia and Tabitha seemed to be more politically aware (in terms of lesbian issues) than other respondents of comparable age. These two interviewees were more aligned with participants over 45 in this way, who were in general more likely to speak about their personal images in terms of belonging to a community with feminist principles and to discuss case studies in terms of not reflecting those principles. In contrast, those under 45 tended to couch their own style in personal reasons and showed less engagement with feminism and fewer considerations of political motivation for dressing to be recognisable as gay. What seemed to me to be the significant contributing factor to these perhaps slightly incongruent opinions held by Ophelia and Tabitha was educational background. These two interviewees were the only two to have undertaken postgraduate study, which may have contributed to their more critical perspectives on the world than peers as defined by age. A possible additional factor is that Ophelia and Tabitha are both of African descent and, as such, may be more aware of issues of otherness and power imbalances in Western society. Emily is of mixed-race although younger and has a BA rather than a postgraduate degree, as both Ophelia and Tabitha hold. Although Emily was less concerned with the politics of looking gay, she did exhibit appreciation for television characters that are not only white, linking this to her enjoyment of seeing something more akin to her own identity in the mainstream: 'I love seeing ethnic women because I'm not white, and I like seeing diversity on television.'³³

Out of respect for my interviewees, especially as some were already friends and others have become so as a result of our conversations for this project, I have taken the decision to make reasonable efforts to preserve anonymity by using pseudonyms. Obviously this was not practical when it came to costume designers, so it is with much gratitude that I have used the material gathered in these interviews, and consequently I have attempted to deal with the responses of these women with great care and respect.

³³ Emily, email to author, 15 April 2012.

Perhaps unusually, I have integrated my interview responses from both designers and—for want of a more exact term—consumers with my textual analysis of chosen case studies. Having originally intended to separate at least the consumer interviews, I soon found that the process of analysing production and text was impossible and indeed less interesting to write about without incorporating insights I was concurrently gaining from interviews concerning their reception. In *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn*, Rachel Moseley's study of the responses of real female subjects to the 'image-text' of Audrey Hepburn, Moseley places great emphasis on the importance of acknowledging 'the intractability of the relationship between textual analysis and audience research when used in conjunction as methodological tools.'³⁴ I have found this to be the case in my work and, as such, have used all three methods (designer interviews, textual analysis, and consumer interviews) as interpretive and analytical tools, intertwining the results in the chapters that follow.

John Fiske and John Hartley contend that 'television functions as a social ritual' in which meanings created by texts 'are decoded according to individually learnt but culturally generated codes and conventions, which of course impose similar constraints of perception on the encoders of the message.'³⁵ This highlights the central preoccupation of this thesis. In closely examining texts to determine the codes which appear to be present, in addition to looking at a group of 'decoders' with a personal investment in the precise meanings being encoded, as well as those doing the encoding through costume design, I will unpick some of the social rituals of lesbianism currently circulating in society via costume and dress in film, television and—assuming viewers no longer experience film and television texts, characters and personalities only at the cinema or via a television set—other media.

Case studies in all three chapters, as well as the slightly different paradigm of the lesbian celebrity which constitutes the bulk of my conclusion, were affected to varying degrees by a complex and contradictory triangle of demands. This nigh-on impossible combination of pressures emerges in more detail in my Review of Literature, but consists of the fluctuating

³⁴ Rachel Moseley, *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn: Text, audience, resonance* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 219.

³⁵ John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television* (2nd edn.; London & New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 64.

but often simultaneous requirements to use costume to telegraph information about 'character', to be wary of stereotyping, and to be sensitive to notions of 'authentic' lesbian iconography.

Chapter One examines the recent phenomenon of the lesbian ensemble cast in *The L Word* and *Lip Service*. The work in this chapter sets up a lot of issues which run through the remaining work in the thesis, such as the still-prevalent concept of the gender binary and questions of what constitutes recognisable lesbian imagery. As in much previous work on *The L Word*, Chapter One spends time focusing on the assimilationist, traditionally feminine appearances of the central cast in terms of frequent demands for 'authentic' imagery which were made of the series. Images from the Showtime drama are compared with the costumes for characters in *Lip Service*. The analysis considers matters of mainstreaming in relation to the production contexts of each series, and frames the emphasis on the inclusion of butch style in the latter series as a likely reaction to criticism of the lack of such imagery in *The L Word*. The chapter takes into account the unique demands of costuming a group of characters with a unifying identity who must simultaneously be represented as individuals, resulting in the consequent removal of the burden of the communication of lesbian identity through costume, which is instead placed on dialogue and interaction. Consumer responses to the texts reveal differing attitudes towards the costuming strategies largely split along generational lines. Younger respondents evidenced strategies of self-presentation constructed along similar lines to especially the earlier series' lack of communication of sexual identity through dress, and the two series provide the most fruitful example of the circular structure of Brunsdon's 'circuit of communication'.

In Chapter Two, examples from *Desperate Housewives*, *Deadwood* and *Mad Men* are used to show how, in this post-Ellen media era, when lesbians are not the focus of a fictional text isolated lesbian characters can be used effectively to tell stories other than homosexuality. Costume strategies in these series bring to light some anxiety over stereotyping on the part of designers. Consumer interview responses largely function in this chapter to demonstrate how, despite some strategies which were apparently not intended to reveal homosexuality

but to telegraph the function lesbianism plays within each text, some costumes inadvertently do telegraph lesbianism, in turn confirming the importance of homosexuality in creating meaning in each example.

Chapter Three focuses on two lesbian-made but vastly differently distributed films concerning lesbian characters: *Gillery's Little Secret* and *The Kids Are All Right*. The chapter examines the films' costume strategies with reference to the filmmakers' attempts to appeal to mainstream audiences and brings to light attempts in *The Kids Are All Right* to incorporate recognisable lesbian iconography while steering clear of stereotypes. The analysis of *Gillery's Little Secret* looks at Scorzafava's method, like that in *The L Word* and in some respects *Lip Service*, of removing the burden of communication of lesbian identity from clothing and placing it instead on physical interaction between characters. I make use of consumer interviews in an attempt to situate this phenomenon historically and socially.

In my conclusion, I tie together the three elements of the circuit of communication—production, text and reception—in one figure: the lesbian celebrity, as read through the sartorial style of British entertainer Sue Perkins. Perkins' status as an out lesbian public figure often appearing on screen (and in other media) in her own clothing puts her in an interesting position as a lesbian consumer of lesbian representations as well as producer of her own lesbian 'text' in the form of personal style.

TEXT REMOVED

A brief note on corpus: I am looking at case studies from both film and television because I believe that modern methods of distribution have blurred the lines between many viewers' reception of each format. I have personally watched many of the television series on DVD, both instead and as well as live broadcasting and personal digital recordings. I saw *The Kids Are All Right* in the cinema, on a plane and later on DVD, and viewed *Gillery's Little Secret* online several times as well as purchasing the DVD online directly from the filmmaker. The most important questions to me were what kinds of images are currently

circulating in culture and why, not necessarily precisely where they had emerged and in what format. Bearing that in mind, however, the particular production context of each film or series will be taken into account when discussing both claimed and theorised intentions of costume designs within the texts. One slightly miscellaneous clarification: in talking about television programmes I have used the American convention of deeming an overall show text a 'series' and each year of production a 'season'; this was simply because I found this more clear than using 'series' to indicate the latter, owing to the fact that the word might mean either or both to some readers.

Review of Literature

This review of literature serves two purposes: to survey pre-existing work in relevant fields and situate my work in relation to it, as required, but also to demonstrate the conflicting demands placed on contemporary designers of costume for lesbian characters which structures much of the analysis in the main body of the thesis. The main bodies of work which have informed my research are as follows: theories of everyday dress as well as costuming within artistic contexts, focusing on clothing as a signifying practice; critical work on the history of gay and lesbian representations in film and on television that engages with dress and style; and prior research which has engaged with audiences using ethnography and qualitative methods of analysis.

The contradictory contemporary lesbian costuming triangle

In Jane Gaines' foundational work on costume design, 'Costume and Narrative, How Dress Tells the Woman's Story', Gaines details a shift from eighteenth century beliefs in clothing's ability to disguise individuality to nineteenth century assumptions that dress reveals personality.¹ Early parts of the article recount how Victorian society, paranoid about the secrets outfits might convey, pursued anonymity in dress so as to avoid possible embarrassment.² In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries we have retained this belief that clothing worn on the exterior can provide clues to interior psychology. Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro discuss dress as both boundary and margin, separating the body from others but also linking it to the social, and also argue that it is 'a manifestation of the unconscious...'³ Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson similarly describe how 'dress and fashion mark out particular kinds of bodies, drawing distinctions in terms of class and status,

¹ Jane Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story' in Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds), *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, New York & London: Routledge, 1990), p. 185-6.

² Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative', p. 186.

³ Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and the Body* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 1998), p. xxii-xviii. For similar concepts about dress as a threshold which can conceal or reveal, see Pam Cook, *Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 1996), p. 43.

gender, age, and sub-cultural affiliations that would otherwise not be so visible or significant.⁴

Of course clothing, whether in real life or fictional contexts, does not necessarily directly articulate information. On occasion it does, as discussed by J.C. Flügel in his classification of some types of dress as a sign of rank, giving, among others, the example of military uniforms.⁵ Yet in every-day dress this is not often the case. Still, clothing is often felt to be readable as a type of language. Entwistle and Wilson argue that 'dress is more like music than speech, suggestive and ambiguous rather than bound by... precise grammatical rules'.⁶ It is clear from work by costumiers and academics that, while sometimes more ambiguous than others, clothing does form a language through which both character and narrative are felt to be spoken and supported. Studio designers Edith Head and Adrian repeatedly wrote and spoke about their designs in this way.⁷ Writers on costume such as Maureen Turim in 'Designing Women: The Emergence of the Sweetheart Line', Tamar Jeffers MacDonald in *Hollywood Catwalk* and Diana Diamond in 'Sophia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*: Costumes, Girl Power, and Feminism' unpick the ways in which costume makes meaning.⁸ According to Gaines, the classical Hollywood costume designer's code 'weigh[ed] design against dramatic content' so that, on the one hand, clothing should 'carry enough information about characters so that the audience could tell something about them if the sound went off in the theatre' and Drake Stutesman argues that ideally, designers created a dress plot which

⁴ Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson, 'Introduction: Body Dressing', in Entwistle and Wilson (eds), *Body Dressing: Body Dressing: Dress, Body, Culture* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2001), p. 4.

⁵ J.C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (3rd edn; London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 32.

⁶ Entwistle and Wilson, 'Introduction: Body Dressing', p. 2-3.

⁷ Gaines recounts some of Edith Head's costuming logic from a 1949 educational short in 'Costume and Narrative', p. 180. Drake Stutesman describes similar reasoning behind Adrian's designs in 'Storytelling: Marlene Dietrich's Face and John Fredericks' Hats', in *Fashioning Film Stars: Dress, Culture, Identity*, Rachel Moseley (ed.), (London: BFI, 2005), p. 27.

⁸ Maureen Turim, 'Designing Women: The Emergence of the Sweetheart Line', in *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, Gaines and Herzog (eds), pp. 212-228; Tamar Jeffers MacDonald, *Hollywood Catwalk: Exploring Costume and Transformation in American Film* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010); Diana Diamond, 'Sophia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*: Costumes, Girl Power, and Feminism', in *Fashion in Film*, Adrienne Munich (ed.), (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press: 2011), pp. 203-231.

could, were the outfits lined up chronologically from beginning to end, also reveal the narrative.⁹

Gaines's article tackles costume, narrative, women, and the creation of character in classical Hollywood films, detailing the ways in which female roles in particular are 'turned inside out on screen.'¹⁰ She analyses classical Hollywood costuming through the use of the Victorian concept of clothing expressing personality, arguing that dress is used, in the main, for characterisation: 'confirming how people of different gender, age, nationality, and social class were thought to be in "real life"'.¹¹ More recently, Julie Weiss, costume designer for *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, Dreamworks SKG, USA, 1999) and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Terry Gilliam, Universal, USA, 1998) stated that 'my job is to show the audience people who look like somebody they know', demonstrating that this idea is still current with designers.¹² Styles can alter within texts, as demonstrated in 'Dress, Class and Audrey Hepburn: The Significance of the Cinderella Story', in which Moseley traces the recurrence of the Cinderella story in the films of Hepburn to show how transformations through dress indicate the shifting femininities of Hepburn's characters.¹³ Yet these shifts are signified by appropriate clothing that creates the required meanings; adherence to 'real life' dress codes is necessary when creating believable characters with instantly readable meanings for viewers.

Gaines' writing, along with other work on film costume such as that by Sue Harper and Stutesman, emphasises the way in which costume is also often subtly representational, but this is also worked through on the level of character and narrative. Harper demonstrates how subtle genital imagery in hairstyle and costuming helps to create sexual identities in Gainsborough melodramas.¹⁴ Stutesman's work on John Frederics' hats worn by Marlene

⁹ Edith Head, 'Dialogue on Film: Edith Head', *American Film* 3:7 (May 1978), p. 36, quoted in Gaines 'Costume and Narrative', p. 188. Also see Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative', p. 180; Stutesman, 'Storytelling: Marlene Dietrich's Face and John Frederics' Hats', p. 27.

¹⁰ Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative', p. 181.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹² Julie Weiss, quoted in Deborah Nadoolman Landis, *FilmCraft: Costume Design* (Lewes, East Sussex: Ilex, 2012), p. 10.

¹³ Rachel Moseley, 'Dress, Class and Audrey Hepburn: The Significance of the Cinderella Story' in Moseley (ed.), *Fashioning Film Stars*, pp. 109-120.

¹⁴ Sue Harper, 'Art Direction and Costume Design', in Sue Aspinall and Robert Murphy (eds.), *Gainsborough Melodrama* (London: BFI, 1983), pp. 40-52.

Dietrich in *Shanghai Express* (Josef von Sternberg, Paramount, 1932) provides an excellent model for in-depth study of the way costume can use subtle details to create and support characterisation as well as convey narrative information in films.¹⁵

Notably, Gaines, along with other writers on costume, omits homosexuality as a trait that might be revealed through dress. In *Undressing Cinema*, Stella Bruzzi notes how writing on women and dress, particularly the example of Susan Brownmiller's 1984 feminist tirade against 'feminine' clothes in *Femininity*, can tend to omit lesbians from 'the category "women"'.¹⁶ As I argue in 'Closet Cases', costume is often thought about in terms of differentiation between women that does not incorporate same-sex desire.¹⁷ This leaves out a consideration of how costume might construct and telegraph homosexual identities. Work on costume which tackles cross-dressing and androgyny, however, forms a useful bridge between theoretical costume writing and analyses of gay and lesbian representation, tackling as it does the homosexual connotations of cross-gendered appearance. Films such as *Sylvia Scarlett* (George Cukor, Radio Pictures, USA, 1935), in which Katharine Hepburn spends much of the time dressed as a young boy and *Some Like It Hot* (Billy Wilder, Ashton Productions/Mirisch Corporation, USA, 1959), which requires Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon's characters to pose as women and join an all-female orchestra in order to hide from mobsters, often raise the issue of same-sex desire through mistaken gender identity. 'Temporary transvestite' films, as Chris Straayer calls them, while generally conservative and concerned with reinstating binary genders and ending in heterosexual coupling, offer audiences 'a gay fix.'¹⁸

Bruzzi's 'Beyond Gender' section in *Undressing Cinema* differentiates between 'The Comedy of Cross-Dressing', exemplified by films like *Mrs. Doubtfire* (Chris Columbus, Twentieth Century Fox, USA, 1993) which shows Robin Williams' character disguising himself as a matronly nanny to bypass his shrill ex-wife and spend time with his children,

¹⁵ Stutesman, 'Storytelling: Marlene Dietrich's Face and John Fredericks' Hats', p. 30.

¹⁶ Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 122. Also see Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity* (London: Paladin, 1984).

¹⁷ Fiona Cox, 'Closet Cases: Costuming, Lesbian Identities and Desire, Hollywood Cinema and the Motion Picture Production Code', *The International Journal of the Image* 1:4 (2011), p. 45.

¹⁸ Chris Straayer, 'Re-Dressing the Natural: The Temporary Transvestite Film', in Barry Keith Grant (ed.), *Film Genre Reader III* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), p. 417.

and 'The Erotic Strategies of Androgyny', visible in *Morocco* (Josef von Sternberg, Paramount, USA, 1930), when Marlene Dietrich dons top hat and tails and deliberately kisses another woman.¹⁹ Bruzzi shows how androgyny manifests 'a softening of the contours... between male and female [and] straight and gay', and remarks that even in films which appear to contain the ambiguities of transvestism within comedy, 'the normalising manoeuvres never quite cancel out the abnormalising ones', as the spectator 'is privy to the intermittent displays of perversion'.²⁰ Rebecca Bell-Metereau's *Hollywood Androgyny* similarly shows how androgynous images 'explore sexual variation'.²¹ Such work allows for homosexual connotations of clothing even within heterosexual narratives and when worn by straight characters. My own work in 'Closet Cases', as well as work on images of gay and lesbian characters by Dyer and Caroline Sheldon, among others, demonstrates how Gaines' classifications of type as telegraphed through costume did occasionally expand to include the question of how people of 'different' sexualities were thought to be in 'real life' as well.²²

This brings us to the body of work concerning dress in representations of gays and lesbians in the media. In 1977, *Gays and Film*—Dyer's seminal edited work on the representation of gay characters in cinema—contained a chapter written by Dyer entitled 'Stereotyping'.²³ In the chapter, Dyer criticised the prevalence of negative stereotypes in media representations of homosexuals. He pointed out that stereotypes are potentially dangerous for gay people, who may 'believe them, leading... to behaviour in conformity with the stereotypes which of course only serves to confirm their truth'.²⁴ The notion that gay people piece together their ideas about what it means to be gay—and in particular what a gay person looks like—from images circulating in the media, is of course significant in my research, and I am partly aiming to update this aspect of Dyer's work in this thesis.

¹⁹ Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema*, pp. 147-199.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 158, 176.

²¹ Rebecca Bell-Metereau, *Hollywood Androgyny* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

²² Cox, 'Closet Cases'; Richard Dyer, 'Stereotyping', in Dyer (ed.), *Gays and Film* (London: BFI, 1977), pp. 27-39; Caroline Sheldon, 'Lesbians and film: some thoughts', in Dyer (ed.), *Gays and Film*, pp. 5-26.

²³ Dyer, 'Stereotyping', pp. 27-39.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

As Dyer explicated, 'types' which are perceived as 'outside' one's own society are typically negatively portrayed and classified as stereotypes.²⁵ Homosexual 'identity' was first widely publicised at a time when homosexuality was much theorised but overwhelmingly condemned in Western cultures, and 'types' of (gay and) lesbian identity were consequently formed as objectionable stereotypes. An important factor of work on gay and lesbian representation in the media is that concepts of both stereotypes and ideas of 'authentic' iconography are often split down gender lines. In some sense, this goes back to the early days of psychosexual theories of identity. Late nineteenth century sexologists like Freud, Karl Westphal and Richard von Krafft-Ebing evidenced strictly binary concepts of gender by mapping homosexuality onto heterosexual structures of desire, conflating sexuality and gender to form classifications of gay women as being like men.²⁶ The stereotype of the unstylish, unglamorous and cross-gender identified 'mannish lesbian' was thus cemented in the public imagination.²⁷

Over the years, gay activists have fought hard against stereotyping; in 1973 the Gay Media Task Force deemed it 'bigotry' and 'damaging' to exclusively depict stereotypically gay people out of the 'broad spectrum of the gay community'.²⁸ As recently as 2010, Sue Perkins responded in the *Guardian* to a media report on the representation of gay, lesbian and bisexual people on television with the following: 'the same issues keep arising. For gay men, it's the predominance of the camp cliché. For lesbians, despair at the outdated butch-

²⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁶ See Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America* (Penguin: New York, 1992), p. 41; Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (New York, Little, Brown & Company, 1965), Sigmund Freud, 'Female Sexuality', in James Strachey (trans.), Angela Richards (ed.), *The Penguin Freud Library Volume 7: On Sexuality* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 376. Also see Freud, 'Femininity', in James Strachey (trans.), James Strachey and Angela Richards (eds.), *The Penguin Freud Library Volume 2: New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 164.

²⁷ Esther Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman', *Signs* 9:4 *The Lesbian Issue* (Summer 1984), p. 560.

²⁸ 'Gay Media Task Force Platform', 1973, quoted in Steven Capsuto, *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television* (Ballantine Books: New York, 2000), p. 99.

femme stereotypes.²⁹ To replace these, Perkins called for more 'real' depictions of gay people, for example, 'just sitting around paying bills like Average Jos.'³⁰

Since the 1970s, scholars like Dyer, Andrea Weiss and Cindy Patton have problematized the notion of the stereotype as always bad, because visual signifiers of minority sexual identities act as a reminder of the specific social implications of living as one of those minorities.³¹ As Wilson points out, clothing can be a useful communicative tool for minorities because it allows for visibility: 'Clothes are the poster for one's act.'³² Dyer himself strongly argued for 'the importance of holding on to some concept of typing... at the same time as we are exposing the reactionary political force of most social and stereotyping.'³³ He advocated the use of 'member types', which are 'linked to historically and culturally specific and determined social groups or classes'.³⁴ Member types, Dyer argued, could potentially shift concepts of collective gay identity away from psychological distinctions, instead emphasising 'distinctions as the basis of collective identity and the heart of historical struggle', incorporating a sense of community and a potentially politically productive viewpoint which centres on an understanding of the social factors that shape gayness.³⁵

Crucially, stereotypical concepts and styles, including masculine gay women, were not only imposed upon lesbians. Such identities were also already inhabited by women who loved other women prior to the time many sexologists were busy classifying them, as Terry Castle argues in *The Apparitional Lesbian*.³⁶ In *The Matter of Images*, Dyer notes that

the development of gay sub-cultures meant that many homosexual people did participate in a lifestyle, a set of tastes, a language and so on that meant that their

²⁹ Sue Perkins, 'Gay roles on television need to be real', *Guardian.co.uk* (Tuesday 5 October 2010) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/2010/oct/05/gay-roles-television-real?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487>>, accessed 30 May 2011.

³⁰ Perkins, 'Gay roles on television need to be real'. I enjoy the fact that Perkins uses the feminine here, appropriating the supposedly 'universal' male form typically used, in a rather feminist manner.

³¹ Dyer 'Stereotyping', pp. 27-39; Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film* (New York: Penguin, 1992), p. 63; Cindy Patton, 'What is a nice lesbian like you doing in a film like this?', in *immortal invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image*, Tamsin Wilton (ed.), (London & New York: Routledge 1995) pp. 20-33.

³² Elizabeth Wilson, 'All the Rage', in Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds.), *Fabrications*, p. 33.

³³ Dyer, 'Stereotyping', p. 39.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁶ Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York & Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 8.

lives were, in more respects than the sexual, different from that of most heterosexual people.³⁷

He argues that 'sub-cultural activity was itself a form of resistance to the negative implications of the lesbian/homosexual categories, in that it took the categories as a basis for a way of life rather than as something to be overcome or cured', forming the basis for the Gay Movement which began in the late 1960s. The movement itself privileges visibility. As Dyer recounts in a passage worth quoting in full:

Wearing badges, kissing in the streets were means of being visible, but so equally were behaving and dressing in recognizably gay ways – they brought you together in an act of sharing and made you obvious on the streets. Typification (visually recognizable images and self-representations) is not just something wished on gay people but produced by them, both in the pre-political gay sub-cultures and in the radical gay movement since 1968.³⁸

There are two important aspects here which are relevance to my thesis. First, there is such a thing as a 'recognizable' image of gayness. Second, looking gay can be understood as a positive political act.

In Chapter One I will go over what might be considered 'recognizable' aspects of lesbian identity in contemporary western society, but for now let's concentrate on the political benefits of being seen to be gay through dress. In the 1950s and '60s in lesbian subcultures in the West, the butch in particular was a powerful political sign, using non-gender conformity to signal non-heterosexuality, stating a daring claim for one's right to love as one chose. Butch women are not the only 'kind' of lesbian to exist, but they are the most instantly recognisable as not adhering to heterocentric norms in a particular (lesbian) way. Joan Nestle has argued for the 1950s butch as a pre-second-wave feminist identity, the obvious butch/femme couple's image functioning, through the butch's visible mismatch of biological sex and gender presentation, as a 'conspicuous flag of rebellion.'³⁹ Nestle demonstrates her investment in the visible butch as powerfully political by insisting:

³⁷ Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (2nd edn.; London: Routledge, 2002), p. 21.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Joan Nestle, 'Butch-Fem Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950s', *Heresies #12 (Sex Issue)* 3:4 (Winter 1981), p. 21.

'Lesbians have always opposed the patriarchy; in the past, perhaps most when they looked like men.'⁴⁰

Malinda Lo picked up on this argument with relation to *The L Word* in 2004, criticising the lack of 'butch haircuts' on the series, for example.⁴¹ Totally erasing gay iconography that makes difference visible potentially means erasing the political power of perceptibly daring not to conform. It also robs those gay women who exhibit non-gender-conforming styles of seeing themselves reflected in popular culture. Radclyffe Hall's 1928 novel *The Well of Loneliness* portrayed a stereotypically mannish lesbian, which Esther Newton argued upset both 'heterosexual conservatives' and 'lesbian feminists' in the years after its publication, but the novel also 'articulated a gender orientation with which an important minority of lesbians still actively identify,' Newton pointed out in 1984.⁴² Strongly typed masculine lesbians might invoke stereotypes, but they are certainly welcomed by some, like Newton, for their rarely represented and 'authentic' lesbian credentials.

For the contemporary costume designer, this triangle of conflicting demands presents a dilemma. Patton argues,

To simply hunt down stereotypes and attempt to replace them fails to understand that narrative film works precisely by loading up characters with signs which refer to something larger than the description of the character who wears them. Signs stand for class traits, issues, and even stand as boundary lines between forms of human being: changing the constellation of these signs doesn't automatically produce more acceptable representations...⁴³

Fundamentally, theories of costume design are founded on the basic premise that dress communicates character, yet the criticisms of both stereotypes and non-typed lesbian roles places designers under contradicting pressures.⁴⁴ Owing to the history of bigotry and defamation, lesbians should not be stereotyped, but lesbians *should* be visibly typed as gay

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

⁴¹ Malinda Lo, 'It's All About the Hair: Butch Identity and Drag on *The L Word*', *AfterEllen.com* (April 2004) <<http://www.afterellen.com/archive/ellen/TV/thelword/butch.html>>, accessed 28 September 2011.

⁴² See Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928); Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian', p. 560.

⁴³ Patton, 'What is a nice lesbian like you doing in a film like this?', p. 23.

⁴⁴ The basic theorisation of costume primarily existing to communicate character has been questioned and troubled, most notably by Stella Bruzzi, who explores *haute couture* as interruptive spectacle in *Undressing Cinema*. This will be addressed in further detail in Chapter Two.

so as to allow for the political visibility of difference. These demands are not entirely mutually exclusive, but the overlap between lesbian stereotypes and recognisable gay female iconography are such that pleasing both critical camps is extremely difficult, especially—as Patton points out—in a medium which requires the simple categorization of ‘types’ of people through dress. The contemporary costumier must attempt to balance this triangle of conflicting demands: the use of what Turim named ‘storytelling wardrobes’; continuing negative attitudes towards stereotypes; and concepts surrounding ‘authentic’ representation of lesbian identity (that they exist and that they are politically beneficial), to create outfits that will both be acceptable to viewers and tell the required story through costume.⁴⁵ Chapters One, Two, and Three take up detailed investigations of designers’ attempts to juggle these conflicting pressures in costume designs, with fascinatingly variant results.

Butch/Femme, postmodern lesbians and the postfeminist sensibility

One topic I have not yet addressed properly is that of Butch/Femme. Butch/Femme has a chequered history within lesbian culture and criticism. Butch itself, as discussed, has long been a recognisable lesbian identity. Butch/Femme, in which butch stood for masculine style and generally signified active sexual behaviour and femme connoted femininity and passivity, and forming what Sally Munt calls a ‘co-dependent’ coupling in which butches seek femmes as lovers and vice-versa, came to prominence as a staple of working-class lesbian bar culture in western communities in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁶ Yet in the late 1960s and into the 1970s, (predominantly middle-class) lesbian-feminists vehemently rejected Butch/Femme practices as ‘a heterosexist imitation of the oppressive gender roles of

⁴⁵ See Turim, ‘Designing Women’, p. 222.

⁴⁶ Sally R. Munt (ed.), *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender* (London and Washington: Cassell, 1998), p. 2. For reference to the prevalence of Butch/Femme at these times see Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, p. 60; Elizabeth Wilson, ‘Deviant Dress’, *Feminist Review* 35 (Summer 1990), pp. 67-74, and Nestle, ‘Butch-Fem Relationships’, pp. 21-24.

patriarchy.⁴⁷ Instead, lesbian-feminists advocated a woman-identified version of lesbian relationships, as Colleen Lamos writes, putting 'the homo back into homosexuality'.⁴⁸

Munt, in the introduction to her 1998 edited collection on Butch/Femme, *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*, notes a divide in pre-eminent theories of Butch/Femme between the epistemological and ontological. Considered epistemologically, Butch/femme is 'deployed as a style of knowing, interpreting, and doing lesbian gender', whereas looked upon ontologically, Butch/Femme is 'concerned with being, with having an identity, and a kind of true self'.⁴⁹ Nestle's writing on the political power of Butch/Femme in the 1950s evidences an ontological perspective when she bemoans the celebration of 'the withering away of butch-fem styles' in favour of androgynous homogeneity.⁵⁰ Nestle remarks that, more than Butch/Femme, the 1970's favoured style was 'truly destructive kind of role-playing—a self-denial of *natural* style so the oppressor will not get angry'.⁵¹

In the late 1980s and into the 1990s, Butch/Femme saw a resurgence, this time with a distinctly epistemological slant, according to many of those who documented the trend. In 'Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic' (1988), Sue Ellen Case theorised that Butch/Femme couples, rather than apeing and reifying heterosexuality, deconstructed it. She writes:

The artifice of butch-femme role playing is its insistence on roles as roles, as a masquerade which, in its excess of 'genderedness,' unmasks the performative nature of roles which have their origin in social constructions rather than nature.⁵²

Case was keen to point out the irony she saw as inherent in late 1980s Butch/Femme 'masquerade', roles she saw as being 'constructed from outside ideology' despite appearing to be trapped within it.⁵³ Others voiced similar opinions, with Judith Roof proclaiming 'By the 1990s butch-femme is back, this time as a political possibility'.⁵⁴ Importantly, this is seen as

⁴⁷ Judith Roof, '1970s Lesbian Feminist Meets 1990s Butch-Femme', in Munt (ed.), *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*, p. 27.

⁴⁸ Colleen Lamos, 'The Postmodern Lesbian Position: *On Our Backs*', in Laura Doan (ed.), *The Lesbian Postmodern* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 93.

⁴⁹ Sally R. Munt, *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Nestle, 'Butch-Fem Relationships', p. 24.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Emphasis added.

⁵² Sue-Ellen Case, 'Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic', in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (eds), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 301.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Roof, '1970s Lesbian Feminism Meets 1990s Butch-Femme', p. 27.

something new. Arlene Stein also noted, 'it's clear that roles mean something very different today than they once did.'⁵⁵ Epistemological understandings—and the rejection of ontological perspectives, framed as indicative of an earlier era—are evident in Stein's work on the emphasis on style over substance in the newly rebooted Butch/Femme era:

Eighties butch-femme... is a self-conscious aesthetic that plays with style and power, rather than an embrace of one's 'true' nature... Gone is the tightly constructed relation between personal style, erotic preference, and economic position – the hallmark of roles during the prefeminist era.

There is no longer a clear one-to-one correspondence between fashion and identity. For many, clothes are transient, interchangeable; you can dress as a femme one day and a butch the next. You can wear a crew-cut along with a skirt. Wearing high heels during the day does not mean you're a femme at night, passive in bed, or closeted on the job.⁵⁶

In the 1990s, then, Butch/Femme was seen as ironic and fun, signifying the start of the era of what Lamos calls 'the postmodern lesbian': 'a queer lesbian culture that blurs distinctions between masculine and feminine.'⁵⁷

Part of the shift in the 1980s and 1990s was what Cherry Smyth calls 'a significant uncoupling of femme from butch'.⁵⁸ With Butch/Femme now regarded as roles to be playfully inhabited and switched daily at will via the donning of alternately—and even mixed—gendered garments, there was less 'need' for lesbian couples to restrict themselves to 'masquerading' as opposing roles. This emphasis on epistemological concepts of Butch/Femme—on the emergence of style over substance—as well as the uncoupling of Butch from Femme paved the way for a major concern of this thesis, indeed for what became one of the biggest tropes of lesbian representation in the media in the 1990s and on into the twenty-first century: butch invisibility.

Despite a reduction in homophobia evidenced by the increasing lesbian representation described in the introduction to this thesis, in mainstream media the types of representation which have predominated since the 1990s are overwhelmingly gender-normative, revealing

⁵⁵ Arlene Stein, 'All Dressed Up, But No Place to Go? Style Wars and the New Lesbianism', in Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (eds.), *Out In Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture* (London: Cassell, 1995), p. 478.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 479.

⁵⁷ Lamos, 'The Postmodern Lesbian Position', p. 94.

⁵⁸ Cherry Smyth, 'How Do We Look? Imaging Butch/Femme', in Munt (ed.), *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*, p. 83.

what Judith Halberstam calls 'butch-phobia.'⁵⁹ I will explore this in detail in the remainder of the thesis—particularly in Chapter One with the lack of truly butch imagery in both *The L Word* and *Lip Service*, as well as in *Gillery's Little Secret* and *The Kids Are All Right*, discussed in Chapter Three—but it is worth mentioning butch-phobia in brief here too, for the striking and revealing parallels it reveals between postmodern lesbianism and postfeminism. Halberstam writes that 'assumptions about the essential masculinity of the lesbian have resulted in the production of stereotypes of the masculine lesbian.'⁶⁰ Owing to the negative connotations of stereotypes, this in turn renders the butch 'a site for lesbian disidentification.'⁶¹ As Charlotte Brunsdon points out, disidentification has been a feature of all generations of feminism:

if second-wave feminists were not like the housewives and sex objects they saw in the media, they were in turn othered by the postcolonial critique of the 1980s. As second-wave feminism interrogated itself, those in the next generation of feminists felt compelled to declare their lack of identity with second-wave feminists.⁶²

Disidentification with feminist principles, while at the same time presenting feminist gains as 'taken for granted', is a key feature of postfeminism, as best elucidated by both Angela McRobbie and Rosalind Gill.⁶³ Gill has helpfully classified postfeminism as a 'sensibility', one that has permeated many representations of women since the 1990s.⁶⁴ The key feature of postfeminism, as described as part of Gill's 'sensibility' but also by McRobbie, is what McRobbie calls a 'double entanglement': postfeminist texts incorporate both feminist and anti-feminist ideas.⁶⁵ Series like *Ally McBeal* and *Sex and the City* (HBO, USA, 1998-2004), as well as films like *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Sharon Maguire, Working Title, UK, 2001) are

⁵⁹ Judith Halberstam, 'Between Butches', in Munt (ed.), *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*, p. 58. Niall Richardson details the gay-male equivalent, 'effeminophobia', in his article 'Effeminophobia, Misogyny and Queer Friendship: The Cultural Themes of Channel 4's *Playing It Straight*', *Sexualities* 12:4 (2009), pp. 525-544.

⁶⁰ Judith Halberstam, 'Between Butches', p. 58.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Charlotte Brunsdon, 'Postfeminism, Feminism, Martha, Martha and Nigella', *Cinema Journal* 44:2 (Winter 2005), p. 112.

⁶³ Rosalind Gill, 'Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10:2 (2007), p. 161. See also Angela McRobbie, 'Post-feminism and popular culture', *Feminist Media Studies* 4:3 (2004), pp. 255-264.

⁶⁴ Gill, 'Postfeminist Media Culture', p. 161.

⁶⁵ McRobbie, 'Post-feminism and popular culture', p. 262; Gill, 'Postfeminist Media Culture', p. 149.

prime examples of texts in which feminism is 'simultaneously taken for granted and repudiated.'⁶⁶

The postmodern (and perhaps postfeminist) lesbian disidentification with butch identity has translated into media representations of gay women. Ann M. Ciasullo argues that 1990s media, with its surge of lesbian visibility undeniably indebted to those women who had rendered lesbianism visible in the past, largely effaced the figure of the butch.⁶⁷ As my three chapters detail, the trend continues, with the distinct (and much discussed) lack of recognisable lesbian imagery in both straight and lesbian-auteured television and film texts. Characters like Mame in 'Flowers of Evil' have been almost entirely replaced by femme lesbians displaying conventionally feminine markers such as long hair and make-up, wearing clothes and generally appearing as indistinguishable from representations of heterosexual women in mainstream media. Ciasullo, Becca Cragin and Arlene Stein, among others, have pointed out that the figure of the lipstick lesbian—the femme face of glamorous lesbian chic—is a resolutely apolitical figure.⁶⁸ Safely refusing to question traditional gender roles by replicating popular representations of heterosexual women, the postmodern lesbian is determinedly femme, posing little threat to patriarchy and conveniently attractive to the straight male gaze.

Yet postmodern lesbian texts, like their postfeminist counterparts, contain contradictory politics so that while many criticise the lack of butch identities on display, others have intervened in the widespread criticism of ostensibly apolitical femme-centric lesbian representations in the media to argue that presenting feminine-looking women who are gay in fact troubles heteronormativity. This, they argue, is subversive and thus political; Lisa M. Walker theorises that the figure of the femme 'both constructs the illusion of an interior gendered self (she looks like a straight woman) and parodies it (what you see is not what

⁶⁶ Gill, 'Postfeminist Media Culture', p. 161. For more on these, see Moseley and Jacinda Read, "Having it Ally': Popular Television (Post-)Feminism", *Feminist Media Studies* 2:2 (2002), pp. 231-249, as well as McRobbie, 'Post-feminism and popular culture'.

⁶⁷ Ann M. Ciasullo, 'Making Her (In)Visible: Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s', *Feminist Studies* 27:3 (Autumn, 2001), p. 578, 579.

⁶⁸ See Ciasullo, 'Making Her (In)Visible', pp. 577-608; Becca Cragin, 'Lesbians and Serial TV: *Ellen* Finds Her Inner Adult', in James R. Keller & Leslie Stratyner (eds.), *The New Queer Aesthetic on Television: Essays on Recent Programming* (Jefferson, North Carolina & London: McFarland & Company, 2006), pp. 193-208; Stein, 'All Dressed Up, But No Place to Go?', pp. 476-483.

you get).⁶⁹ Gill argues that these contradictory ideas in the postfeminist sensibility are reconciled 'through a grammar of individualism', namely choice, which closely resembles neoliberalism.⁷⁰ In Chapter One I return to a discussion of neoliberalism in the context of discussing the assimilationist, feminine representations that dominate *The L Word*, further indicating the parallels between postmodern lesbian texts and the postfeminist sensibility, or perhaps the centrality of the postfeminist sensibility to postmodern lesbianism.

For Gill, postfeminism comprises several recurring features, including:

the shift from objectification to subjectification...; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment...; a marked sexualization of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism... These themes coexist with and are structured by stark and continuing inequalities and exclusions that relate to 'race' and ethnicity, class, age... and disability as well as gender.⁷¹

These features, to varying degrees, are visible in the texts examined in this thesis, with the hyper-sexuality and *Sex and the City*-lite conspicuous consumerism of Showtime's *The L Word* and the overwhelming whiteness of mainstream lesbian representations. For Gill, the shift from objectification to subjectification is key to postfeminism. The apparent 'shift' is, she fears, a 'deeper form of exploitation than objectification', reliant on a sleight of hand by which 'the objectifying male gaze is internalized to form a new disciplinary regime.'⁷² This ostensibly new regime offers women 'the promise of power by becoming an object of desire': gaining supposed liberation from earlier sexist objectification by now apparently 'choosing' to be objectified.⁷³ The flaw at the heart of the 'choice' argument becomes visible, Gill points out, when we question 'why, if we are just pleasing ourselves, the resulting valued 'look' is so similar -- hairless body, slim waist, firm buttocks, etc.'⁷⁴

The same question might be asked of the lack of butch imagery in nearly every single one of my case studies: if lesbians are now free to playfully and ironically display variously

⁶⁹ Lisa M. Walker, 'How to Recognize a Lesbian: The Cultural Politics of Looking like What You Are', *Signs* 18:4, Theorizing Lesbian Experience (Summer, 1993), p. 883. Also see Erin Douglas, 'Pink Heels, Dildos, and Erotic Play: The (Re)Making of Fem(me)inity on Showtime's *The L Word*', in Rebecca Bierne (ed.), *Televising Queer Women: A Reader*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 195-209.

⁷⁰ Gill, 'Postfeminist Media Culture', p. 162, 164.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁷² Gill, 'From Sexual Objectification to Sexual Subjectification: The Resexualisation of Women's Bodies in the Media', *Feminist Media Studies* 3:1 (2003), p.104.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

gendered characteristics, why do the overwhelming majority of lesbian characters in the media present as glamorous, beautiful, traditionally styled—i.e. distinctly femme—women? Gill writes of postfeminism that ‘Girls and women are invited to become a particular kind of self and are endowed with agency on condition that it is used to construct oneself as a subject closely resembling the heterosexual male fantasy found in pornography.’⁷⁵ Similarly, lesbians are tolerated in mainstream space on the provision that they are, as a rule, depicted along the same lines. Much of this thesis is concerned with unpicking the results of this postmodern/postfeminist pressure on producers of lesbian characters within texts.

Audience Research

Historically, work on audiences in film studies has predominantly been characterised by the textually constructed spectator, envisioned as ‘passive’ and theorised through Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts. Such a perspective is exemplified in work by Christian Metz and Mary Ann Doane, for example, as well as in Laura Mulvey’s hugely influential feminist polemic, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, which deconstructed the male gaze Mulvey (and many others at the time) saw as inscribed in mainstream film.⁷⁶ Cultural and television studies, emanating from and heavily influenced by the work of the CCCS in the late 1970s and early 1980s, has focused far more on research with actual and socially situated spectators. Briefly, examples include Morley’s work on audiences categorised into socially differentiated sub-groups, in which Morley analysed how each responded to an episode of *Nationwide* (BBC, UK, 1969-1983), as well as studies like Len Ang’s *Watching Dallas*.⁷⁷ Television studies often posits a more active reader than film studies, with a lot of focus on audiences as producers of ‘resistant’ or oppositional readings of hegemonic norms encoded in texts, as in Morley’s *Nationwide* project. Television studies work on ‘active’

⁷⁵ Gill, ‘Postfeminist Media Culture’, p. 152.

⁷⁶ See Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alford Guzzetti (trans.), (London, Macmillan, 1982); Mary Ann Doane, ‘Film and the Masquerade: theorising the female spectator’, *Screen* 23: 3/4 (1982), pp. 74-87; Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, in Patricia Erens (ed.), *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 28-40.

⁷⁷ David Morley, ‘The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding’, in Morley and Brunson, *The Nationwide Television Studies*, pp. 117-302.

readers has also looked at consumers as literal producers, creating 'new cultural goods' through activities often related to fandom; such theories are illustrated by the work of John Fiske and Henry Jenkins.⁷⁸

Important predecessors of my own work are projects which have combined notions of the active reader of cultural studies with film texts. Examples include Jackie Stacey's *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* and Rachel Moseley's *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn*, both discussed below, as well as Jacqueline Bobo's *Black Women as Cultural Readers*, which is based on interviews with middle-class African-American women and analyses responses to both literature and films concerning black female characters.⁷⁹ Each project undertakes ethnographic research to investigate the relationship between texts and audiences. Each therefore contravenes the historical tendency in (particularly feminist) film studies to privilege the concept of a textually constructed spectator. Although taking different approaches in the theorisation of their results, all deal with real viewers and fans, thus putting 'the spectator back into spectatorship'.⁸⁰ In this section I will primarily be focusing on the work of Stacey and Moseley, owing to their shared focus on how dress, as an identificatory practice, plays a part in spectatorship, offering useful models for my own concerns about lesbian communities making use of images of lesbianism—as constructed through clothing—circulating in culture.

Stacey undertakes analysis of letters and questionnaires collected in the 1990s but which refer back to British women's experiences of cinema-going during the 1940s and 1950s. Chapters are divided into discussions of escapism, identification and consumption. The conclusions in *Star Gazing* acknowledge the socially situated reader, noting the geographic and historical specificity of Stacey's research and taking into account the effect of first scarcity then availability of consumer goods on the complexity of 'identificatory' fantasies of

⁷⁸ Henry Jenkins, 'Why Fiske Still Matters', Introduction to John Fiske, *Television Culture* (2nd edn.; Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. xxx. See Fiske, *Television Culture* and well as and Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁷⁹ Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁸⁰ Rachel Moseley, *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn: Text, audience, resonance* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 26.

female spectators in Britain during and following the Second World War.⁸¹ Despite furthering earlier work in film studies concerning female spectatorship by tackling real (as opposed to theorised) audience responses, Stacey returns to Freudian and Lacanian concepts, analysing responses in terms of pleasure, fantasy, identification and desire. However, instead of remaining within an understanding of spectatorship that takes place at the moment of viewing, like Mulvey and Doane, Stacey makes a distinction between cinematic and extra-cinematic identification.⁸² Stacey also distinguishes between identificatory fantasies and identificatory practices, although she notes that the two are not necessarily separate entities. However, she points to the latter as something that amounts to 'social practice outside the cinema' as opposed to processes that remain 'within the spectator's imagination'.⁸³

In 2000, Gaines noted the lack of work on the relation of viewers to costume design, arguing:

Because of the emphasis in feminist film criticism on spectatorship as well as consumer culture, one would expect that the key questions would have to do with the intersection of on- and off-screen bodies, with embodiment and disembodiment, with emulation and imitation.⁸⁴

Stacey's work offers some insight on these questions, identifying extra-cinematic identificatory practices as those which 'involve the spectators engaging in some kind of practice of transformation of the self to become more like the star they admire' through processes divided into the following categories: pretending, resembling, imitating, and copying.⁸⁵ Imitating and copying both allow for practices which involve clothing, thus intersecting with my own work. I am, however, not interested here in unconscious processes, and focus far less on classifying the exact behaviours of identification, where they were detectable, as manifested by my consumer interviewees. Nonetheless, Stacey's notions of imitating and copying through dress are relevant to my work.

⁸¹ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 240.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁸⁴ Jane M. Gaines, 'On Wearing the Film: *Madam Satan* (1930)', in Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 161.

⁸⁵ Stacey, *Star Gazing*, p. 159-169.

Moseley's work in *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn* is another example of a project that takes on the intersection of on- and off-screen bodies. The book is similar to Stacey's study in that it brings together film studies, cultural studies and a consideration of social history. While rejecting the 'resistance' model of active audiences, Moseley nevertheless emphasises that women are 'not simply "passive" consumers of media images.'⁸⁶ Yet *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn* furthers previously existing concepts of identification in a different manner to Stacey, whose work remains within a psychoanalytic model. Moseley, in contrast, questions 'whether the notion of "identification"' is indeed 'the most appropriate way to characterise the relationship between female viewers and a female star.'⁸⁷

Moseley uses interviews, textual analysis, and archival research to analyse every-day practices of dress in order to uncover various ways in which female spectators interact with the 'image-text' of Audrey Hepburn.⁸⁸ The term 'image-text' is used partly to 'signal the centrality of the visual, the image, the "look" in relation to this particular star.'⁸⁹ The project is sensitive to intersectionality within femininity, constituting 'an historically, socially, and culturally grounded approach' in which the responses of female viewers are divided along generational lines.⁹⁰ Taking from Beverley Skeggs the concept of 'recognition' as a 'critical' part of the process of identification, Moseley comes up with the model of 'resonance and recognition' to characterise the relationship between female subjects and Hepburn's 'image-text'.⁹¹ This concept prevents the need to separate text from audience and provides an understanding of spectatorship and identificatory practices as 'something akin to Williams's notion of "structure of feeling"... , a flexible formulation privileging feeling over more formal concepts like ideology.'⁹²

⁸⁶ Moseley, *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn*, p. 9.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30-31.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20, 8. Also see Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995)

⁹² Moseley, *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn*, p. 132-133.

What Moseley finds useful in the concept of resonance is 'its combination of structure, harmony and imprecision,' as well as 'its suggestion of a perpetual "back and forth"'.⁹³ This provides a way to integrate the textual analysis, archival research and information gathered through audience interviews which has great significance for my own work. A second express function of the term 'image-text' in Moseley's work is to acknowledge Dyer's concept of the 'total star text', which is understood as 'constructed from the sum of all the information available on the figure.'⁹⁴ In *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn* the process of 'resonance and recognition' constitutes a back and forth between (image-)text and audience. Archival research in Moseley's study contributes to an understanding of 'the construction and circulation of Audrey Hepburn as a star', although because of the distance of Moseley's writing from the period being researched, archival materials used consist of further 'texts' (in addition to Hepburn's films), which make up the star's 'image-text'. There was no possibility of going back to those actively manufacturing those films or archival materials. By investigating contemporary images, I have been able to enlarge Moseley's methodological framework somewhat, including research with costume designers as producers of lesbian image-texts. This enabled me to expand the notion of 'resonance' to include the moment of production. I will argue that in some examples in this thesis, particularly those of *The L Word* and *Lip Service*, we can indeed see a process of 'resonance' in action that encompasses production, text and audience, circling back around to production again.

Like the majority of work on costume, much work engaging with real film spectators has focused on straight viewers, with studies often undertaken along gender divides, typically featuring women, as in *Star Gazing*. Notably, Stacey focused on the homoerotic pleasures offered by the female star/spectator relationship. Exploring female respondents' pleasure in recognising differences as well as similarities in femininities, Stacey argues that there is a homoeroticism contained within female spectatorship of stars as ego ideals, thus 'eroticising identification.'⁹⁵ While careful to stress that the two processes are still at times distinct, she argues that the identifications indicated in respondents' letters 'seemed to include forms of

⁹³ Ibid., p. 7-8.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 30-31. Also see Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1998).

⁹⁵ Stacey, *Star Gazing*, p. 29.

feminine desire, rather than being strictly constituted as their opposite.⁹⁶ However, while Stacey claims to 'eroticise identification', the respondents included in *Star Gazing* were, at best estimates, all heterosexual, with those who found female stars particularly fascinating taking care to invoke heterosexuality 'to protect against any interpretations... of such love of another female as containing homoerotic pleasures.'⁹⁷ Several studies divided along gender lines do allow for the further situated reader, as with the focus on generational difference in *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn*, Skeggs' study of working-class women which looks at the intersectionality of gender and class, and Bobo's *Black Women as Cultural Readers*, which acknowledges the intersectionality of gender and race. In *Dressing the Part* I aim to use the situated figure of the gay female spectator as the third element of my study of the social rituals of lesbian dress circulating in contemporary visual cultures, assessing production, texts, and reception of media images.

Previous audience studies provide a useful jumping off point for my work in this thesis, although viewer responses are not my sole concern. In the pages that follow, I will investigate issues of lesbian representation through dress in the twenty-first century, considering clothing in both television and film examples. I will investigate the ways in which designs contribute to the making of meaning with regard to lesbianism in each case study, reading texts through a triple prism of designer interviews, textual analysis and consumer responses. The second trio in my work, the three contradictory pressures on contemporary costume designers, provides a way of structuring not only my three chapters but also my conclusion, which focuses on the simultaneously public and personal style of Sue Perkins. These pressures are juggled in varying ways in case studies, offering as many solutions to the problems presented by these triple design pressures as there are texts; for example I see both rejections of and positive appropriations of stereotypes and recognisable lesbian 'types' in these examples, worked through on the level of costuming. I have deliberately aimed to avoid evaluations of the representations in these films and programmes, partly because I am a fan of many and partly out of respect for the hard work that goes into

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 135.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 142.

creating media texts. Instead, I have focused on processes, context and comparative details which reveal a particular historical moment.

And so let us begin with a chapter looking at American and British examples of something which is very revealing of a recent and particular historical moment: the lesbian ensemble television series, as represented by *The L Word* and *Lip Service*.

Chapter One

Centre Stage: paradoxical lesbian ecologies in *The L Word* and *Lip Service*

This chapter looks at two television programmes that feature communities of lesbians: *The L Word* (Showtime, USA, 2004-2009) and *Lip Service* (BBC, UK, 2010-2012). Like the British and American versions of *Queer as Folk* (Channel 4, UK, 1999-2000) (Showtime, USA, 2000-2005) that preceded them, *The L Word* and *Lip Service* focus on a small number of gay characters. In this case, however, unlike *Queer as Folk*'s group of gay male friends and lovers, the characters were mostly gay women. Both the number of lesbian characters and the consequent shift of lesbianism from content to context contributed to the ways in which designers chose to style and dress characters in *The L Word* and *Lip Service*. Each series was forced to negotiate the trio of conflicting pressures placed on its designers—comprising of theories of costume design which emphasise dress as communicative of character, widespread understandings in the west of what lesbians look like (and less widespread ideas about why it might be positive to do so), and anxieties over stereotypes which have arisen since the 1970s—when creating costume designs. The production context of each series played a part in the eventual decisions made, differing slightly in each example and therefore resulting in somewhat dissimilar design strategies. Yet the particular situation of representing a variety of gay women gave rise to an apparent paradox visible in both series: although lesbianism is an obvious narrative focus, it is not emphasised in terms of the stories telegraphed by costume.

Both *The L Word* and *Lip Service* were subjected to criticism that bemoaned the largely feminine and conventionally attractive picture of lesbianism each series represented. In my interviews with costume designers Cynthia Summers (*The L Word*) and Lesley Abernethy (*Lip Service*) as well as hair and make-up designer Niamh Morrison (*Lip Service*), this raised the issue of whether or not there is a perceived need on the part of creative personnel to depict recognisable images of lesbianism in the media today. Much of the following chapter is concerned with exploring how this question influenced costume designs for both series. Taking into account the triple conflicting pressures on designers of lesbian characters in the early twenty-first century, I will analyse the images of lesbianism which the series construct

through costume and style, paying particular attention to production contexts as well as the unique effects of gay ensemble casts on designs used.

The lesbian ensemble structure of both *The L Word* and *Lip Service* enabled the achievement of goals the sitcom *Ellen* aimed to accomplish in the late 1990s. In terms of lesbian visibility in mainstream cultures, the coming out of both Ellen DeGeneres and her sitcom character Ellen Morgan in 1997 was a major turning point. With regards to form, it was a significant step towards the type of programming exemplified by both *The L Word* and *Lip Service*. Anna McCarthy has written about the representational shift precipitated by Morgan's coming out on *Ellen*. Prior to 1997, homosexuality had been 'an interruptive, marginal force in the sitcom [format], its duration limited to one-off figures in "very special" episodes and supporting characters.'¹ In the introduction to their 2009 edited collection *Queer TV*, Glyn Davis and Gary Needham note that queer characters (in this case, in soaps) are seldom given stories beyond coming out. The writers point out that, often,

the revelation of a character's homosexuality quickly leads to narrative redundancy... Most... gay and lesbian characters... have little to do after they come out, and more often than not they eventually get written out... when provided with post-closet narratives, the fate of such characters is often to have the queer aspects of their lives (sex, love, queer friends and spaces, homophobia) elided.²

By having a lead—as opposed to a secondary character—come out as gay, *Ellen* both offered the chance to end such erasure of lesbian specificity and 'promised to make queer life something other than an interruptive force, something potentially *assimilated*... into the repertoire of romantic and personal situations replayed weekly' on series where gay characters appeared.³ Television now had a potential space to present narratives that took

¹ Anna McCarthy, 'Ellen: Making Queer Television History', *GLQ* 7:4 (16 Oct 2001), p. 599. Also see both Stephen Tropiano, *The Prime Time Closet: A History of Gays and Lesbians on TV* (New York: Applause, 2002) and Steven Capsuto, *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000) for similar arguments about many kinds of US television programming.

² Glyn Davis and Gary Needham, 'Introduction: The Pleasures of the Tube' in *Queer TV*, Davis and Needham (eds), (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 7.

³ McCarthy, 'Ellen: Making Queer Television History', p. 599.

lesbianism for granted rather than making it into the story itself: for the first time television writers enjoyed 'the possibility of coding queer romance as an everyday event'.⁴

A common feature of lesbian representation in the 1990s—as seen in *Friends*, *ER* and *Brookside* as well as many popular films featuring gay women—was the singular lesbian or token gay female couple. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argued that such representations of isolated lesbian characters or couples are 'neutered by lack of context' and, despite her protagonist status, Ellen Morgan, as a solitary lesbian in a predominantly heterosexual cast, was indeed a lonely figure.⁵ A gay female individual in a heterosexual context differentiates such a character from the overwhelming sexual 'norm' of others, indirectly 'othering' her. And while Morgan did get to explore her desire for women in Season Five with girlfriend Laurie (Lisa Darr), *Ellen's* conservative network broadcast context restricted demonstrations of that desire to tame, sexless interactions.⁶ The women never professed love for one another, and their eventual break up ended the possibility. While Ellen's friend on the sitcom Peter (Patrick Bristow) was also gay, the series spent little time focusing on his friendship with Ellen, and there was no attempt to explore queer spaces.

Post 'Puppy episode' *Ellen* did have a rather prolonged focus on homophobia, with Morgan's gradual and occasionally traumatic divulgences to friends and family over the remaining episodes; friend Paige (Joely Fisher) and Ellen's parents in particular take a while to accept her sexuality. However this over-exploration of Morgan's transition into lesbianism rendered her sexuality prone to 'interrupting' the heterosexuality around her. Falling ratings were blamed on this focus on gayness, and forced the cancellation of the series, which acted as

⁴ Ibid., p. 603.

⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Foreword: The Letter L', in Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (eds), *Reading The L Word: Outing Contemporary Television* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. xxi. Ellen's friend Peter is gay, but his day to day experiences are not explored as he is a minor secondary character, also arguably neutered by lack of context.

⁶ ABC's nervous and squeamish reaction to Ellen and Laurie kissing or even merely holding hands was visible in the parental guidance warnings which infamously accompanied episodes in which same-sex kissing occurred. See McCarthy, 'Ellen: Making Queer Television History', p. 602 and Capsuto, *Alternate Channels*, p. 399. The reaction was especially squeamish bearing in mind that kissing is an extremely common occurrence between mixed-sex couples on network television at all hours of the day, and, as Capsuto points out, same-sex kissing was aired without warnings during the same season as Ellen's relationship with Laurie, but on series where only one (male) character of the kissing couples was gay, and the actors were well known to be in heterosexual marriages. Ellen herself remarked how this revealed that 'It's okay to make fun of homosexuality... You just can't have genuine feelings and hold someone's hand.' Ellen DeGeneres, quoted in Capsuto, *Alternate Channels*, p. 399.

an effective writing out of the character—and her entire diegetic world—following her self-realisation.⁷ During *Ellen*, then, little changed from pre-1997 lesbian representations. While the sitcom represented an important step towards moving beyond coming-out stories, the lesbianism it depicted remained as something other than ‘everyday’.

While *Ellen* arguably failed, *The L Word* in the US and, later, *Lip Service* in the UK eventually succeeded in providing more productive serial representations of lesbian characters. In both shows, lesbianism expands to encompass a community of gay female friends: a homocentric set-up that Sedgwick termed ‘a lesbian ecology.’⁸ In these televisual texts, lesbianism is context; several gay women with varying personalities, goals and interests—most aware of their sexual preference before the narrative begins—interact, allowing for stories to expand beyond lesbianism itself. Both series offer explicit scenes of lesbian sex and various extended representations of same-sex love, depict queer spaces and by their very nature provide depictions of queer friends.⁹ Representing lesbianism on these terms represents a political move in itself. Simply allowing gay females to occupy this function within a narrative is a marked improvement for lesbian representation. *The L Word* also tackles homophobia, particularly through the story of Dana (Erin Daniels) coming out to her Republican parents, although it is not a focus in the text.

Unlike *Ellen*, and primarily owing to the sheer number of gay characters, lesbianism is normalised within the narrative of both *The L Word* and *Lip Service*. The ‘normalisation’ of lesbians has a significant effect on the costuming in each series. A unique source of tension for the designer faced with an ensemble lesbian cast is the need to balance the representation of a collective identity with contrasting individual characters. Designing looks for several roles which share a lesbian identity but also have vastly differing character traits

⁷ ABC president Robert A. Iger infamously informed the public that viewers fled the series because it became ‘a programme about a character who was gay every single week’. Robert. A. Iger, quoted in Richard Huff ‘Who Killed *Ellen*? Exec Blames DeGeneres’, *New York Daily News*, (Wednesday May 6th 1998) <<http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/entertainment/killed-ellen-exec-blames-degeneres-article-1.792564>>, accessed 28 June 2012.

⁸ Kosofsky Sedgwick, ‘The Letter L’, p. xxi.

⁹ Queer spaces offered by the series are ‘The Planet’, a café/bar/nightclub in homotopia West Hollywood (another queer space) in *The L Word* and Rubies, a gay or perhaps lesbian bar in Glasgow in *Lip Service*.

requires careful negotiation. Below is an attempt to offer some insight into those negotiations in both *The L Word* and *Lip Service*.

Fab lesbianism in *The L Word*

The L Word was the first ever television series to place a community of lesbian women at the centre of its narrative, focusing on the lives and loves of a group of women—many of them gay—living in West Hollywood, California. Featured lesbian characters comprise of singletons Alice (Leisha Hailey), Dana and Shane (Katherine Moennig), long-term off-and-on-again couple Bette and Tina (Laurel Holloman), and Jenny (Mia Kirshner), who begins the series as the apparently heterosexual fiancée of Bette and Tina’s male neighbour before embracing lesbianism as the narrative progresses.¹⁰ No secret was made of the series’ gay content; lesbian sex was portrayed often and increasingly explicitly, as allowed by the show’s existence outside the family-friendly limits of U.S. network television. Promotional material for the first series carried the tagline ‘Same Sex. Different City’. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass have pointed out the deliberate parallels this suggests with HBO’s glamorous, sex-fuelled and fashion-centric *Sex and the City*—another cable series free of network censure—remarking that ‘Like our girls from Manhattan, all the women are beautiful... and all have impeccable sartorial style.’¹¹ Also like *Sex and the City*, the beauty and style featured in *The L Word* has a distinctly ‘feminine’ appearance. Most of these characters present in an archetypal manner that suggests modern heterosexual womanliness.

Distilling much feminist theory, Jennifer Craik argues that ‘Techniques of femininity’ are ‘characterised by techniques of display and projection of the female body.’¹² She details that

¹⁰ Alice begins the series identifying as bisexual, although as the series goes on her interest in men seems to wane and she is seen exclusively with women, making comments that indicate she no longer identifies as bisexual. She identifies as a lesbian under oath in ‘Lay Down the Law’. Jenny also moves through bisexuality to lesbianism, while Tina goes back and forth. For an analysis of *The L Word*’s troubling representation of bisexuality, see Nicole Kristal, ‘*The L Word* Reinforces Negative Bisexual Stereotypes’, *AfterEllen.com*, (28 February 2008), <<http://www.afterellen.com/TV/2008/2thelwordbisexuality?page=0%2C0>> accessed 8 August 2012.

¹¹ McCabe and Akass, ‘Preface’ in *Reading The L Word*, p. xxv.

¹² Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 43.

femininity is a 'social strategy' enacted partly through gender-specific clothing and historically used to position women as 'passive vehicles of display... as objects of desire and repositories of pleasure.'¹³ This is set in opposition to masculinity, constructed in the modern era by more plain and less revealing clothing than designs for women, symbolically connecting men with activity and work.¹⁴ Consequently, clothing which is tight or otherwise revealing of the body beneath, offering it up for display, can be characterised as 'feminine', as can techniques of aesthetic enhancement like make-up and decorative aspects of garments themselves like colour and pattern. Long hair is currently more associated with women than with men, and thus is read in this chapter (and thesis) as more feminine than short hair, as are other aspects of image typically associated with female wearers like dresses, skirts, and heeled shoes. Much of the central cast of *The L Word* are styled with reasonably long hair and make-up, presenting them as conventionally attractive in a very 'feminine' manner. High heels also predominate. The ancestors of *The L Word* were the sexy lipstick lesbians of nineties 'lesbian chic', not the murderous butch dykes like Mame in 'Flowers of Evil'.

Because the images of women in *The L Word* are such an overt reversal of stereotypes about the way lesbians are expected to look, it will be worth taking a few paragraphs here to go over what those stereotypes are, with help from wider reading and input from my consumer interviewees. The most widespread concept of the western lesbian is the 'Mannish woman'.¹⁵ This stereotype is an historic construct, going back to sexologists' classifications of some women who loved other women as masculine congenital inverts, concepts indicative of predominantly working class Butch/Femme cultures which thrived in the 1950s and '60s.¹⁶ Martha Vicinus has written about the history of women wearing men's clothing and passing as men, and these women's links with lesbianism.¹⁷ In 1930, J.C.

¹³ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁴ This has not always been the case, as discussed in slightly more detail later in the chapter with regard to costuming in *Lip Service*.

¹⁵ Esther Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman', *Signs* 9:4 *The Lesbian Issue* (Summer 1984), p. 560.

¹⁶ For a representative sexologist theory about gender inversion, see Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (New York: Little, Brown & Company 1965). For more on Butch/Femme cultures see the Literature Review to this thesis.

¹⁷ Martha Vicinus, "'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong'": The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity', *Feminist Studies* 18:3 *The Lesbian Issue* (Autumn 1992), pp. 467-497.

Flügel wrote: 'As is well known, a certain proportion of individuals of both sexes desire to wear (and often do wear) the full or partial costume of the opposite sex. This desire (as is also well known) has an intimate relation to homosexuality.'¹⁸ These theories and communities exhibited strong gender binaries, tending to divide identity into masculine and feminine characteristics.

According to some of my other consumer interviews, concepts of lesbian iconography are still very much tied up with masculinity. As my interviewee Tabitha put it: 'Butch is distinctively masculine.'¹⁹ Amy noted that she assumes women with male-like presentation are gay. She said that if she sees women who look 'very masculine', then 'nine times out of ten I feel they could be a lesbian.'²⁰ Particular items named in interviews as looking gay were very strongly connected with widely held concepts of masculine presentation. For example, lack of make-up was a recurring theme. Charlotte told me, 'I think lesbians [...] usually they don't wear any make-up' and Irene offered, 'Generally speaking, the ones I can spot don't wear make-up.'²¹ Flat and practical shoes which allow for easy mobility and stability were another. Asked to identify items that she considers visual markers of gay sexuality in women, Amy mentioned 'Sensible shoes [...] Probably either trainers – Converse – or just, like, boots, you know, flat boots.'²² Charlotte also mentioned trainers and Converse, and Irene pointed out, specifically about older women: 'Well, the old dykes wear kind of [...] walking shoes.'²³ Short hair was the most unifying aspect of recognisable lesbianism according to my interviewees: 'Obviously if they've got short hair that's a big give away,' Charlotte ventured, with Emily tying together two of these aspects in one sweep, arguing that if a woman 'has really short hair and minimal make-up, there's a [large] chance

¹⁸ J.C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (3rd edn.; London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 119.

¹⁹ Tabitha, email to author, 13 May 2012.

²⁰ Amy, personal interview, 22 April 2012

²¹ Charlotte, personal interview, 17 May 2012; Irene, personal interview, 15 November 2011.

²² Amy, personal interview.

²³ Charlotte, personal interview; Irene, personal interview.

she's a lesbian.²⁴ Irene, Leanne, Felicity and Amy all specifically identified short hair as a marker of lesbianism for them.²⁵

As noted, all of these features are marked as masculine in western society. Hannah mentioned that, among the lesbians she personally knows, a masculine image is indeed prevalent. She noted: 'I don't think I know many hugely feminine dykes.'²⁶ It is this stereotype (and, as Hannah points out, legitimate lesbian 'type') from which many jokes about gay women stem in the media. For an example consider this exchange between Jack McFarland (Sean Hayes) and the mother of his long-lost biological son, Bonnie (Rosie O'Donnell) on *Will and Grace* (NBC, USA, 1998-2006): Bonnie is trying to tell Jack she is gay but Jack does not believe her.

Jack: Prove it! Say something lesbionic!

Bonnie: Home Depot.

Jack: k.d. lang you *are* a lesbian!²⁷

The idea that going to Home Depot—a home improvement store that sells timber, tools and other DIY and construction related products—is revealing of lesbian sexuality is a result of the connection in western society of such activities, as well as lesbianism, with masculinity.

Conversely, aspects of appearance and style which were perceived as distinctly *not* lesbian by my interviewees were generally opposites of the items mentioned above, and therefore rather predictably linked with contemporary femininity. Long hair was one example. I had the following exchange with Amy while looking at the images presented for comment during our interview:

Amy: It is something about long hair, as well, I'm just noticing. Looking at all of this – looking at all the pictures of the women with long hair, they do look more feminine.

FC: And therefore?

²⁴ Charlotte, personal interview; Emily, email to author, 2 November 2011.

²⁵ Irene, personal interview; Leanne, personal interview, 26 October 2011; Felicity, personal interview, 8 August 2011; Amy, personal interview.

²⁶ Hannah, personal interview, 15 November 2011.

²⁷ 'Dyeing is Easy, Comedy is Hard'.

Amy: Look straight.²⁸

High heels were a recurring item of attire considered to be not very lesbian looking. On the topic of 'spotting' gay women, Charlotte ventured, 'I suppose you start with the shoes, like, obviously not high heels, usually.'²⁹ Amy concurred, answering the same question about items that might tip her off to gay sexuality in women with: 'Not heels. Definitely not heels.'³⁰ Historically worn by both sexes—and barring the popularity of unisex platforms in the 1970s—high heels are now exclusively linked with femininity in western cultures.³¹ This is demonstrated by the fact that drag queens, mimicking female styles, overwhelmingly tend to wear high heeled shoes.³²

Of course, the masculine woman is not the only stereotypical lesbian figure; lesbians are also often thought of as generally unattractive and unstylish, again harking back to the early days of sexologist classification when men such as Havelock Ellis declared lesbians 'less attractive than... "normal" women'.³³ When I spoke with interviewees, several responses indicated that the 'unattractive lesbian' stereotype still holds sway even in the imaginations of gay women. It is also often connected with butch stereotypes, revealing a rather heterocentric construct of attractiveness internalised, again, even by many lesbians. For example, Emily wrote: 'For me, a typical (i.e. more butch) lesbian is going to be wearing something that's more comfortable and probably less stylish' and Hannah remarked that many older gay women 'kind of look like – they look like your Dad would look, kind of coming from the allotment or something.'³⁴ Tabitha felt that 'most lesbians' dress in a manner that is primarily 'practical' and 'comfortable', two things not frequently associated with either

²⁸ Amy, personal interview.

²⁹ Charlotte, personal interview.

³⁰ Amy, personal interview.

³¹ Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), p. 64.

³² For just one example featuring many drag queens see *Pageant* (Ron Davis/Stewart Halpern-Fingerhut, Cineaste, USA, 2008) a documentary about gay men competing in a drag beauty pageant.

³³ Havelock Ellis, Appendix B, 'The School-Friendships of Girls', in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1936), p. 374. Quoted in Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film* (New York: Penguin, 1992), p. 8.

³⁴ Hannah, personal interview.

stylishness or femininity, and Charlotte ventured 'I don't think a lot of [lesbians] are really... fashionable.'³⁵

Una remarked that stereotypical views of lesbians are 'really horrible', seeing gay women as 'rather sad' and people who 'dress badly.'³⁶ Characterising the look that, for her, would signal lesbian sexuality in a woman, Amy answered: 'Not pretty.'³⁷ It should be noted that such images are associated with some branches of second-wave feminism, particularly lesbian-feminism, which rejected beauty culture and clothing designed exclusively for women. As Arlene Stein writes, 'Lesbian feminism antistyle was an emblem of refusal, an attempt to strike a blow against the twin evils of capitalism and patriarchy, the fashion industry and the female objectification that fuelled it.'³⁸

Several respondents, evidencing what Judith Halberstam refers to as 'butch-phobia', were noticeably not keen on the masculine look.³⁹ For example Emily spoke about deliberately ensuring she looks feminine and therefore not gay, admitting 'If I wear a tank top, I'm worried I look too much like a lesbian, so I make sure to wear a push-up bra and tight jeans.'⁴⁰ Amy expressed confusion over masculine-appearing women, confessing:

I go out and I see women that deliberately look like men. They do it on purpose, and I think "Well, why?" I don't quite understand that. You're a woman. Why don't you want to look like a woman?⁴¹

While not an empirical study, it seems evident that images of the masculine and unstylish lesbian are still present—and, at least by some of my interviewees at the lower end of the age-bracket, viewed with distaste—in the popular imagination.

³⁵ Emily, email to the author, 2 November 2011; Tabitha, email to the author, 19 November 2011; Charlotte, personal interview.

³⁶ Una, personal interview, 17 May 2012.

³⁷ Amy, personal interview.

³⁸ Arlene Stein, 'All Dressed Up, But No Place to Go? Style Wars and the New Lesbianism', in Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (eds), *Out In Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture* (London: Cassell, 1995), p. 477-8. For more on feminist and fashion/antistyle, see Elizabeth Wilson, 'Feminism and Fashion', in Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (Revised and updated edn.; London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 228-247.

³⁹ Judith Halberstam, 'Between Butches' in Sally Munt (ed.), *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*, (London and Washington: Cassell, 1998), p. 58.

⁴⁰ Emily, email to author, 2 November 2011.

⁴¹ Amy, personal interview.

What is also evident is that the gender binary of male/female and masculine/feminine is still the prevalent structuring reality for many. With my respondents using phrases like 'masculine', 'feminine', 'look like men', 'look like a woman' and—as Emily did with regard to DeGeneres' image at one point—'boyish,' traditionally gendered characteristics are a major way that my interviewees, at least, seemed to be making sense of the world.⁴² Even the term 'androgyny', which came up in some interviews, is based on an understanding of a mixing or blurring of genders.⁴³ While not all of my respondents adhere to styles that might be considered congruous with their own gender, it is worth noting that a gender binary does offer useful ways of understanding and thus talking about clothes, which have historically often been strictly split down two sides of this dual gender divide.⁴⁴ As such, I will be using similar terms—which are meant in a purely descriptive and not essentialist manner—throughout this thesis.

Getting back to *The L Word*, Shane provides an exception to the adherence to visual signifiers of femininity in the series. She was the only slightly butch character in the show's central cast when *The L Word* first aired. Shane always wears trousers, never dons a bra, sports a lot of leather, and never willingly puts on heels. However, the character arguably remains within the scope of attractive contemporary femininity, using make-up and wearing her hair longer than most traditionally masculine-inspired 'dos. Candace Moore and Kristen Schilt have written about the character's consequent questionable status as a butch, noting Shane's 'female visibility' which jars with the way she is sometimes mistaken for a man within the show.⁴⁵ Moore and Schilt argue that 'Shane does not register explicitly butch signifiers but rather is *implied as contextually butch when positioned alongside the other characters' femme gender displays*.⁴⁶ Initially the most masculine of the lead characters, Shane is, Moore and Schilt argue, only a 'soft butch', on a 'high femme to stone butch

⁴² Emily, email to author, 11 June 2012.

⁴³ For more on androgyny as the blending of genders see Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: clothing and identity in the movies* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 173-199.

⁴⁴ For more on gendered clothing, see Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits* and J.C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes*.

⁴⁵ Candace Moore & Kristen Schilt, 'Is she man enough? Female masculinities on *The L Word*', in Akass and McCabe (eds), *Reading The L Word*, p. 160. For Shane being mistaken as a man, see 'Lawfully'.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161. Emphasis in the original.

spectrum'.⁴⁷ Shane can perhaps be better understood as slightly androgynous, blending gendered characteristics. Her leather trousers, tank tops and notable lack of skirts and dresses in a largely girlishly costumed cast are 'manly' items which match her aggressive and promiscuous sexuality, which is strongly marked as masculine as she marks up conquests with little emotional attachment. However her use of make-up and the little length we see in her hair are perhaps more feminine, combining to soften 'butch' markers into a glamorised androgyny.

As could be reasonably expected, the favouring of traditionally 'feminine' appearances in *The L Word* was immediately noted by critics and considered to be highly problematic. Sarah Warn deemed it 'sexist, limiting, and a denial of reality' and Jennifer Vanasco worried that the foregrounding of attractive women would alter lesbian communities' historic antithetical relation to beauty culture, arguing '*The L Word* is dangerous because it might sabotage this culture from the inside out.'⁴⁸ Malinda Lo criticised the lack of 'hair diversity' on the show, insisting 'We really need to have a few butch haircuts'.⁴⁹ Moore and Schilt remarked that the feminized homogeneity of the looks on *The L Word* 'neglects to show that butch and masculine-identified lesbians are an equally important part of the culture...'⁵⁰

Such a phenomenon is of course not limited to *The L Word*. Ann M. Ciasullo and Kelly Kessler have pointed out the favouring of conventionally attractive lesbians in the media since the 1990s.⁵¹ Complaints concerning the femme images on *The L Word* do not claim that there are no lesbians who look like the women on the series, but point out that a significant number of lesbians deliberately adhere to a far less 'feminine' dress code as well as recognising the political reasons for 'authentic' lesbian imagery that incorporates masculine-inflected characters. Not representing butch women on a series about lesbian

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Sarah Warn, 'Too Much Otherness: Femininity on *The L Word*', *AfterEllen.com*, (April 2004), p. 2 <<http://www.afterellen.com/archive/ellen/TV/thelword/femininity.html>>, accessed 28 September 2011; Jennifer Vanasco, 'The glamour factor and the Fiji effect' effect' in Akass and McCabe (eds), *Reading The L Word*, p. 185.

⁴⁹ Malinda Lo, 'It's All About the Hair: Butch Identity and Drag on *The L Word*', *AfterEllen.com*, (April 2004), p. 2 <<http://www.afterellen.com/archive/ellen/TV/thelword/butch.html>>, accessed 28 September 2011.

⁵⁰ Moore & Schilt, 'Is she man enough?', p. 168.

⁵¹ Ann M. Ciasullo, 'Making Her (In)Visible: Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s', *Feminist Studies* 27:3 (Autumn, 2001), p. 584-5. Also see Kelly Kessler, 'Mommy's Got a Gal-Pal: The Victimized Lesbian Mother in the Made-for-TV Movie' in Rebecca Bierne (ed.), *Televising Queer Women: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 33-48.

characters both problematically frames butch identities as less valid and therefore less acceptable than their femme counterparts and robs lesbianism of the political undertones present in the image of the recognisable lesbian. On a show about a number of lesbians, created by an out lesbian (show-runner Ilene Chaiken), this seemed like a disappointing sell out.



Figure 4: *The L Word*'s Shane (Katherine Moennig)

So why, on a show about lesbians, were butch images—the most recognisable lesbian type—avoided? One answer to this question lies in McCarthy's writing on *Ellen*, in which she reminds readers that 'making queer television history in the prime-time sitcom is

inevitably an act of making do.⁵² Although not a sitcom, *The L Word* had its own 'making do' to contend with. Judith Halberstam spoke of *The L Word* as a 'rather blatant attempt to give the stereotype of the dowdy dyke a very wide berth', arguing that such a tactic 'underestimates its very sophisticated and... very committed queer fans.'⁵³ However, of course, the show was not aimed only at a queer audience. It is worth noting that the series originally aired on the US cable channel Showtime, which runs on a subscriber system and thus needs to attract viewers willing to pay the required premium subscription price in order to view the channel. For those involved in producing the show, this (and the hope of global syndication and home-viewing sales) necessitated an avoidance of anything they felt might put people off.

Robert Greenblatt, then president of entertainment for Showtime, declared in 2005:

ultimately, we want people everywhere to buy [*The L Word*]. So yes, the women are all attractive and we make no apologies about that. It's television. Who wants to watch unattractive people, gay, straight or whatever?⁵⁴

Marnie Pratt has pointed out that such a statement 'indicates that [Showtime] appear to be designating what it is to be considered "attractive" for the rest of the world', and that their designation is overwhelming traditional in its gender presentation.⁵⁵ Masculine women, Greenblatt implies, are by definition unattractive because they do not adhere to current norms of gender, conflating two stereotypical ideas about lesbians. A relevant consideration is exactly to whom butch women are felt to be so unattractive. Ciasullo offers an answer in her writing on the feminisation of media representations of lesbians in the 1990s, theorising that 'the butch body accommodates neither desire nor identification for mainstream audiences.'⁵⁶ Couched in the use of 'mainstream' here is the notion that the mass audience is predominantly heterosexual and overwhelmingly traditional in its binary gender expectations.

⁵² McCarthy, 'Ellen: Making Queer Television History', p. 607.

⁵³ Judith Halberstam, 'Sex, Love, Television (Pt. 2)' *FlowTV.org*, (9 March 2007) <<http://flowtv.org/2007/03/sex-love-television-pt-2/>>, accessed 29 September 2011.

⁵⁴ Robert Greenblatt, quoted in Alison Glock, 'She Likes to Watch' *New York Times*, (February 6, 2005), p.2 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/06/arts/television/06gloc.html>>, accessed 5 October 2011.

⁵⁵ Marnie Pratt, "'This Is the Way We Live... and Love!': Feeding on and Still Hungering for Lesbian Representation in *The L Word*", in Rebecca Bierne (ed.), *Televising Queer Women*, p. 142.

⁵⁶ Ciasullo, 'Making Her (In)Visible', p. 604.

Jacqueline Bobo, in her work on black women's responses to *The Color Purple* (Steven Spielberg, Amblin Entertainment/Warner Bros., USA, 1985), cites the work of both Stuart Hall and Lawrence Grossberg, detailing how meanings inscribed in texts 'attempt to represent experience in ways which support the interests of those already in power'.⁵⁷ As a consequence, Bobo writes,

the producers of a cultural product are under "ideological pressure" to reproduce the familiar. Even when the producer is being radical, the form of the presentation in most cases will be that of dominant ideology encoding.⁵⁸

We can see this presentation of the radical depicted in terms of the familiar and dominant in the 'appropriately' gendered images on display in *The L Word*. Merely by focusing on lesbians, *The L Word* was quite radical. The series also includes quite politically progressive discussions at times, including its first season exploration of Dana, a tennis pro, and her assumed need to remain in the closet to gain a sponsor. Vignettes which frequently opened early episodes also drew attention to arguably political issues like the use of lesbianism as titillation for heterosexual males in porn.⁵⁹ This need to present the radical in terms of the familiar also goes a little way to explaining Shane's androgynous image as the most butch style on the series when it first aired: a feminised butch, her appearance is potentially more familiar to the mainstream.

There has been a history of lesbian texts using mainstream imagery to present the 'radical'. We can see much of this, for example, in the case of independent lesbian filmmaking. In its early days, lesbian-made film art was deliberately very unconventional. While the mainstream media were still in the exclusionary, threatening-issue, and confrontation stages, there was a separatist project underway; an avowedly feminist exploration of the possibility of a 'feminine aesthetic' in culture.⁶⁰ Around that time, feminists like Sheila Rowbotham and Dale Spender were arguing for the need of a 'feminine' voice, because, as they saw it: 'men

⁵⁷ Jacqueline Bobo, 'Black women's responses to *The Color Purple*', *Jump Cut* 33 (February 1988), pp. 43-51. No page (viewed online) < <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC33folder/CIPurpleBobo.html>>, accessed 13 January 2013.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ 'Liberally'.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Silvia Bovenschen, 'Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?', Beth Weckmueller (trans.), *New German Critique* 10 (Winter, 1977), pp. 111-137.

controlled the language, and it worked in their favour.⁶¹ Rowbotham called attention to the problem of male dominance in filmmaking which meant that 'We learn ourselves from women made by men'.⁶² Feminists felt that women needed to reject male forms and create their own artistic language. In this revolutionary atmosphere, lesbian feminist filmmakers like Barbara Hammer (*Dyketactics*, USA, 1974), and Chantal Akerman (*Je, tu, il, elle/l, You, He, She*, France/Belgium, Paradise Films, 1974) turned to 'experimental, formalist filmmaking precisely because it did not seem to be (yet) the exclusive domain of men'.⁶³

As early as 1973, however, Claire Johnston argued that

a strategy should be developed which embraces both the notion of films as a political tool and film as entertainment. For too long these have been regarded as two opposing poles with little common ground... [W]omen's cinema must embody the working through of desire: such an objective demands the use of the entertainment film.⁶⁴

In the mid-1980s, Donna Deitch followed such a path by breaking away from the avant-garde model to make *Desert Hearts*, which Jackie Stacey termed the 'founding model [of the] lesbian romance feature film'.⁶⁵ The movie was independently financed but popular in more than one sense because 'it used Hollywood conventions and [was] also... a box office success'.⁶⁶ *Desert Hearts* used a mainstream aesthetic, using two very feminine-appearing women as its stars and costuming the more active character, Cay (Patricia Charbonneau) in ways that suggested a butch identity, typically avoiding skirts, for example, but which retained much femininity, with her legs on display in jean shorts and her long bob and pretty, lightly made-up face. By appealing to mainstream audiences in the traditional way she

⁶¹ Dale Spender, *Man Made Language* (2nd Edn.; London: Pandora, 1980), p. x.

⁶² Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (London: Penguin, 1973).

⁶³ Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Women Film Directors: An International Bio-critical Dictionary* (Westport, CT & London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), p. xiv.

⁶⁴ Claire Johnston, *Notes on Women's Cinema* (Reprint; Glasgow: Screen, 1991), p. 31.

⁶⁵ Jackie Stacey, 'If you don't play, you can't win: *Desert Hearts* and the Lesbian Romance Film', in Tamsin Wilton (ed), *Immortal Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 92.

⁶⁶ Jackie Stacey, 'If you don't play, you can't win...', p. 92. *Desert Hearts* is about a rambunctious lesbian and a prim divorcée who fall in love in Reno, and is based on Jane Rule's 1964 novel *Desert of the Heart* (Toronto: Macmillan Canada, 1964).

costumed and shot the film, the director recuperated the potentially controversial subject matter, rendering it unchallenging to mass audience tastes.⁶⁷



Figure 5: The women of *Desert Hearts*. Helen Shaver (centre left), Patricia Charbonneau (centre right)

Perhaps inspired by the relative success of *Desert Hearts*, the romance film was the most prevalent type of work by lesbian filmmakers in the last decade of the twentieth century. Films like *Claire of the Moon* (Nicole Conn, Demi-Monde Productions, USA, 1992), *Thin Ice* (Fiona Cunningham-Reid, Thin Ice Productions, UK, 1995) and *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls In Love* (Maria Maggenti, Smash Pictures/Fine Line Features, USA, 1995) featured romantic storylines and used conventional narrative techniques. Maria Pramaggiore has argued that, unlike gay male filmmakers of the roughly concurrent but

⁶⁷ For example, Deitch recycles 'Hollywood romantic clichés', such as playing a country and western song—a typically conservative genre of music—over a slow-motion shot of one of the characters, Vivian (Helen Shaver), showering while, the lyrics suggest, thinking of the woman she has recently kissed. Stacey argues that this 'reinforces the image but simultaneously encourages a critical distance [from] it, and draws attention to the narrative structure of Hollywood romance as *convention*.' See Jackie Stacey, 'If you don't play, you can't win...', p. 106.

more postmodern and confrontational New Queer Cinema canon, the overwhelming project of lesbian cinema of the time centred on representing 'community' and gaining 'affirmation.'⁶⁸ Two 1990s films which best exemplify both of these projects are *Bar Girls* (Marita Giovanni, Lavender Circle Mob, USA, 1994) and *Go Fish*, both of which tell stories about groups of gay women—set in Los Angeles and Chicago, respectively—depicting their social and romantic lives. By exploring lesbian 'community', films like *Bar Girls* and *Go Fish* moved beyond isolated lesbian characters or couples to a community-based form of affirmation.

The L Word's hyper-feminine costume designs and ensemble lesbian cast position the television series as the natural heir to 1990s lesbian romance films which used mainstream aesthetics, as well as community affirmation films.⁶⁹ *The L Word* not only echoes typically straight-male made 'lesbian chic' but also fits into this history of assimilationist lesbian-made art. As Bobo, Hall, Grossberg and Johnston's theories suggest, the need to appeal to the mainstream required some 'making do' on the part of costume designer Cynthia Summers. It is partly for this reason that—at least through costume—*The L Word* was largely, as Samuel A. Chambers argues, 'a heteronormative show about homosexuals' or perhaps an example of what Lisa Duggan has written about as neoliberal 'homonormativity', described as:

a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising... [a] depoliticized gay culture anchored in... consumption.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Maria Pramaggiore, 'Fishing for Girls: Romancing Lesbians in the New Queer Cinema' in *College Literature*, special issue on *Queer Utilities: Textual Studies, Theory, Pedagogy, Praxis* 24:1 (1997), <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3709/is_199702/ai_n8753202/pg_2?tag=artBody;col>, accessed online December 04 2008, p. 5-6. For more on New Queer Cinema and its inspirations, see B. Ruby Rich, 'New Queer Cinema', *Sight & Sound* 2:5 (September 1992), pp. 31-3; José Arroyo, 'Death, Desire and Identity' in Joseph Bristow & Angelia R. Wilson (eds), *Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), pp. 70-96 and Monica B. Pearl, 'AIDS and New Queer Cinema', in Michele Aaron (ed.), *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 23-35.

⁶⁹ It is also significant that *Go Fish* co-writer, director and co-producer Rose Troche directed the pilot and several subsequent episodes of *The L Word* as well as writing for the series on occasion and acting as a co-executive producer for some episodes. *Go Fish* co-writer and star, Guinevere Turner, also became a writer and occasional guest star on *The L Word*.

⁷⁰ Samuel A. Chambers, *The Queer Politics of Television* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009) p. 86; Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), p. 50.

Notably, the series regulars on *The L Word* were not only extremely feminine looking but were also predominantly white. Richard Dyer has written about the troubling and revealing prevalence of white characters in Western representations, noting how this practice sets white people up as 'the norm, the ordinary, the standard' in an exclusionary manner.⁷¹ In fact, in *The L Word*, Kit (Pam Grier) is African-American and Bette (Kit's half sister) is of mixed-race: her father African-American and her mother presumably white. This gets explored in some depth over the course of the series, particularly in the first season when Bette and Tina are seeking a sperm donor.⁷² In Season Two, Latina character Carmen joined the show as a lead character, and another African-American character, Tasha (Rose Rollins), joined the cast in Season Four, diversifying the largely white depictions somewhat. Yet a scene in Season Five episode 'Lifecycle', involving Tasha and some African-American lesbian friends, self-consciously remarks upon the fact that, despite its few non-white characters, *The L Word* depicts a largely homogenous section of lesbian culture. Taking part in a charity bike ride, the women wear T-shirts declaring they are on 'Team Coco'. Alice, who is white, asks Tasha about this.

Alice: Who's Coco?

Tasha: It's a gay club downtown.

Alice: Really? Thought I knew all the lezzie clubs. Guess not.

Tasha: It's mostly black. It's kind of a different scene.

Alice: Oh.

What connects the prevalence of whiteness and conventional female beauty in *The L Word* is the concept of what it is to be respectable in western culture. Ciasullo points out that representations of whiteness were another typical feature of the femme figure which was so characteristic of lesbian chic, but also argues that whiteness plays a part in constructing mainstream femininity.⁷³ According to Beverley Skeggs, the 'respectable' body is 'white,

⁷¹ Richard Dyer, *White* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁷² Bette picks an African American donor without asking Tina's permission, angering Tina, who is white ('Pilot'). This greatly upsets Bette, and after some discussion they go ahead with Bette's choice, using the donor's sperm to get Tina to conceive their consequently mixed-race daughter, Angelica.

⁷³ Ciasullo, 'Making Her (In)Visible', pp. 577-608.

desexualised, hetero-feminine and usually, middle-class.⁷⁴ Or, as Audre Lorde writes, western society has created a 'mythical norm' comprising of people who are 'white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society.'⁷⁵ Since, in *The L Word*, the characters are predominantly homosexual and highly sexualised, this requires additional concessions to other aspects of respectability and the 'norm', namely overwhelming whiteness, thinness, youth and middle-class identities.

The actresses playing gay characters are almost all very thin, as with most Hollywood actresses, with Laurel Holloman—who is by no means overweight—an arguable exception in the central cast. Most are or appear to be relatively young, certainly below fifty, with most below forty years of age for much of the run. The characters are also mostly middle-class, with Shane, formerly homeless and with a history of prostitution, as more working-class and thus, once again, an exception.⁷⁶ Interestingly, Skeggs suggests 'glamour' as a strategy that, in her study of working-class women, offered a 'way of holding together femininity and sexuality with respectability.'⁷⁷ The costume designs on *The L Word* were very much characterised by 'glamour', allowing the holding together of homosexuality and femininity in the series. As we can see, issues of race and style are closely connected in constructing acceptable bodies for broadcast. However, as masculinity, femininity and glamour are elements that are expressed through dress, as opposed to race, which in a homogenous cultural environment may have less effect on clothing, I will be concentrating on the former in this chapter.

Promotional images for *The L Word* provide a key example of the favouring of glamorous looks within the series. Ensemble photos typically feature the women of the central cast grouped together and looking incredibly feminine, wearing evening gowns and heels, with

⁷⁴ Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 82.

⁷⁵ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), p. 116. Quoted in Jennifer Reed, 'Lesbian Television Personalities: A Queer New Subject', *The Journal of American Culture* 32:4 (2009), p. 316.

⁷⁶ This connection of 'butch' identity with working-class lesbianism is historically accurate, given the history of butch/femme culture with working-class lesbian communities, but also veers on the stereotypical. For more on butch/femme as working-class, see Wilson, 'Deviant Dress', *Feminist Review* 35 (Summer 1990), p. 70.

⁷⁷ Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*, p. 110.

long, curled and styled hair flowing in manufactured breezes. They sport heavy make-up and an airbrushed sheen, and at times wear only lacy underwear or, in one example, appear to be entirely nude. Such images objectify the women in traditionally female terms, costumed according to Craik's writing on feminine dress and positioning them as Laura Mulvey famously theorised women in classical Hollywood cinema: as scopophilic objects, appealing to the sexual desire of consumers to sell the show.⁷⁸ In other words, they look like most images of women produced for mass consumption in America. Una pointed out this similarity to other mainstream television texts when looking at one of the promotional images from the series (Fig. 15), remarking 'Well, they could be from any TV programme, really, couldn't they?' Again, Shane was noted as the exception.⁷⁹

Writing about production stills of gay characters used for promotional purposes, Richard Dyer argues that such images are typically

selected for use with the aim of suggesting or even summing up the entire film or an aspect of the film... Equally, in their wide availability and reproduction, they may fix the gay type more definitively for the viewer than the memory of the film itself does.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, Patricia Erens (ed.), (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 28-40.

⁷⁹ Una, personal interview.

⁸⁰ Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (2nd edn.; London: Routledge, 2002), p. 30.



Figure 6: *The L Word* nude promotional campaign

The 'gay type' to which Dyer refers is not the ultra-glamorous figure of the lipstick lesbian as portrayed by *The L Word*. Similarly, the images mentioned are not production stills but promotional photo-shoots. Still, Dyer's argument seems applicable here. As the most public-facing images of the show, designed to sell the show to new or returning viewers, the photographs are significant, representing the impression the producers wished to convey to the world about their series and the lesbians featured within it. The promotional posters summed up the women of *The L Word* as sexy in a mainstream, heterocentric idealisation of women. Firstly, these types of images reflect 'norms' of mainstream U.S television which see female law enforcement officers or women whose characters have similarly practical professions running and fighting in tight clothing and high-heeled shoes, with just one example being Megan Hunt (Dana Delaney), a forensic pathologist in *Body of Proof* (ABC, USA, 2011-), climbing down muddy embankments to take a look at a murder crime scenes, and performing autopsies—for which she would presumably be required to stand for hours—

while wearing shoes with platform toes and what look like at least six-inch heels.⁸¹ Secondly, using such sexually suggestive photographs to promote the series emphasises that the show is a cable series which by nature tend to feature a lot of explicit material, as also seen in *Sex and the City* and the American *Queer as Folk*.

The ensemble nature and explicit content of *The L Word* placed even greater pressure on costume to uphold the demands of mainstream entertainment concerning heteronormative ideals. Kessler's article about secondary lesbian characters in sitcoms, 'Politics of the Sitcom Formula: *Friends*, *Mad About You*, and the Sapphic Second Banana', argues that generic requirements of such secondary roles necessitate the promotion of heterosexual audience identification.⁸² These depictions, Kessler asserts, thus tend to display 'heterosexual standards of beauty, the invisibility of the lesbian community, the desexualisation of... relationship[s], and the erasure of political struggle', erasing lesbian specificity in an attempt to make characters more accessible to heterosexual audiences.⁸³ Because *The L Word* significantly challenged heterosexual identification in some ways, foregrounding both lesbian community and lesbian sex, with occasional explorations of political struggle, it also necessitated strong tactics to promote heterosexual identification. This was most notably worked through on the level of costume, with the series' representation of women who overwhelmingly adhered to 'heterosexual standards of beauty.'⁸⁴ As even critical voices accepted, the elision of 'dowdy' and butch identities in *The L Word*, especially in early seasons, was part of a shrewd attempt to maximise ratings and thus extend the chances to reach mass heterosexual audiences with non-heterosexual stories. While more butch characters were later added, that the core group remained as a

⁸¹ For example, see 'Dead Man Walking'.

⁸² *Mad About You* (NBC, 1992-1999).

⁸³ Kessler, 'Politics of the Sitcom Formula', in James R. Keller & Leslie Stratyner (eds), *The New Queer Aesthetic on Television: Essays on Recent Programming* (Jefferson, North Carolina & London: McFarland & Company, 2006), p. 142.

⁸⁴ There were instances of gender queering in *The L Word*, such as the depiction of the self-identified butch Moira (Daniela Sea) beginning in Season Three and drag king 'Ivan Acock' (Kelly Lynch) in Season One and Two. However, Moira also has an arguably feminine hairstyle, as she sports several inches of brown locks, and quickly becomes transgendered Max, removing her from unproblematic classification as a butch lesbian. 'Ivan' is only a temporary figure. Thus, in the predominantly feminine lesbian ecology of the show, Moira's butchness becomes something separate to lesbian identity and Ivan's style is 'othered', rendered less normal and therefore less legitimate by its rarity; both are sidelined in favour of traditionally gendered styles.

femmes-plus-Shane ensemble no doubt played a part in securing the six series that *The L Word* enjoyed on air.⁸⁵

The L Word's perceived need to be cautious when it came to lesbian representations and their reception by heterosexual audiences was exacerbated by the timing of the series: when it first aired, Showtime's drama faced a large potential obstacle to its success. It is not insignificant that *The L Word* was commissioned at a time when public reaction to lesbians in the media and by the television industry had only recently been extremely negative: the first season of *The L Word* premiered six years after the cancellation of *Ellen* and the backlash surrounding DeGeneres' coming out; two years after the actress' unsuccessful attempt to return to primetime television with *The Ellen Show* (CBS 2001-2002), which was cancelled before the series was aired in its entirety, and only four months after the beginning of DeGeneres' eventually extremely popular daytime talk show, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* the success of which was largely due to DeGeneres' own post-conflict handling of her sexuality, as will be discussed in the conclusion to this thesis.

The L Word pilot episode was in production during 2002, meaning that initial decisions about the look of the series were being made before DeGeneres' successful return to mainstream popularity.⁸⁶ Significantly, Wilson & Gutiérrez's stereotypical selection phase of minority representation is said to consist of a 'post-conflict period' in which coverage

moves into... [a] phase designed to neutralize... apprehension of [minorities] while accommodating their presence... [S]tories accomplish... two objectives... : (a) The general audience is reassured that [minorities] are still "in their place"... and (b) those who escape their designated place are not a threat to society because they manifest the same values and ambitions as the dominant culture and overcome the deficits of their... communities.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Warn, 'Too Much Otherness', p. 2.

⁸⁶ For a timeline which shows some dates of production, see 'The L Word: Season 1 News', *AfterEllen.com*, (8 April 2004) <<http://www.afterellen.com/archive/ellen/TV/thelword/season1-news.html>> accessed 13 August 2012.

⁸⁷ Clint C. Il Wilson & Félix Gutiérrez, *Race, Multiculturalism, and the Media: From Mass to Class Communication* (2nd edn.; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), p. 156-7.

As a series conceived of during the time of Ellen's near exile from mainstream media, *The L Word*'s production context is a perfect example of a literal post-conflict period.⁸⁸ During our interview, Summers noted:

Season One of *The L Word* was very ground-breaking. It was a little bit... new and a little bit dangerous for television as far as ratings go... Right around that time... there was all the controversy over Ellen's show, so it was kind of a hot time.

The risk of being the first 'lesbian ecology' on television following the furore over DeGeneres and *Ellen* cast a shadow over *The L Word*'s creative staff.

In some senses, lesbians are partly kept 'in their place' in the series. For example, if depictions of a lesbian bar and the butch/femme pairing of Corky and Violet in *Bound* are evidence of lesbians being kept in their place, as Kessler argues in an article about the film, then portraying a group of gay women who live in West Hollywood could be said to accomplish the same aim in *The L Word*.⁸⁹ While the city is more associated with gay men than women, its liberal, tolerant atmosphere and reputation as a gay area means that fictional lesbians living there are safely contained within an appropriate space. Yet characters did 'escape' their place by virtue of the very structure of the diegesis, expanding as they did from beyond their previous 'place' in the margins as secondary, isolated characters. This symbolic threat necessitated careful management.

The dominant project of *The L Word* was therefore the second of the two objectives of a post-conflict text identified by Wilson and Gutiérrez: minimising the threat posed by this 'escape' of a minority demographic from their perceived rightful place. Wilson and Gutiérrez argue that programmes typically make use of stereotypes in order to contain this threat.⁹⁰ For the costume designer managing the triple demands of representing lesbian specificity and using costume to support character while negotiating anxieties surrounding stereotypes, this method of containment is problematic. A costume designer typically creates costumes which aid characterisation and therefore call upon the specificity that gay types offer, but

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 156.

⁸⁹ Kessler, 'Bound Together: Lesbian Film That's Family Fun For Everyone', *Film Quarterly* 56:4 (Summer, 2003), p. 18.

⁹⁰ Wilson & Gutiérrez, *Race, Multiculturalism, and the Media*, p. 156.

because *The L Word* attempted to minimise the threat of lesbians escaping their 'place' as a minority by aligning lesbians with mainstream aesthetic values, types and stereotypes (and thus lesbian specificity) were all but eliminated. The designer spoke of diminishing visible signs of 'otherness' in the first year of production—lest they suggest that the lesbian characters were not part of mainstream culture—specifically by avoiding female masculinity in designs for the women of the cast. She explained 'We were very careful about the looks of the girls... No one was super butch.'⁹¹ Avoiding butch imagery was, she detailed, intended to render the women 'more accessible for the mainstream public to understand... because, look, they're not *that* different.'⁹²

Another feature of Wilson and Gutiérrez's post-conflict text is aiming to overcome the perceived deficiencies of a community. *The L Word* undertook this task by setting out to defy the stereotype of the unattractive and unstylish lesbian. Replacing unfashionable, more androgynous items associated with gay women with their opposites, the series used sought-after brands with considerable cultural cachet to create numerous glamorous images. For example, Summers assured me: 'This is not a Birkenstock-lesbian shoe show. At all', dismissing a brand of flat, comfortable, practical shoes often associated with gay women.⁹³ Instead, the designer spoke of costuming the women in Louis Vuitton heels, emphasising the importance of this feminine and high fashion footwear in the show: 'That's a big thing about *The L Word*: heels', she explained.⁹⁴ The use of big-name brands connects the looks on the series with Duggan's homonormativity, which she sees as rooted in 'consumption'. Even Shane, who frequently wears Converse—a popular brand of basketball shoe mentioned as common lesbian footwear by Amy, Felicity and Charlotte in my interviews—made them appear stylish by teaming them with expensive and chic, designer label clothing: 'Shane wears Converse', Summers conceded, 'but then she goes and puts a Dior suit with it.'⁹⁵

⁹¹ Cynthia Summers, personal interview, 6 December 2010.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

This kind of costuming indicates ways in which *The L Word* is reminiscent of *Sex and the City*, in which, as Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson argue, 'Fashion is the fifth character'.⁹⁶ It also draws attention to the post-feminist credentials of both series, as each is unabashedly concerned with clothing and beauty culture. During our conversation, Summers mentioned using Prada, Marni, Marc Jacobs, Valentino, Stella McCartney, Louis Vuitton, Dior, and Emilio Pucci in the costuming of the lesbian characters, and claimed the women never wore the same outfit twice on the series, edging the costuming strategy of the series towards being a spectacular element in and of itself. In doing so, *The L Word* not only recalls *Sex and the City* but also mimics the use of *haute couture* in films as outlined by Bruzzi in *Undressing Cinema*: such costumes break with their traditionally theorised storytelling purpose, creating moments of visual spectacle that 'prioritise the clothes over the narrative', causing clothing to occasionally 'function independently of narrative and character'.⁹⁷ With high fashion and high femme-ininity a central aspect of the costuming strategy, *The L Word* created an overall atmosphere of glamour which differed greatly from concepts of both stereotypical and 'authentic' recognisable lesbian presentation at the time.

To return briefly to the promotional images for the series, it is clear that these were a part of this strategy: deliberately deployed to replace earlier, less feminine images of lesbians with a new, glamorous 'ideal'. These sexy, über-girly lesbians are intended to be eye-catching, defying unattractive and masculine lesbian stereotypes in an attempt to 'fix' an opposing image of gay women. Instead of the negative stereotypes lambasted by critics in the past, the 'type' the public was meant to see—and internalise—in the images plastered across billboards and DVD covers was lesbians who are outstandingly attractive in a conservatively-gendered, mainstream manner.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ See Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson, "'Fashion is the fifth character": fashion, costume and character in *Sex and the City*', in Akass and McCabe (eds), *Reading Sex and the City* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 115-129.

⁹⁷ Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema*, p. 3.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harpers & Row, 1981), Dyer, 'Stereotyping' in Dyer (ed.) *Gays and Film* (London: BFI, 1977), pp. 27-39, Caroline Sheldon, 'Lesbians and film: some thoughts' in Dyer (ed.), *Gays and Film*, pp. 5-26., and also consider queer activist protests against what were felt to be damaging stereotypes in both *Silence of the Lambs* and *Basic Instinct* in the 1990s. For more on these see Capsuto, *Alternate Channels*, p. 266.



Figure 7: *The L Word* promotional image

In 2009, Katherine Wirthlin wrote about ‘Fad lesbianism’, her term for ‘the popularized trend of heterosexual females engaging in... sexual act(s) to gain the attention and desire of the... heterosexual male.’⁹⁹ Such use of lesbianism for titillation, Wirthlin felt, is deliberately employed ‘in a non-threatening fashion to dominant ideologies of... heterosexuality and femininity.’¹⁰⁰ With predominantly heterosexual actresses playing lesbian characters in *The L Word*, the series might be classed as ‘fad lesbianism’, and with its mainstream norms of femininity was certainly accused of being aimed at heterosexual male viewers.¹⁰¹ However, *The L Word* did not necessarily represent complete submission to heteronormativity. While the use of noticeably feminine women, including Shane’s feminised ‘butch’ look, may appear to mark the series out as existing outside the ‘radical’ political parameters signified by the butch, the series did not operate entirely free of political meaning.

⁹⁹ Katherine Wirthlin, ‘Fad lesbianism: Exposing media’s posing’, *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 13, p. 111 <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07380560802314243>>, accessed 25 July 2012.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁰¹ Alessandra Stanley, ‘Women Having Sex, Hoping Men Tune In’ *The New York Times* online, (16 January 2004) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/16/movies/tv-weekend-women-having-sex-hoping-men-tune-in.html>>, accessed 10 December 2012.



Figure 8: *The L Word* promotional image

Tanya R. Cochran writes that ‘Unidentifiable queers are not trouble’, and an assimilationist view would hold that gays should not want to be trouble, in order to best fit in and be accepted into the mainstream. A more radical perspective, however—like that of Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*—might be that trouble is exactly what queers ought to be seeking to cause, in order to subvert existing norms that privilege heterosexuality.¹⁰² In her hugely influential text, Butler deconstructs gender as a series of deliberate ‘constitutive acts’: repeated choices that make gender appear natural when it is, she argues, highly constructed.¹⁰³ In Butler’s view, the more gender presentation is queered, played with, and altered in various ways, the less strict gender divisions have the potential to become,

¹⁰² Tanya R. Cochran, ‘Complicating the Open Closet: The Visual Rhetoric of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*’s Sapphic Lovers’, in Rebecca Bierne (ed.), *Televising Queer Women*, p. 54; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

¹⁰³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 45.

lessening the power they have to 'support gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality'.¹⁰⁴ The aim, as Butler sees it, is for

Cultural configurations of sex and gender [to] proliferate or, rather, [for] their present proliferation [to] become articulable within the discourses that establish intelligible cultural life, confounding the binarism of sex, and exposing its fundamental unnaturalness.¹⁰⁵

The L Word, a key example of intelligible cultural life rendering lesbian images visible on a large scale, presented overwhelmingly assimilationist images assumed to be more palatable to the maximum number of viewers, the better to gain ratings and stay on the air. In doing so, it seemed to achieve the exact opposite of Butler's described aim: instead of expanding possibilities for cultural configurations of sex and gender, it articulated narrowed possibilities for gay women. However, it has been suggested that the images on *The L Word* did play a part in aiding the proliferation of cultural configurations of sex and gender, while at the same time 'confounding the binarism of sex, and exposing its fundamental unnaturalness' as Butler desired. If stereotypes of visible lesbianism are rooted in female masculinity, representing significant numbers of feminine women *as lesbians* could be said to undermine both the correlation of lesbianism and masculinity and of femininity and heterosexuality. Erin Douglas has argued that, instead of thinking of the overwhelmingly feminine cast as a case of 'femme invisibility', one might instead focus on the possibility that such presentation shows *The L Word* undertaking a project of 'queering femininity' because, in the series, 'femininity does not signify normativity'.¹⁰⁶

Stephanie Theobald identified *The L Word's* concession to a mainstream aesthetic as a Trojan horse strategy, the heteronormative imagery allowing the series to depict lesbian specificity in other ways, particularly as the series progressed.¹⁰⁷ Throughout *The L Word*, arguably political topics often arose in conversation or in the narrative. Over the course of

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. xxx.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁰⁶ Erin Douglas, 'Pink Heels, Dildos, and Erotic Play: The (Re)Making of Fem(me)inity on Showtime's *The L Word*', in Rebecca Bierne (ed.), *Televising Queer Women*, p. 196.

¹⁰⁷ Stephanie Theobald, 'From Ikon to Dykon', *Guardian* online, (24 September 2004) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2004/sep/04/tvandradio.theguide>>, accessed 28 September 2011.

six seasons specifically lesbian issues were explored, such as the legal problems of two women who cannot legally marry but have a child by sperm donor. Because Bette has no legal rights concerning the daughter Tina conceives while the two are in a couple, when they break up Bette is at Tina's mercy to allow her to adopt the child Bette thinks of as her own ('Left Hand of the Goddess'). Looking like Jennifer Beals allows the actress to appear on the air tackling such complex and distinctly not mainstream issues as lesbian parenting in the absence of widespread gay marriage laws. Instead of 'fad lesbianism', *The L Word* gives us something more like fab lesbianism: slipping lesbian specificity through the closely guarded, gender policed walls of heteronormative mainstream culture in order to subvert it from within.

Dress tells the women's stories

Up to now I have covered the general looks on *The L Word*, discussing how the predominance of traditionally attractive femininity on the show was required by the need to maximise mainstream identification (and therefore ratings) in a post-conflict television landscape. However, I believe basic theories concerning costume also play a vital part in affecting the images on display in the series. Costume theory emphasises the importance of 'telegraphing' to the audience who each character is.¹⁰⁸ In 1960, celebrated Hollywood costumier Edith Head insisted:

The audience must know who [a character] is the moment she walks on. They make instant judgement before they've even heard her speak... She can't look like one thing and be another.¹⁰⁹

Thirty years later, Gaines detailed how film costuming is 'expected to reveal a character' reflecting how different types of people are 'thought to be in "real life"'.¹¹⁰ Yet, during our

¹⁰⁸ Costume designer Deborah Nadoolman Landis writes: 'Before an actor speaks, his costume has already spoken for him. In film jargon, this is considered "telegraphing" information. Costume designers are concerned passionately with one thing: creating characters that are truthful.' *Screencraft: Costume Design* (Burlington, Mass.: Focal Press: 2003), p. 8-9.

¹⁰⁹ Edith Head and Jane Kesner Ardmore, *The Dress Doctor* (Kingswood, Surrey: The World's Work, 1960), p. 113.

interview, Summers revealed: 'I didn't approach any of the characters from their sexual point of view or from their sexuality. I really didn't.'¹¹¹ In a drama focusing on a particular type of sexual identity, this seems paradoxical. Viewers would have known that a majority of the characters were gay. Why not telegraph lesbian sexuality on a series about lesbians?

Part of the answer to this question is contained within the question itself. If, as Gaines famously argued, 'dress tells the woman's story', it is worth thinking about the stories costume designers are required or desire to tell.¹¹² In the case of the lesbian ensemble drama, the reasonable assumption that most of the audience will know several women on the series are gay partially removes the necessity for a designer to rely on costume alone to 'speak' the sexuality of lesbian characters. Even if commercial requirements and negative stereotypes had not been a factor, the ensemble nature of a lesbian cast takes some of the pressure off relying on costume to telegraph the characters' shared aspect of identity.

I have previously written about the need for costume to 'speak' lesbian identity in Hollywood cinema under Production Code censorship, when such characters were typically isolated, and representing homosexuality was forbidden.¹¹³ The burden of demarcating such identities was pushed onto 'non-representational' signs, and costume was perfectly placed for this, with designs conveying lesbianism by referencing commonly accepted concepts of the causes and cultural manifestations of female homosexuality, as well as by contrasting with designs for heterosexual characters. In other words, designers made use of stereotypes to design subtle yet suggestive costumes that conveyed female homosexuality because lesbianism could be telegraphed by few other means, and certainly not by direct dialogue or action.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Jane Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story' in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds), *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 186.

¹¹¹ Summers, personal interview.

¹¹² Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative'.

¹¹³ Fiona Cox, 'Closet Cases: Costuming, Lesbian Identities and Desire, Hollywood Cinema and the Motion Picture Production Code', *The International Journal of the Image* 1:4 (2011), pp. 43-56.

¹¹⁴ Although, again, the true butch remained unseen, at that point being too obvious a representation to be approved by scissor-happy censors. For more on Hollywood cinema's erasure of the figure of the butch lesbian, see Weiss, *Vampires and Violets*, p. 1 and Patricia White, *unInvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 1.

When lesbian sexuality can be pre-announced and communicated within a text by any number of means, as in *The L Word*, costume becomes far less critical—and consequently far less instrumental—in conveying the sexual preferences of lesbian characters. In addition to advertising and advanced press which indicated the lesbian content of the show, dialogue and the onscreen portrayal of romantic affection and sex between women explicitly visualised lesbian desire and lifestyles within the diegesis. *The L Word's* typically feminine styles were not attempts at 'passing' as straight to the viewer. Passing, in Judith Butler's terms, is 'a performance that works... [so that] the body performing and the ideal performed appear indistinguishable'.¹¹⁵ This is a very different matter on screen than in real life because of the privileged knowledge that being a viewer offers. For example, lesbians who dress like the women on *The L Word* may 'pass' as straight in real life, whether deliberately or inadvertently, as outlined by Sedgwick, who described the ever revolving doors of the closet for even the most 'out' gay people.¹¹⁶ Yet because the women of *The L Word* are characters constructed for a viewing audience made aware of each character's sexuality, there is no possibility of the lesbian characters passing as straight to the viewer. Verbal references to being gay, or same-sex kissing, affection, and lesbian sex all contribute to the audience's knowledge of which characters are lesbians, and therefore the need for costume to 'speak' the sexuality of lesbian characters is vastly diminished.

This televisual situation is mirrored by changing social possibilities for lesbians in the early twenty-first century. These changes, which were highlighted in my conversation with interviewee Una, shed light on the lack of necessity for clothing to speak lesbianism in *The L Word*. In her late 60s, Una felt that the proliferation of gay social spaces she has witnessed in recent years has resulted in less need for young lesbians to dress in a recognisable fashion. Talking to me in a 'gay' lounge bar frequented by gay men and women and often populated by drag queens, located close to several other queer owned, run and frequented venues, Una described why she felt it was necessary to dress in an overtly lesbian style when she came out.

¹¹⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 88.

¹¹⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Epistemology of the Closet' in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale & David M. Halperin (eds), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 46.

Pre-nineties there was nowhere like this. For me to go and meet other lesbians I had to go to a bar down the road that had a notice on the door—and it was only on Tuesdays—saying Private Party. There was no meeting place unless you really went out of your way, so part of the uniform look was about your publicity because, without that [...] how were you going to meet people?¹¹⁷

Recognisably 'lesbian' style acted as 'publicity' for Una in her early years living as a gay woman, helping to combat isolation by announcing lesbianism in overwhelmingly straight environments. Una also spoke about the impossibility of being vocal about her sexuality in most social groups when she first came out. She highlighted how clothing offering a silent manner of communicating her lesbianism to those who would be willing and able to decode it while at the same time avoiding announcing her sexuality to those who might condemn it.¹¹⁸ As Una pointed out, wearing overtly lesbian clothing ('the uniform look') to be visible is less necessary when one can visit a gay space regularly and safely assume that others there are in some way queer, as well as knowing that one's identity is also readable as not straight simply by being in that context. More widespread acceptance of queer sexualities in the early twenty-first century reinforces the lack of necessity of dressing in a recognisably gay manner as one can often announce one's desire and lifestyle verbally or through subtle public displays of affection. *The L Word* is the televisual equivalent of a gay space and a public liberal, accepting atmosphere. We can assume many of the women in the series are gay because of the lesbian focus, and owing to contemporary televisual mores and lack of censorship on Showtime, dialogue and action are able to confirm the lesbianism of several women without the need for clothes to telegraph it.

In the pilot episode of *The L Word*, there is a fleeting moment that highlights ways in which aspects other than costume can reveal sexuality. Over breakfast at The Planet, the closeted Dana berates Shane for wearing clothes that project her lesbianism; Shane is wearing a button-up shirt with the sleeves ripped off, black leather trousers with a matching cuff on her wrist, and a black leather cord tied around her neck, with choppy, messy hair. Embarrassed,

¹¹⁷ Una, personal interview.

¹¹⁸ I am not saying that this is no longer true for many gay women all over the world. As Kosofsky Sedgwick wrote in 'Epistemology of the Closet', even once a person is 'out' one is daily faced with situations which necessitate either repeated outing or else closeting of one's identity, so that 'there can be few gay people ... in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence.' Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Epistemology of the Closet', p. 46.

Dana remarks that 'every single thing about the way you're dressed, like, screams dyke', pointing out that she wouldn't be seen on the street with Shane. Dana, a closeted professional tennis player, expresses her desire to protect her public image from association with lesbianism, unwilling to risk being 'outed' by mere proximity to her obviously lesbian friend.

Revealingly, Dana's later highly obvious 'checking out' of newcomer Jenny causes Alice to point out the hypocrisy in Dana's complaints about Shane. Indicating that Dana's reaction to Jenny openly reveals her to be 'so gay', Alice draws attention to the fact that action and speech can disclose lesbianism just as much as clothing, if not more so. Indeed, the former are potentially more accurate indicators than image: people can wear anything they wish, but a woman visibly appraising and verbally approving another woman to the degree that Dana does in this scene—sitting upright, looking directly at Jenny, saying 'Hello' in a suggestive manner and smiling coquettishly—is far more likely to be gay than straight. Alice's comment highlights the ways in which lesbianism can be made obvious through clues beyond those largely avoided in *The L Word's* costume designs.¹¹⁹ When it comes to its central characters, *The L Word* allows narrative and action to reveal lesbianism, largely reserving style for the speaking of other stories.

However, although it was perhaps not necessary to convey lesbianism through clothing, the creators of *The L Word* may well have decided to represent lesbians dressing in identifiable ways in the name of authenticity. I believe there is a further reason for generally avoiding visual markers of lesbianism in the costumes on *The L Word*, a reason that goes beyond ratings, negative stereotypes *and* the lack of necessity. In addition to these influences, the elision of lesbianism as visible through style seems to be a result of the combination of the

¹¹⁹ We can witness a similar difference between Jada Pinkett Smith—playing the lesbian Alex in the 2008 remake of *The Women*—and Kristin Scott Thomas playing the lesbian H el ene Perkins in *Ne le dis   personne/Tell No One* (Guillaume Canet, Les Productions du Tr sor, France, 2006). Alex is introduced as recognisably but not definitely gay through the shot of her black leather biker boots in the montage of otherwise colourful, dainty, strappy, pointed, heeled shoes in the opening titles. H el ene is revealed as a lesbian in her second scene via her glance at the retreating *derri re* of a waitress in her employ. We are likely to suspect Alex is a lesbian by her strongly 'othered', suggestively lesbian shoes, but it takes her female date at a party to confirm these suspicions. However, it would be difficult to watch the point of view shot which reveals the focus of H el ene's gaze and not conclude that she desires the woman in question—and therefore women in general—well before we see her with her female partner.

basic tenet of costume design (that dress 'telegraphs' character) and the ensemble nature of the series. In *The Matter of Images*, Richard Dyer argues that while 'types keep the fact of a character's gayness clearly present before us throughout the text' the disadvantage of this continued visual presence is that 'it tends to reduce everything about that character to his/her sexuality.'¹²⁰ Rather tellingly, Shane, the central character who is dressed in the most recognisably lesbian (i.e. most butch) fashion in *The L Word* is a highly sexed, promiscuous woman. If lesbianism is clearly communicated through clothing, the character must be excessively lesbian, i.e. the corresponding sexual drive must be extreme.¹²¹ Yet the femme characters in the series are dressed to communicate far more than simply 'this woman is a femme'. Gender inappropriate clothing has so long been associated with homosexuality that it conveys gayness and, putting aside more recent understandings of gender dysphoria (as well as bearing in mind the way in which Moira/Max's trans* status stabilises the gender of the other women on the series), little else. Gender appropriate clothing leaves a costume designer scope to tell many more stories than just a particular sexuality, and is thus far more appropriate for an ensemble drama where characters are given varying personalities in order to create interesting narratives and conflict. If several people are gay, it becomes less dramatically valuable for the costume designer to 'tell' the story of lesbianism through dress in each case. Other aspects of identity are therefore foregrounded as the defining features of each character.

For example, as creative personnel surrounding *The L Word* repeatedly assured critics, the looks on the show strongly reflect the show's setting of Los Angeles. One of the stories being communicated through the costumes of the 'locals' in the narrative is that they live in that particular city: a city heavily invested in beauty culture and fashion. Speaking to *AfterEllen.com*, Summers made recourse to geographic specificity in an interview that addressed the glamorously feminine aesthetic of the show: 'you have to remember the group that we're portraying here. They're going to influence each other and how they dress.'

¹²⁰ Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, p. 24.

¹²¹ Jada Pinkett Smith's leather-clad, biker-boot wearing Alex in *The Women* provides another useful example here. Her inappropriately enthusiastic appraisal of her friend's husband's mistress (Eva Mendes) while spying on the woman is indicative of Alex's inability to control her evidently strong lesbian desires.

And what's specific to this group is they happen to live in Los Angeles.¹²² Moira, freshly arrived from Colorado in early Season Three, provides an exception that proves the rule, with her baggy, casual clothing marking her as 'other' to the chic city fashions of the rest of the group. She notes the difference herself, remarking on her inadequacy and referring to the others as 'so cool and sophisticated' in comparison with her own, casual style.¹²³ Confronted with Moira's Midwest style, the audience can see how the looks of the women on *The L Word* do have geographic specificity.

In addition to location, costume conveys the women's varying personalities and pastimes, differentiating them from one another, defining their individual selves, and communicating shifts in character and narrative from scene to scene. For example, Alice is quirky and enjoys attention, so wears a lot of bright colours; she is also playful and dresses for occasions, as in 'Listen Up', when she changes out of ripped jeans, a white tank top and green bandana to attend a conservative women's group luncheon. Claiming 'I can look Republican', she arrives at the event in a pink, short-sleeved, sheer blouse worn over a slip, with two strings of pearls around her neck and a white sweater tied around her shoulder: the ultimate WASP look, undermined only by the armband tattoo on her bicep.

Bette is costumed to communicate her high status at work as well as her assertive personality. Her well-tailored look and preference for trouser-suits and sharp-collared shirts speak a certain amount of authority. As Summers described in our interview, Bette is 'a power dyke... a woman to be reckoned with.'¹²⁴ Although the designer used the word 'dyke', the emphasis in the costumes seems to be on power, not sexuality. While Summers spoke of putting Bette in 'a lot of cuff-linked shirts in the beginning' and mentioned that her outfits were 'all kind of men's ... mostly pantsuit inspired', the reason for using masculine-influenced silhouettes and styles does not seem to be to convey any gender inversion or to make Bette look more authentically lesbian: this is definitely not communicated by the

¹²² Cynthia Summers, quoted in 'Interview with *L Word* stylist Cynthia Summers' *AfterEllen.com*, (15 January 2009), p. 3 <<http://www.afterellen.com/people/2009/1/cynthiasummers>>, accessed 5 October 2011.

¹²³ 'Light My Fire'.

¹²⁴ Summers, personal interview.

character's long hair and flawless make-up. Instead, influences taken from masculine tailoring are used to suggest the status and power typically associated with masculinity.

When Bette does not wear trousers, the particular type of skirt she wears also conveys her authority. As Summers described to me: 'Bette didn't wear skirts that were A-line [...] She wore more of a pencil skirt, which has a little more oomph and is a little more powerful.'¹²⁵ The character also wore heeled shoes, as a rule, and Beals, who is 5'9", requested to wear the most extreme heels out of all the cast.¹²⁶ With the actress standing above the other women in height, emphasis was thus placed on Bette as the most powerful woman of the group. Another aspect of Bette's costuming intended to communicate personality traits unrelated to her lesbian identity is her propensity for wearing expensive designer labels. Again, in Summers' words: '[Bette] always wore labels because, of course, her character would be able to afford them and she always dresses to impress...'¹²⁷ In addition to authority, costumes are used to reveal both Bette's wealth and her desire to be noticed and respected by people, none of which has anything to do with her lesbian identity.

We see another example of costume conveying stories other than 'this woman is a lesbian' in the changing styles of Dana. On a basic level, the character is frequently seen in workout clothes because she is an athlete: in the pilot episode we see her at The Planet in a white sports top and grey zipped sports hoodie. Dana is also closeted, and her sports clothes are useful for providing neutral messages about sexuality. Once she is openly gay later on in the series, we see a distinct shift in Dana's style, aided by Alice and Shane who take on the project of making-over Dana's look to contain more lesbian specificity ('Liberally').

This is a rare time in the series when one of the central characters (not including Shane) is overtly costumed in order to appear authentically lesbian. Her newly bought jeans, tank top and lack of bra in fact recall the particular style that Shane exhibits. That this ensemble was not her own design and does reflect her personality is obvious when she admits to feeling

¹²⁵ Summers, personal interview.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

'stupid'. Her terrible sex with Jenny later in the episode suggests that she lacks the confidence in bed that her new cool, slightly lesbian style conveys, undermining any suggestion of lesbian assurance—already tempered by Shane and Alice's part in creating the look—telegraphed by her outfit. The story of Dana's approaching-lesbian-specific attire is not that it fits with her sexuality but that its mismatch with her personality reveals her awkwardness.

All these different looks on Dana communicate character information outside of the basic fact that she is a lesbian, and we see the same strategy in many of the other central cast members. In the second season, new character Carmen's night-time job as a DJ is signalled by her ghetto-blaster necklace, and her Latina background is emphasised in some costume and style, such as by her 'Everybody loves a Latin girl' T-shirt and her Mayan-inspired tattoos.¹²⁸ In a group of lesbians, the relevant story about Carmen is not that she is gay but that she has a different racial background to the other, predominantly white women, explaining the perhaps over-the-top emphasis on that difference.¹²⁹

In rendering lesbians visible in a large group, the intent—beyond the initial novelty factor—seems to be to take the focus off lesbianism as an identity which 'others' women. Thus it is rendered unimportant, as taken for granted and unspectacular as heterosexuality is to most people. This suggests an arguably political aim, encouraging the acceptance that homosexuality is yet to gain legally and socially across America and in many parts of the world. Importantly for costume, if lesbianism is downplayed in this manner, the focus shifts to differentiating between the characters rather than signifying their shared identity, communicating aspects of personality, ethnic background and jobs, amongst other things. The use of mainly traditionally feminine looks prevents lesbianism from being the most important story conveyed through costume.

¹²⁸ See 'Life, Loss, Leaving', and 'Lagrimas de Oro'. For more on the telegraphing of Carmen's racial background in the show, see Shauna Swartz, 'The Other L Word: Representing a Latina Identity', in Akass and McCabe (eds), *Reading The L Word*, pp. 177-181.

¹²⁹ By, for example, literally writing it on her T-shirt. However, to be fair to Cynthia Summers, I do recall a time in 2004 when these T-shirts were everywhere in Los Angeles. Sold at the trendy and pricey Urban Outfitters, they were incredibly fashionable for a time. I personally knew a woman of German ancestry who wore the 'Everybody loves a German girl' version and, interestingly, a straight white man who enjoyed parodying and complicating the trend by wearing the 'Everybody loves an Asian boy' variety, revelling in the reactions he got from strangers who consequently read homosexuality and/or paedophilia into the meaning.

In *The L Word*, instead of 'Bette is a lesbian', 'Dana is a lesbian', 'Carmen is a lesbian', we get 'Bette is a high powered business woman', 'Dana is an athlete who is shy and awkward', and 'Carmen is a Latina DJ', and so on. This refocusing deliberately positions lesbianism as 'uneventful, serial, [and] everyday', as far as the stories told by costume, mirroring the series' attempts to place lesbianism as context, not content. In addition to assimilationist concessions to the mainstream for ratings purposes and the new concept of a gay televisual space created by the use of the lesbian ensemble, the novel use of multiple lesbian characters to position lesbianism as an identity which exists not outside of society but as a subject position within it explains why, in this particular lesbian ecology, visible lesbianism becomes not more prominent, but less.

Resonance in Lip Service

Lip Service first aired in the UK on BBC Three in 2010, featuring another fictional lesbian ecology, this time set in Scotland. In the first series, Frankie (Ruta Gedmintas) returns to her hometown of Glasgow from New York upon the death of the woman she believed was her aunt. Once back, she attempts to reintegrate herself as part of the not entirely welcoming group of her friends Jay (Emun Elliott) and Tess (Fiona Button), Frankie's ex-girlfriend Cat (Laura Fraser) and Cat's new love interest Sam (Heather Peace). Once again, audiences were offered a range of central lesbian characters bound together by romantic relationships and friendships. By virtue of containing another lesbian ensemble, creating the styles seen in *Lip Service* gave rise to the same tensions that existed within the costuming strategy for *The L Word*. Decisions over dress and style involved the same negotiations between the representation of lesbian authenticity, meeting the demands of mainstream entertainment, the use of the conceit 'dress tells the woman's story', and the balancing of shared lesbian identity with differentiation between individuals. However, *Lip Service* negotiated this troubled terrain slightly differently to its predecessor.

Most noticeably, in contrast to *The L Word*, *Lip Service* creator Harriet Braun placed significant emphasis on avoiding the trap of erasing lesbian specificity, with a particular visual and sartorial focus on butch identities. Instead of the fashion-led, unabashed heterosexual-identification strategy used by the former text, Braun made it her personal responsibility to ensure that *Lip Service*'s onscreen styles contained what she felt to be realistic lesbian images, acting as an informal consultant on the topic for the show's designers. Offering slightly more butch imagery via its lead roles than *The L Word* and its lone soft-butch character, Shane, the premiere series of *Lip Service* included two female leads exhibiting recognisably butch styles. These styles were carried over into promotional photo-shoots, for which the *Lip Service* actresses were dressed in ways far more appropriate to their individual characters than the images used to promote *The L Word*. Heather Peace, who plays DS Sam Murray, for example, never wears visible make-up in the series, and this did not change for promotional images for the first series. Her plain, no-frills image was not femme-d up to render the images more 'appropriate' for her gender in an attempt to raise viewing figures by encouraging heterosexual identification (see Fig. 9).

If *The L Word* is a post-*Ellen*-conflict text, *Lip Service* seems to represent a post-*L Word* text, reacting not only to the sartorial representations of lesbian identity contained within the Showtime series but also to the responses those representations garnered. The negative critical responses to the costuming strategy in the earlier drama provide an important backdrop for the British drama. Out lesbian and *Lip Service* creator and writer Braun demonstrated anxiety over the way her characters' images would be perceived before her series even aired. At a press conference during production the creator answered criticisms



Figure 9: *Lip Service* promotional image (l-r: Cat, Sam, Frankie, Sadie)

that had yet to be made about her work, arguing 'I don't think anyone could attempt to portray every member of a community in a drama – if they tried, they'd fail.'¹³⁰ Yet the writer did state a mission of lesbian specificity, assuring journalists: 'It was very important to me that the lesbian characters in this story feel authentic to a lesbian audience.'¹³¹

Braun also demonstrated awareness of *The L Word*, mentioning the earlier series in interviews about her own writing, primarily to dissuade comparisons. For example, she described to *AfterEllen.com* columnists how she tried not to let the earlier show affect her work:

When I set out to write *Lip Service*, I really had to put *The L Word* out of my mind because I didn't want to have to deal with a comparison as such, I didn't want it to be seen as 'in competition' with *The L Word*. I didn't want to be thinking oh it must be better, or different, or the same, I just wanted to do my own thing.¹³²

¹³⁰ Harriet Braun, quoted in Lisa McGarry, 'Lip Service – Lesbian drama coming to BBC Three', *UnrealityTV.co.uk*, (18 September 2010) <<http://primetime.unrealitytv.co.uk/lip-service-lesbian-drama-coming-to-bbc-three/>>, accessed 29 September 2011.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Sarah Beattie and Lee Longley, 'Great LezBritain: Interview with *Lip Service* creator Harriet Braun', *AfterEllen.com*, (4 October 2010) <<http://www.afterellen.com/greatlezbritain/10-04-2010?page=0,0>>, accessed 10 September 2011.

To my knowledge Braun never directly referenced the bad press *The L Word* attracted for its avoidance of arguably authentic lesbian looks. Yet despite her protestations against being influenced by the Showtime drama, such criticism seems a likely source of the writer's extreme wariness of the scrutiny to which the lesbian images in her own series might be subjected. With Braun's emphasis on authenticity, one of the primary areas felt to be missing from the earlier series, it seems unlikely that the criticism of hyper-feminine imagery in *The L Word* did not have some effect on the *Lip Service* creator's decision to promote lesbian specificity through the looks of her own characters.¹³³

Braun's effort to use aspects of costume and style to create authentic, realistic, and specifically butch lesbian identities in *Lip Service* is evidence of its very different context to *The L Word*, which so deliberately avoided visible lesbian types in its central cast in the aftermath of homophobic responses to *Ellen*. *The L Word* was the first television show to be structured around a lesbian ensemble and was created in the traditionally conservative US, needing to attract viewers willing to subscribe to a premium channel. *Lip Service*, however, followed *The L Word* by six years, so while it was the first UK series of its sort it was by definition less ground-breaking and therefore less of a risk. It also debuted in a country with a more tolerant atmosphere and history, both social and specifically televisual. For example, *Lip Service* aired a full five years after the legalisation of Civil Partnerships in the UK, while the battle for same-sex unions still rages—with strong and publically expressed feelings against it—in the US.¹³⁴ In 1990, BBC Two, the second channel of the monolithic and respected British institution, aired *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (Writ. Jeanette Winterson, BBC, 1990), showing a relatively explicit scene of two teenaged girls naked, rolling on top of

¹³³ Of course there has been criticism of femme-heavy lesbian costuming for many years, for example see Christine Holmlund, 'When Is A Lesbian Not a Lesbian?: The Lesbian Continuum and the Mainstream Femme Film' *Camera Obscura* 9:1-2 25-16 (January/May 1991), pp. 144-180. However, that *The L Word* was the only previous ensemble television drama and suffered so much vitriol for its femme-inine representations makes it the most likely text that Braun's was reacting against.

¹³⁴ It should also be noted that while NBC cancelled *Ellen* for being too focused on queer issues, the UK distributor, Channel 4, threw *Ellen* a live, televised party and titled its evening's programming a *Coming Out Party* on the night it aired the infamous 'Puppy Episode' (tx. Saturday 25 April 1998). The party was hosted by out talk-show host Graham Norton, and Channel 4 filled its late night schedule with gay-themed programming like the camp, queer themed game-show *The Staying-In Show*, billed proudly by the voice-over announcer as 'the first ever gay and lesbian quiz show', aired short information films for those questioning their sexuality, and broadcast a helpline number throughout the evening.

one another and kissing.¹³⁵ It would take until May 2003 before US network television aired lesbian sex, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB/UPN, 1997-2003).¹³⁶ This more liberal context than that which surrounded the production of the first series of *The L Word* is potentially one reason why Braun and her creative team felt that it would not be risky to portray authentic lesbian types on the series.

The British series was also broadcast on BBC Three, a freely available mainstream channel, but not one that attracts big audiences. This offers two more factors that might have removed the need to appeal to the widest possible audience by erasing butch identities. BBC Three is available on free-to-air digital television, so financial investment (beyond the standard UK television license fee) was not required from viewers in order to watch the series, as opposed to Showtime's subscriber model, which necessitates attracting a large cross section of the US population.¹³⁷ BBC Three received a 1.3% share of audiences in both Oct and Nov 2010 (when *Lip Service* first aired) as compared to 20.6% (Oct) and 21.3% (Nov) for BBC One and 6.8% and 6.7% for BBC Two.¹³⁸ The creative and production teams behind *Lip Service* necessarily had less to worry about than Summers and Showtime executives when it came to attracting large audiences. Mainstreamed images of femininity were thus not as urgent. In fact, hair and make-up designer Niamh Morrison even regarded depicting butch and other arguably authentic lesbian images as a 'selling factor' of the series.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (BBC, UK, tx. January 1990). Hilary Hinds has written about the way in which the 'literary' pedigree of the Jeanette Winterson novel on which the text was based positively affected critical reception of the series. The television adaptation's scheduling in the Wednesday night slot reserved for 'quality' or 'art television' also added kudos to the drama. These factors allowed mainstream reviewers to both downplay the importance of lesbianism in the text by universalising its themes and recuperate the potentially sensational or risqué onscreen lesbianism in the name of art. See 'Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit: Reaching audiences other lesbian texts cannot reach' in Wilton (ed.), *immortal, invisible*, pp. 29-45.

¹³⁶ 'Touched'. See Sarah Warn, 'How *Buffy* Changed the World of Lesbians on Television', *AfterEllen.com*, (June 2003), p.2 <<http://www.afterellen.com/archive/ellen/TV/buffy-end2.html>> , accessed 6 Dec 2012.

¹³⁷ In 2005, the year after *The L Word* premiered, Showtime had 13.8 million subscribers, according to Bill Carter, 'With *Homeland*, Showtime Makes Gains on HBO', *The New York Times* online, (29 January 2012) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/30/business/media/with-homeland-showtime-makes-gains-on-hbo.html>>, accessed Dec 03 2012.

¹³⁸ According to the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board 'Monthly Total Viewing Summary' <<http://www.barb.co.uk/report/monthly-viewing>>, accessed Dec 03 2012. Reviewer Gerard Gilbert called BBC Three the 'BBC ghetto'. Gerard Gilbert, Review of *Lip Service*, *theartsdesk.com*, (13 October 2010) <<http://www.theartsdesk.com/tv/lip-service-bbc-three>>, accessed 10 September 2011.

¹³⁹ Niamh Morrison, personal interview, 29 October 2011.

Braun went to considerable efforts to achieve her objective of representing lesbian 'authenticity' in *Lip Service*. For example, while Morrison and costume designer Lesley Abernethy were in the planning stages for the series, the writer sent them a document detailing her perceptions of particular lesbian styles as well as 'where the lesbian characters fit within the dyke subculture'.¹⁴⁰ Reading the letter, it became clear that Braun strongly believes style is central to communicating lesbian identities, and that she views gay women as being discrete types. The writer divides lesbians into the categories 'Butch/Androgynous' and 'Femme', demonstrating gendered concepts of dress and identity. Cast members Cat, Tess and Sadie (Natasha O'Keeffe) are classified as femmes, whereas Sam and Frankie are designated as being on opposing ends of the butch/androgynous scale, with Sam as a 'soft butch' and Frankie deemed to be more butch, so that 'the more conservative amongst us could mistake her for a boy'.¹⁴¹

Braun emphasised the importance of Abernethy and Morrison sticking to her classifications of lesbian identity in their designs by explaining 'the type of lesbian [women] are is often expressed through quite rigid dress codes and style'.¹⁴² The word ordering seems to indicate that butch/androgynous and femme styles are expressive of 'essential' and varying forms of lesbian identity (dress codes indicate 'the type' that particular gay women 'are'), in a manner that recalls late nineteenth-century German sexologist's classifications of types of homosexuality as a congenital condition of gender inversion. However, upon reading the document in more detail, it seems that Braun's conception of lesbian types does not necessarily presume essential identities 'expressed' through dress codes and style but instead positions varying lesbian identities as defined—and only defined—by image.

For butch lesbians, Braun outlined a scale ranging from the 'uncompromising, make-up free, jeans, football shirt look to the fiercely trendy, short funky hairstyle, androgynous crew'.¹⁴³ The document connects butch and androgynous lesbians with 'boyish' haircuts. The femme category contains women who 'might wear make up... might have long hair (although a

¹⁴⁰ Harriet Braun, letter to Lesley Abernethy and Morrison, photographed by author during Abernethy and Morrison, personal interview, 29 November 2011.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

funky short haircut is just as likely)...aren't averse to non-boy style jewellery and when they feel like it they are happy to wear a dress/skirt/heels'. The focus on clothing and style may stem from the intended audience of the letter (the costume and hair and make-up designers on the series), but it seems telling that the figure of the femme lesbian is initially described as 'simply a dyke who is less butch than her butch counterparts', with butch (and consequently femme) identity constructed, in this document at least, entirely through aspects of style.

In the not so distant past, butch and femme 'styles' had very definite meanings in subcultures and in everyday lesbian lives, connected with 'roles' which extended beyond image to behaviour. For example, in 1981 Joan Nestle recalled how the 1950s butch identity was more than an image, also embodying sexual prowess and domination; the butch's clothes 'symbolized the taking of responsibility... [for] sexual expertise', specifically expertise in 'arousing another woman'¹⁴⁴ I tested this recollection with some of my interviewees, and found similar experiences. When Hannah mentioned a 'heavily butch/femme culture in Chester' when she first came out at the age of seventeen (based on the 'census' information I took, this would be between 1963 and 1973), I questioned her about whether this referred only to image or whether it had behavioural implications. Hannah's answer was affirmative with regard to behaviour, and the implications were, again, explicitly sexual. She spoke of 'roles' which were strictly adhered to, and referred to butch as meaning both the metaphorical and, on occasion, literal taking on of the phallus (as indicated by the reference to 'packing': wearing a dildo or simply padding in the crotch area beneath clothing):

Butches of my (limited) acquaintance in the bedroom ranged from 'vanilla top' to 100% stone butch, to dykes who were very much into packing. There was a corresponding expectation that a woman who identified as femme would be pretty submissive, never take the lead or want to be in charge. To subvert that [...] broke all the rules. If you were femme on the streets, you could never be butch in the sheets!!! Or vice versa.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Joan Nestle, 'Butch-Fem Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950s', *Heresies* #12 (Sex Issue) 3:4 (Winter 1981), p. 21.

¹⁴⁵ Hannah, email to the author, 17 June 2012.

Neither Nestle nor Hannah seem to suggest that such roles are inborn, with Nestle's description of the butch 'taking on... responsibility' through donning butch garments, as opposed to signifying an essential sexual style, and the way Hannah mentioned that she 'used to be very femme'; her past tense indicating that her femme-ininity was something she could take up and later take leave from.¹⁴⁶ However, it is clear that historically, butch and femme combined sexual roles and images.

Instead of recalling a late nineteenth century concept of congenital inversion or even a mid-twentieth-century understanding of butch and femme as both image and sexual role, the 'simply' in Braun's letter suggests that the writer sees style itself as the defining element of her butch/androgynous and femme categories. Butch, femme, and androgynous 'types' of lesbianism are connected in the document only with image and not with sexual behaviour or congenital characteristics. This seems to indicate a floating free of former definitions of butch and femme lesbian styles so that the terms, like 'androgynous', might now indicate merely image and not role. In 'All Dressed Up But No Place To Go?', Arlene Stein wrote about what she saw as the beginnings of this shift in the 1980s, noting that

Eighties butch-femme... is a self-conscious aesthetic... rather than an embrace of one's "true" nature... Gone is the tightly constructed relation between personal style, erotic preference, and economic position... Wearing high heels during the day does not mean you're a femme at night, passive in bed, or closeted on the job.¹⁴⁷

For Stein, eighties butch and femme styles were so disconnected from identity that one could shift between and even mix the two: 'For many, clothes are transient, interchangeable; you can dress as a femme one day and a butch the next. You can wear a crew-cut along with a skirt.'¹⁴⁸ In Braun's classification, the femme seems to allow for this kind of play; the *Lip Service* creator concedes that femme lesbians are not necessarily feminine all the time, 'often retaining elements of boyishness', for example 'just as likely to spend much of their time wearing jeans/a vest top/trainers etc.'. It is when Braun formulates the butch/androgynous lesbian that things become more rigid, despite the separation of 'butch'

¹⁴⁶ Hannah, personal interview.

¹⁴⁷ Stein, 'All Dressed Up, But No Place to Go?', p. 479.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

image from behaviour and/or an essential nature. 'A common factor amongst them is that they wouldn't be seen dead in a dress, skirt, heels or lipstick', the creator writes, indicating that, in her opinion, gay women who dress in a butch manner are more strict about avoiding visual displays of femininity.

That it is image, and only image, which constitutes a butch identity for Braun becomes very apparent when we consider the character of Frankie. Frankie presents an interesting case when it comes to style and identity in *Lip Service*, as she arguably has the most lesbian visibility on the series, yet is not technically exclusively gay. As such she is particularly indicative of Braun's conception of style as a superficial indicator of nothing more than itself: a butch style is what makes a butch 'type' of lesbian, even to the exclusion of considerations of sexual activity. Stylistically, Frankie typically sports a reasonably androgynous appearance (leather jacket, skinny jeans, trainers, vest tops and wallet chain), and Morrison referred to the character as 'our most androgynous butch lesbian, even though she [wore] make-up.'¹⁴⁹

The character exhibits several strong visual markers of lesbianism, including 'funky' hair and a Superdry leather jacket, a brand that arose as a common lesbian favourite in my interviews and which Abernethy named as a brand she saw on a lot of young women when undertaking some research for the series in a gay nightclub.¹⁵⁰ When I questioned interviewee Leanne about items of clothing she might view as specifically gay, she immediately mentioned racer-back vest tops, adding 'most people I know would call a racer-back vest top a gay vest top.'¹⁵¹ Frankie wears racer-back vest tops almost exclusively, and Leanne remarked that the character 'obviously looks the most gay' of the *Lip Service* cast. Looking at a promotional photograph of the actresses, interviewee Charlotte remarked about Frankie: 'she's got a lesbian style' and Felicity, looking at the same image, referred to

¹⁴⁹ Niamh Morrison, personal interview.

¹⁵⁰ On funky hairstyles: Leanne, personal interview; Charlotte, personal interview. On the Superdry label: Amy, personal interview; Charlotte, personal interview. Lesley Abernethy, personal interview, 29 November 2011.

¹⁵¹ Leanne, personal interview.

Frankie as 'dykey', pointing to the character's 'T-shirt, tattoo, [cigarette], beer, converse and skinny jeans' as 'standard' lesbian iconography.¹⁵²

Frankie, then, looks very much like a lesbian, but also exhibits some sexual interest in men. In the very first episode of the first series, the character admits to being attracted to both men and women, although claims to only fall in love with the latter. We see her having sex with several women, and in the fourth episode she sleeps with her male friend Jay. Frankie remains within Braun's classification of a butch lesbian despite her participation in sexual activity with men as well as women. Notwithstanding Frankie's on-screen sex with a man, out lesbian actress Heather Peace, who plays Sam, used her subcultural affiliation to legitimise the look sported by Gedmintas, saying: 'she plays the type of gay girl that I see out



Figure 10: Frankie from *Lip Service*

¹⁵² Charlotte, personal interview; Felicity, personal interview.

and about so often now'.¹⁵³ I am not arguing that self-identified lesbians do not or should not have sex with men, an arguably prohibitive mind-set challenged by lesbian-made media as far back as *Go Fish* (Rose Troche, USA, 1994) in what Michele Aaron calls a 'dykes-fuck-fellas' storyline that undertakes the queer work of blurring fixed identities.¹⁵⁴ However, interestingly, it is Frankie's image more than her actions that seems to classify her as a lesbian for both Braun and Peace. Braun's 'types' are revealed as defined primarily by style: Frankie is regarded as the most butch/androgynous 'lesbian' because she looks like one, not because she displays a particular kind of behaviour.

Interestingly, Braun's insistence on the inclusion of lesbian style led to a strange situation in this instance that directly opposes *Lip Service's* Frankie with much of the cast of *The L Word*. Instead of several lesbian characters who do not exhibit recognisable lesbian images, their costumes telling stories which downplay lesbianism as a significant defining characteristic, here we have a character whose costume speaks lesbianism so strongly that it overwhelms the non-lesbian aspects of her character. As such the character returns us to the premise that recognisably butch imagery on women speaks gayness so effectively that it conveys little else. Bruzzi and Tamar Jeffers MacDonald have both argued that costume can create meaning when not directly supporting narrative and character.¹⁵⁵ Revealingly, Frankie's costume and style are so over-determined with lesbian meanings (that butch/androgynous women are sexually interested in other women), her 'dress' telling the woman's story to such an extent that the connotations of her image seem capable of not only creating meaning beyond narrative and character but actively overriding both.

Braun's style instructions contained a very definite remit to include butch looks in the series, resulting in a sort of affirmative action for butch lesbian styles. There was a strong effort, stemming from Braun, to ensure that masculine elements of clothing were not eliminated from the costuming in *Lip Service*. The emphasis that the creator placed on butch images

¹⁵³ Heather Peace, quoted in Beattie and Longley, 'Great LezBritain: Interview with Heather Peace from *Lip Service*' *AfterEllen.com*, (25 October 25 2011), p. 2 <<http://www.afterellen.com/greatlezbritain/10-25-2010>>, accessed September 29 2011.

¹⁵⁴ Aaron, 'New Queer Cinema: An Introduction' in Aaron (ed.), *New Queer Cinema*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁵ Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema* and Tamar Jeffers MacDonald, *Hollywood Catwalk: Exploring Costume and Transformation in American Film* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

being represented makes it seem highly likely that Braun was reacting to negative publicity over the lack of such women in *The L Word* and aiming to either redress the balance slightly with her own series or at the very least avoid the same criticisms. Both Abernethy and Morrison spoke to me about the importance Braun placed on representing masculine elements in the styles on display. Abernethy emphasised how important it was to the creator to show characters from the 'whole lesbian community', but specifically mentioned butch characters as needing visibility, saying:

She's worried, I suppose, about criticism about there not being butch characters... I think when it started she was probably concerned that there was going to be all this criticism about them all being lipstick lesbians, so she's really concerned that it doesn't go that way.¹⁵⁶

Morrison also hinted at deliberate efforts to create a mix of lesbian identities that included butch elements, as when she described one of the reasons for keeping Heather Peace's make-up incredibly minimal for her part as the 'soft-butch' Sam: 'it definitely was [a case of] "Yes, we want her to look more gay so she's going to have less make-up on because we don't have enough, perhaps, of that"...'¹⁵⁷

The desire to have not only 'authentic' images but specifically images that incorporate masculine elements is evident in some decisions made over the character Tess. Tess proved to be the most feminine of the cast, with Button's long, blonde hair curled for the part, and the character's propensity for wearing dresses, skirts and heels.¹⁵⁸ Abernethy spoke of counteracting this femininity with specifically masculine elements. For example, in a promotional image in which actress Fiona Button also wears a kilt, with her long blonde hair curled and loose in an extremely feminine manner, the designer put her in 'a boy's vintage waistcoat' (See Fig. 11).¹⁵⁹ This served to deliberately render Button's top half 'really quite boyish... rather than [putting] her in a girly blouse' and was intended by Abernethy to 'just

¹⁵⁶ Abernethy, personal interview.

¹⁵⁷ Morrison, personal interview.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Abernethy, personal interview.

edge it up slightly'.¹⁶⁰ In this interpretation, 'edge' appears to mean masculinity, indicating a slight distance from dainty, passive and glamorous norms of femininity.



Figure 11: *Lip Service* promotional image. (l-r: Sam, Cat, Sadie, Frankie, with Tess at far right)

The letter was not the end of Braun's policing of lesbian authenticity in *Lip Service*. According to Abernethy and Morrison, Braun kept an eye on details of style on set, approving or vetoing things like hairstyles and keeping a close eye on shoes and other accessories.¹⁶¹ This policing did not only cover butch characters but also extended to femme lesbians. Whereas *The L Word* promoted mainstream identification with its lesbian characters through making even the butch character rather feminine, *Lip Service* can be understood as attempting to counteract this slippage between heterosexual feminine appearances and femme-ininity. The aforementioned document argues, for example, that 'generally being "femme" is a very different proposition to being a very girlie, straight woman' and Braun noted that, 'Due to all the prejudices around looking feminine amongst dykes, a femme dyke, when choosing to "femme it up" generally takes this look in a more

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Abernethy and Morrison, personal interview.

edgy/sassy/quirky/trendy direction.¹⁶² Recognising that the series was likely to cast feminine looking women, the writer offered her advice as 'an indication of how we might dyke them up.'¹⁶³ This advice directly affected the looks on the series. During our interview, Abernethy described Braun's strong influence over certain elements, speaking, for example, about the kind of boots the creator allowed her to use to costume Laura Fraser as Cat:

LA: I had to be careful with what kind of boots she would wear because Harriet's particular with that...

FC: In terms of them looking authentically lesbian?

LA: Yeah. So we had to have chunky biker boots.

Interestingly, Braun's insistence on the 'edgy/sassy/quirky' elements of lesbian femme styles is at odds with several opinions about contemporary lesbian style that were offered by my consumer interviewees. Only one account of lesbian femme style appeared to follow similar rules to Braun's femme style classification, but this represented femme style from an earlier era. Hannah, describing her own 'very femme' look in the 1960s and/or 1970s, admitted that the image she portrayed at the time was indeed a very heightened version of femininity. Hannah's described her image at the time thus:

My typical femme outfits were a bit Dita Von Teese-ish: pencil skirts, heels, white blouses which were all pretty cleavage-revealing [...] I was a Wonderbra aficionado. Always stockings; never tights and I had quite an array of silk underwear [...] I wore my hair very long and left it curly [...] Over-the-top jewellery also played a big part.¹⁶⁴

The reference to burlesque star Von Teese is revealing. Teese's pale-skinned, dark haired look incorporates a highly stylized vintage image which seems to parody traditional concepts of femininity by using many aspects of it presented in an amplified manner. The mention of jewellery that is 'over-the-top', as well as fetishized feminine garments (stockings, long hair) and those which emphasise female body parts (the push-up design for Wonderbra, cleavage-revealing blouses) or are traditionally felt to signify intense femininity (silk

¹⁶² Braun, letter to Abernethy and Morrison.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Hannah, email to the author, June 17 2012.

underwear) suggest further aspects of parody in this femme look from a few decades ago.¹⁶⁵ Hannah's former brand of femme-ininity could thus be read as at least 'edgy/sassy/quirky' if not 'trendy' according to the fashions of the time, with the all-important slight distancing from conventional feminine norms, in this case through parody.

More recent responses, however, revealed a slightly different story and suggested that Braun's understanding of 'prejudices around looking feminine amongst dykes' is no longer as true as it once might have been. In particular, both Charlotte and Leanne felt that it has been growing increasingly difficult to tell the difference between straight women and lesbians in recent years due to a proliferation of femininity amongst lesbians that is distinctly not differentiated from styles typically seen on heterosexually identified women. Charlotte admitted that it was 'getting harder and harder' to spot gay women based only on stylistic clues, and Leanne directly indicated that prejudice against femininity in lesbians is no longer present in the communities with which she is familiar:

Now, I think, girls feel like they can be quite feminine. Maybe in some ways it is harder now to tell with some girls whether they're gay or not because I think that they feel they can be totally beautiful, and that's okay. I don't know if there used to be some kind of stigma around where lesbians felt like they had to prove themselves in a certain way, I don't really know, but I think [if so,] that's gone away now. There's not this need to define in the same way.

At least for Charlotte and Leanne, a 'femme' gay woman is now indistinguishable from a feminine straight woman. Abernethy acknowledged an awareness that not all lesbians who exhibit femininity do so in this way, suggesting that her avoidance of such looks was more to do with adhering to Braun's requirements than representing what she herself felt to be an inherent truth about the ways lesbians dress:

I tried to keep away from a very sort of soft, whimsical look [...] I know you get lesbians who dress like that but in the TV programme I don't think the writer would have accepted it [...] She kind of kept an eye on shoes, jewellery, everything.¹⁶⁶

For Braun's purposes in *Lip Service*, femme did not mean simply feminine, but has its own lesbian logic, based on the writer's personal vision of how to remain 'authentic to a lesbian

¹⁶⁵ For a few paragraphs on silk as a feminine fabric, see Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits*, p. 134.

¹⁶⁶ Abernethy, personal interview.

audience.¹⁶⁷ Thinking about the considerable criticism aimed at *The L Word* for not doing this, Braun's particular brand of femme-ininity becomes readable as a likely reaction against the lack of lesbian authenticity in the earlier show.

Despite *Lip Service*'s focus on lesbian authenticity and *The L Word*'s avoidance of it, there were similarities between the costuming strategies in both series. As with *The L Word*, the content of *Lip Service* was advertised before the series aired, and lesbian sexuality was rendered visible through dialogue and action, including graphic lesbian sex scenes, so that *Lip Service* represented a gay televisual space in which costume did not necessarily need to telegraph lesbian sexuality. As with *The L Word*, the diminishing of the importance of lesbianism in the costuming of gay female characters seems to stem from the ensemble nature of the programme.

Standard costume practice calls for characters to be dressed in ways that reveal their character, based on basic typecasting. Edith Head made this central argument in *The Dress Doctor*: 'The script is your Bible; first and above all, what kind of character are we dressing?'¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Jenny Beavan, costume designer for *The King's Speech* and *Gosford Park*, amongst other things, reiterated the same basic rule in a recently published interview: 'My job is about creating the person who's wearing the clothes. I always start from the character... If I do have some kind of style that people notice, I hope it's "appropriateness".'¹⁶⁹ Telegraphing lesbianism, the most notable feature of identity on a rare series focusing on a group of gay women, would be appropriate in *Lip Service*. It might even be expected—despite its side-lining in *The L Word*—due to Braun's emphasis on including butch styles.¹⁷⁰ Yet, once again, this appropriateness fades when one considers the second most important function of costume design: supporting the narrative by telling stories, as in Maureen Turim's 'storytelling wardrobes' and Beavan's statement that

¹⁶⁷ McGarry, 'Lip Service – Lesbian drama coming to BBC Three'.

¹⁶⁸ Head and Kesner Ardmore, *The Dress Doctor*, p. 76.

¹⁶⁹ Jenny Beavan, quoted in Nadoolman Landis, *FilmCraft: Costume Design* (Lewes, East Sussex: Ilex, 2012), p. 21.

¹⁷⁰ There is much work on the erasure of lesbian authenticity in mainstream programming but for some useful arguments see Ciasullo, 'Making Her (In)Visible'; Patricia White, *uninvited*, p. 1, and Kessler, 'Politics of the Sitcom Formula'.

'Costume design has far more to do with storytelling than to do with clothes...'¹⁷¹ As with *The L Word*, the need to tell interesting and varied stories through character affected the costuming and the extent to which lesbianism was emphasised in style in *Lip Service*. At one point in our interview, Morrison noted that 'four lesbians are going to work in four different environments with four different personalities', emphasising that such difference 'needs to come across as well [as lesbian identity], otherwise everybody's just one-dimensional.'¹⁷²

While costume (and hair and make-up) designers are often wary of using typecasting when it comes to gay characters due to anxieties and historic critical reactions to stereotyping, making use of less 'value-laden' forms of typing is less problematic. Social types not considered to be outside of mainstream culture take the positive aspects of stereotyping ('small details of an image can so quickly and assuredly... condense such a wealth of meaning and knowledge') without the negative connotations of outsider status; for example, a businesswoman type is instantly recognisable without being necessarily positioned as 'other'.¹⁷³ Because of the multiple lesbian set up in *Lip Service*, as in *The L Word*, an emphasis was placed on getting non-lesbian elements to come across through costume and style. Once more, this multiplied the stories being conveyed through clothing and thus helped to place lesbianism as context, not content, avoiding one-dimensionality. While *Lip Service* was particularly concerned with lesbian authenticity, lesbianism was neither the only nor always the primary story Abernethy and Morrison aimed to tell through their lead characters' costuming and styles.

Cat, for example, is an architect who likes things organised and planned. She wears clothing that communicates her professional position, with suits and button-up shirts, or smart jackets over tight jeans. In a filmed interview, Abernethy referred to Cat as an 'uptight' character, and attributed her 'smarter' look to this, as well as referencing her slightly formal

¹⁷¹ Jenny Beavan, quoted in Nadoolman Landis, *FilmCraft*, p. 21.

¹⁷² Morrison, personal interview.

¹⁷³ Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, p. 22.

work environment.¹⁷⁴ During our conversation Abernethy again returned to Cat's personality, calling her 'particular' and mentioning that this was reflected through 'simple' clothing and a lack of anything 'fussy'.¹⁷⁵ Neatly cut and fitted clothing suggests Cat's organised mind. Morrison also chose to accentuate Cat's tightly wound personality through her haircut, although allowing it the flexibility to show the difference between Cat's personal and private selves:

She's almost compulsive in her organisation, so we've given her quite an angular bob which she always keeps behind her ears – [it] always looks just so – except when you see her in the bedroom when she's perhaps letting go.¹⁷⁶

Frankie's sometime lover Sadie, also a known shoplifter and thief, works as an estate agent. Because Sadie is Cat's rival for Frankie's affections but very different in personality, Morrison chose to style the actress' make-up to set her up in opposition to Cat. Elsewhere, Morrison has spoken about the way she worked to signal Sadie's dangerous nature, saying she wanted her to look 'a bit minxy' and consequently giving the character 'slightly darker lips' and making her make-up '[a] little bit dark around the eyes' so that "the second you see her she looks like trouble."¹⁷⁷ The darker colours suggest Sadie's corresponding dark side, especially in comparison with Cat's red lips and lighter eye make-up. Sadie's hair is not dissimilar to Cat's—a dark bob—but Sadie's thick, long, straight-cut fringe frames her face in a rather menacing fashion, suggesting, as Morrison noted in our interview, that she is a 'bad Cat': a dangerous version of her rival.¹⁷⁸ We can see echoes of this in Abernethy's costumes for Sadie as well, as the character wears some suits and shirts, like Cat, but her clothes feature more leather and animal print than Cat's smart suits. Sadie's outfits have undertones of mischief, reflecting her very active and often irresponsible sex life (animal print having long been a symbol of active desire in women) as well as her 'dark' nature that results in criminal activities. A black dress featuring diagonal slashes and metal studs in the

¹⁷⁴ Abernethy, *Lip Look*, special feature on *Lip Service Series 1* (2010) (DVD, Universal, UK, 2011) ASIN: B003JQL240.

¹⁷⁵ Abernethy, personal interview.

¹⁷⁶ Morrison, *Lip Look*.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Morrison, personal interview.

fabric up and down each side of the bodice once more hints at her dangerous side, and a black leather jacket with a leopard-print collar signals her predatory nature.

Tess's costume is about playing dress-up. The character—an actress who lacks stability and is shown in various demeaning jobs—seems to enjoy dressing for attention, and is often seen in sequins and colours and patterns. She also has a low income level, frequently shown temping and taking on small jobs to get by while she continues to audition for acting work. In accordance with this, Abernethy sourced the character's wardrobe from charity shops and vintage sales, creating mis-matched ensembles which let Tess' creativity shine through.¹⁷⁹ We rarely see Tess in the same outfit twice; her hairstyles and make-up seem to change as often as her outfits, the variety of all three indicating her enjoyment of dressing up and inhabiting characters, reflective of her desired acting career. Morrison spoke of her designs for Tess as very changeable, explaining this in terms of reflecting the character: '[She's] very very playful so her hair changes all the time, she wears different coloured lipsticks and that's her character, that she's a bit haphazard.'¹⁸⁰

Tess is a character whose life rarely seems to go right, with many mishaps and humiliations along the way, sometimes providing comic relief in the series, but at other times offering poignant moments when the struggling woman truly suffers. Her clothes play a part in this, reflecting the times her lack of career and consequent scattered lifestyle gets her into difficulty or simply put her in embarrassing situations: in the first episode Tess is running late for an audition and is consequently forced to change outfits in a hurry in a toilet cubicle. Her tights ladder, her dress rips and her necklace is noticeably off-kilter. These clothes-related troubles convey the rather disastrous nature of Tess' life, also communicated when she cries in front of the audition panel. Slightly less troubling moments that speak Tess' low status in life come when she is required to dress as a drink can—complete with bright orange tights—for promotional work, or when she arrives at a television studio seeking work as a runner, beautifully dressed in a pretty skirt and top, only to be told to wear a show T-shirt that is too

¹⁷⁹ Abernethy, *Lip Look*.

¹⁸⁰ Morrison, personal interview.

large for her and erases her individuality.¹⁸¹ Tess's eclectic and sometimes humiliatingly enforced style is a very important part of her characterisation, working alongside Braun's efforts to express 'authenticity' to also convey other aspects.

Another character that exhibits a mixture of lesbian authenticity and the telling of stories other than lesbianism is (predictably, perhaps) Frankie. As well as inhabiting a very common lesbian look, Frankie's costumes convey other things about her. In opposition to Sadie and Cat, Frankie's clothes mirror the fact that her job as a freelance photographer does not require a professional look. The casual image she sports fits with the artistic nature of her profession as well as her general lack of commitment (to place and relationships), and her cool persona: cool both in the sense of stylish as well as stand-offish. We see her wearing the same clothes repeatedly, indicating that her wardrobe is minimal, consisting of low-slung skinny jeans and oversized trainers, a few tank tops which she layers for different effects, a hoodie or two, a beanie, a messenger bag, long chain necklaces and her ubiquitous leather jacket. A lone wolf who guards her emotions carefully and takes care of herself, primarily, Frankie's small wardrobe is 'about being relaxed and comfortable and being able to get up and go if she needs to', according to Gedmintas.¹⁸² Its small size and casual nature reflects her lack of stability and commitment in life and relationships, as well as being realistic for the fact that she flies back to Glasgow from New York with little notice.¹⁸³

During the series, Frankie becomes more tormented by various discoveries relating to her deceased aunt and her own true provenance. In her interview, Abernethy mentioned that one of the ways in which she reflected Frankie's altering mental state was to gradually remove the colour from the character's clothes over the course of the first series. The red vest tops Frankie wears in the opening episode have disappeared by the end of the first season: in the final episode the character wears exclusively black, grey and white.

¹⁸¹ See *Lip Service* episodes #1.1 and #1.2.

¹⁸² Ruta Gedmintas, *Lip Look*.

¹⁸³ For more on *Lip Service*'s (and *The L Word*'s) characterisation of Frankie as irresponsible, and the problematic linking of this with bisexuality, as well as butch identity and promiscuity, see Faye Davies, 'More than just *Lip Service*?- Stereotypes in lesbian focused drama', *FlowTV.org*, (4 August 2011) <<http://flowtv.org/2011/08/lip-service/>>, accessed 29 September 2011.

Abernethy also spoke of the way in which the gradual lessening of colour in Frankie's costuming was accompanied by more covered-up looks, so that the low-cut vest tops of the early episodes are replaced by zipped-up hoodies and Frankie's jacket as the narrative progresses. Frankie's sartorial world symbolically becomes more dark and covered-up as she withdraws into herself, telegraphing her deepening depression. In this way Frankie's soft-butch style not only communicates her interest in women but also speaks several other things about the character.

As per Braun's instructions, Sam's appearance also reads as slightly butch and therefore recognisably gay. Interestingly, and apparently going against the creator's classification of butch as based on image alone, Sam's butch characterisation through style does not exist purely for its own sake; the character's slightly masculine identity is brought out in the narrative through moments like her offer to put up shelves for Cat, evidencing quite a 'manly' affinity for DIY (as per the *Will & Grace* joke).¹⁸⁴ The character's butch personality also seems to fit with Sam's work as a Detective Sergeant, which positions her as being 'like a man' because of the traditionally and still more biased-towards-male demographics of the police force. Her clothes and style match her personality, with Sam wearing smart suit trousers and pale button-up shirts, as a general rule. There is a distinct lack of visible make-up, and Sam does wear some jewellery—notably a silver watch and small stud earrings—but otherwise her appearance tends to be quite plain.¹⁸⁵ Whereas for Cat simplicity implies control, Sam's plain clothing was intended to indicate a lack of interest in image, according to Abernethy:

Actually Heather said to me... when we bought stuff, "Oh yeah, that's great, we'll just get a few of them; we'll just get different colours." She said "That's what boy's do, they just find something they like and they just buy it in every colour." And I think that's quite good for Sam...

Sam's simple attire and the consequently implied lack of interest in style in turn symbolise 'masculinity' by harking back to what Flügel termed 'The Great Masculine Renunciation': a point when western male dress codes were divested of decoration in the late eighteenth

¹⁸⁴ See episodes #1.2 and #1.6.

¹⁸⁵ In *Lip Look*, Heather Peace jokingly complained about not even being allowed to wear eye-liner, restricted to foundation only.

century and masculine clothing aimed at being 'useful' rather than 'beautiful'.¹⁸⁶ The masculinity of Sam's costumes directly speaks her classification as butch by Braun and the text.

Fitting in with the strategy of making lesbianism more than story in this ensemble series, in addition to expressing her apparently butch personality, Sam's costuming also reflects her profession and adds to her characterisation. A non-uniformed detective, the character dresses in a way that ensures she is taken seriously, wearing smart, pressed trousers and tailored shirts. In addition to supporting her butch identity, the slightly masculine elements of her clothes—designed to look 'powerful' by Abernethy—speak Sam's authority at work. Providing more ammunition for my argument for *Lip Service* as a post-*L Word* text, Peace references the earlier television series as inspiration for her character's costuming strategy, naming Bette Porter as an influence on her own preferences for Sam's appearance. In an interview for *TimeOut London*, Peace explained 'I'm a plain clothes detective. But I do dress smartly with the waistcoats and the shirts. That was my choice actually. I always liked the way Jennifer Beals dressed in *The L Word* so I thought: "Right, let's go for power suits."¹⁸⁷ During our interview, Abernethy confirmed this version of events, acknowledging Peace's input on Sam's image.

Revealingly, this inter-lesbian-textual inspiration was not based on Bette's costume conveying a type of lesbian identity but focused on an aspect of personality entirely separate from sexuality. Despite having named a lesbian character as a style inspiration, Peace did not place her emulation of Bette in the context of lesbian authenticity, instead referring to the way dressing in 'power suits' can give the wearer confidence: 'It gives you a different walk, a different swagger. You feel differently when you dress like that', Peace enthused.¹⁸⁸ The 'power' of dressing in this way arguably stems from the association of plain, tailored 'useful' clothing, and particularly suits, with masculine attire since Flügel's 'Great Masculine Renunciation', and in turn from masculinity being traditionally associated with status as per

¹⁸⁶ Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, p. 110-11.

¹⁸⁷ Heather Peace, quoted by Sarah Cohen in 'Heather Peace Interview', *TimeOut London*, (April 7 2011) <<http://www.timeout.com/london/gay-lesbian/article/2215/heather-peace-interview>>, accessed 29 September 2012.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

patriarchal society, as well as activity and strength, probably best exemplified by the writing of Sigmund Freud.¹⁸⁹

Sam looks powerful because she looks masculine. Even though the masculinity conveyed by these garments fits with Braun's desire to incorporate butch styles into *Lip Service*, that the 'story' (as 'told' through masculine clothing) taken from the earlier lesbian text and reinterpreted in the later one is not lesbianism but authority demonstrates how both series used costume to tell stories apart from sexual identity. Because the lesbian ensemble set-up both allows for and arguably necessitates that costume tells more stories than sexual preference, in *Lip Service*, as in *The L Word*, costume is used to tell far more stories than 'these women are lesbians'. A significant difference is that *Lip Service*, with its deliberate incorporation of butch elements of style, makes efforts to pluralise this recognisable yet often underrepresented element of lesbian style rather than containing all prominently visible butchness in one lead character.

Perhaps because of the focus on differentiating the women from each other, and despite Abernethy and Morrison taking on board Braun's constant advice, the looks that appeared on *Lip Service* did not escape reproach from critics and viewers, and garnered similar complaints to those levelled at *The L Word*. Anna Leach, of feminist blog Jezebel, sarcastically noted: 'So there are lesbians in Britain – at least three of them! – and they're all hot [and] white.'¹⁹⁰ Interviewee Hannah deemed the looks on the series unrealistic, saying: 'We've got friends who live in Glasgow and we said 'Where are these dykes that look like this in Glasgow?! Come on, you've been hiding them away!'¹⁹¹ Sam Wollaston, reviewing *Lip Service* for the *Guardian* online, criticised the fact that all the gay women on

¹⁸⁹ Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, p. 110-11. Freud strongly equated activity with masculinity and passivity with femininity, despite explicitly advising against doing so. He draws attention to the 'mobile' sperm and 'immobile' ovum as 'a model for the conduct of sexual individuals during intercourse', although he makes sure to highlight the ways in which 'social customs' reinforce passivity in females. See Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', in James Strachey (trans.), James Strachey and Angela Richards (eds), *The Penguin Freud Library Volume 2: New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 148-9.

¹⁹⁰ Anna Leach, 'How Well Does the BBC do Lesbians?', *Jezebel*, (20 October 2010), <<http://jezebel.com/5667038/how-well-does-the-bbc-do-lesbians>>, accessed 29 September 2011. It is notable that, while Braun was keen for the images on *Lip Service* to feel 'authentic' to lesbian viewers, she did not seem anxious to avoid racial homogeneity in the same way as she was so determined not to limit *Lip Service* to depicting only 'lipstick lesbian' identities.

¹⁹¹ Hannah, personal interview.

the series seemed to adhere to mainstream norms of femininity, dismissively declaring 'Hey, lesbians don't all have short hair and Dr Martens, they come in all sorts of varieties (well, so long as they're gorgeous).'¹⁹² Gerard Gilbert of *theartsdesk.com*, though not entirely critical, noted *Lip Service*'s similarities to *The L Word* with the use of conventionally pretty women to alleviate any threat: 'of course all the women are gorgeous – something it shares with *The L Word*. No scary diesel dykes here, just mostly the unthreatening femme variety – this is a Sapphic TV show where even the one butch girl is butchly pretty.'¹⁹³

Claudia Cahalane, writing in *The Guardian*, even dismissed both Frankie and Sam as butches at all, complaining that there were no 'modern butches' at all on the series:

If I were to make one criticism based on the first episode, it's that perhaps the most frequently seen type of woman on the gay scene, the sexy butch – think Rhona Cameron – is not represented at all... [M]odern butches like this are very popular in the lesbian world and if we don't see any in the first series it will show a lack of guts.¹⁹⁴

The Rhona Cameron 'type', with short, spiked hair is, indeed, a common look within lesbian communities. Once again, a lesbian series seems to need a few butch haircuts to calm the critics. Interestingly, whereas in *The L Word* the lack of short hair seemed to an attempt to overcome the perceived separatism of lesbian communities and identities by reiterating a specific, safely homogenous image for women across the social spectrum, in *Lip Service* the same lack apparently stems less from the creative teams and more from the personal anxieties and preferences of the actresses. During our interview, hair and make-up designer Morrison admitted that 'The haircut thing for me is an absolute nightmare', with actress Laura Fraser admitting elsewhere that she was very reticent to have her hair cut even into a bob, not even a recognisably lesbian hairstyle.¹⁹⁵ Morrison also mentioned that in the second season Ruta Gedmintas needed to keep her hair long for a part she was due to play directly after her *Lip Service* filming, which prevented the hair designer from styling Frankie's

¹⁹² Sam Wollaston, 'TV review: Lip Service and Tom Daley: the Diver and his Dad', *Guardian.co.uk*, (13 October 2010) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/2010/oct/13/lip-service-tom-daley-review>>, accessed 29 September 2011.

¹⁹³ Gilbert, Review of *Lip Service*. It is unclear whether he is referring to Frankie or Sam in this review, although because he doesn't mention Sam at all, it seems far more likely to be Frankie.

¹⁹⁴ Claudia Cahalane, '*Lip Service* is groundbreaking – whatever its star says', *Guardian.co.uk*, (13 October 2011) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/oct/13/lip-service-groundbreaking-lesbian-drama>>, accessed 22 September 2011.

¹⁹⁵ Beattie and Longley, 'Great LezBritain: Interview with Laura Fraser of *Lip Service*, *AfterEllen.com*, (11 October 2011), p. 1 <<http://www.afterellen.com/greatlezbritain/10-11-2010>>, accessed 29 September 2011.

hair in a more authentically lesbian fashion that Morrison and Braun would have preferred.¹⁹⁶ However this is not readable in the text itself as reviewed by critics, and while the inclusion of butch identity is recognised by some, the combination of these looks with conventional prettiness loses points for seemingly selling out to heterocentric ideals.



Figure 12: Rhona Cameron

So how is it that even with so much time and effort put into creating authentically lesbian identities and including butch imagery, *Lip Service* was still criticised for the way its lesbians looked? The disapproval from some quarters seems to be a direct result of the tension between lesbian specificity and using dress to tell the woman's story, shaped through the prism of attempts to attract heterosexual viewers. As Gilbert's review suggests, the criticism seems to stem specifically from those storytelling wardrobes (and hairstyles and make-up) which made use of mainstream standards of beauty. After all, butch lesbianism has been

¹⁹⁶ Morrison, personal interview.

celebrated as politically powerful, à la Joan Nestle, and lesbian feminism has for a while associated androgynous lesbian images with oppositional politics in the public (and lesbian) imagination.¹⁹⁷ Images of women that are accepted as conventionally attractive by a mainstream audience do not adhere to either of these models and are therefore not readable as recognisably lesbian to many. Yet when Braun set out to make a series that spoke to lesbians, her aim was to create characters who felt 'authentic to a lesbian audience', not to portray images which would be politically acceptable to those still using (or requiring) recognisable lesbian style to eschew glamour and symbolically refuse patriarchy and capitalism.

Firstly, fitting in with the majority was part of the aim in *Lip Service*. Abernethy echoed *L Word* designer Summers' concessions to mainstream audiences when she noted that creating conventionally attractive looks was part of a strategy of speaking to a wider audience than just lesbians, insisting: 'It's not just [got] to appeal to a lesbian audience...'¹⁹⁸ Like *The L Word*, *Lip Service* had to make do with the requirements of its medium and, despite BBC 3's less than blockbuster status and all of Braun's pro-butch efforts, the hope of attracting more than just lesbian viewers did affect the looks in the series. Thus is the representational burden of all minority images in the mainstream: speaking to both the minority and the majority raises the paradoxical burden of representing difference without signifying it too strongly and alienating mass audiences.

Interestingly, there was a particular contributing factor that allowed Braun's potentially conflicting aims of authenticity and mainstream appeal to coalesce. Ironically, this might have played a part in the use of images that so irked some critics. Braun's butch 'affirmative action' was a deliberate decision that I have partially attributed to a reaction against the omission of significant butch imagery in *The L Word*. But in 2010, the year *Lip Service* was first aired, androgyny was very visible and very fashionable in the mainstream market, inhabited by several quite popular figures. The timely fashion for androgynous styles meant that slightly butch characters (in particular Frankie who wears make-up and has a deliberate,

¹⁹⁷ Joan Nestle, 'Butch-Fem Relationships'; Stein, 'All Dressed Up, But No Place to Go?', p. 477-8.

¹⁹⁸ Abernethy, personal interview.

trendy 'style' as opposed to Sam's more plain image) could be incorporated without straying from the impulse to maximise viewing figures by aiming for audience identification beyond a niche lesbian market. The result may have backfired when it came to creating looks that would be read as 'authentic'.



Figure 13: Agyness Deyn

In Braun's instructional letter to Abernethy and Morrison, while offering examples of butch and androgynous looks, the creator named Agyness Deyn (Fig. 13), a hugely successful high-fashion model, as someone sporting a look appropriate for the butch/androgynous lesbian category, despite the fact the Deyn (as far as I know) is not a lesbian (she is married to actor Giovanni Ribisi). Braun also mentioned internationally successful DJ Samantha Ronson (Fig. 14), who has not openly admitted to being gay, but who is most famous for dating/breaking up with Lindsay Lohan and consequently frequently photographed. Ronson, the creator felt, 'epitomizes hip androgyny'. The DJ is often seen in jeans, T-shirts, plaid shirts and trainers with choppy, funky and sometimes close-cropped hair and a beanie or fedora, and was a central figure of inspiration for Frankie's style. Interviewee Tabitha also

held the view that this particular look is currently popular in the mainstream, remarking that 'As current fashion trends stand, androgyny can seemingly be found everywhere.'¹⁹⁹ That Ronson is generally understood to be gay demonstrates that, beyond the popularity of androgyny, there were fashionable, 'hip' lesbians available to Abernethy and Morrison to reference in their designs. This is also demonstrated by their use of research images of British broadcaster Mary Portas, who is in a Civil Partnership with Melanie Rickey, editor of *Grazia* magazine in the UK, for a character in the second series.²⁰⁰



Figure 14: Samantha Ronson

The 'hip' element of androgyny in 2010 may have contributed to the lack of resistance to butch styles within *Lip Service*, but it also might have meant that the 'hip'—more than the 'androgyny'—was emphasised or perceived, or even both. This is particularly evident in the

¹⁹⁹ Tabitha, email to the author, 13 May 2012.

²⁰⁰ Research images and photographs assembled by Morrison and Abernethy, shown to and photographed by the author during personal interview.

figure of Frankie, whose penchant for leather, skinny jeans, Superdry and funky hair gave her the most recognisably lesbian look on the series, but who wore a fair amount of smudgy eye make-up. Like Shane in *The L Word*, Frankie's slightly butch image possesses significant female visibility owing to the several-inches-long style of her hair and the use of cosmetics. When Gilbert wrote that 'even the one butch girl is butchly pretty', he represented a significant portion of viewers who emphasised the 'pretty' over the 'butch', with an implicit criticism of the representation of feminised lesbians.²⁰¹ In *Lip Service's* melding together of lesbian authenticity with contemporary androgynous trends, recognisable 'authentic' lesbianism either fell victim to the popularity of an androgyny that imbued the look with non-lesbian signifiers, or became a casualty of perception for those who could not see through the 'hip' surface to the butch identity lurking beneath.

As I am arguing for *Lip Service* as a post-*L Word* text, it is well worth mentioning here that the names of Shane, Alice and Dana (in her post coming-out phase) were all mentioned as examples of lesbian images in Braun's letter. Shane was described as 'a fantastic current example of the Frankie type on screen' and Alice and Dana were included in examples of femme lesbians.²⁰² Once again, having mainstream images in the media on which to base designs for lesbian characters might have contributed to the disgruntled responses with which the styles in *Lip Service* were met. The use of 'straight' fashions incorporating androgyny effectively diluted the lesbian meanings of the butch images in the series. Similarly, the *L Word* designs used as inspiration for *Lip Service* made use of mainstream standards of beauty, as discussed above. Ironically, this legitimised non-recognisably 'lesbian' images as 'authentic' for Braun, Abernethy, and Morrison but left the resulting designs open to criticisms for a lack of the very authenticity they were designed to contain. Critical reviewers looking to *Lip Service* for images based on historic concepts of lesbian identity were presented with an updated and US-mainstream-influenced version of lesbian visual identities. Understandably, this led to criticism along the same lines as that aimed at the images Braun named as inspiration.

²⁰¹ Gilbert, Review of *Lip Service*.

²⁰² Braun, letter to Abernethy and Morrison.

Arguably, however, because of the global reach of *The L Word* combined with the lack of images of lesbians in the media, those *L Word* images have, it seems, influenced the style of some lesbians, especially young gay women. A modification of what might be considered lesbian 'authenticity' does appear to have taken place in some quarters. Interviewee Charlotte (in the 25-35 age bracket) named a particular outfit of Shane's from the promotional images for the fifth season of the US series as a specific influence on her style. This demonstrates 'copying', one of Stacey's extra-cinematic identificatory practises.²⁰³ In the photograph, many of the stars are dressed in stylized versions of tuxedos and men's dress shirts. Most wear heels with these outfits, some tie the shirts up to reveal bare midriffs and a few leave top buttons undone to reveal silky underwear or cleavage. Actress Kate Moennig, who plays Shane, wears a black tuxedo with a white dress shirt (buttoned to the top) and a short black neck tie.

Recalling Shane wearing this outfit with jeans during the series, Charlotte mentioned 'I had a white shirt, a black tie, a tuxedo and then just jeans. I probably did copy that look.'²⁰⁴ Emily (23 at the time of being interviewed) spoke of Beals' Bette as an inspirational figure: 'I want a more professional style. I'd love to look like Bette Porter in *The L Word* and rock a power suit.'²⁰⁵ Leanne (25-35) theorised that the looks on *The L Word* had caused a significant stylistic shift for many of its lesbian viewers, and perhaps even for gay women beyond that audience:

I think *The L Word* did something to show lesbians that you can actually not dress like a completely butch lesbian and still be a lesbian and that's okay – and I do think that maybe it had something to do with a slight progression in trends for lesbians.²⁰⁶

Specific images from *The L Word*, then, have been taken on by some lesbians. Also, the general ethos of the series, which separated lesbian identity from 'lesbian' imagery and

²⁰³ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 159-169.

²⁰⁴ Charlotte, personal interview.

²⁰⁵ Emily, email to author, 21 October 2011. Interestingly, like Peace, it is the power and the professionalism of Bette's look—not any lesbian specific image—which appeals to Emily.

²⁰⁶ Leanne, personal interview.

indirectly taught viewers that lesbians 'come in all sorts of varieties (well, so long as they're gorgeous)', seems to have filtered down into consumer opinions of younger viewers.²⁰⁷



Figure 15: *The L Word* promotional image

Notably, respondents who were in older categories did not feel this way. Una (67), Hannah (55-65) and Irene (45-55) all exhibited distaste for the costume designs in *The L Word*. For example, Charlotte (25-35) used words like 'smart', 'elegant', 'high fashion', 'rich' and 'beautiful' to describe one promotional image (Fig. 15). She also noted, about the series as a whole but with specific reference to the costume designs: 'I loved it; I wouldn't have changed a thing about *The L Word*.'²⁰⁸ Leanne (also 25-35) referred to the same image in

²⁰⁷ Wollaston, 'TV review'.

²⁰⁸ Charlotte, personal interview.

terms like 'hot', 'sexy', 'lots of skin', and 'nice'.²⁰⁹ In contrast, Una responded in some depth, explaining:

It looks all very clichéd really, you know? It's like "How can we drape these women so that they look sexy?" And that's nothing to do with being a dyke. But for some people it would be about – you know, some women I know would be really moved by it but for me it's not in that league. I mean I love breasts, you know, I love women's bodies but I have an automatic turn off which says "Don't do that. That's for men; that's not for women." That's turn on material aimed at men who like looking at lesbians, rather than lesbians who like looking at lesbians.²¹⁰

Irene spoke of the way in which Leisha Hailey was dressed in the same photograph as 'preposterous', and objected that Moennig was 'made-up to the eyeballs' when that hadn't been the case, she felt, in the series. She complained:

Shane's marginally different in that she's marginally more dykey [...] but there's no difference between these eight dykes and that one heterosexual character. There's absolutely no difference.²¹¹



Figure 16: *The L Word* promotional image

²⁰⁹ Leanne, personal interview.

²¹⁰ Una personal interview.

²¹¹ Irene, personal interview.

Similarly, Emily referred to another promotional image (Fig. 16) as 'Simple but gorgeous', adding 'I love this picture. I love that cast and they all look amazing in that photo', whereas Hannah remarked that she found the photograph 'atrocious', finishing her assessment with

It's like this really low-rent homogenised version of something I don't even recognise as womanhood, never mind being lesbian. I don't know any real women who look like that; it's just too glossy.²¹²

These polarised responses seemed to reflect political differences between respondents which were noticeably affected by age. Whereas more mature interviewees questioned the images on a clearly feminist basis ('That's for men; that's not for women'; 'something I don't even recognise as womanhood'), younger consumers were far less likely to question images, and simply enjoyed them at face value. This was possibly due to holding post-feminist values and therefore feeling, like Elizabeth Wilson, that 'the most important thing about fashion is *not* that it oppresses women' or perhaps due to lack of knowledge about feminist and, indeed, lesbian debates about clothing at all, as indicated by Leanne's comment: 'I don't know if there used to be some kind of stigma around where lesbians felt like they had to prove themselves in a certain way, I don't really know.'²¹³ Whatever the reason, however, extra-cinematic practices of 'copying' require enjoyment of the image at first point of contact, and this enjoyment seemed fairly widespread at the lower age-range of my interviewees.

As a result, looks in *The L Word* which were criticised for being unrealistic have now been integrated into some parts of lesbian culture. If not the exact looks themselves then the ethos behind them has trickled down as inspiration for some young gay women, as indicated when Felicity and Emily both spoke about wanting to look like—and in Felicity's case even attempting to replicate outfits of—Bette Porter.²¹⁴ Both interviewees appreciated Bette's image, they explained, for its suggestions of authority, not, notably, because it was a specifically lesbian look. The strategy of dressing to telegraph aspects of personality other

²¹² Emily, email to author, 11 June 2012; Hannah, personal interview.

²¹³ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, p. 13.

²¹⁴ Emily, email to author, 21 October 2011; Felicity, personal interview.

than sexuality seems to have been taken on board by several of my younger interviewees as entirely unproblematic. As such, these images—inspired by *The L Word*—have become ‘authentic’ in the sense Braun was aiming for, if not necessarily reminiscent of less feminine political statements of dress.

Lip Service could therefore make double use of the styles from *The L Word* by taking inspirations from lesbian characters in mainstream culture as well as from lesbians in ‘real life’ who may have been influenced by what are after all surely the most widely known lesbian characters in recent years. This particular example represents a fascinating example of resonance in Rachel’s Moseley’s sense, comprising of a ‘back and forth’ among designers and consumers via costume designs embedded in texts. Summers’ costume designs on *The L Word* were witnessed in the text by lesbian consumers, some of whom integrate certain of those images into real life. In turn, Abernethy, as a designer of a later lesbian text, incorporated styles taken from lesbian consumers, reiterating recent changes in style via her designs in *Lip Service*. While *The L Word* strove to present glamorous images of lesbians which appealed to the mainstream rather than accurately reflecting any particular reality, *Lip Service*, as a post-*L-Word* text, was able to incorporate an *L-Word*-influenced emerging reality into its quest for authenticity.

Dyke Feng Shui

I have already discussed how butch imagery was diluted (if inadvertently in the later example) in the central casts in both *The L Word* and *Lip Service*. One place where obvious butch styles are visible in both series, however, is when they are displayed by women not in the central casts, displacing true butch imagery onto peripheral or background characters. This side-lining of butch identity speaks of societal anxieties over gender deviance: the ‘not-man’ and ‘not-woman’ highlighted by Judith (Jack) Halberstam’s treatise in *Female*

Masculinity on the problems posed by gendered public bathrooms for masculine women.²¹⁵ Judith Butler has famously argued that gender consists of 'constitutive acts' which, endlessly repeated, amount to a 'performatively enacted signification' rather than something which can be said truly 'to be.'²¹⁶ Halberstam argues that, despite three decades of feminist and queer theoretical work such as Butler's, which 'has thoroughly dislodged the idea that anatomy is destiny', much of the world still shows a great desire to 'stabilize [gender] boundaries' when confronted with those whose appearance does not seem to match visible clues to biological sex.²¹⁷

Apparently, representing significant female masculinity in a lead character and thus asking viewers to identify with a significantly butch woman (with the sole exception of Moira/Max in *The L Word*) inspires this social anxiety for the producers of series who have their eyes on ratings. In pushing undiluted butch imagery into the background, both series use obvious butches as a stereotype, functioning in Dyer's sense to position butch women as 'other': as outsiders of the onscreen world and presumed community of the viewer.²¹⁸ This has the effect of containing those butch images which do exist, making them safe for mainstream viewing: the underlying message is 'these women are "other."' We are not asking you, viewers, who are obviously gender-appropriate, to identify with them.'

Both *The L Word* and *Lip Service* primarily make use of butch women to display visibly lesbian 'contexts' for their lead characters, populating 'gay' spaces with noticeably masculine women who adhere to commonly recognisable subcultural fashions associated with lesbian lifestyles. Marga Gomez commented on this phenomenon in *The L Word* in 2005, focusing on the attention the show lavished on traditionally attractive women:

the entire cast is hotties, which throws off their dyke feng shui. You only see plain lesbians in the background when the hotties go to a dance. The plain ones never go

²¹⁵ Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, North Carolina and London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 21.

²¹⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), p. 45, 46.

²¹⁷ Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, pp. 20-29.

²¹⁸ Dyer, 'Stereotyping', p. 29.

to Shane's house and they are never pictured naked in those *L Word* bus shelter ads all over New York.²¹⁹

While Gomez hones in on the fact that unattractive women are only represented on the show in a minor, background context, it is worth specifying again that it is not just plain, but specifically butch women who are overwhelmingly contained to secondary roles or—for the really obvious ones—large group scenes where they rebalance the 'dyke feng shui' thrown off by the appearance of the central casts, creating an obvious lesbian context. Butch women immediately telegraph lesbianism. Consequently the less that costumes are required to speak outside of lesbian sexuality, the more they communicate it. This is the reason why, despite Kessler's theorisation that lesbian characters on sitcoms tend to exhibit 'heterosexual standards of beauty', when *How I Met Your Mother* (CBS, USA, 2005-) shows a brief shot of its star Cobie Smulders costumed as her Sapphic doppelgänger 'lesbian Robin', she is costumed in highly stereotypically lesbian clothing.²²⁰ There is no requirement of audience identification with 'lesbian Robin', and all that needs to be communicated is that this woman is gay; her loose fitting plaid flannel shirt, worn with a softball mitt and cropped hair, make the point succinctly.²²¹

Some secondary characters are required to speak a little more than lesbianism, and their recognisable but not necessarily stereotypical looks reflect this. In *Lip Service*, the neighbour living opposite Tess and Frankie's apartment, Fin (Lorraine Burroughs), does appear to be lesbian on first glance, first seen in the episode four of the first series. A woman who wears dungarees and overalls, slicks back her hair (although, with the worry of sounding repetitive, it's actually quite long, coming down past her ears), wears work boots and carries a toolbox, she definitely looks gay. Fin's job as an electrician provides a motivation for the clothing that is additional to her sexuality. Her chosen profession also offers an example of the text playing with audience expectations that women who work in historically masculine trades—particularly those in the media whose occupations are likely to support their characterisation—are likely to be gay. Gina Gershon's Corky from *Bound*, a

²¹⁹ Marga Gomez, 'Lesbian AWOL', *VillageVoice.com*, (14 June 2005) <<http://www.villagevoice.com/2005-06-14/people/lesbian-awol/>>, accessed 29 September 2011.

²²⁰ Kessler, 'Politics of the Sitcom Formula', p. 142.

²²¹ See 'Double Date'.

lesbian who is a painter and plumber, is an example of a gay handy-woman in a fictional context who both reflects and perpetuates the association. In *Lip Service*'s lesbian context, Fin's appearance and profession immediately arouse suspicions of Sapphic proclivities. A similar situation occurs in *The L Word* when we first meet lesbian carpenter Candace (Ion Overman) in 'Liberally'. She is wearing dungarees: stereotypical signifiers of lesbianism. Again, Candace's job provides possible motivation for her attire, but also combines with her appearance to suggest that she is probably gay.

In these cases, however, as secondary characters, we get to see these women several times, and their costumes are required to change and—like the central characters—speak more than just lesbianism. For example, when Fin, chatting with Tess on a balcony, puts her coat around her neighbour in a move that demonstrates her tender feelings towards the other woman—as well as indicating a butch identity by mirroring a male/heterosexual couple cliché—or when the two of them, having spent the night together, are connected as a couple by costume when Tess wears the top half of a pair of pyjamas and Fin wears the bottom half with a tank top; their newfound intimacy indicated by the sharing of the one ensemble.²²² It is also well worth noting here that non-white identities are also overwhelmingly contained to secondary or background characters, a criticism which has been made—both explicitly and implicitly—about both shows.²²³

While the strategies adopted in both series—the avoidance of typage in *The L Word* and the balancing of lesbian authenticity with storytelling wardrobes in *Lip Service*—mean that costumes for lead characters convey stories other than lesbianism, when needing to create a lesbian context, all that costumes are required to communicate is 'these women are gay.' It is in instances where costumes are *only* required to tell the story 'these women are lesbians' that the costume designers of the two series display all the types and stereotypes elided by the appearance of the central characters. This occurs when either large or small numbers of women are required to make short and, usually, one-off appearances in order to

²²² See #1.6.

²²³ See Swartz 'The Other L Word' and Anna Leach 'How Well Does the BBC do Lesbians?', *Jezebel* (20 October 2010) <<http://jezebel.com/5667038/how-well-does-the-bbc-do-lesbians>>, accessed 29 September 2011.

set a (lesbian) scene, or make a (lesbian) point. The singular message allows for and even requires such over-determined costumes. As Lesley Abernethy put it, with extras who tell the story of lesbianism through recognisable imagery: 'What you see is what you get'.²²⁴

In *Lip Service*, we know local bar Rubies is a lesbian hangout because not only do we see two women kissing in expositional shots, but are also shown images of lesbian-seeming women inhabiting the space. Most noticeably, one half of the kissing couple sports a punky faux-hawk with frosted tips, or an overweight, middle-aged woman with close-cropped hair, wearing a T-shirt, baggy jeans and a chunky watch, plays pool (a rather butch activity often dominated by lesbians in gay clubs), the quiff in her fringe adding a retro feel to her masculine presentation.²²⁵ There are also occasions in *The L Word* when the main cast are surrounded by enormous numbers of obvious lesbians, such as when they go on an Olivia cruise (Olivia is a company that offers lesbian vacations and cruises) in 'Land Ahoy' and the Dinah Shore weekend (an annual long weekend of lesbian parties held in Palm Springs, coinciding with Ladies Professional Golf Association tournament, also popular with lesbians) in 'Looking Back'. As with the above background actors at Rubies, the women on the cruise and at the tournament serve as a kind of lesbian 'window dressing' to set the appropriately lesbian scene. During the Dinah Shore episode in particular, there are many butch women on display.²²⁶

This displacement of truly butch women onto secondary and background characters in both series is at least partly the result of the over-determination of butch iconography. Only when there is a need to create lesbian contexts by populating spaces with obviously lesbian crowds does this over-determination become useful to the designer and director. Displacing such instantly recognisable lesbian 'authenticity' onto background characters means both

²²⁴ Abernethy, personal interview.

²²⁵ *Lip Service*, #1.1.

²²⁶ This prompts a candid and irreverent mention of obvious lesbian presentation by Alice, who christens a woman with very close cropped hair, a sports bra bikini top, board shorts and sturdy sandals (and holding hands with another woman in a very similar outfit) 'a hundred footer'. Offering an explanation to Jenny, new to the lesbian scene, Tina explains the term: 'It means you can tell she's a lesbian from a hundred feet away.' Breaking down the image for Jenny and the audience, Alice continues: 'Is it her hair? Is it her jog-bra? Is it her man-dals? I don't know [but] I can tell she's a lesbo from across a football field.' The laughter this elicits from the rest of the women emphasises that none of the *L Word* characters fit into (or want to fit into) this model.

series can keep the mainstream appeal they aim for with the main casts, communicating that lesbianism does not define all lesbians, while also making strategic use of lesbian 'types' to acknowledge recognisable subcultural styles that do still exist.

Conclusion

It is ironic that the designs in *The L Word* display such a marked avoidance of stereotypes that there is a near-total erasure of lesbian identity in the costuming of its main cast. Caught between representing lesbianism as a collective identity and differentiating between individuals, Summers factored in the potentially hostile cultural climate and created a costume strategy that overwhelmingly disavows lesbian specificity in image. Instead, *The L Word* uses high fashion to visually align its characters with mainstream televisual texts, actively avoiding lesbian types in order to discourage viewers from regarding the majority of central characters primarily as lesbians and therefore as 'othered' from heterocentric society.

In *Lip Service*—possibly because of the negative reactions to the femme-heavy images on *The L Word*—there was a consistent effort to costume the women in masculine-influenced and authentically lesbian attire, including the femme characters. Despite these differences, the use of a group of lesbian characters in both series means that the tension between depicting collective lesbian identity and using costume as a method of revealing character was alleviated by allowing narrative and action to take on the majority of the burden of lesbian representation, freeing up costume to express character traits other than sexual identity. This resolution of the conflicting requirements of the costume and hair and make-up designers prioritised differentiation between the women as individuals over differentiation of such individuals from the rest of society, although this was also balanced against the aim for

authenticity in *Lip Service*. When 'speaking' character traits through costume, by avoiding placing emphasis on the nature of the sexual desire of all their central lesbian characters both *The L Word* and *Lip Service* leave themselves room to tell more complex stories through style. If dress tells the woman's story, the stories of these women are thrown wide open from the basic concept 'this woman is a lesbian', mirroring the implicit political aim of each series to render lesbianism as context rather than sensational, interruptive content.

Chapter Two

Supporting Cast: secondary lesbian characters in heterosexual milieux

Critics of lesbian and gay representation in films and on television have often pointed out that such characters are typically confined to secondary roles or bit parts. In *unInvited*, Patricia White's book on lesbian representability in classical Hollywood cinema, White wrote about what she saw as 'the convergence between marginal cinematic femininity and lesbian representation in Hollywood', noting that '[t]he vast majority of gay characters are in fact supporting roles.'¹ In 2006, despite a 1990s surge in independent lesbian filmmaking featuring gay female lead characters, and two years after lesbian ensemble drama *The L Word* hit US TV screens, Becca Cragin noted 'we are still far less likely to be portrayed as main characters than as sidekicks.'² This chapter adds to academic analysis which has focused on gay characters in minor roles, deconstructing the meaning of twenty-first century secondary lesbian characters in otherwise heterosexual fictional television texts, as read through costume. Examples are taken from *Desperate Housewives*, *Deadwood* and *Mad Men*, with lesbian roles ranging from bit-parts which are quickly dismissed to recurring and featured—but not central—characters. I will be questioning the significance of the lesbianism in each series, examining why it is used when it is not the focus of a given text, and considering how the answer to that question influences costume designs.

In 1977, Richard Dyer wrote about the way in which representations of gay people in film up to that point had typically used homosexuality as synecdoche, the part (gayness) standing in for the whole (depravity). He argued that 'gay iconography', of which costume is an important feature, was integral in shaping these depictions because it was used to signal a difference in sexual identity that stood in for moral deviance.³ Gay and lesbian representation has altered greatly since the time of Dyer's writing. Following the

¹ Patricia White, *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 140, 141. See chapter 5, 'Supporting "Character"', pp. 136-193.

² Becca Cragin, 'Lesbians and Serial TV: *Ellen* Finds Her Inner Adult', in James R. Keller & Leslie Stratyner (eds), *The New Queer Aesthetic on Television: Essays on Recent Programming*, (Jefferson, North Carolina & London: McFarland & Company, 2006), p. 194. For examples of 1990s independent lesbian filmmaking, see *Go Fish* (Rose Troche, Can I Watch Pictures, USA, 1994); *The Watermelon Woman* (Cheryl Dunye, Dancing Girl, USA, 1996), *Claire of the Moon* (Nicole Conn, Demi-Monde Productions, USA, 1992); *Thin Ice* (Fiona Cunningham-Reid, Thin Ice Productions, UK, 1995) and *When Night Is Falling* (Patricia Rozema, Crucial Pictures, Canada, 1995), among others. For a comprehensive overview of lesbian-made films, films with lesbian characters and films with potentially lesbian identifiable roles up to 2000, see Alison Darren, *Lesbian Film Guide* (London & New York: Cassell, 2000).

³ Richard Dyer, 'Stereotyping', in Richard Dyer (ed.), *Gays and Film*, (London: BFI, 1977), p. 32.

phenomenon of 'lesbian chic' in the 1990s, the coming-out of Ellen DeGeneres and her sitcom character in 1997, and the subsequent broadcast of television series which feature a number of gay protagonists, same-sex desire and its sympathetic representation in the media are now somewhat normalised for a large proportion of Western populations.⁴

Television and film executives are now quite prepared to allow gay characters and storylines onto mainstream screens in their historically tolerated position as minor characters. In particular, the post-*Ellen* media landscape has seen an increase in representations of gayness which Cindy Patton termed 'incidental'; characters whose 'happen-to-be-gay'-ness demonstrates how things have changed over the years. Patton argues that, unlike Dyer's 1970s gay-equals-depravity equation,

the new presence of incidental lesbians and gay men means that while viewers might think they have detected homosexuals, they could not be sure that they have discovered the secret motivational scheme of the film.⁵

Some secondary televisual lesbians seem highly incidental; apparently gay for no reason other than pluralism. Ming-Na Wen played happens-to-be-lesbian Camile Wray, part of the ensemble cast of *SGU: Stargate Universe* (SyFy, USA, 2009-2011), and in 'Maternity', the fourth episode of US series *House* (Fox, 2004-2012), the parents of an infant that dies from a mysterious virus are both women, with no comment made on this during the episode. Yet in some examples there is deliberate logic detectable in the incorporation of gay (in this case, specifically gay female) characters, logic that goes beyond the relatively recent expansion of representable subjects. For example, there were secondary lesbian characters in primetime sitcom *Friends*, played for laughs at the expense of hapless lead character Ross (David Schwimmer), who suffered the emasculating indignity of having his wife leave him for a woman. However problematic the particular use of her newfound sexual identity,

⁴ A 2010 British study by the BBC found that 75 per cent of people interviewed were either comfortable with or indifferent to the representation of LGB people on television and radio. Heterosexual men and all those over 55 were more likely to be uncomfortable with such representations. See Anon., 'Portrayal of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People on the BBC', Research Report, *BBC.co.uk* (September 2010), p. 19, <http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/howwework/reports/pdf/diversity_research_300910.pdf>, accessed 11 December 2012.

⁵ Cindy Patton, 'What is a nice lesbian like you doing in a film like this?', in Tamsin Wilton (ed.), *immortal, invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image*, (London & New York: Routledge 1995), p. 27.

Ross's ex, Carol (Jane Sibbett), didn't just 'happen-to-be-gay'; her lesbianism emphasised Ross's pathetic nature.

Even in instances where the revelation of lesbian sexuality does still unlock 'the secret motivational scheme' of the character or text, homosexuality is now commonly framed as positive. When agoraphobic journalist Rachel Gibson (Christina Hendricks) goes missing in 'Check Your Head', an episode of missing-person procedural *Without a Trace* (CBS, USA, 2002-2009), the detectives must work out that Gibson is in love with her female former personal assistant, Bianca Stone (Francesca Ingrassia) before they can begin to unravel the journalist's reason for leaving her apartment and therefore pinpoint her whereabouts. The 'discovery' of same-sex desire happens in a very non-spectacular fashion when Bianca casually mentions that her ex-lover is female; no one is shocked or even particularly interested. The episode's final scene finds Gibson and Stone united in a kiss, the mood celebratory as detectives and other characters bowl and converse in a jovial manner. Bianca's mob boss father—whose amoral and violent occupation is aligned with his homophobia early in the episode (we are told he threw his daughter out of the family home for being a lesbian)—is redeemed by his acceptance of the newly-formed couple at the narrative's conclusion. Homosexuality is not at all incidental in *Friends* or 'Check Your Head', and while positioned as 'other' and played for laughs in the earlier series, in the latter case lesbianism is highly normalised and affirmed by the negative portrayal of homophobia, with the audience encouraged to desire the lesbian couple's union.⁶

Because 'gay' is not the focus of *Desperate Housewives*, *Deadwood* and *Mad Men*, I spent time assessing the symbolic importance of the lesbian characters that do appear. With much debt to media lobbying and activism since the 1970s—undertaken by organisations like the Gay Media Task Force, the National Gay Task Force, and The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)—homosexuality no longer automatically functions

⁶ For a more nuanced analysis of the lesbian representation in *Friends*, see Kelly Kessler's 2006 article, 'Politics of the Sitcom Formula: *Friends*, *Mad About You*, and the Sapphic Second Banana', in Keller & Stratyner (eds), *The New Queer Aesthetic on Television*, pp. 130-146.

within media texts as synecdoche for depravity.⁷ However, this does not mean that gayness is not used as synecdoche for other things. Each series utilises its secondary lesbian characters in an arguably similar way to Carol in *Friends* although, significantly, not for humour. As with NBC's sitcom, homosexuality is not fundamental to the texts but, in each example, assists the telling of certain stories.

Anna McCarthy argues that *Ellen* allowed for the possibility of lesbianism being presented as something other than an 'interruptive force' within fictional narratives. As such, like *The L Word*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Deadwood* and *Mad Men* might reasonably be considered post-*Ellen* texts.⁸ Each moves beyond the 'interruptive' model to varying degrees, not simply telling the story of lesbianism but telling stories about gay women – or rather using lesbians to tell stories about other things. In none of the examples in this chapter does homosexuality uncover the secret motivational scheme of the entire text. However, in each case lesbianism supports narrative and/or characterisation in order to echo major themes within the respective series. The particular uses of lesbian desire in *Desperate Housewives*, *Deadwood* and *Mad Men* had perceptible effects on costume choices.

Designs in each series were affected in part by the conflicting triangle of demands made of designers of costuming for lesbian characters in the early twenty-first century. During my interviews with both Catherine (Cate) Adair, who designed for *Desperate Housewives*, and Katherine Jane (Janie) Bryant, costume designer for both *Deadwood* and *Mad Men*, each voiced anxieties over the stereotyping of lesbian identities. For example, Adair rhetorically asked: 'have we moved into a world where the stereotype is less than two per cent of the population but they're the ones that... become the cliché?'⁹ The use of the word 'cliché' suggests a classification of the use of gay 'types' in costume design as derivative and lazy. Bryant exhibited a similar aversion to stereotypes in her work, and in fact used the same

⁷ The Gay Media Task Force, the National Gay Task Force, and GLAAD spent many years negotiating with US television networks, creative personnel and media executives for better onscreen treatment of gays and lesbians from the 1970s on (GLAAD still continues this work fighting defamation in the media). See Steven Caputo, *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000), particularly chapter 12, 'The Negotiators', pp. 97-105 and chapter 31, 'Welcome to the Queer '90s; Television: 1989-1991', pp. 247-270. Also see www.glaad.org.

⁸ Anna McCarthy, 'Ellen: Making Queer Television History', *GLQ* 7:4 (16 Oct 2001), p. 599

⁹ Catherine Adair, personal interview, 7 December 2010.

language, remarking: 'I stay away from clichés'.¹⁰ However, as both Adair and Bryant seemed comfortable using costume to telegraph other elements of identity, such as occupation and personality, it is reasonable to assume that it is the particular history of negative stereotyping of gay people in the media against which the designers are, even if perhaps unconsciously, reacting.

Each designer spoke in ways that revealed her adherence to theories of costuming which mean that recognisable 'types' of persons are useful in creating roles with coherent meanings for audiences. Yet, interestingly, many of the costumes discussed downplay immediately decipherable elements of lesbian identity. One potential reason for this avoidance of recognisable lesbianism in clothing and style might be the symbolic removal of one of the triangulated pressures on designers; in contrast to *The L Word* and *Lip Service*, because none of the three series analysed here focused on gay characters, critics paid little attention to the representations of lesbianism within them. This resulted in a lack of urgent demand for gay female characters to visibly inhabit familiar lesbian iconography. There is, of course, the notable exception of Calamity Jane, whose historic fame and iconic image represent a differing paradigm to the other, original characters, which has its own interesting results for meaning as communicated through costume.

At first glance it might be concluded that the lack of demand for 'authentic' lesbian images coupled with avoidance of stereotyping caused costuming strategies which circumvent overt images of gay identities. However, further investigation reveals that the answer is more complex than this. With the removal of two of the three major demands on designers of contemporary lesbian costumes, what remains is the use of dress to convey character and narrative. What seems to be happening in *Desperate Housewives*, *Deadwood* and *Mad Men* is that lesbianism functions as a deliberate device for creating meaning in characters and narrative, contributing to costume designs which must support these meanings without necessarily being represented via 'authentic' iconography. Costume analysis shows that, rather than focusing on sexuality itself, designs in each text primarily work towards the

¹⁰ Janie Bryant, personal interview, 13 December 2010.

common goal of conveying whichever series-wide concept the lesbian character has been employed to reiterate.

That costume typically highlights the aspect of character or narrative signified by gayness (rather than the gayness which signifies that aspect) reflects the post-*Ellen* status of the texts: homosexuality itself is not the story. Same-sex desire is treated sympathetically, but also as a fact of life which has implications for those who experience it, creating specific and differing meanings. These meanings are exploited, but are used to tell stories beyond sexuality, for example independence or modernity. Yet, crucially, the fact that costumes did not make obvious use of recognisable lesbian imagery does not mean that designs by Adair and Bryant were entirely unaffected by lesbianism. In some cases the telegraphing of the function of a particular character's sexual identity or desire also overlaps with historic lesbian iconography so that both appear to be readable within the same image. Whether it is directly signalled or not, homosexuality is never irrelevant in costuming in these examples because even in the latter case the messages offered by clothing are inextricably linked with the meanings lesbian sexuality is employed to suggest within each text.

Things are not what they seem in *Desperate Housewives*

Robin Gallagher (Julie Benz) is a character in the sixth season of *Desperate Housewives*. We are introduced to Robin in 'The Glamorous Life' when Susan (Teri Hatcher) meets Robin at Double Ds, a lap-dancing club Susan unwittingly comes to co-own. After inadvertently causing Robin to quit her job with no alternative source of income, Susan persuades her husband Mike (James Denton) to allow the near stranger to stay with them temporarily. Robin later moves in with neighbour Katherine (Dana Delany), who is seeking a housemate. It is not immediately revealed that Robin is a lesbian, but in the following episode, 'Lovely', the character expresses her preference for dating women in a conversation with Katherine. The two women soon become sexually involved. The audience knows from prior storylines that Katherine has previously been attracted to men, and the character's reaction to her

burgeoning feelings for Robin are explored from a heterosexual perspective, eliciting surprise, confusion, and temporary resistance. Robin's narrative arc plays out over five episodes before both characters are written out of the series in 'My Two Young Men', leaving for Paris to see if their attraction to one another can work away from the prying eyes of Wisteria Lane.¹¹

In terms of appearance, Robin is conventionally attractive. She is heavily invested in mainstream signs of glamorous femininity, wearing her blonde hair long and curled, typically sporting heavy make-up, and possessing a slender, tanned, toned body which befits her initial occupation as a stripper and lap dancer. Robin often wears skimpy clothing. When we first encounter the character, in her work environment, we see her in a delicate leopard-print robe under which she wears a silver, halter-necked outfit resembling a bikini, with matching cuffs (Fig. 17). A lot of Robin's clothing overtly communicates sensuality, either through clinging tightly to her body or showing a lot of bare skin, such as a short red dress in 'Lovely' which reveals the shape of Benz's body by clinging to her lower half and exposing her bare limbs, shoulders and back. The white feather boa Robin dons in preparation for performing a lap dance in 'The Glamorous Life' suggests commercialised heterosexuality because such items are typically used by female strippers for the physical titillation of male clients. The leopard-print robe connotes active sexuality: animal print—and in particular leopard-print—long having been a symbol of (often predatory, typically straight) sexuality in women, as amply demonstrated by Anne Bancroft in *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, Lawrence Turman/Embassy, USA, 1967). Given the historic and stereotypical association of lesbianism with unstylish and unattractive masculine-influenced dress and appearance, Robin cannot be said to exhibit any sartorial signs of being gay, instead actively inhabiting an image of erotically charged heterosexuality. This is also supported by her job, which suggests her appearance is purposefully aimed at the heterosexual male gaze.

¹¹ Delaney left the series to take on the lead role in *Body of Proof*, so her resignation from *Desperate Housewives* may have been the cause of Katherine's attraction to Robin, as well as the storyline's swift and slightly far-fetched conclusion.



Figure 17: Robin at work in *Desperate Housewives* episode 'The Glamorous Life'

During our interview, Adair recognised that there is such a thing as a gay or lesbian 'look', theorising that the growing visibility of queer identities in western society over recent decades increased the need or desire for recognisable images in the past: 'because the gay and lesbian movement became much more open and much more discussed in the media... it had to have a visual title', she reasoned.¹² Since Robin is gay, and Adair recognises that there are recognisable 'gay' styles, why, we might ask, is Robin not dressed in such a way as to render her visually readable as a lesbian? To answer this question, I will briefly return us to the consideration of costume theory, 'authentic' lesbian imagery and attitudes towards stereotypes, examining these in relation to the concept of gayness acting as synecdoche. I began my conversation with Adair by asking about her working methods, and the designer referred to her training to explain her typical focus on mirroring elements of characters'

¹² Adair, personal interview.

identity in dress. Speaking of her time spent studying costume design in Britain, Adair reminisced:

I always start with a script because that's how I was trained... I remember Stephen Doncaster—who was one of my tutors—pounding his fist on the table and saying “Start with what's on the page. What do you know about the person? What do you want to say about the person?”¹³

Questions of script-based information concerning Robin—and what Adair consequently knew and wished to communicate about the character—therefore had an effect on costume design. To begin with, the designer was not made aware that Robin would be a lesbian character, as no mention is made of it in ‘The Glamorous Life’, the episode in which the character first appears. Responding to a question about whether she factored lesbianism into Robin’s costuming, Adair responded negatively, explaining:

First of all, we don't know what the storyline's going to be... My mandate with her was just... “We... want it pretty, we want it sexy, we want it sensual and if you can find that line where it doesn't become cheap, that would be great.”¹⁴

Considering Adair’s lack of information about the future revelations concerning Robin’s character, it makes sense that lesbian sexuality is not a part of the information conveyed by Benz’s costumes. What Adair’s ‘mandate’ concerning Robin does reveal, however, is that the character’s look was heavily influenced by her occupation. Referring back to her training, the designer noted that during the design process for Benz, ‘We did start from what was on the page: she’s a stripper, it’s how she makes her living; it’s how she moves, it’s how she talks, it’s how she is.’¹⁵ Deeming Robin’s occupation to be the element of identity that defines her, Adair chose to emphasise this aspect through costuming with skimpy and sexually suggestive clothing.

When Adair became aware of Robin’s sexual preference, the costume strategy for Benz did not alter to include any indication of the character’s lesbianism. This is perhaps strange

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

given that costume is typically concerned with revealing character traits; that Adair was trained to communicate information on the page through dress; and that in a programme populated by mostly heterosexual people, Robin's lesbian desire sets her apart. Yet the designer's decision not to telegraph this information reflects that Doncaster's instructions include a dual strategy: to consider not only what can be known about a character from the script but also what the designer might wish to reveal about a person through costume. Robin not being costumed in a recognisably lesbian manner even after her sexuality is revealed by the script might be partially attributable to Adair's attitude towards lesbian stereotypes and 'types', affecting what she 'want[ed] to say' about Robin and about gay people in general:

[Robin] wasn't the quintessential lipstick lesbian any more than she was the quintessential parody of the Birkenstock gal either, and I think some of that came out of a desire to respect the friends that I have who are gay... I don't think I'd ever want to parody anybody.¹⁶

Naming stereotypes (here, the figures of the lipstick lesbian and the 'Birkenstock gal') as parody, Adair picks up on arguments like the Gay Media Task Force's classification of stereotypes as 'bigotry'. This anxiety—which Adair is not alone in experiencing, based on the five designer interviews I conducted for this thesis—possibly helped to shift the emphasis in Doncaster's dual strategy away from depicting the information 'on the page', with the stress instead placed on what one *wants* to say (or not to say) about a character. There was also a sense of progression in Adair's discussion of the topic, as the designer asked 'have we moved into a world where the stereotype is less than two per cent of the population...?', indicating that, while she acknowledged that the gay movement gave rise to recognisable gay and lesbian styles, Adair also feels that these are no longer representative of most gay people and therefore potentially not truthful if used in the costuming of contemporary lesbian identity.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

The combination of distaste for stereotypes and a lack of investment in particular iconography as characteristic of any modern sexual identity apparently causes sexuality to be entirely erased in Adair's design process: 'Generally speaking, when I'm dressing any character,' Adair insisted, '[sexuality is] not a consideration. It's not. Because I think the character's the character, and then their sexual preference is secondary.'¹⁸ Far from Dyer's synecdoche for depravity, for Adair homosexuality, heterosexuality or any other preference have no bearing on modern characterisation at all. Yet *Desperate Housewives* does not make merely 'incidental' use of Robin's lesbianism, and the designer's personal preference for the avoidance of stereotypes and belief that sexual preference now tends to be unidentifiable through dress were not the only reasons for the lack of recognisable lesbian imagery in costume designs for the character.

Adair's mandate to keep the character's erotic appearance out of the realm of anything that might appear 'cheap' hints at a deliberate project connected to Robin's characterisation in the series. Far from being unimportant, Robin's sexuality is a major contributor to her function within the narrative. Significantly, the lack of communication of lesbianism through her clothing is a central factor in this function. In 'Costume and Narrative', Jane Gaines argued that costume tends to reveal character and support narrative, suggesting that designs which function 'against' character or plot threaten to result in 'meaninglessness'.¹⁹ Yet others, notably Maureen Turim, Stella Bruzzi and Tamar Jeffers MacDonald, have countered this argument, pointing out instances where costume can bring meanings to onscreen representations independently of scripted personalities or storylines.²⁰ In *Hollywood Catwalk*, Jeffers highlights instances where costumes work against character and narrative. The concept of dressing 'against' character is central to this example from *Desperate Housewives*, in which Robin is very deliberately costumed to be unrecognisable as gay. The productive results indicate that this technique can indeed be very useful in creating meaning. *Desperate Housewives* gradually and calculatingly reveals that Robin's

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Jane Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story', in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds), *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 184.

²⁰ Maureen Turim, 'Designing Women' in Gaines and Herzog (eds), *Fabrications*, p. 220-1; Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. xvii; Tamar Jeffers MacDonald, *Hollywood Catwalk: Exploring Costume and Transformation in American Film* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

sex worker background and erotically feminine appearance do not communicate the 'truth' about her character, reiterating a central theme which dominated the series from its inception.

After just one season, *Desperate Housewives* was classified by Samuel Chambers as a queer text. Using Judith Butler's work in *Gender Trouble* on gender as performativity to define 'subversion as the practice of *undermining from within*', Chambers demonstrates how *Desperate Housewives* uses its white, straight, middle-class suburban setting to subvert prevailing norms.²¹ Many inhabitants of Wisteria Lane—the fictional street on which the bulk of narrative action is set—strive to present appearances which mask less than idyllic or even deviant aspects of their lives. For example, the first series is structured around solving the mystery of why Wisteria Lane resident Mary Alice Young (Brenda Strong)—previously an apparently happy wife and mother—committed suicide. Chambers argues that by foregrounding the labour that goes into maintaining the norms featured on the series,

the actions and choices of the characters... ultimately call mainstream American "family values" into question. In the effort to shore up the heterosexual norm, *Desperate Housewives* reveals its operation... [which] amounts to a subversion of heteronormativity.²²

In his article 'As Kamp As Bree', Niall Richardson makes a similar argument, focusing on the character of Bree Van De Kamp (Marcia Cross).²³ Bree attempts to disguise the perpetual and sometimes criminal dysfunction of her family with her flawless appearance and domestic mastery. As Richardson notes, a camp sensibility is detectable in many of her scenes.²⁴ Richardson argues that *Desperate Housewives*' camp representation of Bree's obsession with surface appearances emphasises the gap between the character's actions and her experiences and emotions, challenging 'heterosexuality's assumed naturalness'.²⁵ The depiction of Bree 'continually draws attention to... gender roles as being nothing more than

²¹ Samuel A. Chambers, *The Queer Politics of Television* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), p. 107. Emphasis in the original. Also see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990).

²² Chambers, *The Queer Politics of Television*, p. 106.

²³ Niall Richardson, 'As Kamp As Bree: The Politics of Camp Reconsidered By *Desperate Housewives*', *Feminist Media Studies* 6:2 (2006), pp. 157-174.

²⁴ Richardson, 'As Kamp As Bree', p. 157.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

constructs or performances', with, as Richardson points out, both feminist and queer implications.²⁶ Lisa Hill has written about the programme's 'affinity with the gothic genre' owing partly to its focus on the themes of 'secrecy and perversions behind the veneer of virtue'.²⁷ Richardson also writes about secrecy as the 'dominant theme of the series... with everything locked indoors.'²⁸ Deliberate concealment is commonplace on Wisteria Lane: internal demons are often veiled by pleasant external appearances.

While the series does focus on the suppression of truth behind idyllic façades, I would argue that the character of Robin reveals that the queer project of *Desperate Housewives* is better defined by the slightly differently nuanced project of confounding expectations based on appearances. Robin, like so much else on Wisteria Lane, is not what she seems. Significantly, however, the character represents an opposing strategy to that exhibited by the majority of characters on the show. As opposed to other Wisteria Lane inhabitants who, as Richardson argues, are shown to be "desperate" people obsessed with conforming to appropriate social roles', Robin is content with being gay and comfortable with not conforming to heterosexuality or any other social expectations of her.²⁹ She never attempts to hide her former employment as a stripper or her lesbianism, and the 'truths' occluded by her appearance are not regarded as sinister.

Robin's lesbianism is afforded positive value within the series, for example when the character indicates she actively chose to date women because she was turned off dating men by her work in the sex industry. Katherine has problems accepting her same-sex desires, but Robin is portrayed as so well-adjusted, sweet and happy that lesbianism cannot be read in *Desperate Housewives* as a damaging or even challenging sexual orientation. This illuminates, once again, the differences between contemporary media representations and those described by Dyer in the later 1970s, but also shows how Robin is both different and similar to other characters: the similarities emphasising the true project of the series. That Robin's appearance is not intended to mislead but is instead misread by other

²⁶ Ibid., p. 160.

²⁷ Lisa Hill, 'Gender and Genre: Situating *Desperate Housewives*', *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 38:4 (Oct-Dec 2010), p. 168.

²⁸ Richardson, 'As Kamp As Bree', p. 169.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 169.

characters demonstrates how the distance between appearances and reality is perhaps more important in creating queer meaning in *Desperate Housewives* than deliberate concealment. In 'The Epistemology of the Closet', Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wrote that

the deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption means that, like Wendy in *Peter Pan*, [gay] people find new walls springing up around them even as they drowse: every encounter with a new... boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets.³⁰

Heteronormativity means that a person is always read as straight unless she or he somehow declares her or himself otherwise. It is not necessarily secrecy but the insinuation that things might not exist exactly as they are typically imagined to—as Richardson argues about Bree—which questions heteronormativity, therefore creating the subversiveness and queer implications of *Desperate Housewives*.

When Robin makes an appearance in the sixth season, she exemplifies this central preoccupation of the text. Her storyline focuses heavily on the mismatch between the expectations others have of her (based on her appearance) and her personality and character as gradually revealed to the street's residents and, consequently, the audience. Written before Robin's storyline existed, both Chambers' and Richardson's articles prophecy the particular project of her character and storyline: instead of indirectly subverting heteronormativity, Benz's character directly challenges heterosexist thinking by dramatizing aspects of the closet as described by Sedgwick. Reflecting the predominant attitude of Western society and bolstered by her conventional femininity, Robin is presumed to be heterosexual by the diegetic community and, one assumes, most viewers, until proven homosexual. During our interview, Adair confirmed that Robin's function as someone who confounds expectations based on image played a central role in Benz's costumes. Adair directly referenced the importance of this concept within the series overall; speaking about

³⁰ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Epistemology of the Closet', in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale & David M. Halperin (eds), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 46.

creator Marc Cherry, the designer noted 'people not necessarily being what you expect them to be is a theme he plays with with a lot of his characters.'³¹

In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler addresses the issue of potentially deceptive appearances; analysing *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, Prestige Film/Miramax Films/OffWhite Productions, USA, 1990), a documentary film about Harlem Drag Balls, Butler details the rituals of contestants dressing up so as to appear to inhabit hegemonic norms, attempting to replicate the images of not just women but also businessmen and various straight male types. The results are then scored on whether they are readable in terms of 'realness' and 'passing'. Butler explains that passing is:

a performance that works, that effects realness, to the extent that it *cannot* be read. For "reading" means taking someone down, exposing what fails to work at the level of appearance... The impossibility of reading means that the artifice works... the body performing and the ideal performed appear indistinguishable.³²

Desperate Housewives reverses these processes. While Robin's appearance is shown to be a performance, this is tied to her need to present a certain image for professional reasons and not framed as an attempted disguise, which might suggest aspects of identity which one is hoping to conceal. The 'realness' that the character projects is the result of heterocentric misrecognition in the diegesis; others cannot 'read' Robin's image not because she is so successful at deliberately 'passing' but because they are trained to see heterosexuality everywhere unless told otherwise. Yet although the narrative reverses such processes in this manner, the costume design does make deliberate use of the concepts Butler identified in *Paris Is Burning* in order to make the queer point about the unreliability of external appearances. The fact that Robin's lesbianism needed to be unreadable to the audience and other characters meant that 'the body performing and the ideal performed' were required to 'appear indistinguishable' in the series.

³¹ Adair, personal interview.

³² Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), p. 129.

Costume designs repeatedly present Robin/Benz as a visual spectacle for a fetishizing sexual gaze. She wears low-cut tops revealing ample cleavage; her breasts are often pushed up by brassieres unabashedly presenting them for display, and short skirts and shorts exhibit her bare, tanned legs. High heels force her buttocks and chest out in gravitational compensation and advantageously shape her frequently unclad calves and ankles. The use of sensuous materials and design features such as satin, silk, netting, ribbons, ruffles, and bows symbolically offer her body as a gift to be unwrapped. Transparent fabrics reveal her skin and/or underwear beneath. Personifying Laura Mulvey's concept of 'to-be-looked-at-ness' with her job stripping for men, the heterosexual and male nature of the desiring gaze directed towards Robin goes without question, and all other characters apparently assume that she returns it.³³ Not only do the men on Wisteria Lane fawn over Robin but Susan and the other married women on the street mistake her to be a sexual threat. As soon becomes clear, this assumption—and many other assumptions that the character's image inspires—is in direct opposition to the traits Robin actually exhibits.

Robin defies expectations partially based on her former profession and, significantly, also based on her costuming. *Desperate Housewives* makes use of layers of stereotyping to complicate the notion that one's choice of employment and exterior appearance necessarily communicate a directly corresponding interior self. Lesbianism is only one aspect of this, and it is worth exploring the character's challenges to assumptions inspired by her external appearance that go beyond the supposition of heterosexuality; there are connections between the functions of these other challenges and that of her sexuality because all demonstrate that looks can be deceiving.

The motif of undermined expectations as explored through Robin's character begins with the astonishment expressed by Susan when she sees Robin reading Herman Melville's literary classic *Moby Dick* in 'The Glamorous Life'. Susan initially misreads Robin as lacking intelligence due to Robin's identity as a stripper and visual appearance as an attractive, hyper-feminine woman which calls on the 'dumb blonde' stereotype personified by Sugar

³³ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in Patricia Erens (ed.), *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 33.

Kane (Marilyn Monroe) in *Some Like It Hot* and Lina Lamont (Jean Hagan) in *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen & Gene Kelly, USA, MGM, 1952). By reading the novel, Robin challenges Susan's perception of her. The conflict between Robin's appearance and her true identity is foregrounded in the episode 'Lovely', which undertakes the double project of challenging the misconception that Robin's image means she is somehow morally deficient as well as queering heteronormative assumptions concerning visual presentation of the self.

During the early moments of 'Lovely', the voice-over of deceased former Wisteria Lane resident, Mary Alice Young, informs us that 'The first thing you need to know about Robin Gallagher was that everyone liked to look at her.' However, in the opening sequence, 'everybody' is clearly shown to be men and boys whose gaze incorporates lust. Costumed to be sexually appealing to an appreciative eye, Benz wears a short red dress—tight around the buttocks and thighs and finishing above the knee—which both displays the shape of her posterior and leaves her legs on display. The top of the dress is less fitted but no less provocative, with the scooped neckline rising to a halter-neck design that exposes the actress's bare shoulders and arms, with the dress forming something resembling a racer-back design behind, hanging loosely down the centre of Benz's back, tantalizingly offering a view of her naked upper back and revealing the fact that it is unlikely Robin is wearing a bra. Black, patent leather peep-toe pumps push her breasts and buttocks out.

Adair confirmed that the aim of the dress in the scene was to render Robin exceptionally attractive, thus fitting with the script's description of the character as somebody whom others enjoy looking at. Outlining her initial brief for the scene, the designer described Cherry's request for a red dress, making use of the attention-grabbing colour to better position Robin as the object of several gazes: 'Mark knew he wanted red,' Adair recalled. 'He was very specific.'³⁴ The designer narrowed the choice down to four dresses, and the differences between the options were minor, with the major requirements being that

³⁴ Adair, personal interview.

We knew it needed to be form fitting. We knew it needed to be attractive. We knew it needed to make everybody watch her walk by.³⁵

This positioning of the character as attractive is emphasised through the editing of the opening sequence. A series of shots showing Robin's walk down Wisteria Lane towards a neighbourhood party reveals the effect she has on heterosexual males, and exactly what it is they enjoy looking at. As we follow Benz's progress, the script motivates fragmented tracking shots of her body (her legs, her breasts, and her hair), with reverse shots of male onlookers revealing the gazes to which she is subjected: those belonging to adolescent Wisteria Lane resident Parker (Zane Huett), a garden labourer, and a courier.³⁶ These males become focal points when the moving camera halts each time, inviting the audience to view the men—and one boy—as subjects in the act of looking at the object Robin. Once at the party, the male protagonists of the series are also seen ogling Robin, forsaking their conversation with Katherine to surround the beautiful newcomer. These men apparently assume that Robin is at least interested in men, if not themselves in particular.

Yet it is not only men who read Robin as an unproblematic object of a male heterosexual gaze. During 'Lovely', Gaby (Eva Longoria Parker), Bree, Lynette (Felicity Huffman), Katherine and, later, Susan, read Robin as deliberately inviting the male gaze in order to return it. When Mary Alice's voice-over states that, of those looking at Robin, 'not everyone liked what they saw', the specific implications of 'not everyone' are made immediately obvious by those framed within the shot: married heterosexual women do not like Robin. Demonstrably jealous of their husbands' reactions to the character, the married women of Wisteria Lane see her as competition for their spouses' attention.

In 'Lovely', Susan gets possessive of Mike following a scantily-clad Robin's attempt to soothe his bad back with an amateur chiropractic session. Susan defends herself by asking

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Mulvey writes about how close-ups of women's faces and bodies create eroticism by fragmenting the human figure into something like an 'icon'. She argues that this causes the 'overvaluation' of female beauty in (heterosexual) men, or 'fetishistic scopophilia, [building] up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself.' See 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', pp. 28-40. Flawed as Mulvey's argument might be in its strict adherence to Freud and strongly gendered division of desire, it is clear that the on-screen fragmentation of female bodies is certainly used to affect eroticism.

Robin 'How was I supposed to react? You used to be a stripper!', assuming that Robin's former employment means the therapeutic session is intended to please Mike sexually. While such misunderstandings arise from assumptions about sex workers, Adair also made sure to emphasise Robin's false threat to the women through costume design. While it is later made clear that Robin is not romantically or sexually interested in men, initially Adair needed to present the character as a believable rival and potential corrupting force. This was aided by the appearance of the actress, Benz. Adair pointed out that the natural appeal of the actress made her job very easy in this instance: 'First of all she's beautiful; she oozes a very specific sensuality before you start. You could put her in a paper sack, and she'd still ooze that.'³⁷ Consequently, while the tiny gym shorts and sports bra Robin wears to work on Mike's back are not commonly viewed as erotic garments, the expanse of flesh that they reveal—and in particular the slender, tanned, toned nature of that flesh—render the outfit potentially erotic and thus threatening from Susan's perspective.

For one particular character, Adair needed to devise a specific strategy to render Robin a substantial threat. It is not a coincidence that Robin's costuming strategy bears a striking resemblance to that of Gaby, a former model who puts much effort into looking desirable to men. Gaby is often dressed in form-fitting, cleavage-revealing, limb-baring outfits that emphasise her figure, offering it up for an appreciative gaze. In cut and style, Robin's red dress is reminiscent of something Gaby might wear. Yet Adair went further than mere similarity, visually matching the two characters by using items that are almost identical to costume both actresses on occasion. In 'Lovely', when Robin encounters Gaby while out on a run, Robin wears tight black Lycra yoga trousers with a yellow top and a tight zip-up sweater. Gaby also wears tight black yoga trousers and teams them with a red version of Robin's top and a red zip-up sweater. Although Gaby's collar is turned up, the outfits are extremely alike, differentiated almost exclusively by colour. Also, in 'Lovely', Gaby and Robin appear to wear earrings from the same collection at various points in the episode. Robin teams her red dress with an elaborately designed pair, featuring nine flat metallic

³⁷ Adair, personal interview.

circles hanging in a diamond formation. Later, in Susan's kitchen, Gaby sports what appear to be items from the same collection, featuring the same shape but with hollow circles.

The use of such comparable pieces on both characters on more than one occasion suggested a deliberate attempt to align the two. When I quizzed Adair about this, she confirmed that it was a conscious decision, stating 'even if I don't do it exactly I'll do something that at least emulates or is similar or is in a similar vein.'³⁸ Further discussion revealed that this choice was based on Gaby's characterisation as a very attractive woman within the series and the need for Robin to be a realistic potential threat, in Gaby's view. The other female characters, though played by conventionally attractive actresses, are not presented in the series as exceptionally beautiful women. Lynette is a perpetually harried housewife, and Bree, an uptight conservative type, is often portrayed as rather 'safe', old-fashioned, and generally not sexually appealing. Adair explained:

The others could feel intimidated quite easily... You needed to up the ante so that everybody felt threatened by [Robin], so that meant that you had to look at Gaby who historically has the most time to look after herself and indulge herself. It has to be a strong enough ante for Gaby to go "Hmm, I'm not sure I'm comfortable with this."³⁹

Robin was styled as a woman in Gaby's mould the better to suggest that Gaby might be feeling, as Adair noted, 'If Carlos fancies me, and this is my competition, then Carlos is going to notice her.'⁴⁰ Costume designs for Benz's character present her as an apparently realistic potential rival for male affections in order to increase the effect of undermining this assumption later in the episode.

'Lovely' offers a series of vignettes in which the opinions held about Robin by the women of Wisteria Lane are changed one by one when individual characters make discoveries about the woman beneath the erotic exterior. Several female characters learn something which surprises them; for example Bree sees that Robin is kind and generous, and Susan discovers that Robin is sensitive, not tough like Susan imagines strippers to be. By the end

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

of the episode, Gaby, Susan, Bree and Lynette have all been taught to see beyond Robin's external appearance, no longer treating her as morally questionable or anything else based on the fact that she looks like a 'loose' woman and was formerly employed in a lap-dancing club. The return of Mary Alice's voice-over in the closing moments of 'Lovely' explicates that the women have perceived, respectively, Robin's 'sense of morality', 'loyal heart', 'surprising insight' and 'forgiving nature'. The costume and style which so strongly foreground Robin's former unrespectable occupation are complicated by the new perspectives of the women. Mirroring the overall theme of the series, Robin is not what she initially appears to be.

While many characters make incorrect assumptions about Robin's desires, morals and aims based on her image and profession, it is clear from the way Robin speaks of clothing that she conflates it (or the lack of it) with identity only in terms of employment, not personality. For example, Robin refers to stripping in 'The Glamorous Life' as 'wearing tassels' and in 'Lovely' describes giving up her dreams of being a ballerina and taking up lap-dancing out of financial necessity as 'goodbye tutu, hello ta-tas'. This idea of Robin's image as deliberately constructed for work purposes is continued beyond her lap-dancing career. On the first day of a new job assisting Susan in an Elementary school in 'The Glamorous Life', the character introduces herself thus: 'Robin Gallagher, teaching assistant, reporting for duty', pointing out that she does not need the glasses she is wearing but has added them to suggest seriousness and intelligence. In 'The Chase', Robin borrows Katherine's blouse to look suitably 'classy' during an interview for the position of restaurant hostess.

Robin evidently thinks of her job- and situation-appropriate attire as a form of costuming and not as clues to her innate personality. Unlike the other women on the lane, she does not think of herself as 'a stripper' but instead recognises that she is a person who has worked as one, not letting her jobs or her clothing define her. This is not an uncommon theme in fictional films and on television, where sex workers are often distanced from the seediness of their professions by being given sympathetic backstories—usually involving children—about why they have been forced into such work, as in *Striptease* (Andrew Bergman, Castle

Rock, USA, 1996).⁴¹ A similar distancing of sex workers from their profession also occurs in other narratives where, like Robin, women who perform sexual acts for men are revealed to be lesbians, as with Molly (Louise Smith) in *Working Girls* (Lizzie Borden, USA, 1986). Robin's denial that her profession and clothes reveal her inner personality furthers *Desperate Housewives'* queer theme of subverting expectations based on surface appearances.

The disclosure of Robin's lesbianism, revealed to Katherine, serves, in 'Lovely', as the final revelation in the series of revelations. In an episode in which the explicit aim is to detail how Robin subverts assumptions based on her appearance and inhabitation of the identity 'stripper'; the subversion of the expectation that she returns the heterosexual male gaze her appearance attracts is the last and perhaps most surprising of all. Even though Bree, Gaby, Susan and Lynette experience realisations that Robin's image does not reveal who she 'really' is, their assumption that she is a heterosexual woman remains unshaken until 'My Two Young Men', when they overhear an argument that reveals Katherine and Robin are sexually involved.

Significantly, it is not only scripted characters who read Robin's image as that of a heterosexual woman. Many of my consumer interviewees felt that Benz was costumed in a manner that lacked recognisable lesbian style. The following are all responses to a screen grab of the actress wearing the red dress in 'Lovely' (Fig. 18). Una pointed out that 'She doesn't speak to me as a dyke', and Hannah expressed similar sentiments, explaining 'That doesn't say anything to me about a kind of gay... sexuality at all. That's very heterosexual for me.'⁴² Amy guessed 'She's got a bottle of wine in her hand so she's... going round her boyfriend's house', assuming that the character was straight before being informed otherwise. Later, knowing that Robin was a lesbian character but asked if the character looked like a straight woman, Amy answered 'Absolutely', clarifying her answer by explaining

⁴¹ The trope of gaining sympathy for the sex worker is a well-worn path, as with Vivian (Julia Roberts) in *Pretty Woman* (Gary Marshall, Touchstone, USA, 1990). See Claude J. Smith Jr., 'Bodies and Minds For Sale: Prostitution in *Pretty Woman* and *Indecent Proposal*', *Studies in Popular Culture* 19:3 (1997).

⁴² Una, personal interview, 17 May 2012; Hannah, personal interview, 15 November 2011.

'Women with long hair, they do look more feminine' before adding that she feels feminine women do not look like lesbians.⁴³



Figure 18: Robin on Wisteria Lane

Charlotte offered reasons why Robin did not strike her as inhabiting a lesbian image, also couching the character's lack of lesbian signifiers in her womanly appearance: 'She doesn't look like a lesbian at all... because she looks so feminine. She looks very girly... If I saw her in the street I would *definitely* not think she was a lesbian.'⁴⁴ Felicity expressed the most surprise at the fact that Robin might be gay, at first asking 'Is that a trick one? Is that a straight woman?' and continuing with 'I'm surprised. Is she gay?!'⁴⁵ In Butler's sense; Robin 'effects' the 'realness' of heterosexuality so closely that there are no remaining signs of the 'body performing' the 'ideal performed'. And yet Robin's style is not framed within the diegesis as an attempt at 'passing'; she is not daring anyone to 'read' her appearance. 'Realness' might be 'the ability to compel belief', but, while Robin does not immediately

⁴³ Amy, personal interview, 22 April 2012.

⁴⁴ Charlotte, personal interview, 17 May 2012.

⁴⁵ Felicity, personal interview, 8 August 2011.

announce her lesbianism to all she meets, she is not shown to be necessarily attempting to compel anyone's belief in her heterosexuality.⁴⁶

That Robin's costume and style is unrecognisable as gay is a vital part of the function the character's sexuality plays within the series. Robin's image and employment history are intended to inspire a very particular set of expectations so that the series can set about undermining them, furthering its queer theme of subverting heteronormativity. The character's lack of identifiable lesbian specificity also highlights widespread beliefs about a close relationship between straight and lesbian female identities, as discussed by Sedgwick, who argued:

opposition between the "homosocial" and the "homosexual" seems to be much less thorough and dichotomous for women, in our society, than for men... [A]n intelligible continuum of aims, emotions and valuations links lesbianism with other forms of women's attention to women.⁴⁷

Similarly, Adrienne Rich theorised a 'lesbian continuum', described as

a range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman.⁴⁸

Theories like Rich's, as well as the widely circulating lack of sanctions against female bonding identified by Sedgwick, '[unhinge] lesbianism from a solely sexual definition', with the result that lesbianism lacks specificity in many people's imaginations.⁴⁹ Robin's desire for other women is invisible not only due to a misrepresentative appearance but because of the prevalence of 'homosocial' desire and activity between women.

Making the character's lesbianism known through verbal admission counters this invisibility and complicates heterocentric assumptions. In Robin's storyline, 'invisible' gayness acts as synecdoche for all traits which cannot necessarily be read through appearance, teaching

⁴⁶ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 129.

⁴⁷ Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 2.

⁴⁸ Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' in Ablove, Barale, and Halperin (eds), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, p. 239.

⁴⁹ Introduction to Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', p. 227.

viewers, effectively, not to read a book by its cover. This places costume in an interesting position, as it is required to tell a story which is not unrelated to the character (Robin is, after all, a stripper when we meet her, a fact that her clothing emphasises), but which in some senses is designed to mislead the audience as well as diegetic characters. When lesbianism was eventually revealed, Adair was required to consider what she (and the script-writers) wanted to say about the character through costume rather than automatically telegraphing everything that was on the page. The function of lesbianism in *Desperate Housewives*, as explored through the character of Robin, is to foreground the difference between appearances and reality, echoing the central and decidedly queer occupation of the overall series. Costume acts to bolster this function, deliberately telling a slightly different story than that which is revealed to be Robin's truth.

The latter-day queering of the Western in *Deadwood*

Deadwood (HBO, USA, 2004-2006) is HBO's violent and foul-mouthed take on the early days of the eponymous pioneer mining camp. With its late nineteenth century setting, frontier settlement, guns, horses, cowboy hats, rough-and-ready gold prospectors, refined easterners, saloons, prostitutes, schoolmarms, and an aggressive male-dominated society, *Deadwood* exhibits many of the generic signifiers of the Western, including many elements of costume.⁵⁰ The townspeople of HBO's fictional *Deadwood* are instantly identifiable as inhabitants of the familiar fictional Western world. Costume designer Janie Bryant made use of recognisable sartorial components to visually place those inhabitants within the typical Western social hierarchy; the cut and state of repair of their outfits telegraphing residents' occupations and varying statuses within the mining camp.

In her article 'Whores, Ladies and Calamity Jane', Kathleen E. R. Smith outlines the two main options for women in the pioneer American West: marriage or working in the sex

⁵⁰ For typical generic signifiers and other components of the Western, see Will Wright, *Six Guns & Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

trade.⁵¹ This dichotomy holds true for most of the women in *Deadwood* and is brought out in Bryant's costume designs: the instant marker of the woman-for-sale is the easily available view of the goods she has to offer: her body on display, barely—or sometimes not even—covered by underwear. In contrast to the publicly exposed breasts and stocking-clad legs of prostitutes, the few married and widowed women of the settlement cover up in feminine fashions of the time (around 1876). The corsets, layered petticoats, long skirts, tight bodices, bustles and long sleeves worn by Alma Garrett (Molly Parker) and Martha Bullock (Anna Gunn) cover their bodies and mark them out as being female but not-prostitutes; the high collars of their blouses and dresses keep their outfits respectable.⁵²

Heterosexual sex is typically offered as a business transaction in the series, and its availability saturates the text. The social lives of the white members of the community (and the working lives of many of those who are not gold prospectors) revolve around the town's two most prominent brothels which double as drinking and gambling houses: the Gem Saloon and the Bella Union. However, *Deadwood* features two lesbian characters amongst its otherwise predominantly aggressively heterosexual milieu. In 'The Trial of Jack McCall', we see Joanie Stubbs (Kim Dickens)—the resident Madam at the Bella Union—kissing one of the prostitutes in her care while bathing her. The kiss is neither romantic nor necessarily sexual, instead a forced show of bravado for her boss, the male owner of the establishment, Cy Tolliver (Powers Boothe). Nonetheless, it hints that Joanie is romantically interested in women. Three episodes later, in 'Suffer the Little Children', a young, female newcomer to Deadwood refers to Joanie as a 'dyke' and later uses the information she has intuited about the older woman's desires in an attempt to emotionally seduce Joanie in order to pull off a robbery.

Jane Canary (Robin Weigert) is the latest fictional incarnation of the much-represented real-life character Martha Jane Canary, better known as Calamity Jane. Jane is less easy to

⁵¹ Kathleen E. R. Smith, 'Whores, Ladies, and Calamity Jane' in David Lavery (ed.), *Reading Deadwood: A Western to Swear By*, (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 88.

⁵² For more on costume in the Western see Gaines, 'Costume', in Edward Buscombe (ed.), *The BFI Companion to the Western*, (London: André Deutsch/BFI publishing, 1990), pp. 98-100. Gaines argues that the primary function of ornate female costumes in the classic Western was to signify 'the incongruousness of Woman... in a rough masculine world.', p. 100.

classify as unambiguously lesbian; when we first encounter her in the opening episode, 'Deadwood', she appears besotted with traveling companion (and yet another much represented real-life figure) Wild Bill Hickok (Keith Carradine). As the seasons progress, however, Canary is shown to be in a sexual relationship with Stubbs. In 'Unauthorized Cinnamon', in the third season, Jane invites a kiss from Joanie, then in 'A Constant Throb' delivers a confessional speech which indicates she enjoys being kissed by the other woman. In series finale 'Tell Him Something Pretty' we see the two sharing a bed without discussion, suggesting they are sexually involved.

As Smith points out, Jane is one of very few women in the series who are able to carve a life outside of marriage or the sex trade, which she does 'by co-opting a man's lifestyle', evident in her previous work as a scout for General Custer.⁵³ Stubbs, while involved in selling sex for much of the series, first manages to find a way to do so on her own terms, leaving the Bella Union to open her own establishment in the second season, and later ceases her work as a madam and makes arrangements for the camp's first schoolroom in the third season, in 'Full Faith and Credit'. Because the first revelation of Joanie's lesbianism is framed as a slightly rebellious action, performed for the benefit of her male boss, there is a suggestion that Stubbs' interest in women is partly a deliberate, symbolic insubordination: a way to prevent her life from being spent entirely in service of males. Once again, lesbianism acts as synecdoche within the text, standing in—in this example—for the women's varying methods of carving out lives un beholden to men.

The lesbian relationship between Stubbs and Canary in *Deadwood* aids in an apparent series-wide attempt to reimagine and update the Western, directly intervening in the genre's well-known iconography to create new possibilities and meanings for women in the format. In terms of costume, both characters are dressed to communicate their function within the text, which is to exist outside of the prostitute/wife dichotomy. Lesbianism is a major part of this function, both enabling and symbolising their independence from men, and there are overlaps between costume elements apparently intended to communicate the women's

⁵³ Smith, 'Whores, Ladies, and Calamity Jane', p. 90.

independence but which also indirectly suggest non-heterosexual desires. *Deadwood's* Jane offers an unusual example, with the pre-existing cultural iterations of her well-known image bringing established meanings to the text. Picking up on themes of 'defy[ing] the sanctity of the past' which characterised some films in the New Queer Cinema movement of the early 1990s, these often repressed implications are allowed to come to fruition in the HBO drama, demonstrating the modernity and revisionist project of the series.⁵⁴

While clearly a 'Western', in that it is set at the time and place when many other 'Western' films and television series are set, *Deadwood's* production context allows it to be very different to the most famous texts that arguably constitute the genre. Classic movie Westerns—*High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, Stanley Kramer Productions, USA, 1952), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford, Paramount, USA, 1962), and *Ride The High Country* (Sam Peckinpah, MGM, USA, 1962) for example—are products of Hollywood cinema at a time when it was largely characterised by the censorship of the Motion Picture Production Code, popularly known as the Hays Code.⁵⁵ *Deadwood*, in contrast, was produced for HBO, a premium US channel which exists outside the restrictions of network television, allowing its writers to tell the familiar-seeming generic stories in an unfamiliar fashion.

Most noticeably different to earlier Westerns is the language of the series, notorious for its profanity. Words like 'motherfucker', 'cocksucker', 'cunt' and 'whore' are bandied around with abandon from the first episode: a far cry from the vernacular of classic Gary Cooper and John Wayne films. In an interview with Allen Barra for *American Heritage* magazine, series creator David Milch remarked on his novel manner of depicting the stories of the American West in the late nineteenth century. Denying that he was copying any model set up by previous Westerns, Milch explained: 'I've never really understood or cared for the conventions of the Western. I always thought they had more to do with what the Hays Office

⁵⁴ Michele Aaron, 'New Queer Cinema: An Introduction' in Michele Aaron (ed.), *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 4.

⁵⁵ For more on the Motion Picture Production Code, see Leonard J. Leff and Jerold L. Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code* (Revised edn.; Lexington: The University of Kentucky, 2001).

would allow than with what happened on the American frontier...⁵⁶ In particular, Milch points out 'The Hays Code said right up front that obscenity in word or action was an offense against God and man and could therefore not be depicted on a movie screen.'⁵⁷ Yet the creator's research indicated that profanity was an integral part of the vocabulary of Western settlers, allowing 'anyone, no matter what his or her background, [to] connect with almost anyone else on the frontier'.⁵⁸ Working for HBO allowed Milch to reinsert what he believed to be the reality of pioneer speech into the genre of the Western. Although the *Deadwood* creator states that it wasn't his intention 'to create a revisionist Western', he admits to a focus on 'creating a vision of the West... which has seldom been presented before.'⁵⁹

Deadwood, then, enacts a form of intervention into the Western genre, and the representation of women in the series is an integral part of that intervention. Scholars like Smith and Pam Cook have written about 'the gender bias underlying Western history [which] has led us to believe that stalwart men and incidental, unimportant women built the West', as well as later, revisionist histories which admitted 'that [women's] real contribution was far more extensive and diverse than traditional histories and literature have led us to believe.'⁶⁰ The classic Western typically positions women as secondary to male heroes. Martin Pumphrey theorises that women in the Western often function in relation to the hero to symbolise 'civilisation' and 'social order', contrasting with the 'wilderness' that exists as 'a sphere for masculine action'.⁶¹ Yet as Cook also points out, blanket dismissals of the representation of women in the genre overlook 'a series of extraordinary heroines' who passed through the genre in its classic manifestations.⁶²

⁵⁶ Allen Barra, 'The Man Who Made *Deadwood*: An Interview With David Milch by Allen Barra', *American Heritage Magazine* 57:3 (June/July 2006), p. 1, accessed online at www.americanheritage.com, 8 September 2010.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Milch, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁶⁰ Smith, 'Whores, Ladies, and Calamity Jane', p. 90; Pam Cook, 'Women', in Edward Buscombe (ed.), *The BFI Companion to the Western*, p. 240.

⁶¹ See Martin Pumphrey, 'Why Do Cowboys Wear Hats in the Bath?: Style Politics for the Older Man', in Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye (eds.), *The Movie Book of the Western*, (London: Studio Vista, 1996), p. 52. This brings to mind the civilising force of the trailful of women heading west to provide food and eastern propriety in *The Harvey Girls* (George Sidney, MGM, USA, 1946).

⁶² Cook, 'Women', p. 241.

As Tania Modleski argues in 'A Woman's Gotta Do... What a Man's Gotta Do?', one of the ways in which the Western has traditionally allowed women to take on active roles in the narrative is through the figure of the cross-dressed heroine.⁶³ Josephine Monaghan (Suzy Amis), a passing woman who tends sheep in *The Ballad of Little Jo* (Maggie Greenwald, Joco/Polygram, USA, 1993) provides a recent example, her male garments intended to disguise her gender and keep her safe, and Ellen (Sharon Stone) in *The Quick and the Dead* (Sam Raimi, TriStar Pictures, USA, 1995) represents another relatively recent masculine Western woman, with her leathers and horse riding and sharpshooter skills. But the figure of the cross-dressed woman in the Western is not only a recent phenomenon. Owing to its 'wild', lawless setting where, as Will Wright notes, 'for a brief time, many ways of life were available, each of which contained its own element of adventure', the West during pioneer settlement was 'historically a place of disrupted gender relations.'⁶⁴ There were real life women who took on 'masculine' activities like shooting, cattle herding, horse wrangling and trick riding, confidently moving through the tough masculine circles of the 'Wild West'.⁶⁵ Notable and enduring legends exist in the form of Phoebe Moses, whose stage name was the more familiar Annie Oakley, and of course Canary as Calamity Jane.⁶⁶ Both women earned fame and notoriety in their lifetimes touring with theatrical 'Western' productions like Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West showcase in the 1880s and '90s. Such shows often featured women who engaged in staged activities like stunts performed from horseback and displays of difficult skills like lassoing and target shooting.⁶⁷

These active Western women, and in particular Oakley and Calamity Jane, found their way into the Western (or Western-modelled film, if not the classic iteration of the genre) as relatively rare but surprisingly recurrent female protagonists. Betty Hutton played Oakley in

⁶³ Tania Modleski, 'A Woman's Gotta Do ... What a Man's Gotta Do? Cross-Dressing in the Western', *Signs* 22:3 (Spring, 1997), pp. 519-544.

⁶⁴ Wright, *Six Guns & Society*, p. 5; Susan Lee Johnson, "'A Memory Sweet to Soldiers': The Significance of Gender in the History of the 'American West'", *The Western Historical Quarterly* 24: 4 (November 1993), p. 499.

⁶⁵ Ona Russell, 'What's in a Name Anyway?: The Calamity of Calamity Jane', *American Studies* 35 (Fall 1994), p. 29.

⁶⁶ For information on Moses see Ann McGrath, 'Being Annie Oakley: Modern Girls, New World Woman', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 28:1 & 2 (2007), p. 210-211. For more on Canary see Russell, 'What's in a Name Anyway?', pp. 21-38.

⁶⁷ For a little on the touring Wild West shows, see McGrath, 'Being Annie Oakley', p. 207, Russell, 'What's in a Name Anyway', p. 29 and James D. McLaird, *Calamity Jane: The Woman and the Legend*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), p. 116.

MGM's adaptation of Irving Berlin's *Annie Get Your Gun* (George Sidney, USA, 1950), fresh from a successful Broadway run. In the mid-1950s, a US television series portrayed Oakley (Gail Davis) as a singleton Sheriff stand-in who frightened villains by shooting tricky targets or blasting the weapons from their hands (*Annie Oakley*, Flying 'A' Productions, USA, 1954-1957).⁶⁸ Both L. Clare Bratten and Ann McGrath have detailed how Oakley's televisual incarnation offered a rare 1950s 'gender critique'.⁶⁹ Yet despite her 'masculine' abilities (and authority as a sheriff in the television series), the fictionalised Oakley was typically costumed in a skirt, more 'Hollywood "glam"... than western grime'.⁷⁰



Figure 19: Doris Day's 'perky' Calamity Jane in buckskins

Canary's preference for masculine attire, typically buckskins, as well as her almost certainly exaggerated exploits and dexterous skills were made famous by a brief autobiography, her

⁶⁸ See McGrath 'Being Annie Oakley', p.213.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 213;

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.212; L. Clare Bratten 'Shootout at the Gender Corral: Annie Oakley Deconstructs Gender', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 22:1 (Spring 1997), pp. 5-12.

stage appearances, popular fiction like Edward L. Wheeler's *Deadwood Dick* dime-novel series, and many filmic and televisual representations such as *The Plainsman* (Cecil B. DeMille, Paramount, USA, 1936) and made-for-TV movies *Calamity Jane* (James Goldstone, CBS, USA, 1984) and *Buffalo Girls* (Rod Hardy, CBS, USA, 1995).⁷¹ However, prior to Milch's HBO drama, the most culturally resonant image of Jane was provided by *Calamity Jane*, the 1953 musical film starring Doris Day (David Butler, Warner Bros., USA). Day's 'perky tomboy', as Janet McCabe describes her, guards the Deadwood Stage from the advances of combative American Indians on the stage's trips to and from Chicago.⁷² For much of the film Calamity is coarse and filthy, has a loud, gargled voice and exhibits a tendency to argue and sulk. As we shall see, Day's Calamity provides a model for Weigert's Jane, but can only hint at the characterisation allowed in the HBO series.

In *Deadwood*, Jane arrives in the settlement in the first episode, driving a horse-drawn wagon and vehemently swearing at men. She is soon revealed to be an inveterate alcoholic and exhibits no ladylike qualities whatsoever. As the latest in the long line of similarly dressed media representations of the character based on the real life figure, Jane wears the obligatory buckskins—leather trousers with buttons down the outside leg, fringed from the knee down—and an outsized leather overcoat. Her trousers are held up by braces (suspenders), worn over a loose, coarse shirt and under a dark grey waistcoat with a striped pattern on the back, and with one or two rags used as neckties. The butch ensemble is completed by a slouch hat, a type of military cap. Like Day's Calamity, Weigert's Jane does not use a corset or wear bloomers like other women in the settlement. While Butler's film does not reveal what—if anything—its eponymous character wears instead, in place of feminine underclothing in *Deadwood* Jane wears a union suit complete with a button-up flap in the rear, as do the men in the series, most notably owner of the Gem Saloon Al Swearingen (Ian McShane) who is frequently seen in his identical underwear.

⁷¹ For more on Calamity Jane's autobiography see McLaird, *Calamity Jane*, p. 7-9. For more on the Wheeler series, see Modleski, 'A Woman's Gotta Do ... What a Man's Gotta Do?', p. 528.

⁷² Janet McCabe, 'Myth Maketh the Woman: Calamity Jane, Frontier Mythology and Creating American (Media) Historical Imaginings', in David Lavery (ed.), *Reading Deadwood*, p. 63.

When I interviewed Bryant, she recalled Weigert's costume in *Deadwood*, first focusing on the elements of Jane's outdoor lifestyle and the relevant required toughness that the design brought out. A former army scout, the character's clothes reflect that a lot of her time is spent outdoors, travelling and working with and amongst men and animals. Bryant explained:

Her costumes were... about what I read about [the real Jane's] experiences going to Deadwood and also her working with the animals... I really wanted to incorporate all the different skins in the costume... to incorporate elements of the wild.⁷³

Costuming Jane in various animal skins communicated more than simply that the character works in the wild. That Jane's clothing is suited to a primarily out-of-doors existence suggests that she is hardy, as she is obviously equipped to endure her frequent exposure to the elements. Bryant explained:

That character, to survive the land and to go through all of that horrendous, horrendous terrain, and travels, and weather, and being able to hang with the men on the road as well: you would have to be incredibly tough.⁷⁴

⁷³ Bryant, personal interview.

⁷⁴ Ibid.



Figure 20: *Deadwood's* Jane in buckskins

The leathers, with their connotations of both animal strength and masculinity, suggest this hardiness. The robust feel of her costume fits with Jane's independence in the series, as she is often seen alone once Hickok is killed, sleeping outside on her own and at one point taking herself away from the mining camp, living in the woods while she gets over the shame of behaving cowardly in front of Al Swearngen when she was supposed to be keeping him away from an injured child.⁷⁵ Her independence is, however, qualified by her lack of ability to care for herself properly. A seasoned alcoholic, we often see her passed out in the street, and only Stubbs is able to force Canary to take extremely rare baths.⁷⁶ Bryant aimed to reflect this lack of personal care in Weigert's costumes, stating that her overall vision for Jane was for the audience to be able to 'smell the filth coming off the screen', and working

⁷⁵ The exchange with Swearngen takes place in 'Deep Water' and Calamity disappears in 'The Trial of Jack McCall'.

⁷⁶ See 'Boy-the-Earth-Talks-To' and 'Unauthorized Cinnamon'.

towards this by keeping the character's clothes 'incredibly distressed and dirtied all the time', particularly the union suit.⁷⁷



Figure 21: *Deadwood's* Jane in shirt, waistcoat and hat

The strongest characteristic suggested by Jane's clothing is masculinity, particularly when her style is contrasted with the dresses and/or underwear worn by all the other women in camp: trousers, for example, are not worn by any other women in the settlement. Her manly attire includes a pistol carried in a leather holster, which is mounted on one of two ammunition belts, with all the accompanying phallic symbolism and connotations of masculine power.⁷⁸ Her trousers and a jacket made of leather echo the similarly attired men in the town. Weigert's hair is matted and tied back from her face, with no hint of Hollywood or even regular-girl glamour. Jane's slouch hat is a military design and therefore (at the time) intended for men, simply rounded on top, and covering a significant portion of her face. It is not a dainty, decorative adornment but a functional piece of clothing that looks able to keep wind and rain off her visage when travelling. The character displays no vestiges of

⁷⁷ Bryant, personal interview.

⁷⁸ For more on the gun (in general but in Westerns, *Deadwood* and for Calamity Jane in particular) as masculine, see David Scott Diffrient, 'Deadwood Dick: The Western (Phallus) Reinvented', in David Lavery (ed.), *Reading Deadwood*, pp. 185-199.

femininity. Jane's appearance is so manly as to cause hotel owner E.B Farnum (William Sanderson) to qualify his address to her as 'Madam' by deliberately looking her up and down, pointedly adding 'If I guess your sex correct.'⁷⁹



Figure 22: Robin Weigert in promotional image for *Deadwood*

Unlike *The L Word's* Shane, whose textually signified manliness does not translate to viewers, *Deadwood's* Jane looks significantly mannish to objective viewers. Of my interviewees, asked to offer a word or two to describe images of the case studies in this thesis, Felicity identified Weigert (as Jane in Fig. 22) as looking 'butch' and 'manly'; Amy remarked that 'She looks awfully like a man... She could pass for a man, easily', and Charlotte informed me that 'To me that looks like a guy; I wouldn't have known that that was

⁷⁹ 'Reconnoitering the Rim'.

a woman unless you were doing this.⁸⁰ Amy, Charlotte and Emily all referred to Weigert's style as 'Cowboy', with no one using the female version 'Cowgirl'.⁸¹

Jane also behaves in a masculine fashion, her language distinctly unladylike, marking her as 'one of the most foul-mouthed frontiers-people of either sex'.⁸² She enacts a performance of specifically masculine bravado in the episode 'Deadwood' when she declares herself to be 'the only one with balls' in a saloon full of men, aligning herself with male potency and its associations with strength. Because Jane's behaviour strongly conjures up the stereotypical figure of the 'mannish lesbian'—and because she later embarks on a lesbian relationship—the masculine elements in her costuming might be read as a sign that Bryant made use of male-like sartorial features to speak the character's same-sex desire. However, the designer specifically denied that she sees a default connection between women with masculine appearances and lesbianism, stating 'I think if you're a lesbian, not necessarily are you a *man*', distancing herself from concepts of sexuality which align sexual desire with gender and result in the gender-inversion model of sexuality.⁸³ It is also significant that Jane is not presented as a lesbian from the start of the series, and therefore Bryant—like Adair with Robin in *Desperate Housewives*—did not know or therefore originally intend to design costumes that would speak lesbianism. From the designer's perspective, then, Jane's costume design was entirely separate from the character's lesbian identity.

Yet Jane presents a particularly unique case study. While Jane Canary does exist on the page as part of the *Deadwood* cast, her fame in western cultures meant that neither Milch nor Bryant were able to begin their plans for the character with a blank slate. Martha Jane Canary was a sometime travelling companion of 'Wild' Bill Hickok, and arrived in Deadwood alongside him in 1876.⁸⁴ Reports of her life have been confused by rumours and unconfirmed stories often taken as fact, as well as by an extended yet inept forgery of letters and diaries in the 1940s by a woman claiming to be Jane's daughter with Bill Hickok, given

⁸⁰ Felicity, personal interview; Amy personal interview; Charlotte, personal interview.

⁸¹ Amy, personal interview; Charlotte, personal interview; Emily, email to author, 11 June 2012.

⁸² Diffrient, 'Deadwood Dick' p. 195.

⁸³ Bryant, personal interview.

⁸⁴ McLaird, *Calamity Jane*, p. 270.

up for adoption.⁸⁵ Owing to Canary's fame, however, there is photographic evidence of what she looked like and, at least for portraits, what she chose to wear. During our interview Bryant spoke about the fact that she based Weigert's costume partly on a photograph of the real life Jane: 'there was... a photo of her, which I loved, [in which] she had the fringed deerskin pants and... from that image, I took that and really used a lot of different elements.'⁸⁶



Figure 23: Martha Jane Canary, the real Calamity Jane

Canary is not known to have been a lesbian or to have had relationships with women, instead allegedly living with several different men at separate times in her life, referring to such arrangements as marriages.⁸⁷ As Bryant's costume for Weigert stemmed from a presumably heterosexual real-life figure and the designer herself does not connect lesbianism with masculinity, it seems fair to argue that Jane's costume was chiefly designed to signal not that the character is a lesbian but that she is Calamity Jane. The rugged, filthy

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 237-252.

⁸⁶ Bryant, personal interview.

⁸⁷ McLaird, *Calamity Jane*, p. 270.

outfit Bryant designed draws on recognisable iconography that principally marks *Deadwood*'s Jane as the well-known persona. This was the demonstrable result of the costume for some during my consumer interviews. While none of my interviewees were familiar with the HBO series, I received the following responses to the image of Weigert in costume: Amy commented 'She's got, like a Calamity Jane outfit', and both Felicity and Irene asked if the image was of 'the real Calamity Jane.'⁸⁸

Because the design used by Bryant was so influenced by the available photographic imagery of Canary, when analysing the costume in *Deadwood* it quickly became less interesting to think about the meanings Bryant brought to the pre-established image and more revealing to ask about the meanings the pre-established image brought to the series. Consequently, in the case of Weigert's Jane, we are offered a completely different paradigm to ordinary costume design. Instead of costume primarily communicating aspects of the character, a well-known character presented the chance to communicate the meanings which have been implicit in her globally famous image—but suppressed—for many years. *Deadwood* is an intervention not only into the history of a genre but also into the representational history of Calamity Jane. In her article on the HBO series, McCabe points out 'the depth of past media referencing that *Deadwood* builds into the generic memory'.⁸⁹ Milch's series evidences use not only of the real life nineteenth century figure of Martha Jane Canary, but of the preceding media representations of the same woman, and in particular the Butler film.

A certain sequence in the series provides us with an example of this past media referencing. In Warner Bros.' *Calamity Jane*, 'Calam' undergoes a make-over—with the assistance of friend/love rival/housemate Katie Brown (Allyn Ann McLerie)—before attending the Fort Scully Ball. The result is extremely beautiful and conventionally womanly, revealed after having been hidden beneath a large, dark cloak for the journey to the Ball, and involving a décolleté pink dress with a floor-length skirt, a pink satin ribbon in Day's hair and diaphanous material around her shoulders. The transformation is replayed—but rather differently—in

⁸⁸ Amy, personal interview; Felicity, personal interview; Irene, personal interview, 15 November 2011.

⁸⁹ McCabe, 'Myth Maketh the Woman', p. 76.

Deadwood when Stubbs somewhat deviously persuades Jane to wear a plain dress and bloomers for Alma's second wedding in 'Boy-the-Earth-Talks-To'. As well as recalling the earlier text, the differences between these two events—and those which follow them in each text—aid the demonstration of *Deadwood's* modern take on the Western genre.

Both Bratten and Russell have written about the way in which active Western female heroines deconstruct gender, reading such women through Butler's theories of gender as performative to show how women acting and looking like men reveal masculinity to be merely an act: a performance that anyone can enact to 'become' masculine.⁹⁰ Russell also theorises that the woman's ability to shoot, because of 'the power associated with a gun as well as the obvious sexual connotations of the gun itself' is 'threatening to men on both a literal and symbolic level'.⁹¹ Russell identifies the 'emasculating' effect of the reversal of 'the "normal" sexual (and power) dynamic', which leaves the male 'symbolically impotent'.⁹² But where does this symbolically leave the woman? Modleski identifies the most dangerous threat the cross-dressed heroine presents to the hero: that she might not need or care about him at all. For, as Freud, Westphal, Krafft-Ebing, Flügel, and Radclyffe Hall have taught us, and as literature and visual media have often reiterated, 'underneath the transvestite's garments frequently lurks... a dyke.'⁹³ That the mannish woman in film is easily readable as lesbian is evident in the responses Modleski reported following *The Ballad of Little Jo*, in which, apparently, 'the lack of homoeroticism in the film disappointed some critics, notwithstanding the evidence of heterosexual activity in the "real" Jo Monaghan's life.'⁹⁴

Owing to the real Canary's penchant for wearing buckskin trousers as well as shooting, swearing and drinking—all male prerogatives in her time—she and her fictional counterparts have on occasion been read through the same prism of twentieth century concepts positing homosexuality as gender inversion which caused the desire for lesbianism in *The Ballad of*

⁹⁰ Bratten writes '[A] show such as Annie Oakley, which inserts a female protagonist into a genre position that had been marked as "male," produces a hero/ine whose gender markers are radically up for grabs.': 'Shootout at the Gender Corral', p. 9; Russell argues '[W]hat these shows did by featuring performances which emphasized masculine skill and prowess is implicitly emphasize the performance of gender that was (always already) occurring.': 'What's in a Name Anyway?', p. 31.

⁹¹ Russell, 'What's in a Name Anyway?', p. 27-8.

⁹² Ibid., p. 28.

⁹³ Modleski, 'A Woman's Gotta Do ... What a Man's Gotta Do?', p. 540.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 541.

Little Jo. This reading is particularly available in the Butler film. As Jeffers McDonald has argued, '[t]he threat of gender confusion, of homosexuality, haunts the film text'.⁹⁵ Because Calamity dresses and behaves in an entirely unfeminine manner, she gets into 'scrapes' like being mistaken for a man in Chicago, where a woman winks at her on the street. When Katie Brown makes the same mistake, horrified by Calamity's attempt to help her out of her corset, her reaction raises the possibility—although safely contained in comedy—of Jane's sexual interest in Katie. When Calamity and Katie move in together in Calamity's ramshackle cabin, the event instigates the sprucing up of both the living space and Jane, all to the melodic sound of the two women singing about how one should 'Never Underestimate a Woman's Touch'. The lesbian undertones are strong, and the Butler text became a firm favourite with lesbian audiences.⁹⁶

This was, however, not through want of the film trying to prevent such readings of Calamity's butch persona; Jeffers McDonald has detailed how 'the narrative's main project is to exorcise this ghostly desire through its return of Calamity to normative heterosexuality'.⁹⁷ In Calamity's manly phase in the Butler film, Jane is in love with Lieutenant Danny Gilmartin (Philip Carey) who does not return her affections. Once the character reaches the end of the film clean and softly spoken with a ready smile, she is united in matrimony with Bill Hickok (Howard Keel). Pam Cook has argued that the trope of 'the tomboy abandon[ing] her transvestite garb for the arms of the hero by the end of the movie' functions in the Western to re-establish gender-boundaries, returning the woman to her rightful place within patriarchal society: 'Suitably re-clad in dress or skirt' as Day is (although only temporarily) for her wedding, 'she prepares to take her place in the family, leaving adventure to the men'.⁹⁸ By placing Weigert's Jane in a lesbian relationship, *Deadwood* undertakes an opposite and distinctly queer project which is echoed in the character's costume design.

Comparing Day's rambunctious, loud and sulky Calamity to Weigert's version—a profane, abrasive alcoholic who becomes involved in a sexual relationship with another woman—the

⁹⁵ Quote from Jeffers McDonald, 'Carrying Concealed Weapons: Gendered Makeover in *Calamity Jane*', *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 34: 4 (Winter 2007), p. 183.

⁹⁶ Patricia White, *unInvited*, p. 39.

⁹⁷ Jeffers McDonald, 'Carrying Concealed Weapons', p. 184.

⁹⁸ Cook, 'Women', p. 241.

possibilities of creating a show for HBO in the twenty-first century versus filmmaking under the Hays Code are quite plain. Doris Day's 'Calam' may live in dusty squalor, tell tall tales and fall into a muddy creek at an inopportune moment but *Deadwood*'s Jane calls strangers 'ignorant fucking cunts', vomits in the street and urinates on herself through her clothes while passed out drunk.⁹⁹ Yet beyond merely demonstrating differing production contexts, the transformations of the two Janes provide an excellent argument for the opposing projects of the two texts.

In *Hollywood Catwalk*, Jeffers MacDonald argues that 'within the Hollywood transformation, the success of the alteration is frequently judged by its effect on a man.'¹⁰⁰ By this criterion, Day's steps towards 'normative homosexuality' are certainly successful. Although Day's transformation to dance floor beauty is slightly abortive (with Calamity preferring a cleaned up, feminine look that is more in keeping with her boyish style, as Jeffers MacDonald points out) it is still shown to be successful in some manner, attracting the attention of several men, and in particular the all-important Hickok (Fig 24).¹⁰¹ Day's Calam moves from problematically masculine to heterosexualised, cleaned-up beauty. In *Deadwood*, the transformation is a total failure. The temporary alteration of Jane's image is far from glamorous: Weigert is not presented as suddenly beautiful when placed in girlish attire; her borrowed outfit, a hazel-green dress, is not ostentatious or revealing of her body underneath, and there is no big entrance, neither does the camera nor any character dwell on her made-over image (see Fig 25). In MacDonald Jeffers' theory of Hollywood transformations, the new look should not only attract men but is designed to 'reflect more "truly" than the old unattractive exterior the "real" person within.'¹⁰² That the makeover in *Deadwood* is meant to be read as comic and unsuccessful—and to signify the very opposite of Canary's true self—is made clear when Jane continually fidgets with her borrowed underwear at the ceremony and later punches a man in the face when she catches him looking at her. The transformation also has absolutely nothing to do with a man: it may be

⁹⁹ See episodes 'Deadwood', 'A Rich Find, and 'I Am Not the Fine Man You Take Me For'.

¹⁰⁰ Jeffers MacDonald, *Hollywood Catwalk*, p. 12.

¹⁰¹ For more on Day's Calamity's preferred look and its significance, see Jeffers McDonald, 'Carrying Concealed Weapons', p. 182.

¹⁰² Jeffers MacDonald, *Hollywood Catwalk*, p. 7.

approved by one (unfortunate) onlooker, but it inspires no heterosexual coupling, in fact forming part of Jane and Joanie's slow, awkward courtship.



Figure 24: Doris Day as Calamity Jane attracting male attention in a dress

The production context that allows for *Deadwood's* profanity also allows for the depiction of lesbian identities and relationships, and in complete contrast to Butler's film, *Deadwood* moves Calamity from potentially straight to arguably lesbian. Weigert's Jane may arrive in town with an easily detectable soft spot for Hickok but is last seen in bed with Stubbs, embarked upon a sexual relationship with her version of Katie Brown. This opposing project is highlighted in *Deadwood* by the fact that Jane returns to her favoured garments following the wedding and ends the series just as filthy and manly as she begins it.



Figure 25: *Deadwood*'s Jane (l) in a dress, with Joanie Stubbs (r)

The New Queer Cinema movement of the 1990s, as first categorised by B. Ruby Rich, contained a spate of films which set about 'revising histories'; such films 'reinscribed... homosexuality' by inserting queer characters and plots where previously they had been overlooked or by depicting vilified gay characters in a sympathetic light.¹⁰³ Examples include Christopher Münch's *The Hours and Times* (Antarctic Pictures, USA, 1991), a fictional representation of the private interactions of John Lennon and Brian Epstein on a weekend spent in Barcelona, Derek Jarman's *Edward II* (Working Title, UK/Japan, 1991) 'which reinscribed the homosexuality so integral to its sixteenth century source',¹⁰⁴ and Tom Kalin's *Swoon* (Intolerance/American Playhouse, USA, 1992), which told the story of the historic case of violent murderers Nathan Leopold Jr. and Richard Loeb, exploring how 'the link between their homosexuality and the crime figured so prominently in and out of the courtroom,' criticising the logic of Defense Attorney Clarence Darrow who pleaded homosexuality as a 'psychologically debilitating' mitigating circumstance.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ B. Ruby Rich, 'New Queer Cinema', *Sight and Sound* 2:5 (September 1992), p. 31, 32.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁵ Roy Grundmann, 'The Fantasies We Live By: Bad Boys in *Swoon* & *The Living End*', *Cineaste* 19:4, p.28, 29.

José Arroyo has argued that New Queer Cinema's preoccupation with placing 'gays in history' was 'a way of legitimising present existence and... imagining a future.'¹⁰⁶ Michele Aaron attributed New Queer Cinema's revisionist history to a defiance of 'the sanctity of the past, especially the homophobic past.... [revisiting] historical relationships and firmly [instating] the overlooked homosexual content.'¹⁰⁷ The twenty-first century representation of Canary in *Deadwood* responds to and rewards earlier subcultural readings of the legendary figure. The lesbian connotations of the real and fictional Jane's masculine attire are played out to what many fans have long understood as their natural fruition: the butch woman as lesbian. By allowing Calamity Jane's butch clothing to 'mean' what such fans have already read it to insinuate, *Deadwood* exhibits a similar project to New Queer films.

The Western had been queered prior to Milch's series, most notably in Andy Warhol's *Lonesome Cowboys* (Andy Warhol Films, USA, 1968), an art-house success which featured overtly gay ranch hands. *Red River* (Howard Hawks/Arthur Rosson, Monterey Productions, USA, 1948) famously contains some very queer scenes, with an exchange between Matthew Garth (Montgomery Clift) and Cherry Valance (John Ireland) concerning guns that was so subtextually rich the scene warranted a spot in the 1995 clip documentary about gays on film, *The Celluloid Closet* (Rob Epstein/Jeffrey Friedman, HBO, USA). The 1980s brought the camp appropriation of the cowboy to the masses, via pop group The Village People.¹⁰⁸ Yet Warhol's film was limited in its reach, not a mainstream hit, and neither of the other two examples was explicitly homosexual.

The overt representation of homosexuality in Hollywood cinema was, of course, specifically forbidden by the Hays Code, but the code's repeal in the late 1960s allowed for more direct depictions.¹⁰⁹ *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, Alberta Film Entertainment, Canada/USA, 2005), which portrayed Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal as tragically ill-fated lovers, represents a post-Code example of a queered Western. The film was released between the

¹⁰⁶ José Arroyo, 'Death, Desire and Identity' in Joseph Bristow & Angelia R. Wilson (eds), *Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), p. 93.

¹⁰⁷ Aaron, 'New Queer Cinema: An Introduction', p. 4,

¹⁰⁸ I must credit Cory K. Creekmur's 'Brokeback, the Parody', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13:1 (2007) with informing me of many of these gay cowboy references. See p. 106-7.

¹⁰⁹ See Father Daniel Lord, 'Code to Govern the Making of Talking, Synchronized and Silent Motion Pictures' (Production Code Administration, 1930), reproduced in Leff and Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono*, p. 288.

broadcast of *Deadwood's* second and third series, which places it before Jane and Joanie are shown to become sexually involved, but importantly after we are informed that Stubbs is a 'dyke'. There have been a few onscreen lesbian cowgirls, notably Bonanza Jellybean (Rain Phoenix) in *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (Gus Van Sant, New Line Cinema/Fourth Vision, USA, 1993), and Cay (Patricia Charbonneau) in *Desert Hearts*—who actually worked at a casino but whose image was strongly cowgirl influenced—although these are very rare and not particularly culturally resonant instances of lesbians in a Western setting. The inclusion of a lesbian relationship in *Deadwood* represents a new possibility in a genre which, though significantly historically queer, has seldom been so in the mainstream.

While this latter-day queering of the butch connotations of Calamity Jane's famous buckskins is highly interesting and relevant in a thesis on twenty-first century lesbian costuming, this particular intervention does not exist simply for intrigue or titillation. As critics have noted, the woman in the Western has historically existed not for her own sake but for the varying purposes of the male hero. Ann McGrath writes 'In most Westerns, women were generally helpmeets or prostitutes in background roles', and Budd Boetticher, apparently glossing over gun-slinging heroines of their own narratives, argues 'What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one... who makes [the hero] act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance.'¹¹⁰

In general, *Deadwood* allows more possibilities for its women than 'the impoverished range of female stereotypes on offer' in classic Westerns as named by Cook: 'mother, school-teacher, prostitute, saloon girl, rancher, Indian squaw, [and] bandit'.¹¹¹ We do see some of these stereotypes in the series in the form of Martha Bullock, a mother who sets up the town's first school in 'Childish Things'; the prostitutes at the Gem Saloon and Bella Union, and non-prostitute 'saloon girl' Stubbs. Yet some activities undertaken by women on *Deadwood* are, significantly, not performed for the benefit of men. Alma Garret is a salient example: widowed via foul-play in 'Reconnoitering the Rim', she inherits land where gold has been found. Swarengen, who originally sold the claim to Alma's husband thinking it was

¹¹⁰ McGrath, 'Being Annie Oakley', p. 212; Budd Boetticher, quoted in Cook, 'Women', p. 241.

¹¹¹ Cook, 'Women', p. 240.

worthless, sends prostitute Trixie (Paula Malcomson) to ensure that opium-dependent Garret remains addicted in a sly bid to buy back the claim. Trixie and Alma form an alliance, with Alma regaining her health but the two women pretending for Swearingen's benefit that Alma is still using the drug, thus buying time while the claim is investigated for gold (in 'Here Was a Man' and 'The Trial of Jack McCall'). Garret keeps the land and mines the gold with great success, thus growing independently wealthy. She later enables the town's efforts to establish a bank by making the largest deposit, as demonstrated by her financial dealings in 'Amalgamation and Capital' and 'Full Faith and Credit'.

In 'One is Not Born a Woman', Monique Wittig refashions Simone de Beauvoir's famous argument that 'One is not born, but becomes a woman'—through indoctrination in the rules and behaviours of patriarchal civilization—to argue that lesbians, as females who dedicate their lives to other females, are not 'women' as society defines them.¹¹² For Wittig, to be lesbian 'goes further than the refusal of the role "woman."' It is the refusal of the economic, ideological, and political power of a man.¹¹³ The Western heroine who, as Cook puts it 'relinquishes her desire to be active and independent, ceding power to the hero's cause rather than her own' is a woman in de Beauvoir and Wittig's sense.¹¹⁴ *Deadwood* offers us some alternatives.

Arguably, Alma Garret manages to escape from domination by men because of her economic independence. Yet Joanie and Jane go symbolically further than Garret, who has a long affair with Seth Bullock (Timothy Olyphant) and is forced to marry the kindly, middle-aged Ellsworth (Jim Beaver) following the resulting pregnancy. By 'being' lesbians (or perhaps simply entering a lesbian relationship on Jane's part), Joanie Stubbs and Jane Canary refuse the limitation of the role of 'woman'. While Jane's drunken state and the care that Joanie offers her qualifies her independence, the Sapphic liaison Canary begins with Stubbs does represent a rare generic separation from men. Jane and Joanie—as female characters who arrive at the end the series not defined by men in either occupation or via

¹¹² See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (trans.), (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009). Originally published in 1949.

¹¹³ Monique Wittig, 'One is Not Born a Woman', in Abelove, Barale, and Halperin (eds), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, p. 105.

¹¹⁴ Cook, 'Women' p. 241.

romantic affiliation—offer a differing paradigm to traditional iterations of women in the Western, foregrounding Milch's refashioning of the genre.

Through a variety of methods, Stubbs represents *Deadwood's* revised model of women in the Western. In the Deadwood community, Garret's independent wealth notwithstanding, real power is generally restricted to males. Yet Stubbs—with her responsibility as hostess at the Bella Union and her later move to running her own establishment, the Chez Ami, in 'New Money'—occupies a rare position in the public sphere first as a woman with some power within a male-run establishment and later as a business proprietor.¹¹⁵ Even before she makes the move to running the Chez Ami, Joanie holds a certain amount of independence, as indicated by the scene in 'The Trial of Jack McCall' when she defiantly kisses one of the prostitutes in her care: a moment of symbolic revolt that would not be tolerated in one of her charges. Once Joanie ventures out on her own in business (or even when she initially runs the Chez Ami with another woman), she cuts a singular figure in the community: not defined by a man either by employment, marriage or other romantic affiliation.

Within *Deadwood*, Joanie's lesbianism functions as part of her independence from (or perhaps deliberate rejection of) men and therefore from patriarchal society in general. Smith details how, owing to the lawless nature of the early frontier settlement, women in *Deadwood* can seize the 'opportunity to discover who they want to be and choose their own identities.'¹¹⁶ It is the permissive setting of the pioneer camp which both allows Jane her independence and enables Joanie to act on her desires for other women. Tolerant attitudes towards lesbianism demonstrated by those—such as Charlie Utter and Cy Tolliver—who know of it are contextualised by the pervasive atmosphere of vice in the mining camp. Homosexual acts *are* regarded as sinful, as hotel proprietor Shaughnessy (Dan Hildebrand) makes clear to Jane and Joanie when shouting Biblical condemnations at them the morning after, he assumes, they have consummated their physical relationship in 'Leviathan Smiles'. However, this is a town where murder, prostitution, and cons are openly accepted as part of

¹¹⁵ Trixie (Paula Malcomson) appears to be charged with the care of the prostitutes at the Gem Saloon, but as she is also a prostitute, her power and independence are lessened in comparison to Stubbs.

¹¹⁶ Smith, 'Whores, Ladies, and Calamity Jane', p. 90.

daily life. Lesbianism is no special sin amongst these sins. In this way *Deadwood* suggests that the freedom of the West allowed (some) women new and atypical opportunities for independence in the late nineteenth century.

Stubbs occupies a slightly middle ground in Bryant's classification of *Deadwood*'s women by dress. While Joanie is always dressed in beautiful finery—the silk, satin and velvet fabrics of her elaborately embroidered and beaded gowns revealing the expense that goes into procuring them—she is set apart from the other moneyed women of the town in ways that are different to prostitutes. Stubbs is never seen in public in her underwear, as she does not work as a prostitute herself. She is not branded by her costume as a sexual object for sale. However, Smith points out that Joanie's outfits typically feature 'just a touch of inappropriateness, i.e. wearing her bodice too low'.¹¹⁷ During our conversation, Bryant touched on the feminine but slightly sexual elements of Stubbs' costuming, explaining:

She has a little more décolleté, and also more ruffles, more bows [than other women]. I definitely made Joanie more over the top with all of the frills and bows and all those little really feminine details. That was about her being a Madam... She was probably... also a little bit more opulent, or—I don't want to say tacky—it's just that very different sensibility... in comparison to the sophistication [of] Alma Garrett.

Garret provides the most useful contrast for Joanie's general style. The two women wear similarly shaped dresses, typically seen in tightly corseted bodices and floor length skirts over several petticoats and a bustle. The key differences, as Bryant points out, reside in the details: Alma's refined simplicity (fewer ruffles and bows, less gaudy colours, dresses which cover her neck) highlights her class and wealth over and above Stubbs whose occasionally visible shoulders and cleavage, brightly coloured skirts and tightly-fitted jackets draw a little too much attention for her appearance to be classed as demure, thus reflecting her disreputable occupation.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 88.



Figure 26: *Deadwood's* Alma Garrett

The femininity in Stubbs' clothing fits with her maternal tendencies. While it is Joanie's job to look after the prostitutes of the Bella Union, it is her choice when, later, she takes on some responsibility for caring for and occasionally cleaning up Jane. This characteristic exists alongside her independence, the coexistence of which Bryant signified in the 'pairing' of masculine and feminine elements in Stubbs' clothing. The designer explained her work for Stubbs in terms of intermingling Joanie's profession as a Madam—signified by the ways in which the character dresses in a slightly gaudy style—with the independence echoed by the masculine connotations of the character's signature top hat:

I... loved the idea of her having masculine and feminine qualities to her costume... That's why, when she came to town, I made that beautiful top hat for her.... It's a

grey felt and it had that long equestrian-style white chiffon scarf and the very feminine filigree buckle on the front.¹¹⁸

The filigree and chiffon scarf, as decorative jewels and a lightweight fabric, are clothes more connotative of femaleness, given the connections of austerity with men and decoration with women in the Western world since the French Revolution and what Flügel termed the ‘The Great Masculine Renunciation’ as well as the association of less sturdy fabrics with women’s clothing.¹¹⁹



Figure 27: Joanie wearing her signature top hat

The hat itself, however, had the more masculine associations the designer was aiming to blend with such feminine aspects of Joanie’s costuming. Bryant spoke about using Stubbs’

¹¹⁸ Bryant, personal interview.

¹¹⁹ J.C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (3rd edn.; London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 110-11; Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), p. 134.

hat to highlight the character's rare freedom. Intrigued by Joanie's unusual position of power in a male-dominated world, the designer professed 'it really inspired me to portray her costume design... to say that she was very independent.'¹²⁰ The suggested masculinity of the hat functions as a mark of Joanie's elevated status through reflecting her 'manly' position of power in charge of the Bella Union women, and later her 'masculine role of business owner as the madam of... a high-class bordello.'¹²¹ Bryant also spoke about using masculine elements of costuming other than the top hat which she would layer over more girly items in Dickens' costumes, remarking that she saw Joanie as being a very feminine character, but that 'she'll have the element of the masculinity by wearing a leather belt with her dress', for example.¹²² Leather, with its connotations of ruggedness and favoured status amongst the working men of the settlement, hints at male traits in a similar way to Stubbs' top hat.

Yet independence is not the only characteristic in women generally considered to be male-like. The top hat has high-class connotations which help—along with the well-kept state of the Bella Union in comparison with the Gem Saloon—to differentiate the tone of Tolliver's establishment from its rival, where the premises and employees are frequently filthy, the workers' soiled clothes indicating squalid living conditions. Notably, Marjorie Garber, writing about transvestism, details how markers of high-class male privilege such as the tuxedo, cravat, and monocle were appropriated by moneyed members of the Parisian lesbian subculture of the 1920s, consequently imbuing later images of women wearing top hats with lesbian meanings. Once Stubbs' sexuality is revealed, the hat seems to have the same implication; it both links Joanie's desire for and attempts at seducing women with 'masculine' desires as in the gender-inversion model of homosexuality and seems to reference the top hat as a popular item of lesbian iconography. When Joanie dresses up for a wedding in 'Boy-the-Earth-Talks-To', she dons a new hat, this time made of straw, but which retains the top hat shape (Fig. 25).

¹²⁰ Bryant, personal interview.

¹²¹ Smith, 'Whores, Ladies, and Calamity Jane', p. 88.

¹²² Bryant, personal interview.



Figure 28: Joanie wearing her signature top hat

This referencing extends beyond allusions to interwar Parisian lesbians to make very specific use of an iconic Sapphic film moment which mirrors the lesbian facet of Stubbs' sexuality. Although *Deadwood* is set around 1876, the high-class cross-dressing lesbian is a visual reference point for contemporary audiences because, as Garber points out, the figure 'became a kind of signature in film as well as society...'¹²³ Although Joanie only wears a top hat and not a tuxedo, the image of a woman wearing this type of headgear is now inextricably linked to the scene in *Morocco* in which Marlene Dietrich, now famed for wearing such outfits in real life and having sexual liaisons with women, dons top hat and tails before kissing a female audience member as part of Amy Jolly's cabaret act.¹²⁴ Since women wearing top hats are still rare, and since the Dietrich image with its lesbian connotations is so ubiquitous, the Sapphic implications of a woman wearing a top hat are inescapable and easy to trace within visual culture. The eras and locations of *Morocco* and *Deadwood* are quite different, but even so the 1930 Dietrich outfit continues to reverberate

¹²³ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York & London: Routledge, 1992), p. 154.

¹²⁴ Drake Stutesman, 'Storytelling: Marlene Dietrich's Face and John Fredericks' Hats', in Rachel Moseley (ed.), *Fashioning Film Stars: Dress, Culture, Identity*, (London: BFI, 2005), p. 35. Stutesman quotes von Sternberg referring to Dietrich 'wearing the full-dress regalia of a man, high hat and all' in Berlin in the late 1930s.

through our collective imagination so that many might read Joanie's signature accessory as a historically lesbian signifier, with no need for any knowledge of either the origins in 1920s Parisian lesbian subculture or recognition of the fact that the fictional action of *Deadwood* technically precedes this.



Figure 29: Marlene Dietrich wearing a top hat in promotional image for *Morocco*

Interestingly, and again like Adair with Robin in *Desperate Housewives*, when Bryant designed Joanie's overall style (including the top hat) for the arrival of the Bella Union crew in 'Reconnoitering the Rim', she was not made aware that Stubbs would be written as a gay character.¹²⁵ 'It really wasn't about her being a lesbian', Bryant made clear to me; 'It was just more from the script, I was just really inspired by... the independence of that character, and the free spiritedness.'¹²⁶ The designer spoke about maintaining this focus on Joanie's independence as the series unfolded over three seasons, describing 'having her costumes

¹²⁵ Bryant, personal interview.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

become more opulent, more decorative, as the series went on' and Stubbs gained greater freedom, a strategy visible in the new outfit Joanie gains once she opens the Chez Ami. Having worn a V-neck, red velvet jacket (with, again, slightly manly brocaded cuffs and collar and triangular tails at the front worn hanging down over her skirts and petticoats) for much of the three seasons, in 'Tell Him Something Pretty', Joanie wears a new ensemble. A new red jacket, this time with a pleated front and square-shaped detail at the waist, is worn over a new quilted gold skirt. The additional texture of the garments increases Joanie's visual appeal, perhaps suggesting an increase in wealth and certainly connected to her increased independence within the settlement after the opening of her own establishment.

Bryant's non-lesbian interpretation of and intentions behind the associations of freedom and independence with masculine clothing on women does fit with elements of Garber's argument which are free of queer meanings. Garber details how the 1920s lesbian subcultural appropriation of such attire 'declared at once...its alliance with... masculine social and economic power'.¹²⁷ Like the inter-war Parisian lesbians who sported them, Joanie's top hat mirrors headgear designed for men to suggest she has access to money and a high status when compared to other women. However, this does not mean that lesbianism is entirely irrelevant in the costume. In *Deadwood*, Joanie's sexuality, as with Jane's action of entering a relationship with a woman, functions as synecdoche for independence. Incidentally, because Bryant uses costume details which suggest masculinity to infer Stubbs' independence, on occasion those same details also suggest homosexuality. Patriarchy and the notion (which Judith Butler worked so hard to complicate in *Gender Trouble*) that biological sex is anchored to both gender and cross-sex desire means that the concept of 'masculinity' in women represents an intersection of the meanings 'power', 'freedom' and often—important here—'lesbian'.¹²⁸ To the viewer, once given the knowledge of Joanie's interest in women, Stubbs' costumes might seem to deliberately suggest homosexuality.

¹²⁷ Garber, *Vested Interests*, p. 153.

¹²⁸ For more on masculine women as lesbian see Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, North Carolina & London: Duke University Press, 1998).

The fact that the speaking of 'free spiritedness' in Joanie's costuming also conjures up the spectre of lesbianism serves to highlight that Stubbs' sexuality contributes to the character's independence. Joanie's autonomy—and costumes which telegraph it—communicate what her lesbian identity also communicates: that she is a woman who is free from the totalising influence of men because, in some ways, she lives like a man. In *Deadwood*, Stubb's costumes were designed to support the function that the character's lesbianism plays within the series, thus, even if inadvertently, speaking both the independence and the gayness which acts as synecdoche for it. The inverse example of Jane, whose iconic style was borrowed by the text and rebooted in a lesbian manner, Stubbs's sexuality contributes to the revisionist project of *Deadwood*: Milch's liberation of Western women from domination by men.

Social change in *Mad Men*

Set in the 1960s, AMC's *Mad Men* follows the employees of Sterling Cooper (later Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce), an advertising agency in Manhattan, and their families, friends and lovers. Over the course of its five seasons aired to date, the series has portrayed two lesbian characters. In 'The Long Weekend', the first, Carol (Kate Norby) prepares for a girls' night out with her roommate, Joan Holloway (Christina Hendricks), one of the show's central characters. Before they leave, Carol confesses her long-term and heartfelt love for Joan, and is kindly but firmly rejected by Holloway, who manages to do so without directly acknowledging what Carol has actually revealed. Carol ends her evening weakly submitting to the desires of an overweight, middle-aged gentleman while Joan invites a similarly unattractive man into her bedroom. Viewers never see Carol again.

In 'The Rejected' another central character, Peggy Olsen (Elisabeth Moss) befriends Joyce Ramsay (Zosiah Mamet), who publicly attempts to woo Peggy at a party by kissing Peggy's ear. Peggy has a boyfriend, and appears not to be interested in women, so rejects Joyce, but the characters become friends and Joyce returns periodically in Season Four, and once

in Season Five. These lesbian characters are highly dissimilar, evidencing greatly differing levels of comfort with their own same-sex desires and, perhaps consequently, themselves in general. That one is far more 'out' than the other reflects the way in which the conservative morals of the era begin to shift over time, so that different ways of being lesbian in *Mad Men* act as synecdoche for social changes taking place in the 1960s.

Bryant's costume designs bring out the differences between the characters. When we first meet Carol, she blends almost seamlessly into the famously stylish *Mad Men* world. Sets assembled with painstaking detail by the teams headed up by production designer Dan Bishop, art director Christopher Brown, and set decorators Amy Wells and Claudette Didul create the textured, period-accurate diegetic world demanded by notoriously fastidious series creator, Matt Weiner.¹²⁹ Bryant's colourful, varied, often sumptuous costumes complement this diegetic world which almost hysterically draws attention to its surface details, the better to highlight that there is much tension simmering away beneath them. Appearing in the Sterling Cooper offices to meet Joan on two occasions, Carol is outfitted in a manner similar to the office's well-dressed secretaries.¹³⁰ Arriving to whisk Joan away on a weekend out of town, she is only visible from the waist up but sports a green jacket with matching round plastic buttons centred down the front. The high, round neckline is modest, with faux pocket detail high on the chest and a collar which matches the neckline exactly, adding plain yet fetching detail to the garment. We also catch a glimpse of white gloves at the bottom of the frame, and Carol carries a light overcoat on one arm. The coat and gloves are proprietary out-door items of clothing that were still in fashion for women at that point so, in this sense, she is dressed 'correctly'. Her hair is extremely styled, with two large curls emanating from a centre part, neatly gathered and shaped into a ponytail at the back, which is itself sculpted into a twist at the top with a tiny decorative bun at the bottom. Carol adheres to high-maintenance codes of femininity.

¹²⁹ In a 2009 article on *Mad Men* in *Vanity Fair*, Weiner's attention to detail was described as 'maniacal'. Writer Bruce Handy recounted a story of Weiner's dislike of a bowl of apples on set which were deemed to be too 'pumped up' for the 1960s setting. Weiner apparently ordered that they be replaced with 'smaller, dumpier fruit' for the shot. Handy, 'Don and Betty's Paradise Lost', *Vanity Fair* 589 (September 2009), p. 134, 128-134 & 210-212.

¹³⁰ In 'Red in the Face'.



Figure 30: Carol's first appearance in *Mad Men*

Much to the contrary, and very unusual in the traditionally gendered world of *Mad Men*, Joyce typically wears trousers, ties her hair back in a simple, unadorned ponytail, and is most often seen wearing a grey tweed blazer, teaming it with various sweaters and collared shirts. Offering a slightly different example to *Desperate Housewives* and *Deadwood*—and setting aside the exceptional example of Calamity Jane's famous image—at first glance Joyce does appear to be costumed in a manner that is designed to communicate her lesbianism, although Bryant's intentions as recounted during our conversation trouble this classification of the designs. However, costumes for both characters once again emphasise the function that lesbianism plays within the text. This function, as with the previous examples, fits in with a central theme of the series, suggesting a deliberate reason for the inclusion of lesbianism within a primarily heterosexual text.

Before the Season Three premiere aired in 2009, series creator Weiner gave an interview to *The New York Times*. Speaking of both the passage of time and the particular decade featured in *Mad Men*, Weiner spoke about what he saw as the central theme of the series: 'I'm interested in how people respond to change', he explained. 'That's what the show's

about.¹³¹ Opening in March 1960 and currently having covered up to April 1967, *Mad Men* is a series highly concerned with the effect of social and political change on individuals, viewed from the knowing perspective of the modern day audience member. While there is a primary focus on the reactions characters have to events in their own lives, the social upheaval that characterised the 1960s in the US—with the civil rights movement and the beginning of women's liberation—has made shifting social realities an increasingly noticeable factor in the characters' lives on the series as the years progress. As the youth culture grows and various causes gain headway, the creative personnel at Sterling Cooper alter their campaigns and working models, hiring Peggy away from her secretarial job to become a copywriter in the second season and forced to employ an African American woman to work as a secretary in 'Tea Leaves'.



Figure 31: Joyce's first appearance in *Mad Men* (left)

One facet of the portrayal of social change in *Mad Men* is the representation of gay and lesbian characters. The passage of time in the series so far has been accompanied by a move away from the necessary closeting of homosexuality in gay characters towards slightly

¹³¹ Fred Kaplan, 'Drama Confronts a Dramatic Decade', *nytimes.com*, (9 August 2009) <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/09/arts/television/09kapl.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all>, accessed 4 September 2012.

more accepted, somewhat open lifestyles. This is not restricted to lesbian characters; gay men also play their part in depicting progressing times. Salvador Romano (Bryan Batt), the art director at Sterling Cooper until 'Wee Small Hours', lives a miserable, closeted existence: marrying for show but pining after colleague Ken Cosgrove (Aaron Staton); living in fear that his boss' discovery of his liaison with a hotel bellhop in 'Out of Town' will come to light; resisting sexual advances of men out of fear for a time, as with Lee Garner in 'Wee Small Hours', and finally dangerously cruising for gay sex later in the episode. By contrast, in 'The Jet Set'—which is set in 1962/3—Kurt (Edin Gali), a younger, European character, casually announces in the break room that he is a homosexual.

This is so outré in the context of the era and social setting that the congregated men and women assure him that he must be using the wrong word. Kurt proceeds to explain exactly *how* he is a homosexual: 'I make love with the man, not the woman.' His more open attitude is a complete contrast to Sal's closeted desires and behaviour. Kurt's European nationality stands in for the early gay rights movements of the continent, his foreign provenance used to explain either the sexuality itself or Kurt's candour, or perhaps both: 'He's from Europe; it's different there', a friend offers to clear the air following the admission.¹³² Kurt is of a later generation than Sal and feels more able to be open about his sexual preference. Sal witnesses Kurt's blasé statements and the homophobic responses they elicit once Kurt has left the room. The audience is invited to consider Sal's silent reaction during a close up following the incident, directly contrasting his closeted sexuality with Kurt's openness. Kurt's behaviour foreshadows developments in American society, particularly the rise of the gay movement in North America following the Stonewall riots of 1969.

¹³² Lillian Faderman wrote about the German organisation Scientific-Humanitarian Committee which was founded in 1897 and 'used the congenital theory' that gays were born homosexuals, 'to challenge legal sanctions against sodomy.' The Committee argued that there was 'no reason for social concern about homosexual seduction, since someone who was not a congenital invert could not be seduced by a person of the same sex.' Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America* (Penguin: New York, 1992), p. 59. Date of founding taken from *Encyclopaedia Britannica* online, <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/528924/Scientific-Humanitarian-Committee>>, accessed 19 December 2012.

Carol and Joyce are similarly differentiated. Both make an unsuccessful pass at a lead female character, and both are rejected. The differences between the characters and what happens to them in the narrative following each rejection reflects the slight social change that takes place between the incidents, which occur in 1960 and 1965, respectively. As I have argued elsewhere, Joan is generally shown to be progressively out of step with changing mores as the series unfolds: her worldview fashionable and powerful in the opening season but soon falling behind the times and contrasted with the more forward-thinking Peggy.¹³³ Joan and Peggy's generational difference is demonstrated by their reactions to the lesbian characters: whereas Joan closes down the discussion with Carol, never verbalising her obvious comprehension of her roommate's confession and all but forcing the woman back into heterosexuality, Peggy acknowledges the sexual nature of Joyce's kiss, politely turning Joyce down by saying she has a boyfriend and appearing to be unfazed, answering Joyce's wisecrack 'He doesn't own your vagina' with the light-hearted response 'No, but he's renting it.'¹³⁴

That we never see Carol after the episode in which she confesses her true feelings to Joan suggests that the latter cuts off contact with her roommate following the incident, or at least demonstrates that Joan's re-closeting of Carol's desires was the likely end of any dialogue on the topic. It is also notable that the revelation of Carol's lesbianism comes as a surprise and is only mentioned once, framed as a shocking moment. Peggy, by contrast, continues to be friends with Joyce after the rejected kiss, and Joyce frequently shows up in the office, even licking Peggy's face in 'The Beautiful Girls' to make a point to SCDP employee Stan Rizzo (Jay R. Ferguson) about her ability to pleasure women. Stan sardonically refers to Joyce as Peggy's boyfriend and tells Joyce that he is not shocked by 'lesbian antics'.

The differences between the behaviour of Carol and Joyce as well as the variations between the reactions of Joan (and the roomful of bemused Sterling Cooper employees who witness Kurt's outing) and Peggy and Stan are symptomatic of differences in tone between earlier

¹³³ Fiona Cox, "'So Much Woman': female objectification, narrative complexity and feminist temporality in AMC's *Mad Men*", *Invisible Culture* 17, "Where Do You Want Me To Start?": *Producing History Through Mad Men* (2012).

¹³⁴ See 'The Rejected'.

and later seasons of *Mad Men* which are in turn indicative of the social change in attitudes and behaviour which occurred in the 1960s. Carol is a far more closeted character than Joyce, forced to hide her sexual interest in her roommate behind her attempts to fit in with the glamorous world of New York working women. Yet cracks appear in her façade, suggesting a hint of something being concealed. In contrast, Joyce's blazers, trousers and pulled-back ponytail stick out like a sore thumb in the (by then) Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce world of jewel-tone dresses, blouses, skirts, visible legs and curled-and-set hair on women. Joyce's visible difference from the other women speaks a confidence in her identity that Carol does not possess, whether one reads overt signalling of lesbianism into Joyce's image or not. By comparing the costuming of Carol and Joyce and exploring how their construction through dress intersects with their respective experiences of their own lesbianism, we can see how dress is used alongside action to emphasise the effects of social and political change as depicted within the series.

The tag-line on the DVD box set of *Mad Men's* first season—'Where the truth lies'—outlines one of the central themes of the premiere year or two of the programme. Many characters conceal secrets, either from someone in particular or from everyone in general, with the apex of this conceit presented in the form of Don Draper (Jon Hamm). Don's real name, it is quickly revealed, is Dick Whitman. Whitman took on Draper's identity after the real Don's death in order to return early from his military tour of duty in the Korean War. The new 'Don Draper' lives in fear of his secret being found out, a fear that continues into the fourth season, although over time Don becomes far more open about his true identity with certain people. Peggy also hides some major secrets, such as her love for a married man, Pete Campbell (Vincent Kartheiser), and the fact that she gives birth to his baby, which is given up for adoption.

Carol, who is closeted up until her confession, fits within this world of secrets and lies. Prior to telling Joan, she is the epitome of a character closeted by both action and appearance: until her disclosure, she does not reveal her love, and at first glance, nothing of her clothing 'speaks' her homosexual desire. Bryant deliberately made sure this was the case because

of the particular setting of the first season: 'Carol really could not express herself in the world in which she lived', the designer made clear.¹³⁵ Working as a secretary in 1960s Manhattan, the character is required to fit within a world that demands flawless, decorative femininity from women, designed to appeal to heterosexual men but remain respectable, as advocated by Helen Gurley Brown and her lifestyle manuals for the '60s working woman, *Sex and the Single Girl* and *Sex and the Office*.¹³⁶ Joan's advice dispensed to the secretaries working at Sterling Cooper—telling Peggy to shorten her skirts and wear scarves, commenting on Peggy's weight gain and chastising a new secretary for revealing too much cleavage—demonstrates the sort of image expected of Carol.¹³⁷ As Bryant confirmed during our interview, 'that character was definitely... about being very much like how all the other girls were in the office and on the streets of New York: very put-together, and very feminine.'¹³⁸ Accordingly, Carol's clothing fits within the strictly gendered style of the time, and the audience finds out about her lesbian desire at the same moment as Joan. Carol 'comes out' vocally; her image and behaviour does not indicate any major difference from the female heterosexual characters on the series.

There are hints in Carol's image, however, that her femininity is slightly compromised in comparison to other women. When we first encounter her in 'Red in the Face' Carol does not appear to wear any eye shadow or eyeliner, nor is there any visible blush. She does seem to be wearing lipstick, yet of a tone very close to that of her own lip-colour so that it is not very striking or noticeable as make-up. In comparison with Joan, whose pink lips and cheeks, thick black eyeliner, false eyelashes and gently shaded eyelids are a significant part of her well-maintained, bombshell appearance, Carol's much more bare face acts as a contrast through which attentive viewers may be able to read an alternative femininity. A similar strategy is used when we meet Carol for the second time, in 'The Long Weekend',

¹³⁵ Bryant, personal interview.

¹³⁶ Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl* (New Jersey: Barricade Books, 2003); Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Office* (New Jersey: Barricade Books, 2004). Weiner has spoken of the influence Gurley Brown's books had on the series, and on the characterisation of Joan in particular. See Kathy Lyford, 'Mad Men Q & A: I'm fascinated that people get so much out of it', *Season Pass*, (22 October 2008) <http://weblogs.variety.com/season_pass/2008/10/mad-men-qa.html>, accessed 21 April 2011.

¹³⁷ In 'Smoke Gets In Your Eyes', Joan tells Peggy 'Don't take this the wrong way, but a girl like you with those darling little ankles—I'd find a way to make 'em sing. Also, men love scarves'; encourages Peggy to drink tea and therefore lose weight in 'Shoot', and in 'The New Girl', the large-chested but appropriately covered-up Joan tells a secretary 'Your décolletage is distracting'.

¹³⁸ Bryant, personal interview.

once again in the Sterling Cooper offices, when she unexpectedly turns up, seeking consolation after being fired.

Once more, Carol wears a very 'correct' outfit, in the sense that she is appropriately put-together according to 'rules' of clothing for women of the time: she wears a light brown dress (or perhaps skirt) which is cinched at the waist and falls to below the knee. Over this she wears a short, lightweight, fitted white jacket with a diagonal criss-cross pattern in brown which matches the skirt and is picked out by more brown on the large, round fabric buttons which fasten down the front. Her white pillbox hat matches both the white of the jacket and her slightly off-white, short day gloves, once again as expected at the time of the well-dressed woman out-of-doors. A simple, dainty gold watch and off-white and brown handbag complete the rigorously matched ensemble. Her hair complements the outfit, with the return of the centre-parted large curls at the front of her hairline, although this time they are sculpted up and over her ears to be swept into a bun which pokes out from beneath her hat, held in place by a small hairnet. The clothes are extremely feminine.



Figure 32: Joan and Carol (l-r) in 'The Long Weekend'

We learn that Carol has just come from work, so this is her professional image. She looks ladylike and professional: extremely well presented. Yet the last piece of the puzzle is not quite completed, as Carol still appears not to be wearing much or any make-up. She is also extremely sweaty, having walked through the city in considerable heat. Joan draws attention to Carol's slightly dishevelled appearance by commenting 'I see you didn't take my advice about the dress shields' (underarm pads designed to absorb sweat, protecting clothing and preventing sweat marks). Because of the import *Mad Men* places on highly stylised images of both men and women, Carol's subtly ruffled presentation suggests a deliberate effort to establish difference from other women in the series.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Peggy offers a singular case in opposition to many of the other female Sterling Cooper/Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce employees, but unfortunately I do not have the space to explore the reasons for or subtleties of this here. I will, however, mention that her slightly dowdy image in comparison to the other women on the



Figure 33: Carol (minus dress shields)

Speaking about Carol's slightly 'off' appearance on these two occasions, Bryant remarked:

She tries. She tries but she's not trying as hard as some of the other girls... That, to me—her whole hair and make-up and costumes...—[was] about being just more subtle but not as girly... in comparison to a lot of the girls in *Mad Men*. You know, so she's a little less done up.¹⁴⁰

The intentions behind this decision can be interpreted on three slightly overlapping levels, with important implications for the function of Carol's sexuality within *Mad Men*. From one perspective, the character's slightly distressed style might be understood as suggesting that lesbian women are naturally 'different' to their heterosexual counterparts. I have argued elsewhere that under the Hays Code costume designers sometimes used insufficient femininity as a subtle means of signalling lesbianism within Hollywood films.¹⁴¹ In particular, in *The Children's Hour* (William Wyler, The Mirisch Corporation, USA, 1961), Martha Dobie (Shirley MacLaine) is revealed to harbour lesbian desires for her colleague, Karen Wright

series contributes to her star persona, which no doubt played a part in Elisabeth Moss being cast as none other than Martha Dobie in a 2011 London production of *The Children's Hour*, supporting my argument that lesbianism is often read into or suggested by less-than-perfect femininity.

¹⁴⁰ Bryant, personal interview.

¹⁴¹ Cox, 'Closet Cases: Costuming, Lesbian Identities and Desire, Hollywood Cinema and the Motion Picture Production Code', *The International Journal of the Image* 1:4 (2011), pp. 43-56.

(Audrey Hepburn). MacLaine is very deliberately costumed so as to suggest a defective, lesser femininity in comparison to Hepburn: Martha's clothes are dowdy where Karen's are chic, Martha's are loose and rumpled where Karen's are fitted and neat, Martha's hair is unkempt whereas Karen's is styled and tidy. The differences of characters like Martha from straight women tap into concepts of lesbians as unattractive based on Havelock-Ellis-style stereotypes of gay women as 'virtually indistinguishable from (although less attractive than) "normal" women.'¹⁴² By exhibiting minor 'failures' in Carol's appearance, *Mad Men* echoes the historic use of frumpy designs to hint at lesbian sexuality.

The second layer of meaning suggested by Carol's costuming is that of her femininity as subterfuge. Whereas in *Desperate Housewives*, Robin was not shown to be using her femininity to deliberately hide her lesbianism, given her closeted status, Carol's appearance is in fact a masquerade. When Joan Riviere wrote about 'Womanliness as Masquerade' in 1929, she focused on a female psychoanalytic client who partook in intellectual work which required public speaking. Riviere reported that the woman, immediately after her speaking engagements, sought out father-figures for 'flirting and coquetting', putting on a masquerade of womanliness in 'an unconscious attempt to ward off the reprisals she anticipated from the father-figures after her intellectual performance'.¹⁴³

Carol, if she knows what she is hiding behind her mask of womanliness, makes use of femininity not to hide masculine intellectual performances, but to cover up what Freud interpreted as masculine desires.¹⁴⁴ The character uses her appearance to project the image of a heterosexual woman, avoiding any overt suggestion of lesbian desires. The cracks in her image hint at the strain of that masquerade. This brings us to the third layer of meaning in Bryant's costume designs for the character, which is that Carol's appearance suggests frailty and a slightly introverted nature. The effort of hiding her truth beneath the

¹⁴² Havelock Ellis, Appendix B, 'The School-Friendships of Girls', p. 374. Quoted in Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film* (New York: Penguin, 1992), p. 8.

¹⁴³ Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as Masquerade', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1929), p. 305.

¹⁴⁴ See Sigmund Freud, 'Female Sexuality', in James Strachey (trans.), Angela Richards (ed.), *The Penguin Freud Library Volume 7: On Sexuality*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 376. Also see Freud, 'Femininity', in James Strachey (trans.), James Strachey and Angela Richards (eds.), *The Penguin Freud Library Volume 2: New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 164.

surface of normality affects Carol's ability to maintain the veneer of stylish heterosexuality, suggesting the misery of 'the closet syndrome.'¹⁴⁵

Bryant spoke about choosing the green ensemble in 'Red in the Face' because of its slightly unflattering effect on the actress' skin tone. Quizzed about the outfit, the designer explained: 'it was... pea-green', noting that she chose it because 'I wanted her skin tones not to be so bright' in order to bring out 'that almost shy quality about her: this sort of feeble quality'.¹⁴⁶ As with her designs in *Deadwood*, Bryant was keen to point out that her intentions were not to suggest that Carol's subtly compromised appearance was directly linked to the character's lesbianism. The less than perfect image, according to the designer, reflected the character's personality and emotional state prior to her confession to Joan: 'She was a little bit of a mousy character' the designer agreed, '[but] that wasn't really about her being a lesbian, it was more about her discovering things about herself, and also being able to come out of her shell where she confesses.'¹⁴⁷

Bryant attributed Carol's flawed femininity to the telegraphing of something akin to shyness. However, the designer's use of the phrase 'come out' is particularly interesting here given the phrase's common contemporary use to mean making homosexuality known to others, because this is of course what Carol does when she makes Joan aware of her desires. What Carol is discovering about herself (if she is not already aware of it) is her lesbianism. The emphasis Bryant placed on the disconnection between shyness and lesbianism is arguably moot in this instance because Carol's 'mousy' personality is so connected with the closeting of her sexuality. The designer's pointed separation of the two was possibly inspired more out of anxiety over appearing to suggest that being unattractive is suggestive of lesbian sexuality—thus reinforcing a negative stereotype—than indicative of a belief that the costume designs for Carol were not at all connected to the character's closeted lesbianism. Bryant herself acknowledged that the character being 'not quite as done up' as she might be is directly linked to her sexuality; when I questioned whether Carol's somewhat

¹⁴⁵ Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harpers & Row, 1981), p. 153.

¹⁴⁶ Bryant, personal interview.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

low-key appearance was something that Bryant aimed for because of Carol being gay, the designer answered: 'Yeah, for sure.'¹⁴⁸ Carol is under-styled and under-dressed to express feebleness, which is directly linked to her inability to express her true emotions; she is 'mousy' because she cannot 'come out of her shell'. All three layers of meaning (difference from heterosexual women, masquerade, and being inhibited) intersect to indicate the function that Carol's lesbianism plays within the text: demonstrating how the mores of the time impact on characters, and specifically how the conservative social and political atmosphere restricted those experiencing same-sex desires.

In the scene in which Carol does 'come out', Bryant used a slightly different strategy. When the character confesses her love for Joan in 'The Long Weekend' she is dressed in the most glamorous outfit we see her wearing, and is also shown wearing visible make-up for the first time. Her hair is parted slightly to the side and worn in a high, bouffant ponytail. The make-up accompanies a blue dress with echoes of Dior's 1947 'New Look' silhouette, with a fitted, pleated bodice, a square neck-line which shows just a hint of cleavage, and a wide, flared skirt that begins in pleats at the waist but flattens out at the hem. The blue is broken up by purple embroidered flowers, with a small purple bow at the waist.¹⁴⁹ Bruzzi has written about the way in which the 'New Look' dress has historically been used by Hollywood 'as one of the most persistent means of representing classic and ostensibly traditional femininity.'¹⁵⁰ The bright colour, the 'New Look'-style cut of the dress, and the fact that Bryant accessorises the outfit with that most conservatively ladylike of jewels, a pearl necklace, combine to speak an attractive, conventional girlishness.

In the scene, the two women prepare for an evening out—seeking men in order to forget two others who have upset them—and Carol has allegedly prepared herself for the heterosexual male gaze: the express purpose of their evening. Yet it becomes clear through her

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ The dress belonged to Bryant's mother and was made by her Grandmother, according to Bryant herself, interviewed by Banana Republic Creative Director in the cross-promotional AMC & Banana Republic video *Mad About Style: Dresses* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNNykvI3Jv8>>, accessed 22 November 2010. The garment is therefore genuinely vintage, presumably from the approximate era. The authenticity of the dress itself confirms that the look is appropriately feminine for the time.

¹⁵⁰ Bruzzi, "It will be a magnificent obsession": Femininity, Desire, and the New Look in 1950s Hollywood Melodrama', in Adrienne Munich (ed.), *Fashion in Film*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press: 2011), p 160.

confession just who (and which gender) Carol is more interested in attracting. According to Bryant, Norby's outfit in this scene was concerned with 'wanting to be sure that the audience really has this surprise, when she confesses to Joan... [because] you wouldn't look at her and suspect that, "Oh, she's gay"'. Making use of the notion of Carol's 'womanliness' as masquerade, the designer deliberately misled the audience so as to maximise the dramatic impact of the sequence. Bryant explained that she 'really wanted to use that element of [Carol] being the most feminine, the most girly, the most dressed up that we've seen her' in order to compound the surprise.¹⁵¹ Interestingly, lesbianism is separated from glamour in this statement; the designer implies that because the character appears 'dressed up', she is therefore at her most unrecognisable as gay. Lesbianism is also suggested as slightly detached from femininity; the surprise of Carol's same-sex desire is not intended to stem merely from the fact that Carol has 'dressed up', but that she has done so in a 'girly' fashion. That Bryant notes Carol's femininity is misleading in this scene reveals an acknowledgment that the female who is visible as 'not-woman' might in fact telegraph aspects of lesbianism, as Judith Halberstam explores in *Female Masculinity*.¹⁵²



Figure 34: Carol confesses her love for Joan in 'The Long Weekend'

¹⁵¹ Bryant, personal interview.

¹⁵² Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, p. 21.

The masquerade intended by this pretty, feminine image seems to be effective in closeting homosexuality, according to a few of my interviewees. Shown a screen grab of Carol and Joan during the scene, two respondents read this feminine image as indicative of heterosexuality in Carol. Amy said ‘She looks more like a housewife than she does a lesbian... She doesn’t look like a lesbian at all.’¹⁵³ Charlotte echoed these thoughts, this time examining an image of Carol during the ‘dress shields’ scene, pointing out that she thought Norby was ‘not lesbian-looking at all.’¹⁵⁴ The ‘at all’ which ends both sentences indicates that, at least for these two women, Carol’s image did not seem to speak any lesbianism whatsoever. For viewers who felt the same way, the element of shock must have worked as envisioned. The surprise is the point: we are intended to misread Carol’s image as straight both because this increases the dramatic potential of the scene and because Carol herself dresses in a way that keeps her desires secret.

Like Adair’s design for Robin, Bryant’s altered strategy in this part of the episode offers audiences a case of costume being used to deliberately *not* telegraph an aspect of character. That this happens just at the moment when that aspect of character is revealed demonstrates how the costume functions in that moment to telegraph an aspect of narrative instead: the apex of Carol’s glamour in costume in fact supports, as Bryant points out, the moment when the character is finally able to ‘come out of her shell’ and confess her interest in Joan. Feeling confident, Carol can finally look it. What happens after that is highly interesting because the meaning of the same costume alters as the scenes progress. Carol wears the same blue and purple dress at the end of the episode when, instead of successfully persuading Joan to ‘think of [her] as a boy’ as she suggests, Joan disappears into her bedroom with an unattractive, middle-aged man and Carol sadly submits to the unwanted advances of a similarly depressing male suitor in their shared living space. The character’s hopes are dashed, her advances rejected, yet she remains in the dress which, earlier, signalled hopefulness and newfound confidence. At this point it will be useful to

¹⁵³ Amy, personal interview.

¹⁵⁴ Charlotte, personal interview

return to Bruzzi's consideration of the use of the New Look dress in costume design: in her article on the use of Dior's style in 1950s Hollywood melodrama, Bruzzi argues that

the New Look silhouette becomes in many films a notable site of conflict between what the characters around them (notably the men) want these women to be and what the women themselves feel they are like or might want to be.¹⁵⁵

This is of course evident in Carol's costume at the end of 'The Long Weekend'; she does not want to be with the unappealing man but lets him realise his desires for sex with her because her desired relationship with Joan has proved impossible. The dress therefore becomes a visual marker of the physical masquerade Carol enacts in submitting to the man: a reminder that what she wishes to be and do is at odds with what the man wants from her, the fulfilment of which she—feeble once more—despondently allows. As in Bruzzi's example from *Magnificent Obsession* (Douglas Sirk, Universal Pictures, USA, 1954), as well as, coincidentally, her concluding example of another New Look dress in *Mad Men*, this time worn by frustrated housewife Betty Draper (January Jones) in an emotional breakdown, Bryant's use of Carol's New Look dress becomes quite subversive at this point in 'The Long Weekend'. By the end of the episode, the dress comes to signify, like the designs in the Sirk film and as seen on Jones, a woman's 'repressed and thwarted emotions', telegraphing the distance between what she truly desires and the life she is forced to live instead. The dress which signalled happiness transforms into the sartorial expression of '[her] unhappiness with [her] lot as conventional wom[a]n'.¹⁵⁶

It is important to remember that in 1960 convention meant a society in which opposite-sex relationships represented the only legitimate site for the expression of sexual desire, the social and political environment which Adrienne Rich termed 'compulsory heterosexuality'.¹⁵⁷ It is this conservative atmosphere which gives Carol's lesbianism the particular meaning it creates within the text, which returns us once more to the consideration of her function within the series and how this impacts on costume. That Carol is quite strongly visually closeted—

¹⁵⁵ Bruzzi, "It will be a Magnificent Obsession"..., p. 160.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁵⁷ See Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', pp. 227-254.

really only readable as slightly unfeminine in retrospect—is at odds with the fact that she is one of very few *Mad Men* characters to verbalise feelings in early episodes, particularly any as controversial as these. While her costumes signify the workings of the literal closet enacted to maintain metaphorical closeting of her desire, Carol is actually awarded a highly irregular moment of honesty within the first season. Interestingly, her rare frankness is partly the result of the costuming strategy necessitated by the conservative setting. That Carol's moment of honesty is not rewarded but results in her humiliating and submissive exchange with her 'date' at the end of the evening, followed by her exit from the series altogether, demonstrates that remaining closeted was in fact a shrewd survival mechanism in the 1960 depicted in *Mad Men*. Carol hides her sexuality in order to avoid these kinds of negative consequences, and therefore Bryant needed to costume the character in a way to render her, for the most part, unrecognisable as lesbian. This necessary closeting is Carol's function within the narrative, which uses the character's lived experience of lesbianism as synecdoche for the results of conservative restrictions in the early 1960s.

In revealing her feelings for Joan, Carol makes herself an impossible figure in the first season narrative, where secrets are common and truth is feared, and is swiftly disposed of. In contrast, Joyce is able to be much more open about her sexuality. We don't witness a verbal 'coming out'; Joyce prefers to make her desire known with the physical gesture of kissing Peggy's ear. There are hints before this attempted kiss that she might be a lesbian: for example when we see Joyce apparently admiring Peggy while the latter walks away after their first encounter in the elevator, and when Joyce is comically patronising towards Megan (Jessica Paré), the SCDP receptionist, calling her 'sweetheart' as a man might (both incidents occur in 'The Rejected'). This openness is situated within the series as part of Joyce's overall characterisation in opposition to conservatism and authority. She spends much of her time with a group of artists who are young, idealistic and free-spirited. They throw a party in a warehouse which is raided by the police, reference Warhol and attempt to submit nude photographs to *Life Magazine*, where Joyce works as an assistant photo editor. Joyce is part of a different culture to that which we are typically shown in the series: she and her friends dress in an artistic fashion, giving off the impression of stylish modernity. Joyce

is unafraid to telegraph her alternative lifestyle. The character is thus a far cry from the feeble, shy, closeted Carol whose lesbianism damns her to silence and humiliation.

Joyce rebels through her appearance: her clothing speaking her non-conformity. Far more overtly than Carol, Joyce's clothes suggest an alternative or perhaps muted femininity in comparison with other women in the series. To begin with, she wears a blazer. Although not tight, the garment is somewhat fitted to her shape, so is not literally a man's item of clothing. However, otherwise, it looks like one, with its light grey tone, lapels and general cut and design. In comparison with the women in the SCDP office who overwhelmingly tend to wear bright colours and clothes which are cut and designed very differently to the omnipresent suits worn by men, Joyce may as well be wearing the latter. The blazer was made of 'heather tweed', according to the designer, which she felt was appropriate for the intellectual side of the character. The connection with intelligence and knowledge works well because tweeds are often worn by teachers and professors in popular media, as with Harrison Ford's Indiana Jones in a three piece tweed suit and glasses while lecturing on archaeology in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, Lucasfilm/Paramount, USA, 1981) and Harvard Professor of Religious Symbology Robert Langdon in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, who wears Harris tweed.¹⁵⁸

With the possible exception of Peggy, other women in *Mad Men* do not dress to appear intellectual but apparently aim to look beautiful and respectable, as suggested by Joan's frequent sartorial advice. Other women also typically dress in a variety of bright colours, styles, cuts and garments from day to day. Joyce, on the other hand, always seems to wear her blazer when in the office, sporting it as a kind of 'uniform', in Bryant's words.¹⁵⁹ Anne Hollander writes about the suit as the 'perfect... visualization of modern male pride', noting the origins of the modern suit in Western male fashions.¹⁶⁰ The masculine elements of Mamet's look were picked up on by some of my interviewees, with Charlotte remarking that the actress seemed to be 'wearing quite masculine clothes', and Emily deeming Joyce

¹⁵⁸ Bryant, personal interview. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2003), p. 9, 27.

¹⁵⁹ Bryant, personal interview.

¹⁶⁰ Hollander, *Sex and Suits*, p. 55.

'Slightly boyish'.¹⁶¹ In addition to her blazer, the character also always wears trousers, which we have never seen any other women do while in the office. Women, as a rule, did not wear trousers in offices at this point, so her decision to do so is extremely 'bold', as pointed out by 'Tom and Lorenzo', who write a style blog and dedicate a lot of space to analysing the costumes on *Mad Men*.¹⁶²

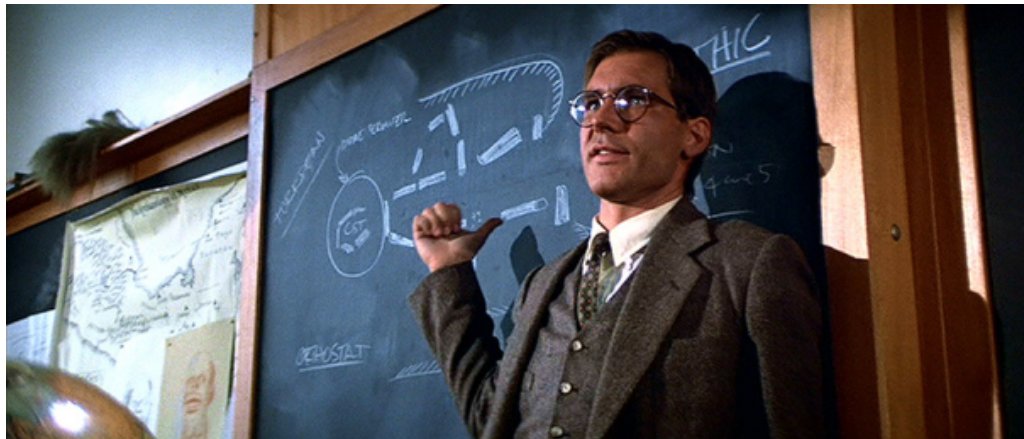


Figure 35: Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones in tweed in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*



Figure 36: Joyce in blazer and trousers

¹⁶¹ Charlotte, personal interview; Emily, email to author, 11 June 2012.

¹⁶² Tom and Lorenzo. 'Mad Style: The Rejected', (18 August 2010) <<http://tomandlorenzo2.blogspot.com/2010/08/mad-style-rejected.html>>, accessed 20 November 2010.

In addition to this, Joyce does not appear to wear make-up, and her hair is extremely different to that of the other women on the series: at work, she wears it straight and in a low ponytail, held together with a black hair-elastic. Una termed this a 'plain' look; Ruby described it as 'homely', and Charlotte remarked upon the mismatch between the length of Mamet's hair and what essentially was not done with it, pointing out 'she's got long hair, but it's kind of like very plain and drab.'¹⁶³ The other women in the office have elaborately curled and coiffed styles with a lot of detail, using hair-pieces and other methods to add body and height. Even Peggy, who makes a point of not using her looks or femaleness to get ahead at work, always has curled and styled hair. In contrast, Joyce's hair is low- and almost no-maintenance: not decorative at all. She pulls it away from her face and keeps it in place, and there is no attempt at elaboration. Visually, therefore, Joyce stands out from the other working women on the show. Her plain, homely look and the lack of effort she puts into styling her hair, alongside her trousers and blazer, mark her out as very different to the women of SCDP.

Joyce's slight manliness could be construed as indicative of lesbian tendencies, especially as the viewer is very quickly made aware of the character's lesbianism, and because of the continuing popular connections between masculinity in women and lesbian sexuality. During my online interview with Tabitha, the respondent even specifically named blazers as part of a list of what she termed 'lesbian staples' and thus as something that she and others might read as indicating lesbianism in the character. Historically, blazers have been used to telegraph obvious lesbian sexuality on screen, perhaps most memorably in the case of the tweed-and-sensible-shoes-wearing abusive butch Sister George (Beryl Reed) in *The Killing of Sister George* (Robert Aldrich, Palomar Pictures International, USA/UK, 1968). As with Joanie Stubbs in *Deadwood*, costumes designed to telegraph independence might also be read as communicating lesbianism.

¹⁶³ Una, personal interview; Ruby, email to author, 18 May 2012; Charlotte, personal interview.



Figure 37: Beryl Reid in tweed blazer in *The Killing of Sister George*

Interestingly, once more, Bryant downplayed the connections of Mamet's costumes with lesbianism, speaking instead—again, as with Joanie Stubbs—about the character's masculinity in terms of her independence from conventional society. The designer acknowledged that her designs for Joyce did feature aspects of masculinity, including 'a lot of stripes', for example, with which the designer described herself as 'playing with that whole masculinity thing'.¹⁶⁴ Stripes, of course, are one of the few decorative embellishments used in male clothing design and therefore evidently considered acceptably masculine in dress. For Bryant, however, the primary meaning of the masculine elements of Mamet's costumes was modernity. She spoke of research that demonstrated some women did wear trousers to offices at that time, but noted that it 'was a new, more modern thing to do'.¹⁶⁵ Elaborating further on why she felt that expressing modernity through trousers was right for the character, the designer explained:

[Joyce] was experimenting with drugs, she was going to all the hip parties in New York, she was a rule breaker, she was very hip and so for her to be in trousers to go to the office, I think, was saying not so much "I'm a lesbian" but it was more about

¹⁶⁴ Bryant, personal interview.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

“I’m breaking the rules, I’m breaking boundaries, I’m not doing what all the other girls do.”¹⁶⁶

The character’s modernism does extend to outfits that aren’t necessarily masculine, such as the white mod jacket she wears to the party in ‘The Rejected’ (Fig. 38). The jacket and its accompanying ‘cigarette pants’, and red turtleneck mark Joyce as part of the ‘hip’ and modern group that makes up her friends.¹⁶⁷



Figure 38: Joyce and Peggy in ‘The Rejected’

The association of Joyce with slight avant-gardism is, admittedly, an important part of the function her character plays within the series. *Mad Men* directly contrasts this young, liberal woman and her group of artist friends with the world of SCDP in ‘The Rejected’, when Joyce brings the entire crowd to the elevator lobby outside the agency’s glass doors to observe Megan. While the large group gather in the lobby, costumes and the use of space mark the

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

separation between Joyce's world of the future and the comparatively reserved SCDP. By the reception desk, several male employees in near-uniform grey, blue and brown suits with white shirts and thin ties meet similarly dressed clients, with fedoras, long overcoats and wool scarves completing the formal look.¹⁶⁸ Megan wears a salmon cardigan and curled, coiffed hair piled high on her head, seeming rather old fashioned in comparison with the people in the lobby.

Outside the glass doors, peering in with great amusement, the younger crowd of men and women gather to observe the scene within. One woman in the second group wears a green shift dress with a swirling pattern of colours, looking very 'mod' with her hair cut into a bob, a matching headband, round, dark-framed glasses, fishnet stockings, and flat shoes. A man wears tight, drainpipe trousers and a turtleneck underneath a blue, buttoned shirt which is worn open at the collar. Over this, his short casual jacket completes the informal look. Joyce is there in blazer and trousers, worn with low-heeled pumps. Awash with colour and looking very hip in comparison with the SCDP employees, the artists remain in the lobby, with the glass doors separating them from the ad men and their clients, as well as Megan. The contrasting styles and attitudes are emphasised by the physical separation; although these two groups can see one another, they are of two completely different worlds. As part of the group in the lobby, Joyce is firmly positioned as modern. Peggy's association with this group aids in her portrayal as the SCDP employee most open to the political and cultural shifts occurring in the series. These young artists already have both feet firmly in what the audience knows is the future, and by contrast the world of SCDP begins to look dated.

Joyce's simply styled hair might also be read as indicative of modernity, in that it rejects the time and effort that more old-fashioned styles require, allowing her to concentrate on things other than her appearance, somewhat anticipating the second-wave feminist movement. Bryant also suggested that Joyce's lack of primping when it comes to her hair and face could be understood to convey the guilelessness of her character. Despite the designer's lack of influence over Mamet's hair and make-up design, the topic came up in the interview, and

¹⁶⁸ Lane Pryce (Jared Harris) even wears a three piece suit, even more formal attire which represents his English provenance.

Bryant indicated that Weiner had been instrumental in keeping the style very plain, apparently because he was keen to present Joyce as 'just being natural.'¹⁶⁹ This construction of Joyce as 'genuine' because of her lack of cosmetics and attention to hair styling once again supports the function that both she and Carol play within the series. In declining to create a façade, as well as refusing to bow to authority and conformity, Joyce is far more modern than Carol.

In the past, as many critics of gay and lesbian representations in Hollywood cinema have noted, lesbianism has been forcibly closeted. *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, Argyle Enterprises/MGM, UK/USA, 1963) is an example of a film in which lesbianism seems to play an important part in characterisation, but in which it is repressed in the literal narrative. As Patricia White notes, '*The Haunting* is "not a film about lesbians,"... It is (pretends to be) about something else.'¹⁷⁰ And yet, bearing in mind the widespread censorship that affected Hollywood filmmaking for many years, White also argues 'I would consider "something else" to be a useful working definition of lesbianism in the classical cinema.'¹⁷¹

In the case of *Mad Men*, while the text very definitely does not repress Joyce's lesbianism, the 'something else' of modernity which Bryant foregrounds in her descriptions of the intent behind the character's costuming does seem to be a handy metonym for lesbianism. Joyce's sexuality is a major part of her forward thinking and non-conformity. The character's openness about her lesbianism and her own—as well as Peggy and Stan's—attitude towards it function to support her modernity and youth and indicate the changing modern world which *Mad Men* represents. While I am not suggesting that homosexuality was widely accepted by the mid-1960s or that all lesbians were comfortably open about their sexuality at that time, the move towards a future in which the gay movement actively fought to destroy the strictures of the closet is hinted at by the differences between Carol and Joyce. The function of lesbianism within *Mad Men* is to demonstrate the changing social times, which in turn is the central preoccupation of the series. Carol's secrecy and the humiliating result of

¹⁶⁹ Bryant, personal interview.

¹⁷⁰ Patricia White, *Uninvited...*, p. 80.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

her confession speak of the conservative past, and Joyce's eccentric social group situates her openness about her sexuality within the context of shifting cultural mores, prophesying a more accepting future. The costuming strategies employed for the two characters support this function by separating the closeted silence of the mid twentieth century from the promise of impending liberation. While Carol hides her transgressive desires behind attempts at visually inhabiting femininity, as the 1960s unfold Joyce flaunts her non-conformity through her masculine-inspired clothing and her lack of feminine styling, foretelling great social changes to come.

Conclusion

In *Desperate Housewives*, *Deadwood*, and *Mad Men*, lesbianism is not the focus of the narrative. Yet lesbian sexuality is not incidental in any of these examples either. These isolated gay characters in heterosexual casts are deployed very deliberately to act as synecdoche in a variety of ways. Robin is not just a lesbian, she is a lesbian who does not look like one, functioning as synecdoche for the disparity between appearance and character which the series foregrounds, satirising heteronormativity; Joanie Stubbs is not just a lesbian, she is a lesbian whose consequent independence allows her rare female freedom, and Jane Canary is not just a lesbian, she is a character whose lesbianism fulfils the sub-textual readings of many a queer film fan, their shared sexuality acting as synecdoche for female autonomy in Milch's revised presentation of the Western; Carol and Joyce are not just lesbians, they are lesbians whose historical settings greatly affect the ways in which they are able to exhibit and experience their own desires, their differing abilities to live out their desires acting as synecdoche for the effects of social change in the 1960s, the preoccupation of the series as a whole.

Desperate Housewives, *Deadwood* and *Mad Men* do not use gayness in a disrespectful or negative way, which highlights the changes since Dyer wrote about the damaging effects of stereotypes in the media. Lesbianism is still infrequently depicted on television, but in the

programmes examined in this chapter it is not presented as inherently 'bad' or employed in a detrimental manner as synecdoche for depravity or anything else negative. Instead, lesbian characters are depicted in a value-less or positive fashion, taken for granted, and utilised to push the central theme of each series, with costume designed in turn to support these themes.

The attitudes of both Adair and Bryant towards stereotyping appeared to cause some hesitation in letting lesbianism itself affect costume design, with the designers preferring to seek alternative stories to telegraph through dress. The story told by costumes designed for lesbian characters in *Desperate Housewives*, *Deadwood* and *Mad Men* is not necessarily lesbianism, even though each set of designs details the story which lesbianism helps to construct. In each case, costume is designed to emphasise the synecdoche rather than necessarily directly indicating lesbianism through appearance. The fact that in some cases the designers were not informed of the sexuality of the lesbian characters at the beginning of the process also affected this focus on elements beside lesbianism in the costumes. However, because lesbianism is central in forming characterisation, with each character's sexuality performing a required function in each series, there is often much overlap, with costumes that communicate function also indirectly (and even sometimes directly) suggesting lesbianism.

Chapter Three

'What Would a Lesbian Woman Wear?': lesbian authored independent films

This chapter looks at representations of lesbian characters central to the narrative in two independent films. Each case study was written and directed by an out lesbian filmmaker: 2006's *Gillery's Little Secret* by T. M. Scorzafava, and *The Kids Are All Right* by Lisa Cholodenko, who co-wrote the script for the 2010 film with Stuart Blumberg. The films form part of a rich history of gay-made cinema telling stories about gay characters. Historically, there has been a split between 'confrontational' and 'affirmation' politics in gay and lesbian filmmaking and criticism.¹⁷² Confrontational approaches gave rise to films which 'flew in the face of acceptability'.¹⁷³ The distinctly non 'approval-seeking' texts of the New Queer Cinema canon, with their homosexual killers and unapologetic, vital characters living with AIDS exemplify this attitude.¹⁷⁴ Affirmative filmmakers, on the other hand, are more concerned with assimilation within mainstream society, engaging in consciousness-raising often by focusing on the motif of coming out and the creation of positive images.¹⁷⁵

The question of whether gay characters should be dressed to announce their difference from straight characters has frequently formed part of this discussion. The relatively recent overwhelming tendency to depict gay women as conventionally feminine—as detailed by Ann. M. Ciasullo in 'Making Her (In)Visible': Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s' and exemplified by *The L Word*—has brought such debate to the fore.¹⁷⁶ Early arguments concerning the costuming of gay and lesbian characters in film advocated recognisable iconography, such as Andrea Weiss's postulation that attempts to

¹⁷² Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 209-286.

¹⁷³ Dyer, *Now You See It*, p. 212.

¹⁷⁴ Michele Aaron, 'New Queer Cinema: An Introduction', in Michele Aaron (ed.), *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 3.

¹⁷⁵ Dyer, *Now You See It*, pp. 215-286. In 1981 Edith Becker, Michelle Citron, Julia Lesage and B. Ruby Rich noted that, for lesbian filmmakers, 'Affirmation has been and remains vital', Becker et al., 'Lesbians and Film', in Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (eds), *Out In Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture* (London: Cassell, 1995), p. 35.

¹⁷⁶ Ann M. Ciasullo, "'Making Her (In)Visible": Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s', *Feminist Studies* 27:3 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 577-608. Also see Sarah Warn 'Too Much Otherness: Femininity on *The L Word*', *AfterEllen.com*, (April 2004)

<<http://www.afterellen.com/archive/ellen/TV/the>

[Lword/femininity.html](http://www.afterellen.com/archive/ellen/TV/theLword/femininity.html)>, accessed 28 September 2011 and Malinda Lo, 'It's All About the Hair: Butch Identity and Drag on *The L Word*', *AfterEllen.com*, (April 2004) <<http://www.afterellen.com/archive/ellen/TV/theLword/butch.html>>, accessed 28 September 28 2011.

eradicate stereotypes deny 'cultural difference' so that "happen to be gay" has become another form of invisibility'.¹⁷⁷ Conversely, the concept of the 'happen to be' lesbian, specifically as constructed through dress, was seen as a positive by both Tina Scorzafava and, according to Mary Claire Hannan, costume designer for *The Kids Are all Right*, Lisa Cholodenko. The benefits and politics of dressing lesbian characters to appear to fit in with the majority of the population was a central topic in our discussions.

In recent years, as reflected by Scorzafava and Hannan's responses during their interviews, there appears to have been a perceptible move away from celebrating sexual difference through appearance to a preference for downplaying alterity in both costume and narrative. As evident in *The L Word*, there is now a marked bias towards allowing the overt depiction of same-sex relationships and desire to shoulder the burden of representing lesbian characters' otherness from heterosexuality. In *The Kids Are All Right*, much like Cynthia Summers' work on the Showtime series, ideas of mass appeal and commercial success were a contributing factor to less than obvious communication of lesbian sexuality through costuming. However, Hannan and Cholodenko allowed knowledgeable audience members the pleasure of recognition by encoding some lesbian specificity in the film. When discussing *Gillery's Little Secret*, Scorzafava echoed both Cate Adair's beliefs and Una's opinions on gay spaces, as discussed in Chapter One. The director was resolute that the cultural climate has recently moved away from elements which necessitate the announcement of gayness through clothing, an attitude which contributed to her decision not to emphasise sexual identity with costume designs during production. Interestingly, whether intentionally or not, *Gillery's Little Secret* does in fact contain certain garments that are suggestive of historic subcultural lesbian trends, but the overwhelming visual style in costume is assimilationist and non-lesbian-specific.

As lesbian-centred films written and directed by openly lesbian filmmakers, *Gillery's Little Secret* and *The Kids Are All Right* are part of a tradition that goes back to the 1970s and the films of gay female artists like Chantal Akerman and Barbara Hammer. Scorzafava and

¹⁷⁷ Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film* (New York: Penguin, 1992), p. 63.

Cholodenko's singular influence over their films also draws on a tradition of lesbian authorship. While theories of authorship (for example, auteurism) are problematic, given the collaborative nature of filmmaking—and particularly large-budget, studio based filmmaking—the fact that a lot of lesbian work tends to be made independently and on a lower budget than most mainstream work perhaps allows lesbian filmmakers unusual control over their output.¹⁷⁸ The early 1990s videos of Sadie Benning, many of which were made by Benning on a Pixelvision camera in her bedroom, are a good example of this.¹⁷⁹

While Scorzafava and Cholodenko were not working on such a small and personal scale as Benning, they proved a strong creative presence during production of their films: Scorzafava wrote the screenplay for *Gillery's Little Secret* as well as directing and co-producing the short, and Cholodenko co-wrote *The Kids Are All Right* and directed the feature. It was confirmed in my interviews that each also played a central role in guiding the sartorial looks in the films. In the absence of a specific person to fulfil the role of costume designer, Scorzafava worked with the *Gillery's Little Secret* cast to make wardrobe decisions, using a mixture of the actors' clothes and her own belongings.¹⁸⁰ Cholodenko, Hannan revealed, had a large influence on both the overall costume design and specific sartorial choices during production and, like Scorzafava, offered some of her own garments and accessories for use in *The Kids Are All Right*.¹⁸¹

Reading these case studies—as with Chapters One and Two—through the contemporary lesbian costuming triangle of demands consisting of 'authentic' lesbian imagery, anxiety over stereotypes and the use of costume to convey character and narrative, I will also consider the fact that both directors are lesbians themselves, examining how the women's personal styles and beliefs affected the balance of the above triangle in each text. Taking *Gillery's Little Secret* and *The Kids Are All Right* as arguable examples of lesbian authored films, this

¹⁷⁸ For a useful overview of the varying theories of and problems with auteur theory, see Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink (eds), *The Cinema Book* (2nd edn.; London: BFI publishing, 1999), pp. 235-315. For a brief mention of the difficulty of funding lesbian work, see Dara Nai, 'An interview with Rose Troche', (7 March 2012) <<http://www.afterellen.com/content/2012/03/interview-rose-troche>>, accessed 3 January 2012.

¹⁷⁹ For more on Benning's work, see Anat Pick, 'New Queer Cinema and Lesbian Films', in Michele Aaron (ed.), *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*, pp.110-11.

¹⁸⁰ Tina Scorzafava, personal interview, 11 December 2010.

¹⁸¹ Mary Claire Hannan, personal interview, 8 December 2010.

chapter considers how lesbian authorship impacts on costume design, detailing two quite diverse ways in which the personal remains political.

Telling personal stories in *Gillery's Little Secret*

Independent short film *Gillery's Little Secret* centres on Gillery (Annabeth Gish), who returns to her hometown with girlfriend Abby (Julie Ann Emery) for Gillery's twenty-year high school reunion. In town, Gillery is approached by Blake (Jeanette Brox), the daughter of Gillery's high school lover, Bernadette (Allison Smith). Despite her mother's marriage to a man, Blake seeks answers to questions about her own parentage, which she suspects somehow stems from the relationship between Bernadette and Gillery. An eighteen-year secret begins to unravel during a confrontation between the former lovers before Gillery intuits the truth: that her brother is Blake's biological father. In my analysis, I will mainly be focusing on the character of Gillery; as the lead character she is given the most screen time and was also discussed in the greatest detail by Scorzafava and myself during our conversation. I will touch on the clothing of Abby—a less integral character—but with slightly decreased focus.

We first witness Gillery at a booth in a diner, reading a newspaper. She wears a tan blazer over a white cotton, short-sleeved, collared, button-up shirt casually unbuttoned at the neck, with a pair of fitted jeans and dark, heavy, flat boots. She has long brown hair worn loose and slightly messy towards the ends, and wears dark-rimmed, stylish reading glasses. At the high school reunion, Gish wears slightly loose black trousers with another white cotton button-up shirt, this time with long sleeves flared at the cuffs, with her hair loose once again. For the final scene of the film during which Gillery and Abby prepare to drive home, Gish returns to fitted jeans, worn with a white T-shirt underneath a cable-knit brown sweater, with her hair worn partly down but with the top section tied back from her face. In Abby's first scene Emery wears tightly fitted jeans, a blue T-shirt with a white and red graphic on the chest, and is shown first wearing then removing a black leather jacket. In the reunion she wears a pink satin skirt and sheer black blouse over a black vest top, and in the final shots

we see her in jeans once more, with a loose-knit green and brown double layered sweater. The various meanings of these clothes, which signal both Scorzafava's declared intentions as well as giving rise to some perhaps unintended meanings, reveal the thought processes at work during production.

During my conversation with Scorzafava it became clear that the director made use of costume to support the narrative and reflect aspects of character, thus adhering to the first demand placed on costume designers, as Drake Stutesman describes it, 'to tell a story', manipulating meaning 'through tools such as silhouettes, color nuances, design lines, or fabric textures'.¹⁸² Despite her admitted lack of expertise in costume design, Scorzafava exhibited beliefs in the communicative potential of clothes which echo the theories of successful costumiers. During our interview the director touched on elements of costuming discussed by Hollywood designer Edith Head and several of those featured in Deborah Nadoolman Landis' collated interviews with film industry practitioners.¹⁸³ As Nadoolman Landis phrases it, 'Before an actor speaks, his costume has already spoken for him' (*sic*).¹⁸⁴

In the opening paragraph of 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story', Jane Gaines recounts Head's commentary in *The Costume Designer* (Tholen Gladden, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, USA), described as 'a 1949 educational short on Hollywood studio production'.¹⁸⁵ Head narrates her design process for a scene in which a woman cries before an important romantic date, explaining that she decided on white chiffon to offer a soft effect best suited to 'a big emotional moment [which] deserves all the emphasis it can get'.¹⁸⁶ In *Gillery's Little Secret* Scorzafava adhered to similar ideas as Head, venturing 'I'm sure that there must be some sort of emotional resonance for fabric' and using varying fabric types to create meaning. For example, the black leather jacket

¹⁸² Drake Stutesman, 'Costume Design, or, What Is Fashion in Film?', in Adrienne Munich (ed.), *Fashion in Film* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press: 2011), p. 22.

¹⁸³ See Edith Head and Jane Kesner Ardmore, *The Dress Doctor* (Kingswood, Surrey: The World's Work, 1960), Deborah Nadoolman Landis, *FilmCraft: Costume Design* (Lewes, East Sussex: Ilex, 2012) and Nadoolman Landis, *Screencraft: Costume Design* (Burlington, Mass.: Focal Press: 2003).

¹⁸⁴ Deborah Nadoolman Landis, *Screencraft: Costume Design* p. 8-9.

¹⁸⁵ Jane Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story', in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds), *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), p. 180.

¹⁸⁶ Edith Head, quoted in Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative', p. 180.

worn very briefly by Abby was used to indicate the character's 'flair' and youth in comparison with Gillery, whose more plainly textured attire was intended to make her seem more calm and mature.¹⁸⁷

In a similar way, Scorzafava also made use of colour coding to indicate character traits. By positioning Gillery as the protagonist and portraying events from her perspective, the film presents the character as sympathetic. The use of white in Gish's costumes was intended to support this; the director explained that she wanted Gillery to 'represent good, which is why she wears a lot of white.'¹⁸⁸ The equivalence of white with wholesomeness in film costuming is neither scientific nor uniformly adhered to, as indicated in this case by what Stella Bruzzi calls the 'inverse symbolism' of the *femme fatale* dressed in white in *films noirs*, such as Lana Turner in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Tay Garnett, MGM, USA, 1946) and Jane Greer in *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, RKO, USA, 1947).¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, as Dyer's *White* details, there is a prevalent conflation of whiteness, purity and goodness in western cultures, and Scorzafava aimed to use these symbolic connections to counteract any reception of Gillery as a 'bad' person for leaving town and effectively abandoning her former lover.¹⁹⁰

As well as attempting to make use of costume to add meaning in this emblematic manner, it became evident that Scorzafava placed an emphasis on image reflecting social expectations based in reality, signifying aspects of character through connection with subcultural dress codes. This adheres to Gaines' theorisation of the use of dress in film, with costume reiterating 'how people of different gender, age, nationality, and social class [are] thought to be in "real life"'.¹⁹¹ Scorzafava spoke of using costume to swiftly convey character information based on the different 'types' the characters in her film were intended to be, with lecturer Gillery costumed to appear 'professor-ish' and 'scholarly', and artist Abby's leather

¹⁸⁷ Scorzafava, personal interview.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: clothing and identity in the movies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) p. 126.

¹⁹⁰ Dyer, *White* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 58-60.

¹⁹¹ Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative', p. 186.

coat and brightly coloured T-shirt in her first scene used because they 'could show her artistic nature'.¹⁹²

As well as aiming to reflect 'real life', Gillery's costumes seem to draw on uses of costume in earlier films and on television. Interestingly, the results led to some conflict between the intentions ascribed to the *Gillery's Little Secret* costumes by the director and certain meanings readable within the images. To begin with, deciding how to dress Gillery, Scorzafava focused on the character's job, asking herself 'What would a professor wear?' and aiming to dress Gish in something 'collegiate'.¹⁹³ In her first scene in the film, Gillery reads a newspaper in a diner. This act immediately signals her intellect, and the actress' costuming supports the impression. Echoing the common symbolism of countless media texts—including, to offer just two examples, *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, Warner Bros., USA, 1946), which features a knowledgeable female book clerk (Dorothy Malone) wearing reading glasses, and *Follow the Fleet* (Mark Sandrich, RKO, USA, 1936), in which dowdy music teacher Connie (Harriet Hilliard) wears spectacles—eyeglasses reinforce the character's pursuit and possession of knowledge and her intellectual nature.

As she is seated at a booth table, we can only see Gish's top half, on which she wears the blazer and white button-up shirt. The blazer is a sandy beige colour. It is about hip-length and not overly-fitted but with straight, slightly formal lines. It has a blended woollen texture which takes the edge off its formality, so the overall look is smart-casual. Gillery's blazer and button-up shirt have professional connotations, reminiscent as they are of the upper items of the two piece suit worn with a dress shirt. As J.C. Flügel writes of the (male) suit, which gained popularity at the end of the eighteenth century following the French Revolution, the adoption of suits as respectable attire for men indicated hard work and seriousness.¹⁹⁴ By wearing garments derived from the suit, Gillery is marked out as a serious woman likely to be employed in some sort of white collar profession, offering slight mirroring of the ubiquitous skirt suits of the resolutely staid and sceptical FBI Agent Dana Scully (Gillian

¹⁹² Scorzafava, personal interview; also see Scorzafava, audio commentary on *Gillery's Little Secret* (2005) (DVD, Liquid Filmworks, USA, 2005).

¹⁹³ Scorzafava, personal interview.

¹⁹⁴ J.C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (3rd edn.; London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 112-13.

Anderson) in *The X Files* (Fox, 1993-2002) (Fig.39) or the oft suited and stiletto-wearing Dean of Medicine and hospital administrator Dr. Lisa Cuddy (Lisa Edelstein) (Fig. 40) in *House*, a stickler for rule-following who frequently collides with the irreverent Dr. Gregory House (Hugh Laurie). The blazer as specifically 'scholarly' harks back to designs for phonetics scholar Professor Henry Higgins (Rex Harrison) in his formal suits in *My Fair Lady* (George Cukor, CBS/Warner Bros., USA, 1964) (Fig.41) and in particular the blend of smart and casual recalls the costuming of Michael Caine as Dr. Frank Bryant, a lecturer in English Literature in *Educating Rita* (Lewis Gilbert, Acorn Pictures, UK, 1983), first seen walking across the university quadrangle in a brown blazer with a white shirt unbuttoned at the neck and no tie, teamed with green trousers (see Fig.42). Vivian in *Desert Hearts* provides another example, with her 1950s inflected pale lavender skirt suit, paired with a respectable-looking hat to emphasise her initially prim characterisation (Fig. 5).



Figure 39: Gillian Anderson in a characteristic costume; promotional still for *The X Files*



Figure 40: Lisa Edelstein as Dr. Cuddy in suit jacket and dress shirt in *House*



Figure 41: Rex Harrison as Professor Higgins in *My Fair Lady*



Figure 42: Michael Caine as Dr. Bryant in *Educating Rita*

Conspicuously, when discussing elements she attempted to convey through dress in the film, none of the ‘types’ the director mentioned were based on sexuality. When I consequently asked Scorzafava whether she had intended to dress Gish ‘as a lesbian’ in addition to bringing out Gillery’s academic side through clothes, the director responded negatively. This seemed interesting—because contradictory—in two ways. Firstly, it denies the subtle lesbian allusions of Gillery’s image; the stern and strict (and straight) characters of Scully and Cuddy are not the only fictional images conjured up by the use of a blazer on a woman. In addition to Dietrich’s Sapphic turn in *Morocco*, lesbian characters have frequently been costumed in suits, as when a tuxedo-wearing, monocle-sporting, woman in *Blood Money* (Rowland Brown, Twentieth Century Pictures, USA, 1934) is accompanied by a girlfriend, or as with Barbara Stanwyck’s rigid dark pencil skirt suits in *Walk on the Wild*

Side (Fig. 43) and Beryl Reid's butch blazer as the eponymous character in *The Killing of Sister George*.¹⁹⁵



Figure 43: Barbara Stanwyck (left) in tight suit in *Walk on the Wild Side*

The connections between blazers and lesbianism extend to everyday life, according to my interviewees. Blazers were named by Tabitha as a staple item of lesbian clothing, and Charlotte also mentioned blazers in connection with identifiably lesbian garments, so the fact that Gillery wears this item of clothing might be readable as motivated by the character's lesbian sexuality, indicating what a lesbian might wear 'in "real life"'.¹⁹⁶ Dyer's notes on stereotypical lesbian costuming in film up to the late 1970s mention the 'hard, precise lines... presenting [the female form] conspicuously without frills or fussiness or any sort of softness – in a word, without "femininity"'.¹⁹⁷ Gish's presentation in this scene in *Gillery's Little Secret* seems to echo such historic sartorial constructions of lesbianism; the material of the shirt

¹⁹⁵ Vito Russo mentions the character in *Blood Money* in Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harpers & Row, 1981), p. 44. For more on Stanwyck as the lesbian Jo Courtney and Reid as Sister George see my previous work on costuming of lesbian sexuality in cinema: Fiona Cox, 'Closet Cases: Costuming, Lesbian Identities and Desire, Hollywood Cinema and the Motion Picture Production Code', *The International Journal of the Image* 1:4 (2011), pp. 43-56.

¹⁹⁶ Tabitha, email to author, 19 November 2011; Charlotte, personal interview, 17 May 2012.

¹⁹⁷ Dyer, 'Stereotyping', p. 33.

has no pattern and the design also features straight lines, with an unstarched but pointed collar, plain white buttons down the front and simple breast pocket detail on each side. The white shirt is definitely a shirt and therefore male-influenced as opposed to featuring the decorative patterns or softer lines around the collar that might make it more easily classifiable as a blouse, a more feminine item of clothing. Women in male clothing have long been linked with lesbianism, as notoriously promoted by nineteenth century sexologists but also reiterated in the more recent work of Judith Halberstam in *Female Masculinity*.¹⁹⁸

Given the previous use of blazers and straightforward tailoring to connote lesbianism in films, as well as the western tendency to connect masculinity in women with homosexuality, Gillery's blazer and shirt allow for queer readings. Alexander Doty's work in 'Whose Text is it Anyway? Queer cultures, queer auteurs, and queer authorship' draws on Roland Barthes' theorisation that 'readers do their share in "authoring" the meanings of texts from their positions as cultural consumers.'¹⁹⁹ Doty reworks auteurist theories to include the 'authoring' work of 'queer cultures and queer cultural analysis' which, he argues, can bring its own queer meanings to texts regardless of authorship and intention.²⁰⁰ Because of the culturally resonant meanings inherent in Gish's costumes, the designs can be 'authored' as having gay implications by audience readings in spite of Scorzafava's stated intentions.²⁰¹ The reading of the blazer and shirt as subcultural markers of lesbianism is particularly available because the audience is made aware that Gillery is gay, in an interesting reverse telegraphing-through-costume process in which character brings meaning to costume rather than necessarily the other way around.

Secondly Scorzafava's refutation that she intended to convey lesbianism through Gillery's costuming seemed to contradict the director's investment in ideas which mimic traditional costume theory, including telegraphing 'types' through clothing. Yet despite Gillery's blazer, both Gillery and Abby—the two unambiguously gay characters in the film—do in fact lack

¹⁹⁸ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, North Carolina and London: Duke University Press, 1998).

¹⁹⁹ Alexander Doty, 'Whose Text is it Anyway?: Queer cultures, queer auteurs, and queer authorship', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 15:1, Special Issue: Queer Theory: Desire, Authorship and Visibility (1993), p. 42.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁰¹ See Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*.

overt lesbian recognisability. Both have long hair, which several of my interviewees characterised as distinctly not lesbian-looking and which, like Shane in *The L Word*, overwhelms those elements of Gillery's appearance which are readable as gay. Long hair is associated with prettiness and girlishness in women (not widespread markers of lesbianism); Abby's dainty, pretty necklaces in the opening and closing scenes, with their beaded chains, red ribbons and little heart pendants have the same connotations. At the reunion, Abby's pink satin skirt with ruffled hem and her transparent black blouse are very womanly and, again, therefore represent a stereotypically non-gay look. We can only read Abby's lesbianism through her intimacy with Gillery.²⁰² Notably, this is characteristic of the entire film.

Although lesbian styles may be absent in *Gillery's Little Secret*, this does not mean that lesbianism is rendered invisible. Like *The L Word*, while the film renders its central couple's lesbian sexuality unreadable through image, it reinserts unmistakable lesbianism into the action. We see Gillery and Abby kiss several times, and Abby rather intimately tucks Gillery's hair behind Gillery's ear in a gesture of reassurance; Abby sits on Gillery's lap at the reunion and the two slow-dance together (Fig. 44). Gillery later spins Abby round in a clearly loving embrace, kissing her and taking her hand before the two characters drive away in the final scene. Abby is also visibly jealous of Gillery's ex-lover, Bernadette. It is clear from these elements that the two are romantically involved. Commenting on a production still of Gish and Emery seated on the floor, appearing relaxed with their arms around one another and smiling (Fig. 45), interviewee Una described the image in revealing terms:

It's interesting; it's the way they're holding themselves. It's the way they're relating to each other. I don't think it's about clothes... They're not dykey but they've just got that sense of compassion between them which is lovely.²⁰³

²⁰² This is not an uncommon observation about the lesbian femme, although she is generally noted to be readable as gay through association with the butch, an identity to which Gillery does not conform. For one example of the femme as visible alongside the butch see Joan Nestle, 'Butch-Fem Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950s', *Heresies #12 (Sex Issue)* 3:4 (Winter 1981), pp. 21-24.

²⁰³ Una, personal interview, 17 May 2012.

As Una notes, as far as style is concerned, Scorzafava displaces the communication of sexuality in the film, avoiding a recognisable lesbian look for Gillery and Abby yet showing them relating to one another tenderly, letting action (rather than costume) speak lesbianism. Of course, as in the case of *The L Word* and *Lip Service*, most people who watch *Gillery's Little Secret* are likely to be aware that it is about lesbians, so there is once more a lack of necessity to convey gay sexuality by spelling it out through costume. However, Scorzafava's costume decisions seemed to go further than this.



Figure 44: Gillery and Abby dance together at the reunion with Bernadette looking on in *Gillery's Little Secret*

Not including lesbianism in any communicated form of classification through dress denies lesbian difference from straight women. Despite the availability of gay readings of Gillery's outfit, Scorzafava challenged the notion that lesbian women present themselves in a particular way. 'To be honest with you', she asked, 'how does a lesbian dress?'²⁰⁴ According to Scorzafava, and much like Cate Adair's discussion of her perception of contemporary gay communities with reference to Robin in *Desperate Housewives*, a lesbian is no longer a 'type' which can be said to dress like anything in particular 'in "real life"'. The director did acknowledge that some lesbians wear a 'uniform' which renders them immediately recognisable as gay, in particular noting that in her experience this is common

²⁰⁴ Scorzafava, personal interview.

in San Francisco, where she described the look as consisting of ‘white T-shirts, buzz cuts,
[and]



Figure 45: Julianne Emery (left) and Annabeth Gish in *Gillery's Little Secret*

jeans or cut-off shorts.²⁰⁵ However, she felt such women were—at the time of our interview in late 2010—a minority, remarking that they are only ‘one section of the community’.²⁰⁶ Acknowledging that stereotypes exist, the director firmly positioned continuing ideas that gay women dress in a certain way in the minds of ‘society’, by which she presumably meant people outside of lesbian subcultures. ‘Sure’, she admitted, ‘society has their stereotypes’—the ‘their’ distancing this society from her own—but these stereotypes, in Scorzafava’s opinion, no longer overlap with ‘member types’ to the extent writers such as Dyer, Kessler and Ciasullo indicated a few years ago.²⁰⁷ Interestingly, instead of evidencing anxiety over stereotypes as Adair and Janie Bryant did, worrying that using them might be negative or damaging, Scorzafava simply dismissed stereotyping as irrelevant and outdated.

Significantly, the director connected not projecting gayness through costume in *Gillery's Little Secret* with her own experience. ‘We as filmmakers and we as story tellers have to tell

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Dyer, ‘Stereotyping’, p. 37; Kessler, ‘Mommy’s Got a Gal-Pal’; Ann M. Ciasullo, ‘Making Her (In)Visible’.

the stories that we know,' Scorzafava argued. This raises the notion of authorship, as through this comment the writer/director marked the finished film as personal: partly reflecting her own life. Scorzafava defended her avoidance of obviously identifiable lesbian styles in *Gillery's Little Secret* by remarking on the non-affinity of such images with both her own image and that of her gay friends and acquaintances.²⁰⁸ She spoke about receiving complaints concerning the feminine looks of the lesbian characters in *Gillery's Little Secret* from gay female viewers who did inhabit perceptibly lesbian styles. Scorzafava used her own relationships with gay people who do not render themselves readable as such through dress and style to counter these objections, retorting:

Basically I just looked at them and I was, like, "Really? Because," I said, "I'm not wearing your uniform... These fifteen friends of mine back here, none of them have on your uniform – and everybody's gay."²⁰⁹

In addition to her dismissal of the relevance of stereotypes at the time *Gillery's Little Secret* was filmed, the director rejected the notion that supposedly 'authentic' lesbian imagery is indicative of modern gay identities. The style created for Gillery in the film in fact exhibits a different kind of 'authenticity' based in the personal. This legitimacy—as well as the argument for Scorzafava's true authorship of the film and its costumes—is increased by the fact that Gish wears items from the director's own wardrobe on screen. The white shirt worn in the reunion scene belongs to the director, as does Gillery's watch.²¹⁰ While not a *recognisably* lesbian look, Gish's costumes can be argued to represent a realistic (literally, because based in the real) lesbian style.

Like Adair, Scorzafava spoke about a lack of separatist self-definition through identifiable styles she has observed in modern gay communities. The director attributed this apparent move away from obviously lesbian styles in real communities to growing comfort levels with homosexuality among gay people. 'As people get more comfortable with themselves', she explained, 'we are not having to project who we are and we're just being who we want to be

²⁰⁸ Scorzafava, personal interview.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

and living the life'.²¹¹ Such an assertion both postulates that there has been a cultural shift in recent years—to gay people feeling 'more' comfortable than in the past as well as dressing differently—and raises questions about what might have triggered this transformation.

In recent decades the need to perceptibly express oneself as something other than straight has been felt to be important within non-heterosexual communities. 'Queer' and 'gender fuck' theorists and activists have promoted the political benefits of visual difference throughout the Gay Liberation movement.²¹² The radical organisation Queer Nation insisted that assimilationist 'polite tactics *never* would win gay equality'.²¹³ In 1993 Walker noted this tendency in queer theoretical writing and her own lesbian community, calling it a 'privileging of the visible' in which

feminist and lesbian and gay theorists have begun to theorize the performance of visible differences as the locus of political agency because of its potential to deconstruct foundational categories of identity such as race, gender, and desire.²¹⁴

The continued usefulness of such resistance was highlighted by interviewee Tabitha who, in a discussion over email, argued that being readable as gay through image acts as 'a statement of lesbian civil rights and a response to the regressive and repressive nature of homophobic prejudices'.²¹⁵ Yet apparent changes in lesbian trends which have occurred in recent years signal a new era in which the perceived need for confrontation has lessened for many younger gay women, leading to more acceptance of assimilation via image. According to Leanne, many lesbians have not only moved away from placing import on observable difference, but femininity in lesbians is more accepted by the overall gay community now. Recounting a visit to a gay bar a few years previously with a friend who identified as lesbian, Leanne spoke of hostile reactions to the friend's long hair. She

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² For more on 'queer' as a general oppositional stance see Cherry Smyth, who argues that 'queer articulates a radical questioning of social and cultural norms, notions of gender, reproductive sexuality and the family.' Smyth, *Lesbians Talk Queer Notions* (London: Scarlet Press, 1992), p. 20. For more on 'gender fuck' activists, including photographs, see the brilliantly named book by Shaun Cole: *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel': Gay Men's Dress in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2000), p. 88-9.

²¹³ Steven Capsuto, *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000), p. 263. Emphasis in the original.

²¹⁴ Lisa M. Walker, 'How to Recognize a Lesbian', p. 868.

²¹⁵ Tabitha, email to author, 19 November 2011.

recalled a gay club patron making a comment to the effect of 'Get out of here, you straight people'.²¹⁶ However, she countered, 'I don't think that would happen now... because I think that [lesbians] feel like they can be totally beautiful... There's not this need to define in the same way.'²¹⁷ Why might this be?

In his work in *Gays and Film* concerning gay stereotypes, types, and more rounded gay characters in onscreen fictions, Dyer named the 'problems' he found with representing gay characters as individuals visually indistinct from straight characters. He identified that such depictions 'make it very difficult to think of there being solidarity... collective identity and action between the gay protagonist and her/his sex caste.'²¹⁸ The gay man or woman depicted in this way lacked visibility, Dyer felt at the time, 'as a member of an oppressed group.'²¹⁹ Admittedly, such arguments are relevant when damaging stereotypes are the norm in depictions of gay people, and whenever and wherever gay lifestyles are reviled and hindered and therefore remain oppressed. However, published in 1977, *Gays and Film* was written about a very different cultural landscape to that which existed upon *Gillery's Little Secret's* 2005 release. Since the 1970s, the Gay Liberation Movement has gained hard-won victories in areas of media representation and legal policy. While there is still work to be done in the West and particularly globally, some countries' anti-discrimination laws and an increase in social acceptance in places mean the everyday impact of homosexuality on many gay peoples' lives is much altered in places.

There are also thriving gay cultures in select places now, as evidenced by gay bars, magazines, websites and, of course, film and television. Is there an urgent need for creating 'solidarity... collective identity and action' through style when one does not feel oppressed? Scorzafova, as evident in her discussion of growing comfort levels within the gay community, appears not to think so. As the director believes that lesbian dress no longer constitutes a legitimate 'type' which Gaines theorised required telegraphing through costume, we can see why Scorzafova might not have incorporated sexuality into the 'types' she attempted to

²¹⁶ Leanne, personal interview.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Dyer, 'Stereotyping', p. 36.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

convey through dress in the film. Yet not dressing lesbian women according to socially recognised lesbian 'types' still contradicts basic costume theory. As further discussion with the director revealed, dressing gay women in a manner which renders their sexual identity imperceptible and thus directly contravening common costuming techniques is not only a reflection of perceived contemporary social situations but, as with Summers in *The L Word*, also an assimilationist political tactic.

Notably, during our interview, 'comfort' emerged as a central theme in the film's costumes. Gillery was apparently intended to be visibly 'confident' and 'comfortable' because, as Scorzafava explained, 'She knows who she is.'²²⁰ This is supported by the relaxed way in which Gish is styled. In the diner scene and, later, at home, the top few buttons of her shirt are undone, so that while its short sleeves already make Gillery appear casual, the way in which she wears the garment emphasises this further. Pairing the slightly professional-seeming blazer and shirt with jeans indicates an additional level of informality. The same might be said of Gillery's flyaway hair: Gish's slightly unkempt locks in the diner and lake scenes give the impression that the character does not primp excessively, nor worry about having a flawless appearance.

Further indication that Scorzafava wanted to present Gillery as casually dressed comes in the form of an anecdote about Gish's final costume. Wearing a short brown woollen sweater over a white T-shirt and jeans, the actress allegedly presented herself for the shot with the T-shirt tucked in beneath the sweater. Scorzafava recalled:

Originally [the T-shirt] was tucked under and so I came in and I was pulling her shirt down and... I said, 'We need just a little more casualness.... You've got a sweater on, you just threw it on over your shirt; you're not all proper.'²²¹

The implication is that Gillery does not put an excessive amount of thought into the appearance of her outfits. If we compare this to the frequently alternating jewellery worn by Abby, we can see that there is a slight difference in the characterisations of these women detectable even through accessories: each time we see Abby in a new situation, she has

²²⁰ Scorzafava, personal interview.

²²¹ Ibid.

changed her necklace. At the lake she wears a heart pendant threaded on a red ribbon, at the reunion she wears a circular pendant on a black cord, and the next day has on a cream, rectangular pendant on what looks like a beaded thread. Perhaps once more demonstrating Abby's artistic nature, the changing accessories also indicate that she assembles deliberately constructed outfits, teaming each ensemble with a new piece of jewellery. Her appearance requires thought, choice and variety. Gillery, however, dons a sweater for warmth: for function, not decoration. She knows who she is, is relaxed about it, and does not feel the need to draw attention to herself through an overly decorative appearance. Her relaxed style of dress complements her ease with her sexuality: an important yet unremarkable aspect of her identity, helping to establish lesbianism as unapologetic context and, importantly, an 'assimilated' identity.

The unremarkable presentation of lesbianism as something Gillery is comfortable with extends beyond costume and the individual character. As with *Lip Service* and the majority of *The L Word*, lesbianism is not the story of Scorzafava's short. Nobody comes out during the course of the narrative, so that the lesbian sexuality of Gillery and Abby is taken for granted. If we take the 'spectacular' in film to refer to elements of narrative or *mise-en-scène* which, like Bruzzi's definition of the 'star-costume' 'intrude on [and] dominate the scenes they are couched in', lesbianism in *Gillery's Little Secret* is deliberately constructed as unspectacular.²²² For example, there is Blake's unfazed acknowledgment of her ostensibly heterosexual mother's former relationship with another woman and the shots of Gillery and Abby sitting on one another's laps, kissing, and slow-dancing together at a small-town American high school reunion at which—almost conspicuously, because surprising—no one reacts (adversely or otherwise) to the sight of an obvious same-sex couple. Scorzafava explained that, while perhaps such moments were not altogether realistic, she included the shots at the reunion to demonstrate that Gillery, Abby and those around them are 'totally are comfortable with who [Gillery and Abby] are.'²²³ The discovery or overt display of lesbianism does not intrude upon narrative or change the course of the plot. Lesbianism is thus not marked as 'other' within the film.

²²² Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema*, p. 13.

²²³ Scorzafava, personal interview.

Situating the narrative in a small town where the few other residents we encounter or know of are apparently heterosexual, the film avoids depicting any kind of gay community. Instead of isolating Gillery and Abby from heterosexual people, the short establishes gayness to be a part of otherwise heterosexual communities so that general society is shown to incorporate both gay and straight people. The non-ghettoised presentation of lesbianism in *Gillery's Little Secret* presents gayness as just like any other sexual orientation. This constructed 'ordinariness' of lesbianism through costume and narrative in *Gillery's Little Secret* provides what seems to be the underlying political motivation for the script. Scorzafava explained: 'I... wanted it to represent... that [if you are gay] you live your life just like everybody else lives their life. What's the big deal?'²²⁴



Figure 46: Abby sits on Gillery's lap at the reunion in *Gillery's Little Secret*

Espousing the importance of her lesbian characters fitting in with straight society, Scorzafava represents a differing viewpoint to historic arguments not only made by gay critics but also reflected in the work of earlier lesbian filmmakers. In 1994, *Go Fish* was

²²⁴ Ibid.

independently made and released to moderate success. Written by out lesbians and then girlfriends Guinevere Turner and Rose Troche, the latter of whom also directed and co-produced the film, *Go Fish* depicted gay women who were well adjusted and generally happy but who experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Kia (T. Wendy McMillan) is subjected to homophobic abuse while walking on the street and Evy (Migdalia Melendez) is kicked out of her family home when she is outed to her mother. Several of the gay characters in the film inhabit noticeably gay imagery, such as Max (Guinevere Turner) in her long, baggy denim shorts, loose T-shirts and backwards baseball cap, Kia in men's suit jackets, Ely (V.S. Brodie) shaving her head partway through the film, and Daria (Anastasia Sharp) with her slicked back short hairstyle. The script focuses on the group of lesbian friends, emphasising solidarity against a demonstrably unwelcoming society which might inspire their separatist sartorial statements. In *Gillery's Little Secret*, the lack of anything against which to 'resist' removes any urgent need to make a statement against homophobic prejudices through stylistic difference.

Scorzafava's portrayal of lesbians comfortable with themselves and their surroundings contributes to a culture which increasingly validates lesbian images. This in turn contributes to and reflects an apparent progression away from the cultural atmosphere of the 1970s which argued for 'member types' in order to validate gay people through separatist specificity. The director rejects earlier arguments that creating politically positive cinematic images of non-straight sexuality involves the foregrounding of sexual difference via aesthetic means. For Scorzafava, a twenty-first century lesbian filmmaker, the emphasis is on visibility that promotes assimilation and which aims to encourage approval from and acceptance by heterocentric societies, visually placing Gillery and Abby as part of wider society instead of separating them from it. Downplaying difference, *Gillery's Little Secret* represents a potential change in attitudes on the part of lesbian authors.

Recognition in *The Kids Are All Right*

Independent feature *The Kids Are All Right* focuses on Nic (Annette Bening) and Jules (Julianne Moore), a long-term couple raising a family. Produced by Focus Features, the speciality films unit of Universal Pictures, it was far more widely distributed than *Gillery's Little Secret*. The film tells the story of what happens when their teenaged children Joni (Mia Wasikowska) and Laser (Josh Hutcherson) seek out their mothers' sperm donor, Paul (Mark Ruffalo), who disrupts the family members' lives by having an affair with Jules. As in *Gillery's Little Secret*, lesbianism is framed as a non-issue. There is no 'coming out' in the film, as Nic and Jules have been together for at least nineteen years and are obviously open about their relationship, and homosexuality remains entirely unspectacular in Bruzzi's sense. Based on textual analysis, quotes gathered from various promotional interviews given by the film's director and stars, and my own in-person interview with costume designer Mary Claire Hannan, I will offer a reading of what I see as a dual discourse within Cholodenko's film. On the one hand promotional materials, narrative and some costume designs indicate attempts to 'universalise' lesbianism, with directly political undertones given the social context of the film's writing and production. However, elements of production design including clothing and set dressing reveal hints of lesbian specificity and thus in some sense what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick termed a 'minoritizing' view of lesbianism by acknowledging subcultural differences, opening up the possibility for the pleasure of recognition for spectators who can decipher these 'codes'.²²⁵

In a way, *The Kids Are All Right* strives to achieve the same political aim as *Gillery's Little Secret*, attempting to 'normalise' lesbianism for the non-gay public. The promotional strategy upon the film's release seemed intent on undertaking this work of normalisation, focusing as it did on insisting that *The Kids Are All Right* is not about lesbians but the importance of family. The overwhelming message coming from those involved with the production was reassurance that lesbian unions are no different to those of any other long-term couple, and therefore that the film is no different to any other romantic comedy/drama. When lesbianism was mentioned in promotional interviews and reviews, it was framed as

²²⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Epistemology of the Closet', in Ablove, Barale, and Halperin (eds), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, p. 56.

unremarkable, with any differences from other families elided by emphasising the similarities. In a promotional special feature included on the DVD release, Cholodenko referred to her project as 'a relationship movie' about 'family values', with no mention of the sexual orientation of the central characters.²²⁶ In an interview for the BBC, Ruffalo insisted that the film's family unit is 'no different than any other family, ultimately; the novelty of the gay marriage... melts away pretty quickly.'²²⁷

The downplaying of lesbian specificity extended to media responses to the film. For example, *Red* magazine made sure to mention 'That the main relationship is gay is by the bye' and Claudia Winkleman prefaced her *Film 2010* review by assuring audiences: 'You forget that it's two women in under four minutes... It's just about a family.'²²⁸ Attempts to use press to 'mainstream' films about lesbians are not uncommon, as seen in similar promotional material for Donna Dietch's *Desert Hearts*, for which, Christine Holmlund recalls, 'publicity downplayed the lesbian subject matter, billing the film as about "friendship, love and self-discovery between two women."²²⁹

The Kids Are All Right is of course very different to many other films about family, and also represents a significant 'first' for queer film: never before had major Hollywood stars played lesbian characters in such a visible manner. Gay male protagonists have been portrayed by stars, as when well-regarded actor Sean Penn played San Franciscan politician Harvey Milk in the Oscar™ winning *Milk* (Gus Van Sant, Focus Features & Axon Films, USA, 2008). In 2005, *Brokeback Mountain* offered significant visibility, portraying the fraught sexual relationship between two cowboys, played by Jake Gyllenhaal and Heath Ledger, in early 1960s Wyoming.²³⁰

²²⁶ *The Journey to Forming a Family* (Prod. Universal, 2010). Special Feature on *The Kids Are All Right* (2010) (DVD, Alliance, Canada, 2010) ASIN: B003L20ICE.

²²⁷ Mark Ruffalo, interview aired on Episode three, *Film 2010*, UK, BBC, tx. 22 October 2010.

²²⁸ Niki Browes (ed.), 'Red Hot' *Red*, November 2010, p. 157 and Episode three, *Film 2010*.

²²⁹ Christine Holmlund, 'When is a lesbian not a lesbian?: The Lesbian Continuum and the Mainstream Femme Film', *Camera Obscura* 9:1-2 25-16 (January/May 1991), p. 151.

²³⁰ Whether that visibility was beneficial or not is questionable. For a discussion on how *Brokeback Mountain* pleases both gay people and right-wing Christians, see Michael Cobb, 'God Hates Cowboys (Kind Of)', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13:1 (2007), pp. 102-105.

In the past, there have been hints of lesbianism in mainstream films, or perhaps read into ostensibly heterosexual narratives by critics and fans queering the texts. Doty's *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon* offers some examples, analysing *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, MGM, USA, 1939) and *The Women* (George Cukor, MGM, USA, 1939) in this way.²³¹ Valerie Traub's work in 'The Ambiguities of "Lesbian" Viewing Pleasure: The (Dis)articulations of *Black Widow*' is another example of such work. Traub reads intra-feminine desire into the relationship between federal investigator Alex (Debra Winger) and serial-husband-killer Catharine (Theresa Russell) in *Black Widow* (Bob Rafelson, Twentieth Century Fox, USA, 1987), arguing that the film poses 'the problem of "lesbian" representation within a dominantly heterosexist and patriarchal system', invoking the possibility of lesbian desire 'only to reencode it as invisible, inarticulate.'²³² Jackie Stacey's work 'eroticising identification' in *Desperately Seeking Susan* (Susan Seidelman, Orion Pictures, USA, 1985) and *All About Eve* (Joseph Mankiewicz, Twentieth Century Fox, USA, 1950) in her article 'Desperately Seeking Difference' covers similar ground.²³³ Stacey emphatically does not '[claim] these films as "lesbian films", but rather [uses] them to examine certain possibilities of pleasure'.²³⁴ Yet the characters considered by Traub and Stacey were merely offering potential lesbian pleasures for viewers and not overtly portrayed as being lesbians.²³⁵

There have been relatively popular feature films with central lesbian characters, such as *Desert Hearts*, *Bound* and *Chasing Amy*, but these roles were taken by less well-known actresses than Moore and Bening. Many popular lesbian-centred films, like *Bound* and *Chasing Amy* but also *Heavenly Creatures* and *Personal Best* (Robert Towne, The Geffen Company, USA, 1982) have been directed and written by men (or in the case of *Heavenly Creatures*, co-written by one man and one woman), lending the films an air of exploitation

²³¹ Doty, *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon* (New York & London: Routledge, 2000).

²³² Valerie Traub, 'The Ambiguities of "Lesbian" Viewing Pleasure: The (Dis)articulations of *Black Widow*', in Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (eds), *Out In Culture*, p. 129.

²³³ Jackie Stacey, 'Desperately Seeking Difference', *Screen* 28:1 (1987), pp. 48-61. 'Eroticizing identification' quote from Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 29.

²³⁴ Stacey, 'Desperately Seeking Difference', p. 53.

²³⁵ Although the character of Eve (Anne Baxter) is problematic in this respect, interpreted as an implied lesbian by Robert J. Corber in 'Cold War Femme: Lesbian Visibility in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *All About Eve*', *GLQ* 11:1 (2005), pp. 1-22.

rather than of gay women speaking for themselves.²³⁶ Major stars had played lesbians in feature films prior to *The Kids Are All Right*; Sharon Stone appeared as a prospective co-parent with Ellen DeGeneres in the tripartite movie *If These Walls Could Talk 2* (HBO, USA, 2000), in which Vanessa Redgrave and Chloë Sevigny also co-starred, yet the film was made for broadcast on television rather than in theatres. Moore and Bening have both previously played women sexually involved with other women, in *The Private Lives of Pippa Lee* (Rebecca Miller, Grand Army Entertainment, USA, 2009) and *Running With Scissors* (Ryan Murphy, Plan B Entertainment, USA, 2006) respectively, but these roles were either not fully classifiable as lesbian—Bening’s character appears to use sex with another woman as part of her consciousness-raising attempts in the 1970s—or were simply cameos, as in Moore’s case.

While lesbian protagonists have been allowed to live seemingly ‘happy ever after’ with one another at the end of lesbian authored films such as *Thin Ice*, *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love* and of course *Gillery’s Little Secret*, to name but three examples, lesbian-made films about lesbian characters tend to star little known actresses and are primarily popular among lesbian audiences. In 2000, B. Ruby Rich bemoaned the results of a survey that showed ‘a full 80 per cent of the work shown [at gay and lesbian film festivals] was never seen outside the queer circuit.’²³⁷ Lesbian authored, lesbian-centric cinema, like *Desert Hearts*, also tends to focus on love and/or coming-out stories, far more often tracking the obstacle-strewn path to union for two women than focusing on families parented by gay female couples.

The Kids Are All Right, co-written and directed by an out lesbian, was given a relatively widespread release, distributed internationally in theatres and discussed widely on television and radio as well as in magazines. It was also nominated for Best Picture at both the Golden Globes and the Oscars, winning the 2010 Golden Globe in the ‘Best Motion Picture:

²³⁶ It is worth noting that Larry Wachowski, who co-wrote *Bound*, is now Lana Wachowski, a trans* woman. See, for example, ‘Director’s cut! *Matrix* he now a she’, *NYPPost.com*, (29 July 2012) <http://www.nypost.com/p/news/national/director_cut_matrix_he_now_she_sD7fVze22xgBbjN90dlYeO>, accessed 6 January 2012.

²³⁷ B. Ruby Rich, ‘Queer and Present Danger’, *Sight and Sound* 10:3 (March 2000), no page (viewed online at *FIAP International Index to Film Periodicals Plus*).

Comedy and Musical' category. This media focus was no doubt partly due to the star power of Bening and Moore, also reflected by the 'Best Actress' Golden Globe nominations both women received for their roles in the film, and Bening's Oscar nomination. Bening won the Golden Globe. *The Kids Are All Right* was consequently an extremely high profile and also rare lesbian-authored representation of lesbian family life. This alone made the film different to other films about families, as well as diverse from earlier films about lesbians.

Freud classified disavowal as the rejection of a belief that results in that same belief being simultaneously retained and not retained: that which is disavowed, he theorised, is always present.²³⁸ The same effect seems to be at play in the promotional strategy, narrative and costume designs for *The Kids Are All Right*. To begin with, the repeated positioning of lesbian families and gay marriage as 'just like' heterosexual versions of the same glosses over significant differences between the two which the film appears to be designed to highlight, if only by implication. In particular, the socially unstable time in which *The Kids Are All Right* was produced significantly affects its meaning. Laws governing same-sex marriage were in a volatile condition in 2010 in California, where the film is set and where November 2008 saw the passing of anti-gay-marriage bill Proposition 8, which was swiftly appealed. Consequently, the validity of gay families was a topical and highly contentious issue upon the film's release. *The Kids Are All Right* is not just a film about family and marriage; it is a film which, in a hostile environment, attempts to expand what those terms are allowed to mean.

Kosofsky Sedgwick argued that Western understandings of homosexuality are 'organized around a radical and irreducible incoherence.' Namely, gayness is commonly simultaneously conceived of in the Western world in both 'minoritizing' and 'universalizing' concepts.²³⁹ In the 'minoritizing' view, it is believed that 'there is a distinct population of persons who "really are" gay'.²⁴⁰ The 'universalizing' view, in Kosofsky Sedgwick's dual system, is a more fluid concept of desire which allows for 'bisexual potential' in all

²³⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism', in James Strachey (trans.), Angela Richards (ed.), *The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 7: On Sexuality*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 347-357. Originally published by Freud in 1927.

²³⁹ Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Epistemology of the Closet', p. 56.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

humans.²⁴¹ Translated into representations of gays and lesbians in film, Dyer and Weiss' arguments for typing through costume reflect a preference for the minoritising view, allowing for political statements of specificity. Portrayals in which same-sex desire is presented as nothing out of the ordinary adhere to more universalising beliefs. Anat Pick has written that films which favour the latter approach present 'lesbian desire as incidental, private, and thus as politically inconsequential. The message is one of inclusion, but it is also inclined to 'phase out' the specificity of lesbian... intimacy.²⁴² The plot of *The Kids Are All Right* is universal in several ways, as many people can relate to love and family, as well as long-term relationships, infidelity, and children growing up and acting independently of their parents. Because lesbianism is not the subject of the movie, it could be argued—as *Red* and *Winkleman* suggest—that the sexuality of Nic and Jules is of no importance in the film, and on a purely textual level this is true: there is nothing in *The Kids Are All Right* which could not happen in a story about purely heterosexual characters.²⁴³

Yet the structuring insignificance of the lesbian relationship at the heart of the narrative is itself significant. The professed unimportance of lesbianism in marketing materials suggests Freudian disavowal because the lead characters' homosexuality was depicted as 'normal' at a time when it was not legally treated as such. Lesbianism is declared to be immaterial, but the subversive implication of handling lesbianism in this way at that time is undeniable: by universalising Nic and Jules' story in press materials, the filmmakers attempted to make a political statement that gay people are not and therefore should not be treated as different to heterosexual people. In a rare candid admission of the subversion inherent in the film, Cholodenko told *AfterEllen.com* interviewer Bridget McManus:

we were very clear that... we didn't want to bring too much attention to the fact that they were... a gay family but we'd focus on how they were like any other family. So in a sense we were sort of were subversive about it... [O]bviously the intention was to get that out there in a mainstream way.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

²⁴² Pick, 'New Queer Cinema and Lesbian Films', p. 109.

²⁴³ Of course two women cannot biologically produce children alone but the same applies to many heterosexual couples, so using sperm-donors is not necessarily a lesbian-specific issue.

²⁴⁴ Anon., *Julianne Moore, the wrath of the lesbians and The Kids Are All Right* (VIDEO), Bridget McManus interview with film cast and Lisa Cholodenko, (July 9 2010)

Picking up on the idea of subversion in another interview, the director explained that, much like Summers' strategy for *The L Word*, normalising lesbianism within the film was designed to downplay elements of 'otherness' for those who may find discomfort in that:

I think we were somewhat successful in making it so that you don't realize... the subversiveness of what you're seeing. You can settle into watching it without that kind of discomfort of being super aware of, "This is something I'm not..."²⁴⁵

Making lesbianism ordinary within the film was deliberately designed to legitimise gay relationships and families for those who might not have previously held that opinion.

In order to aid in this legitimising project, affirmation is first created simply by portraying the lesbian family as entirely conventional. The couple brush their teeth together in the bathroom, the children keep things from their parents, and the four of them eat together at the kitchen table: a common manner of depicting the family as a domestic unit, as in *Meet Me In St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, MGM, USA, 1944). The family table scene is so connected with domestic harmony, in fact, that *American Beauty* uses this setting to add impact to its disintegrating family unit, staging Lester (Kevin Spacey) and Carolyn's (Annette Bening) marital meltdown during dinner.²⁴⁶

For those unfamiliar or perhaps uncomfortable with the concept of lesbian parenting, *The Kids Are All Right* begins by quietly making a case for equality by positioning Nic and Jules' family as entirely average. However, despite this project of normalisation, and contrary to Pick's argument, the lesbian women in *The Kids Are All Right* are not 'happen to be gay' characters in Dyer and Weiss' damaging, invisible sense. Lesbian specificity is present in the film in several guises. In response to Winkleman's anxious side-lining of the lesbian content on *Film 2010*, critic Danny Leigh evidenced a more nuanced understanding of the content of the story, remarking that the most interesting thing about *The Kids Are All Right* is that 'it's not a film that apologises for itself... Very quickly you have some really quite candid

<<http://www.afterellen.com/blog/karmankregloe/julianne-moore-the-wrath-of-the-lesbians-and-the-kids-are-all-right>>, accessed September 14 2012.

²⁴⁵ Louis Peitzman, 'Lisa Cholodenko on *The Kids Are All Right*', *San Francisco Bay Guardian Online*, (July 7 2010) <http://www.sfbg.com/pixel_vision/2010/07/07/lisa-cholodenko-kids-are-all-right>, accessed July 24 2012.

²⁴⁶ In fact *The Kids Are All Right* utilises this same tactic later in the film.

discussions—and indeed portrayals—of lesbian sexuality.²⁴⁷ For example, in addition to a sex scene, there are discussions in the screenplay which directly reference lesbian sexuality, such as a punch-line about Jules' tongue 'working' at the end of the couple's tale of how they met, which hinges on understandings of oral sex as the primary lesbian sex act.

In addition to this, the narrative privileges lesbianism over straight coupling. Having established lesbian parenting as valid and positive, the film undertakes an aggressive legitimisation of the lesbian family unit, defending Nic and Jules' union against the threat of outside intrusion, and against heterosexuality in particular.²⁴⁸ The fact that Jules has an affair with a man could be seen as regressive, harking back to a long-running trope in films about gay women written and directed by straight men. For example, in *The Fox* (Mark Rydell, Motion Pictures International, Canada, 1967) and *Personal Best* lesbians seem to be converted to heterosexuality by the closing credits. As Holmlund argued, the moral of such films seemed to be that 'a lesbian, and especially a femme, is not a lesbian when there's a man around.'²⁴⁹ Predictably, then, Paul's maleness angered many lesbian viewers including my interviewee Felicity, who felt that the film undermined lesbianism. She complained:

It perpetuates that thing that [gay] women... just haven't met the right man yet... You know "They always just need a good seeing to."... That's what made me really angry about that film, because I think it really didn't do anything for that kind of perception of lesbian relationships.²⁵⁰

Interestingly, however, the affair functions in a radically different manner to Felicity's reading of *The Kids Are All Right* and Holmlund's analysis of films like *Personal Best*. Instead of propagating a vision of lesbians as merely women in need of 'the right man', the affair queers notions of the fixed nature of desire, as with Aaron's classification of the 'dykes-fuck-fellas' storyline in *Go Fish*.²⁵¹ More importantly, the aftermath of the liaison positions the

²⁴⁷ Episode three, *Film 2010*.

²⁴⁸ The couple's relationship is referred to both in the film and publicity as a marriage. There was indeed a short time in 2008 when same-sex couples could wed in California, and those marriages have been allowed to stand amidst the legal changes which have followed, so Nic and Jules may well have been legally married in the diegesis. Equally, they may not have been actually married, barred from partaking in that particular institution by law. However, whether they are legally married or not is not felt to be significant enough to mention in the film, probably for the same 'normalising' impulse which affects the rest of the production.

²⁴⁹ Holmlund, 'When is a lesbian not a lesbian?', p. 154.

²⁵⁰ Felicity, personal interview, 8 August 2011.

²⁵¹ Aaron, 'New Queer Cinema: An Introduction', p. 6.

lesbian relationship in *The Kids Are All Right* as the more favourable union. That Jules' relationship with Paul is the rejected coupling allows for the representation of heterosexuality as a threat, facilitating the defence of the lesbian family unit and encouraging the audience to desire and celebrate its continuation over a heterosexual alternative.

This politically affective complex dance between the significance and insignificance of lesbianism lies at the heart of *The Kids Are All Right*, with substantial effect on costumes. Moments of lesbian specificity in an ostensibly universalised text reveal how the film is structured by something akin to Kosofsky Sedgwick's 'irreducible incoherence' of minoritising and universalising views. In *The Kids Are All Right*, Freudian disavowal extends to costume design; that which is rejected (lesbian specificity) is also retained.

To offer an overview of the costuming of the central couple, Bening—like Gish in *Gillery's Little Secret*—is typically dressed in plain styles, without fussiness or much decoration. Her character wears trousers, often tailored, teaming them with Converse shoes, button-up shirts, T-shirts, waistcoats, and V-neck sweaters and tank tops. Nic wears a lot of blue, black and white. She wears scrubs for work, and women's T-shirts—or, on one occasion, navy satin or silk pyjamas with white piping—for bed. Moore's outfits display slightly more decoration, with a wider ranging colour palette, for example wearing T-shirts in purple and turquoise, tunics in pink, red and white, and a black top with embroidered designs on the upper arms featuring red, orange, yellow and white ornamental patterns. As with Bening, Moore wears trousers throughout the film, but favours denim and cargo shorts, and wears Birkenstock sandals on occasion. Also like Bening, she is costumed in women's T-shirts to sleep, although wears a linen tunic for one night-time scene.

The contrast between the two women's clothes lends Jules a slightly more casual and whimsical quality than Nic's more structured, slightly plain, practical clothing. Nic's look reflects her slightly uptight nature, revealed by her strict parenting style (forbidding motorcycle rides, setting non-negotiable boundaries) and instant dislike of the far more laid back Paul. Jules, a homemaker, has a more casual look which befits her domestic

surroundings. The tunics appear to be influenced by Indian garments, suggesting a hippy-like personality with New Age and Hindu spiritual influences also hinted at by dialogue, as when Nic teases Jules that if Jules were in charge of thank you notes, the children would only send out ‘good vibes.’



Figure 47: Bening in *The Kids Are All Right*

At the start of production, Cholodenko focused on the normalisation of lesbian women through clothing, allegedly announcing to costume designer Mary Claire Hannan: ‘This is not a lesbian movie.’²⁵² Some costume decisions, as Hannan described them to me, were accordingly made in order to prevent the film from becoming overly lesbian identified. The designer recalled, for example, initially suggesting a different kind of sleepwear to the soft T-shirts, linen tunic and slinky pyjamas the women wear to bed in the film, bringing in ‘tougher looking T-shirts... that have a thick neck on them, and thick fabric’ as an option. Rejecting these initial suggestions, Hannan recollected:

²⁵² Hannan, personal interview.

we decided... to keep it soft, keep it pretty... [Lisa] was trying to make a statement about family, and this just happened to be two women instead of a man and a woman. So... when it started to identify itself too much as lesbian, we pulled it back.²⁵³

Hannan's comment reveals that the amount or strength of communication of lesbian identities to the audience through costume was a major consideration, and that there was a general policy against imbuing outfits with 'too much' lesbian meaning. The 'tougher' clothing was felt to be stereotypically butch, therefore making the images more lesbian specific than was desired. Such overly-determined specificity was judged to encroach upon the message of the film as being about family rather than about lesbians. As in Chapter One, we can see again here the notion that butch imagery speaks lesbianism almost exclusively, inadvertently crowding out other meanings. In *The Kids Are All Right*, as in *The L Word* and *Lip Service*, efforts were therefore made to allow stories about the women other than their sexual orientation to surface in costume designs, with Hannan rejecting overly-determined lesbian imagery and downplaying differences from the mainstream. Costume in the film therefore demonstrates to viewers that lesbian women are not dissimilar to heterosexual women. Dress and style in *The Kids Are All Right* are used to convey personality and character beyond sexual identity, and consequently there are many elements of Nic and Jules' costumes which have nothing to do with lesbianism.

Based on her initial reading of the script, Hannan saw Jules, with her hippy tendencies (she gets the family into composting, much to Nic's annoyance) and aspirations to set up an environmentally-conscious landscape design business, as the 'softer' of the two main characters, 'a dreamer.'²⁵⁴ To show this, Hannan put Moore in 'ethereal looking blouses': 'India blouses' from authentic Indian clothing stores in downtown Los Angeles.²⁵⁵ The designer felt Jules, often seen in a relaxed domestic setting, lacked a certain kind of professional responsibility. As a consequence, she put Moore in T-shirts with designs that had connotations of 'fun' and leisure, like the shirt in the opening scene with a picture of

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

Elvis Costello's face printed across the front.²⁵⁶ Jules' necklace displays the word LOVE, and so also speaks to the slightly soft, not overly-worldly aspect of her characterisation. Jules lacks a well-defined identity outside of the home, which is subtly communicated by the tattoo on her forearm of the letters JLN. The letters stand, according to Cholodenko, for Joni, Laser and Nic.²⁵⁷ That Jules' tattoo expresses not something about herself but instead refers to the other members of her nuclear family is indicative of her lack of individual identity and fulfilment which causes her to look outside the home and family for validation and appreciation through both her start-up business and the affair with Paul.

Similarly, Nic is not costumed in a way that only serves to speak her sexual orientation. Hannan saw this character, the family's income earner, as a sensible woman, particularly in comparison with Jules. As a doctor, Nic requires particular clothing for her job which usefully highlights her more professional, confident side when contrasted with Jules' casual appearance and slight lack of personal definition. To bring this out in costuming during scenes when Nic is heading to or from work, Hannan put Bening in medical scrubs, or other 'practical clothing' like her tailored shirts.²⁵⁸ Nic also displays little touches in her costuming which speak a certain responsibility, like her wrist watch (Jules does not wear a watch), and accessories which fit with her job, like the pager clipped to the strap of her bag.

When Jules arrives for her first day renovating Paul's garden, her over-zealous attempt to dress as a professional landscaper results in what Hannan deemed 'contrived garden-wear clothes' which consistently elicited chuckles throughout the audience in each screening I attended.²⁵⁹ Hannan, with approval from Cholodenko, used the particular look—and the humour it created—to make a comment on and reveal the character's anxieties at that point in the narrative:

We did it on purpose... we were trying to say something about the character of that woman, and the mental place of that woman: that she's uncomfortable with herself

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Lisa Cholodenko, audio commentary on *The Kids Are All Right* (2010) (DVD). Cholodenko expressed dissatisfaction with the results from the make-up team, which she felt looked like 'a prison tattoo', but the important aspect of the design was that it contained the initials of Jules' family members, so it seems to have been left for time's sake and out of deference to Moore's approval.

²⁵⁸ Hannan, personal interview.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

and that she has to put on this faux gardener outfit to make herself look like a real gardener.²⁶⁰

Interestingly, the lack of connection between image and inner self is used to reveal that inner self. The comedy of the moment relies on the classical, non-ironic understanding of costume as a direct expression of the person beneath. In 'Costume and Narrative', Gaines writes about the notion of the modern personality which conflates the outward expression of personality through clothes with the 'true' inner self, and which informs basic costume theory. When the 'faux gardener' scene occurs in *The Kids Are All Right*, viewers know Jules has no experience of landscaping, and Hannan establishes the character as having had a very different look in preceding scenes. The departure from Jules' typical style and from what we expect a woman of her level of expertise to be wearing is amusing precisely because it is a departure. We laugh because we read the outfit to be 'false' in relation to her inner self. In *Hollywood Catwalk* Tamar Jeffers MacDonald argues that the 'false transformation' is often met with 'tacit disapproval' in film unless, of course, the temporary image change is 'sanctioned generically' by comedy, as in Ginger Rogers' makeshift disguise as a young girl, effected to avoid a full-price train fare, in *The Major and The Minor* (Billy Wilder, Paramount, USA, 1942).²⁶¹ The fact that Jules' outfit is so obviously untrue to her real self reiterates the 'self' which we have already come to know: that Jules is 'uncomfortable with herself' and inexperienced in this area.

As well as playing for laughs and revealing aspects of Jules' personality, the contrived gardener outfit functions to communicate the story, supporting the narrative; the ensemble tells us that the character has gone to Paul's house to begin the landscaping project. Hannan made extensive use of this function of costuming in addition to dressing the characters to match the women's personalities. For instance, during a scene (prior to Nic's discovery of the affair) in which the family go for dinner at Paul's house, Bening's costume marks a transition for her character. Hannan told me:

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Tamar Jeffers MacDonald, *Hollywood Catwalk: Exploring Costume and Transformation in American Film* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2010), p. 75.

When they went to dinner at Paul's house, Annette Bening... wanted to wear what she'd been wearing through the whole film, but then she said "I want to show that I'm more fun and that I'm going to be friends with Paul, so I need just a touch of something"... We thought about it... and she said "...This would be something that I own that I never wear, but it's colourful and fun and it's going to show that I'm fun."²⁶²

The scarf that Bening and Hannan agreed upon, a long multi-coloured design made of thin but not flimsy material, suggests a more relaxed side to the character than the film has previously demonstrated. The additional decoration and colour add a symbolic layer to Nic's preceding, more uptight self, mirroring the development of her emotions towards being comfortable with the unusual situation with a 'fun' development in accessories. A sequence



Figure 48: Annette Bening (in the red scarf) and Julianne Moore at Paul's house in *The Kids Are All Right*

towards the end of the film shows costume once again used to aid in the telling of the story. Once Jules' and Paul's affair comes to light, Moore is costumed in the same outfit for several scenes, sleeping on the couch in grey sweatpants and a blue T-shirt with no bra then wearing the ensemble around the house during the day as well. This is a distinct change from her previous sleepwear; once Jules is banished from the marital bedroom Hannan

²⁶² Hannan, personal interview.

abandons the 'groovy looking India shirts', tunics and fashionable T-shirts. This fits with Jules' depressed state of mind; her image is less important now that her relationship is suffering and her primary emotion is guilt.

Keeping Moore in the same style of outfit, wearing the same trousers (but with a change of shirt at one point), reflects the tense and stagnant emotional situation between the couple for a few scenes until Jules makes a heartfelt apologetic speech to Nic and the children. Until that important alteration of mood, the clothes reflect how 'She's just in the same zone; she's not moving,' explained Hannan.²⁶³ The apology allows the plot to move towards the conclusion and, consequently, triggers a change in costume for Jules. In accordance with the universalising tendencies in the film, these costuming decisions had nothing to do with lesbian identity, but were based instead on aspects of character and narrative which were entirely unrelated to sexual preference.

Revealingly, the effort to universalise lesbianism in *The Kids Are All Right* is occasionally belied by the lesbian specificity that the film also exhibits. Although clothing is also used to convey personality and support the narrative, one of the ways in which lesbian specificity surfaces in the film is within costume design. While Hannan took on board Cholodenko's disclaimer that *The Kids Are All Right* is 'not a lesbian movie', the designer also aimed to remain true to the identities she was representing. 'The subtleties were so important', the designer stressed, talking about the emphasis she placed on balancing the avoidance of obvious stereotypes with the consideration 'what would a lesbian woman wear?'²⁶⁴ First of all, Hannan acknowledged that 'because [Nic and Jules] are lesbian women, they might not look completely like straight women.'²⁶⁵ Jules, for example, although she has long hair falling loose over her shoulders in the film—consequently far longer than Bening's short

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

crop—is not an invisible femme who inhabits traditional femininity so completely as to be visually undetectable as gay.²⁶⁶

I showed my consumer interviewees images of Bening and Moore in costumes from the film to see what they made of the looks. Photograph seven (Fig. 49) showed the couple dropping Joni off at college at the end of the film. Bening, her hair cropped and dyed blonde, is in blue jeans with a dark brown leather belt which features a two-pronged buckle. She wears these with a light blue button-up shirt, worn casually: tucked in at the waist, unbuttoned a few buttons down at the neck with the sleeves rolled up to just below her elbows. She has a leather-look bag over one shoulder with her pager visible, and also wears sunglasses. Moore also wears blue jeans and what looks like the same belt design, but fastened in the opposite direction. She teams these with a blue T-shirt with the number 85 on it in a large graphic which covers most of her torso, with the bulk of the numbers in red but outlined in yellow, with 'TIJUANA MEXICO' written in yellow above and below the digits.²⁶⁷ She wears a thick leather strap on her right wrist next to a thinner, apparently fabric bracelet, a thin leather cord around her neck alongside her 'LOVE' pendant, and aviator style sunglasses. In photograph eight (Fig. 50), which only captures the women from the chest up, the women are shown seated at their outdoor dining table. Bening wears another button-up shirt, this time in slightly darker blue, once again undone slightly at the neck. She also has on small, metal earrings. Moore wears the black top mentioned above, featuring colourful embroidery on the arms, with the same leather cord necklace.

²⁶⁶ Martha Vicinus writes about the invisible femme, a lesbian in straight woman's clothing, as it were, who caused significant anxiety in 1950s America, demonised as 'the consummate actress who deceived unsuspecting husbands'. See Vicinus, "'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong": The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity', *Feminist Studies* 18:3 *The Lesbian Issue* (Autumn 1992), p. 481.

²⁶⁷ Given the reputation of Tijuana as a party holiday destination, this fits with Hannan's strategy of costuming Moore in costumes with connotations of fun and leisure.



Figure 49: 'Photograph seven'; Bening, Josh Hutcherson and Moore in *The Kids Are All Right*



Figure 50: 'Photograph eight'; Bening and Moore in *The Kids Are All Right*

Interviewee Leanne, looking at two images from the film, noted that, while Bening's hairstyle made her more readable as gay than Moore, the latter did inhabit a lesbian look with one, if not both of her outfits:

I think that's a fairly realistic looking couple ... She's obviously the more obvious lesbian in this couple, the blonde one [Bening], and then the ginger one [Moore]... comes and goes with her outfits, I think... Number seven's a much more gay outfit than what [Moore is] wearing [in number eight].²⁶⁸

Despite the fact that not all of Moore's outfits in the film carry connotations of lesbianism, Leanne found this itself to be authentic-seeming, as it reflected what she finds to be true in real life: 'I think that's true - I think you get quite a few lesbians who just sort of do that: have varying degrees of gay outfits', she explained.²⁶⁹ Asked to elaborate why Moore's ensemble in photograph seven was a 'gay outfit', Leanne replied:

She looks gay because she's wearing a T-shirt with a pattern on it that is that kind of lesbian T-shirt: a bright colour and a bold image. And her neck thing is – that's probably quite lesbian, I think: leather cord round the neck. You don't see a lot of straight girls doing that.²⁷⁰

Leanne identified the 'bright colour' and 'bold image' on the T-shirt as elements in Moore's costume which 'kind of' suggested lesbianism to her, yet it is the leather necklace that makes Moore appear not only authentically lesbian but actively gay rather than straight looking for this interviewee ('You don't see a lot of straight girls doing that'). Felicity also noted Moore's look in photograph seven as a gay look, naming the same elements as Leanne as 'lesbian' items, but adding in jeans and the belt: 'T-shirt, kind of standard lesbian casual attire, and, you know, big chunky belt, jeans, the whole tight necklace thing going on.'²⁷¹ The language Felicity uses ('standard lesbian casual attire', 'tight necklace thing') suggests that she finds these elements ubiquitous among lesbians.

²⁶⁸ Leanne, personal interview.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Felicity, personal interview.

There is even a little nod in the costuming to the phenomenon of lesbian couples ‘merging’: when the styles of two romantically involved women become remarkably similar. Felicity, seeing the matching belts in photograph seven, remarked: ‘They’re exactly the same! Merge.’²⁷² For Irene, some of Moore’s outfits contained even more elements readable as lesbian than Bening’s costuming. Explaining that, for her, hairstyle is a major part of lesbians looking gay (‘I find long hair not particularly dykey’), Irene nevertheless conceded: ‘Even though [Julianne Moore] doesn’t look dykey, her clothes are more dykey than Annette Bening’s.’²⁷³ Felicity confirmed, of photograph seven, ‘To me, they’re both quite lesbian styles.’²⁷⁴ For many of my interviewees, then, Hannan’s designs seemed realistic for lesbian characters.

Obviously affected by negative criticism of stereotypes of gay identities as bigoted and damaging, Hannan was noticeably anxious not to seem ignorant or prejudiced when it came to lesbian sexuality. At one point in our discussion, when talking about her initial designs for Moore’s costumes—which involved a lot of dresses—Hannan seemed to be having trouble with terminology. She appeared to be avoiding using the words ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ despite speaking about Jules being ‘more feminine’ than Nic. Eventually, the designer halted the flow of the conversation and admitted, ‘I don’t know how to put it because... I’m not lesbian; I’m straight, so I don’t know how to be politically correct in how I speak.’²⁷⁵ Aware of her position as an outsider, Hannan’s anxiety over political correctness revealed significant nervousness about appearing to be derogatory towards lesbians in her vocabulary. As became clear in her discussion of the lesbian specificity which did exist through dress in the film, Hannan evidently wished to avoid stereotypes in her costume designs for the same reason, truly asking ‘what would a lesbian woman wear?’ rather than simply relying on distorted received wisdom.

One very specific answer to that question came from a highly visible lesbian image in the media. Taking a cue from Bening’s short hair, Hannan settled on Ellen DeGeneres—who

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Irene, personal interview, 15 November 2011.

²⁷⁴ Felicity, personal interview.

²⁷⁵ Hannan, personal interview.

has a similarly coiffured look—as an inspiration for many of Nic’s outfits. As well as being a famous lesbian, DeGeneres looks like society’s concept of what a gay woman looks like, favouring trousers, blazers, trainers, plain fabrics with straight lines, and dark, bold colours or crisp white dress shirts. Interviewee Emily noted the perceptibly gay aspects of DeGeneres’ style, saying that the actress/presenter’s look is: ‘very obviously lesbian, because [it’s] slightly... boyish.’²⁷⁶ DeGeneres’ attractive, androgynous, verging on the casual yet also slightly professional style matched Hannan’s outlines for Nic’s character as practical and no-nonsense, as well as adhering to the ideal of not being too heavy-handed in suggesting lesbianism: ‘[Ellen’s] very tailored, and she doesn’t necessarily look like ‘Oh, is that a gay woman?’ but it’s just... It’s, you know, man-tailored on a girl – and it’s very pretty’, Hannan described.²⁷⁷ Taking DeGeneres as direct inspiration, the designer sought similar items for Bening, buying: ‘J Crew men’s dress shirts... in navy and dark grey’ and a man’s tanktop.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ Emily, email to author, 11 June 2012.

²⁷⁷ Hannan, personal interview.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.



Figure 51: Ellen DeGeneres in button-up dress shirt and waistcoat

In her discussion of Ellen's image, Hannan seemed to be working through the two most conflicting points of the triangle of demands placed on the contemporary designer of lesbian costumes: attitudes towards stereotyping and lesbian authenticity. She is sure to emphasise that Ellen's image is not exclusively lesbian ('she doesn't necessarily look like 'Oh, is that a gay woman?') and therefore wouldn't appear to be a clunky stereotype on Bening in the film, and also made certain to offer reassurance that Ellen's 'man-tailoring' was 'very pretty', the word pretty of course most often associated with dainty, decorative femininity and therefore

definitely not the stereotype of the mannish or unattractive lesbian. However, Hannan also clearly recognised that costumes being 'very tailored' and putting 'man-tailored' clothes 'on a girl' would be beneficial in designing a costume which, by alluding to perceptibly lesbian styles ('you know'), would take into account the third point of the triangle: conveying character through dress.

Using real gay women as inspiration provided Hannan with a solution to this conflicting triangle of demands. Ellen's soft-butch style is one of the most visible lesbian looks in America, possibly closely followed by Rachel Maddow, another out gay woman with a casual, slightly butch appearance regularly appearing on American television on *The Rachel Maddow Show* (MSNBC, 2008-).²⁷⁹ As Candace Moore puts it, Ellen's daily appearances on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* allow her to maintain 'a *televisibility* of queer identity.'²⁸⁰ Named as gay, and as one of a small minority of famous lesbian women, DeGeneres' image and public position creates a cycle of reinforcement: she inhabits recognisable lesbian style, we read her outfits as genuinely gay because we know she is a lesbian, and she reiterates her look as a lesbian image with each public appearance. Making use of clothing inspired by Ellen's look allowed Hannan to cash in on the authenticity of DeGeneres' style and imbue Nic with a recognisable lesbian image without necessarily stereotyping.

Another authentically lesbian image that was mined for the film, and one with significant implications for lesbian authorship in *The Kids Are All Right*, was that of director and screenwriter Lisa Cholodenko herself. Having initially considered dressing Moore in a very traditionally feminine fashion, designed to match and bring out the softer side of Jules' character in comparison with Nic's butch energy, Hannan was later directly inspired by the looks of Cholodenko and her partner, Wendy Melvoin. The designer explained how the real life couple's slightly androgynous look gave her scope to design costumes for both Moore and Bening which allowed for lesbian specificity without resorting to butch or femme gendered characterisations:

²⁷⁹ For more on Ellen's lack of discussion of her lesbian sexuality on her chat show, in which she 'avoids the topic of her own homosexuality and actively closes down conversations in which the very word or concept comes up' see Candace Moore, 'Resisting, Reiterating, and Dancing Through: The Swinging Closet Doors of Ellen DeGeneres' Televised Personalities', in Rebecca Beirne (ed.), *Televising Queer Women*, p. 17.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

They weren't very he or very she. They weren't necessarily super 'gay' looking women, or super feminine looking women; they weren't butch-looking, necessarily. They just wore jeans and T-shirts;... they wore groovy, hip jewellery... To me it was indicative of probably what maybe a lesbian woman would wear - but also a non-lesbian... So we got rid of the dresses for Julianne Moore.²⁸¹

A centrally important part of Hannan's analysis is that, while Cholodenko's casual, 'hip', slightly androgynous look is not exclusively lesbian, it is 'indicative of... what... a lesbian woman *would* wear.'²⁸² As with the use of DeGeneres's style for inspiration, being able to use Cholodenko and her partner as examples from which to work allowed Hannan to draw from the women's images as a genuine and therefore 'politically correct' and not stereotypical style.

Some of the costume pieces in the film were literally authentic; several of Cholodenko and Melvoin's personal garments were borrowed for the film. The director brought in several of her T-shirts for Moore to wear, and the LOVE necklace belonged to the couple.²⁸³ Bening's cropped hair is also styled in a manner akin to Cholodenko's—waxed and tousled—and Nic's glasses are similar to those worn by the director, with thick black rims. Julianne Moore apparently took the art-imitating-life theme even further by basing her performance partly on Cholodenko's voice and mannerisms.²⁸⁴ It is not the case that Cholodenko and her partner were taken as representative of all lesbians, providing a definitive blueprint of lesbian identity, but by basing the images in the film on real people whose story reflects that of the characters in the film, Hannan allowed for an undeniable cultural specificity which reflects a literally authentic lesbian self.²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ Hannan, personal interview.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Cholodenko, audio commentary on *The Kids Are All Right* (2010) (DVD).

²⁸⁴ Moore, Ibid.

²⁸⁵ The idea for the story was partly inspired by Cholodenko and Melvoin's own decision to conceive children via anonymous sperm donor. Cholodenko talks about her inspiration for the script in *The Writer's Process* (Prod. Universal, 2010), Special Feature on *The Kids Are All Right* (2010) (DVD).



Figure 52: Lisa Cholodenko in T-shirt



Figure 53: Cholodenko in outfit similar to Bening's costuming (and DeGeneres' look). Note blue button-up shirt and waistcoat, with signature thick-rimmed eyeglasses



Figure 54: Wendy Melvoin (left) and Cholodenko with their son. Note jeans, T-shirts with bold graphics, Melvoin's thick leather wrist strap and leather cord necklaces on both Cholodenko and the boy.



Figure 55: Bening and Moore in *The Kids Are All Right*

Cholodenko's authentic and personal influence on the film also created opportunities for rewarding moments of recognition for viewers with very specific knowledge. The director's insider status results in some fleeting subcultural 'codes' readable by those 'in the know' as signifying lesbian specificity. Some of those codes do not require any specialist insider knowledge, as they consist of items which carry lesbian connotations for many members of society, functioning, effectively, as stereotypical iconography. For example, Birkenstock sandals, that tongue-in-cheek by-word for lesbian style, were donated to the production for free upon Hannan's request.²⁸⁶ Moore wears them at times in the film, such as when playing table-tennis in the back garden with Laser. Converse, with their casual, androgynous feel, are also often associated with lesbian women—as mentioned in Chapter One, they were noted as favoured by lesbians by interviewees Amy, Charlotte, Ruby and Felicity, and Hannah wore them to our interview—and are also worn by Bening in the film.²⁸⁷

Much like Ellen's cycle of reinforcement, items of clothing like this which are not necessarily lesbian but which are occasionally identified as lesbian in style take on additional and specifically lesbian meaning when they are worn by characters whom we know to be lesbian women. Because lesbians often wear such shoes and many people think of the brands as marked as lesbian, their use in the film reads partially as stereotypical but also partly as authentic. It is not that a particular style or brand reveals lesbianism, since of course anyone can wear whatever they choose, but that the associations a particular item brings to the screen, in conjunction with the information the script gives us, allows that item to be read as reflective of lesbianism, providing a moment of recognition for those aware of the connotation.

²⁸⁶ Hannan, personal interview.

²⁸⁷ Amy, personal interview; Charlotte, personal interview; Ruby, email to author, 13 April 2012; Felicity, personal interview; Hannah, personal interview.



Figure 56: Melvoin (left) and Cholodenko with remarkably similar scarves, perhaps indicative of the phenomenon of 'merging'

Where Cholodenko's own subcultural knowledge and more exclusive pleasures of recognition come into play is with less well-known but in some ways lesbian-affiliated cultural products. For example, in Joni's bedroom there is a poster featuring the band Uh Huh Her. This band is fronted by Leisha Hailey, who played Alice in *The L Word*. Not a significantly well-known band, 'Uh Huh Her' mainly receive publicity in connection with Hailey's *L Word* fame, typically mentioned in lesbian press like UK magazine *DIVA*. Those who are aware of the band are likely to know of the lesbian connection, and seeing the poster in the film provides a moment of pleasure in acknowledgment. The pleasure is of recognition, bringing us back to Rachel Moseley's work in *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn*. Ien Ang writes that

'popular pleasure is first and foremost a pleasure of recognition', yet this recognition, although located with a relatively well-distributed film, is somewhat constructed as private.²⁸⁸

The particular sartorial codes I have in mind do not seem to be intended to be popular in the sense of appealing to mass audiences. As Lisa Henderson writes, 'under the press of symbolic annihilation, or even commercial chic, it remains true that there is delight and momentum in a grain of one's own'.²⁸⁹ Such moments also create a very different scenario for lesbian viewers than the subtext of lesbian desire Traub identifies as swiftly quashed in *Black Widow*, or Doty and Stacey's 'possibilities of pleasure' in ostensibly heterosexual narratives.²⁹⁰ The pleasure is triple, in that it contains the enjoyment of being recognised by the text, that of recognising what the text is referencing, and the realisation that those without one's own particular expertise will miss the allusions.

Lesbian codes offering these pleasures are not a new idea. For example, according to Edith Becker, Michelle Citron, Julia Lesage, and B. Ruby Rich in their introduction to a special 'Lesbians and Film' edition of *Jump Cut*, in *The Power of Men Is The Patience Of Women* (Cristina Perincioli, Sphinx-Film GmbH & ZDF, Germany, 1978) Perincioli 'decided to show clearly the double-headed axe (a symbol of lesbian identity) worn by one of the women in the film as a code for lesbian viewers'.²⁹¹ While the director also deliberately 'omitted any other reference to lesbianism to ensure the film's being televised', sharp-eyed lesbian viewers starved of representation would have no doubt picked up on the reference.²⁹² Cameos have often provided these subcultural moments of recognition, offering sly allusions to lesbian subcultures within mainstream texts, such as the lesbian wedding episode of *Friends*, which, Steven Capsuto notes,

features several in-joke appearances, which few people outside the gay community probably appreciated or even noticed. Activist Candace Gingrich played the minister... and comedian Lea Delaria played a kindly, tuxedoed butch... The mere fact that a show was working under an assumption that gay people were watching,

²⁸⁸ Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 20.

²⁸⁹ Lisa Henderson 'Simple Pleasures: Lesbian Community and Go Fish' *Signs* 25:1 (Autumn, 1999), p. 44.

²⁹⁰ Stacey, 'Desperately Seeking Difference', p. 53.

²⁹¹ Becker et al., 'Lesbians and Film', p. 33.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

and that such viewers' pleasure counted for something was an unusual development.²⁹³

In *Chasing Amy*, Guinevere Turner, co-writer and star of *Go Fish*, makes an in-person cameo and also receives a verbal reference as someone main character Alyssa (Joey Lauren Adams) has slept with. Such moments add a layer of enjoyment for those who possess particular pieces of subcultural knowledge.

In *The Kids Are All Right*, this insider referencing also occurs with costume; the use of the brand Free City in the film offers the potential pleasure of recognition for those who are aware of lesbian connections with the brand. The clothes from the particular Free City line used in the film are identifiable by the brightly coloured hummingbird on the upper left side on the front of garments and/or the words 'LIFE, NATURE, LOVE' printed on the back. Julianne Moore, whose slightly hippy characterisation fits with this slogan, wears a turquoise Free City T-shirt in the scene when Jules first kisses Paul.²⁹⁴ Later, she wears grey Free City sweatpants when moping around the house (the hummingbird is just visible for a short time when she is seated on the couch). Joni also wears a yellow Free City sweatshirt to a party towards the end of the film. Free City merchandise is owned and designed by Nina Garduno, who is the ex-girlfriend of, once more, Leisha Hailey. Not only is the store owned by an out lesbian woman, but the Hailey connection closely associates the brand with a major aspect of lesbian culture, which is a fairly small part of culture in general.

This element of *The Kids Are All Right* taps into a slightly different employment of costume design than is typically understood as basic costume theory. Using clothing like Free City, which has subcultural affiliations for a very small number of people, creates meaning at a level beyond merely supporting character and mirroring vicissitudes of narrative. Using items of clothing which have lesbian affiliations but which are not stereotypical items functions in a similar manner to Bruzzi's theorisation of *haute couture* in cinema, in that it

²⁹³ Steven Capsuto, *Alternate Channels*, p. 362.

²⁹⁴ This appears to be one of the shirts loaned by Cholodenko, as she can be seen wearing the same one in the 'Making of' featurette. In this and the DVD promotional film *The Journey to Forming a Family*, the director is visible on set wearing other items of Free City clothing. The purple T-shirt worn by Moore also features an undeniably gay-connotative rainbow triangle on the right sleeve.

offers pleasures which are disconnected from body and narrative, if not character.²⁹⁵ Free City merchandise and the pleasures of its particular implications are connected with character because they are created by the inclusion of lesbian subcultural codes in a film with lesbian protagonists. However, these codes are unobtrusive to the uninitiated and also not important in the overall creation of character through costume, since most viewers would not recognise the lesbian reference in the use of such items.

Hannan acknowledged that the lesbian connection was important in the decision to use Free City: 'It's not gay women's wear, but it kind of is 'under the cover' gay women's wear... If you're in the gay scene, you know that that's gay women's clothing. Because it's owned by - I think Nina's probably gay...'²⁹⁶ the designer explained. Although Hannan talks of Free City as 'gay women's wear' the brand is not necessarily used in the film to create authentic lesbian images, since Joni is not portrayed as gay, but she wears a Free City hoodie. Yet those who know the lesbian associations of the brand are likely to be intimate with lesbian culture and therefore also probable lesbians themselves. Free City therefore acts as an insider nod for a select few. Hannan made it clear that the use of the brand had in fact stemmed from Cholodenko's insistence. Hannan proposed the use of a very similar brand, but the director was specific in the use of Free City items: 'There's also one called Jet', Hannan explained, 'and Lisa said "No, let's go Free City." And they're almost identical... but [we used it] because Lisa is friends with them and also, it's because it is, yes, wink wink, kind of what gay women wear.'²⁹⁷ Whether Cholodenko's decision was based on the desire to support the brand out of friendship, personal preference for the designs, or a feeling that Free City is culturally specific gay women's wear, the resulting effect is to add an aspect of pleasure (the 'wink wink' factor) for those aware of this part of lesbian subculture.²⁹⁸ Instead of the historical need for lesbian viewers to look askance at 'straight' texts, reading against

²⁹⁵ Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema*.

²⁹⁶ Hannan, personal interview.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Cholodenko's insider affiliation, and particularly with Hailey, extends to the music of the film, which includes a track by Uh Huh Her. Cholodenko's partner, Melvoin, produced the track and, having just been recorded and not yet released, the song 'Same High' was used as a temporary measure during post-production, then kept in. Cholodenko, audio commentary on *The Kids Are All Right* (2010) (DVD). Again, because the band features someone who is arguably a 'lesbian star' the music becomes, in certain ways, culturally lesbian specific.

the heteronormative grain as in Traub and Stacey's examples, is replaced by the ability to read codes hidden in plain view.



Figure 57: Cholodenko wearing Free City T-shirt on set



Figure 58: Cholodenko wearing Free City T-shirt (and hoodie) on set

Those promoting *The Kids Are All Right* worked very hard to remove the association of lesbianism from their product, pushing the text as a 'film about family' and downplaying the differences of lesbian sexuality from any other kind of identity. Yet, in its costumes, the film contains not only lesbian specificity but also extra-textual pleasures for those 'in the know' about lesbian sartorial codes. As such, *The Kids Are All Right* offers a solution to the triangle of demands on the twenty-first century costumier faced with lesbian characters. Taking into account attitudes towards stereotyping yet also allowing for authenticity in designs, Hannan's costumes convey aspects of character which extend beyond sexuality but also offer viewers discernible lesbian imagery. Through making use of brands and styles commonly associated with gay women (Converse, Birkenstocks, Bening's short hair and androgynous style), many of Moore and Bening's costumes telegraph a familiar lesbian identity easily identifiable by those with very little personal knowledge of gay women. The slightly more subculturally resonant elements (Moore's leather cord necklace, the couple's matching belts, Free City merchandise, merging) create sartorial codes which are authentic to some or indeed many gay women themselves, allowing for a form of 'recognition' for lesbians whether or not they personally inhabit the images of lesbianism shown on screen. No matter what one's chosen image, the reward—as a frequently under-represented minority—of being 'recognised' by codes in the film offers the pleasure of detecting and identifying with a part of oneself in the film.

Conclusion

The costume strategies in *Gillery's Little Secret* and *The Kids Are All Right* are quite different: *Gillery's Little Secret* contains little in the way of costume that could be classified as unmistakably identifiably gay while Cholodenko's film features commonly recognisable lesbian images. However, what both examples do share is the justification of their costume designs through the connection with the style of their respective writer/directors. The androgynous looks of Cholodenko and her partner allowed Hannan to use costumes that speak lesbian identity without feeling as though she were stereotyping, and Scorzafava's

linking of the images in her film with her own appearance lends her costumes lesbian authenticity despite their lack of gay readability. For the queer authors in these examples, the personal is integral in legitimising costumes used. Of course there is not one definitive image of lesbianism in the real world, and not all lesbians choose to telegraph their identity through clothing; this much shows in the fact that such disparate examples as Gillery and Nic are both authenticated by their partial basis in the directors' own appearances. What this authentication does mean, however, is that characters based on real life images can be classified as *representative* of lesbians whether readable as such to audiences or not.

Representation of lesbian characters by lesbian authors which is authentic in this way is a political tactic. Scorzafava theorised that a greater number of gay women telling their own stories through visual media would increase the variation of images of lesbians circulating in culture:

I think that we need more voices out there telling those stories, and I think that when you have the larger number of voices telling the greater number of stories, you're going to have a lot of different looks and feels and it's not all going to be *The L Word*... There are so many different levels of it, and it's up to us to put those representations out there.²⁹⁹

Of course some gay women do in fact look like the femme actresses on *The L Word*, and given the social inequalities which are still a part of gay life in all parts of the world, work that aims to gain affirmation by 'universalizing' and normalising gay people remains important. However, equally, many gay women do not look like the cast of the Showtime drama and, as Teresa de Lauretis argues, the project of lesbian art is to alter 'the standard of vision, the frame of reference of visibility, of *what can be seen*'.³⁰⁰ The specificity of the costumes in *The Kids Are All Right* works to make visible through style the lesbianism clearly communicated by dialogue and intimate interaction in both Cholodenko and Scorzafava's films. The project of normalising lesbianism in *The Kids Are All Right*, takes place in the unspectacular treatment of gay parenting but, importantly, not in a comprehensive erasure of stylistic differences from the mainstream. The film thus allows for a presentation of women

²⁹⁹ Scorzafava, personal interview.

³⁰⁰ Teresa de Lauretis, 'Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation', in Abelove et al. (eds), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, p. 152.

like Nic and Jules, along with their children, as a family unit worth caring about. Work such as Ciasullo's arguments about the lack of acceptance and representation of butch women in the media points to the general lack of acceptance of visually obvious gay women in film and television.³⁰¹ Lesbians who look like lesbians are typically either not valued or not represented at all. By dressing Bening and Moore to be readable as gay through style, Hannan and Cholodenko attempted to normalise gay women not by making them indistinguishable from straight women but by depicting gay women who look gay as women worthy of representation. In doing so, Cholodenko used the personal as political, expanding the boundaries of what is deemed acceptable on screen, and perhaps widening the margins of that which, in future years, *can be seen*.

³⁰¹ Ann M. Ciasullo, 'Making Her (In)Visible'.

Conclusion

One of my consumer interviews was a joint discussion with Hannah and Irene, a couple. At the time we met, Hannah was aged between 55 and 65, and Irene between 45 and 55. During the interview, both women discussed social changes that have taken place during their lifetimes. For example, Irene works for a government organisation and her job requires some security clearance involving background checks. She spoke about being accepted without question by her employers and about being happy to be open about her relationship and living situation in her current work environment. However, she contrasted this with her attitude in earlier years, explaining:

Irene: I wouldn't have come out in the seventies. I wouldn't [...] My perception is it would have been frowned on -

Hannah: Mmm, absolutely.

Irene: - that you would have been discriminated against. But in the last thirty years things have moved on hugely.¹

One of the symptoms of this seismic shift in social conditions for gay women over the last thirty years has been the appearance of the openly lesbian celebrity, emerging at the beginning of the 1990s. The lesbian celebrity is still a relatively rare figure in society, but the numbers are slowly increasing. Even notoriously private Hollywood powerhouse Jodie Foster, long rumoured to be gay, finally publically named her co-parent Cydney Bernard as her ex-lover in an acceptance speech for the Cecil B. DeMille award at the 70th Golden Globes ceremony in January 2013.

TEXT REMOVED

Butch-phobia so affects younger lesbian viewers and the images they consume, erasing what older women would regard as truly butch, that what looks 'stylish' with aspects of feminine presentation to women with experience of Butch/Femme culture and with overtly

¹ Irene and Hannah, interview with the author, 15 November 2011.

feminist viewpoints looks 'butch' and stereotypical to younger, perhaps less politically engaged gay women. Postmodern lesbian texts, heavily influenced by neoliberal and postfeminist sensibilities, have shifted the lesbian circuit of communication away from the possibility of celebrating butch identities to a point where recognisable lesbianism is dismissed as a stereotype and the bisexual Frankie on *Lip Service*, with her make-up and chin-length hair, is one of the most 'butch' characters on television.

This thesis has aimed to investigate costume and dress with relation to lesbian representations in film and on television since Ellen DeGeneres' coming out in 1997. I have used the triple methodology of interviews with producers of texts, textual analysis, and interviews with lesbian consumers to detail the current state of lesbian representation, taking into account social and historical contexts and noting a shift from earlier depictions in the media. As such, this work is intended as an update to work on gay and lesbian representations by Richard Dyer, Andrea Weiss, Patricia White, Caroline Sheldon and others. It is also designed to expand the field of costume theory, both to encompass lesbian costuming and to reinsert the costume designer (and other producers of lesbian images) into work analysing costume. In an area of both academic and popular investigation that tends to focus on singular facets of production or reception, I have aimed to trace the complete process of costume design, bring producer intentions, textual analysis and consumer reception into dynamic dialogue with one another.

What has become most clear to me in the process of researching and writing this thesis is that while representations of lesbian characters have altered immensely in relatively recent years, one thing has not changed since Gaines penned her formative work on costume and narrative: whether lesbianism is the focus or not, and whether it is recognisable or visible only through action, costume remains central in telling the woman's story.²

² Jane Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story' in Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds), *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, New York & London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 180-211.

Appendix 1

Transcript taken from The L Word episode 'Let's Do It' and used in consumer interviews.

Shane

The ones that never look back... you can spot them a mile away.

Dana

How can you tell?

Alice

Through the signals.

Dana

That's my problem.

Alice

You don't have gaydar[...]

(Later, the three women look at another customer, trying to work out whether she is gay or not)

Dana

I don't know.

Shane

Look at her fingernails; are they long or short?

Alice

Are they polished or natural?

Dana

They're long and polished. So she's...?

Shane

Leaning to straight but we still need more info.

Alice

Look at the shoes.

Dana

High-heeled sandals.

Alice

With tapered jeans. Would you wear high-heeled sandals with tapered jeans?

Dana

Yes?

Alice

No!

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All About Eve. Dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Prod. Twentieth Century Fox, USA, 1950. Main Cast: Bette Davis (Margo Channing), Anne Baxter (Eve Harrington), George Sanders (Addison DeWitt).

Ally McBeal. Fox, USA, 1997-2002.

'Amalgamation and Capital', episode nine, *Deadwood*, second season, USA, HBO, tx. 1 May 2005. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearengen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary), Powers Boothe (Cy Tolliver), Kim Dickens (Joanie Stubbs).

American Beauty. Dir. Sam Mendes, Prod. Dreamworks SKG, USA, 1999. Main Cast: Kevin Spacey (Lester Burnham), Annette Bening (Carolyn Burnham), Thora Birch (Jane Burnham), Wes Bentley (Ricky Fitts), Mena Suvari (Angela Hayes), Chris Cooper (Col. Frank Fitts).

Annie Get Your Gun. Dir. George Sidney, Prod. MGM, USA, 1950. Main Cast: Betty Hutton (Annie Oakley), Howard Keel (Frank Butler), Louis Calherne (Col. Buffalo Bill Cody).

Annie Oakley. Flying 'A' Productions, USA, 1954-1957.

Arrested Development. Fox, USA, 2003-2013.

The Ballad of Little Jo. Dir. Maggie Greenwald, Prod. Joco/Polygram, USA, 1993. Main Cast: Suzy Amis (Josephine Monaghan), Bo Hopkins (Frank Badger), Ian McKellan (Percy Corcoran), David Chung, (Tinman Wong).

Bar Girls. Dir. Marita Giovanni, Prod. Lavender Circle Mob, USA, 1994. Main Cast: Nancy Allison Wolfe (Loretta), Liza D'Agostino (Rachel), Camilla Griggs (JR).

Basic Instinct. Dir. Paul Verhoeven, Prod. Carolco Pictures/Canal+, USA, 1992. Main Cast: Michael Douglas (Detective Nick Curran), Sharon Stone (Catherine Tramell), Jeanne Tripplehorn (Dr. Beth Garner), George Dzundza (Gus).

'The Beautiful Girls', episode nine, *Mad Men*, fourth season, USA, ABC, tx. 19 September 2010. Main Cast: John Hamm (Don Draper), Elisabeth Moss (Peggy Olsen), Christina Hendricks (Joan Harris), John Slattery (Roger Sterling), Kiernan Shipka (Sally Draper), Cara Buono (Faye Miller).

Better Off Ted. ABC, USA, 2009-2010.

The Big Sleep. Dir. Howard Hawks, Prod. Warner Bros, USA, 1946. Main Cast: Humphrey Bogart (Philip Marlowe), Lauren Bacall (Vivan Sternwood Rutledge), John Ridgely (Eddie Mars), Martha Vickers (Carmen Sternwood).

Black Widow. Dir. Bob Rafelson, Prod. Twentieth Century Fox, USA, 1987. Main Cast: Debra Winger (Alexandra Barnes), Theresa Russell (Catharine Peterson).

Blood Money. Dir. Rowland Brown, Prod. Twentieth Century Pictures, USA, 1933. Main Cast: George Bancroft (Bill Bailey), Judith Anderson (Ruby Darling), Frances Dee (Elaine Talbert), Chick Chandler (Drury Darling).

Boardwalk Empire. HBO, USA, 2010-

Body of Proof. ABC, USA, 2011-

Bound. Dir. Andy and Larry Wachowski, Prod. Dino De Laurentiis Company/Spelling Films, USA, 1996. Main Cast: Jennifer Tilly (Violet), Gina Gershon (Corky).

'Boy the Earth Talks To', episode twelve, *Deadwood*, second season, USA, HBO, tx. 22 May 2005. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearngen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary), Powers Boothe (Cy Tolliver), Kim Dickens (Joanie Stubbs).

Bridget Jones's Diary. Dir. Sharon Maguire, Prod. Working Title, UK, 2001. Main Cast: Renee Zellweger (Bridget Jones), Colin Firth (Mark Darcy), Hugh Grant (Daniel Cleaver).

Brokeback Mountain. Dir. Ang Lee, Prod. Alberta Film Entertainment, Canada/USA, 2005. Main Cast: Heath Ledger (Ennis Del Mar), Jake Gyllenhaal (Jack Twist).

Brookside. Mersey Television, UK, 1982-2003.

Buffalo Girls. Dir. Rod Hardy, Prod. CBS, USA, 1995. Main Cast: Angelica Houston (Calamity Jane), Melanie Griffiths (Dora DuFran), Peter Coyote (Buffalo Bill Cody).

Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Fox/WB/UPN, USA, 1997-2003.

Calamity Jane. Dir. David Butler, Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1953. Main Cast: Doris Day (Calamity Jane), Howard Keel (Wild Bill Hickok), Allyn McLerie (Katy Brown), Phillip Carey (Lt. Gilmartin), Dick Wesson (Frances Fryer), Paul Harvey (Henry Miller).

Calamity Jane. Dir. James Goldstone, Prod. CBS, USA, 1984. Main Cast: Jane Alexander (Calamity Jane), Frederic Forrest (Wild Bill Hickok), Ken Kercheval (Buffalo Bill Cody).

The Celluloid Closet. Dir. Rob Epstein/Jeffrey Friedman, Prod. HBO, USA, 1995.

'The Chase', episode sixteen, *Desperate Housewives*, sixth season, USA, ABC, tx. 28 February 2010. Main Cast: Teri Hatcher (Susan Delfino), Felicity Huffman (Lynette Scavo), Marcia Cross (Bree Hodge), Eva Longoria Parker (Gabrielle Solis), Julie Benz (Robin Gallagher), Dana Delaney (Katherine Mayfair).

Chasing Amy. Dir. Kevin Smith, Prod. Too Askew Prod. Inc., USA, 1997. Main Cast: Ben Affleck (Holden McNeil), Joey Lauren Adams (Alyssa Jones), Matt Damon (Shawn Oran).

The Children's Hour. Dir. William Wyler, Prod., Mirisch Company; Worldwide Productions, 1961. Main Cast: Audrey Hepburn (Karen Wright), Shirley MacLaine (Martha Dobie), James Garner (Dr. Joe Cardin), Miriam Hopkins (Aunt Lily), Karen Balkin (Mary Tilford), Fay Bainter (Mrs. Tilford).

'Check Your Head', episode seventeen, *Without a Trace*, fourth season, USA, CBS, tx. 9 March 2006. Main Cast: Anthony LaPaglia (Jack Malone), Poppy Montgomery (Samantha Spade), Christina Hendricks (Rachel Gibson), Francesca Ingrassia (Bianca Stone).

'Childish Things' episode eight, *Deadwood*, second season, USA, HBO, tx. 24 April 2005. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearngen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary), Powers Boothe (Cy Tolliver), Kim Dickens (Joanie Stubbs).

Claire of the Moon. Dir. Nicole Conn, Prod. Demi-Monde Productions, USA, 1992. Main Cast: Trisha Todd (Claire), Karen Trumbo (Dr. Noel Benedict), Faith McDevitt (Maggie).

The Color Purple. Dir. Steven Spielberg, Prod. Amblin Entertainment/Warner Bros., USA, 1985. Main Cast: Whoopi Goldberg (Celie Johnson), Danny Glover (Albert), Margaret Avery (Shug Avery), Oprah Winfrey (Sofia), Willard Pugh (Harpo Johnson).

The Costume Designer. Dir. Tholen Gladden, Prod. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, USA, 1950.

Cruising. Dir. William Friedkin, Prod. Lorimar, USA, 1980. Main Cast: Al Pacino (Steve Burns), Paul Sorvino (Capt. Edelson), Karen Allen (Nancy), Richard Cox (Stuart Richards).

Dallas. CBS, USA, 1978-1991.

'Dean Man Walking', episode five, *Body of Proof*, first season, USA, ABC, tx. 19 April 2011. Main Cast: Dana Delaney (Megan Hunt), Jeri Ryan (Kate Murphy), Nicholas Bishop (Peter Dunlop), Sonja Sohn (Samantha Baker), Geoffrey Arend (Ethan Gross), Christina Hendricks (Jessica/Karin Archer).

'Deadwood', episode one, *Deadwood*, first season, USA, HBO, tx. 21 March 2004. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearngen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Keith Carradine (Wild Bill Hickok), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary).

'Deep Water', episode two, *Deadwood*, first season, USA, HBO, tx. 28 March 2004. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearngen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Keith Carradine (Wild Bill Hickok), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary).

Desert Hearts. Dir. Donna Deitch, Prod. Desert Heart Productions, USA, 1985. Main Cast: Helen Shaver (Vivian Bell), Patricia Charbonneau (Cay Rivvers), Audra Lindley (Frances Parker), Andra Akers (Silver), Dean Butler (Darrell).

Desperate Housewives. ABC, USA, 2004-2012.

Desperately Seeking Susan. Dir. Susan Seidelman, Prod. Orion Pictures, USA, 1985. Main Cast: Rosanna Arquette (Roberta Glass), Madonna (Susan), Aidan Quinn (Dez), Mark Blum (Gary Glass).

'Double Date', episode two, *How I Met Your Mother*, fifth season, USA, CBS, tx. 29 September 2009. Main Cast: Josh Radnor (Ted Mosby), Jason Segel (Marshall Eriksen), Cobie Smulders (Robin Scherbatsky), Neil Patrick Harris (Barney Stinson), Alyson Hannigan (Lily Aldrin).

'Dyeing is Easy, Comedy is Hard', episode fourteen, *Will & Grace*, fourth season, USA, NBC, tx. 31 January 2002. Main Cast: Eric McCormack (Will Truman), Debra Messing (Grace Adler), Jack McFarland (Sean Hayes), Megan Mullally (Karen Walker), Michael Angarano (Elliot), Bonnie (Rosie O'Donnell).

Dyketactics. Dir. Barbara Hammer, Prod. Barbara Hammer, 1974. Main Cast: Barbara Hammer (woman making love).

Educating Rita. Dir. Lewis Gilbert, Prod. Acorn Pictures, UK, 1983. Main Cast: Michael Caine (Dr. Frank Bryant), Julie Walters (Rita Susan White).

Edward II. Dir. Derek Jarman, Prod. Working Title Films, UK & Japan, 1991. Main Cast : Steven Waddington (Edward II), Andrew Tiernan (Gaveston), Tilda Swinton (Isabella), Jerome Flynn (Kent), Nigel Terry (Mortimer).

Ellen: The Ellen DeGeneres Show. NBC, USA, 2003-

'Emma', episode eight, *Ellen*, fifth season, USA, ABC, tx. 19 November 1997. Main Cast: Ellen DeGeneres (Ellen Morgan), Emma Thompson (Herself), Joely Fisher (Paige Clarke).

ER. NBC, USA, 1994-2009.

'Escape From L.A.', episode fourteen, *Ellen*, fifth season, USA, ABC, tx. 28 January 1998. Main Cast: Ellen DeGeneres (Ellen Morgan), Lisa Darr (Laurie Manning).

Episode sixteen, *The Graham Norton Show*, tenth season, UK, BBC, tx. 10 February 2012.

Episode three, *Film 2010*, UK, BBC, tx. 22 October 2010.

'Flowers of Evil', episode eight, *Police Woman*, first season, USA, NBC, tx. 8 November 1974. Main Cast: Angie Dickinson (Sgt. Suzanne 'Pepper' Anderson), Earl Holliman (Sgt. Bill Crowley), Fay Spain (Mame Dorn), Laraine Stephens (Gladys Conway), Lynn Loring (Janet Richards).

Even Cowgirls Get the Blues. Dir. Gus Van Sant, Prod. New Line Cinema/Fourth Vision, USA, 1993. Main Cast: Uma Thurman (Sissy Hankshaw), Lorraine Bracco (Delores Del Ruby), Keane Reeves (Julian Gitche), John Hurt (The Countess).

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. Dir. Terry Gilliam, Prod. Universal, USA, 1998. Main Cast: Johnny Depp (Raoul Duke), Benicio Del Toro (Dr. Gonzo), Tobey Maguire (Hitchhiker).

Finn's Girl. Dir. Dominique Cardona and Laurie Colbert, Prod. Cardona-Colbert Production, Canada, 2007. Main Cast: Brooke Johnson (Finn), Yanna McIntosh (Diana), Maya Ritter (Zelly).

Follow the Fleet. Dir. Mark Sandrich, Prod. RKO, USA, 1936. Main Cast: Fred Astaire (Bake Baker), Ginger Rogers (Sherry Martin), Randolph Scott (Bilge Smith), Harriet Hilliard (Connie Martin).

The Fox. Dir. Mark Rydell, Prod. Motion Pictures International, Canada, 1967. Main Cast: Sandy Dennis (Jill Banford), Anne Heywood (Ellen March), Keir Dullea (Paul Renfield).

Friends. NBC, USA, 1994-2004.

'Full Faith and Credit', episode four, *Deadwood*, third season, USA, HBO, tx. 2 July 2006. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearengen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary), Powers Boothe (Cy Tolliver), Kim Dickens (Joanie Stubbs).

The Gay Divorcee. Dir. Mark Sandrich, Prod. RKO, USA, 1934. Main Cast: Fred Astaire (Guy Holden), Ginger Rogers (Mimi Glossop), Alice Brady (Aunt Hortense), Edward Everett Horton (Egbert 'Pinky' Fitzgerald), Erik Rhodes (Rodolfo Tonetti).

Giles and Sue's Royal Wedding. BBC, UK, 2011, tx. 27 April 2011.

Gillery's Little Secret. Dir. T.M. Scorzafava, Prod. Liquid Filmworks, USA, 2006. Main Cast: Annabeth Gish (Gillery), Allison Smith (Bernadette), Julie Ann Emery (Abbie).

'The Glamorous Life', episode fourteen, *Desperate Housewives*, sixth season, USA, ABC, tx. 31 January 2010. Main Cast: Teri Hatcher (Susan Delfino), Felicity Huffman (Lynette Scavo), Marcia Cross (Bree Hodge), Eva Longoria Parker (Gabrielle Solis), Julie Benz (Robin Gallagher).

Go Fish. Dir. Rose Troche, Prod. Can I Watch Pictures, USA, 1994. Main Cast: Guinevere Turner (Camille 'Max' West), V. S. Brodie (Ely), T. Wendy McMillan (Kia), Migdalia Melendez (Evy), Anastasia Sharp (Daria).

The Graduate. Dir. Mike Nichols, Prod. Lawrence Turman/Embassy, USA, 1967. Main Cast: Dustin Hoffman (Ben Braddock), Anne Bancroft (Mrs Robinson), Katharine Ross (Elaine Robinson).

The Great British Bake Off. BBC, UK, 2010-

Grey's Anatomy. ABC, USA, 2005-

'H Anatomy', episode two, *QI*, eighth season, UK, BBC, tx. 24 September 2010.

The Harvey Girls. Dir. George Sidney, Prod. MGM, USA, 1946. Main Cast: Judy Garland (Susan Bradley), John Hodiak (Ned Trent), Ray Bolger (Chris Maule), Angele Lansbury (Em).

The Haunting. Dir. Robert Wise, Prod. Argyle Enterprises/MGM, UK/USA, 1963. Main Cast: Julie Harris (Eleanor Lance), Claire Bloom (Theo), Richard Johnson (Dr. Markway), Russ Tamblyn (Luke Sannerson).

Have I Got News for You. BBC, UK, 1990-

Heading Out. BBC, UK, 2013.

Heavenly Creatures. Dir. Peter Jackson, Prod. Fontana Productions, UK/Germany/New Zealand, 1994. Main Cast: Pauline Parker (Melanie Lynskey), Kate Winslet (Juliet Hulme).

'Hello Muddah, Hello Faddah', episode 24, *Ellen*, fourth season, USA, ABC, tx. 7 May 1997. Main Cast: Ellen DeGeneres (Ellen Morgan), Alice Hirson (Lois Morgan), Steven Gilborn (Harold Morgan).

'Here Was a Man', episode four, *Deadwood*, first season, USA, HBO, tx. 11 April 2004. Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearengen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Keith Carradine (Wild Bill Hickok), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary).

High Noon. Dir. Fred Zinnemann, Prod. Stanley Kramer Productions, USA, 1952. Main Cast: Gary Cooper (Marshal Will Kane), Thomas Mitchell (Mayor Jonas Henderson), Lloyd Bridges (Deputy Marshal Harvey Pell), Katy Jurado (Helen Ramirez), Grace Kelly (Amy Fowler Kane).

The Hours and Times. Dir. Christopher Münch, Prod. Antarctic Pictures, USA, 1991. Main Cast: Ian Hart (John Lennon), David Angus (Brian Epstein).

House. Fox, USA, 2004-2012.

'I am Not the Fine Man You Take Me For', episode two, *Deadwood*, third season, USA, HBO, tx. 18 June 2006. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearengen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary), Powers Boothe (Cy Tolliver), Kim Dickens (Joanie Stubbs).

If These Walls Could Talk 2. HBO, USA, 2000.

The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love. Dir. Maria Maggenti, Prod. Smash Pictures/Fine Line Features, USA, 1995. Main Cast: Laurel Holloman (Randy Dean), Nicole Parker (Evie Roy), Kate Stafford (Rebecca Dean), Maggie Moore (Wendy).

I've Heard the Mermaids Singing. Dir. Patricia Rozema, Prod. Canada Council, Canada, 1987. Main Cast: Sheila McCarthy (Polly), Paule Baillargeon (Gabrielle), Ann-Marie MacDonald (Mary Joseph).

Je, tu, il, elle/I, You, He, She. Dir. Chantal Akerman, Prod. Paradise Films, France/Belgium, 1976. Main Cast: Chantal Akerman (Julie), Niels Arestrup (Truck Driver), Claire Wauthian (Girlfriend).

'The Jet Set', episode eleven, *Mad Men*, second season, USA, ABC, tx. 12 October 2008. Main Cast: John Hamm (Don Draper), Elisabeth Moss (Peggy Olsen), Vincent Kartheiser (Pete Campbell), Christina Hendricks (Joan Holloway), Edin Gali (Kurt Smith), Patrick Cavanaugh (Smitty).

The Kids Are All Right. Dir. Lisa Cholodenko, Prod. Liquid Filmworks & Gilbert Films, USA, 2010. Main Cast: Annette Bening (Nic Allgood), Julianne Moore (Jules Allgood), Mark Ruffalo (Paul), Mia Wasikowska (Joni), Josh Hutcherson (Laser).

The Killing of Sister George. Dir. Robert Aldrich, Prod. Palomar Pictures International, USA/UK, 1968. Main Cast: Beryl Reid (June 'Sister George' Buckridge), Susannah York (Alice 'Childie' McNaught), Coral Browne (Mercy Croft).

'Lagrimas de Oro', episode six, *The L Word*, second season, USA, Showtime, tx. 27 March 2005. Main Cast: Katherine Moennig (Shane McCutcheon), Leisha Hailey (Alice Piezecki),

Jennifer Beals (Bette Porter), Laurel Holloman (Tina Kennard), Erin Daniels (Dana Fairbanks), Mia Kirschner (Jenny Schechter).

'Land Ahoy', episode ten, *The L Word*, second season, USA, Showtime, tx. 24 April 2005. Main Cast: Katherine Moennig (Shane McCutcheon), Leisha Hailey (Alice Piezecki), Jennifer Beals (Bette Porter), Laurel Holloman (Tina Kennard), Erin Daniels (Dana Fairbanks), Mia Kirschner (Jenny Schechter).

Late Lunch. Channel 4, UK, 1998-1999.

'Lawfully', episode five, *The L Word*, first season, USA, Showtime, tx. 15 February 2004. Main Cast: Katherine Moennig (Shane McCutcheon), Leisha Hailey (Alice Piezecki), Jennifer Beals (Bette Porter), Laurel Holloman (Tina Kennard), Erin Daniels (Dana Fairbanks), Mia Kirschner (Jenny Schechter).

'Lay Down the Law', episode eight, *The L Word*, fifth season, USA, Showtime, tx. 24 February 2008. Main Cast: Katherine Moennig (Shane McCutcheon), Leisha Hailey (Alice Piezecki), Jennifer Beals (Bette Porter), Laurel Holloman (Tina Kennard), Erin Daniels (Dana Fairbanks), Mia Kirschner (Jenny Schechter).

'Left Hand of the Goddess', episode twelve, *The L Word*, third season, USA, Showtime, tx. 26 March 2006. Main Cast: Katherine Moennig (Shane McCutcheon), Leisha Hailey (Alice Piezecki), Jennifer Beals (Bette Porter), Laurel Holloman (Tina Kennard), Erin Daniels (Dana Fairbanks), Mia Kirschner (Jenny Schechter).

'Let's Do It', episode two, *The L Word*, first season, USA, Showtime, tx. 25 January 2004. Main Cast: Katherine Moennig (Shane McCutcheon), Leisha Hailey (Alice Piezecki), Jennifer Beals (Bette Porter), Laurel Holloman (Tina Kennard), Erin Daniels (Dana Fairbanks), Mia Kirschner (Jenny Schechter), Karina Lombard (Marina Ferrer), Eric Mabius (Tim Haspel).

'Leviathan Smiles', episode eight, *Deadwood*, third season, USA, HBO, tx. 30 July 2006. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearngen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary), Powers Boothe (Cy Tolliver), Kim Dickens (Joanie Stubbs).

'Liberally', episode ten, *The L Word*, first season, USA, Showtime, tx. 21 March 2004. Main Cast: Katherine Moennig (Shane McCutcheon), Leisha Hailey (Alice Piezecki), Jennifer Beals (Bette Porter), Laurel Holloman (Tina Kennard), Erin Daniels (Dana Fairbanks), Mia Kirschner (Jenny Schechter).

'Life, Loss, Leaving', episode one, *The L Word*, second season, USA, Showtime, tx. 20 February 2005. Main Cast: Katherine Moennig (Shane McCutcheon), Leisha Hailey (Alice Piezecki), Jennifer Beals (Bette Porter), Laurel Holloman (Tina Kennard), Erin Daniels (Dana Fairbanks), Mia Kirschner (Jenny Schechter).

'Lifecycle', episode ten, *The L Word*, fifth season, USA, Showtime, tx. 9 March 2008. Main Cast: Jennifer Beals (Bette Porter), Laurel Holloman (Tina Kennard), Mia Kirschner (Jenny Schechter), Leisha Hailey (Alice Pieszcecki), Marlee Matlin (Jodi Lerner), Katherine Moennig (Shane McCutcheon), Rose Rollins (Tasha Williams), Daniela Sweeney (Max Sweeney).

Light Lunch. Channel 4, UK, 1997-1998.

'Light My Fire', episode four, *The L Word*, third season, USA, Showtime, tx. 29 January 2006. Main Cast: Katherine Moennig (Shane McCutcheon), Leisha Hailey (Alice Piezecki), Jennifer Beals (Bette Porter), Laurel Holloman (Tina Kennard), Erin Daniels (Dana Fairbanks), Mia Kirschner (Jenny Schecter).

Lip Service. BBC, UK, 2010-2012.

'Listen Up', episode eight, *The L Word*, first season, USA, Showtime, tx. 7 March 2004. Main Cast: Katherine Moennig (Shane McCutcheon), Leisha Hailey (Alice Piezecki), Jennifer Beals (Bette Porter), Laurel Holloman (Tina Kennard), Erin Daniels (Dana Fairbanks), Mia Kirschner (Jenny Schecter).

Lonesome Cowboys. Dir. Andy Warhol, Prod. Andy Warhol Films, USA, 1968. Main Cast: Viva (Ramona D'Alvarez), Tom Hompertz (Julian), Louis Waldon (Mickey), Eric Emerson (Eric), Taylor Mead (Nurse), Joe Dallesandro (Little Jo).

'The Long Weekend', episode ten, *Mad Men*, first season, USA, AMC, tx. 27 September 2007. Main Cast: John Hamm (Don Draper), Elisabeth Moss (Peggy Olsen), Vincent Kartheiser (Pete Campbell), Christina Hendricks (Joan Holloway), John Slattery (Roger Sterling), January Jones (Betty Draper), Robert Morse (Bertram Cooper), Kate Norby (Carol).

'Looking Back', episode eleven, *The L Word*, first season, USA, Showtime, tx. 28 March 2004. Main Cast: Katherine Moennig (Shane McCutcheon), Leisha Hailey (Alice Piezecki), Jennifer Beals (Bette Porter), Laurel Holloman (Tina Kennard), Erin Daniels (Dana Fairbanks), Mia Kirschner (Jenny Schecter).

'Lovely', episode sixteen, *Desperate Housewives*, sixth season, USA, ABC, tx. 21 February 2010. Main Cast: Teri Hatcher (Susan Delfino), Felicity Huffman (Lynette Scavo), Marcia Cross (Bree Hodge), Eva Longoria Parker (Gabrielle Solis), Julie Benz (Robin Gallagher), Dana Delaney (Katherine Mayfair).

Mad About You. NBC, USA, 1992-1999.

Mad Men. AMC, USA, 2007-

Maestro. BBC, UK, 2008.

Magnificent Obsession. Dir. Douglas Sirk, Prod. Universal Pictures, USA, 1954. Main Cast: Jane Wyman (Helen Phillips), Rock Hudson (Bob Merrick), Agnes Moorehead (Nancy Ashford), Otto Kruger (Edward Randolph).

The Major and The Minor. Dir. Billy Wilder, Prod. Paramount, USA, 1942. Main Cast: Ginger Rogers (Susan Applegate), Ray Milland (Major Kirby).

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance. Dir. John Ford, Prod. Paramount, USA, 1962. Main Cast: John Wayne (Tom Doniphon), James Stewart (Ransom Stoddard), Vera Miles (Hallie Stoddard), Lee Marvin (Liberty Valance).

Mary Queen of Shops. BBC, UK, 2007-2009.

'Maternity', episode four, *House*, first season, USA, Fox, tx. 7 December 2004. Main Cast: Hugh Laurie (Dr. House), Lisa Edelstein (Dr. Lisa Cuddy).

Meet Me In St. Louis. Dir. Vincente Minnelli, Prod. MGM, USA, 1944. Main Cast: Judy Garland (Esther Smith), Margaret O'Brien ('Tootie' Smith), Mary Astor (Anna Smith), Lucille Bremer (Rose Smith), Leon Ames (Alonzo Smith), Tom Drake (John Truett), Marjorie Main (Katie), Harry Davenport (Grandpa), Joan Carroll (Agnes Smith).

The Meeting of Two Queens, Ed. Cecilia Barriga, Spain, 1991. Main Cast: Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich.

Milk. Dir. Gus Van Sant, Prod. Focus Features, USA, 2008. Main Cast: Sean Penn (Harvey Milk), Emile Hirsch (Cleve Jones), Josh Brolin (Dan White), Diego Luna (Jack Lira), James Franco (Scott Smith).

Morocco. Dir. Josef von Sternberg, Prod. Paramount, USA, 1930. Main Cast: Marlene Dietrich (Amy Jolly), Gary Cooper (Tom Brown), Adolphe Menjou (La Bessière).

Mrs. Doubtfire. Dir. Chris Columbus, Prod. Twentieth Century Fox, USA, 1993. Main Cast: Robin Williams (Daniel Hillard), Sally Field (Miranda Hillard), Perce Brosnan (Stu Denmeyer), Lisa Jakub (Lydia Hillard), Matthew Lawrence (Chris Hillard), Mara Wilson (Natalie Hillard).

The Muppet Christmas Carol. Dir. Brian Henson, Prod. Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1992. Main Cast: Michael Caine (Ebenezer Scrooge).

My Fair Lady. Dir. George Cukor, Prod. Warner Bros. Pictures, USA, 1964. Main Cast: Audrey Hepburn (Eliza Doolittle), Rex Harrison (Professor Henry Higgins).

'My Two Young Men' episode eighteen, *Desperate Housewives*, sixth season, USA, ABC, tx. 21 March 2010. Main Cast: Teri Hatcher (Susan Delfino), Felicity Huffman (Lynette Scavo), Marcia Cross (Bree Hodge), Eva Longoria Parker (Gabrielle Solis), Julie Benz (Robin Gallagher), Dana Delaney (Katherine Mayfair).

Nationwide. BBC, UK, 1969-1983.

Ne le dis à personne/Tell No One. Dir. Guillaume Canet, Prod. Les Productions du Trésor, France, 2006. Main Cast: François Cluzet (Alexandre Beck), Marie-Josée Croze (Margot Beck), André Dussollier (Jacques Laurentin), Kristin Scott Thomas (Hélène Perkins).

'The New Girl', episode five, *Mad Men*, second season, USA, AMC, tx. 24 August 2008. Main Cast: John Hamm (Don Draper), Elisabeth Moss (Peggy Olsen), Christina Hendricks (Joan Holloway), Vincent Kartheiser (Pete Campbell), Melinda McGraw (Bobbie Barrett), Peyton List (Jane Siegel).

'New Money', episode three, *Deadwood*, second season, USA, HBO, tx. 20 March 2005. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearengen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary), Powers Boothe (Cy Tolliver), Kim Dickens (Joanie Stubbs).

'The One With the Lesbian Wedding', episode eleven, *Friends*, second season, USA, NBC, tx. 18 January 1996. Main Cast: Courteney Cox (Monica Geller), Jennifer Aniston (Rachel

Green), Matt Le Blanc (Joey Tribbiani), Matthew Perry (Chandler Bing), David Schwimmer (Ross Geller), Lisa Kudrow (Pheobe Buffay), Jane Sibbett (Carol Willick), Jessica Hecht (Susan Bunch).

Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit. BBC, UK, tx. January 1990.

Out of the Past. Dir. Jacques Tourneur, Prod. RKO, USA, 1947, Main Cast: Robert Mitchum (Jeff), Jane Greer (Kathie), Kirk Douglas (Whit).

'Out of Town', episode one, *Mad Men*, third season, USA, ABC, tx. 16 August 2009. Main Cast: John Hamm (Don Draper), Elisabeth Moss (Peggy Olsen), Vincent Kartheiser (Pete Campbell), Christina Hendricks (Joan Harris), Aaron Staton (Ken Cosgrove), John Slattery (Roger Sterling), January Jones (Betty Draper), Jared Harris (Lane Pryce), Bryan Batt (Salvatore Romano).

Pageant. Dir. Ron Davis/Stewart Halpern-Fingerhut, Prod. Cineaste, USA, 2008.

Paris Is Burning. Dir. Jennie Livingston, Prod. Prestige Film/Miramax Films/OffWhite Productions, USA, 1990. Main Cast: Pepper LaBeija, Willi Ninja, Dorian Corey, Paris Dupree.

Personal Best. Dir. Robert Towne, Prod. The Geffen Company, USA, 1982. Main Cast: Marial Hemingway (Chris Cahill), Scott Glenn (Terry Tingloff), Patrice Donnelly (Tory Skinner), Kenny Moore (Denny Stites).

'Pilot', *The L Word*, USA, Showtime, tx. January 18 2004. Main Cast: Katherine Moennig (Shane McCutcheon), Leisha Hailey (Alice Piezecki), Jennifer Beals (Bette Porter), Laurel Holloman (Tina Kennard), Erin Daniels (Dana Fairbanks), Mia Kirschner (Jenny Schecter).

The Plainsman. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille, Prod. Paramount, USA, 1936. Main Cast: Gary Cooper (Wild Bill Hickok), Jean Arthur (Calamity Jane), James Ellison (William 'Buffalo Bill' Cody).

'Pointless', episode 1358, *Brookside*, UK, Channel 4, tx. 14 January 1994. Main Cast: Lee Hartney (Simon Howe), Brian Regan (Terry Sullivan), Vince Earl (Ron Dixon), Mark Lennox (Tony Dixon), Anna Friel (Beth Jordache), Nicola Stephenson (Margaret Clemence).

The Postman Always Rings Twice. Dir. Tay Garnett, Prod. MGM, USA, 1946. Main Cast: Lana Turner (Cora Smith), John Garfield (Frank Chambers).

Pretty Woman. Dir. Gary Marshall, Prod. Touchstone Pictures, USA, 1990. Main Cast: Richard Gere (Edward Lewis), Julia Roberts (Vivian Ward), Ralph Bellamy (James Morse), Jason Alexander (Phillip Stuckey), Laura San Giacomo (Kit De Luca).

Primetime, Diane Sawyer Interview with Ellen DeGeneres and Robert A. Iger, USA, ABC, tx. 6 May 1998.

Primetime Thursday, Diane Sawyer Interview with Rosie O'Donnell, USA, ABC, tx. 14 March 2002.

The Private Lives of Pippa Lee. Dir. Rebecca Miller, Prod. Grand Army Entertainment, USA, 2009. Main Cast: Robin Wright Penn (Pippa Lee), Mike Binder (Sam Shapiro), Alan Arkin (Herb Lee), Winona Ryder (Sandra Dulles), Ryan MacDonald (Ben Lee), Cornel West (Don Sexton), Maria Bello (Suky Sarkissian).

'The Puppy Episode' parts 1 & 2, episode 22/23, *Ellen*, fourth season, USA, ABC, tx. 30 April 1997. Main Cast: Ellen DeGeneres (Ellen Morgan), Laura Dern (Susan), Oprah Winfrey

(Therapist), Joely Fisher (Paige Clark), David Anthony Higgins (Joe Farrell), Clea Lewis (Audrey Penney), Jeremy Piven (Spence Kovac), Steven Eckholdt (Richard).

QI. BBC, UK, 2003-

Queer As Folk. Showtime, USA, 2000-2005.

Queer As Folk. Channel 4, UK, 1999-2000.

The Quick and the Dead. Dir. Sam Raimi, Pro. TriStar Pictures, USA, 1995. Main Cast: Sharon Stone (Ellen), Gene Hackman (Herod), Russell Crowe (Cort), Leonardo DiCaprio (Kid).

The Rachel Maddow Show. MSNBC, USA, 2008-

Raiders of the Lost Ark. Dir. Steven Spielberg, Prod. Lucasfilm/Paramount, USA, 1981. Main Cast: Harrison Ford (Indiana Jones), Karen Allen (Marion Ravenwood).

'Reconnoitering the Rim', episode three, *Deadwood*, first season, USA, HBO, tx. 4 April 2004. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearengen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary), Powers Boothe (Cy Tolliver), Kim Dickens (Joanie Stubbs).

'Red in the Face', episode seven, *Mad Men*, first season, USA, AMC, tx. 30 August 2007. Main Cast: John Hamm (Don Draper), Elisabeth Moss (Peggy Olsen), Vincent Kartheiser (Pete Campbell), Christina Hendricks (Joan Holloway), John Slattery (Roger Sterling), January Jones (Betty Draper), Robert Morse (Bertram Cooper).

Red River. Dir. Howard Hawks/Arthur Rosson, Prod. Monterey Productions, USA, 1948. Main Cast: John Wayne (Thomas Dunson), Montgomery Clift (Matt Garth), Joanne Dru (Tess Millay).

'The Rejected', episode four, *Mad Men*, fourth season, USA, AMC, tx. 15 August 2010. Main Cast: John Hamm (Don Draper), Elisabeth Moss (Peggy Olsen), Vincent Kartheiser (Pete Campbell), Christina Hendricks (Joan Harris), John Slattery (Roger Sterling), Robert Morse (Bertram Cooper), Zosiah Mamet (Joyce Ramsay), Cara Buono (Faye Miller), Alison Brie (Trudy Campbell).

Revealing Anne Lister. Dir. Matthew Hill, Prod. BBC, UK, tx. 31 May 2010. Presented by Sue Perkins.

'A Rich Find', episode six, *Deadwood*, third season, USA, HBO, tx. 16 July 2006. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearengen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary), Powers Boothe (Cy Tolliver), Kim Dickens (Joanie Stubbs).

Ride The High Country. Dir. Sam Peckinpah, Prod. MGM, USA, 1962. Main Cast: Randolph Scott (Gil Westrum), Joel McCrea (Steve Judd).

Rope. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1948. Main Cast: Dick Hogan (David Kentley), John Dall (Brandon), Farley Granger (Phillip), Douglas Dick (Kenneth), Joan

Chandler (Janet), Cedric Hardwicke (Mr. Kentley), Constance Collier (Mrs. Atwater), James Stewart (Rupert Cadell).

Running With Scissors. Dir. Ryan Murphy, Prod. Plan B Entertainment, USA, 2006, Main Cast: Annette Bening (Deirdre Burroughs), Brian Cox (Dr. Finch), Joseph Fiennes (Neil Bookman), Evan Rachel Wood (Natalie Finch), Alec Baldwin (Norman Burroughs), Joseph Cross (Augusten Burroughs).

Sex and the City. HBO, USA, 1998-2004.

SGU: Stargate Universe. SyFy, USA, 2009-2011.

Shall We Dance. Dir. Mark Sandrich, Prod. RKO, USA, 1937. Main Cast: Fred Astaire (Petrov), Ginger Rogers (Linda Keene), Edward Everett Horton (Jeffrey Baird), Eric Blore (Cecil Flintridge).

'Shoot', episode nine, *Mad Men*, first season, USA, AMC, tx. 13 September 2007. Main Cast: John Hamm (Don Draper), Elisabeth Moss (Peggy Olsen), Christina Hendricks (Joan Holloway), Vincent Kartheiser (Pete Campbell), January Jones (Betty Draper).

Singin' in the Rain. Dir. Stanley Donen & Gene Kelly, Prod. MGM, USA, 1952. Main Cast: Gene Kelly (Don Lockwood), Donald O'Connor (Cosmo Brown), Debbie Reynolds (Kathy Selden), Jean Hagen (Lina Lamont).

Skins. Channel 4, UK, 2007-

'Smoke Gets In Your Eyes', episode one, *Mad Men*, first season, USA, AMC, tx. 19 July 2007. Main Cast: John Hamm (Don Draper), Elisabeth Moss (Peggy Olsen), Christina Hendricks (Joan Holloway), Vincent Kartheiser (Pete Campbell), Aaron Staton (Ken Cosgrove), Rich Sommer (Harry Crane), Michael Gladis (Paul Kinsey), John Slattery (Roger Sterling).

Some Like It Hot. Dir. Billy Wilder, Prod. Ashton Productions/Mirisch Corporation, USA, 1959. Main Cast: Tony Curtis (Joe/Josephine), Jack Lemmon (Jerry/Daphne), Marilyn Monroe (Sugar Kane).

The Staying-In Show. Channel 4, UK, tx. 25 April 1998.

Striptease. Dir. Andrew Bergman, Prod. Castle Rock Entertainment, USA, 1996. Main cast: Demi Moore (Erin Grant), Burt Reynolds (Congressman David Dilbeck), Armand Assante (Lt. Al Garcia), Ving Rhames (Shad), Robert Patrick (Darrell Grant), Rumer Willis (Angela Grant).

'Suffer the Little Children', episode eight, *Deadwood*, first season, USA, HBO, tx. 9 May 2004. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearngen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary), Powers Boothe (Cy Tolliver), Kim Dickens (Joanie Stubbs).

The Supersizers Eat... (The Supersizers Go...) BBC, UK, 2007-2009.

'The Supersizers Eat... The Eighties', episode one, *The Supersizers Eat*, second season, UK, BBC, tx. 15 June 2009. Main Cast: Sue Perkins, Giles Coren.

'The Supersizers Eat... The Fifties', episode five, *The Supersizers Eat*, second season, UK, BBC, tx. 20 July 2009. Main Cast: Sue Perkins, Giles Coren.

'The Supersizers Go... Seventies', episode four, *The Supersizers Go...*, first season, UK, BBC, tx. 10 June 2008. Main Cast: Sue Perkins, Giles Coren.

'The Supersizers Go... Wartime', episode one, *The Supersizers Go...*, first season, UK, BBC, tx. 20 May 2008. Main Cast: Sue Perkins, Giles Coren.

Swing Time. Dir. George Stevens, Prod. RKO, USA, 1936. Main Cast: Fred Astaire (Lucky Garnett), Ginger Rogers (Penny Carroll), Victor Moore (Pop Cardetti), Helen Broderick (Mabel Anderson).

Swoon. Dir. Tom Kalin, Prod. Intolerance/American Playhouse, USA, 1992. Main Cast: Daniel Schlachet (Richard Loeb), Craig Chester (Nathan Leopold Jr).

Sylvia Scarlett. Dir. George Cukor, Prod. Radio Pictures (RKO), USA 1935. Main Cast: Katharine Hepburn (Sylvia Scarlett), Cary Grant (Jimmy Monkley), Brian Aherne (Michael Fane), Edmund Gwenn (Henry Scarlett).

'Tea Leaves', episode three, *Mad Men*, fifth season, USA, ABC, tx. 1 April 2012. Main Cast: John Hamm (Don Draper), Elisabeth Moss (Peggy Olsen), Vincent Kartheiser (Pete Campbell), John Slattery (Roger Sterling), January Jones (Betty Francis), Rich Sommer (Harry Crane), Christopher Stanley (Henry Francis).

'Tell Him Something Pretty', episode twelve, *Deadwood*, third season, USA, HBO, tx. 27 August 2006. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearengen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary), Powers Boothe (Cy Tolliver), Kim Dickens (Joanie Stubbs).

Thin Ice. Dir. Fiona Cunningham-Reid, Prod. Thin Ice Productions, UK, 1995. Main Cast: Charlotte Avery (Natalie), Sabra Williams (Steffi), James Dreyfus (Greg), Clare Higgins (Fiona).

Tipping the Velvet. BBC, UK, 2002.

Top Hat. Dir. Mark Sandrich, Prod. RKO, USA, 1935. Main Cast: Fred Astaire (Jerry Travers), Ginger Rogers (Dale Tremont), Edward Everett Horton (Horace Hardwick), Erik Rhodes (Alberto Beddini), Helen Broderick (Madge Hardwick).

'Touched', episode twenty, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, seventh season, USA, UPN, tx. 3 May 2003. Writer: Rebecca Rand Kirshner, Dir. David Solomon. Main Cast: Sarah Michelle Gellar (Buffy Summers), Nicholas Brendon (Xander Harris), Alyson Hannigan (Willow Rosenberg), Iyari Limon (Kennedy).

'The Trial of Jack McCall', episode five, *Deadwood*, first season, USA, HBO, tx. 18 April 2004. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearengen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary), Powers Boothe (Cy Tolliver), Kim Dickens (Joanie Stubbs).

'Unauthorized Cinnamon', episode seven, *Deadwood*, third season, USA, HBO, tx. 23 July 2006. Main Cast: Timothy Olyphant (Seth Bullock), Ian McShane (Al Swearengen), Molly Parker (Alma Garret), Brad Dourif (Doc Cochran), John Hawkes (Sol Star), Paula Malcomson (Trixie), Robin Weigert (Jane Canary), Powers Boothe (Cy Tolliver), Kim Dickens (Joanie Stubbs).

Walk on the Wild Side. Dir. Edward Dmytryk, Prod. Columbia, USA, 1962. Main Cast: Laurence Harvey (Dove Linkhorn), Hallie Gerard (Capucine), Jane Fonda (Kitty Twist), Anne Baxter (Teresina Vidaverri), Barbara Stanwyck (Jo Stanwyck).

The Watermelon Woman. Dir. Cheryl Dunye, Prod. Dancing Girl, USA, 1996. Main Cast: Cheryl Dunye (Cheryl), Guinevere Turner (Diana), Valarie Walker (Tamara), Lisa Marie Bronson (Fae 'The Watermelon Woman' Richards).

'Wee Small Hours', episode nine, *Mad Men*, third season, USA, ABC, tx. 11 October 2009. Main Cast: John Hamm (Don Draper), Elisabeth Moss (Peggy Olsen), Vincent Kartheiser (Pete Campbell), John Slattery (Roger Sterling), January Jones (Betty Draper), Christopher Stanley (Henry Francis), Jared Harris (Lane Pryce), Bryan Batt (Salvatore Romano).

When Night Is Falling. Dir. Patricia Rozema, Prod. Crucial Pictures, Canada, 1995. Main Cast: Pascale Bussières (Camille Baker), Rachael Crawford (Petra), Henry Czerny (Martin).

Will & Grace. NBC, USA, 1998-2006.

The Wire. HBO, USA, 2002-2008.

The Wizard of Oz. Dir. Victor Fleming (also Mervyn LeRoy and King Vidor), Prod. MGM, USA, 1939. Main Cast: Judy Garland (Dorothy Vale), Frank Morgan (The Wizard of Oz), Ray Bolger (Hunk/The Scarecrow), Bert Lahr (Zeke/The Cowardly Lion), Jack Haley (Hickory/The Tin Man), Billie Burke (Glinda), Margaret Hamilton (Elmira Gulch/The Wicked Witch of the West).

The Women. Dir. Diane English, Prod. Picturehouse Entertainment, USA, 2008. Main Cast: Meg Ryan (Mary Haines), Annette Bening (Sylvia Fowler), Eva Mendes (Crystal Allen), Debra Messing (Eddie Cohen), Jada Pinkett Smith (Alex Fisher), Bette Midler (Leigh Miller).

Working Girls. Dir. Lizzie Borden, Prod. Alternate Current, USA, 1986. Main Cast: Louise Smith (Molly), Deborah Banks (Diane), Liz Caldwell (Liz), Marusia Zach (Gina), Amanda Goodwin (Dawn), Boomer Tibbs (Bob).

The X Files. Fox, USA, 1993-2002.

