

# **Male-to-Female Cross-Dressing in Yorkshire: 1870-1939**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines male-to-female cross-dressing in Yorkshire between 1870 and 1939. It analyses the relationship between cross-dressing and masculinity in the criminal justice system, on the stage, in carnival and on film. By analysing cross-dressing in spaces in which it could be accepted this thesis demonstrates that cross-dressing had the ability to reinforce hegemonic constructions of both femininity and masculinity. In doing so, it demonstrates that binary narratives of masculine vs. effeminate behaviours do not reflect the majority of experiences of cross-dressing and masculinity in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Yorkshire. Instead, cross-dressing is best understood as existing on a scale of acceptability.

Historical and regional specificities were important in defining where an act of gender transgression was positioned on the scale of acceptability and deviance. The regional focus of the thesis develops histories of cross-dressing and masculinity by drawing attention to how regional culture shaped attitudes towards gender, sexuality, and the masculine body. Yorkshire was a space with a very specific set of traditions that significantly influenced understandings of masculinity, community, and identity, which in turn influenced experiences of male-to-female cross-dressing. The experiences of the men discussed in this thesis were shaped by the fact that they lived and worked in Yorkshire.

The broad time frame of this thesis also exposes the endurance of cross-dressing in popular entertainment culture alongside changing technologies. The move from music hall to silver screen emphasises the relative normativity of cross-dressed men in a range of entertainment forms. Tracking the decline in the popularity of the act also demonstrates how changing entertainment technologies, developing understandings of gender and sexuality as binary identities, and the increasing conflation of the two, complicated the ability of cross-dressing to be enjoyed as family entertainment.

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## Abbreviations

BBFC	British Board of Film Censors
BFI	British Film Institute
DORA	Defence of the Realm Act 1914
TNA	The National Archives
IWM	Imperial War Museum
WYAS	West Yorkshire Archive Service
YFA	Yorkshire Film Archive

## Introduction

On the thirtieth of November 1880 forty-seven men appeared at Manchester Police Court having been arrested at a ‘fancy-dress ball’ the previous Saturday evening. According to newspaper reports twenty-two of the men were dressed ‘as women.’<sup>1</sup> Ten of those arrested had travelled thirty-three miles from Sheffield for the event. The men were accused of soliciting and inciting each other to solicit sex with other men as well as ‘conspiring together to assemble at a particular place, and there to solicit and incite each other to commit improper actions’.<sup>2</sup> The arrested men were called upon to find ‘two sureties of £25 each to be of good behaviour for twelve months, to give 24 hours’ notice and in default go to prison for three months’.<sup>3</sup> The majority were able to make the payments and avoid a prison sentence. Stories of court cases such as that of the Manchester Fancy-Dress Ball have formed a large body of the historiography surrounding male-to-female cross-dressing. The centrality of criminality and the court in the existing literature has positioned the male body in female-coded clothing as inherently deviant; as a result, historians have tended to focus on links between cross-dressing and homosexual identities.<sup>4</sup> Through placing focus on the relationship between cross-dressing and masculinity as opposed to cross-dressing and sexuality this thesis will demonstrate that the act was accepted more often than it was cast as deviant.

As the work of Matt Cook has shown, locality and place undoubtedly influenced queer lives, experiences, expressions, and ‘self-understanding’.<sup>5</sup> Although this thesis will argue that men who cross-dressed did not necessarily consider themselves ‘queer’, nor were they definitively

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<sup>1</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 1880, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 1880, p.3.

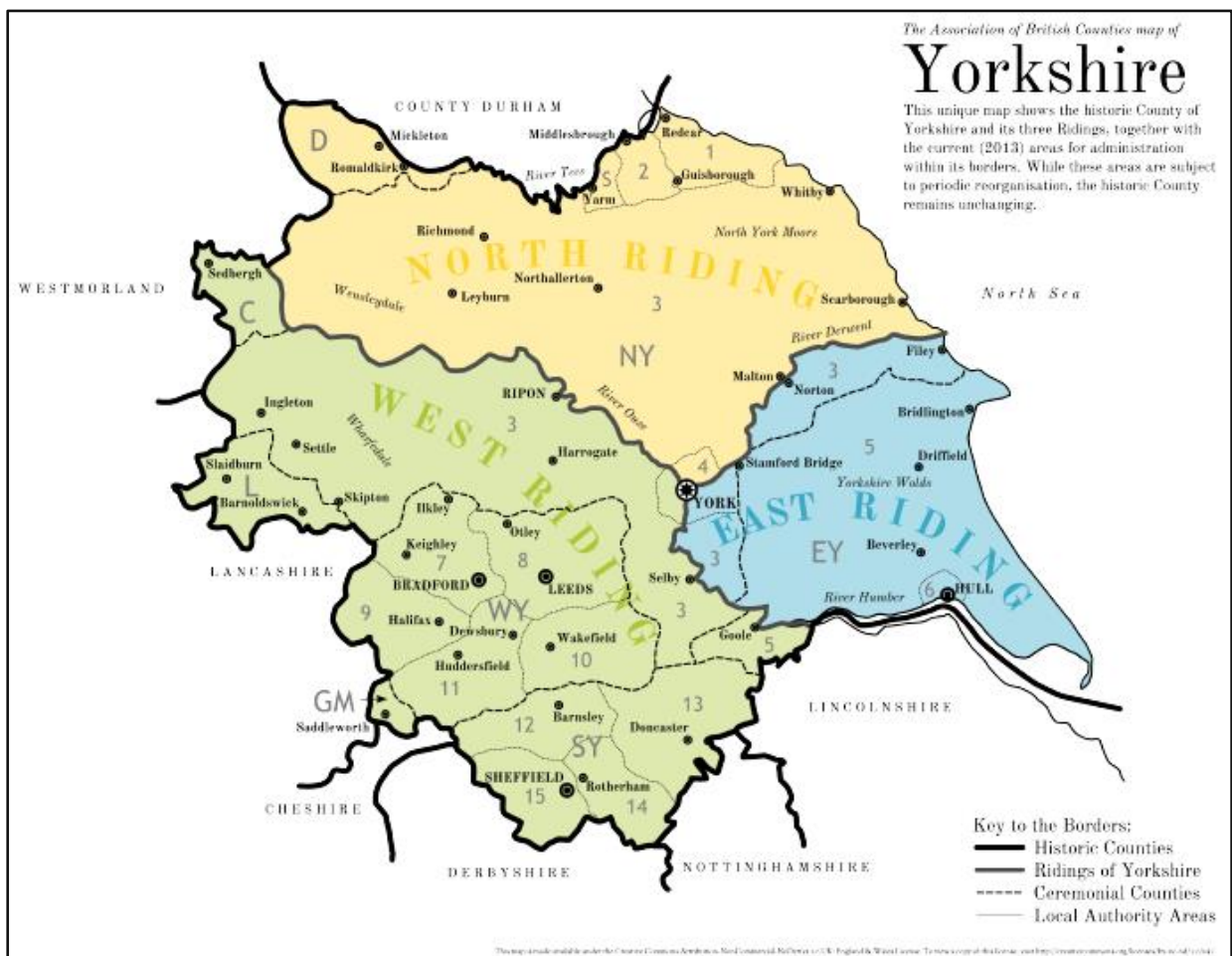
<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures of the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2005) ; Charles Upchurch, ‘Forgetting the Unthinkable: Cross-Dressers and British Society in the Case of the Queen vs. Boulton and Others’, *Gender & History* 12:1 (2000), 127-157.

<sup>5</sup> Matt Cook, ‘Local Turns: Queer Histories and Brighton’s Queer Communities’, *History Compass* 17:10 (2019) 1- 12 (2).

viewed as such by their contemporaries, these deviations from heteronormative gender expressions were equally influenced by the social, economic, and cultural specificities of the localities in which they took place. This thesis focuses on experiences of men who lived and worked in Yorkshire in order to understand how the region influenced experiences and understandings of cross-dressing. In addition to considering regional influence, the following chapters analyse how experiences were shaped by the spaces within Yorkshire in which men cross-dressed. The spaces explored in this thesis include the popular press, the court, theatre, carnival, and the cinema screen and therefore this thesis moves away from existing historiography by shifting focus onto spaces in which the act was accepted. Through this analysis it ‘queers’ understandings of acceptability in relation to gender non-conformity and ultimately disrupts preconceptions about the boundaries between deviance and acceptance.

## Yorkshire



During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the north of England represented a population which, at times, was almost double that of the capital, making it an important location for the study of conformity and deviance.<sup>6</sup> The population of Yorkshire, the largest county in the north of England, expanded rapidly in the twentieth century alongside a boom in the steel, coal, and textile industries. Despite the rapid growth of industrial towns, many areas of the country remained rural, making Yorkshire unique in its diverse range of living conditions from the extreme isolation of the moors in the north of the county, to the cramped conditions of industrial Sheffield in the south.<sup>7</sup> Yorkshire was also renowned for its insular, working-class culture which was formed around a strong sense of belonging with ones' own kind and was 'built on an opposition to what is other'.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, this thesis understands the county of Yorkshire as a space with a very specific set of traditions that significantly influenced understandings of masculinity, community, and identity, but more specifically influenced experiences of male-to-female cross-dressing.

The landscape and demography of Yorkshire was dramatically altered by the rapid industrialisation that took place in the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Although agriculture remained one of three main employers across the four ridings in Yorkshire between 1881 and 1951, the number of people employed in mining and manufacturing continued to increase throughout the period.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Helen Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 10.

<sup>7</sup> A. P. Donajgrodzki, 'Twentieth-Century Rural England: A Case for 'Peasant Studies?', *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 16:3 (1989), 425-442 (427).

<sup>8</sup> Claire Martin, 'Bodies of Knowledge: Science, Popular Culture, and Working-Class Women's Experience of the Life Cycle in Yorkshire, c.1900-1940' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2018), 19 : Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 345-346 & 218 : Smith, *Masculinity*. See also Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life, with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), 53.

<sup>9</sup> Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Neville Kirk (ed.) : *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of 'the North' and 'Northernness'* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) : Helen M Jewell, *The North-South Divide: The Origins of Northern Consciousness in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, East Riding of Yorkshire UA through time, Industry Statistics, Simplified Industrial Structure, *A Vision of Britain through Time*.

< [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10217660/cube/IND\\_SECTOR\\_GEN](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10217660/cube/IND_SECTOR_GEN) > [accessed 10.10.2021] : GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, East Riding of Yorkshire UA through time, Industry Statistics, Simplified Industrial Structure, *A Vision of Britain through Time*.

South Yorkshire in particular saw the largest growth in manufacturing. In 1881, 87,765 people were employed in manufacturing in South Yorkshire, but by 1911, that number had increased by almost 100,000.<sup>11</sup> One defining feature of all of these industries was the gendered division of labour. The gendered division of labour affected both the large industrial centres such as Sheffield and Doncaster, but also the smaller cotton towns in the West Riding. Men and women were not only separated in the world of work but social life was often divided along gendered lines too. Gender separation of course existed in other parts of the country, particularly those with heavy industries, but it is the combination of this with the textile industry that made Yorkshire unique. These strict differences in the lives of men and women in Yorkshire drastically influenced how gender was understood and experienced in the county.

The exception to this rule was the textile industry which not only had more opportunities for female labour than heavy industry and mining, it also had much smaller differentials between male and female wages.<sup>12</sup> As Martin found, 'higher rates of female employment also fostered more communication and interaction between men and women, in part because many of them worked together.'<sup>13</sup> But for the most part the lives of men and women in Yorkshire were separated by both work and leisure. This division of the sexes meant that gender was understood in strict dichotomies of male and female; however, as Martin has demonstrated, individual experiences of gender relations and sexuality varied significantly.<sup>14</sup> Occupation was central to the

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<[http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10217660/cube/IND\\_SECTOR\\_GEN](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10217660/cube/IND_SECTOR_GEN)> [accessed 10.10.2021] : GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, South Yorkshire Met.C through time, Industry Statistics, Simplified Industrial Structure, *A Vision of Britain through Time*

<[http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10092784/cube/IND\\_SECTOR\\_GEN](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10092784/cube/IND_SECTOR_GEN)> [accessed 10.10.2021] : GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, West Yorkshire Met.C through time, Industry Statistics | Simplified Industrial Structure, *A Vision of Britain through Time*.

<[http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056974/cube/IND\\_SECTOR\\_GEN](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056974/cube/IND_SECTOR_GEN)> [accessed 10.10.2021]

<sup>11</sup> GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, South Yorkshire Met.C through time, Population Statistics, Total Population, *A Vision of Britain through Time*.

<[http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10092784/cube/TOT\\_POP](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10092784/cube/TOT_POP)> > [accessed 10.10.2021]

<sup>12</sup> Schwarzkopf, *Unpicking Gender*.

<sup>13</sup> Martin, 'Bodies of Knowledge', 22.

<sup>14</sup> Martin, 'Bodies of Knowledge', 19.

lives and identities of many members of the working-class, and as Helen Smith has argues, the very nature of this work directly influenced how gender was understood. For example, strength and bravery was central to masculine ideals in areas dominated by dangerous physical labour such as mining, and the iron and steel industries.<sup>15</sup> Alongside the culture of physical toughness fostered by work in dangerous industries, this masculine culture also fostered the separation of genders, as these industries ‘offered virtually no employment opportunities for women.’<sup>16</sup>

As Smith has shown, experiences of masculine identity and sexuality in the industrial north were markedly different to those in London.<sup>17</sup> Smith demonstrates that in the same period in which sex between men was being actively policed in the capital, same-sex sex was a normative part of masculine friendship in the North of the country. Discovering that men in industrial England were able to consider themselves, and be considered by others, ideal masculine men whilst still engaging in same-sex sex, highlights the increased knowledge to be gained by a regional approach. Smith’s work also proves that the culture of repression surrounding men who had sex with other men, noted by Sean Brady, was not experienced universally.<sup>18</sup> Highlighting a ‘particularly northern’ way of understanding sexual desire and masculinity, Smith not only challenges the way we think about historicised sexuality but highlights how regional history has the ability to change the dominant narrative.<sup>19</sup> This northern understanding of masculinity significantly influenced the culture of cross-dressing discussed in this thesis.

Smith’s work highlights just how much has been missed in the history of masculinity and sexuality due to a lack of focus on the North. Asa Briggs argued in 1966 that ‘we know far too little about the north of England’, and although the success of *Northern History Journal*, the

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<sup>15</sup> Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire*, p.14.

<sup>16</sup> Martin, ‘Bodies of Knowledge’, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*.

<sup>18</sup> Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 2.

inaugural edition for which Briggs was writing, has led to an increase in regional histories of the North, gender history has remained fairly London centric.<sup>20</sup> Following this trend, the history of cross-dressing has focused almost exclusively on the capital.<sup>21</sup> By changing the geographical focus to Yorkshire, my work reveals the key differences between the metropolis and a part of the country which did not have an overtly visible queer culture. By paying close attention to the culture in which these acts took place, this thesis highlights the variety of cultural and social specificities which influenced how gender, and gender transgressions, were experienced.

Yorkshire was not the only area of the country in which labour was strictly divided on gendered lines. However, its physical and cultural distance from the capital, its close-knit communities formed around work, and its rapidly expanding population in the first few decades of the twentieth century, make Yorkshire an area with its own, quite specific ideas of what it meant to be a man and what it meant to be a woman. This thesis at times positions Yorkshire as the antithesis of the capital. While Yorkshire towns were renowned for their close-knit communities, London offered men and women a level of ambiguity which was not available to those who lived in the close-knit communities of Yorkshire.

While this thesis focuses on the ‘ordinariness’ of cross-dressing amongst men in Yorkshire, the historiography surrounding cross-dressing in London has tended to focus on the city as a place in which men could find space to express their ‘queerness’.<sup>22</sup> While men in Yorkshire could find sexual relationships with their male work colleagues, London’s network of commercial venues fostered a queer network where men could find both friends and sexual partners away from the prying eyes of the communities that raised them.<sup>23</sup> The industries in

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<sup>20</sup> Asa Briggs, ‘Themes in Northern History’, *Northern History* 1:1 (1966), 1-6 (1).

<sup>21</sup> See for example, Houlbrook, *Queer London* : Upchurch, ‘Forgetting the Unthinkable’ : Rose Collis, *Colonel Barker’s Monstrous Regiment: a Tale of Female Husbandry* (London: Virago Press, 2001) : Rudolf Dekker, M., Lotte C. and Van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1989) : Michelle Liu Carriger, ‘The Unnatural History and Petticoat Mystery of Boulton and Park’: A Victorian Sex Scandal and the Theatre Defense’, *The Drama Review* 57 (2013), 135-157.

<sup>22</sup> See Houlbrook, *Queer London*.

<sup>23</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 1.

which Londoners worked also differed to those in Yorkshire, with the majority of workers in London being employed in consumer services, utilities construction and transport, and manufacturing between 1881 and 1951.<sup>24</sup> The demand for casual labour in London also meant that many young men lived transient lifestyles in the city, moving between work places and areas of the city. Houlbrook describes the economy of London as helping to create an ‘amorphous bachelor culture, linked by age, economic marginality, and lives lived within all-male space.’<sup>25</sup> While some of the busier industrial areas in Yorkshire did provide opportunity for a certain level of anonymity and transience, most men in Yorkshire lived in close contact with their work colleagues and families, remaining on the inside of traditional heteronormative family life. In contrast the young men in London, even if only temporarily, lived outside of these norms. These differences would have influenced how men and masculinity, and therefore male-to-female cross-dressing, were understood in London and Yorkshire.

### Regionality

The approach taken to regionality in this thesis sets it apart from existing historical work on cross-dressing. This study is the first to take a regional approach to the study of cross-dressing outside of London. In this work the county of Yorkshire itself is treated as space imbued with meaning by those who inhabited it, but also regionality is also used as a lens through which to explore and understand a range of different spaces *within* the county. It follows the argument of Doreen Massey, that space ‘both reflects and has effects back on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live.’<sup>26</sup> Not only is region central to understanding specific lived experience, but different spaces within the region also allowed gender-crossing to be experienced in different ways. As Amanda Flather explained, ‘One of the

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<sup>24</sup> GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, Inner London through time, Industry Statistics, Simplified Industrial Structure, A Vision of Britain through Time.

<[http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10076845/cube/IND\\_SECTOR\\_GEN](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10076845/cube/IND_SECTOR_GEN)> [accessed 10.10.2021]

<sup>25</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 168.

<sup>26</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994) 1.



key points to emerge in spatial study has been the multiple and dynamic ways in which spaces can be conceived, used, experienced, and understood by different users at different times.<sup>27</sup> As the spaces in which men who cross-dressed appeared were dynamic, temporary, and fluid, so too was the way the act itself was interpreted and experienced. By highlighting the importance of space this thesis draws attention to the variety of factors which influenced how the act was understood. The acceptability of the act was often defined by the space in which the act took place, the behaviour of the cross-dressed individual, and to some extent, their existing reputation. Men who cross-dressed in the street were likely to arouse suspicion, although had those same men cross-dressed on the same street during carnival, their cross-dressing would most likely have been enjoyed as part of the spectacle. They may even have won a prize for their ‘costume’. In using space as a category for historical analysis, this thesis will demonstrate that cross-dressing was understood and experienced differently in both rural and urban spaces, in outdoor or indoor spaces, in the theatre or in the court.

Because communities in Yorkshire were often built around specific industries and places of work, the spaces this thesis explores within Yorkshire were predominantly occupied by the working classes. As will be discussed in more detail throughout the thesis, class played an important role in the construction on masculine identity and in defining the acceptability of transgressive gendered acts. Matt Houlbrook uncovered ‘a broader comprehension and tolerance of gender inversion’ in London’s working-class neighbourhoods, emphasising the centrality of class to defining the acceptability of cross-dressing in different spaces.<sup>28</sup> This suggests tolerance as a particular attribute of working-class attitudes in early twentieth-century Britain, a topic Smith has explored in great detail.<sup>29</sup> More specifically it demonstrates a particular way of understanding gender. By drawing attention to the significance of regional culture and class to understandings

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<sup>27</sup> Amanda J. Flather, ‘Space, Place, and Gender: The Sexual and Spatial Division of Labor in the Early Modern Household’, *History and Theory* 52:3 (2013), 344-360 (346).

<sup>28</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 161.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*.

of gendered behaviour, this thesis demonstrates that one act can be seen simultaneously as sexually transgressive in one space and community and as suitable family entertainment in another.

This thesis furthers knowledge of masculinity in Yorkshire because it views cross-dressing as a gendered act. Where Smith's work focuses on sexuality and the relationship between sexual acts and masculinity, my work demonstrates that cross-dressing was an act with changing and varied sexual and gendered connotations, therefore nuancing understandings of cross-dressing in the past. This work does not ask questions about who was having sex with whom. Instead, it asks if, and if so why, the popular press, and society more broadly, *believed* that men dressed as women were having sex with other men, if they did at all, what this meant for the popularity of cross-dressing as entertainment, and how this changed across time. In focussing on the act of cross-dressing instead of sexual acts, this thesis shifts focus from private acts, or acts which were at least intended to be private, to those which intentionally took place in public. Because of this focus on an intentional performance of the opposite gender to that assigned at birth, Butler's theory of gender as both performative and performed is central to the analysis.<sup>30</sup> Butler argues that gender is not something we 'are' but is something that we 'do' and the process of performing gendered behaviours produces, and reproduces, gender norms.<sup>31</sup> Analysing cross-dressing as a performative gendered act places both performance and performativity at the centre of analysis.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40:4 (1988), 519–31.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Here I am using performative to mean both an act which is characterised by the performance of a social or cultural role, but also one which reflects Butler's argument that performativity of gender is a stylized repetition of acts, an imitation of the dominant conventions of gender. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990) 42.

By moving away from the tendency to view cross-dressing as transgressive, this work will reveal how ‘non-hegemonic’ gendered identities could exist as part of ‘normative’ masculine identities. As R.W Connell demonstrated,

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of the patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.<sup>33</sup>

Hegemonic masculinity is the ideal that men position themselves in relation to, and is, usually, only enacted by a small majority.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, ‘normative’ masculinity relates to how behaviours are defined by the specific cultures in which they take place. For example, while hegemonic ideals of masculinity would have remained fairly consistent across the country and in different spaces, normative masculinity on the stage in Yorkshire would have differed significantly to normative behaviour on the street in London. Therefore, this approach emphasises the importance of considering the difference in national and regional norms. It destabilises current ideas about northern masculinity in the past and points to the existence of more fluid and changeable attitudes towards masculinity than those which have been revealed by historians thus far. Analysing cross-dressing in this distinctive culture allows us to draw parallels between London and Yorkshire, but in demonstrating a clear difference in the way gender was understood in each area, it rejects the idea that binary models of gender and sexuality are natural or innate.

### Cross-Dressing Literature

In 1870 Earnest Boulton and Frederick William Park were arrested in drag outside the Strand Theatre in London on charges of outraging public decency. The charges were quickly changed to that of sodomy. After a lengthy and scandalous trial, Boulton and Park walked free. It has been argued that this trial helped to cement the link between cross-dressing and an emerging queer

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<sup>33</sup> R.W Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 77.

<sup>34</sup> Linsey Robb, *Men at Work: The Working Man in British Culture, 1939-1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 6-7.

identity in late nineteenth-century London.<sup>35</sup> Alan Sinfield, Charles Upchurch, and Michelle Liu Carriger have demonstrated the existence of a cultural link between cross-dressing and transgressive sexuality at the time of Boulton and Park's trial.<sup>36</sup> Due to its unprecedented press coverage, and its alleged role in linking cross-dressing and sodomy in the popular imagination, the 1870 trial of Boulton and Park has been a cornerstone in the current literature on cross-dressing. This thesis will build on the themes of class, theatre, public and private spaces, and public knowledge of queer sexualities, which run through the literature surrounding the Boulton and Park trial. It argues that cross-dressing's position in popular culture was relatively unaltered by links same-sex sex fostered by large trials such as that of Boulton and Park, Lady Austin's Camp Boys, and the Manchester Fancy-Dress Ball.<sup>37</sup>

Much of the early work on cross-dressing focused on female-to-male cross-dressing and examined the act as one which subverted power dynamics and sought to destabilise the patriarchy.<sup>38</sup> Cross-dressing's long-standing tradition in theatre has also led to the production of a significant body of work which focusses on cross-dressing on the stage.<sup>39</sup> As a result theatre historians have done much to highlight the cultural significance of cross-dressing on the stage and their work reveals the diverse meanings and interpretations of theatrical cross-dressing from

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<sup>35</sup> Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Alan Sinfield argues that at the time of the trial, concepts of same-sex desire had not developed to the point at which the court could explicitly link cross-dressing with homosexuality.<sup>36</sup> This, he argues, is the reason they were able to walk free. Charles Upchurch's analysis of the case mirrors this argument and also highlights the importance of public and private spaces when tracing notions of acceptable gendered behaviour. In addition, Both Upchurch and Michelle Liu Carriger argue that the scandal of the case came from the revelation that, until the arrest, these men were 'thoroughly integrated into middle-class (and higher) society.' Carriger, 'The Unnatural History' : Upchurch, 'Forgetting the Unthinkable' : Sinfield, *Wilde Century*.

<sup>37</sup> Matt Houlbrook, 'Lady Austin's Camp Boys': Constituting the Queer Subject in 1930s London', *Gender and History* 14:1 (2002), 31-61.

<sup>38</sup> Julie Wheelwright, *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty, and Happiness* (London : Pandora, 1989) : Dekker and Van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism* : David Cressy, 'Gender Trouble and Cross-Dressing in Early Modern England', *Journal of British Studies* 35 (1996), 483-465 and Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>39</sup> Laurence Senelick, 'Boys and Girls Together: Subcultural Origins of Glamour Drag and Male Impersonation on the Nineteenth-Century Stage', 80-95, in *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, ed. by Lesley Ferris (London: Routledge, 1993) : Jim Davis, "Slap On! Slap Ever!": Victorian Pantomime, Gender Variance, and Cross-Dressing', *New Theatre Quarterly* 30 (2014) : J.S. Bratton 'Beating the Bounds: Gender Play and Role Reversal in the Edwardian Music Hall,' 86-110, in *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage*, ed. by Michael Booth and Joel Kaplan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) : Peter Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning: Music-Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture', *Past & Present* 144 (1994), 138-70 and, Carriger, 'The Unnatural History'.

the point of view of both audience and performer. A number of theatre historians have highlighted the stage as a 'safe' space in which men, and women, were granted a certain level of freedom to test the boundaries of acceptable gendered behaviour.<sup>40</sup> Although histories of cross-dressing in the theatre have tended to focus on the popularity of the act on the stage, they have not simply defined the act as acceptable on stage and deviant elsewhere. For example, Jim Davis' exploration of gender variance in Victorian pantomime, argues that there was a contextual awareness of gender variance beyond the stage and a complex, nuanced view of cross-dressed performances.<sup>41</sup> Peter Bailey also noted these nuanced understandings in his analysis of Victorian music halls. Bailey argues that it was sexual jokes and double entendre, and therefore their relationship with sexuality, that made the cross-dressed acts so popular with audiences and simultaneously immoral in the eyes of the reform critics.<sup>42</sup> Building on this work, Alison Oram has noted the significance of the theatre as a space of indeterminacy, particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Despite growing associations between cross-dressing and sexual deviance in other contexts, the stage does appear to have been a 'safe space' for the expression of gender variant behaviour.<sup>44</sup> I argue that this is due to the separation of the stage from reality. By analysing female impersonation in various entertainment spaces including music hall, carnival, and film, my work will explore the nuances which made cross-dressing acceptable on the stage and examine the links between changes in society and changes in theatrical traditions.

Whilst my own focus is on working-class practices, other historians have explored the experiences of middle- and upper-class men. For example, Lucy Bland's analysis of the discourse surrounding the Russell Divorce trial in the late 1920s includes a brief discussion of John

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<sup>40</sup> Senelick, 'Boys and Girls Together : Davis, 'Slap On! Slap Ever!' : Bratton 'Beating the Bounds' : Carriger, 'The Unnatural History.

<sup>41</sup> Davis, "Slap On! Slap Ever!", 218.

<sup>42</sup> Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning', 138–70.

<sup>43</sup> Alison Oram, 'Cross Dressing and Transgender', in *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality*, ed. by Harry Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (London: Palgrave, 2006) 256–285 (269).

<sup>44</sup> Oram, 'Cross Dressing and Transgender', 269.

Russell's cross-dressing.<sup>45</sup> Russell was heir to the Amphthill peerage, and, as Bland suggests, due to his social status and war service, his cross-dressing was not necessarily presented as a signifier of sexual deviance. However, it was used by his wife's counsel as evidence of a lack of manliness.<sup>46</sup> Bland's work stands out from the historiography discussed thus far in that she focuses on the gendered representations of Russell and does not align his cross-dressing to any form of 'transgressive' sexuality. Notions of public and private space were also central to the representation of Russell's cross-dressing. Russell only cross-dressed at home or at private parties, and as a result, his cross-dressing was brushed off as part of the kind of eccentric behaviour to be expected of a young aristocrat.<sup>47</sup> Bland's work links back to that of Charles Upchurch in that she questions notions of acceptability, arguing that class and demonstrable masculinity in other aspects of life played an important role in deciding whether male-to-female cross-dressing was deemed deviant or 'just a bit of fun'. This case demonstrates that an individual's social standing was as important to how their cross-dressing was perceived as where they cross-dressed. The idea of reputation and social standing influencing a man's ability to transgress was not limited to the middle and upper classes.

As this thesis will show, a man's reputation within his community was an important factor in defining the acceptability of his cross-dressing. Working-class men were significantly more prominent in the history of cross-dressing because of access to space. The men who found themselves before the court whilst cross-dressed had almost always been cross-dressed in the street or in other public spaces. In contrast middle- and upper-class men would have had access to private spaces in which to cross-dress away from the eyes of the police. Therefore, if middle and upper-class men did cross-dress with the same frequency as working-class men, they were much less likely to appear in the historical record. The spatial approach thus makes a significant

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<sup>45</sup> Lucy Bland, *Modern Women on Trial: Sexual Transgression in the Age of the Flapper* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2013), 184-186.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 184-186.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

addition to the field by explaining the class divide in histories of men who cross-dressed. In particular, chapter three analyses the distinction between cross-dressing in working-class carnivals and in middle-class university rag weeks.

One of the few spaces in which men from a range of classes could cross-dress or watch cross-dressed performances was in the concert parties of the First World War. David Boxwell has argued that the prevalence of cross-dressing amongst British troops between 1914 and 1918 reiterates the idea that ‘cross-dressing does not merely inhabit the margins, but also ‘the very heart of public, institutional and mainstream structures.’<sup>48</sup> Whilst Boxwell suggests that the practices of cross-dressing on the front lines went some way to sanction different sexual identities and homoerotic desire, Lisa Sigel adds nuance by establishing that ‘female impersonation during the Great War allowed for the existence of pleasures resistant to categorization’.<sup>49</sup> Joan Scott’s argument that; ‘[w]ar is the ultimate disorder, the disruption of all previously established relationships, or the outcome of earlier instability’, does not only speak to the disruption of cross-dressing as part of popular entertainment, but also to the increased diversity of its audience during wartime.<sup>50</sup> Both men of ranks and privates enjoyed cross-dressing in the same spaces.<sup>51</sup> Sigel draws on the idea of a theatrical veil of acceptability, noted by Carriger, Davis, Boxwell and others, arguing that female impersonation during the Great War was not merely a form of entertainment. It allowed men freedom of homoerotic pleasure without stigmatization, yet held a variety of meanings for a variety of men.<sup>52</sup> Although this thesis acknowledges the possibility for cross-dressing to incite homoerotic desire, it argues for a more diverse range of meanings. Cross-dressing as part of theatrical entertainment was not ‘one of the

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<sup>48</sup> David A. Boxwell, ‘The Follies of War: Cross-Dressing and Popular Theatre on the British Front Lines, 1914-18’, *Modernism/Modernity* 9 (2002), 1-20 (4).

<sup>49</sup> Lisa Sigel, ‘Best Love’: Female Impersonation in the Great War’, *Sexualities* 19 (2016), 98-119 (99).

<sup>50</sup> Joan Scott, ‘Rewriting History’, 19-30, in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* ed. by Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Wietz (London: Yale University Press, 1987), 27.

<sup>51</sup> Sigel, ‘Best Love’, 102.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 98-119.

strange absurdities of war' as it has been presented.<sup>53</sup> Instead, it was an example of men bringing long-standing traditions from home to the front lines. This was a moment when men from different social classes shared their experiences and understandings of cross-dressing, and in turn shared aspects of their cultures. As this thesis will show the Great War was emblematic in highlighting the continuities in cross-dressing as entertainment.

The pervasiveness of cross-dressing in popular entertainment culture means that analysis of the act can reveal a great deal about the culture in which it took place. Cultural theory has significantly influenced historians of gender and sexuality and this thesis is no exception. The positioning of cross-dressing as a central aspect of a range of cultural forms puts cultural theory at the heart of analysis. Marjorie Garber and Judith Butler examined cross-dressing in the early 1990s and encouraged a move away from viewing gender through binary concepts.<sup>54</sup> The influence of Garber and Butler's ideas can be seen in Houlbrook's 'Lady Austin's Camp Boys': Constituting the Queer Subject in 1930s London', which examines gender variant dress as an aspect of an emerging queer identity.<sup>55</sup> In an examination of a trial of men arrested on sodomy charges whilst dressed as women at a fancy-dress ball, Houlbrook argues that the relationship between the men's appearance and their sexual conduct were closely intertwined.<sup>56</sup> This analysis demonstrates the growing association between cross-dressing and same-sex desire in interwar London, yet the work proves the ambiguous and problematic nature of understanding sexual difference in the period. Houlbrook argues that, 'The boundaries between queer and normal were fluid and unstable, existing in a precarious tension through which one threatened constantly to collapse into the other.'<sup>57</sup> Where Houlbrook's work considers how men used transgressions and deviance to form a queer identity, my research focuses on how cross-dressing could work

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<sup>53</sup> Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (New York: Penguin, 2003) 254 & Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1996).

<sup>54</sup> Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), 196.

<sup>55</sup> Houlbrook, 'Lady Austin's Camp Boys', 31.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>57</sup> Houlbrook, 'Lady Austin's Camp Boys', 51.



alongside social norms and be a part of ‘normative’ masculine identity. This thesis therefore challenges Butler’s construction of cross-dressing as inherently disruptive, instead viewing the act as one which could simultaneously reinforce hegemonic gender norms whilst disrupting gendered codes of dress. Examining the ways men might ‘get away with’ cross-dressing will shape an understanding focussed on masculinity rather than on queer identity.

Again, building on the work of both Butler and Garber, Oram encourages historians to focus on the historical ambiguities of cross-dressing:

we need to bear in mind the specific historical meanings given not only to gender, but also to the association of cross-dressing, gender dissidence, sexuality and gender identity. The best way to disentangle some of the above themes and questions is to approach them as a series of chronological phases,<sup>58</sup>

Thinking about cross-dressing in the way Oram suggests allows for the consideration of all men who cross-dressed, moving away from an over-emphasis on the links between cross-dressing and queer identity. The aim is not to ignore the queer identity of some men who cross-dressed, but to consider them alongside men who did not identify as queer, and to consider the place their gender transgressions occupied in society.

One area of analysis which is lacking detailed attention in histories of male-to-female cross-dressing is the relationship between masculinity and the body. Davis has suggested that intentional displays of the masculine physique were essential in retaining a level of acceptability in cross-dressed performance. He argues that the visibility of the masculine body was seen to remove the possibility of accidentally inciting homoerotic desire.<sup>59</sup> Yet this is where the analysis ends. Without analysis of the body as an object of many and varied desires, we are left with the suggestion that any and all desire for the masculine body in female coded clothing must be sexual. As Sigel argues cross-dressing performance satisfied a multitude of different pleasures and desires, therefore there must be more to understanding this relationship than binary identity

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<sup>58</sup> Oram, ‘Cross Dressing and Transgender’, 357.

<sup>59</sup> Davis, “Slap On! Slap Ever!”, 224.

categories.<sup>60</sup> This thesis adds nuance to this discussion by acknowledging the possibility of varied forms of desire but also by analysing the male body as a symbol of masculinity rather than of sexuality.<sup>61</sup> In viewing the body itself as representative of masculinity this thesis is able to explore the relationship between the male body and masculinity when that body is dressed in female-coded-clothing. This thesis seeks to address this gap and, particularly in chapter three, shows that when understood as a bodily act cross-dressing can fit into a heteronormative model of ideal masculinity.

### Masculinities Literature

This thesis demonstrates that binary narratives of masculine vs. effeminate behaviours do not reflect the majority of experiences of cross-dressing and masculinity in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Yorkshire. Understanding the relationship between cross-dressing and masculinity relies not just on an understanding of historically contingent masculine ideals but also an understanding of how these ideals were constructed. The history of masculinity has continued to grow as a field of historical enquiry since the 1990s. A significant body of work in the field has focused on points of crisis in masculinity, most notably surrounding war and the *fin de siècle*.<sup>62</sup> However, as Ben Griffin argues, this has led to the emergence of an unsustainable and implausible picture of men and masculinity in perpetual crisis.<sup>63</sup> This approach has led historians to focus on the fluid nature of masculine identity, and has disrupted understandings of

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<sup>60</sup> Sigel, 'Best Love', 99.

<sup>61</sup> See Begiato.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Kimmel, 'The Contemporary "Crisis of Masculinity" in Historical Perspective', in *The Making of Masculinities*, ed. by Harry Brod (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987) : Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 1991) : Higonnet, Jenson, Michel and Weitz, 'Behind The Lines' : Phillip Mallett, "*The Victorian Poverty*" *In Britain 1870-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) : Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 1994) : Leonore, Davidoff 'Gender and the "Great Divide": Public and Private in British Gender History', *Journal of Women's History* 15 (2003), 11-27, 98 : John Tosh, 'Home and Away: The Flight from Domesticity in Late-Nineteenth-Century England Re-visited', *Gender & History* 27 (2015), 561-575 : John Tosh, 'The Making of Masculinities: The Middle Class in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain', 38-61, in, Angela V. John and Claire Eustance eds., *The Men's Share? Masculinities, Male Support and Women's Suffrage in Britain 1890-1920* (London: Routledge, 1997). See also Judith Allen, 'Men Interminably in Crisis? Historians on Masculinity, Sexual Boundaries, and Manhood', *Radical History Review* 82 (2002), 191-207.

<sup>63</sup> Ben Griffin, 'Hegemonic Masculinity as a Historical Problem', *Gender & History* 30 (2018), 1-24,

masculinity based on dichotomies of normative and non-normative ideals. For example, in their analysis of crossing-dressing servicemen during the Second World War, Emma Vickers and Emma Jackson have demonstrated that a focus on the fluidity of masculine identities can reveal how traits and behaviours which may be considered effeminate or feminine in some contexts, can be assimilated into different models of masculinity in others.<sup>64</sup> An analysis of cross-dressing which moves away from the tendency to view the act as a transgressive builds upon this work by demonstrating how wearing female-coded clothing did not always prevent a man from developing or retaining a ‘respectable’ masculine identity or image.

Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity, as laid out in *Masculinities* (1995), has been incredibly influential in the field.<sup>65</sup> Connell encouraged scholars to look towards a multiplicity of meanings and identities within gender. Connell argued:

To recognize diversity in masculinity is not enough. We must also recognize the relations between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate and exploit, and so on.<sup>66</sup>

Connell emphasised the importance of historical context to the formation of masculinities. For my work, this means that understanding the culture and the context in which men were cross-dressing, either with or without reproach, will be central to understanding the experiences of these men and how they framed their own masculine identities. One important aspect of the various contexts in which cross-dressing is examined in this thesis is audience. Who views the performance is often as important as the performer themselves, particularly in determining the acceptability of the act. In many of the spaces discussed here, the audience is mostly made up of one’s own community, and as Smith has shown, a sense of respectability amongst one’s

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<sup>64</sup> Emma Vickers and Emma Jackson, ‘Sanctuary or Sissy? Female Impersonation as Entertainment in the British Armed Forces, 1939-1945’, in *Gender and the Second World War: Lessons of War*, ed. by Corinna Peniston-Bird and Emma Vickers (London: Palgrave, 2017) pp.40-52 (44).

<sup>65</sup> Nikki Wedgwood, ‘Connell’s Theory of Masculinity – Its Origins and Influences on the Study of Gender’, *Journal of Gender Studies*, 18 (2009), 329-339 (329).

<sup>66</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 37.

community was central to maintaining masculine reputation.<sup>67</sup> This thesis follows Connell's recommendations as it acknowledges the multiplicitous nature of masculine identity and ensures that the context of cross-dressing is as central to the analysis as the act itself.

Despite vast variations in masculine identity and experience, hegemonic ideals still have some influence on how masculinity is understood. Dominant codes of acceptable masculine behaviour are dependent on the spaces in which the behaviour took place as much as on the historical context. Space and place have also featured heavily in gender histories since Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes* outlined their separate spheres analogy in the 1990s.<sup>68</sup> Their concept of separate public and private spheres are perhaps the most common categories through which gendered space is analysed. Davidoff later argued that these concepts are much more complex than early gender histories have led us to believe and vary significantly according to context.<sup>69</sup> 'Public', stands for the open and revealed, the collective, whilst 'Private' stands for the hidden and withdrawn, the individual.<sup>70</sup> Despite this gendering of public and private there were always men and women in both spaces, and as John Tosh has shown, for the Victorian middle-classes in England a man's masculinity was measured by his conduct in the home perhaps even more so than his conduct in public.<sup>71</sup> Davidoff demonstrates that although women have always been part of the public sphere and, the public sphere was, and to a certain extent still is, governed by men. In this sense, the public sphere is an inherently masculine place, but the public and private spheres are much less static than earlier historiography on gendered spaces, such as Tosh and Michael Roper's *Manful Assertions*, has suggested.<sup>72</sup> This thesis demonstrates that although distinctions between public and private spaces are important in

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<sup>67</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*.

<sup>68</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>69</sup> Davidoff, 'Gender and the "Great Divide"', 12.

<sup>70</sup> Davidoff, 'Gender and the "Great Divide"', 12.

<sup>71</sup> John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Roper and John Tosh eds., *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991).

defining behaviours positioning on a scale of acceptability, the extent to which an act could be considered acceptable varied across different public spaces.

The prominence of Davidoff and Hall's separate spheres framework has led to a significant focus on place and space amongst historians of gender. Gendered space has been used to demonstrate how spatially specific masculinities are formed as well as to emphasise how the dichotomies of public and private spaces were never as rigid as Davidoff and Hall suggested.<sup>73</sup> A focus on gendered space has led to a rejection of singular hegemonic or non-hegemonic masculinities and has been particularly useful for historians of queer masculinity. For example, works such as Houlbrook's *Queer London* demonstrate the necessity of carefully navigating spaces and places for queer men.<sup>74</sup> Houlbrook reveals how queer men applied their own meanings to public spaces such as parks, pubs, urinals, restaurants, and Turkish baths to survive and thrive in the city. This demonstrates that finding or creating 'safe spaces' was essential for men who were, for the most part, demonised for their sexual preferences and gendered behaviour.<sup>75</sup> In response to this literature my thesis will use theories of space and place to examine the differences in experiences and representations of cross-dressing in different spaces, demonstrating the significance of spatially specific gendered experiences to understanding queer lives.

Tosh and Roper have argued that 'masculinity has a history' and that history 'is subject to change and varied in its forms.'<sup>76</sup> This thesis views masculinity as fluid, changeable, and historically contingent, as both an identity that is experienced by the individual yet also as a label

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<sup>73</sup> Matthew McCormack, *Public Men: Masculinity and Politics in Modern Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3; Ben Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Michelle Fine and Peter Kuriloff, 'Forging and Performing Masculine Identities Within Social Spaces: Boys and Men Negotiating the Crucible of Dominant Cultural Representations at the Intersection of Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality', *Men and Masculinities* 8 (2006), 257-261.

<sup>74</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*.

<sup>75</sup> Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>76</sup> Tosh and Roper, *Manful Assertions*, 1.

applied to a person by their community. Masculinity is at once a social construct that defined by a set of behaviours, and something that individuals perform both consciously and unconsciously. By drawing attention to individual acts and their relationship to masculinity we see how individual men drew ‘on a range of cultural resources to negotiate their identities and relationships’.<sup>77</sup> And as Katie Barclay argues, ‘In doing so, the contingent, contested and distributed nature of those identities comes to fore.’<sup>78</sup> Ideals of masculinity shift across time, and this is reflected in the changes in representations of cross-dressing noted throughout this thesis. The analysis in the following chapters follows the work of Begiato in that ‘it seeks to queer the history of masculinity, to view it sceptically, to pull apart its constitutive pieces and analyse them from a variety of perspectives, taking nothing for granted’.<sup>79</sup>

### A Sexual or Gendered Act?

The privileging of heterosexuality in Western constructions of masculinity has resulted in masculinity and sexuality being frequently intertwined, both in popular consciousness and in historiography.<sup>80</sup> Alan Sinfield, historian of male homosexuality, has argued that in the latter half of the nineteenth century effeminacy and deviations of gendered dress became synonymous with male same-sex desire, and thus deviance.<sup>81</sup> And this, he argues, was the point at which the modern homosexual was born. If we follow Sinfield’s argument, then men who dressed as women would be automatically cast as sexually deviant. While this thesis does not dispute that in some circumstances men who dressed in female-coded clothing were assumed to have a desire to engage in sex with other men, and in some cases it is evident that they did, it argues for a more nuanced approach, one that understands the multiplicity of meanings ascribed to the act of

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<sup>77</sup> Katie Barclay, *Men on Trial: Performing Emotion, Embodiment, and Identity in Ireland, 1800-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 8.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Joanne Begiato, *Manliness in Britain, 1760–1900: Bodies, Emotion, and Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 4.

<sup>80</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 104.

<sup>81</sup> Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1994).

cross-dressing and how these understandings were influenced by space, place, and reputation. This thesis will demonstrate that cross-dressing was not inherently viewed as interconnected with ‘deviant’ sexuality in all spaces. The act was only linked to same-sex sex and desire in the press and in the court when there was clear evidence to suggest this was the case. On the stage, on film, and at the carnival, cross-dressing was often enjoyed part of family entertainment.

Because historical analysis of male-to-female cross-dressing has so often been centred on the court where men who cross-dressed were often brought on charges relating to sex, connotations of sexual deviance have been a constant feature of analysis. However, the act of dressing oneself as the ‘opposite’ gender is undoubtedly a gendered act in that it is a literal performance of gender. The act’s relationship to sexuality is dependent on the individual and the context in which it takes place. Although this thesis places emphasis on cross-dressing as a gendered act the topic of sex and sexuality is rarely absent. One reason that sexuality cannot be completely removed from a historical analysis of cross-dressing is that across history, male-to-female cross-dressing has been closely intertwined with male prostitution. As cultural theorist Garber argued ‘the history of transvestism and the history of homosexuality constantly intersect and intertwine, both willingly and unwillingly.’<sup>82</sup> Analysing cross-dressing as an act which speaks to both sexuality and gender at different moments complicates arguments which depict the subversion of gendered dress as inherently linked to sexual ‘deviance’. Following the notion that there was a ‘culture of acceptance’ of male same-sex sex amongst the working classes in the North of England this thesis argues that cross-dressing was not seen as inherently deviant in all contexts, even in cases where it was linked to same-sex desire.<sup>83</sup>

Judith Butler’s theories about the production and reproduction of gender provide the foundation for the arguments in this thesis. Butler argues that gender is produced through subconscious acts of the body. It is these bodily acts that create gender, and these acts are

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<sup>82</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin, 1993), 131.

<sup>83</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 93.

historically constituted.<sup>84</sup> Butler also argues that ‘gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo. In its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status.’<sup>85</sup> Gender, according to Butler, is performative in that it produces a series of effects, but also in that it can be knowingly performed.<sup>86</sup> Cross-dressing is a conscious performance of gender which can be interpreted in a variety of different ways. While cross-dressing in some instances has been viewed as the early steps in developing a ‘new’ gender identity, cross-dressing also appears as parody of existing gender structures. Although Butler claims that all gender is inherently parodic, she states that ‘[p]arody by itself is not subversive’.<sup>87</sup> Defining cross-dressing as acceptable or deviant was often contingent on a range of factors. This informs another argument made in this thesis, that instead of being inherently transgressive, cross-dressing was enjoyed and experienced in a variety of spaces in Yorkshire without the character of those who cross-dressed being challenged, because the act often reinforced gender norms. Sara Salin’s work adds to this as she argues that cross-dressing can serve ‘to reinforce existing heterosexual power structures.’<sup>88</sup> Salin uses the example of Robin Williams’s cross-dressed performance as a nanny in *Mrs Doubtfire* to argue that this type of cross-dressed performance ‘serve[s] to reinforce existing distinctions between “male” and “female,” “masculine” and “feminine,” “gay” and “straight.”’<sup>89</sup> Thinking about cross-dressing as an act that can both subvert and reinforce normative gender structures depending on the context, type, and intention of the act, will be key throughout this thesis. Although this thesis aims to complicate binary constructs of gender and sexuality, it also shows that cross-dressing was able to sustain these binary categories in the popular consciousness as much as it challenged them.

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<sup>84</sup> Butler, ‘Performative Acts’, 519-531.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 520.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 521.

<sup>87</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 139.

<sup>88</sup> Sara Salin, ‘On Judith Butler and Performativity’, in *Sexualities & Communication in Everyday Life*, ed. by, Karen Lovaas, Mercilee Jenkins (London: Sage, 2007), 55-68 (58).

<sup>89</sup> Salin, ‘On Judith Butler’, 58.



Central to demonstrating the instability of these binary categories is queer theory. This thesis follows the approach to queer theory laid out in Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson's 'Queer Theory without Antinormativity'. This work rejects the supposition that a 'critique of normativity marks the spot where *queer* and *theory* meet'.<sup>90</sup> Antinormativity forms the foundation of queer theory and

reflects a broad understanding that the critical force of queer inquiry lies in its capacity to undermine norms, challenge normativity, and interrupt the processes of normalization – including the norms and normativities that have been produced by queer inquiry itself.<sup>91</sup>

Wiegman and Wilson encourage queer studies to sever its allegiance to antinormativity. They dispute the idea that norms restrict and exclude, ostracize, constrict and control.<sup>92</sup> Instead they encourage scholars to rethink 'the meaning of norms, normalization, and the normal'.<sup>93</sup> Heather Love has also argued that, 'the wholesale refusal of normativity seems less and less viable as a guiding principle for the field.'<sup>94</sup> The essence of these arguments is that, in order to understand the queer experience, we should examine how queerness existed at the heart of society rather than in the margins. Love suggests that for this to be successful, a return to reading what is already there, is necessary 'rather than constantly searching for what is absent, what is hidden and what is repressed.' Connell also argues that gender theorists and queer theorists should not necessarily look to reject normativity but should look for 'a different normativity.'<sup>95</sup> Connell suggests theorists should be looking to change hegemonic ideals rather than focusing on positioning themselves against normativity as 'normativity is not always detrimental to the queer voice'.<sup>96</sup> Exploring cross-dressing in 'ordinary' and public spaces acts on these calls from queer

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<sup>90</sup> Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson, 'Introduction: Antinormativity's Queer Conventions', *Differences* 26 (2015), 1-25 (4).

<sup>91</sup> Wiegman and Wilson, 'Introduction', 4.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>94</sup> Heather Love, 'Doing Being Deviant: Deviance Studies, Description, and the Queer Ordinary', *Differences* 26 (2015) 74-95 (93).

<sup>95</sup> Mary Lou Rasmussen, Christina Gowlett & Raewyn Connell, 'Interview with Raewyn Connell: the Cultural Politics of Queer Theory in Education Research', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 35:3 (2014), 335-346 (340).

<sup>96</sup> Rasmussen, Gowlett, and Connell, 'Cultural Politics', 341.

theory. By analysing cross-dressing in contexts in which it was part of ‘normative’ behaviour, my work builds on these new ways of thinking about queerness and aims to challenge understandings of hegemonic ideals. I will argue that although cross-dressing had the ability to deconstruct norms, its position within mainstream society is indicative of a more nuanced, and less binary way of understanding masculinity in Yorkshire. I argue that the ‘queerness’ associated with the act was a significant part of northern culture and society *because* it was part of normative entertainment culture, and, in some spaces, normative gendered behaviour.

By rejecting binary identity categories which privilege heteronormativity we are able to nuance our understanding of the relationship between sexual identity and gendered acts. Analysing historical gendered and sexual acts in line with binary categories removes our ability to truly understand individual experiences. As Jeffrey Weeks argued, “The category of “the homosexual” is a construct of the human mind, a historical invention that has meaning only within very particular historical conditions.”<sup>97</sup> Therefore an analysis of the spaces and contexts in which sexual and gendered acts took place is central to understanding the acts themselves. In challenging notions that gendered acts and sexual acts exist in binary categories, this thesis also challenges binary constructions of acceptability and deviance. Because of the centrality of binary constructs in western society, many historians of masculinity and sexuality in modern Britain have tended to analyse masculinities, identities, and sexualities as either ‘normative’ or ‘non-normative’, as acceptable or deviant.<sup>98</sup> Whilst these histories have begun to acknowledge that the two are not mutually exclusive, a focus on ‘queer’ behaviour or identities as ‘non-normative’ or transgressive means that the intersections between acceptable and transgressive behaviour have yet to be explored in detail. A study of cross-dressing as an act that could be simultaneously

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<sup>97</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, ‘Queer(y)ing the “Modern Homosexual”’, *Journal of British Studies* 51:3 (2012): 523-539 (531).

<sup>98</sup> Roper and Tosh eds., *Manful Assertions*: Eileen Yeo, ‘The Boy Is the Father of the Man’: Moral Panic over Working-Class Youth, 1850 to the Present’, *Labour History Review* 69: 2 (2004) 185-199; Harry Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in Nineteenth Century England* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003); Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Kevin Porter and Jeffrey Weeks eds., *Between the Acts: Lives of Homosexual Men, 1885-1967* (London: Routledge, 1991).

accepted or rejected, dependent on context, can further understandings of where the line between deviance and acceptability sat, and how, when, and why it moved or was moveable.

### Periodisation

This thesis analyses men who cross-dressed in Yorkshire from the late nineteenth century until the eve of the Second World War. It begins in the final decades of the nineteenth century which has previously been cited as the moment at which the modern homosexual was born.<sup>99</sup> The late nineteenth century was also the period in which female-impersonators were taking centre stage in music-halls across the country and firmly situating themselves at the heart of popular entertainment culture in Britain.<sup>100</sup> The Second World War has been chosen as the end point, not because female impersonation disappeared from popular culture during the war, but because there was a significant cultural shift in the way gender and sexuality and gender were understood in the post-war period. Described by Linsey Robb and Juliette Pattinson as an ‘inevitable point of rupture’, the Second World War led to significant ‘shifts in idealised conceptions of malehood.’<sup>101</sup> These changes take gender variance in a new direction and therefore require separate study. In addition, the specific regional culture of Yorkshire which provides the context for this thesis, began to slowly disappear as mass culture boomed in the late 1930s.<sup>102</sup> In tying together the historiography of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this thesis will make an original contribution to the field of gender history, regional history, and the history of cross-dressing. This is achieved through highlighting change over time, but also by showing how a number of the traditions of nineteenth century popular culture which placed cross-dressing at

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<sup>99</sup> Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*. This idea has since been replaced by a historiography which views notions of selfhood and sexual identity as ‘dependent on specific practices of class and the structure of life in a particular time and place’. H. G. Cocks, ‘Modernity and the Self in the History of Sexuality’, *The Historical Journal* 49:4 (2006) pp. 1211-1227 (1226-1227) see also Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2004) and Houlbrook, *Queer London*.

<sup>100</sup> See Davis, “Slap On! Slap Ever!”: Bratton ‘Beating the Bounds’: Carriger, ‘The Unnatural History’: Senelick, ‘Boys and Girls Together’.

<sup>101</sup> Linsey Robb, and Juliette Pattinson eds., *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 3.

<sup>102</sup> This is by no means to say that the North/South divide had been bridged, but simply that differences were not as obvious. Smith, *Masculinity* 12-13.

the heart of acceptable family entertainment continued into the first half of the twentieth century.

Tosh has noted that the field of masculinity is lacking in broader analysis, arguing that since the 1980s ‘no one ventured beyond the limits of a single century. No overarching periodisation of Western masculinities has been proposed since Connell’s pioneering article, “The big picture,” of 1993.’<sup>103</sup> The existing literature on cross-dressing proves Tosh’s observation; that this approach rarely spans more than a decade or two. My research will fill this gap by tracing change across the centuries rather than documenting specific moments in time. In addition, the history of cross-dressing has primarily focused on individual case studies or a particular moment. Perhaps due to a lack of sources covering a longer period this is often also the case for queer history more broadly, meaning changes across time are often difficult to trace. By tackling the topic over a broader time frame this thesis not only tracks change overtime but also highlights continuities in tradition, demonstrating how these traditions were adapted for new entertainment forms and across new media. Therefore, this thesis does not merely show a ‘queer moment’ but demonstrates the pervasive nature of cross-dressing in popular entertainment culture in Britain from the end of the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century.

### Men who Cross-Dress

In the present day, there is an ever-growing collection of labels used to reflect the identities of those who do not conform to heteronormative, hegemonic models of gender and sexuality. Identity labels such as non-binary, gender queer, gender fluid, agender, bigender, and gender non-conforming, have replaced the more binary terms transsexual and cross-dresser to reflect the increasing nuance with which gendered identity and gender expression is understood and to distance gender expression from sexuality. However, what is most important about these identity

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<sup>103</sup> John Tosh, ‘The History of Masculinity: An Outdated Concept?’, in *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from antiquity to the Contemporary World*, ed. by John H. Arnold and Sean Brady (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 17-34 (20).

labels is that they are not assigned to individuals, but individuals are able to choose which label best suits their own identity. As Emily Skidmore has discussed, there remains a ‘great debate’ over terminology when writing histories of gender identities outside of hegemonic binary categories.<sup>104</sup> This thesis does not however, explore individual identities. Instead, it uses cross-dressing in line with Roland Bentacourt’s definition by viewing cross-dressing as a term which ‘refers to persons who choose as a form of expression, to dress as but not to live full time as the “opposite” gender’.<sup>105</sup> Because there is often no evidence of how the men discussed in this thesis understood their own gender identities, I have chosen to refer to them as ‘men-who cross-dressed’ a term which highlights the act that these men took part in rather than a term which attempts to define their identity.<sup>106</sup> Referring to my subjects in this way also mirrors how they were presented to their contemporaries at the time. For example, the phrase ‘man in woman’s clothes’ was a term that frequently appeared in the popular press in reference to the cases discussed in this thesis. Assigning modern identity labels to individuals who cross-dressed in the past removes their agency and ignores their own experiences. The only moments at which the men in this thesis identify themselves with cross-dressing is when it is part of their profession, and in these instances, they refer to themselves as a ‘female impersonator’. Thinking about the varied experiences of men who cross-dressed in a variety of different contexts allows for the inclusion of men who cross-dressed for diverse reasons without assuming their identity. A focus on how men performed gender by donning the clothes of the opposite sex, rather than speculating about how they may or may not have identified, emphasises the fluidity of gender in different contexts.

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<sup>104</sup> Emily Skidmore, ‘Troubling Terms: The Label Problem in Transgender History’, *Notches Blog* (2017) <<https://notchesblog.com/2017/11/28/troubling-terms-the-label-problem-in-transgender-history/>> [accessed 15 April 2021].

<sup>105</sup> Roland Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages* (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2020), 90.

<sup>106</sup> Heather Ellis and Jessica Meyer eds., *Masculinity and the Other: Historical Perspectives* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009) 1-6 & Michael Roper, ‘Slipping out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History’, *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005), pp. 57–72.

### Sources and Methods

One of the greatest barriers to writing histories of lives and moments which sit outside of ‘normative’ binary structures is language. As Betancourt argued, issues of language in historical writings often stem from ‘modern assumptions about a binary gender system and a conflation of sex and gender’.<sup>107</sup> One of the core aims of this study is to step away from such assumptions. This thesis makes a significant contribution to field of gender history through answering the call of gender theorists and historians such as Judith Butler, Laura Grantmyre, Matt Cook, Heather Ellis, and Jessica Meyer, to reject interpretations of gender and sexuality as binary terms and instead view gender as part of individual identity.<sup>108</sup> However, as Roper has argued, if we understand masculinity as an internal individual identity rather than as mere cultural codes, exploring masculinity through cultural approaches often ‘leaves open, and untheorized, the question of what the relationship of the codes of masculinity is to actual men, to existential matters, to persons and to their psychic make-up’.<sup>109</sup> One of four methods Roper suggest to tackle this issue is to shift focus onto relationships.<sup>110</sup> This thesis rises to the challenge posed by Roper by analysing the relationships between men who cross-dressed with different spaces, with the legal system, with audiences, and perhaps most closely related to Roper’s ideal study of masculinities, the relationship between these men and their communities.

There is an abundance of evidence that men cross-dressed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the sources in which they can be found - photographs, newspaper reports of crime and carnivals, and advertisements for female impersonators in variety shows- reveal that male-to-female cross-dressing was a part of everyday life for many from the end of the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. However, for the most part, cross-dressing

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<sup>107</sup> Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality*, 90.

<sup>108</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* : Laura Grantmyre, “They lived their life and they didn’t bother anybody”: African American Female Impersonators and Pittsburgh’s Hill District, 1920-1960’, *American Quarterly* 63 (2011), 983-1011 : Cook, *Queer Domesticities* : Ellis And Meyer, *Masculinity and the Other*.

<sup>109</sup>Roper, ‘Slipping Out of View’, 58.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 63-64.

as entertainment, or when classified ‘as a joke’ seems to have passed without comment. It is this lack of comment which makes the intimate details of the lives and experiences of these men difficult to find. These difficulties are by no means issues exclusive to historians of cross-dressing. Historians of gender and sexuality have often been required to combine a multitude of methodologies in order to reconstruct these historical narratives. As a result, many histories of queer lives combine fragmentary evidence from census data, court reports, diaries, letters, popular literature, oral histories, and the minutiae of everyday life.<sup>111</sup> This thesis is no exception and is based on evidence from newspaper articles, photographs, court records, census data, flyers for theatrical performances and local carnivals, alongside film and newsreel footage of local events form a range of local archive collections across Yorkshire.

Michelle Liu Carriger, Charles Upchurch, Alison Oram, Matt Houlbrook, James Vernon and Lucy Bland have all used a case study methodology in works concerning cross-dressing, sexuality, and gender to great effect.<sup>112</sup> Although this methodology has produced some invaluable work and fascinating analysis, the popularity of this approach has led to a lack of research exploring wider changes. Thus, broader continuities and shifts are, at present, hard to trace. Each chapter of this thesis builds on variety of smaller case studies and moments which, when considered alongside one another, document these changes over time.

Finding these stories has not been a straightforward task, though the act itself was by no means hidden. The terminology used adds an additional layer of complexity. For example, a search of the northern newspapers held in the British Newspaper Archive (BNA), dates ranging

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<sup>111</sup> Laura Doan, ‘Queer History / Queer Memory The Case of Alan Turing’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 23, (2017), 113-128 : Chris Waters, ‘Disorders of the Mind, Disorders of the Body Social: Peter Wildeblood and the Making of the Modern Homosexual’ in *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964* ed. by Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, Chris Waters (Rivers Oram Press: London, 1999), 134-151 : Porter and Weeks, *Between the Acts* : Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), Justin Bengry, ‘Courting the Pink Pound: Men Only and the Queer Consumer, 1935-39’, *History Workshop Journal*, 68 (2009) : Smith, *Masculinity*, and Houlbrook, *Queer London*..

<sup>112</sup> See; Carriger, ‘The Unnatural History’ : Alison Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman! Women's Gender-Crossing in Modern British Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2007) : Houlbrook, *Queer London*, Bland, *Modern Women on Trial* : James Vernon, ‘For Some Queer Reason’: The Trials and Tribulations of Colonel Barker's Masquerade in Interwar Britain’, *Signs* 26 (2000), 37-62.

from 1870 to 1939, did not reveal a single relevant result for the terms ‘cross dressed’, ‘cross-dresser’ or ‘cross-dressing’. Turning to the literature of cross-dressing in theatre I noted the term ‘female impersonator’ was in regular use. Searching this term in the BNA led to over 5,000 results in the same period. In addition, the historiography of cross-dressing and crime highlighted the use of other terms such as ‘masquerade’, ‘dressed as a woman’ or ‘in women’s clothes’, as terms regularly used when men who cross-dressed found themselves entangled with the criminal justice system. These terms uncovered a range of newspaper articles relating to men who cross-dressed, and the same search terms also proved useful for searching catalogues at local archives. Thus the terminology used to describe men who cross-dressed was often closely related to the spaces in which they cross-dressed.

The silences and the gaps can, arguably, be just as useful in understanding how representations and experiences of cross-dressing have changed across time. Historians have approached silences in a number of ways. For example, Natalie Zemon Davis has treated her sources as individual narratives. Davis fills the silences by examining a variety of different sources, merging methodologies from literary studies with the methodologies of political and social historians.<sup>113</sup> Building analysis from a range of source bases has allowed historians to tackle a variety of silences presented when forming historical narratives. As Valerie Johnson argues, the voices we find in archives do not tell a complete story, ‘Archives are a form of memory, and record a truth. We must remember that it is not the whole or only truth.’<sup>114</sup> Johnson also emphasises the importance of being creative in thinking about what we consider to be an archive alongside exploring why we are unable to find the voices we are searching for.<sup>115</sup> This thesis

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<sup>113</sup> Natalie Zemon-Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

<sup>114</sup> Valerie Johnson, ‘Dealing With the Silence’, 101-116, in David Thomas, Simon Fowler and Valerie Johnson eds. *The Silence of the Archive* (London: Facet Publishing, 2017), 103.

<sup>115</sup> Johnson, ‘Silence’, 107-10.



follows suit and combines cultural sources such as film and newspaper articles with the methods of social and family history to fill in these gaps.

This thesis combines a regional focus with ephemeral details of everyday life to illuminate experiences of cross-dressing in Yorkshire. This methodology not only offers further analysis of gender in an area of the country often forgotten by the field, but its emphasis on spatially specific masculinities demonstrates the complexities and fluidity of gender. With the exception of the first chapter, this research is not built on sources which intrinsically frame cross-dressing as transgressive. This thesis examines cross-dressing in contexts in which it was accepted. Because this thesis is organised around the different spaces in which men cross-dressed, the methodology varies in each chapter. Newspaper reports and advertisements are used across the chapters however, chapter one also builds on court reports, chapters two and three utilise local archive collections, and the final chapter analyses films shown in Yorkshire. However, regional newspapers have formed the source base for each chapter. Newspapers are an incredibly rich source for analysing cultural representations of cross-dressing and although newspaper reports rarely reveal intimate details of lived experiences, they do provide an overview of how cross-dressing was perceived by the press, and to a certain extent, by the public too. As Adrian Bingham noted, one of the key problems with analysing both the popular and local press is that ‘most popular papers have not made record management a priority’.<sup>116</sup> As a result, we have little information regarding the reception and production of newspapers, though the survival of a paper can be taken as testament to a continually significant readership, and therefore noteworthy influence. While the precise details surrounding readership and reception are limited, the BNA houses an extensive collection of national and regional newspapers which provides a breadth of national and regional sources. Although some periods are represented more than others in the archive, making qualitative analysis problematic, trends and changes can

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<sup>116</sup> Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers: Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918-1978* (Oxford, 2009), 20.

still be traced. British gender history has made few steps into regional studies and, as a result, regional newspapers rarely feature in the literature of the field, though historians such as Houlbrook and Bland have used national papers to great effect when analysing cases in London.<sup>117</sup> Focusing on papers written about and circulated within Yorkshire emphasises the specifics of Yorkshire culture and the specific way masculinity and cross-dressing was understood within the county.

News of men arrested whilst cross-dressed was often spread by the regional press, and occasionally the national press, an institution that spread information into the homes of most Britons. The rapid expanse of newspaper readership in the twentieth century meant that a large proportion of the Yorkshire community are likely to have been aware of these trials. Bingham notes that the mass audience for national and regional newspapers included a large cross-section of society.<sup>118</sup> Bingham also stated that,

Between 1918 and 1978 newspapers were right at the heart of British popular culture, with the vast majority of adults regularly reading at least one national paper: at mid-century, indeed, Britons read more newspapers per capita than any other people.<sup>119</sup>

Newspapers are therefore an invaluable source for understanding how cross-dressing in criminal spaces was portrayed to the general public. Due to the breadth of readership and the role of the popular press as a vehicle of entertainment, regional newspapers would have played a significant role in shaping opinions in Yorkshire about men who cross-dressed.

Although the regional press did not reproduce court trials verbatim, they often provided at least a brief summary of court cases. The articles frequently focussed on the sensational aspects of these stories and encouraged readers to laugh at the notion of a man appearing before the judge in female-coded clothing. In these cases, the sensation was often drawn from the idea of a man appearing in the dock in women's clothes and the incongruity between the serious

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<sup>117</sup> Bland, *Modern Women on Trial*: Houlbrook, *Queer London*: Houlbrook 'Lady Austin's Camp Boys'.

<sup>118</sup> Bingham, *Family Newspapers*, 1-2.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

space of the court and the subversive act. These reports occasionally present the men's choice to perform gender 'incorrectly', as comedic and as a result rarely present the act threatening or dangerous.<sup>120</sup> Although the stories that appear in the Yorkshire press do not outline the experiences of all men in Yorkshire, reading about these cases is likely to have significantly influenced how Yorkshire folk understood the act of cross-dressing in relation to crime.

As with all historical sources, newspapers cannot reveal the full range of experiences of cross-dressing. Aside from the men who cross-dressed for a living on the stage, or to help raise money for charities through fancy-dress competitions, cross-dressing men only appeared in newspapers when their lives had taken a turn for the worse. Men appeared in papers having been arrested for 'loitering', 'importuning', theft or public disturbance whilst dressed as women, or, when they were found dead having killed themselves or having been killed by others whilst dressed in female-coded clothing.<sup>121</sup> As Houlbrook explains about his own 'queer' subject, Cyril, '[t]hat his story is preserved is thus evidence of a momentary failure to negotiate the tensions of urban life'.<sup>122</sup> If these men had not suffered such tragic fates they may never have been written about in the local or national press. This thesis will argue that the reason the details of these men's lives are so hard to trace in Yorkshire is not that they did not exist, but that they were generally able to continue undisturbed. Smith argues that this is due to 'the tolerant or ambivalent attitudes of both local people and authorities' towards what the modern mind would understand as gender variant or sexually transgressive behaviour, coupled with the lack of specific targeting of sexually transgressive behaviour by the police in the North of England more broadly.<sup>123</sup> My research suggests that Smith's argument still stands when applied to male-to-

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<sup>120</sup> For a discussion of incongruity humour theory see A. Nijholt, "All the world's a stage": Incongruity Humour Revisited', *Annals of Mathematics and Artificial Intelligence* (2018), NPN.

<sup>121</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 23 September 1938, p.16 : *Sheffield Independent*, 15 August 1863, p.3 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 6 January 1931 (NPN) and *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 1 August 1950, p.1.

<sup>122</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 5.

<sup>123</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 21.

female cross-dressing. However, this does not mean that it is impossible to recreate and analyse the lives of these men.

Each chapter also makes use of genealogical methods to trace the lives of individual men who cross-dressed.<sup>124</sup> Genealogical methods have allowed historians to gain intricate details into individual lives in a range of areas of historical enquiry.<sup>125</sup> In this thesis, tracing men's family lives through census, birth, marriage, and death records has added a depth to their stories which is often absent from court and newspaper reports. It allows us to follow what happened in their lives after their arrests or performances as female-impersonators. This knowledge opens up discussion about the relationship between men who cross-dressed and their communities. These methods emphasise individual experience and reveal details of men's lives when they are no longer of note to the regional press or the court. By combing a variety of sources, from court reports and census records to theatrical play bills, we can piece together the fragments of these lives.

### Chapter Breakdown

This thesis is comprised of four chapters, each chapter focussing on a different space in which men cross-dressed. Though many themes and traditions overlap in each space, I argue that each space influenced how cross-dressing was performed and understood. Chapter one builds on the literature which has analysed cross-dressing in relation to crime. This is achieved by exploring stories of men who were arrested whilst cross-dressed in Yorkshire and in doing so develops

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<sup>124</sup> As Laura King has demonstrated, family history continues to grow in popularity with academic historians and the combination of genealogical methods of research with more 'traditional' academic methodologies has led to the production of some fascinating projects. Tanya Evans has called for academic historians to engage with the methods of genealogists and family historians. Laura King, 'Family History and Academic History – the Value of Collaboration', *Living With Dying* (2018) [<https://livingwithdying.leeds.ac.uk/2018/02/06/family-history-and-academic-history-the-value-of-collaboration/>] accessed 01/07/2020. Tanya Evans, 'Secrets and Lies: The Radical Potential of Family History', *History Workshop Journal* 71:1 (2011), 49-73.

<sup>125</sup> Jane McCabe, *Race, Tea and Colonial Resettlement: Imperial Families, Interrupted* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017) ; Richard Grayson, *Belfast Boys: How Unionists and Nationalists Fought and Died Together in the First World War* (London: Continuum, 2009) ; Tanya Evans, *Fractured Families: Life on the Margins of Colonial New South Wales* (Sydney: Newsouth Publishing, 2015) ; C. De Bellaigue, 'Great Expectations? Childhood, Family, and Middle-Class Social Mobility in Nineteenth-Century England', *Cultural & Social History* 16:1 (2019), 29-46 and Julia Laite, *The Disappearance of Lydia Harvey: A True Story of Sex, Crime and the Meaning of Justice* (Profile Books: London, 2021).

understandings of how the act was treated in the press and in the criminal justice system in the region. It also highlights the significance of space to defining how cross-dressing was understood and experienced in the county by distinguishing between the court and the street as spaces of perceived transgression, providing a foundation on which the rest of this thesis is built. This chapter examines the lives of ten Sheffield men who were involved in the Manchester Fancy-Dress Ball case alongside six cases of men arrested in Yorkshire between 1870 and 1940.

Although these men were arrested for crimes relating to sex, cross-dressing played a central role in their experience at the ball as half of the men in attendance were 'dressed as women'. Even if the men from Sheffield were not dressed in female coded clothing, they would have been surrounded by men who were. This research also demonstrates that cross-dressing could have different meanings for different individuals and affected lives in different ways. For some men it was a moment of frivolity, never to be repeated, for others it was linked to sexuality and desire and formed a part of their everyday lives. It argues that the boundary of acceptability was often crossed when men who cross-dressed committed a crime, but men who cross-dressed without committing a specific crime were often allowed to walk free. This chapter highlights that cross-dressing was viewed as deviant under some circumstances but argues that cross-dressing is best understood as existing on a scale of acceptability, rather than being viewed as either acceptable or deviant. As the following chapters demonstrate, outside of the criminal justice system, cross-dressing was often enjoyed as part of popular entertainment culture in spite of its potential links to deviance.

The relative acceptance of cross-dressing amongst Yorkshire communities can be linked to the prevalence of female-impersonation in entertainment spaces, the theatre being the most prominent of these spaces. Chapter two makes an original contribution to histories of cross-dressing in theatre by bringing a regional focus to the discussion of cross-dressing on the stage. It builds on the second of the two largest bodies of literature on cross-dressing and argues that, although links between cross-dressing and male same-sex sex were undeniably in existence in a

range of contexts, these links did not negatively influence the popularity of the act until the latter half of the twentieth century. This argument is reached through an examination of cross-dressing in music hall, variety theatre, First World War concert parties, and in professional and amateur theatre. This will link with discussions about the scale of acceptability from the previous chapter. This chapter also demonstrates the pervasiveness and longevity of male-to-female cross-dressing in theatre, feeding into Smith's discussions of Yorkshire people's tolerant attitudes. This chapter provides a framework for understanding cross-dressing as a performance and therefore provides essential context for understanding cross-dressing in carnival and on film. Those who cross-dressed in carnival and created cross-dressing films often borrowed from and built on the traditions and tropes of cross-dressing in theatre.

The third chapter highlights how these tropes transferred to local carnivals. It uses the spaces of local charity fundraising events to explore cross-dressing in relation to traditional working-class masculinity. This space centres around the local community and thus this chapter analyses the role community could play in sanctioning gendered deviance. It places particular emphasis on the audience at these events and the street space of carnival as one of licenced misrule. This chapter argues that in the space of community carnival, cross-dressing reinforced heteronormativity and the gender binary, whilst simultaneously providing a space for men to transgress codes of gendered dress whilst actively reinforcing masculinity. Cross-dressing in these events was primarily made acceptable by the transformation of the space, but also by the protection of community. The carnival, in its physical positioning in the street and its theoretical position as a performance space, ties together both the stage and the street as areas where cross dressing could achieve acceptability.

Retaining focus on cross-dressing in popular entertainment, chapter four moves towards the end of the period studied by analysing cross-dressing in one of the most rapidly growing technologies of the twentieth century, the cinema. This chapter traces the development of this

media alongside the rise and fall of cross-dressing in popular culture. It reflects on themes and tropes highlighted in the previous chapter and develops a sense of change over time. In doing so it ties together the two centuries allowing for a detailed analysis of continuity and change in cross-dressing and popular culture. Linking back to chapter three, this chapter also explores the use of cross-dressing to reinforce 'normative' behaviours, and in so doing, places emphasis on the important role played by women in stories of cross-dressing.

A regional analysis of cross-dressing offers a deeper understanding of how attitudes towards gender and gender transgressions were shaped by their social, cultural, and political contexts. The importance of context is explored in this thesis through its unique approach to cross-dressing and space. Exploring the act in spaces in which it was accepted as entertainment allows for an analysis of the act's relationship with hegemonic ideals of masculinity. In doing so it furthers knowledge of how ideals were developed placing particular emphasis on the centrality of the body to constructions of masculinity. This thesis makes an original contribution to the study of gender non-conformity by showing how a conscious transgression of gender norms could often serve to reinforce hegemonic, binary notions of masculinity.

## Chapter 1: On Trial

While the rest of this thesis explores spaces in which men *could* dress in female-coded clothing without fear of arrest, this chapter focuses on moments when men who cross-dressed found themselves under the scrutiny of the criminal justice system. While this space has been given significant coverage in the historiography of male-to-female cross-dressing this thesis is the first to examine cross-dressing and the criminal justice system within Yorkshire. Through a focus on moments of transgression, this chapter demonstrates the circumstances which led cross-dressing to be understood as deviant. I will argue that cross-dressing could mostly be passed off as a moment of misjudged frivolity unless a crime was committed whilst the person was cross-dressed. In order to further understand why the act was considered acceptable in one context yet deviant in another, this thesis begins by exploring why and where men were prosecuted. Exploring these boundaries of acceptability in Yorkshire highlights how ‘a particularly northern understanding of sexuality’ and masculinity, as highlighted by Smith, affected how communities and the criminal justice system responded to transgressions of gendered dress.<sup>126</sup> Even when men who cross-dressed committed crimes such as theft or fraud, or when they had solicited sex with other men, they were not necessarily prevented from continuing to live their lives as they had before. This chapter makes a significant contribution to the history of masculinity and queer history by demonstrating that a man’s respectability or masculine reputation was not removed due to engagement with cross-dressing and crime, further solidifying the centrality of work and family to northern understandings of masculinity.

The criminal court has played a central role in histories of those who transgressed hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality and the history of male-to-female cross-dressing is no exception.<sup>127</sup> The centrality of the court in this historiography can be accounted for by historic

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<sup>126</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 2.

<sup>127</sup> Houlbrook, ‘Lady Austin’s Camp Boys’, 31-61 : Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman* : Bland, *Modern Women on Trial* : Cocks, *Nameless Offences* : Carriger, ‘The Unnatural History’, 135-157 : Upchurch ‘Forgetting the Unthinkable’, 127-158 : Vernon, ‘For Some Queer Reason’, 37-62 : Rose Collis, *Colonel Barker’s Monstrous Regiment: a Tale of Female*



links between cross-dressing and male prostitution.<sup>128</sup> When these links are coupled with the criminalisation of male homosexuality in Britain until 1967, the court becomes the most logical place to search for tales of those who transgressed gendered codes of dress. As a result, the historical enquiry has largely centred around the prosecution of men who cross-dressed in the court.<sup>129</sup> In contrast to this, Houlbrook's seminal *Queer London* demonstrated that in early twentieth-century London cross-dressing formed part of a thriving queer subculture in which some men were able to live queer lives and express their queer identities with relative freedom.<sup>130</sup> Although these networks provided the potential for freedom of expression, according to London-based research, from the end of the nineteenth century onwards men who cross-dressed in public outside of the theatre, and outside of 'secret' queer networks were frequently treated with suspicion.<sup>131</sup> These studies have argued that connections between cross-dressing and sexual deviance, coupled with growing fears surrounding homosexuality and effeminacy, worked to brand the act as inherently deviant.<sup>132</sup> However, this chapter will show that the acceptability of the act in Yorkshire was contingent on a range of factors, not just the space in which it took place, but also who witnessed the cross-dressing, the intent behind the cross-dressing, and how the individual behaved whilst cross-dressed.

Smith has argued that the distinctive and very visible queer culture noted by Houlbrook, which was mostly formed around the commercialisation of sex between men, was not present in Yorkshire before the 1950s.<sup>133</sup> Smith has shown that men who had sex with other men in

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*Husbandry* (London: Virago Press, 2001) : Joseph Bristow, 'The Blackmailer and the Sodomite: Oscar Wilde on Trial', *Feminist Theory*, 17:1 (2016), 41–62.

<sup>128</sup> Rictor Norton, has traced links between cross-dressing and male prostitution as far back as the fifteenth century. See Norton, *Mother Clap's Molly House: The Gay Subculture in England 1700-1830* (GMP Publishers Ltd: London, 1992), 19 & 261.

<sup>129</sup> This is of course with the exception of theatre histories such as; Carriger, 'The Unnatural History': Houlbrook, 'Lady Austin's Camp Boys': Houlbrook, *Queer London* : Senelick, 'Boys and Girls together', 80-95 : Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, Jacob Bloomfield, *Male Cross-Dressing Performance in Britain, 1918-1970* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2017).

<sup>130</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*. However, as Houlbrook demonstrates, a man's ability to live a fruitful 'queer life' was dependent on a variety of factors such as class, gender, age, and ethnicity, alongside their ability to navigate the complex spaces of the city.

<sup>131</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London* : Norton *Mother Clap's Molly House* : Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality*

<sup>132</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London* : Sinfield, *The Wilde Century* : Upchurch, 'Forgetting the Unthinkable'.

<sup>133</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 2-7.

industrial areas of Yorkshire did not necessarily live their lives in a way that was markedly different to men who had sex with women: in fact many of these men also had sex with women.<sup>134</sup> This was also the case for most of the men in this chapter whose cross-dressing did not appear to be part of their everyday lives.

As will be shown, arguments based around behaviour and intent were central to the discussions of men who cross-dressed in both the court and the press. The most common ‘excuse’ presented was that the cross-dressing was a joke, temporary, a moment of frivolity and separate from the personality of the arrested party. The idea that cross-dressing could be a joke was undoubtedly related to the popularity of cross-dressing, and most importantly, comedic cross-dressing on film, on the stage, and in carnival. This could benefit the accused but could also be used by local judges to deflect ideas that there may be a ‘problem’ in their local area. Intent was key in defining cross-dressing as a ‘joke’, if clear ‘deviant’ intent could be shown or if the cross-dressed person committed a crime, then their ability to pass cross-dressing off as a harmless joke was removed.

Despite the press fixation with the dress of those arrested whilst cross-dressed, the act of cross-dressing was never illegal in Britain. That these men’s clothes aroused suspicion from police officers or members of the public demonstrates that cross-dressing could, in some instances, be conflated with criminality and deviance. The crimes of the men discussed in this chapter ranged from theft to same-sex sex, and/or prostitution. In all the cases in this study men were only arrested whilst cross-dressed when they were perceived to be potentially threatening to the community. For cross-dressed men to be arrested in Yorkshire, they had to act in a way that police officers could not ignore. Therefore, it is likely that men who cross-dressed without committing crimes or drawing attention to themselves may have been able to pass unobstructed and thus remain absent from the historical record. In a number of cases, the crime committed

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<sup>134</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*.

appeared to have played a more significant role in drawing them to the attention of the police than their dress.

Methodologies based on court records have proven incredibly successful for London based studies. However, for a study of Yorkshire, the methodology must be altered. This is in part due to the nature of the surviving sources. For example, *The Old Bailey Online* archive contains sources relating to close to 200,000 criminal trials held at London's central criminal court between 1674 and 1913. Unfortunately, no such archive exists for any Yorkshire cities. While there are records held at The National Archives relating to various local assize courts, most of the men in this chapter appeared at smaller police courts whose records have not been as well preserved. As a result, in many cases newspapers have proven to be the most fruitful source for this investigation. Although the journalists' 'artistic' licence may mean that facts are distorted and trials are rarely reproduced verbatim, this by no means reduces their worth. As Katie Barclay has shown, the court reports published in newspapers provide insight into wider cultural beliefs and it is the court reporters' 'decisions about what to include and what to ignore that produce meaning.'<sup>135</sup>

Employing a methodology based around press reporting of the criminal justice system also highlights regional differences in policing methods, and thus regional experiences of gender transgressions. Because cross-dressing itself was not a crime, the reason listed for the arrest of these men in court and police records, with the exception of those who had committed theft, fraud, or other more easily discernible crimes, was often 'frequenting' or 'loitering', sometimes with the addendum 'with intent to commit a felony'. These terms were often used in relation to arrests for sexual deviance, for general suspicious behaviour, or for being in a place without purpose under the 1824 Vagrancy Act.<sup>136</sup> Consequently, finding that Thomas Baker was arrested

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<sup>135</sup>Katie Barclay, *Men on Trial: Performing Emotion, Embodiment, and Identity in Ireland, 1800-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 13.

<sup>136</sup> The 1824 Vagrancy act aimed to police public spaces by giving the police power to arrest and convict 'probable criminals' on the basis of suspected intent to commit a felony, often with just one witness testimony. As Shapira

for 'loitering with intent' in Bradford in 1906 cannot be taken as evidence that he was cross-dressed and/or soliciting sex any more than it can be suggested that he was waiting outside a shop with a crowbar in his hand.<sup>137</sup> The relatively small number of cases uncovered in this context does not mean that proportionally fewer northern men cross-dressed than Londoners. It instead demonstrates that fewer men who cross-dressed found themselves on trial in Yorkshire, perhaps due to an absence of a queer culture which was actively policed and based around the commercialisation of sex.<sup>138</sup>

The first section of this chapter looks at individual case studies to draw out what linked cross-dressing to deviance and criminality. It then moves on to analyse the Manchester Fancy-Dress Ball case, to trace what happens to men after they had been brought before the court for crimes relating to cross-dressing. The experiences of men brought before the court for crimes committed whilst cross-dressed often disappear from the historical record once they leave the legal system. In following what happened to these men after their arrest, this section furthers knowledge of attitudes towards cross-dressing in the wider community.

## 1.1 Yorkshire case studies

### *1.1.1 Living as a Woman*

In 1909 Clement Mitchell appeared at Bradford Police court charged with 'fraud, theft and being a deserter from the Seaforth Highlanders'. Mitchell was alleged to have caused quite a stir by

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notes, the criminals this act aimed to apprehend, 'included common prostitutes who wandered the streets, people who refused or neglected to work, people with no visible means of subsistence and who failed to give a good account of themselves, beggars or street fortune tellers, and people who indecently exposed themselves in view of the public.' (Shapira p.55). For detailed discussions of the act and its implications see Paul Lawrence, 'The Vagrancy Act (1824) and the Persistence of Pre-emptive Policing in England since 1750', *The British Journal of Criminology*, 57 (2017), 513–531, and Michal Shapira, 'Indecently Exposed: The Male Body and Vagrancy in Metropolitan London before the Fin de Siècle', *Gender & History* 30 (2018) 52-69.

<sup>137</sup> I found just one case in police and court records which I could directly link to cross-dressing. The case was that of Harry Goodwin who was noted in in the HMP Wakefield records as having been arrested for 'loitering' in 1901 and was sentenced to three months in prison. I was only able to discern that he was cross-dressed when arrested because his case also appeared in a local newspaper. WYP1/8/1/1 Nominal Register for HMP Wakefield, 1801-1914, 1901, Reference C118.

<sup>138</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 2-7.

appearing in the dock in ‘female attire.’<sup>139</sup> After deserting the army, Mitchell had been living as a woman under the name of Mrs. May Wilson. Mitchell’s story is the only case I have come across in the Yorkshire press where it is stated that the arrested party lived as a woman and did not simply cross-dress temporarily. Mitchell claimed to be a married woman who was separated from her husband and ‘worked in the mill as a woman and had even gone courting as a woman.’<sup>140</sup> According to the prosecution, ‘his sole ambition and aim seemed to be to impersonate women.’<sup>141</sup>

In this case Mitchell’s dress and gender presentation was evidently a way of life. However, in the eyes of the court and the press, Mitchell was not harmlessly living as a woman, they suggested Mitchell cross-dressed in order to ‘deceive’ others. While it is tempting to ask if this was merely a disguise to avoid desertion charges as the *Leominster News* suggested, or if this can be read as evidence of a historical trans identity, with no surviving evidence of Mitchell’s testimony and no ego-documents available, we cannot know why Mitchell chose to live as Mrs May Wilson, that knowledge died with Mitchell. Laura Doan has argued that queer history should acknowledge ‘the unknowability and indeterminacy of the sexual past’ and resist the urge to read the past in relation to contemporary identities, or to apply those contemporary identities to historical actors.<sup>142</sup> Acknowledging the unknowability of the past allows us to make space in the narrative for a range of gender expressions and identities, yet completely avoiding contemporary identity labels risks failing to acknowledge the existence of what would today be understood as trans identity. Chris Mowatt has argued that by ‘dancing around’ the use of modern identity labels in Queer history, we expand the gap between ‘normative’ and ‘non-

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<sup>139</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 2 October 1909, p.2. Men arrested in women’s clothes were rarely given the opportunity to change into male attire before they were brought before the magistrate, and Mitchell is just one of a number of men who had no choice but to appear in the dock still dressed in female attire.

<sup>140</sup> *Leominster News and North West Herefordshire & Radnorshire Advertiser*, 15 October 1909, p.6.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practises: History, Sexuality, and Women’s Experience of Modern War* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013), 61.

normative'.<sup>143</sup> To use Mowatt's example's, we assume that Julius Ceasar was heterosexual due to his many marriages, and extra marital relationships with women, but we are told to 'restrict our language surrounding the (potential) same-sex desire evoked in Sappho's poetry, unable to call her a Lesbian in any sense except her citizenship of the island of Lesbos.'<sup>144</sup> Mowatt argues that this approach presents heterosexuality as the norm and 'others' identities which do not conform to heteronormative, hegemonic constructions of sexuality and gender. However, for the purposes of this study we can acknowledge that Mitchell lived part of his life as a woman, for Mitchell cross-dressing was not a temporary act but a part of how he lived and existed within their community. While we will likely never know what the act of wearing female-coded clothing meant to Mitchell, what pronouns Mitchell would have us use or how Mitchell understood their own gender expression, we can try to understand what that meant to the local community, to the police officers who arrested him, to the judge who presided over his trial and to the newspapers who publicised his case.<sup>145</sup>

As will be shown in the following chapters, when men cross-dressed for entertainment purposes, it was generally deemed acceptable. However, when Mitchell was arrested, he was not cross-dressed at a carnival or in the theatre. Mitchell was living, working and 'courting' as a woman. *The Leominster News* reported that '[the] prisoner seemed to have such a fascination for impersonating women that he devoted almost all of his time to it. He had prepared his own dresses and had won prizes by so doing.'<sup>146</sup> Mentioning that Mitchell cross-dressed in spaces in which he won prizes complicates readings of his case. It shows that his cross-dressing was accepted in the context of competition, but also suggests that members of his community were aware of his cross-dressing at local events and therefore aware of his biological sex. The

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<sup>143</sup> Chris Mowatt, 'Why I use Modern LGBTQ+ Terminology For The Pre-Modern Past', *History Matters*, (2019) <<http://www.historymatters.group.shef.ac.uk/modern-lgbtq-terminology-pre-modern/>> [accessed 08.06.2020]

<sup>144</sup> Mowatt, 'LGBTQ+ Terminology'.

<sup>145</sup> Here I am using he/him pronouns to reflect the way Mitchell was presented in the press at the time.

<sup>146</sup> *Leominster News*, p.6.

detective who arrested Mitchell stated that there ‘had been no complaints about the accused in his woman’s disguise’, suggesting that although the community were not fooled by his ‘disguise’ he was still generally accepted by the community in which he lived, at least to the extent that he did not draw the attention of the authorities until a crime was committed. This community acceptance or tolerance is further evidenced by the fact that Mitchell was able to win a prize at a local carnival and was able to hold down a job at the mill.<sup>147</sup>

Despite evidence that Mitchell was granted a certain level of acceptance by his community, following his arrest the press worked to discredit his ‘disguise’ and presented him as a fool. Although his community accepted him, the press still tried to discredit him and render him less of a ‘problem’. In stating that ‘his manner habits and disposition were that of a man,’ the *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail* drew attention to Mitchell’s masculine body, highlighting the incongruity, and potential comedy, between his sex and the gender he was performing.<sup>148</sup> His unconvincing disguise also served to make him less ‘dangerous’ in the eyes of the press. At the time of Mitchell’s arrest, Music Hall performers who did ‘pass’ were regularly praised in reviews for their ‘convincing impersonations’.<sup>149</sup> However, Davis has argued that the more convincing female impersonators were more likely to be seen as ‘dangerous’ due to the possibility that they may incite homosexual desire.<sup>150</sup> Davis’ argument also relates to those who cross-dressed on the street. The glimpses of Mitchell’s biological or ‘true’ sex which could allegedly be seen through his manner, habits, and disposition allowed the constables to see through his disguise. If he did not present a ‘convincing’ image of a woman, as the detectives claimed, then he would be unlikely to ‘trick’ innocent members of the public. The word ‘disguise’ is used a number of times in press reports of Mitchell’s case. This terminology suggests that Mitchell was hiding from something or someone. The intended suggestion is that he was pretending to be a woman simply

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<sup>147</sup> *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 6 October 1909, p.5.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

<sup>150</sup> Davis, ‘Slap on Slap Ever’, 224-225.

to avoid arrest after deserting the army. Describing Mitchell's choice of dress as a 'disguise' also presents the act as inherently deviant, the disguise being part of an *intentional* deception. *The Shipley Times* noted that '[the] make-up was but a disguise – a clever one it is true – used by the man Mitchell in his career of thieving.'<sup>151</sup> The focus on cross-dressings links to Mitchell's theft as opposed to his 'courting' suggests that the journalists and editors who wrote for this paper either felt that this was the most significant aspect of the case, or were trying to detract from the fact that a man was living and courting as a woman in the middle of the local community, and nobody seemed to mind. The description of Mitchell as having made a 'career' out of theft reads as a deliberate detraction from the reality of the story. There is no evidence to suggest that Mitchell had previously been charged or even arrested for any other crimes.

Exactly what Mitchell stole in the lead up to his arrest varies across press reports, but the general consensus is that he stole a number of pieces of women's clothing. While Mitchell's 'true identity' seems to have been known by his community, and possibly also the local police officers, it was not until after the theft of these clothes that Mitchell was arrested. Smith found that in sodomy trials, Northern juries were unlikely to convict when the only evidence in a case was provided by the police force as they belonged to 'a culture that believed what people did in their own homes and communities was no business for official regulation,' and as a result 'working-class communities often resented police infringement into their private and sexual affairs.'<sup>152</sup> It is possible that the attitude of Northern juries in sodomy trials would have been similar in cases such as that of Mitchell because it related to his private life. This culture provides a possible reason as to why the community in which Mitchell was living as a woman would not complain about his behaviour to the police and why the jury were unwilling to convict for anything other

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<sup>151</sup> *Shipley Times and Express*, 8 October 1909, p.10.

<sup>152</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 12 & 33.



than theft. This highlights an experience of cross-dressing to which the 'live and let live' attitude of Yorkshire folk was central.

Although Mitchell's arrest was for theft, during his trial suggestions were made that hinted at him having intended to engage in sex with other men. Mitchell was alleged to have 'gone courting' as a woman. Though the meaning of this is not made explicit, my interpretation is that if he had been courting 'as a woman', meaning in the way one would expect a woman who conformed to hegemonic ideals of gender and sexuality to 'go courting', then he had been courting men. Ambiguous language may have been intentionally used by the press in order to uphold a respectable image or to avoid corrupting the minds of readers.<sup>153</sup> However, it is also possible that the press and the court did not make a definitive decision about what Mitchell's behaviour meant because they themselves did not fully understand the implications of such a case. When the trial came to a close there was not enough evidence to convict Mitchell of anything other than desertion and theft, despite hints made about his potential intent to engage in sex with other men. As desertion was a matter that would be later dealt with by the military court, and was beyond the remit of Bradford Police Court, he was only charged with theft. For Mitchell, the boundary between his cross-dressing being accepted or cast as deviant was crossed the moment he committed theft and not the moment he went to work, or went courting, as a woman. It is possible that alongside Mitchell's relationship with his community, other aspects of his character may have also allowed him to retain a respectable role within his community. As has been discussed, the close-knit communities of Yorkshire viewed good citizenship, neighbourliness, and hard work as signs of masculinity, respectability and therefore good character.

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<sup>153</sup> See Adrian Bingham *Family Newspapers*, 1-15 for a discussion of how popular newspapers presented themselves and made attempts to appear 'morally respectable'.

### 1.1.2 *The Hawker*

In 1912 Harry Goodwin was brought to Sheffield Police Court for ‘masquerading as a woman with intent to commit a felony.’<sup>154</sup> Despite evidence to suggest that the police did not actively pursue men who dressed as women under suspicions relating to homosexual offences in the north in this period, evidence from this case demonstrates that under some circumstances, cross-dressing in the street did arouse suspicion from police. When he was arrested in 1912, Harry Goodwin was already known to the police, according to the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* he had been convicted of ‘a similar offence’ in 1901.<sup>155</sup> The nominal register for HMP Wakefield reveals that Goodwin had been sentenced to three months for ‘loitering’.<sup>156</sup> This makes the exact nature of his crime difficult to trace without further official records.<sup>157</sup> As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the term ‘loitering’ frequently appeared in records of cases in which men were suspected of having had intent to engage in same-sex sex.<sup>158</sup> The felony Goodwin was alleged to have had intent to commit in 1912 however, was, according to the Sheffield press, ‘to bring men to a house of ill-fame [a brothel], and then, as was often the case, to rob them of any valuables they might have with them.’<sup>159</sup> The evidence of this charge was that; ‘[a]ccused was dressed up in a complete “rig-out” of female attire, and when he saw the constable he started to run.’<sup>160</sup> It is possible that when Goodwin had been arrested for ‘loitering’ eleven years earlier he was also dressed in female attire, which led to the police’s suspicion that he was once again ‘up to no good’, or perhaps other men had been arrested for similar offenses in that area. Conversely, that Goodwin ran from the officers may have aroused further suspicion. Goodwin’s defence was that he ‘had been drinking during the afternoon in the house, and put on the clothes as a joke: he was

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<sup>154</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 18 November 1912, p.5.

<sup>155</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 18 November 1912, p.5.

<sup>156</sup> Nominal Register for HMP Wakefield, 1801-1914, 1901, Reference C118.

<sup>157</sup> Unfortunately records of this case appear not to have been preserved and this arrest was not reported in the regional or national press.

<sup>158</sup> ‘Loitering’ was often followed by ‘with intent to...’ which could cover a range of crimes, from theft to sodomy. The term ‘hawker’, referred to anyone who sold goods in the street.

<sup>159</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 19 November 1912, p.11.

<sup>160</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 19 November 1912, p.11.

not out for more than two minutes.<sup>161</sup> This was an excuse made by those arrested in female attire frequently throughout the period studied. The idea of a ‘joke’ or a ‘prank’ emphasised the temporary nature of their cross-dressing and attempted to remove the idea that there was anything deviant or sinister in the act of wearing women’s clothing. This was likely to have been an attempt to conflate cross-dressing with that of comedy performers on stage and screen. In passing off the act of wearing women’s clothes as a temporary joke, men were emphasising that this was not a regular occurrence, it did not reflect their identity, character, sexual preferences or their everyday behaviours.

Goodwin was accused of having intended to ‘lure men to a house of ill fame’ though whether he had intended to, or was believed to have had intent to, have sex with men himself is not made clear in the press. That Goodwin was out in the street in women’s clothes, and then chose to run from officers, clearly suggested to the police that he was intending to commit a crime or that he expected to be arrested. As Bingham notes, the popular press ‘carefully crafted’ the stories within their pages to ‘remain within the bounds of acceptability as defined by their particular paper’.<sup>162</sup> By carefully considering the language used and avoiding directly stating exactly what Goodwin’s alleged intention was believed to be, the newspaper retained a level of respectability by avoiding the ‘grizzly details’. However, this ambiguous language could lead readers to believe that it was merely the act of cross-dressing that led to Goodwin’s arrest, creating a deeper association between cross-dressing and criminality. The magistrate found that being dressed as a woman and running from police was not strong enough evidence for a conviction and, despite Goodwin’s previous appearance in court, he was discharged.

Goodwin was a known criminal who spent a good deal of time on the streets. When he was sent to Wakefield Prison in 1901 his occupation was given as ‘hawker’.<sup>163</sup> Hawker was a term

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<sup>161</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 18 November 1912, p.5.

<sup>162</sup> Bingham, *Family Newspapers*, 2.

<sup>163</sup> Nominal Register for HMP Wakefield, 1801-1914, 1901, Reference C118.

frequently applied to travelling street sellers, usually men of the lowest class who peddled whatever wares they could get their hands on. He was part of a criminal class which had increasingly occupied the pages of newspapers, periodicals, and popular fiction since the mid nineteenth century and formed ‘a pleasure culture of crime’ which grew in popularity during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>164</sup> The reporting of Goodwin’s case in the regional press clearly played a part in this entertainment culture. Goodwin’s arrest for ‘loitering’ and his role as a ‘street hawker’, positions him as one of the many male vagrants who were an increasing cause for concern in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>165</sup> The male vagrant, or ‘tramp’ was a figure treated with suspicion and even fear in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Despite the 1906 vagrancy committee finding that ‘public fears of tramps were much exaggerated,’ the displaced man continued to be represented in the press as a dangerous criminal.<sup>166</sup>

As we have seen so far, the press and the courts spent a great deal of time attempting to uncover or explain men’s reasons for cross-dressing. A legitimate ‘purpose’ was key to retaining acceptability, those without clear purpose were to be treated with suspicion. Societal fears surrounding vagrancy, and men ‘loitering’ without purpose, escalated in the interwar period as they were further amplified during the economic depression.<sup>167</sup> Over a quarter of a million soldiers returned from the First World War with ‘debilitating and permanently life-changing injuries.’<sup>168</sup> These men formed part of the group of displaced men which aroused concern in the interwar years. ‘State support, in terms of employment, retraining and even basic welfare, for such men was ad hoc and fragmentary,’ this resulted in a significant increase in the visibility of disabled, unemployed, and homeless men in public spaces in interwar Britain.<sup>169</sup> Joseph McBrinn states

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<sup>164</sup> Matt Houlbrook, *The Prince of Tricksters* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 116.

<sup>165</sup> Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 18-47 (51).

<sup>166</sup> Lionel Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds!: Vagrant Underworld in Britain 1815-1985* (London: Routledge, 1988), 103-105.

<sup>167</sup> Rose traces the beginning of the growth in such fears from the 1815 economic depression. Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds!*

<sup>168</sup> Joseph McBrinn, ‘The Work of Masculine Fingers’: the Disabled Soldiers’ Embroidery Industry, 1918–1955’, *Journal of Design History*, 10 (2016), 1-23 (4).

<sup>169</sup> McBrinn, ‘The Work of Masculine Fingers’, 4.

that widespread fears surrounding ex-servicemen and unemployment emerged as early as 1916.<sup>170</sup> The press reports of Goodwin's case reflect these anxieties even before the war by emphasising that a lack of clear, legitimate purpose, particularly in public places, could lead to men being linked with further deviant or criminal behaviours. As well as highlighting attitudes towards men who cross-dressed, reports of Goodwin's case, and other similar cases, highlight wider concerns surrounding displaced men, and the criminality into which they could easily fall were they to remain 'without purpose'. The concern reflected in the press reports of Goodwin's case were less to do with how he dressed and more about the criminal underworld of displaced men which he represented. Once again, it was not his attire that cast him as deviant but his relationship with crime.

### *1.1.3 Playing the Fool*

Another case of cross-dressing and 'loitering' was brought before Bradford City Police court in 1923. Percy Slater, resident of Bradford, was charged with 'loitering' in Oak Lane, with intent to commit a felony, he was 'dressed completely in the women's clothes which he was wearing when arrested.'<sup>171</sup> No other information is given in the article and it seems the piece was printed for the sheer human-interest value of the story. Four days later, the *Yorkshire Evening Post* divulged more information about the case. Beginning with a detailed description of Slater's attire, 'He was dressed in a red hat, blue skirt, brown coat, scarf, umbrella, and handbag, and had some woolly stuff hanging down for hair.'<sup>172</sup> This description draws attention to the 'disguise' as the main feature of the story while emphasising the effort Slater had gone to in putting together his female attire. However, in noting the 'woolly stuff' he had used for hair the reporter pokes holes in his disguise. Showing that he did not make a convincing woman depicted Slater as humorous and harmless, or at least less dangerous. Slater was arrested after a witness had complained about him

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<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>171</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 21 September 1923, p.9.

<sup>172</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, , 24 September 1923, p.7.

‘as his movements seemed strange.’<sup>173</sup> Perhaps due to the nature in which Slater was brought to the attention of the police, the Magistrate found it necessary to state; ‘In the interests of the public, some guarantee should be given that this man will not do this again. I think he has realised that he has made an ass of himself.’<sup>174</sup> The *Leeds Mercury* followed in this pattern with a very brief article which consisted of just two sentences;

A man who had dressed himself as a woman and paraded the streets of Heaton, was discharged at Bradford yesterday on the understanding that he did not again “make a fool of himself.” He was Percy Harold Slater (44) a wool-classer.<sup>175</sup>

That the magistrate named the act as ‘making an ass of himself’ (or ‘making a fool of himself’ depending on which paper one reads), works to remove any aspects of danger from what Slater was doing. It was presented merely as a silly thing to do, but nonetheless something which the public required reassurance would not happen again. The judge’s casual reaction was perhaps as much a source of entertainment as the story itself. These reports are careful to avoid depicting any particularly deviant details, perhaps relying on some readers having prior knowledge of cross-dressing’s potential connections with same-sex sex, while the innocent readers would view the case as nothing more than a man making ‘an ass of himself.’

Slater’s story is fairly similar to Goodwin’s, yet instead of being treated as a dangerous deviant, Slater is simply presented as a bit of a fool. Slater was not a known criminal, and had no previous convictions. This is likely to have played a significant role in how Slater was treated in the court. When considered collectively these case studies show that when a man was brought before the court for a crime relating to cross-dressing, he was treated with much more lenience if it was a first offence. If the act can be presented as a singular moment of ‘silliness’ rather than a

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<sup>173</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 24 September 1923, p.7.

<sup>174</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 24 September 1923, p.7.

<sup>175</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 25 September 1923, p.4.

way of life or a pattern of gender-non-conforming behaviour, then it seems much less threatening to the social order.

#### *1.1.4 Seducing Soldiers*

During the war, there was a significant decrease in the number of stories of men arrested whilst cross-dressed in the Yorkshire papers. However, in 1917, in Shipley, a small town on the outskirts of Bradford, Fenton Butterfield appeared at Bradford Police Court, having been accused of ‘masquerading as a woman’ and attempting to seduce members of the Royal Flying Corps. It was alleged that Butterfield was ‘loitering about’ near the YMCA Soldiers Institute in Shipley, and at around 11pm he spoke to a soldier named Hoyle. Butterfield invited Hoyle back to his home under the promise that his sister would make him some tea. The soldier went home with Butterfield where he encountered someone ‘partly dressed’ who ‘proved to be a man’, there were no women in the house.<sup>176</sup> Hoyle reported that he was given some wine and invited upstairs, he refused and left. Butterfield allegedly followed him outside and ‘carried on as if he were a woman.’<sup>177</sup> Butterfield later had an altercation with another soldier who pulled off his wig, revealing his ‘true sex’. The soldiers captured him, and he was taken to the police station. While in several other cases, men were described as attractive women, and emphasis was placed on the novelty and humour of a man’s ability to present himself as a convincing woman, every effort was made to discredit Butterfield and cast him as deviant. For example the *Shipley Times and Express* reported; ‘The prisoner...presented a ludicrous appearance and still wore the costume in which he was apprehended’.<sup>178</sup> The word ‘costume’ here functions to emphasise the ‘unconvincing’ image Butterfield presented.

Whereas after the war Percy Slater’s similar case of ‘loitering’ in an unconvincing female disguise was presented as foolish, Butterfield’s case was presented as dangerous and deviant.

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<sup>176</sup> *Shipley Times and Express*, 5 January 1917, p.7.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

Evidently, the circumstances of wartime affected how Butterfield's case was represented in both the court and the press. The men Butterfield was attempting to engage in sex with were not ordinary civilians, but soldiers whose role was to represent and protect the nation. The subtitle of the article reads 'Trying to contaminate young soldiers', implying that his aim was to cause intentional harm. 'Contaminate' could here be used in the literal sense meaning that Butterfield posed a risk of Venereal Disease, or it could relate to moral contamination through deviant sexuality. Emma Vickers highlights the view in this period that sexual 'inverts' were considered physically weak, and childlike, the very antithesis to the ideal masculine soldier.<sup>179</sup> Veterans spoke to Vickers of 'the incompatibility of same-sex desire and military masculinity, and the perceived threat of the predatory, penetrative sexuality of active queer men to the supposedly vulnerable heterosexual soldier.'<sup>180</sup> Because of the perceived threat to the physical and mental health of the British army, homosexuality and effeminacy were also seen as a threat to the safety and preservation of the nation, as evidenced by the reaction to Butterfield's attempted seductions.

The threat of deviant sexuality to the militarised male body was not only related to same-sex sex and desire, 'immoral women' were also seen to pose a threat. Concern surrounding sexual corruption of soldiers was pervasive across social purity groups during the war years, with the National Vigilance Association in Edinburgh going so far as to put a worker on patrol outside local barracks 'in order to prevent soldiers from being 'molested by women'.<sup>181</sup> In 1918 Regulation 40D was added to the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) by the War Office. This amendment 'allowed the state to remand and imprison a woman for the transmission of venereal disease to a member of His Majesty's armed force.'<sup>182</sup> While Sonya Rose, Angela Wollacott, Siobhán Hearne, and Laura Lammasniemi have discussed fears surrounding female sexuality and

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<sup>179</sup> Emma Vickers, *Queen and Country: Same-Sex Desire in the British Armed Forces 1939-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013)30-41.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>181</sup> Vivienne Cree, 'Khaki Fever' during the First World War: A Historical Case Study of Social Work's Approach towards Young Women, Sex and Moral Danger', *British Journal of Social Work*, 46 (2016), 1839–1854 (1843).

<sup>182</sup> Laura Lammasniemi, 'Regulation 40D: Punishing Promiscuity on the Home Front During the First World War', *Women's History Review*, 26 (2017), 584–596 (584).



the corruption of soldiers in the First World War, relatively little attention has been paid to the threat of male ‘deviant’ sexuality to the British armed forces in the same way.<sup>183</sup> Vickers found that male same-sex sex could be legitimised amongst those serving as a way of dealing with ones’ sexual frustrations without the ‘expense of local prostitutes and the threat of venereal disease.’<sup>184</sup> However the turning of a blind eye noted by Vickers always took place when the same-sex relations took place between members of the armed forces, and mostly while soldiers were away at the front. Butterfield was an outsider. By contrast Butterfield’s attempts to ‘seduce’ soldiers took place in public, on the street. Butterfield not only posed a threat to the individual soldier, but to the status and reputation and health of the British armed forces.

It is notable that the soldiers in Butterfield’s story are presented as being completely innocent, even Hoyle who went back to Butterfield’s house. Hoyle claimed that he was only out looking for some tea, and only went with Butterfield under the promise of tea and under the illusion that Butterfield was a woman. There is incongruity in this story, as the other soldiers claim to have quickly realised that Butterfield was a man, but the press and the court seem hesitant to burden the soldiers with the slightest hint of impropriety. Butterfield is painted as the criminal, or even the villain, and the soldiers his ‘almost’ victims. He was cast as ‘other’ as a strange and potentially dangerous individual and was treated as a much more threatening than any of the other men discussed in this chapter.

### *1.1.5 Lovers’ Tiff*

In 1927 Frank Walker, resident of Sheffield, was sentenced to three months imprisonment at Barnsley after stealing a watch from a man who he ‘tricked’ into believing he was a woman.<sup>185</sup> A number of witnesses claimed to have been aware that Walker was a man and saw him attempting

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<sup>183</sup> Sonya Rose, *Which People’s War?*, 71-106 : Angela Woollacott, “‘Khaki Fever’ and its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29 (1994), 325–347 : Siobhán Hearne, “Sex on the Front: Prostitution and Venereal Disease in Russia’s First World War” *Revolutionary Russia*, 30 (2017), 102–122 : Lammasniemi, ‘Regulation 40D’, 584–596.

<sup>184</sup> Vickers, *Queen and Country*, 59.

<sup>185</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 17 June 1927, p.16.

to seduce another man, yet the only person who reported him to the police was the man from whom he had stolen a watch (who happened to also be his lover). That so many people saw this take place and made no complaint furthers Smith's claim about the 'live and let live' attitude amongst the Yorkshire working classes and their general distrust of police.<sup>186</sup> The *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* noted that, on Whit Monday Walker took part in a local charity carnival, where he was collecting money for the Blind whilst dressed as a woman (Whit Monday usually falls in early June or late May and therefore was only a few weeks before the trial).<sup>187</sup> Despite his community being aware of his cross-dressing Walker was not reported to the police until he had committed a crime for which the victim demanded retribution. This story demonstrates that men were unlikely to be reported to the police merely for cross-dressing, or even for flirting openly with another man in a public place.

The complainant, John Hinchcliffe, 'who apparently had had more drink that was good for him, in as much as he should have discovered before very long that prisoner was not a woman', met Walker at an inn.<sup>188</sup> Walker and Hinchcliffe left the inn together at closing time, and boarded a bus where Hinchcliffe allegedly made 'such violent love to his companion that the conductor had to put them off at Barugh Green.'<sup>189</sup> Hinchcliffe boarded another bus after 'realising' that Walker was a man, whilst on the bus he noticed that his watch and money were missing. A witness claimed to have seen the pair in the public house and warned Hinchcliffe that Walker was a man, to which Hinchcliffe is alleged to have replied, "Tha' never knows."<sup>190</sup> The conductor stated that other passengers had complained about their conduct and claimed to have seen through the defendant's 'disguise'. This case therefore suggests that the culture of 'turning a blind eye' only when same-sex couples began to behave in an overtly sexual way in public. In this

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<sup>186</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 12 & 33. This distrust of the police was not specific to Yorkshire, but as Houlbrook found, was also common amongst the working-classes in London. Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 156.

<sup>187</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, June 1927, p.11.

<sup>188</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 17 June 1927, p.16.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

case they were reported to the closest authority figure, the bus conductor. However, it was only when a theft occurred that the issue was escalated to the police. When compared to the work of Houlbrook this suggests that Yorkshire folk had different ways of defining acceptable behaviour to their contemporaries in the capital.<sup>191</sup>

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Despite differences in experience and press representation, these stories all contain significant similarities, particularly in terms of *why* these men found themselves before the court. Although some of the men, such as Goodwin, had a criminal past, others had no previous convictions. Importantly, all of the men discussed in this section were arrested when they engaged in overt criminal activity in public. This criminal activity either caused members of the public to report them to the police or directly engaged the attention of the police, often when they were seen to be acting ‘suspiciously’ in the street. Houlbrook said of his subject Cyril, who was charged with ‘aiding and abetting in the keeping of a disorderly house’ when the club he frequented was raided by police in the 1930s, ‘That his story is preserved is thus evidence of a momentary failure to negotiate the tensions inherent to queer urban life—a failure to evade the law and public hostility.’<sup>192</sup> This is the case for all of the men discussed in this chapter. It was not the act of cross-dressing which led to the arrest of these men but a transgression of other codes of acceptable behaviour, whether that be the theft of a wig, attempting to engage in same-sex sex with soldiers, or acting suspiciously in public spaces.

### 1.2 The Manchester Fancy-Dress Ball Case

When the doors to the Manchester Police Court were opened on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 1880, a crowd of over 100 people rushed to gain admittance to the court room. Those who managed to secure a seat spent the next six hours watching the trial of forty seven men accused of soliciting,

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<sup>191</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*.

<sup>192</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 4-5.

and inciting each other to solicit, sex with other men.<sup>193</sup> The men were charged with ‘conspiring together to assemble at a particular place, and there to solicit and incite each other to commit improper actions.’<sup>194</sup> The previous Saturday evening these forty seven men had gathered at the Temperance Hall in Hulme, Manchester, for a fancy-dress ball. Of the forty seven men in attendance twenty two were dressed as women.<sup>195</sup> Although the ball was attended by men between the ages of sixteen and forty eight, the majority of the attendees were in their 20’s, their occupations ranging from school master to hawker.<sup>196</sup> The fancy-dress ball brought together working-class and lower-middle-class men from across the city, though a significant number came from areas surrounding Manchester and ten were residents of Sheffield.<sup>197</sup> Of those whose marital status was reported in the press, thirty stated that they were single and just five claimed to be married.<sup>198</sup> The arrest and trial were given significant column inches in the Yorkshire press and, unsurprisingly, the Sheffield newspapers paid particular attention to the story.<sup>199</sup> Each man’s name and address was listed in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, *The Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, the *Sheffield Independent*, and the *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*. Most of the men’s age, marital status, and occupation were also listed.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 1880, p.3.

<sup>194</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 1880, p.3.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.* The list of occupations given was as follows; School Master, Two Drapers, Book Keeper, Book Binder, Painter, Drawing Master, Grocer, Singer, Factory Operative, Plumber, Dancer, five Waiters, two Hawker’s, three Clerks, Carter, Finisher, two Mechanics, Gilder, Piecer [sic], Porter, Silver Smith, Jeweller’s Assistant, Stone Mason, Bottle Maker, Baker, Fustian Cutter, Bill Poster, three Shopkeepers, Chemist, Salesman, Metal Worker, Butler, Confectioner, Publican, and Carriage Trimmer.

<sup>197</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 27 September 1880, p.3.

<sup>198</sup> *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 1 October 1880, p.4.

<sup>199</sup> Examples include the following articles; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 27 September 1880, p.3; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 1880, p.3; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 2 October 1880, p.3; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 2 October 1880, p.11; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 6 October 1880, p.4; *Sheffield Independent*, 27 September 1880, p.3; *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 1 October 1880, p.4; *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 4 October 1880, p.4; *Beverley and East Riding Recorder*, 9 October 1880, p.2; *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 27 September 1880, p.4; *Shipley Times and Express*, 9 October 1880, p.2; *Todmorden & District News*, 1 October 1880, p.6; *Yorkshire Gazette*, 2 October 1880, p.9; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 28 September 1880, p.4; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 1 October 1880, p.4; *Leeds Times*, 2 October 1880, p.8; *York Herald*, 1 October 1880, p.5.

<sup>200</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 1880, p.3; *Sheffield Independent*, 27 September 1880, p.3; *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 27 September 1880, p.4.

It is unclear if any of the ten Sheffield men were amongst those dressed in female attire. However, their attendance at the ball is evidence that they were part of a queer network within which men cross-dressed and therefore experienced male-to-female cross-dressing in some form. The Manchester Fancy-Dress Ball was not the first event of this type held by this group of men. The *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle* reported;

A similar ball was held a short time ago in a building near Waterloo-road, [sic] Manchester. The police watched the proceedings on that occasion, but no action was taken, though sufficient was seen to justify the suspicions which had been entertained. The company included several of the persons who have now been apprehended. It will be seen from the list of addresses given below that the prisoners do not all belong to Manchester. They are said to form a sort of private society, and to hold balls regularly in different parts of the county.<sup>201</sup>

The police informant claimed that he was given the password needed to enter the ball ‘about four or five years ago’ so this network, or ‘private society’, existed undisturbed for quite some time prior to 1880.<sup>202</sup> Evidence of this network complicates Smith’s argument that Yorkshire lacked a visible queer culture akin to that which was present in the capital. Although these networks do not seem to have been as focussed on the commercialisation of sex in the same sense as their counterparts in the capital, they did exist in ways that went beyond men engaging in sex with their work colleagues and close friends. It is also likely that the networks that existed in Yorkshire were by no means as visible as those in the capital due to different methods of policing. The police force in Yorkshire suffered from a ‘serious shortage of manpower’ throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and as a result, in the area covered by the North Eastern-Assize circuit, which included Yorkshire, significantly fewer men were arrested on charges of homosexual offences than in the capital or even in the Northern Assizes.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 27 September 1880, p.4.

<sup>202</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 1880, p.3.

<sup>203</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 16. The majority of homosexual cases were sent to the Assize courts. The North-Eastern Assize Court was held at Leeds, York, Durham, Newcastle and Northumberland, and saw the trial of men from these cities and the surrounding areas. The Northern Circuit was held at Manchester, Liverpool and Lancaster.

Although the event was described as a fancy-dress ball, the dress of the attendees was not what led to the men's arrest, though it was used as further evidence of their supposed 'deviant' intentions. A police informant gave evidence that the men 'danced an indecent dance' and closed the shutters so that their actions could not be seen from outside. The informant also described what was referred to in the press as 'the abominable performances which took place'.<sup>204</sup> Shattering the clumsy façade that this was merely a fancy-dress ball, the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* reported that the magistrate referred to the ball as 'one of the foulest and most disgraceful orgies that ever disgraced any town.'<sup>205</sup> This article ends by stating that a 'considerable portion of the evidence was of a nature not only unfit for publication, but too bad even to be indicated in general terms.'<sup>206</sup> Instead of simply providing a space for men to transgress gendered codes of dress, this ball appears to have been held in order to provide ordinary working men with a space to engage in sex with other men, whether cross-dressed or otherwise.

Along with the case studies from Yorkshire, the Manchester Fancy-Dress Ball demonstrates the point at which cross-dressing became a 'problem.' The Fancy-Dress Ball was understood as deviant, not because of cross-dressing alone, but because the ball revealed a secret society of men who arranged events at which they could have sex with other men. Because the intent of the Fancy-Dress Ball was to engage in same-sex sex and not just to cross-dress, it could not be passed off as a mere joke, or a moment of misjudged frivolity as it was in the case of Percy Slater.

### 1.2.1 *After the Ball: The Sheffield Ten*

The experiences of men brought before the court for crimes committed whilst cross-dressed often disappear from the historical record once they leave the legal system. However, knowing what happened in their lives following their arrest helps further our understanding of attitudes

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<sup>204</sup> Further discussion makes it clear that this phrase was used in reference to sexual acts.

<sup>205</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 1880, p.3.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

towards cross-dressing and same-sex sex in the wider community. In this section I have traced the ten men from Sheffield who were arrested in the Manchester Fancy-Dress Ball case, or ‘the Sheffield ten’, using the census, marriage and death records, prison records, and the regional press. The evidence these men have left behind is fragmentary and therefore requires an approach that embraces the uncertainty and indeterminacy of history. This is a methodology Julia Laite has referred to as ‘uncertain, multi-possible, quantum history.’<sup>207</sup> This section follows the approach of both Saidiya Hartman and Matt Houlbrook who have pushed the boundaries of what is knowable in order to bring forward the voices of their historical subjects.<sup>208</sup> Testing the limits of what is knowable is often necessary when writing histories of those who are not white, privileged, heterosexual, and male. According to Laite,

Without these uncertainties, the branching narratives, the maybe this and a that’s, we are left unable to articulate the histories of most women, of racialized and marginalized and humble people, and we are left with... the fiction of the archive.<sup>209</sup>

Exploring the lives of these men demonstrates how their involvement in a case such as this affected their lives and their position within their communities. The narratives in this section have been pieced together using family history methods to explore the affect an arrest for a crime relating to cross-dressing may have had on an individual’s life and position within their community. This approach also builds a broader understanding of the place of the trial in the lives of these men, revealing whether their attendance at the ball was part of a broader pattern of behaviour that connected them with cross-dressing and queer networks or if it had been merely a one off. Often, the fact that these men had been placed on trial at one point in their lives may have been what led us to find them in the archive but did not define the rest of their lives. The

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<sup>207</sup> Julia Laite, ‘Radical Uncertainty’, *History Workshop* (2020) <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/radical-uncertainty> [accessed 05.03.2021].

<sup>208</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2019) and Houlbrook, *The Prince of Tricksters*.

<sup>209</sup> Laite, ‘Radical Uncertainty’.

following analysis therefore reveals how cross-dressing fits into wider narratives of society, community, masculinity, and even queerness.

The Sheffield ten were all members of the working and lower middle classes, some were married, others single. Most returned to Sheffield after the trial. Some pursued a heteronormative family life, while others remained single, or spent the rest of their lives in the company of other men. For those who returned to their wives and children or went on to marry later in life, it may appear that their attendance at the fancy-dress ball was only a momentary exploration of same-sex desire which ended when they returned to Sheffield. However, as Smith found, the presence of a wife and family did not necessarily prevent men from having sex with other men as, ‘Traditional, industrial work imbued men with a sense of security in their own masculinity and allowed them a potential level of sexual freedom’.<sup>210</sup> Six of the Sheffield ten were employed in traditional industrial work. As future chapters will also show, cross-dressing did not prevent men from living otherwise heteronormative lives either.

This trial received significant coverage in Sheffield’s largest newspaper the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, alongside a number of other regional papers.<sup>211</sup> Andrew Hobbs has argued that regional newspapers were at the centre of nineteenth-century print culture.<sup>212</sup> As a result a large number of the neighbours, colleagues, friends, and family members of the men arrested in Manchester were likely to have read, or had read to them, the reports of the case in the Sheffield press. Therefore, that a number of the men were able to return to their families and the areas they had lived after the highly publicised trial, points to a level of acceptance amongst the working-class communities of Sheffield. The return to heteronormative family life, may have aided in the

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<sup>210</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 93.

<sup>211</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 27 September, 1880, p.3 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 October, 1880, p.3 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 2 October, 1880, p.3 & p.11 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 6 October, 1880, p.2 : *Sheffield Independent*, 27 September 1880, p.3 : *Beverley and East Riding Recorder*, 9 October 1880, p.2.

<sup>212</sup> Andrew Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town: The Provincial Press in England, 1885-1900* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2018), 6.



overlooking of their past ‘transgressions’ for some of the men, though it doesn’t appear to have been essential.

William Oats was one of the men who returned to, what appears to have been, a relatively heteronormative family life after his arrest. Describing himself as a 28-year-old porter when arrested, his marital status was not reported in the press.<sup>213</sup> However, the 1881 census reveals that he was married to a woman named Sarah, and lived with her and their three children at 7 Wentworth St, Ecclesall, Sheffield.<sup>214</sup> His marital status may have been misreported – after all the court reporter had the details of 47 men to note down – or Oats may have intentionally concealed his marital status in order to protect his family. Oats continued to work in the railway industry upon his return to Sheffield and remained out of the public record until the end of his life. Nathaniel Saxton, a 25 year old waiter at the time of his arrest, appears to have had a similar experience upon his return to the city. Between his arrest in 1880 and 1891, Saxton had returned to Sheffield, married his wife Ellen, and began working as a carter in the railway industry, perhaps coming into contact with William Oats at work.<sup>215</sup> Again Saxton remained out of the public record for the rest of his life. Thomas Whitworth also mirrored this pattern. Aged just 23 when arrested, Whitworth worked as a silversmith both before and after his arrest and was married with two sons both born prior to his arrest.<sup>216</sup> The ability of these men to return to family and work life following their arrests furthers Smith’s argument that same-sex sex did not necessarily remove a man’s ability to conform to heteronormative ideals of home and family life. Because these men conformed to normative expectations following the trial, they were able to return to their role in their households and in their communities.

However, a return to one’s family did not always guarantee acceptance and a life unentangled with the criminal justice system. Arthur Lomas, a 29-year-old drawing master lived

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<sup>213</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 27 September 1880, p.4.

<sup>214</sup> 1881 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG11, piece number 4621, fol 22, p.37.

<sup>215</sup> 1891 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG12, piece number 3817, fol 119, p.17.

<sup>216</sup> 1881 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG11, piece number 4651, fol 73, p.34.

with his wife Sarah in the Ecclesall area of Sheffield.<sup>217</sup> By 1891, Lomas' occupation had changed and he was working as a draper's porter, which would have resulted in a significant drop in wage and social standing.<sup>218</sup> Although Lomas had returned to his wife and step-son following his arrest in Manchester, he was arrested again in August and charged with committing 'an act of gross indecency with Frederick William Hall, at Sheffield, on the 19th May, 1892'.<sup>219</sup> At the time of his second arrest Arthur was working as a greengrocer and the 24 year old Frederick was a 'weights and measures inspectors assistant'.<sup>220</sup> Lomas' initial change in career from drawing master to drapers porter may have been a result of his involvement with the Manchester trial. Of the Sheffield ten, Lomas was the only one with a middle-class occupation. It is possible that these sorts of transgressions were somewhat more difficult for the middle-classes to overlook. Thankfully for Lomas, he and Frederick were found not guilty and subsequently discharged. Unlike Lomas' previous arrest, this case was only briefly mentioned in the *Leeds Times*, and was not printed on the pages of the Sheffield papers.<sup>221</sup> However, after this event Lomas is no longer listed on the census and his name does not appear again in the Yorkshire press or local prison records suggesting he may have moved away. One arrest may have been emblematic of an escape, a temporary slip in judgement, whereas two arrests were perhaps not quite as forgivable. A second arrest suggests a pattern of behaviour, rather than a 'one off', and being arrested pointed to a failure to navigate the boundaries of acceptability, which in this case seem to have been crossed by being indiscreet. After 1892 Lomas disappears from public record, by 1901 he had moved away from Sheffield and his wife Sarah, having remained in the area, was living alone yet was still noted as married.<sup>222</sup> In 1911, Sarah is recorded on the census as a widow.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915, 1874, and 1881 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG11, piece number 4646, fol. 120, p.19 & 1891 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG12, piece number, 3802, fol 21, p.5

<sup>218</sup> 1891 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield ref RG12, piece number 3802, fol 21, p.5.

<sup>219</sup> Nominal Register for HMP Wakefield, 1801-1914, Reference C118, p.194.

<sup>220</sup> It is likely from their occupations that the pair met in the workplace. *Leeds Times*, 1 August 1892, p.3

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>222</sup> 1901 1901 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG13, piece number 4359, fol 11, p.13.

<sup>223</sup> 1891 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG12, piece number 3804, fol 8, p.9.

Evidently, Sarah and Arthur separated following his second arrest, and Arthur left the area. He perhaps also switched to using a pseudonym which would explain why he cannot be found on the census on a different part of the country'. This suggests that one such arrest could be passed off as a momentary lack of judgement, but a second arrest could jeopardise a man's position in his family and community.

A number of the Sheffield ten did not begin, or return to, the stereotypical heteronormative lifestyle of the Yorkshire working class. Charles Speed, one of the older attendees of the ball in Manchester was another resident of Ecclesall. At the time of his arrest he was a 45-year-old silver finisher. Born in Sheffield in 1835, he was the youngest of three children born to John Speed and Mary Ann Speed.<sup>224</sup> Once he reached adulthood, Speed did not go on to marry and start a family. A year after his arrest Speed was still residing at 77 Monmouth Street, the address he gave when arrested in Manchester, and was still working as a silver finisher, the occupation he gave at the time of his arrest.<sup>225</sup> The home he returned to in 1881 was shared with 30-year-old Henry Kirkby, a grocer's assistant, from Derbyshire. Both were listed as unmarried.<sup>226</sup> On the day the census was taken, Speed and Kirkby were accompanied by a visitor, 33-year-old Louis Schultz, a married butcher from Germany. Ten years later when the 1891 census was taken, Speed was still at the same address, and in the same occupation, but was now living with 21-year-old Thomas Maddison, a groom from Grantham, Lincolnshire.<sup>227</sup> Kirby had moved to west Sheffield and was living alone.<sup>228</sup> Just a few months after the census was taken in 1891, Charles Speed died aged 56.<sup>229</sup> Having no wife or children to leave his estate to, his solicitors and the executors of his will arranged for the publication of a call to claims for his

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<sup>224</sup> 1841 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, class HO107, piece number 1337, fol 38 p.22.

<sup>225</sup> 1881 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG11, piece number 4632, fol 87, p.10.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> 1891 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG12, piece number 3804, fol 8, p.9.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> 1891 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref; piece number 3815, fol 118, p.5.

<sup>229</sup> England & Wales Deaths 1837-2007, Ecclesall Bierlow, Yorkshire, Volume 9 c, p.345.

estate in the local press.<sup>230</sup> This advertisement names the executors of his will as William Bets and George Bingham. Bingham was also amongst the forty-seven men arrested in Manchester. He had given his age as 36 and his occupation as a metal worker, he also lived in Ecclesall.<sup>231</sup> It is possible that he worked with Speed and the networks and friendships that led to the appearance of the Sheffield ten at the Manchester ball were formed through workplace connections. Like Speed, Bingham also remained single throughout his life, from 1891 he was living with his widowed sister and her three adult children.<sup>232</sup> George passed away in 1896 aged 52.<sup>233</sup>

Cook has argued that from the late nineteenth century, the bachelor label has increasingly ‘signalled a certain queerness.’<sup>234</sup> However, Richard Hoggart has argued that bachelors were an established feature of working-class communities and were mostly treated with respect.<sup>235</sup> These seemingly contrasting arguments are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As Hoggart himself argued, tolerance was central to working-class culture.<sup>236</sup> Even if bachelorhood was understood as a signifier of ‘a certain queerness’ or even same-sex desire more explicitly, the tolerant nature of working-class Sheffield, highlighted by both Hoggart and Smith, is likely to have meant that these men were accepted or at the very least their lifestyle appears to have been tolerated by their community. Perhaps the men who were accepted back into their family homes and work places were already accepted as men of good character, or their community simply chose not to pay attention to who they may or may not have had sex with. Both Bingham and Speed remained in the same industry for most of their lives suggesting they held one of the most important attributes of northern masculinity, they were ‘good workers.’<sup>237</sup> They also worked in the steel

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<sup>230</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 13 June 1891, p.1 & *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 20 June 1891, p.3.

<sup>231</sup> 1891 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG12, piece number 3799, fol 45, p.27.

<sup>232</sup> 1891 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG12, piece number 3799, fol 45, p.27.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> Sheffield Archives & Local Studies, *Yorkshire Burials*, PR-10-45, 10 Jan 1896.

<sup>235</sup> Cook argued that this association grew ‘stronger after the second world war [sic] when marriage rates increased and singleness became more exceptional.’ Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 64.

<sup>236</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 89.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 88.

industry which was a physically demanding and well-respected profession. Of course, they may have been subjected to whispers, or even shouted comments as they returned to the silver works, but if this was the case the comments did not push the men out of their community. It is important to note that merely remaining in an area without arrest did not mean the community agreed with and individuals' choices, rather it suggests that they were happy to 'live and let live.' Of course, bachelorhood alone cannot be taken to be symbolic of a homosexual identity or same-sex desire. However, when coupled with attendance at the ball in Hulme, and with continued friendships with other men who also attended the ball and themselves lived as bachelors it becomes easier to define these men's lives as queer.<sup>238</sup>

For example, Isaac Haslam, a single, 36-year-old shopkeeper of Sheffield Park was also amongst those who did not settle down with a wife and child. In fact, Haslam's life post 1880 opens up a space for analysing queer experiences in a way which has not yet been explored outside London. In 1881 Haslam was living with his widowed father and his unmarried sister at the same address he gave when arrested. As well as continuing to live with his family, Haslam also retained his job as a shopkeeper.<sup>239</sup> By 1901 Haslam had become the keeper of a lodging house at 29 Harmer Lane, a lower working-class area of the city. Haslam's lodging house was not too far from the train and bus stations, nor the steelworks, meaning his beds could have been a stopping point for the transient as well as providing a more regular spot for the poorer steel workers to rest their heads. On the day the census was taken in 1901, forty residents were staying in his lodging house, all were men. Three were widowers, four were married, and the rest single. Their occupations included, painter, horse keeper, casual labourer, steel worker, shoe black, fruit seller, wheel wright, coal labourer, and steel smelter.<sup>240</sup> Local newspapers reveal that Haslam's

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<sup>238</sup> I use queer here to mean men who did not experience their sexuality as exclusively heterosexual. However, I have avoided using specific identity markers such as homo or bisexual as there is no direct evidence of how these men identified in relation to their sexuality, or whether they saw their sexuality as a marker of identity at all.

<sup>239</sup> 1881 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG11, piece number 4654, fol 123, p.1.

<sup>240</sup> 1901 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG13, piece number 4369, fol 30, p.14.

lodging house was far from respectable. A number of the men who resided in Haslam's lodging houses between 1901 and 1912 found themselves brought before the courts for various petty crimes such as theft and trespass.<sup>241</sup> The occupations of Haslam's lodgers and their entanglements with the law position it at the lower end on the scale of lodging house respectability. Often referred to as 'doss houses', in these places beds were cheap and very few questions were asked. The conditions in lodging houses varied greatly, but the in very worst 'residents slept on the floor, in passageways and crammed so closely up against others that anyone attempting to enter the room was obliged to step on prostrate bodies.'<sup>242</sup>

Haslam continued to keep lodging houses and in 1911 he was running another lodging house on Harmer Lane, all but one of the residents were different yet all of his lodgers were still men predominantly employed in the unskilled trades.<sup>243</sup> The only tenant who had remained with Haslam since 1901 was Leonard Shaw, the fruit seller. Except for one married coal miner, all of the residents in 1911 were bachelors or widowers. Due to the likely cramped conditions, filled with transient male bodies, Haslam's all male lodging houses may have provided opportunity for the same-sex-intimacy which those who attended the fancy-dress ball seem to have been in search of. The conditions in the lodging house would not have been dissimilar from the conditions James Greenwood uncovered in the casual ward at Lambeth Workhouse in the 1860s. Greenwood's reports record men, cramped together in their sleeping quarters, most completely naked, sleeping in each other's arms and engaged in sexual acts.<sup>244</sup> Similar scenes of naked men sleeping in the arms of one another were also found in the 'licenced lodging house' to which Lambeth Workhouse sent it 'excess casuals'.<sup>245</sup> If we read Haslam's lodging house as a site for male intimacy, as Seth Koven does of the London doss houses in *Slumming*, then it is possible

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<sup>241</sup> See examples in; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 4 November 1902, p.3 : *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 2 February 1914, p.5 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 2 February 1904, p.3 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 6 September 1901, p.3.

<sup>242</sup> Joseph O'Neil, *The Secret World of the Victorian Lodging House* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword History, 2014), p.8.

<sup>243</sup> 1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG14, piece number 27895, fol 3, NPN.

<sup>244</sup> Koven, *Slumming*, 47.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

that Haslam's past may have been a draw for some men looking for male intimacy in the city.<sup>246</sup> Haslam's lodging house may also have provided him with an opportunity to live a queer life that was relatively fulfilled. He never married and that he lived with Shaw for at least a decade suggests the pair may have been involved in a relationship. Lodging houses usually only served as temporary shelter for the transient, and lodgers rarely stayed for long, so Shaw's long stay was particularly unusual. Haslam passed away aged 67 in 1912. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of April the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* ran an advertisement for the sale by auction of Haslam's possessions, including 'the contents of several Lodging-Houses.'<sup>247</sup> Despite links to various petty criminals through his lodging houses, Haslam himself remained on the right side of the law, or was at least never caught if he did commit any crimes. Had he not managed to remain out of the hands of the police his story may have been more closely aligned with that of Lomas, leaving the area and 'disappearing' from the public record.

The final three Sheffield men remain elusive. William Frudd, whose age was not given at the time of his arrest, also found himself on the wrong side of the law in the years following his arrest in Manchester. Like Saxon and Oats, Frudd also worked on the railway, he was a carriage trimer at the time of his arrest.<sup>248</sup> Although he does not appear to have been living in Sheffield according to the census, he made an appearance in the records for Wakefield prison on two occasions. First in 1889 when he was arrested for being drunk and disorderly in Sheffield and again when he was sentenced to seven days imprisonment for stealing in the same year.<sup>249</sup> He was listed as a resident of Sheffield and the theft took place in Sheffield, but besides from this fleeting glimpse, his name is absent from public record. That he only appeared in prison records suggests that Frudd may have used a different name in the census or that he was 'without fixed abode', Perhaps the type of man who may have taken shelter at Haslam's lodging house when he

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<sup>246</sup> Koven, *Slumming*, 47.

<sup>247</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1912, p.1.

<sup>248</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 1880, p.3.

<sup>249</sup> Nominal Register for HMP Wakefield, 1801-1914, reference C188, p.10 & p.194.

could afford to. Frudd is not listed in Yorkshire prison records prior to 1880, suggesting that the Fancy-Dress Ball case may have been the beginning of his life of crime and poverty.

The same is true of Edward Powell, a gilder, aged just 23 at the time of his arrest. Powell was also born and raised in Ecclesall, his Father, George was a table blade forger, and Edward grew up amongst the famous steel works of Sheffield. His parents regularly took in lodgers who also worked in the industry, meaning his understanding of masculinity would have been closely tied to that of family, work, and community described by Smith.<sup>250</sup> However, once again Powell is no longer traceable after 1881, perhaps he felt compelled to leave the area following his arrest, or perhaps he was unable to make the two surety payments on time.<sup>251</sup> It may have been that his parents were unwilling to welcome him back into the family home, or that he chose to pursue a new life elsewhere. Searches for further information about the tenth Sheffield man, 28-year-old Frederick Richardson were equally fruitless. He appears only in 1871 when he lived at Kenwood Park and served as footman to a 'Merchant Manufacturer' named George Wolstenholm [sic].<sup>252</sup> It is possible that the men who disappeared from census records left to join the army, travelled abroad, began living under a different name, or lived on the streets. However, that they are absent does not necessarily relate to their involvement in the Manchester Fancy-Dress Ball case, as we have seen, a number of the men continued to live and work within their communities after 1880.

Many of the men involved in the Manchester Fancy-Dress Ball were from the Ecclesall area. This suggests that the queer networks through which these men heard about the ball, were formed within local communities. These networks would have been formed in workplaces, in

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<sup>250</sup> 1861 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG9, piece number 3473, fol 24, p.6 : 1881 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG11, piece number 4637, fol 8, p.8. In 1861 the family were joined by George Grestbeck, a silversmith, and his wife Elizabeth. In 1881 Scissor manufacturer Albert Clark, was lodging with the family at 59 Woodhead road. See also Smith, *Masculinity*.

<sup>251</sup> Powell's name does not match up with any of those with a matching birth date and/or occupation. It is possible that after Powell's arrest he chose to live under a pseudonym.

<sup>252</sup> 1871 England, Wales & Scotland Census, Sheffield, ref RG10, piece number 4674, fol, 36, p.13.



public houses, or working men's clubs, though if these men had access to private spaces, they may have arranged to meet up in private after the initial relationship had been formed. Because the men who attended the ball were predominantly working-class, their initial encounters were likely to have taken place in public spaces which increases the likelihood that there was a wider knowledge within the community of men's involvement with gender-non-conforming behaviour. The connections between these men provide evidence of a queer network which allowed men to cross-dress, experience same-sex-desire and even engage in sex with other men. For some of these men, their participation in that network was only temporary, for others such as Haslam, Bingham and Speed, they retained friendships with men within their network throughout their lives. However, those who returned to their wives and children or later married women, were not automatically separated from queer networks. Their engagement with same-sex sex and cross-dressing, was often never again brought to the attention of police or the press. This is likely due to the 'live and let live' culture of working-class communities in the north more broadly. Even when Lomas was arrested for a second time on suspicion of engaging in sex with another man, he was allowed to walk free. This was not unusual, between 1895 and 1915 around 50% of men who were brought before the court for homosexual offences in this area were not charged.<sup>253</sup>

In addition, the Sheffield ten shared a representative in the case, Mr. Binns, who stated that his clients had;

received letters from two or three persons in Manchester inviting them to come over to a ball to be held in the city. Ten came over without the slightest intension of going into an exhibition of this nature. They saw Scotch reels and quadrilles, but they did not see the "can-can."<sup>254</sup>

This statement may have protected them, their plea of ignorance distancing them from deviance. Although this could well be true, it seems unlikely that the organisers of this event would invite people who were unaware of the nature of the ball, as this would risk the safety of those involved. That the men shared a legal representative is evidence that they were all connected

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<sup>253</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 30-33.

<sup>254</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 1880, p.3.

prior to the ball and is further evidence of a queer network existing within Sheffield. Many of these men had connections to Sheffield's steel industry and lived in the same areas, they would have worked and socialised together, meaning their connections with one another are unlikely to have been a secret. Many of the men's connection to a queer network which involved cross-dressing and all-male orgies, did not mean that they lived outwardly 'queer' lives. Most went on to conform to a heteronormative model of masculinity centred around work and family. While some men may have been scared away from participating in such events in future, it is just as likely that the networks with which they were involved became much more discreet following the incident in 1880 as they learnt the importance of negotiating boundaries of acceptability. In this instance, exploring cross-dressing in relation to same-sex sex and criminality has opened up avenues to explore new areas of queer life in the north of England, and added nuance to our understandings of masculinity in the north.

### 1.3 The Significance of Space

In all of the cases discussed in this chapter space has played a central role in defining the experience of men put on trial for crimes related to cross-dressing. Access to space ultimately influenced how men experienced cross-dressing, and access to space, or lack of access, was often dependent on class. The importance of navigating public space would have been drastically reduced if these men had access to domestic spaces, or other private spaces, in which they could cross-dress. The question of space, or a lack of, is what brings the spaces of the court and the street together in their significance to the experiences of working-class men who cross-dressed. If working-class men intended to cross-dress away from their own homes, which for many such men would have been the family home or a lodging house, they had to do so in public spaces. The men discussed in this chapter were most frequently arrested for theft or intent to steal. Clearly these were not wealthy men. The second most frequent crime to appear in these cases is 'loitering' or 'loitering with intent', again a crime closely tied to their class and perceived lack of purpose. The term 'loitering' positions the men as being without clear purpose and not

belonging in a particular space. Press discussions of men arrested for loitering or being in places without clear purpose fed into fears surrounding vagrancy and displaced men. If those arrested for loitering had access to spaces where they could cross-dress in private, then we may never have heard their stories. If these men cross-dressed but were of a socio-economic class which did not mean they found it necessary to steal, then they may also have never appeared in the historical record.

However, the Manchester Fancy-Dress Ball case has shown that working-class men could create their own spaces in which to cross-dress, but creating these spaces required a large amount of organisation and could risk drawing unwanted attention. That the police informant claimed he was given the password needed to enter the ball roughly five years prior to the ball, demonstrates that this group of men had remained viable, and managed to continue without being apprehended by the police for a number of years.<sup>255</sup> It is entirely possible that similar groups existed that managed to avoid police attention, but again here we are tangling with the unknowable. The very fact that groups protected their spaces from the authorities prevents historians from gaining access to these spaces.

The spaces occupied by the men in this chapter, and the streets in which they were arrested, although not blessed with the same heightened anonymity of London, were all decidedly urban. The rapid industrialisation of the North in the nineteenth century saw ‘increased geographical mobility of the population’ and therefore an increase in the ‘anonymity of existence in the urban slums’.<sup>256</sup> Clement Mitchell for example, lived and was arrested in Listerhills, an area on the edge of central Bradford which was dominated by dye works and mills and was predominantly inhabited by the working poor.<sup>257</sup> Harry Goodwin was arrested in central Sheffield, and the house to which he was alleged to have intended to ‘lure’ men to was number 5

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<sup>255</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 1880, p.3.

<sup>256</sup> Andrew Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions. Madness and Society in Britain, 1700–1900* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 237.

<sup>257</sup> *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, ‘In Feminine attire’, 6 October 1909, p.5.



Figure One

Bethel Walk. Figure one shows Bethel walk surrounded by a mixture of factories and terrace houses, in the heart of industrial Sheffield. Percy Slater was apprehended in Oak Lane in Bradford, close to the Lister Hills area where Mitchell was arrested 14 years earlier. Fenton Butterfield was arrested in central Shipley a town on the outskirts of Bradford, another industrial

town, though this time centred around gasworks.<sup>258</sup> These areas were all physically very similar to the map depicting Bethel Walk, a complex maze of back-to-back terrace houses, mills, yards, factories, and public houses.<sup>259</sup> The layout of these areas provides an explanation as to why the majority of cases in which cross-dressed men are arrested occur in these urban areas. Industrial towns such as Sheffield, Bradford, and Leeds, were densely packed together and it is easy to see how one could disappear in these streets. These streets may have given men the ability to pass unnoticed and to quickly move out of sight if they needed to. However, this urban space may also have made it more likely that men who cross-dressed would have been apprehended by the authorities. If these streets did provide the perfect network for theft, prostitution, and other crimes, then it is likely that there was a higher police presence in these areas than in more rural villages. Although the police were not necessarily on the look out for men dressed in women's clothing, they may well have been on the look out for sex workers, thieves, and other criminals in the poorer districts of Bradford and Sheffield in which these cases appear most frequently.

For those who lived in the wilderness of the Yorkshire Dales, their nearest neighbour could have been at least an hours' walk away. Instead of busy streets, residents were surrounded by empty country lanes, and sprawling fields, where, if anyone was around to notice them at all, they would not be able to slink into the shadows. Despite the expanses of fields between neighbours in areas such as Swaledale in North Yorkshire, the population was small enough that anonymity was not an option.<sup>260</sup> Only one of the cases discussed in this chapter includes a man from one of the more rural areas of Yorkshire, and he was not the one who cross-dressed. Although Leslie Dean was from Sheffield, Hinchcliffe, the man who he is alleged to have 'seduced' was a farmer from Skelmanthorpe, a rural village on the outskirts of the city. Hinchcliffe was visiting Sheffield when he met Walker, the man with whom he made 'violent

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<sup>258</sup> University of Portsmouth, 'History of Shipley, in Bradford and West Riding', *A Vision of Britain through Time* (2019) <<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/place/197>> [accessed on 16.06.2020].

<sup>259</sup> Extract from OS map, 1890. Ref: ARC02767, *Picture Sheffield*.

<sup>260</sup> Donajgrodzki, 'Twentieth-Century Rural England', 427.

love' on a bus. Hinchcliffe, arguably, only became embroiled in such a case because he had come into the urban space of the city. Farm workers from rural Yorkshire were also unlikely to appear in court due to public cross-dressing. Most farm workers lived on the farm for most of the year, and had limited spare money to spend on heading into town in the evenings.<sup>261</sup> This does not mean that rural dwellers or farm workers would have been completely unable to cross-dress if they wished to do so. Most workers left the Farm for the yearly hiring fayres around Michael Mass, and for the summer carnivals, especially those held on Whit Monday. These events, as following chapters will demonstrate, provided a space in which men could, and did, frequently cross-dress under the protection of entertainment and philanthropy.

#### 1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the boundary between acceptance and deviance, in the eyes of the law at least, was often crossed when the men who cross-dressed committed a criminal offence, whether that crime was the theft of a watch or openly soliciting sex from soldiers. If men did not commit a crime whilst cross-dressed they appear to have been able to continue unobstructed in a range of spaces. That men's cross-dressing was often known to their community long before they found themselves brought before the court demonstrates a level of acceptance, or at least tolerance, of male-to-female cross-dressing in public spaces amongst the working classes in Yorkshire.

Through an analysis of male-to-female cross-dressing on trial, this chapter has demonstrated how the places in which men cross-dressed affected the likelihood of them being apprehended by police and the likelihood of being able to cross-dress without repercussion. While it is evident that there were links being made in the press and in the court between cross-dressing and same-sex sex in this period, Yorkshire courts and Yorkshire newspapers seemed to pay as little attention as possible to the matter of same-sex sex in these cases. Even widely

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<sup>261</sup> Stephen Caunce, *Amongst Farm Horses: the Horselads of East Yorkshire* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1991).

reported cases, such as that of the Manchester Fancy-Dress Ball, did not appear to cast the act of cross-dressing as inherently troublesome or inherently deviant. That the case was reported as a ‘fancy-dress ball’ when in reality the event was an all male orgy at which some men cross-dressed, is indicative of an unwillingness on the part of the local press to address same-sex sex as a potential ‘problem’ within their locality.

Lack of prosecution and general acceptance of men who cross-dressed may even be read as indicative of a separation of cross-dressing from sexual deviance in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Yorkshire. If, as Smith argued, same-sex sex was not seen as particularly deviant, provided it took place under the right circumstances, then it follows that linking cross-dressing with same-sex sex would not have made the act any more deviant in the eyes of contemporaries. This chapter has revealed the complexity of the relationship between same-sex sex and cross-dressing in a period before either was considered a signifier of a distinct identity. This chapter continues to destabilise binary constructions of gender and sexuality, of acceptance and deviance.

In retaining focus on the moments that men found themselves in court this chapter has added to a body of literature which closely aligns cross-dressing to criminality. However, the general light heartedness with which these cases were presented in the regional press, and the focus on the ‘absurd’ suggests that for the most part, cross-dressing was not presented to Yorkshire folk as a threat. This sits in contrast to the London press which, as Houlbrook has shown, presented court cases of night club raids ‘as exposing a dangerous underworld to the purifying light of the public gaze’.<sup>262</sup> It also points to a familiarity with seeing men dressed in women’s clothes, which is likely to have come from the frequency with which they appeared in a range of entertainment spaces in this period, as the following chapters will demonstrate. The entertainment which has been most frequently linked to female impersonation throughout

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<sup>262</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 222.

history is undoubtedly the theatre. The following chapter explores male-to-female cross-dressing in music hall, amateur theatre, and on the professional stage



## Chapter Two: On the Stage

‘Charley’s Aunt’ is one of those rare comedies whose freshness never fades. It possesses that quality of genuine unforced humour which never loses its power, and one can see it again and again, at reasonable intervals, with full enjoyment of its many mirthful situations. - *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 18 May 1915, p.5

First performed in 1892, *Charley’s Aunt* made playwright Brandon Thomas a household name on both sides of the Atlantic. The original London run was record breaking at 1,466 performances and during this run seven additional companies toured across the country.<sup>263</sup> The play was also adapted into a number of feature films throughout the twentieth century.<sup>264</sup> The play centres on the quest of two Oxford Undergraduates, Jack and Charley, to propose to their sweethearts. When their chaperone, Charley’s aunt, fails to arrive in time they convince their fellow undergraduate Lord Fancourt Babberley, to impersonate the chaperone. The success of *Charley’s Aunt* across the country stands as testament to the endurance and popularity of female impersonation on the British stage. The popularity of the tale of four young lovers and Charley’s aunt from Brazil ‘where the nuts come from,’ lasted throughout the century. In the 1960s three productions of the play were broadcast by the BBC and the 1969 adaptation starred the now infamous Danny La Rue.<sup>265</sup>

*Charley’s Aunt* highlights the central role female impersonation played in British theatrical tradition. Cross-dressing has undoubtedly become synonymous with queer culture in the present day. However, as *Charley’s Aunt* attests, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries female impersonation was at the centre of mainstream entertainment culture. Although the

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<sup>263</sup> *Charley’s Aunt* also ran for four years on Broadway, was translated into a number of different languages and, performed across Western Europe and the English speaking world. <https://www.benchtheatre.org.uk/plays00s/charleysaunt.php> accessed 25/08/2020 and *The Times*, 25 November 1952, p. 11.

<sup>264</sup> *Charley’s Aunt* was adapted for silent film in 1915 and again in 1925, a sound adaptation was released in 1930. A further film adaptation was released in 1940 under the title *Charley’s (Big Hearted) Aunt*. See *The Times*, 11 April 1925, p. *The Times*, 1 January 1930, p.12, and *The Times*, 5 September, 1940, p.6.

<sup>265</sup> BBC Genome, *Radio Times 1923-2009: The Sunday Night Play Presents: Charley’s Aunt* (16th April 1961) <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/ed5685a1d4354c18939373e83990de45> [Accessed 21 May 2020] : BBC Genome, *Radio Times 1923-2009: Summer Comedy House: Charley’s Aunt*, (10th July 1965) <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/705ec180caeb427c89da3ca4dd6c884b> [Accessed 21 May 2020] : BBC Genome, *Radio Times 1923-2009: Play of the Month: Charley’s Aunt* (23rd November 1969) <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/03d100a3246c4645829231d710efd889> (1969) [Accessed 21 May 2020].

historiography has made steps away from the theatre, the stage has remained a central space for the analysis of historical cross-dressing. This is mostly because the act's public history was formed in the theatre, the earliest examples of cross-dressing coming from theatrical settings.<sup>266</sup> For many years female impersonation was a necessity in professional English theatrical troops as until 1660 these troops were entirely male.<sup>267</sup> Female impersonation clearly had a much broader significance than necessity as it did not disappear from British theatrical tradition with the ascension of female actors to the stage. Instead, the female impersonator remains a notable feature of theatrical culture in Britain into the twenty first-century.<sup>268</sup> Although plays such as *Charley's Aunt* have followed the long tradition of placing the cross-dressed man as a comedic figure, and prove the popularity of cross-dressing in this context, farce was not the only genre of theatre in which female impersonation proved popular. From the mid-nineteenth century and into the 1930s, female impersonation was a staple of music hall and variety theatre.

Peter Bailey, Laurence Senelick, and Alan Sinfield argue that cross-dressing and homosexuality were intrinsically linked by the end of the nineteenth century. However, cross-dressing remained a feature of entertainment in a range of theatrical contexts, notable for its humour and familiarity and not for its potential to incite or suggest 'sexual deviance'.<sup>269</sup> This chapter will demonstrate that despite clear cultural links between female impersonation and same-sex sex in some contexts, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries cross-dressing was deemed an acceptable form of entertainment. This chapter lays the foundation for analysing

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<sup>266</sup> For example, Roger Baker has traced the origins of theatrical cross-dressing to medieval street performances of biblical stories, Rodger Baker, *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts*, 2nd Edn. (London: Cassell, 1994), 27-28. These street performances were intended to teach the word of God to the illiterate and those who did not attend church.

<sup>267</sup> The realities of female presence on stage is as Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin have argued, is much more complex than women being entirely absent from theatrical performances until 1660. However, there is not space here to do this debate justice. For more see Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin eds. *Women Players in England, 1500-1660: Beyond the All-Male Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005) 1-8.

<sup>268</sup> Lesley Ferris eds, *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, (London: Routledge, 1993) : Baker, *Drag* : Vern: Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) : Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>269</sup> Senelick, 'Boys and Girls together', 80-95 : Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning' 138-170 and Alan Sinfield, 'Private Lives/Public Theatre: Noel Coward and the Politics of Homosexual Representation', *Representations*, 36 (1991), 43-63 (59).

cross-dressing as a theatrical performance which is central to the following chapters. In addition, shifting the analytic gaze from the court to theatre demonstrates why it was often easy to pass cross-dressing off as ‘just a joke’ even outside of theatrical spaces. The long-standing tradition of cross-dressing in popular entertainment culture meant that those who witnessed cross-dressing in the court and on the street already had a framework with which to understand cross-dressing. This framework positioned cross-dressing as humorous entertainment rather than sexually deviant.

This chapter supports Smith’s argument that the development of the ‘homosexual type’ as a distinct identity, dichotomous with heteronormative masculinity, did not directly influence the working classes in the north of the country until the 1950s.<sup>270</sup> Because of this, it was not possible for cross-dressing to be seen as synonymous with any sexual identity in the period under study. Although this chapter does not deny potential links between queerness and cross-dressing, it argues that these links did not significantly affect the popularity and interpretation of the act until the second half of the twentieth century. This is because of the way gender and sexuality was understood in Yorkshire in this period. The decline in popularity of ‘convincing’ or glamorous female impersonation in theatre in the 1930s did not necessarily reflect a decline in audience enjoyment of the act or of an increased understanding of same-sex desire as a signifier of identity. Instead this decline was part of a general decline in theatre attendance which followed the boom of the film industry in the interwar period.<sup>271</sup> Even this change in media did not remove the act from British entertainment culture as cross-dressing transitioned from the stage to the screen.<sup>272</sup> Taking a regional approach to the study provides further explanation of the endurance of cross-dressing in entertainment in the north of the country while men continued to be arrested for dressing in female-coded clothing in the capital.

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<sup>270</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 194.

<sup>271</sup> Roger Wilmut, *Kindly Leave the Stage! The Story of Variety 1919-1960* (London: Methuen, 1985), 62.

<sup>272</sup> This will be explored further in the final chapter of this thesis.

Central to this chapter is an analysis of cross-dressing in both amateur and professional theatrical spaces. Following on from the previous chapter, it continues to challenge existing findings in the London-centric literature, this chapter finds key differences in the experiences of men who cross-dressed in Yorkshire.<sup>273</sup> Varied regional identities were key to formations of identity as well as constructions of idealised gender.<sup>274</sup> These regional identities also fed into experiences in professional and amateur theatrical spaces particularly when we think about how gender and sexuality was understood in Yorkshire. This chapter focuses on the boundaries of acceptability in cross-dressed performance in different theatrical spaces. It was not the space of the theatre, or its professional nature, that kept cross-dressing in these spaces acceptable. It was the distinction between performance and reality.

The first part of this chapter is formed around two key themes: the distinction between professional and amateur theatrical spaces, and the presentation of the female form on stage. Comparatively examining professional and amateur theatrical spaces demonstrates how this distinction between professional and amateur theatre affected the ways in which female impersonation was understood and experienced. Carriger and Upchurch have argued that the professional theatre provided a veil of acceptability for cross-dressed performance.<sup>275</sup> This argument, however, assumes an understanding of cross-dressing outside of the theatre as inherently deviant. As the previous chapter and subsequent chapters demonstrate, this was not the case for the majority of men who cross-dressed in Yorkshire. Thinking about the distinction between professional and amateur theatre will be used to analyse whether the idea of a ‘theatrical veil of acceptability’ is useful for understanding cross-dressed performances in Yorkshire.

The second theme of realism and the physical presentation of the female body on the stage bridges across professional and amateur spaces. This will be used to analyse the differences

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<sup>273</sup> Examples include; Senelick, *The Changing Room*; Baker, *Drag*; Houllbrook, *Queer London* and Senelick, *Boys and Girls Together*.

<sup>274</sup> Griffin, *The Politics of Gender*.

<sup>275</sup> Carriger, ‘The Unnatural History’ and Upchurch. ‘Forgetting the Unthinkable’.

between the two most popular styles of cross-dressing in the theatre, namely, glamour drag and the dame. Glamour drag placed emphasis on the portrayal of realistic feminine beauty, while the pantomime dame, in which the impersonator's 'true sex' was always evident, often found its comedy and appeal through the absurdity of the impersonation. Both styles of female impersonation held different meaning to performer and audience, and both were generally regarded as acceptable and enjoyable.

The second section of this chapter explores three case studies of female impersonators who were particular 'stars of the stage' in Yorkshire. The first two case studies provide more detail regarding what made music-hall acts popular, revealing that the ability to deceive an audience, even temporarily, was highly praised highlighting the differences between female impersonation on stage and female impersonation on the street. The second and third case studies look at the lives of two popular female impersonators beyond the stage and finds that, on the surface both lived relatively heteronormative lives. That these men conformed to heteronormative models of masculinity beyond the stage not only shows how cross-dressing could be entirely separate from queer identities, feelings and experiences but also raises questions about the definition of cross-dressing as a 'queer' act.c

## 2.1 Theatrical Spaces

Whilst men performed as women in a variety of theatrical genres across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, female impersonators appeared most frequently in music halls, variety theatres, and pantomime. Female impersonators performed in Yorkshire music halls at least as early as 1860; however, these early 'music halls' have left little behind regarding their performances. In 1867 there were only half a dozen music halls in the entire West Riding of Yorkshire, yet female impersonators were already becoming a staple on the bills.<sup>276</sup> Even as the number of purpose built halls rapidly increased in the 1870s, music hall was still far removed

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<sup>276</sup> C.M.P. Taylor, *Right Royal Wakefield Theatre 1776-1994* (Wakefield: Wakefield Historical Publications, 1995), 154-156.

from the glittering variety palaces which would come to dominate early twentieth-century entertainment culture.<sup>277</sup> Music hall's popularity grew drastically in the following decades, finally reaching a peak in the early interwar period. In the 1930s however, the genre slowly lost its popularity to film.<sup>278</sup> Theatre historian G.J. Mellor noted that by the height of the cinema craze in 1935 hundreds of variety theatres across the country 'had been wired up for sound films' as the owners capitalised on the popularity of this exciting new media.<sup>279</sup> As a result the variety 'turns' were pushed aside to make space for moving pictures. Rodger Wilmut claims that effects of the depression and the fact that cinema tickets were significantly cheaper than theatre tickets also played a significant role in the decline of music hall.<sup>280</sup> However, music hall did not completely disappear from British entertainment culture. In the 1930s a significant number of cross-dressed performances still took place in music halls and variety theatres in Yorkshire, though drastically fewer than the previous decade.<sup>281</sup>

Music hall often struggled to present itself as 'respectable', especially in the early days. However, complaints about the propriety of music hall often centred on the character of the audience rather than the nature of the acts themselves, particularly surrounding the presence of single women soliciting sex.<sup>282</sup> As halls clamoured for respectability more precautions were brought in to create a respectable image. In London 'A hall could be closed if single women were seen entering without men.'<sup>283</sup> In order to control the behaviour of music hall audiences in the 1880s and 1890s, many halls also resorted to changing the seating arrangements from chairs and

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<sup>277</sup> Taylor, *Right Royal*, 156.

<sup>278</sup> Cross-dressing on film will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

<sup>279</sup> G. J. Mellor, *The Northern Music Hall* (Newcastle: Frank Graham Limited, 1970), 200.

<sup>280</sup> Wilmut, *Kindly Leave the Stage!*, 62.

<sup>281</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 23 April 1938, p.5, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 18 May 1937, p.3, *Leeds Mercury*, 27 May 1933, p.5, *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 7 December 1939, p.10, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 29 September 1931, p.5.

<sup>282</sup> See, Tanya Cheadle, *Nine Centuries of Man: Manhood and Masculinity in Scottish History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).

<sup>283</sup> Derek B. Scott, 'Music Hall: Regulations and Behaviour in a British Cultural Institution', *Musicology* 26 (2019), 61-74 (70).

tables around which people could talk and drink, and between which unaccompanied women could ‘promenade’, to rows of seating reflective of ‘traditional’ theatres.<sup>284</sup>

The working-class origins of music hall and concerns about the morality of the audience has led to music hall frequently being presented as a distinctly working-class pastime.<sup>285</sup>

However, Dagmar Höher has argued against this assumption, despite continuing middle-class opposition to the impropriety they saw in music hall acts. Höher argues that the provincial music hall audience became increasingly diverse from the 1870’s onwards.<sup>286</sup> One example of this diversity was highlighted by Derek Scott who noted that Winston Churchill had been amongst the group of young men who tore down the curtain which had been erected to prevent ‘promenading’ at the back of ‘The Empire Theatre of Varieties in Leicester Square in the 1890s.’<sup>287</sup> Given that Churchill ‘had been born into the aristocratic family of the Dukes of Marlborough’, his presence shows that enjoyment of music hall was by no means limited to the working-class.<sup>288</sup>

Despite the diverse audience, many of the acts reflected traditionally working-class stereotypes. Although in London there were a variety of different halls which each served a different class of audience, this was the exception and not the ‘prototype’ for the nineteenth-century music hall.<sup>289</sup> Höher described the industrial and factory towns of the north as being ‘economically and socially more homogenous’ than London and as a result ‘despite residential segregation, there were no distinct classes of music hall in different areas of the towns.’<sup>290</sup>

Regionality, then, is important in understanding the reality of these spaces. The majority of provincial halls were situated in town centres and drew audiences from a wide area, meaning that

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<sup>284</sup> Scott, ‘Music Hall’, 64.

<sup>285</sup> Dagmar Höher, ‘The Composition of Music Hall Audiences, 1850-1900’, 73-92, in Peter Bailey eds. *Music Hall, The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), 74-76.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>287</sup> Scott, ‘Music Hall’, 63.

<sup>288</sup> Scott, ‘Music Hall’, 63.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

music hall-based female impersonators would have been enjoyed by the people of Yorkshire from a variety of socio-economic classes.<sup>291</sup>

Female impersonation has also played a significant role in the history of pantomime. The origins of pantomime have been traced to ancient Rome; however, pantomime as we know it today - slap stick comedy and bawdy entertainment - found its way to England in the early eighteenth century.<sup>292</sup> As pantomime evolved over the years the pantomime dame has retained a central role. Dan Leno is often credited with making the dame popular in Britain. Born into a family of entertainers in 1860s London, Leno became famous for his ability to create ‘a credible woman whom everyone knows is being played by a man.’<sup>293</sup> Jill Sullivan noted that, much like music hall, nineteenth-century pantomime was interpreted by its contemporaries as ‘commercial, popular (vulgar) and inartistic’.<sup>294</sup> Despite this ‘throughout the nineteenth-century pantomime was one of the most successful and commercially viable forms of popular entertainment and a crucial component of Victorian popular culture.’<sup>295</sup> While pantomime and music hall often built on similar tropes and themes, pantomime has retained its popularity into the twenty-first century, whereas music hall and variety theatre have been left behind.

One reason that pantomime retained its audience is its ability to speak to regional identity. Sullivan argued that although the staging and story of the pantomime remained much the same throughout the country, the renowned pantomime ‘patter’ which made it so popular with audiences, often built on a sense of regional identity.<sup>296</sup> Actors in pantomime regularly ad-libbed references to local events and public figures, which Sullivan argues helped to foster a

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<sup>291</sup> Höher, ‘Music Hall Audiences’, 84.

<sup>292</sup> Maureen Hughes, *A History of Pantomime* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword History, 2013), 16.

<sup>293</sup> Jane Moody, ‘It’s behind you! A look into the History of Pantomime’, *University of York*, <<https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/features/pantomime/>> [accessed 05.01.2019].

<sup>294</sup> Jill Sullivan, *The Politics of the Pantomime: Regional Identity in the Theatre, 1860-1900* (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2011), 5.

<sup>295</sup> Jim Davis, Introduction to: *Victorian Pantomime: A collection of Critical Essays* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2-3.

<sup>296</sup> Sullivan, *The Politics of Pantomime*, 13.



sense of ownership and belonging amongst the audience.<sup>297</sup> The difference between the theatrical forms of pantomime and music hall means the presentation of female impersonation was often also incredibly different, which could account for one form's endurance beyond the other. Variety theatres presented acts or 'turns' dedicated to female impersonation. In these acts the female impersonator was often the only one on stage and the audience were invited to admire and to question the gendered body on stage. In contrast, the pantomime dame was part of a wider story - she may not even be central to the plot.

Key to the success of both the music hall and the pantomime was its ability to make the audience laugh. As Asa Berger observes 'dissecting humor [sic] is an interesting operation in which the patient usually dies.'<sup>298</sup> Despite the difficulty of the task, the popularity of the history of emotions has led to a growing academic field which examines humour in historical contexts.<sup>299</sup> Sandra Swart has noted:

Laughter is singularly lacking in an archive...Laughter vanishes into the ether. But the things that made people laugh, their observations on their own laughter, and commentary on what was popularly funny may remain, albeit widely scattered and only recorded as an afterthought.<sup>300</sup>

Although newspaper reports present quite clear ideas of why audiences found female impersonators funny it would be too simplistic to assume these reports accurately reflect the full reasons behind the laughter and popularity of the impersonators. At base level, the humour in male-to-female cross-dressed performance appears twofold. Firstly, in Western societies masculinity was, and still is, the pinnacle of privilege, therefore the humour can be found in the presumed absurdity of a man choosing to surrender his privileges to become the 'weaker' sex. In contrast, as Oram has demonstrated, when women cross-dressed they undermined the 'idea of

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<sup>297</sup> Sullivan, *The Politics of Pantomime*, 13.

<sup>298</sup> A.A. Berger, 'Anatomy of a Joke', *Journal of Communication* 26 (1976), 113-115 (113).

<sup>299</sup> Sandra Swart, "The Terrible Laughter of the Afrikaner": Towards a Social History of Humor', *Journal of Social History* 42 (2009), 889-917 : A.J. Chapman, and H. C. Foot, eds. *Humor and Laughter: Theory, Research and Applications* (London: Routledge, 1976) : John Durant, and Jonathan Miller, eds. *Laughing Matters: A Serious Look at Humour* (London: Longman, 1988), and Lawrence Mintz, eds. *Humor in America: A Research Guide to Genres and Topics* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

<sup>300</sup> Swart, 'The Terrible Laughter', 892.

essential gender difference', upon which sustained patriarchal power.<sup>301</sup> As such, this was often deemed more deviant than funny. Secondly, cross-dressing plays with the boundaries of gender. It confuses binaries and mocks either one or both sexes. But as Bailey notes, the most important factor of all humour in music hall performance was knowingness. Therefore, one could argue that as historians we will always be the outsider who is excluded from enjoying the joke.

The comedy in music hall performance often relied on innuendo and a shared knowledge between audience and performer.<sup>302</sup> Due to frequent complaints about the propriety of music hall, from 1875 acts were required to submit the lyrics of their songs to the hall and theatre managers before they were allowed to perform them to the public. However, this by no means succeeded in 'cleaning up' the acts by removing the innuendo from performances which had made the genre so popular. Instead, it meant that innuendo made its way into performance through gesture, the 'patter', and the re-signifying of everyday language. As Cheadle explained, 'seemingly innocent phrases were given a second, hidden meaning relating to sexual anatomy or activities the decoding of which required a degree of competence on the part of the audience.'<sup>303</sup> The audience and performer thus shared in this language, which Bailey terms 'knowingness.' Knowingness, Bailey argues, relied on popular knowledge and built a strong sense of community which to the outsider 'was increasingly populous, extensive and unknowable.'<sup>304</sup> This type of comedy relied on a shared culture between audience and performer, and assumed understanding of what cross-dressed performers represented or *could* represent. Without access to information about how these gestures were performed, the historian, and anyone else who did not share the cultural experiences of the audience is prevented from truly understanding the joke. Lucy Delap argued 'what one finds funny is highly context dependent,' by developing an understanding of

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<sup>301</sup> Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman*, 20.

<sup>302</sup> Tanya Cheadle, 'Music Hall, 'Mashers' and the 'Unco Guid': Competing Masculinities in Victorian Glasgow', 223-241 in Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Ewan eds *Nine Centuries of Man: Manhood and Masculinities in Scottish History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017) : Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning', 138-70.

<sup>303</sup> Cheadle, 'Music Hall', 231.

<sup>304</sup> Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning', 167.

the context in which these jokes took place, the theatrical space as well as the historically contingent understanding of gender, this chapter unpicks the comedy behind female impersonation in the theatre.<sup>305</sup>

## 2.2 'Amateur Theatricals'

While the presence of actresses in theatre had made female impersonations a rarity in dramatic and highbrow theatre by the 1860s, the growth of music hall in Yorkshire ensured that men dressed as women were still a significant feature of professional entertainment culture. In amateur theatre, which was performed in schools and community theatres, men continued to dress as women in a range of genres. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century emphasis on professionalism advanced rapidly.<sup>306</sup> Claire Cochrane has argued that this led to a 'semantic shift in the deployment of the word "amateur".' The term 'professional', Cochrane argues, came to connote 'ultracompetence' [sic], rendering the amateur 'non-professional and by implication incompetent.'<sup>307</sup> Instead of thinking of amateur theatrical performers as incompetent, it is more useful to think of them as Judith Hawley and Mary Isbell do, as those who 'performed for love not money...whose endeavours blur the boundaries between actor and audience, public and private as they cross the line between the production and consumption of drama.'<sup>308</sup>

While music hall and pantomime performances were relatively similar across the country, analysing female impersonation in amateur theatre is arguably more representative of specific regional identity. This is because 'amateur theatre is dependent on social networks, friendship and shared histories, with companies often sustaining their own in-jokes, playfulness, rivalries and rituals over many years.'<sup>309</sup> With the exception of the makeshift theatres put together by the

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<sup>305</sup> Lucy Delap, 'Kitchen-Sink Laughter: Domestic Service Humor in Twentieth-Century Britain', *The Journal of British Studies*, 49:3 (2010), 623-654 (627).

<sup>306</sup> Claire Cochrane, 'The Pervasiveness of the Commonplace: The Historians and Amateur Theatre', *Theatre Research International*, 26:3 (2001), 233-242, (234).

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>308</sup> Judith Hawley and Mary Isbell, 'Amateur Theatre in the Long Nineteenth Century', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 38:2 (2011) xvii-xix (xvii).

<sup>309</sup> Helen Nicholson, *The Ecologies of Amateur Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 7.

British Armed forces, relatively little attention has been paid to female impersonation on the amateur stage.<sup>310</sup> As Cochrane argues, part of the problem historians have faced with writing histories of amateur theatrical societies in general has been ‘the sheer bulk of amateur activity.’<sup>311</sup> David Coates explains that the nature of archival material relating to amateur theatre, although plentiful is often scattered and fragmented;

More often than not a researcher may find a lone amateur theatrical playbill inserted into a personal scrapbook or diary, or among a box of playbills that are otherwise related to the activity of a professional performance venue.<sup>312</sup>

For example, a collection of Leeds playbills from the 1860s, which is mostly made up of playbills for professional productions also contains two playbills for amateur productions featuring female impersonators. The first is from Leeds Grammar School (a single sex boys’ school at this time) for a performance of the comedy *The Honeymoon* in 1860. In this production four of the thirteen roles were female parts played by boys.<sup>313</sup> The second playbill advertised a production of Dion Boucicault’s *Streets of London* by Yeadon Theatre’s amateur theatrical group. In this production Mr E. Rourke played Mrs Huggleston ‘a millionaire’.<sup>314</sup> In the case of Leeds Grammar School, it could be argued that men and boys were playing female roles in these plays out of necessity as there were no female students present to play these roles. The ‘necessity’ argument was one which would be later used by servicemen to justify female impersonation in the makeshift theatres of the First World War.<sup>315</sup> However, the school could also have chosen to perform a play which included solely male characters. Outside of all male institutions, female impersonation

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<sup>310</sup> Sigel, ‘Best Love’ : Boxwell, ‘The Follies of War’ : Vickers and Jackson, ‘Sanctuary or Sissy?’ : Laurel Halladay, ‘A Lovely War: Male to Female Cross-Dressing and Canadian Military Entertainment’, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 46:3 (2004), 19-34 : Alon Rachamimov, ‘The Disruptive Comforts of Drag: (Trans)gender Performances among Prisoners of War in Russia, 1914–1920’, *American Historical Review* 111:2 (2006) 362–382 : Jason Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front: Masculinity, Sexuality and German Soldiers in the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) : Jason Crouthamel, ‘Cross-Dressing for the Fatherland: Sexual Humor, Masculinity and German Soldiers in the First World War’, *First World War Studies* 2:2 (2011),195–215 and Justin Fantauzzo and Robert L. Nelson, ‘A Most Unmanly War: British Masculinity in Macedonia, Mesopotamia and Palestine, 1914-1918’, *Gender & History* 28:3 (2016) 587-603.

<sup>311</sup> Cochrane, ‘The Pervasiveness of the Commonplace’, 236.

<sup>312</sup> David Coates, ‘Amateur Theatre Networks in the Archive’, *A Journal of the Performing Arts* 25:1 (2020) 39-43 (39).

<sup>313</sup> Leeds Play Bills, ‘The Honeymoon’, 20031014\_44466799, 1860.

<sup>314</sup> Leeds Play Bills, ‘The Streets of London!’, 20031016\_31792849, 1868 and Leeds Play Bills, ‘Mother Goose of Woodhouse Moor’, 2003710\_7645815, 1865.

<sup>315</sup> Sigel, ‘Best Love’.

was far from a necessity as women became more likely to appear in amateur productions from the 1860s. Therefore, the inclusion of female impersonation in many amateur productions in this period must have been a direct choice.<sup>316</sup> The prevalence of this choice demonstrates the centrality of the tradition in British theatrical culture.

The distinction between amateur and professional can apply as much to the space in which theatricals were performed as to the individual performer. In the 1890s examples of female impersonators engaged to perform at charity events and in spaces outside of the traditional theatre appear frequently in the regional press. These productions often transformed village halls, working-men's clubs, and in one instance a workhouse, into spaces of entertainment and performance.<sup>317</sup> For example, in 1893, the Odd-Fellows Good Intent Friendly Society' engaged Bob Voy, female impersonator, to perform at their Annual Tea-Party, Concert and Ball.<sup>318</sup> The concert was held in the Town Hall and attended by upwards of 650 people. Voy's 'clever female impersonations and songs' were described by the *Todmorden and District News* as 'the principle feature' of the evening.<sup>319</sup> Although the space in which he performed was far from a professional theatre, Voy himself was by every means a professional female impersonator as he performed in a range of professional theatres across Yorkshire and Lancashire in the same year.<sup>320</sup> Such instances demonstrates the mutable boundaries between professional and amateur stages, as performers moved between the two, thus blurring these distinctions. This ability to move between spaces also speaks to the transformation of everyday spaces into theatrical spaces which could change the meaning of performances of gender.<sup>321</sup> For example carnival turned

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<sup>316</sup> Hawley and Isbell, 'Amateur Theatre', xvii.

<sup>317</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 25 May 1892, p.3 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 11 November 1892, p.4 : *Barnsley Chronicle*, 21 December 1895, p.2 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 27 November 1896, p.6 : *Knaresborough Post*, 29 June 1912, p.6.

<sup>318</sup> *Todmorden & District News*, 20 January 1893, p.4.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>320</sup> In the same year he performed at the Bridge Music Hall in Manchester, the Queens Varieties in Ashton-Under-Lyne, The Peer Pavilion in Morecambe and The Theatre Royal in York. *The Era*, 28 October 1893, p.7 : *The Era*, 16 December 1893, p.18 : *Music Hall and Theatre Review*, 1 September 1893, p.17 and *The Era*, 6 May 1893, p.18.

<sup>321</sup> These themes will also be explored in chapter three which explores female impersonation in carnival. In these instances, everyday spaces were turned into spaces of performance.

streets into performance spaces in which men frequently cross-dressed to entertain their community members, however, outside of carnival men who cross-dressed in those same streets would be treated with suspicion and possibly even arrested.

Other examples include a performance by Walter Giffiths, ‘female impersonator, skirt and serpentine dancer,’ at a charity event for the Railway servant’s orphanage fund in Barnsley in 1895, who was ‘received with special marks of favour’.<sup>322</sup> In 1892 a concert was performed for the inmates of a workhouse in Hull. *The Hull Daily Mail* reported that ‘the various items on the programme... were rendered in first-rate style, eliciting hearty applause throughout,’ and ‘Mr G.F. Grunby distinguished himself as a female impersonator, and was very realistic and amusing’.<sup>323</sup> Mr Grunby again performed at a charity concert in 1892, this time presented by the Hull Branch of the ‘G.P.O Abstinence Society’.<sup>324</sup> The humour of the performance was clearly important for both amateur and professional female impersonators. The regional press was keen to emphasise both the light hearted humour in these performances as well as the important charitable cause. Female impersonation in these different spaces meant that a man in female-coded clothing would have been a familiar sight. This may have fed into a level of acceptance or the ‘live and let live’ attitudes towards those who cross-dressed for reasons other than entertainment. By performing in these spaces female impersonators put themselves not just at the heart of popular entertainment culture but had a physical presence in a variety of spaces at the centre of local communities. Analysing these amateur productions demonstrates that female impersonation did not necessarily require the physical space of the theatre to remain acceptable.

Linking female impersonation to charity work imbued the act with a sense of respectability. Ellen Curley has argued that ‘charity theatricals’ provided performers with freedom to transgress some societal norms due to the assumed morality of charity work.<sup>325</sup> While

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<sup>322</sup> *Barnsley Chronicle*, 21 December 1895, p.2.

<sup>323</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 25 May 1892, p.3.

<sup>324</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 11 November 1892, p.4.

<sup>325</sup> Ellen Curley, ‘Tainted Money?: Nineteenth-century Charity Theatricals’, *Theatre Symposium* 15:1 (2007) 52-73 (53).

Curley's claim is related specifically to middle- and upper-class women, these sanctions could be easily transferable to other forms of gendered transgression, such as female impersonation. This demonstrates how temporary theatrical spaces can hold the same cultural significance and social structures as permanent theatres. Therefore, the supposed veil of acceptability which Upchurch and Michelle Lui Carriger argue was provided to performers in professional theatre, must also have extended to amateur theatre.<sup>326</sup> It was not the 'professional' nature of the theatre that made space for men to dress in female-coded clothing, but the separation of performance from reality.

Theatrical female impersonators were not intrinsically linked to sexual deviance and Yorkshire society generally accepted entertainment which included the potential for gender and sexual deviance. The performance of theatrical female impersonators in traditionally conservative institutions such as churches and schools further exemplifies that this was regarded as an acceptable form of entertainment. For example, in 1892 female impersonator Tom Burwell performed in a church schoolroom when Mrs Watt of Bishop Burton Hall organised 'a successful tea and entertainment for her tenants and servants'.<sup>327</sup> In addition, the 'Klondike Minstrel's and Variety Company', which included a female impersonator, also performed a concert to raise money for the National School, Todmorden.<sup>328</sup> These men not only performed in women's clothes in spaces which were often linked with traditional models of gender and morality, but according to the local press were well received by audiences. The ubiquity of female impersonators in such a range of spaces evidences female impersonations role as acceptable entertainment. In a discussion of cross-dressing during the First World War, Sigel noted;

The visual evidence of female impersonation shows it as commonplace and pervasive, notable for its ubiquity and ordinariness as much as its erotic potential. Photographers documented female impersonation as part of the cultural landscape...people circulated the images of female impersonators for a variety of reasons including both homosocial and familial affection.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Upchurch, 'Forgetting the Unthinkable', 127-157 and Carriger, 'The Unnatural History', 135-157.

<sup>327</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 27 November 1896, p.6

<sup>328</sup> *Todmorden & District News*, 28 October 1898, p.4.

<sup>329</sup> Sigel, 'Best Love', 103.

This was as much the case in the decades before and after the war as it was during.<sup>330</sup> The frequency with which theatrical female impersonation was noted in the press in both professional and amateur performances, without any negative connotations, emphasises the act's normalised position in society. Little distinction was made between professional and amateur theatrical female impersonation in terms of acceptability. Evidence from the regional press demonstrates that female impersonation was not only accepted but also widely enjoyed by their contemporaries.



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"MY WORD, I CAN WEAR MY SUMMER HAT AT LAST!"  
THE LATEST PORTRAIT OF MR. DAN LENO.

### 2.3 The Pantomime Dame and Glamour Drag

Regardless of the spaces female impersonators performed in, their acts can, for the most part, be separated into one of two 'types', the dame and the glamour drag artist. As Pantomime became a staple of the Christmas theatrical season in the nineteenth century the dame took up her role at the centre of the genre.<sup>331</sup> The pantomime dame often represented a de-sexualised woman, usually post-menopausal, nagging, and clumsy, with the 'joke' existing in the dame's mocking of older women but also in the tension between her feminine clothes and the masculine body beneath them. The 'true sex' of the body was usually emphasised through 'masculine' mannerisms, and

<sup>330</sup> See BK95/6, Lorna Butterfield Postcard Collection, 1906-1929, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

<sup>331</sup> WYL2410/3/1 Leeds City Varieties Music Hall Records, Scrapbook 1, 1948 and WYL2410/3/2 Leeds City Varieties Music Hall Records, Scrapbook 2, 1962.



sometimes obvious facial hair.<sup>332</sup> The dame was comical because she failed to present an idealised form of feminine beauty and grace.

Benjamin Poore has argued that the dame became cemented in modern pantomime tradition in the late nineteenth century as a result of the resounding success of Dan Leno's dames in the Drury Lane pantomimes between 1888 and 1904.<sup>333</sup> In contrast to the dames of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the early dames 'hardly ever explored the erotic'.<sup>334</sup> This separation from sexuality not only freed the dame from the possibility of inciting homosexual desire, it also made her humorous. Analysis of the dame therefore not only reveals theatrical tradition and understandings of gender non-conformity but because she was so deeply entrenched in British popular culture, the dame also reflects wider societal attitudes towards gender. Ruth Shade has argued that jokes about older women, most frequently mothers-in-law, can be found in the world's oldest surviving book of jokes *The Philogelos* which was compiled in the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>335</sup> The longevity of these jokes highlight the strength of the image of the older woman as 'unattractive, troublesome and inconsequential' in British popular culture.<sup>336</sup> Often the menopause was the unspoken moment at which a woman past the point of idealised femininity and as a result was open to ridicule. As Claire Martin has demonstrated, in the first half of the twentieth century the menopause was constructed in medical discourse 'as a failure, a physiological manifestation of the beginning of the end'.<sup>337</sup> The dame's comedy is reflective of societies attitude towards older, de-sexualised and infertile women. It is because she

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<sup>332</sup> Jim Davis, 'Slap on Slap Ever!' and: Benjamin Poore, 'Reclaiming the Dame: Cross-dressing as Queen Victoria in British Theatre and Television Comedy', *Comedy Studies*, 3 (2012) 177-189 (180).

<sup>333</sup> Poore, 'Reclaiming the Dame', 180.

<sup>334</sup> Peter Holland 'The Play of Eros: Paradoxes of Gender in English Pantomime', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 13:51 (1997), 195 – 204) 201-202.

<sup>335</sup> Ruth Shade, 'Take my Mother-in-Law: 'Old Bags', Comedy and the Sociocultural Construction of the Older Woman', *Comedy Studies*, 1:1 (2010), 71-83 (72).

<sup>336</sup> Shade, 'Take my Mother-in-Law', 72.

<sup>337</sup> Martin, 'Bodies of Knowledge', 188.

mocks this stage in the female life cycle that the dame has retained such a prominent role in British popular culture.<sup>338</sup>

At the turn of the century, the dame had become one of the most commented upon features of the Christmas pantomimes that took place across Yorkshire. The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* raved about the performance of Mr Fred Williams, who took on the role of dame in the Christmas Pantomime *Jack and the Bean Stalk* at the Alexandra Theatre in 1896. The paper described the dame role as fitting Williams 'like the proverbial glove' and gushed over his accomplishments 'as the representative of Cockney old women, and indeed the "chiefest" of such representatives.'<sup>339</sup> In a similar vein Mr Tom Conway delighted audiences in Hull in 1899 and was again described as suiting the role of dame 'to perfection.'<sup>340</sup> While the ability of these men to portray the eccentric character of the dame was regularly praised, it was the ability of the dame to evoke laughter that really cemented her popularity. Conway's humour was described as 'most infectious, and the hearty laughter he is the means of causing does one good.'<sup>341</sup> In the 1909 production of *Goody Two Shoes* at the Royal in Sheffield, Mr Marriott Edgar was described above all else as being 'more amusing every night in the Dame Part'.<sup>342</sup> The type of laughter the dame evoked however demonstrates the reach and longevity of stereotypes of older women as objects to be laughed at rather than admired.

Although the dame style of female impersonation has become intrinsically linked with the nineteenth-century pantomime, Roger Barker argues that the origins of the dame role in

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<sup>338</sup> Misogyny against older women in particular has for a long time been focused around a fear of women's bodies which were no longer fertile and is reflective of societies inability to find a place for women when they are no longer able to bare children. In Early Modern Europe, it has been argued that these fears about the post-menopausal body fed into suspicions surrounding witches. See for example Lyndal Roper, 'Sex, Bodies and Age: Misogyny and the Witch-Hunt' (unpublished paper given at the Women's History Seminar, Institute of Historical Research, London, 4 June 1999) : Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (London: Harper Collins, 1996) : Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994) and Alison Rowlands, 'Witchcraft and Old Women in Early Modern Germany', *Past & Present*, 173 (2001), 50-89.

<sup>339</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 19 December 1896, p.8.

<sup>340</sup> *Eastern Morning News*, 4 July 1899, p.8.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>342</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 5 January 1909, p.9

theatrical productions can be traced back to the fifteenth century.<sup>343</sup> Barker locates a dame character in one of the earliest recorded comedy plays, a fifteenth-century production of the nativity. Gyll, he argues, reflects the dame tradition as we know it today.<sup>344</sup> Gyll exemplifies the dame because she is a parody of womanhood. Gyll uses her body's ability to give birth to escape condemnation. Not only does the humour come from the disguise of the sheep as a baby, but also because the audience would be aware that Gyll was being portrayed by a man and could not in fact give birth. However, if Gyll was portrayed in a similar style to the twentieth-century dames, a post-menopausal woman, an additional layer of 'humour' could have been added as not only was the actor unable to give birth but this is something Gyll herself would have been unable to do. Here, both the post-menopausal body and the male-body perform an impossible feat. As Begiato argued 'human bodies are vessels for abstract cultural values and can be read as sites for cultural meaning and social practice.'<sup>345</sup> In this instance, the body of the actor is as important as the body he performs.<sup>346</sup>

In the 1920s we begin to see images of the dame which would be recognisable to many who grew up attending Christmas Pantomimes in the twenty-first century. The dames became more eccentric in their separation from idealised femininity. For example, in Hull 1929, Fred Hutchings was praised not just for his ability to appeal across the generations but his 'weird and wonderful garments' which were said to have created 'roars of laughter.'<sup>347</sup> The elaborate costumes emphasised the failure of the dame to retain the femininity of her youth. At this point

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<sup>343</sup> Baker, *Drag*, 29.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.* Gyll was a side-line role in the production and appears in the narrative having stolen a sheep. She pretended 'to be in labour to distract the shepherds and then ...[pretended] the sheep was a baby.'

<sup>345</sup> Begiato, *Manliness in Britain*, 6.

<sup>346</sup> There is a vast literature on the significance of the physical body to constructions of gender. See for example; Bourke, *Dismembering the Male* : Gabriel Koureas, *Memory, Masculinity and National Identity in British Visual Culture, 1914–1930: A Study of 'Unconquerable Manhood'* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016) : Joanne Begiato, 'Between Poise and Power: Embodied Manliness in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Culture', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 26:2 (2016), 125–47 : Roberta Park, 'Muscles, Symmetry and Action: "Do you measure up": Defining Masculinity in Britain and America From the 1860s to the Early 1900s', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 22:3 (2007), 366–367: Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Roger Cooter, 'The Turn of the Body: History and the Politics of the Corporeal', *Arbor, Ciencia, Pensamiento y Cultura* 186:743 (2010), 393–405

<sup>347</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 27 December 1929, p.4.

the dames unique style appears and she no longer aims to portray a ‘real’ or even recognizable image of womanhood. Instead she presents herself as a parody in an elaborate style which is unequivocally that of the pantomime dame. The dame was not intended to be an accurate reflection of the older woman, but instead she was a caricature of post-menopausal womanhood. For example, in the 1910 Pantomime at Todmorden Hippodrome it was Mr Ally Benson’s dame’s ‘eccentricities’ – as the opposite of genteel femininity - which were said to ‘convulse the audience’.<sup>348</sup> It was her very lack of femininity and her eccentric and unsuccessful attempts to appear feminine that made the dame so humorous to contemporary audiences, cementing her popularity.

Although dame characters had previously performed in music hall, by the 1920s the dame was largely confined to the pantomime stage. Female impersonation did not, however, disappear from music hall and the popularity of glamour drag artists soared. From the late nineteenth century onwards music-hall female-impersonators were increasingly praised for their ‘realistic’ impersonations and their ability to ‘trick’ the audience into believing that they were biological women. The aim was to portray as realistic an impersonation as possible, both in terms of looks, and in the case of some of the most popular performers, to sing in a convincingly feminine falsetto. Glamour drag undeniably required more than a dress and a pretty face; it was a skill. Reviews of female impersonators in music hall regularly included comments on the ‘realness’ of their ‘disguise’ and the appearance of the performer was often placed at the forefront of the reviewers’ comments. For example, in 1898 Mr Pullan, of Pullan’s Music Hall, Bradford was described by *The Hull Daily Mail* as ‘a fine female impersonator in all respects, his make-up being excellent and his falsetto is a good resemblance to the voice of a lady.’<sup>349</sup> Another of Yorkshire’s most popular glamour drag artist, Max Waldon was described as having;

many physical advantages which helps [sic] him in his impersonations of cosmopolitan characters, and it is only when he breaks into a deep manly note

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<sup>348</sup> *Todmorden & District News*, 11 February 1910, p.7.

<sup>349</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 16 December 1898, p.4.

in the midst of a song rendered with feminine sweetness, that those who have never seen him before realise [sic] he is not a woman after all.<sup>350</sup>

This trend for realism extended into the twentieth century and perhaps reached its peak with the ex-serviceman's revues which toured the country in the 1920s.<sup>351</sup>

Alongside realism, newspaper reports and advertisements in this period highlight an important aspect of defining the acceptability of glamor drag on stage. Much like the dame, these were presented as comedic. Although many artists were said to have convinced the audience that they were biologically female, the regional press were keen to emphasise that it was the comedy of the reveal that made these performances so enjoyable, rather than the deception. Some, like George Tacius, revealed their 'true sex' by switching between a feminine soprano to a masculine baritone in the middle of song.<sup>352</sup> Switching between a 'feminine' voice and a 'masculine' voice disrupted the gender binary and in doing so produced humour through 'the experience of a felt incongruity between what we know or expect to be the case, and what actually takes place'.<sup>353</sup> The audience expected Tacius' voice to be that of a woman or that of a man; his ability to switch quickly and convincingly between the two was an impressive and humorous addition to his act. Max Waldon was another who revealed the 'trick' through his voice and was praised for being able to 'switch the tone of his voice from masculine to feminine at the drop of hat'.<sup>354</sup> Others, like Quinton Gibson used double entendre and suggestive lyrics to reveal their identity.<sup>355</sup>

Arthur Roberts' performance in *the Importance of being Another Man's Wife* at Sheffield's Empire Palace in 1910 received rave reviews for its humour, 'A born comedian, Mr. Roberts by the slightest of facial contortions can set the house in a roar, and as a female impersonator he provides a rich fund of humour'.<sup>356</sup> These facial contortions would have presumably, changed the

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<sup>350</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 24 June 1903, p.5.

<sup>351</sup> These revues will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

<sup>352</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 16 February 1904, p.5.

<sup>353</sup> Simon Critchley, *On Humour (Thinking in Action)* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3.

<sup>354</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 10 June 1902, p.4 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 24 June 1903, p.4 : *Leeds Mercury*, 7 July 1903, p.4 : *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 22 March 1910, p.5, and *Todmorden & District News*, 6 July 1906, p.4.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>356</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 8 March 1910, p.2.

meaning of words building on a shared sense of ‘knowingness’ with the audience. In this instance, Roberts’ abilities as a comedian were prioritised over his abilities as a female impersonator. Similarly, *The Shipley Times and Express* praised female impersonator Russell Wallot for his comedic talent; ‘as usual, [he] provokes hearty laughter as a female impersonator.’<sup>357</sup> The humour also helped female impersonation retain a sense of respectability. If the performer was humorous then it was easy to align his popularity with this rather than with any kind of illicit sexual allure.

The long-standing tradition of the theatrical female impersonator as a comedic character meant that cross-dressing outside of the theatre was also easily explained away as a ‘joke’. Beyond the stage this understanding was used in the 1920s to protect the reputation of the heir to the Amphil peerage, Jon Russell when it was revealed during his divorce trial that he had a penchant for wearing ‘female attire.’<sup>358</sup> His counsel, and to some extent the press, explained away his cross-dressing as ‘just a joke.’<sup>359</sup> In this instance, the language and culture of the theatre is used to construct meanings of female impersonation in other spaces, in this instance Russell cross-dressed at ‘private parties’ among friends<sup>360</sup>. It is therefore possible that the humour - the presentation of cross-dressing as a joke - and not the way these men actually lived their lives afforded the impersonators, and those who enjoyed watching them, a level of protection from social stigma. The joke was a performance and was therefore separated from reality, thereby reducing the threat of these gendered transgressions.

Glamour drag reached the peak of its popularity in the 1920s, boosted by the frequency with which soldiers cross-dressed for entertainment during the First World War.<sup>361</sup> Throughout

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<sup>357</sup> *Shipley Times and Express*, 8 November 1907, p.11.

<sup>358</sup> Bland, *Modern Women on Trial*, 184-186.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>361</sup> See Sigel, ‘Best Love’: Jacob, Bloomfield, ‘Splinters: Cross-Dressing Ex-Servicemen on the Interwar Stage’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 30:1 (2019) and Jacob Bloomfield, ‘Male Cross-Dressing Performance in Britain, 1918-1970’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2017).

the conflict concert parties became an incredibly popular means of entertaining servicemen, with most containing at least one female impersonator. As Sigel explained,

Music and theatrical performances became a way to pass the time and to make meaning of changed circumstances. Informal singalongs, concert parties, and theatrical events bonded men together and created a coherent culture.<sup>362</sup>



### “Les Rouges et Noirs.”

The great attraction appearing at the Theatre Royal next week. What do you think of the make-ups of the “ladies” in the above picture - and each one a mere man?

Sigel demonstrates how for the soldiers missing their young lovers and female company in general, glamor drag artists allowed them to experience sexual desire resistant to categorization whilst ‘[t]he overlapping expressions of disdain and acceptance at watching the dame might then reflect the reactions over forms of femininity not linked to desire.’<sup>363</sup> For those who desired the

<sup>362</sup> Sigel, ‘Best Love’, 101.

<sup>363</sup> Sigel, ‘Best Love’, 102-103.

male body beneath the clothes, glamour drag performers could also provide opportunity for men to watch each other's bodies on stage. The individual female impersonators in both glamour and dame style drag were easily justified in all-male spaces - they were there to play the female role in productions in the absence of women.

However, during the war a new type of cross-dressed entertainment grew in popularity. This was the 'beauty chorus' made up of a group of young men dressed as women. Images from various fighting fronts reveal that soldiers transformed themselves into 'realistic' young women in these choruses, often donning fashionably short haircuts and 'flapper style' dresses, which also displayed their bodies.<sup>364</sup> The beauty chorus tells us more about acceptance than one or two soldiers playing female parts in plays. There was no way of justifying these types of performance as necessary; they were not based on all female plays where all the parts had to be played in female dress. It was purely female impersonation for female impersonation's sake. Again, that the tradition transferred to the fighting fronts demonstrates the ubiquity and longevity of female impersonation as a theatrical tradition. This suggests that in some circumstances female impersonation did not require justification. Despite the variety of meanings these performances would have had for the different men who watched them, these acts were again presented as comedic and as serving role in boosting servicemen's morale. Even though these performances may have had sexual connotations for both performer and audience alike, the presentation of

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<sup>364</sup> Some examples include; IWM, HU 129252 [online]

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205384144> [accessed 14.09.2019] This image was taken at Gottingen Prisoner of War Camp and depicts officer Bill Sturgeon with two female impersonators sat on his lap. IWM, HU 58739 (1917) [online] <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205046436> [accessed 14.09.2019] Portrait of 'Miss Keele' (Pte Tommy Keele dressed as a woman): the print is annotated 'Sincerely yours Tommy Keele. Light Comedian and Female Impersonator'. IWM, HU 82025 (1917) [online] <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205022704> [accessed 14.09.2019] Image of 'Lizzie' the female impersonator of the 66th Field Ambulance concert party, summer 1917. IWM, CO 2013 (1917) [online] <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205194032> [accessed 14.09.2019] A female impersonator of the "Maple Leaves", the Canadian Concert Party, making up for his role in a field on the Western Front. Imperial War Museum, HU 95840 (1917) [online] <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205025311> [accessed 14.09.2019] Performers of an Indian concert party at the Royal Ordnance Corps theatre, Baghdad, ca.1917.



female impersonation as a joke and the longevity of female impersonation in theatre, worked to keep the productions within the realm of acceptability.

In addition, soldiers were likely to have been afforded more leniency in terms of temporary transgressions of precisely because as they embodied ‘the soldier hero’ which was the pinnacle of hegemonic masculinity. As Graham Dawson argued ‘the soldier hero has proved to be one of the most durable and powerful forms of idealized masculinity within Western cultural traditions since the time of the Ancient Greeks.’<sup>365</sup> The unspoken associations between fighting men and heightened masculinity heightens the incongruity between the masculine body beneath the female-coded clothing thus intensifying the humour in the act.

Throughout the 1920s a number of beauty choruses began to tour the country. The most famous ex-serviceman’s beauty chorus was ‘Les Rouges et Noirs’, or *Splinters*, whose success eventually led them to the silver screen. The *Splinters* leading ‘lady’ was Reg Stone, who had joined the concert party during the war and subsequently became a favourite in theatres across the country. The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* exclaimed; ‘as chief accomplice Reg Stone is quite the best female impersonator we have seen and has brought this branch of acting to a fine art with widely entertaining results.’<sup>366</sup> Although the key aim appears to have been to present soldiers as convincing, beautiful women, reviews and advertisements again focused on the humour of the performances, much as they had before the war. An advertisement for one of their performances in Sheffield read;

the First Army Entertainers known in France as “LES ROUGES ET NOIRS,” in the “SPLINTERS IN 1922” (in which every “lady” is a gentleman), “Every Artiste a Soldier – every Soldier an Artiste.” “The Show that made the battle-front rock with laughter and has since made all England laugh.”<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1.

<sup>366</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 5 October 1926, p.9.

<sup>367</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 19 August 1922, p.1.

The group toured for five years with continuing success, and Stone appeared at a number of theatres in Yorkshire throughout the 1920s.<sup>368</sup> Though no other groups of female impersonators made up entirely of ex-servicemen appeared to have had the same level of success and celebrity as *Les Rouges*, there were a number of others who tried to emulate the famous group such as the 'Blondes and Brunettes' and 'The Follies'. The Blondes and Brunettes were managed by Mr Claude A. Dunn who, like Reg Stone, had appeared as a female impersonator on the variety stage before and during the war.<sup>369</sup>

The popularity of cross-dressing amongst servicemen during the war clearly played a role in the continued popularity of glamour drag. While glamour drag was not a direct product of the war, the First World War could be seen as the beginning of the end for this style of theatrical female impersonation in mainstream culture. By the 1930s, female impersonators were mentioned in increasingly fewer advertisements for music hall and variety theatre.<sup>370</sup> Despite the declining popularity of glamour drag the dame remained a prominent feature of popular entertainment. As will be explored in later chapters, the decline in popularity of the music hall has often been attributed to the rise of cinema. Female impersonators did transfer from the stage to the screen, but they were no longer solo acts. Instead, they often formed a central role in the narrative.<sup>371</sup> In contrast the dame retained her place in pantomime and also appeared on screen.

Houlbrook has argued that there was a significant growth in links between cross-dressing and sexual 'deviance' in the 1930s which he attributes to a 'string of 'pansy cases'' and an increase in the policing of gender variant behaviour in the capital.<sup>372</sup> While many of the cases Houlbrook is referring to took place in London, a number were reported in Yorkshire papers,

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<sup>368</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 17 June 1924, p.3 : *Leeds Mercury*, 10 August 1922, p.6 : *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 8 August 1922, p.1 : *Leeds Mercury*, 17 September 1927, p.3 and *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 19 August 1922, p.5.

<sup>369</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 15 November 1929, p.7.

<sup>370</sup> A search of the term 'female impersonator' in the BNA online catalogue reveals 317 results in newspapers produced in Yorkshire and the Humber between 1925 and 1930. In contrast, the same search revealed just 169 results between 1935 and 1940.

<sup>371</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

<sup>372</sup> Houlbrook, 'Lady Austin's Camp Boys', 34.

and therefore had the potential to influence how the act was understood in the north.<sup>373</sup> Despite clear differentiations between theatrical female impersonation and cross-dressing on the street, Vickers and Jackson noted that; ‘Various historians and academics have concluded that male-to-female cross-dressing, both on and off the stage, was, by 1939, linked unproblematically to same-sex desire and more importantly, identity.’<sup>374</sup> Despite this, the pantomime dame has continued to reappear every Christmas to engage in a chorus of “Oh no it isn’t!” and “Oh yes it is!” with audiences across the country.

Different styles of female impersonation held different meanings for both performer and audience. Not all female impersonation was seen as emblematic of same-sex sex or desire. The dame mocked older women and was desexualized in a way that made her presence more comforting than troubling. Secondly, I argue that the relationship between same-sex sex and masculinity needs to be analysed with more nuance in this period. Female impersonation as a theatrical tradition began out of necessity but developed into one of the most popular comedic tropes in music hall and pantomime throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The development of two distinct ‘types’ of female impersonation is evidence of the numerous ways the act could be experienced and understood. In Yorkshire at least, it was not links with same-sex desire that rendered glamour drag less popular in the 1930s. This was instead due to a decline in the popularity of music hall. The following chapters demonstrate that cross-dressing remained a popular feature of British comedy and culture, particularly on film. However, this is not to say that female impersonation was completely free from links to same-sex desire. As Smith has shown, same-sex sex was not necessarily linked to any particular identity

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<sup>373</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 21 December 1932, p.11 : *Leeds Mercury*, 10 June 1930, p.3 : *Sheffield Independent*, 16 November 1931, p.8 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 3 June 1935, p.1 : *Leeds Mercury*, 21 January 1932, p.5 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 31 January 1930, p.3 : *Leeds Mercury*, 10 June 1930, p.3 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 January 1932, p.2 : *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 1 January 1932, p.3 : *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 January 1932, p.5 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 1 July 1933, p.1, and *Hull Daily Mail*, 3 June 1935, p.1.

<sup>374</sup> Vickers and Jackson, ‘Sanctuary or Sissy?’, 47.

or ‘type’ in the North at least until the 1950s.<sup>375</sup> In the latter half of the century, apart from the pantomime dame, female impersonation as entertainment became increasingly associated with queer culture.

#### 2.4 Stars of the Stage

The Yorkshire stage was frequented by an incredible number of female impersonators between 1860 and 1939. Amongst the hundreds of men who dressed as women on the Yorkshire stage were a number of particular favourites who gained local and national celebrity. Max Waldon, a German performer, was one of Yorkshire’s favourite female impersonators and appeared regularly in various halls and theatres between 1899 and 1911.<sup>376</sup> He was not only praised for his realistic female impersonations and convincing female soprano but was also a ‘skilled quick-change artiste’ and, had the ability to switch the tone of his voice from masculine to feminine at the drop of hat.<sup>377</sup> Waldon’s act revealed a number of skills and he frequently impressed reviewers:

Mr Max Waldon, as a lady impersonator, is in the front rank of entertainers, and the Fregoli [sic] like changes from the ballet dancer to the operatic artiste, and the French chanteuse were remarkably clever and convincing.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 3.

<sup>376</sup> *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 1 August 1899, p.5 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 25 October 1899, p.1 : *Leeds Mercury*, May 8, 1900, p.7 : *Driffield Times*, 7 June 1902, p.2 : *Beverley and East Riding Recorder*, 20 June 1903, p.4 : *Leeds Mercury*, 26 May 1906, p.4: *Halifax Evening Courier*, 30 June 1906, p.1 : *Leeds Mercury*, 24 July 1907, p.4 : *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 October 1908, p.1 : *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 3 May 1910, p.5 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 9 October 1911, p.1 : *Leeds Mercury*, 5 October 1911, p.4 . Despite his international celebrity, Waldon’s private life remains a mystery. Like many of the men who appear in this chapter, Waldon never appeared in a newspaper for any reason other than his profession. With no known ego documents publicly available we cannot, and should not, try to understand how Waldon considered his female impersonation in relation to his identity. Waldon’s allusiveness is cemented through a search of census records. In the United Kingdom’s census in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Waldon is just one example of many professional female impersonators who completely disappeared after they retired from the stage. However, there are some men who left behind evidence of their lives beyond the stage who’s experiences can further knowledge about what it meant to be a female impersonator who performed in Yorkshire.

<sup>377</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 10 June 1902, p.4 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 24 June 1903, p.4 : *Leeds Mercury*, 7 July 1903, p.4 : *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 22 March 1910, p.5, and *Todmorden & District News*, 6 July 1906, p.4.

<sup>378</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 25 July 1899, p.3.



Reports praise Waldon for his cleverness, perfection of his voice, make-up, dress and dance, but the talent that featured in almost every review and advertisement and set him apart as 'Europe's' most polished female impersonator', was his ability to portray a variety of incredibly realistic women.<sup>379</sup> Davis has argued that female-impersonators who looked too glamorous or too

<sup>379</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 22 March 1910, p.5 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 27 October 1908, p.11 : *Leeds Mercury*, 7 July 1903, p.4 : *Todmorden & District News*, 6 July 1906, p.4 and *Hull Daily Mail*, 24 June 1903, p.5.

feminine were deemed dangerous due to their potential to incite male sexual desire.<sup>380</sup> Davis argued that it was in keeping the true sex of the performer evident that gender variance remained popular.<sup>381</sup> To counteract this, the performer revealing their ‘true sex’ during or at the end of the act became a popular trope in cross-dressed performance from the 1890s until the mid-twentieth century, and Waldon joined in this tradition.<sup>382</sup> Alongside these revelations Waldon and his contemporaries did not use female pseudonyms and as a result the audience were aware that they had come to see the performer ‘Max Waldon’ and were not watching a woman on the stage. Retaining a masculine name served as a constant reminder of his ‘true sex’. Bailey notes this shift between ‘role and self, artifice and autobiography’ has been a key part of the music hall genre. He argues that ‘it secured a distinctive relationship with the audience by initiating them into the mysteries of the performer’s craft and giving them a consequent sense of select inclusion.’<sup>383</sup> In letting the audience in on his ‘secret’ Waldon’s act created space for his audiences to experience a wide variety of pleasures.

Quinton Gibson was born in Scarborough in 1862 and become another favourite on the Yorkshire stage in the 1890s and 1900s. He was renowned for his convincing impersonations and ‘feminine beauty’.<sup>384</sup> Gibson claimed to have performed in every music hall in the country between 1887 and 1910. His success gained him the title of ‘world-renowned Lady Impersonator’ in the Yorkshire press.<sup>385</sup> In addition to his convincing female impersonation and expert vocal range, he was also known to give impressive mandolin performances.<sup>386</sup> Despite his skill with a mandolin, according to the *York Herald* part of the appeal, cleverness, and comedy of his act was found in the uncertainty surrounding his biological sex:

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<sup>380</sup> Davis, ‘Slap on! Slap Ever!’, 218.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid*, 218-231.

<sup>382</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, ‘24 June 1903, p.4 and *Hull Daily Mail*, 10 June 1902, p.4.

<sup>383</sup> Bailey, ‘Conspiracies of Meaning’, 144-145.

<sup>384</sup> Ancestry.com. England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2007, and *York Herald*, 29 October 1891, p.3.

<sup>385</sup> *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 16 May 1904, p.1.

<sup>386</sup> *York Herald*, 29 October 1891, p.3.

The great attraction of the evening was the marvellous female impersonations and mandolin performances of Mr. Quinton Gibson. When this finished [the] singer first came before the audience, dressed after the style of a lady artiste, and singing a fine soprano voice, there was much difference of opinion as to the sex of the impersonator, only, however to be rudely set at rest in the serio-comic song "So Shy." Mr. Gibson may well be proud of the showers of applause his evident desire to please evoked. He was recalled at the close of each impersonation, and deservedly so.<sup>387</sup>

The *Hull Daily Mail* also drew attention to the appeal of Gibson's convincing portrayal at the Leeds Empire theatre;

Quinton Gibson created much amusement when, after his impersonation, he revealed his manhood. The female portion of the audience had, especially been "taken in!"<sup>388</sup>

The paper's choice to note that the female portion of the audience had been 'tricked' more than the male audience members points towards a certain level of uncertainty surrounding the potential for men to be fooled by female impersonators and perhaps the possibility for glamorous female impersonators to incite homosexual desire. If Gibson's act only fooled female members of the audience, then the possibility of inciting male desire was removed. If we follow Davis' argument that the most dangerous part of female impersonation was the possibility of inciting sexual desire, then it is understandable that the *Hull Daily Mail* would attempt to protect this popular performer and his fans by suggesting that it was only the women who were tricked by his disguise.<sup>389</sup> This example appears to be the exception in the 1890s rather than the rule. In general, theatrical reviews and advertisements make no obvious attempts to justify the propriety of cross-dressed performances or audience's enjoyment of them. That this is the exception rather than the rule is indicative of female impersonation's relatively unproblematic place in popular entertainment culture.

Outside of his career on the stage, Gibson became the manager of The People's Palace theatre in Scarborough in 1900, and in 1915 he became the proprietor of the Picture Drome

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<sup>387</sup> *York Herald*, 29 October 1891, p.3.

<sup>388</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 4 November 1896, p.4.

<sup>389</sup> Davis, 'Slap on Slap Ever!', 224.

Picture House (also in Scarborough).<sup>390</sup> A successful businessman, Gibson appears to have lived a relatively heteronormative life. In 1916 *The Bioscope* reported the marriage of ‘Marian Gibson the only Daughter of Mr and Mrs Quinton Gibson the well-known lessees of the Picturedrome [sic] and the Picture House, Scarborough’.<sup>391</sup> Despite his receipt of a fine of £1 in 1916 for ‘allowing children under the age of 14 years to attend the picture shows without being in the charge of adults’, Gibson appears to have become a respectable businessman after retiring from the stage.<sup>392</sup> His career, coupled with his family life, demonstrates his conformity to traditional notions of masculinity, demonstrating that men could be both professional female impersonators and retain a sense of respectable masculinity through conforming to norms of gendered behaviour away from the stage. It is possible that his conformity in his private life also made his performances seem more ‘acceptable.’

Although born in Birmingham, Bert Errol was a particular favourite on the music hall and pantomime stages of Yorkshire. Errol, like Gibson, lived an outwardly heteronormative life beyond the stage. Born in Birmingham, Errol fascinated audiences across the country in the early twentieth century and his ‘natural soprano voice’ and convincing portrayals of female characters also gained him popularity in America.<sup>393</sup> Errol built a successful career as female impersonator in both variety theatres and in pantomime appearing regularly on the Yorkshire stage from the 1910s to the 1930s.<sup>394</sup> Tracing Errol through the census records was a difficult process. At some points he appears as Isaac Whitehouse, others as Bert Errol, and in 1918 he joined the

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<sup>390</sup> *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 12 May 1900, p.2, and *The Bioscope*, April 1915, p.30.

<sup>391</sup> *The Bioscope*, 17 August 1916, p.102.

<sup>392</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 2 March 1916, p.1.

<sup>393</sup> *Nottingham Evening Post*, 25 January 1929, p.4.

<sup>394</sup> *The People*, 26 December 1915, p.4, *Leeds Mercury*, 21 March 1916, p.5, *Sheffield Independent*, 6 April 1916, p.3, *Hull Daily Mail*, 19 May 1922, p.7, *Leeds Mercury*, 8 September 1928, p.6, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 17 September 1927, p.5, and *Hull Daily Mail*, 1 May 1931, p.12.



Freemason's under 'Isaac Brown as Bert Whitehouse Errol.'<sup>395</sup> In his early years, Errol was primarily a glamour drag artist, though as he grew older and his 'looks began to fade' he took on an increasing number of dame roles. Errol was married to Ray Errol, also known as Rachel Whitehouse, who remained with him as he travelled around the country.<sup>396</sup> That Ray travelled the with Errol suggests that the pair had a fairly close marriage. The image of the Errol's idealised



family life was further reiterated when the couple's daughter, Betty, began to appear alongside her father in variety acts, before successfully 'going it alone' in the world of pantomime and variety theatre.<sup>397</sup> The very public image of the Errol's as a family who worked and performed together would have helped to garner an image of respectability for this well-known artist.

Errol's status as a respectable female impersonator was further substantiated during

the First World War. Throughout the war, some female impersonators continued to perform on the home front and Errol was one of a small number who continued to entertain the nation throughout the conflict. His impersonations were increasingly framed by the press as a form of war service as they were often produced to entertain servicemen and their families.<sup>398</sup> This could link to a wider reframing of roles and behaviours in wartime. Traditionally feminine roles took on new meanings making traditionally feminine roles somewhat more acceptable for men to

<sup>395</sup> Library and Museum of Freemasonry; London, England; Freemasonry Membership Registers: London A Lodges Grand Stewards Lodge to 87 to London B; Reel Number: 32.

<sup>396</sup> Year: 1926, Arrival: New York, New York; Microfilm Serial: 1715. 1897-1957: Roll 3956; Line:1; Page Number: 12 and The National Archives of the UK: Kew, Surrey, England; Board of Trade: Commercial and Statistical Department and Successors: Inwards Passenger Lists; Class BT26; Piece 686, and *The Era*, 31 August 1932, p.5.

<sup>397</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 8 September 1928, p.6, and *The Era*, 9 November 1927, p.26.

<sup>398</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 'Cheering the Wounded', 6 April 1916, p.3.

perform because of the ‘exceptional’ circumstances of war.<sup>399</sup> For example in December 1915, Errol appeared as one of the ugly sisters in a production of *Cinderella* at the London Palladium alongside two other female impersonators, Mr Ivan Berlyn and Mr. Victor Crawford.<sup>400</sup> *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* noted that the audience for the preview of this show ‘consisted almost entirely of wounded officers and soldiers, their wives and families’, thus the intent behind the pantomime was to provide a service to the country through entertaining its war heroes.<sup>401</sup> However, after April 1916 Bert Errol can no longer be found in Yorkshire newspapers, and does not emerge again until 1918. Rather than being due to a decline in Errol’s popularity during the war years it is possible that Errol, like many performers, was affected by the 1916 entertainments tax which increased the price of cinema and theatre tickets and negatively affected audience numbers.<sup>402</sup> There was of course also the issue of paper rationing which may have resulted in fewer press advertisements for theatre. London based newspapers *The Stage* and *The Era* reveal that Errol continued to perform in London for the remainder of the war.<sup>403</sup> In 1919 Errol, along with other female impersonators and variety artists returned to stages across the country in seemingly higher numbers than ever before. These findings make further contributions to the wider debates surrounding continuity and change in relation to First World War and gender.

Errol’s all-star variety family reflected norms of masculinity, as did Gibson’s successful career and family life. That these men appeared to live relatively ‘normative’ lives beyond the stage raises questions about how we define a ‘queer act’. Both Gibson and Errol’s deaths were remembered when they passed away in 1957 and 1949 respectively. However, their deaths were not as widely reported as one may have expected for two men who had such successful careers

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<sup>399</sup> Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2009)

<sup>400</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 27 December 1915, p.4.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>402</sup> According to Trevor Griffiths, ‘Within weeks of its introduction, the tax was being blamed for a marked downturn in business beyond that normally expected in the summer months.’ Trevor Griffiths, ‘Quantifying an ‘Essential Social Habit’: The Entertainments Tax and Cinemagoing in Britain, 1916–1934,’ *Film History*, 31:1 (2019), pp. 1–26 (15).

<sup>403</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 February 1917, p.3 : *The Era*, 27 September 1916, p.6 : *The Era*, 10 May 1916, p.5 : *The People*, 11 June 1916, p.4.

across the country. Errol's death was only reported in 6 of the digitised newspapers in the BNA, only one of those being a Yorkshire paper.<sup>404</sup> Amongst these, *The Stage* was the only paper that named Errol as a *female* impersonator, all the other reports simply referred to him as 'variety artist and impersonator'.<sup>405</sup> Gibson's death on the other hand, was only reported in *The Stage*, despite his previous country-wide fame.<sup>406</sup> The popularity of variety declined significantly in the 1930s and the stars of variety no longer frequented the popular press which could account for the lack of press attention surrounding their deaths. When variety returned in the 1950s, female impersonators were mostly absent from the bills with the acceptance of the occasional dame style character such as Danny La Rue. It appears that men like Gibson and Errol were almost intentionally forgotten, the memory of a country who rejoiced at the sight of a man transformed into a beautiful woman was perhaps not one that was fondly looked upon in period when concerns surrounding homosexuality were being increasingly voiced in the public domain. By the 1950s cross-dressing was more often linked to 'queerness' or a queer identity than not. In addition, the debates surrounding de-criminalisation of homosexuality had led to a stigma surrounding feminine men and the creation of a homosexual 'type'.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Female impersonation in a theatrical setting was not only widely accepted but enjoyed by numerous audiences in Yorkshire. However, the wide press coverage of trials of men who were arrested in women's clothes makes it unlikely that the public would have been completely unaware of potential links between cross-dressing and 'queer' sexual behaviour. This means that theatrical cross-dressing was interpreted differently to cross-dressing outside of entertainment

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<sup>404</sup> *The Stage*, 8 December 1949, p.3 : *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 30 November 1949, p.2 : *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 29 November 1949 p.19 : *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, 29 November 1949, p.1 : *Lincolnshire Echo*, 29 November 1949, p.6 : *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 29 November 1949, p.6.

<sup>405</sup> *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 30 November 1949, p.2 : *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 29 November 1949, p.19 : *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, 29 November 1949, p.1 : *Lincolnshire Echo*, 29 November 1949, p.6 : *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 29 November 1949, p.6.

<sup>406</sup> *The Stage*, 29 August 1957, p.5.

space. In showing that connotations of same-sex -sex were never completely removed from understandings of the male cross-dresser, this chapter has demonstrated that there was a silent acceptance of same-sex desire and same-sex sex in this period, as Smith has suggested.<sup>407</sup> This chapter problematises the conceptualisation of cross-dressing as regional queer history. There is little evidence to suggest that the majority of men who cross-dressed in theatre conformed to anything other than hegemonic norms of sex and gender outside of the theatre, for some men cross-dressing on the stage was part of an otherwise heteronormative identity and lifestyle.

Theatrical female impersonation was accepted and enjoyed by audiences across the county. Rodger Baker has claimed that by the 1920s, the new brand of very convincing and alluring female impersonators had become ‘an almost transparent cover for homosexual flirtation’.<sup>408</sup> However, as this chapter has shown, because same-sex sex was not particularly linked with an identity or type in the North these links did not influence the popularity of female impersonation until at least the 1950s. The interwar period witnessed a significant increase in the circulation of information about same-sex desire. However, despite this increase in awareness and understanding, ‘public discussion was veiled under a pervasive stigma of silence. In the press, the issue was rarely discussed in open terms.’<sup>409</sup> When coupled with the continued popularity of theatrical female impersonation, this shows a level of acceptance of gender variance and possibly also same-sex desire if it remained within the realm of the theatre.

Theatre, whether amateur or professional, provided a space in which gender transgressions could be accepted because there was no suggestion that this was part of everyday life. As the next chapter demonstrates, men who cross-dressed on the street were not afforded such freedom and were almost always treated as deviant and transgressive. Although the theatrical history of cross-dressing overlaps and intertwines with the narrative of cross-dressing

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<sup>407</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*.

<sup>408</sup> Baker, *Drag*, 188.

<sup>409</sup> Vickers, *Same Sex Desire*, 30-31.

as a deviant act, analysing cross-dressing in Yorkshire theatres opens up a narrative of acceptance in which cross-dressing in theatre was deemed a part of normative entertainment culture.

### Chapter 3: At the Carnival

Clement Mitchell's arrest for 'masquerading as a woman' was discussed in the previous chapter. But one of the many intriguing aspects of Mitchell's case was that he had won prizes for his female impersonation at local carnivals prior to his arrest.<sup>410</sup> Following on from this case, this chapter will analyse male-to-female cross-dressing in carnivals, galas, and other community fundraising events. In doing so it will focus on developing a detailed understanding of carnival as a space in which cross-dressing was accepted and enjoyed. I argue that carnival turned the same streets discussed in previous chapters, where men in female-coded clothing were at best treated with suspicion and at worst arrested, into spaces where cross-dressing was embraced and enjoyed as community and family entertainment. Mitchell's status as a regular prize winner in the category of 'best female impersonator' at local charity events was used in court to justify his cross-dressing and to explain away any suggestions of deviance. This therefore positioned the act as socially acceptable in this space. However, as previous chapters have demonstrated, cross-dressing cannot be defined in simple binaries of acceptance and deviance. I argue that the act is best understood as existing on a scale of acceptability. As I will show, cross-dressing in carnival was situated on the acceptable end of this scale. However, the act's very potential for deviance was part of what made it so enjoyable in a space that privileged ideas of misrule. In contrast to the theatre and the court, carnival was a space where the working-class public were as central to the construction and performance of female impersonation as they were to its consumption. Analysing female impersonation in Yorkshire carnival opens up discussions surrounding masculinity and gender non-conformity while also raising questions about the relationship between cross-dressing, community, charity, class, and region. This chapter will explore these themes through the lens of carnival misrule as the inverse of the rule of law which governed the

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<sup>410</sup> *Leominster News and North West Herefordshire & Radnorshire Advertiser*, 15 October 1909, p.6.

first chapter. These themes will also be explored as a means to further understand the circumstances in which men were granted freedoms to subvert gendered codes of dress.

Using the space of carnival as an analytic tool reveals the boundaries of hegemonic ideals of gendered behaviour. As Zemon-Davis has argued:

rather than being a mere “safety-valve”, deflecting attention from social reality, festive life can on the one hand perpetuate certain values of the community, even guarantee its survival, and on the other hand, criticize political order.<sup>411</sup>

Following Zemon-Davis’ argument, this chapter shows how the disruptive power of cross-dressing reflected the communities from which it emerged. By exploring cross-dressing in a space in which it was accepted, this chapter continues to make new interventions into a historiography which has for a long time linked cross-dressing outside of the theatre almost explicitly to same-sex sex.<sup>412</sup> By exploring cross-dressing’s acceptance in carnival, this chapter complicates and ‘queers’ present-day understandings of masculinity by disrupting simple binaries of masculine and feminine, ‘queer’ and ‘normative’. It also highlights the incongruity of modern ideas of acceptable gendered behaviour with experiences of men who cross-dressed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

By moving away from Bakhtin’s analysis of the carnivalesque, this chapter follows Dion Georgiou’s approach to the study of twentieth-century carnival. It acknowledges the geographic specificities of the spaces in which these events took place.<sup>413</sup> However, it also analyses carnival as a space of misrule. Carnival misrule, as a cultural phenomenon, has remained heavily rooted in medieval and early modern histories of carnival festivities and political unrest.<sup>414</sup> The idea of

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<sup>411</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, ‘The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France’, *Past & Present* 50 (1971), 41-75 (41).

<sup>412</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London* : Sinfield, *The Wilde Century* : Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality*.

<sup>413</sup> Dion Georgiou, ‘Redefining the Carnavalesque: The Construction of Ritual, Revelry and Spectacle in British Leisure Practices through the Idea and Model of ‘Carnival’ 1870–1939’, *Sport in History*, 35:3 (2015), 335-363, (336). See also Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984).

<sup>414</sup> Robert Hornback, ‘The Reasons of Misrule Revisited: Evangelical Appropriations of Carnival in Tudor Revels’, *Early Theatre*, 10:1 (2007), 35 -65 : Max Harris, *Sacred Folly: A New History of the Feast of Fools* (London: Cornell University Press, 2011) : Max Harris, *Carnival and Other Christian Festivals: Folk Theology and Folk Performance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003) : Chris Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) : Catherine Dille, ‘The Eton Montem Custom c. 1750–1844:

misrule is somewhat absent from twentieth-century historiography of carnival, yet as this chapter demonstrates, misrule played a role in sanctioning behaviours which would be deemed inadmissible in other contexts. Perhaps due to its provincial nature, carnival has not been a popular subject with historians of the twentieth century. One exception to this is Georgiou whose work presents carnivals as events which both ‘recycled old themes, but also consciously embraced modernity’.<sup>415</sup> Misrule in the traditional sense is ‘characterized by licence, parody, and inversion’.<sup>416</sup> In early modern carnivals the tradition of misrule could sanction inversions of class, office, and station.<sup>417</sup> Cross-dressing in twentieth-century carnival often represented a parody of womanhood and in the case of the carnival queen, also represented a subversion of class and station. If carnival misrule could licence transgressions of class, authority, and patriarchal forms of control, then the subversion of gender in carnival, for the purposes of entertainment, can be categorized as an aspect of misrule.<sup>418</sup>

However, it was not solely the idea of carnival that licenced these gender transgressions but the fact that cross-dressing in this context was part of a performance. The nature of cross-dressing as both performance and as an act of misrule separated the act from reality. While cross-dressing can be read as characteristic of misrule in its parody of the gendered body, to view the act as sanctioned only by misrule ignores its acceptance in a range of other contexts such as theatre and film.<sup>419</sup> In addition, the geographic specificity of carnival also influenced how gendered performances within these events were understood. The reign of misrule contributed to carnival becoming a space where men were free to transgress gendered codes of dress and to

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Privilege, Pageantry and Sanctioned Misrule’, *Cultural and Social History*, 15:3 (2018), 361-377 : Keith Thomas, *Rule and Misrule in the Schools of Early Modern England* (Reading: University of Reading, 1976).

<sup>415</sup> Dion Georgiou, ‘The Drab Suburban Streets were Metamorphosed into a Veritable Fairyland’: Spectacle and Festivity in The Ilford Hospital Carnival, 1905–1914, *The London Journal*, 39:3, (2014), 227-248 (227). See also Dion Georgiou, ‘Only a local affair?’ Imagining and Enacting Locality Through London’s Boer War Carnivals’, *Urban History*, 45 (2017) 100-127 : Dion Georgiou, ‘Restaging Mafeking in Muswell Hill: Performing Patriotism and Charitability in London’s Boer War carnivals’, *Historical Research*, 91 (2018), 744-771 : Georgiou, ‘Redefining the Carnavalesque’, 335-363.

<sup>416</sup> Clifford Davidson, *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 12–13.

<sup>417</sup> Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2003), 110.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid* 94.

<sup>419</sup> See chapter two and chapter four.



push against the boundaries of acceptability. The village carnival was a space that centred on community and was accessible to men from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. In late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Yorkshire, these villages often centred on one or two main industries. Communities not only lived in close quarters but worked and socialised together too. Because the carnivals were free to watch and participate in, they were accessible to the entire community and could be attended by everyone from the factory foreman to seasonal workers, and even the unemployed.

These close-knit communities were predominantly working-class, therefore analysis of male-to-female cross-dressing in these types of community entertainments highlights the significance of cross-dressing in working-class entertainment culture. These events were developed, performed, and experienced by working-class people in their local towns and villages. Because of this, unlike the cinema or the music hall, these events reveal what working-class people found entertaining when given the freedom to perform in, and produce, the events themselves. However, as the final section of this chapter will show, these traditions were not solely the domain of the working classes. Student 'rag' weeks often contain some of the same traditions, though while the carnival involved the whole family, it was only young students, presumably free from the commitments of home and family, who performed in the university rag. One of the main links between the student rag and the village carnival was the style of clothing worn by men who cross-dressed. While it is possible that this style of 'unconvincing' female impersonation was influenced by a lack of resources rather than being a direct choice, it still positioned the male body at the centre of the spectacle. Thus, analysis of cross-dressing in carnival also reinforces the argument made in previous chapters that both context and style of cross-dressing were central to defining the acceptability of the act. This chapter will argue that a certain style of cross-dressing in this very specific context could actually serve to reinforce masculine identity through emphasising gender binaries and strengthening hegemonic gender ideals. By moving beyond the analysis of cross-dressing in the professional space of the theatre

and the deviant space of the court and instead examining the act in the very public and predominantly working-class space of local community events in Yorkshire, this chapter demonstrates the significance of exploring gender variant behaviour away from the realm of the ‘transgressive’ act.

The carnival was undoubtedly a public space, and this is reflected in the sources used in this chapter. All of the sources considered were made for, and consumed by, the general public. While newspapers had to be purchased and tickets were required to view the films screened at local cinemas, the galas, carnivals, and fetes were open to all. The key to understanding cross-dressing in carnival relies on an understanding of its public nature, but also in understanding that this was all still contained to a local area. The films were shown in local cinemas, the reports could be found in the local press, and those who attended village carnivals were usually from that village, or at least somewhere relatively nearby.<sup>420</sup> The visibility of performers within these spaces makes them arguably more ‘public’, identifiable, or more visible than those who donned female attire on the music hall stage. There is a level of distance afforded to performers on stage which was not available to those who cross-dressed in carnival. This chapter argues that it was knowing, and being known by, one’s audience that allowed men to cross-dress in this context without challenging their masculinity.

Regional press coverage of carnivals usually included a comment on the weather, a note of thanks to the organisers, a report of the amount raised, and a list of prize winners in the sports competitions and fancy-dress parades. Nestled amongst the prizes for ‘best children’s fancy dress’, ‘best tradesmen’s float’, and ‘best decorated shop front’, one can frequently find the category ‘best female impersonator’.<sup>421</sup> Little more information is given about the prize winners

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<sup>420</sup> Although attendees seem to never have been recorded, examining lists of exhibitors and competitors in activities from hammer throwing to the fancy dress parade reveals very few people participated in events like these outside of their local area.

<sup>421</sup> *Todmorden & District News*, 2 March 1894, p.5 : *Wharfedale & Airedale Observer*, 16 June 1899, p.7 : *Shipley Times and Express*, 1 September 1900, p.5 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 10 June 1907, p.8 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 16 August 1909, p.2 : *Sheffield Independent*, 26 September 1921, p.3 : *Leeds Mercury*, 4 August 1925, p.5 : *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 13

aside from their name and occasionally their place of residence, but the volume and ubiquity of these notes that appear in Yorkshire press in the summer months is astounding. The volume of these articles alone demonstrates the normativity of female impersonation in Yorkshire carnivals. Although reports of female impersonators in Yorkshire carnivals began to appear in the regional press in 1901, images of these events do not appear regularly in regional newspapers until after the First World War.<sup>422</sup> This period also saw the growth in film production providing a further window into these events.<sup>423</sup>

Alongside photographs from newspapers, this chapter makes use of footage from both the Yorkshire Film Archive (YFA) and the British Film Institute (BFI). Both archives are home to a significant collection of films covering local entertainment in Yorkshire. These films provide insight into how these events were structured, what the parade looked like, how the competitors put their costumes together, how people behaved, and who watched the parade, whilst most importantly showing the female impersonators in the context of the event. Being able to see how men moved when dressed as women in these parades provides important and intricate detail about how they performed gender. As Butler states, gender ‘must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.’<sup>424</sup> As carnival centred on visual spectacle, technological developments in photography and film make the interwar period the ideal moment to study cross-dressing in this space. Through analysing cross-dressing with a dual focus, not just as the act itself, but also as part of carnival and entertainment, and as an act seen through the relatively new technology of film, we are able to explore the detail of its historical specificities and significance. This chapter

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June 1927, p.12 : *Leeds Mercury*, 7 April 1931, p.3 : *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 16 July 1934, p.3 : *Shipley Times and Express*, 22 August 1936, p.4.

<sup>422</sup>This is likely due to the growth in newspaper readership during the war significantly increasing the income for regional papers and therefore increasing the scope for newspapers to print images. Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press In Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.1.

<sup>423</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

<sup>424</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 191.

also builds on evidence from regional archive collections which contained programmes and posters from galas, fetes, and carnivals.

### 3.1 Carnival and the Yorkshire Community

Georgiou has argued that from the late Victorian period until the interwar period ‘carnival’ was a descriptive term used for a variety of leisure activities, though it later came to denote ‘a more specific type of event designed to raise funds for charity, initially centred...on a procession but increasingly incorporating a diverse range of other popular cultural forms.’<sup>425</sup> Georgiou highlights the concrete realities of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century carnivals and notes three unifying elements of carnival:

firstly, an emphasis on ritual and its continuing significance within the temporal configuration of modern capitalism; secondly, a signification of revelry, in a manner reflecting liberalisation of attitudes to usage of space time; and thirdly, a privileging of the spectacular with a demarcation of watchers and watched derived from the world of commercial entertainment but frequently applied outside that sphere.<sup>426</sup>

The presence of the cross-dressed man symbolises the liberalisation of attitudes noted by Georgiou and also played a role in the signification of revelry. Much like the music hall, carnival was a space in which cross-dressed men were placed at the centre of the festivities as they led and performed in the parade. From the last few decades of the nineteenth century until at least the 1940s, the defining feature of a local carnival was its parade. In 1919 *The Hull Daily Mail* claimed that the parade at the British Legion Carnival in Hull in was ‘over a mile long,’ and ‘the best the county has seen’.<sup>427</sup> The participants in these parades were awarded prizes in various categories from ‘best turned out horse’ and ‘best tradesmen’s float’, to ‘best comic costume’ and ‘best female impersonator’.<sup>428</sup> Although cross-dressing in carnival was not, at a glance, completely dissimilar to cross-dressing on stage, the spaces of carnival and theatre differ significantly.

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<sup>425</sup> Georgiou, ‘Redefining’, 335-336.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>427</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 18 July 1919, p.1.

<sup>428</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 3 August 1914, p.5 : *Todmorden & District News*, 9 March 1923, p.4 : *Leeds Mercury*, 23 July 1928, p.1 : *Todmorden & District News*, 7 August 1931, p.5 : *Shipley Times and Express*, 22 August 1936, p.4.

Carnival was a public event that took place on the street, but most importantly it took place in the centre of local community. Carnival processions usually made their way down the main street of the village through spaces of commerce, past homes, and sometimes through church grounds. The parade was not confined to a single entertainment space such as the theatre where the roles between watcher and watched were clearly defined. Instead, carnival turned the whole village into a space of revelry and performance.

Carnivals were centred around community, with most towns and villages holding at least one carnival or gala a year, most frequently around the Whitsun celebrations in midsummer. According to Alun Howkins ‘even in 1900 few countrymen travelled further than the nearest market town at Whitsun.’<sup>429</sup> Therefore carnivals would rarely have been attended by ‘outsiders’ and both performers and audience were drawn from nearby areas. Carnival was primarily a working-class space, and for the poorest members of Yorkshire society who did not have access to music halls and variety theatres, carnival was likely to have been the primary space in which they witnessed female impersonation. Although the working-classes were accessing theatres and music hall with increasing ease in this period, music hall entertainment was still not accessible to the poorest sections of the working-class. According to Stephen Counce, this would have been particularly true for farm workers who made up a significant part of the population in rural areas of Yorkshire.<sup>430</sup> Many farm workers had very little spare money or time to spend on commercial leisure activities.<sup>431</sup> Therefore, carnivals were accessible to a much wider cross-section of society as they were often held on national holidays such as Easter or Whit Monday when many workers were free to attend.<sup>432</sup> Although the aim of these events was usually to raise money for a local charity, the organised sports and procession through the village were mostly free to observe.

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<sup>429</sup> Alun Howkins, ‘The Taming of Whitsun: the Changing Face of a Nineteenth-Century Rural Holiday’, 187-208 in Eileen Yeo and Stephen Yeo eds. *Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590-1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure* (Brighton, The Harvester Press Limited, 1981), pp. 187-208 (194).

<sup>430</sup> Counce, *Amongst Farm Horses*, 195.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

As has been demonstrated in previous chapters, community played a significant role in shaping masculine reputation in industrial Yorkshire. That men were able to cross-dress so freely in these community events suggests that cross-dressing did not necessarily challenge masculine reputations. Carnival was a form of leisure through which participants could emphasise their status as upstanding members of the community. These events usually aimed to raise money for a local charitable organisation, often local hospitals, and therefore provided an opportunity for revellers to give back to their community. The charitable nature of these events gave performers and attendees the opportunity to emphasise their good character through their willingness to support a local cause. For the men who attended these events in Yorkshire, community played a central role in the formation of their masculine identity. As demonstrated by Smith, masculine reputation in the north was formed around one's status as a worker, as a reliable husband and father, and as an upstanding member of the community.<sup>433</sup> Smith argues that if a man was already considered to be respectably masculine by their community, this allowed 'other potential transgressions to be forgiven or overlooked.'<sup>434</sup> Working-class culture centred around street culture, neighbourliness and, as Melanie Tebbutt demonstrated, gossip.<sup>435</sup> Gossip not only played a role in monitoring behaviour and shaping social values, but also on building the reputation of individuals. In Yorkshire, if a man's reputation within his community could provide a form of licence to transgress it follows that this could easily transfer to cross-dressing in carnival, especially with the addition of a charitable motive, which in turn would help to present those who participated in carnival as an upstanding member of the community. Because of the charitable nature of carnival, cross-dressing in these events was positioned as benefiting ones community rather than as a fulfilment of individual desire, which is likely to have added to the presentation of the act as more acceptable than deviant.

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<sup>433</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 3.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>435</sup> Melanie Tebbutt, *Women's Talk? A Social History of 'Gossip' in Working-class Neighbourhoods, 1880-1960* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1995), 2-5.

Alongside this, the temporal performative space of the carnival was also important in providing licence to transgress. Davis, Carriger, and Upchurch have all argued that the temporary nature of theatre provided a ‘veil of acceptability’ to cross-dressed performance.<sup>436</sup> Because carnival was a form of theatrical performance this is likely to have transferred to the temporary space of carnival. Alongside the temporal entertainment space, the community setting of carnival could provide opportunities for men to perform another aspect of their personality, or to become somebody completely different, privileges that were usually afforded to those who performed on stage. As Rebecca Mitchell argued of late Victorian fancy-dress balls, the wearing of fancy dress ‘allowed participants to negotiate rather than to escape their self-presentation and their milieu: revealing aspects of their character (including, for men, the novelty of sartorial pleasure)’.<sup>437</sup> As a space in which fancy dress played a central role, carnival could also allow men to explore usually repressed aspects of their personality whilst remaining safe in the knowledge that they were amongst a community who knew that they were a good worker, a good father, or a good son, thus protecting their masculine reputation.

As shown in chapter two, female impersonation in music hall was incredibly popular in the period under discussion. The stage was a space in which boundaries of gendered behaviour could be pushed further and explored under the guise of performance. The characters men portrayed on the stage were not deemed to be reflections of their life outside of the theatre; they were temporary, created solely for entertainment purposes. Although the carnival can be read in a similar way to the stages of music hall and pantomime, the key distinction between the theatre and the events discussed in this chapter is that carnivals took place in community spaces. Organisers, performers, and audience members were all part of the same community. The majority of the men who won first prize in the category for ‘best female impersonator’ in carnivals generally won contests at events close to home. Most of these men appear just once or

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<sup>436</sup> Davis, ‘Slap on!’, 223 : Carriger, ‘The Unnatural History’, 154-155 : Upchurch, ‘Forgetting the Unthinkable’, 129.

<sup>437</sup> Rebecca N. Mitchell, ‘The Victorian Fancy Dress Ball, 1870–1900’, *Fashion Theory* 21:3 (2017), 291-315.

twice in newspaper reports relating to carnival cross-dressing, suggesting that this was a temporary moment of frivolity, rather than an identity choice. Though as Sigel argues in her discussion of cross-dressing during the First World War, men experienced the act as both performer and audience member in a myriad of different ways.<sup>438</sup> One example is E. Wade who won the prize for ‘best female impersonator at the Keighley Friendly Society Gala held in Shipley, a textile town on the outskirts of Bradford, in 1929. Wade travelled just four miles from his home in the small agricultural village of Silsden to the Gala in Shipley, the closest town to Silsden.<sup>439</sup> Despite rigorous newspaper searches, E. Wade does not appear again in the Yorkshire press in the same context, suggesting his foray into female impersonation in carnival may have been a one-off. Similarly, in 1914 an L. Dean of Bradford won the prize for best female impersonator at a street procession in Halifax, just short of eight miles away from his home, and does not again appear in the Yorkshire press for the same reasons.<sup>440</sup>

While most men who appeared at a carnival dressed in female-coded clothing seem to have only done so once or twice, meaning that the act could easily be passed off as a joke or a moment of frivolity to help raise money for a local cause, there were some men who were more regular competitors and winners for the prize of best female impersonator. W. Haynes of Askern, a small farming village on the edge of Doncaster, took first prize in the fancy-dress contest at the 1918 ‘annual athletic carnival in aid of Doncaster Royal Infirmary’, which took place before 4,000 spectators.<sup>441</sup> In this instance the paper does not tell us what costume Haynes was wearing but his later appearances suggest he may have been cross-dressed. Two summers after the Doncaster carnival, Haynes is reported as winning first prize for best female impersonator at the ‘Chapeltown Comic Band Contest and Gala’ which took place near Sheffield

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<sup>438</sup> Sigel, ‘Best Love’, 104-108.

<sup>439</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 17 June 1929, p.6.

<sup>440</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 22 June 1914, p.5. There is a possibility that this L. Dean was in fact Leslie Dean who was discussed in chapter two and was arrested in Doncaster for the theft of a wig from a fancy dress repository in 1909, though aside from their penchant for female impersonation there is no other evidence to link to two.

<sup>441</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 15 July 1918, p.3.



in June 1920.<sup>442</sup> Just a few months later, Haynes won first prize in the same category at an event closer to home, the Peace Gala in Doncaster.<sup>443</sup> Haynes's female impersonation was not therefore a singular moment of frivolity, however that he mostly cross-dressed in events close to home suggests he did not fear admonishment from his local community.

Not every town and village hosted an annual gala; however, there were a number of towns in and around Bradford in West Yorkshire which held a carnival style event regularly throughout the interwar years. Searches of regional newspapers suggest that West Yorkshire in general was the host of a much larger concentration of such events than other parts of the county. This is possibly due to the tight knit communities that formed in towns centred around a single industry, which was often the cotton industry in these areas. Reports of these events in the regional press reveal countless names of men who won prizes in the best female impersonator category; but one name occurs a number of times in the carnivals close to Bradford: Mr A. Whitley of Heckmondwike. Whitley first appears in the regional press after coming second in the competition for 'best female impersonator' in the 1929 Bingley Carnival.<sup>444</sup> His name appeared again, this time in the *Leeds Mercury*, a month later when he was awarded first prize for 'best Lady Impersonator' at the Yeadon Charity Carnival, and then again when he won first prize for 'best female impersonator' at the Keighley Gala in 1931.<sup>445</sup> That men like Whitley and Haynes cross-dressed regularly in these spaces points to a level of acceptance. Whitley retained his reputation as best female impersonator in the area the following year when he won first prize at the Shipley Gala in 1932.<sup>446</sup> In June 1933 Whitley kept his titles again at the Keighley Friendly Society Gala.<sup>447</sup> Whitley's style of female impersonation must have been popular with his local community in order for him to have won so regularly, and perhaps positions him as somewhat

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<sup>442</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 June 1920, p.5.

<sup>443</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 3 August 1920, p.3.

<sup>444</sup> *Shipley Times and Express*, 15 June 1929, p.2.

<sup>445</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 22 July 1929, p.5 : *Leeds Mercury*, 22 June 1931, p.7.

<sup>446</sup> *Shipley Times and Express*, 11 June 1932, p.3.

<sup>447</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 June 1933, p.5.

of a local celebrity. This demonstrates that female impersonation in the context of carnival did not have to be a 'one off' in order to be accepted and enjoyed.

Although community was important to sanctioning cross-dressing in carnival, it was not the only factor, as occasionally men from further afield came to compete for the prize of 'best female impersonator'. At the Keighley gala in June 1933 W. Singola from New Cross in Manchester (around 36 miles away, a significant distance to travel for such an event) appears in the list of prize winners, having been awarded third place in the same category.<sup>448</sup> While prize money is rarely mentioned in most carnival reports, at the two carnivals in Bingley prizes of up to the total £100 were awarded for various classes.<sup>449</sup> This could provide motivation for travelling further afield to compete. Though this seems unlikely. Instead, I believe he was temporarily living in the area. Singola does not appear on the 1927 or the 1939 census in the Bradford area, suggesting that if he was living in the area when he appeared in carnival, he did not stay for long. However, his absence from the Manchester census' data too makes him even harder to trace. Singola may have been transient and may not have been in either place at the time the census was taken. It is also possible that he gave a false name, or his name was recorded incorrectly by the journalist or competition organisers. Additionally, as Singola is an Italian word meaning 'single' or 'sole' he may have been an immigrant or traveller from Italy. Either way, the outsider, Singola, displaced Whitley from the top spot just a month later in July 1933 and took the title of best female impersonator at the Shipley Gala, leaving Whitley in second place.<sup>450</sup> The following year Whitley regained his title at the Bingley Carnival, and Singola was not listed in the top three, either having lost the competition or perhaps having moved on.<sup>451</sup> Once again, the men who cross-dressed in early twentieth-century Yorkshire prove ever elusive though this story

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<sup>448</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 June 1933, p.5.

<sup>449</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 13 June 1927, p.12.

<sup>450</sup> *Shipley Times and Express*, 8 July 1933, p.1.

<sup>451</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 18 June 1934, p.5.

suggests that although the carnival events which sanctioned cross-dressing were primarily community based, even transient members of the community could compete, and win.

Much as with music hall, the popularity of female impersonation in carnival appears to have dwindled from the middle of the 1930s.<sup>452</sup> In Shipley, one of Singola and Whiteley's battle grounds, after 1933 the role of female impersonators is no longer acknowledged in press coverage of the events. In 1934 the only fancy-dress competition mentioned in the local paper was the children's fancy-dress parade and the summer carnival would see the introduction of the 'Miss Shipley' competition.<sup>453</sup> The loss of the adults fancy-dress competition, and thus the prize for best female impersonator, may have disappeared due to change in organising committee. In 1934 a selection of local philanthropic groups joined to form the 'Shipley and District Hospital and Charities joint committee' who became the carnival organisers.<sup>454</sup> This new committee is likely to have been predominantly middle-class. In 1934 advertisements for the summer carnival in the *Shipley Times and Express* focussed on the crowning of the carnival queen with the headline "MISS SHIPLEY" Eighteen Year Old "Queen" chosen to rule Shipley Carnival Week.<sup>455</sup> Until this point, the focus of the carnival had predominately been the 'rag' or fancy-dress parade, where those in fancy dress, including female impersonators, paraded through the town collecting money for the local hospital fund.<sup>456</sup> However, the beauty contest now took centre stage.<sup>457</sup>

Direct reference to female impersonation in press reports of Yorkshire carnival become much less frequent in the 1930s than they had been the decade before. Even before 1930, smaller carnivals did not always include the category for female impersonator in their fancy-dress

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<sup>452</sup> Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England 1920-60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 59-60.

<sup>453</sup> *Shipley Times and Express*, 14 July 1934, p.8 and *Shipley Times and Express*, 12 May 1934, p.6.

<sup>454</sup> *Shipley Times and Express*, 10 August 1936, p.7.

<sup>455</sup> *Shipley Times and Express*, 16 June 1934, p.3.

<sup>456</sup> *Shipley Times and Express*, 11 June 1932, p.3.

<sup>457</sup> The carnival queen performed a role similar to that of the 'cotton queen's' of Manchester discussed by Rebecca Conway. Chosen for their beauty and 'ideal image of femininity', these young working girls were chosen as representatives of their communities. The Rose Queen's appeared in white flowing dresses representative of their idyllic innocence. For more on mill girl's as beauty queens see, Rebecca Conway, 'Making the Mill Girl Modern? Beauty, Industry, and the Popular Newspaper in 1930's England', *Twentieth Century British History* 24:4 (2013) 518-541.

contests, instead awarding prizes for ‘best comic costume’ or ‘best adults fancy dress’ and in general awarded fewer prizes. Considering the prevalence of female impersonation in this space it is likely that some men still would have dressed as women to compete in the more general categories. However, as the 1930s drew on, more carnivals removed the adult fancy-dress competitions all together, leaving only the children’s fancy-dress parade in place.<sup>458</sup> A substantial change in terms of the centrality of female impersonation was seen at the Bingley Carnival. In 1927 the annual charity carnival in Bingley was presided over by the King and Queen of carnival played by ‘Mr. A. Matkin, a well-known local amateur operatic artiste[sic] and Mr. W. E Medley, respectively.’<sup>459</sup> Prior to the carnival their identities had been kept a secret, perhaps in order to increase the comedic effect of Mr Medley appearing as the carnival queen. In 1929 Medley again presided over the carnival, but this time as King and his queen was played by Mr Raynor.<sup>460</sup> Medley and Raynor returned to their roles in 1931 and 1933, though in these years the category for best female impersonator appears to have been removed from the fancy-dress competition.<sup>461</sup> By 1935 however, the King and Queen had been usurped in their role as the central focus of carnival by the ‘Rose Queen’, played by a local teenaged girl as had happened in the Shipley Gala the previous year.<sup>462</sup> Viewing this decline alongside the decline of the bawdy traditions of music hall in the same period, this could be indicative of a shift away from misrule in popular culture more broadly, and a move towards a focus on displaying feminine beauty instead of the masculine body.<sup>463</sup>

### 3.2 The Carnival King and Queen

Prior to the mid-1930s the larger summer carnivals in Yorkshire were regularly presided over by a ‘royal couple’, the King and Queen of the carnival. Often, the Queen of Yorkshire carnivals

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<sup>458</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 15 June 190031, p.12 : *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 16 July 1934, p.12 : *Leeds Mercury*, 14 June 1937, p.5.

<sup>459</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 13 June 1927, p.12

<sup>460</sup> *Shipley Times and Express*, 15 June 1929, p.2.

<sup>461</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 15 June 1931, p.12 : *Shipley Times and Express*, 17 June 1933, p.4.

<sup>462</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 8 June 1935, p.3.

<sup>463</sup> Conway, ‘Making the Mill Girl Modern’.

was played by a man. The role of the royal couple was primarily to entertain the crowds and they played a significant role in the ritual opening ceremonies which often involved the presentation of a key to the city, town, or village. The King and Queen also headed up the parade, smiling and waving at the crowds of spectators and helping to raise money for the carnivals chosen charity. Despite the subversion of gendered dress, the King and Queen of carnival also served to reinforce hegemonic gender norms.

In 1924, at the annual summer carnival in Hebden Bridge, the King and Queen were played by two men billed as ‘the Simpson Brothers’.<sup>464</sup> The pair’s performance began with an extravagant opening ceremony which amalgamated various aspects of royal, religious, and mythic ritual. The ritual ended with the presentation of an incredibly large key to the city that the pair struggled to hold aloft as they were cheered by the crowd. Through entertaining the crowd, their costumes, their performance of regal grandeur and, of course, the performance of a different gender for one of the pair, the King and Queen both encouraged and signified the revelry pointed to as one of carnivals’ key defining features by Georgiou.<sup>465</sup> Their elaborate costumes, the large key, the carriage, and the heavily decorated float on which they led the parade also played a role in privileging the spectacular. Medley and Raynor, the King and Queen of the Bingley carnivals in 1929, 1931, and 1933, played a similar role in signifying revelry and privileging the spectacular. In 1929 the pair opened the carnival by awarding the Head of Bingley District Council with a ‘Knighthood’ before heading up the procession in a ‘carriage’ which was almost completely hidden underneath flowers, bunting, streamers, and balloons.<sup>466</sup> In 1931 they led the procession on top of ‘one of the oldest motor-cars in the country, with the driver and

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<sup>464</sup> The Simpson Brothers have proven to be elusive historical figures, bringing me to the conclusion that this may well have been a stage name. Hebden bridge was home to a large number of well known ‘Simpsons’ due to the prominence of Simpson’s mineral water manufactures in the town. However, Jim and Joe do not appear to be related to this prominent family. YFA6070, Hebden Bridge Band Carnival, (1924). Hebden Bridge is a market town in the Calder Valley of West Yorkshire, eight miles from the city of Halifax.

<sup>465</sup> Georgiou, ‘Redefining the Carnivalesque,’ 336.

<sup>466</sup> *Shipley Times and Express*, 15 June 1929, p.2 : *Leeds Mercury Monday*, 10 June 1929, p.10.

attendant in striking uniform.<sup>467</sup> In 1933, the comedic revelry embodied by the King and Queen was emphasised once more during the opening ceremony. After Mrs. Bently, wife of Bingley district council's chairman, was presented with a bouquet of carnations 'the "Queen" also received a "bouquet" – a mixture of onions, radishes, and carrots.'<sup>468</sup> The bouquet of vegetables perhaps signified the Queen's lack of femininity, reflecting the tradition of laughing at the dame's desexualisation discussed in chapter one.<sup>469</sup>

In 1924, the annual summer carnival in Hebden Bridge was documented by a local film maker and later shown at the town's picture house.<sup>470</sup> The film includes a scene of the King and Queen of carnival sharing a kiss to great cheers from onlookers.<sup>471</sup> While this public display of intimacy may seem surprising, a kiss between brothers or between male friends was not a rarity in Yorkshire. Havelock Ellis noted, 'among the working masses of England and Scotland... Friends often kiss each other, though this habit seems to vary a good deal in different sections and colonies.'<sup>472</sup> This intimacy has also been noted by Joanna Bourke and Santanu Das in relation to soldiers during the First World War.<sup>473</sup> Bourke argues that the physical intimacy between men during the war and a lack of female company for servicemen played a significant role in legitimising these displays.<sup>474</sup> However, images such as those of the Simpson Brothers and anecdotal evidence such as that given by Ellis suggests that instead, public displays of affection

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<sup>467</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 15 June 1931, p.12.

<sup>468</sup> *Shipley Times and Express*, 17 June 1933, p.4.

<sup>469</sup> This also speaks to Peter Bailey's discussion of knowingness. The bouquet of vegetables represented the Queen's distance from femininity and because the audience knew that the Queen was being played by a man, they could share in the joke that shattered the false 'illusion'. See Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning'.

<sup>470</sup> *Todmorden & District News*, 5 September 1924, p.1

<sup>471</sup> *Todmorden & District News*, 5 September 1924, p.2.

<sup>472</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume II Sexual Inversion*, (New York, 1942), p.22 : YFA6070, *Hebden Bridge Band Carnival*, 1924. While Ellis remarked on the custom of friendly kisses between men as part of a wider culture of male intimacy amongst the working classes in England, he represents these kisses as directly related to homosexual desire and not simply male friendship. Fellow sexologist Iwan Bloch also saw kissing between men not as an aspect of male friendship, but as directly related to sexuality. 'While it is true that these aberrations of the vogue are not as such indicative of a generalized tendency toward homosexuality, yet it is unquestionable that these customs did engender a pseudo-homosexuality and permitted the congenital urgings to indulge their desires publicly and without any hesitation.' Iwan Bloch, *Sex Life in England*, Vol. 2 (New York: The Panurge Press Inc., 1934), 128.

<sup>473</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male* and Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>474</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 127-137.

between men were commonplace in working-class culture across a broader period than Bourke has suggested. For example, Smith's research found that physical displays of affection between men were both accepted and commonplace in the north of England even though 'there were plenty of women available to provide comfort, friendship, and entertainment.'<sup>475</sup> Physical intimacy between men was evidently a part of everyday life in the North, that these brothers shared a brief kiss for the entertainment of the crowd seems unlikely to have raised any eyebrows. This performance instead reiterated heteronormativity because it was not performed as a kiss between two men but instead as a kiss between husband and wife.

Central to the acceptability of the kiss between the Simpson Brothers was its very nature as performance and subsequent separation from reality. Carnival was a space of performance, but it did not share the professional status of the theatre and music hall. Most carnival performers were not full-time entertainers and this lack of 'professional status' blurred the line between audience and performer. The very local nature of the carnival meant that the audience were likely to have personally known most of those who performed in the parade, further blurring the lines between watcher and watched. Carnival audience members were as much part of the spectacle as the performers and their involvement perhaps added to the freedom granted to transgress. In the case of the Simpson Brothers, the close relationship between audience members and performer is significant in two ways. First it removed a layer of deviance. The Simpson Brothers appear to have been fairly well known as entertainers as they performed at a range of local charity events and as a result their names appear a number of times in the local press.<sup>476</sup> The relatively small population of Hebden Bridge made them likely to have been known to a large proportion of audience members outside of performance spaces. Second, it had the

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<sup>475</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 65.

<sup>476</sup> In 1921 the population of Hebden Bridge was fewer than 6,500. The local paper reported that Hebden Bridge had a relatively low acreage density at just 13.6 (For comparison, some of the larger nearby towns such as Castleford, Middlesbrough, and Kingston-Upon-Hull had acreage densities of between 31 and 43). See *Todmorden & District News*, 27 July 1923, p.6. For performances see *Todmorden & District News*, 15 May 1925, p.3; *Todmorden & District News*, 9 May 1930, p.7 & *Todmorden & District News*, 26 March 1926, p.8.

potential to increase the comedic value of their performance as royalty. Incongruity has been positioned as the fastest route to humour, and their performance as King and Queen would have been incongruous with their everyday presentations of self.<sup>477</sup> If audience members were used to seeing the ‘brothers’ in their everyday form, as ‘normal’ workers, husbands, fathers, or sons, then the sight of them in royal regalia would have increased their comedic value but may also have made the kiss more permissible.

The aim was rarely to perform a ‘convincing’ image of femininity amongst men who cross-dressed in carnival. For example, in the Simpson brother’s performance, the Queen’s bizarre and elaborate physical image emphasised her role as a performance rather than reality. Davis has argued that keeping the performers’ true sex evident was key to keeping cross-dressed entertainment within the realms of acceptability during the *fin de siècle* and elements of this tradition seem to have transferred to interwar carnivals as men who cross-dressed in this context regularly kept their true sex evident.<sup>478</sup> Davis argues that retaining visibility of the masculine form was thought to remove the possibility of accidentally inciting homoerotic desire from male audience members and thus helped to keep female impersonation within the realms of respectability.<sup>479</sup> Press advertisements for the Hebden Bridge Carnival demonstrate the continuity of this tradition by drawing attention to the Queen’s ‘true sex’ prior to her appearance.<sup>480</sup> While this is likely to have had some relevance in carnival, I believe that keeping the ‘true sex’ of the female impersonator evident in this context served more to render the act humorous than to remove connotations of deviance.

As we have seen in chapter two there were two popular styles of female impersonation originally seen in late-nineteenth-century music hall, both of which worked to reinforce

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<sup>477</sup> See Stephen Olbrys Gencarella, ‘Remembering Folly: Comedy Hypnosis and the Management of the Uncanny’ *Comedy Studies*, 7:2 (2016), 193-205 (194-195).

<sup>478</sup> Davis, ‘Slap on Slap Ever!’, 244.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>480</sup> *Todmorden & District News*, 5 September 1924, p.2.



hegemonic constructions of femininity. The style of dress adopted in this carnival is more reflective of the dame style than that of the glamour drag artist. As I have shown, the comedy of the dame lay in the performers biological sex remaining evident through ensuring their facial or body hair was visible, and often through the way they carried themselves.<sup>481</sup> The dame was intended to portray a woman whose sexuality had been lost, rendering her comedic and unattractive. Instead of blurring the lines between male and female, in this role men were mocking the desexualised woman, positioning ideal femininity alongside youth and fertility.

In playing post-menopausal, de-sexualised women, the men who cross-dressed were essentially mocking women who had aged past the point of idealised femininity. Martin has demonstrated that in the first half of the twentieth century the menopause was constructed in medical discourse ‘as a failure, a physiological manifestation of the beginning of the end.’<sup>482</sup> This happened at the same time that an ‘emerging cult of youth contributed to negative cultural representations of middle age and ageing.’<sup>483</sup> Therefore, by performing an image of femininity which was tainted with both age and an underlying masculinity, men who dressed as women in carnival were reflecting socio-cultural stereotypes of women who had passed the stage of youthful femininity.

The Queen of the 1927 Stanley and District Hospital Carnival was a prime example of the ‘desexualised’ carnival queen perhaps more explicitly than our Hebden Bridge Queen.<sup>484</sup> The 1927 carnival film shows the King and Queen descending from their carriage and making their way to a stage to address their ‘subjects’ where they are again presented with a large key to the town. Upon receiving the key, the Queen cries over dramatic tears of joy in an overt mocking of

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<sup>481</sup> Dan Leno has often been credited as the inventor of the modern pantomime dame. His Dame’s were, desexualised, androgynous, menopausal, and in no way feminine. ‘The danger of Mother Goose’ argues Davis, ‘looking too glamorous (and putting their gender in doubt) lay in the possibility of his arousing male desire.’ The desexualised, older dame was seen as free from this danger. See Davis, ‘Slap on! Slap Ever!’, 224.

<sup>482</sup> Martin, ‘Bodies of Knowledge’, 188.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>484</sup> YFA 3680, *Stanley and District Hospital Carnival*, (1927).

feminine emotion. In contrast, the King assumes a much quieter role.<sup>485</sup> As well as her parody of the over emotional woman, the Queen's physical image also emphasises the de-sexualised nature of her character. She was played by a stout man, who was at least middle-aged, wore an ill-fitting permed wig, a knee length skirt, voluminous false breasts, and a cardboard crown. There was evidently no attempt to portray a realistic representation of the feminine form or even a realistic image of royalty. The role in this context is clearly intended to be imbued with comedy. The crocodile tears and the intentionally unconvincing 'disguise' work to emphasise the absurdity of the situation and the revelry of carnival. However, representations of the female body in this context also reflect wider attitudes towards older women, as over-emotional, desexualised, comedic figures.

So why did this style of cross-dressing become so prominent in these events? Smith's theory that working-class, northern masculinity relied on a man's reputation within their community feeds into the answer to this question. By dressing their bodies in women's clothes and failing to achieve even the slightest hint of femininity, these men were displaying their masculinity to their community. If these men already had a reputation as good workers, as respectable members of the community, and as men who took good care of their families, they could be afforded a layer of protection to dress in women's clothes without being branded as effeminate. Because this style of cross-dressing emphasised the contrast between the individual and the 'feminine' dress, if men were already seen as respectable and masculine by their community, cross-dressing in this context could reinforce this identity. Carnival allowed participants to show off their costume skills, their sporting prowess, and also allowed them to position themselves as an upstanding member of the community through helping to raise money for a local charitable cause. Portraying the Queen gave men an opportunity to simultaneously transgress gender norms and reinforce their masculinity.

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<sup>485</sup> YFA 3680, *Stanley and District Hospital Carnival*, (1927).

### 3.3 Carnival and the Body

Having demonstrated how dressing the body in female-coded clothing could reinforce hegemonic gender norms, this section will further build on the idea that the display of the body beneath the female-coded clothes could emphasise the masculine body, and therefore the masculinity, of the performer. In Bahktinian carnival theory the body takes centre stage, mostly in discussion of grotesque, bodily functions, subversion of norms, and disorder.<sup>486</sup> David Danow explains ‘in its most general sense, carnival celebrates the body, the senses, and the unofficial, uncanonized relations among human beings’.<sup>487</sup> While the twentieth-century carnival is far removed from the medieval spaces of complete subversion and misrule discussed in Bahktin’s *Rabelius and His World*, the physical body remained an integral part of the carnival spectacle. Female impersonation in carnival was often performed in such a way that it emphasised the masculine body by highlighting the incongruity of the body with an ill-fitting frilly dress, which was clearly designed for a different bodily form. However, female impersonation was not the only means through which the masculine body was put on display in carnival, nor was it alone in its ability to emphasise hegemonic constructions of the idealised masculine body.

As the cross-dressed carnival Queen had the potential to both subvert and reinforce hegemonic gender norms, so too did the display of male bodies. The relationship between the physical body and masculinity has significantly influenced the history of masculinity.<sup>488</sup> Joanne Begiato has argued that in the long nineteenth-century ‘manliness in Britain was produced, maintained, and disseminated...through men’s bodies’.<sup>489</sup> The display of the masculine body in

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<sup>486</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*.

<sup>487</sup> David K. Danow, *The Spirit of Carnival: Magical Realism and the Grotesque* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 3.

<sup>488</sup> Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body* : Bourke, *Dismembering the Male* : Hera Cook, ‘Emotion, Bodies, Sexuality, And Sex Education in Edwardian England’, *The Historical Journal*, 55:2 (2012), 475-495 : Karen Harvey, ‘Craftsmen in Common: Objects, Skills and Masculinity in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’, in Hannah Grieg, Jane Hamlett, and Leonie Hannan (eds), *Gender and Material Culture in Britain since 1600* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 68–89 : Karen Harvey, ‘Men of parts: Masculine Embodiment and the Male Leg in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Journal of British Studies* 54:4 (2015), 797–821 : Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge, 2004), 175–98 : Matthew McCormack, *Embodying the Militia in Georgian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>489</sup> Begiato, *Manliness in Britain*, 3.

entertainment settings was by no means limited to carnival. Men's bodies played a central role in a range of popular entertainments, from sport to theatre, and, as Smith has demonstrated, familiarity with the masculine body, and often the naked or nearly naked masculine body, was central to working-class men's experiences Yorkshire.<sup>490</sup> Smith argues; '[m]iners often worked naked, or in very scanty clothing due to the heat of their environment, and similar situations occurred in the steelworks.'<sup>491</sup> Not only was the nude male body encountered by many men on a daily basis, but the naked male body also played a role in certain aspects of entertainment culture which were specific to the North. For example, in late-nineteenth-century Sheffield, young working-class men took part in races through Sheffield's main thoroughfare's wearing nothing but a pair of 'hob-nailed running shoes' and maybe a 'small strip of material covering their crotches.'<sup>492</sup> These naked races were by no means alone in the display of the male body. In all sports, men's bodies were viewed for both entertainment and pleasure, mostly while in motion.<sup>493</sup> This movement could display skill, strength, and the robustness of the physical form.

Regular interaction with naked male bodies did not mean that men were blind to the attractiveness of the physiques of their male acquaintances.<sup>494</sup> Nor did it mean that each of the hundreds of men who lined the streets of Sheffield to watch a horde of young workers sprinting through the city, or to watch a muscular man parade through the village in a skimpy dress, all viewed these male bodies with erotic desire. Begiato articulates the nuance of desire for the male form as follows:

Such idealised bodies aroused erotic feelings in some who encountered them, which rendered the associated gender qualities they possessed appealing beyond any immediate sexual gratification. For others, the enchantment of a manly body might be non-sexual or not genitally based but still charged with desire for the gender attributes it embodied;

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<sup>490</sup> Smith, *Masculinities*, 61-63.

<sup>491</sup> Smith, *Masculinities*, 62.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

<sup>493</sup> Begiato, *Manliness*, 35.

<sup>494</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*.

their yearning was to become him, to possess him, to display him, to be admired or saved by him.<sup>495</sup>

The feelings evoked towards men who ran in naked races and other sports would also have been evoked in carnival because men's bodies were on display in similar ways. Although the display of bodies is not as overt in carnival fancy-dress competitions as it was in Sheffield's naked races, men paraded the streets or participated in sports, often wearing costumes that displayed their bodies to onlookers. Whether dressed as a woman, an ambiguous tribesman, or a sailor, the physical attributes of a man's body were often emphasised through his fancy dress costume. Therefore, cross-dressing in this context could incite desire for the masculine body that was both erotically charged and based on a desire to possess the physique on display.

Carnival also included sporting competitions in which men's bodies were displayed in motion. Sport was a means through which men could demonstrate their strength and masculinity but also allowed watchers to glory in the idealised physique of the working man. Sport, whether professional or otherwise, could provide men with the opportunity 'to affirm their masculinity through the demonstration of strength, competitiveness, and the ability to endure pain stoically'.<sup>496</sup> In a charity event in Horsforth, a town on the outskirts of Leeds in the 1930s a 'comic cricket match' was held to raise money for charity. The 'comic' aspect being that all of the men who participated in the cricket match were wearing dresses, some also wore wigs but most kept as much of their masculine form as visible as possible.<sup>497</sup> Their chests, arms and legs were displayed to onlookers as they ran around in short dresses, tightly stretched across their chests and thighs. As Georgiou argues, rather than retaining the competitive element of traditional sports, carnival sport was much more focussed on '[d]isplay activities such as diving, dancing, callisthenics and gymnastics', which 'lay peripheral to a male-oriented British sporting culture focused on contests between individuals or teams with objective means of deciding the winner

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<sup>495</sup> Begiato, *Manliness*, 4.

<sup>496</sup> Pamela Gilbert, 'Popular Beliefs and the Body: "A Nation of Good Animals"', in Michael Sappol and Stephen P. Rice (eds), *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Age of Empire* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), p. 142. (125-148).

<sup>497</sup> YFA 5502, *Horsforth Village Events* (1931-1933).

intrinsic to the rules.<sup>498</sup> Therefore carnival sport was less about competition and instead focused on bodily display, once again positioning the idealised masculine body at the centre of the spectacle.

Despite undertones of a mocking of femininity in a similar style to the dame, cross-dressing in carnival took on its own style. This is akin to the ‘lad drag’ style of cross-dressing, which is a familiar sight in present day Britain, often adopted by University Rugby teams, and by groups of men at ‘stag’ parties. Lad drag finds comedy through the incongruity of the physically masculine body and female-coded clothing. Men who dress in this style often wear dresses that are revealing and ill fitting, stretched across their torsos and stopping at the thigh, these dresses emphasise the idealised, muscular, masculine form. These dresses were often either accompanied by unconvincing wigs and makeup or no wigs and make up at all, intentionally drawing attention to ‘masculine’ facial features. Gender theorists Garber and Butler both present drag as the ultimate subversion of gendered ideals, one that ‘offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity’.<sup>499</sup> Butler states that ‘drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity’ revealing ‘the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency.’<sup>500</sup> However, carnival drag did not necessarily challenge or subvert binary ideals of gender; instead, it often emphasised a man’s inability to portray his body as feminine. Therefore, cross-dressing in this way could work to accentuate physical masculinity.

In the footage of the 1924 Hebden Bridge carnival, a number of female impersonators can be spotted in the parade, though one man stands out as a prime example of cross-dressing in a way that overtly emphasises physical masculinity.<sup>501</sup> The man is one of the tallest in the parade, with broad, sloping shoulders and a strong jaw which offset his frilly costume. He is dressed as a

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<sup>498</sup> Georgiou, ‘Redefining’, 354-355.

<sup>499</sup> Garber, *Vested Interests*, 10.

<sup>500</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 186-187.

<sup>501</sup> YFA 6070, *Hebden Bridge Band Carnival*, (1924).

young girl and swaggers along with his long faux braid swinging as he occasionally bends over to flash his undergarments at the crowd and then engages in a game of leapfrog with another member of the procession who is dressed as a young boy.<sup>502</sup> The way this individual walks almost apes masculinity, an overtly masculine shoulders-first swagger that reiterates his biological sex and makes sure all around are aware of his masculinity. His intentional display of tomfoolery and his masculine manner of moving creates a comedic disconnect between his behaviour and his clothes, reiterating the entertainment value in such a display.

A participant in the 1927 carnival in the Calderdale market town of Elland not only chose to emphasise his physical distance from femininity but also his emotional distance from traditionally feminine attributes. Dressed in the obligatory skimpy dress and braided wig, he swaggers along absentmindedly swinging a baby doll by its arm as he goes, demonstrating his complete lack of maternal instinct.<sup>503</sup> This emotional distance was not always emphasised in carnival performances of womanhood. On occasion men attempted to represent an ideal of motherhood as a clear demarcation of the feminine role they were portraying. Men dressed as women appeared in carnival processions holding the hands of children, carrying dolls, pushing prams containing a doll, a child, or as in the Ferndale carnival in 1926, containing an adult man dressed as a baby.<sup>504</sup> These performances of motherhood were placed in contrast with the male body on display through the clothing. In emphasising their inability to present themselves as respectable and convincing women, these men reinforced their masculinity. Through drawing on stereotypes of masculinity and femininity and their failure to marry the feminine stereotype with their masculine body, men who cross-dressed in this context and style reinforced normative ideals of masculinity and femininity, strengthening the boundaries between the two rather than disrupting them.

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<sup>502</sup> YFA 6070, *Hebden Bridge Band Carnival*, (1924).

<sup>503</sup> YFA 981, *Elland Carnivals*, (1926-1927).

<sup>504</sup> BFI, *Ferndale Carnival*, (1926).

The very public display of men's bodies, and men's cross-dressed bodies, in carnival undoubtedly encourages admiration of their physical form. Therefore, the display of the masculine body, whether cross-dressed or otherwise meant that the potential for erotic desire must have been present.<sup>505</sup> Although it was not just the masculine body which was on display in late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century carnival. Women often joined in the fancy-dress processions, though very rarely in drag and in distinctly more modest clothing than their male counterparts. Women also rode on floats, took part in beauty contests, and handed out prizes.<sup>506</sup> In the 1930s female bodies increasingly moved towards the centre of the carnival festivities. As female impersonation and the popularity of the carnival King and Queen dwindled, the 'Rose Queen' took centre stage, often followed by a retinue of young women.<sup>507</sup> The Rose Queen herself was often an older teenager or woman in her early twenties, chosen for her beauty. This shift of focus from the male to the female body reflects a change in popular culture more broadly. Once again, we see the reiteration of hegemonic gender norms in a space devoted to the privileging of the spectacular. It is precisely because of the constant reiteration of hegemonic norms that late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century carnival do not fit with Bakhtinian analysis. Far from being a space of complete misrule, carnival was yet another aspect of popular culture which privileged a binary, heteronormative model of gender.

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<sup>505</sup> Georgiou, 'Redefining', 354-355.

<sup>506</sup> Examples of the costumes worn by men in carnival processions can be seen in the following films; BFI, *Skipton Carnival & Hospital Gala* (1902) : BFI, *Armley and Wortley Carnival* (1904) : BFI, *Hunslet Carnival and Gala* (1904) : YFA 1503, *Normanton Gala* (1922) : YFA 44, *Eccleshill Carnival* (1922) ; YFA 1182, *Wakefield Gala* (1925) : YFA 881, *Elland Carnivals* (1926-1927) : YFA 4861, *Docks, Bridlington Rag, Filey and Scarborough* (1933) : YFA 1113, *Skipton Carnival and Hospital Gala* (1934).

<sup>507</sup> By the 1930s popular newspapers were increasingly utilising images of 'beautiful young women' to promote sales and entice readers. Bingham, *Family Newspapers*, 203-4.



### 3.4 The Rag Fairy



The display of the male body through female-coded clothing was not just visible in working-class carnivals. The ‘lad drag’ style of cross-dressing was also prevalent in the more middle-class space of student Rag events. The student Rag week took place annually and included various activities arranged by university students to raise money for a local charity. Many of these Rag weeks either began or ended with a parade through the town or city and were similar in both form and content to carnival parades. Instead of being headed by the carnival King and Queen or the Rose Queen, Rag parades were often led by the Rag Fairy. Much like the carnival queen, the ‘Rag Fairy’ was often played by a student who fitted the stereotype of physical masculinity.<sup>508</sup> William Whyte argues that Student Rag weeks were created at the redbrick universities as a means of creating their own

traditions.<sup>509</sup> These ‘new traditions’, however, were clearly influenced by the working-class fundraising events. Whyte claims that the ‘modern university’ or redbrick ‘was rooted in its locality’ and Rag week further tied together the University and the local community.<sup>510</sup> Rag week positioned the students in the town centre as they paraded in their finest fancy dress, but also engaged them in the all-important philanthropy which had become a staple of student life since the birth of the University settlement movement in 1833.<sup>511</sup> Fundraising for local charities and hospitals became a popular form of student voluntarism in the interwar period and Rag week in particular, became the pinnacle of both student revelry and philanthropy for many students at

<sup>508</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 84-85.

<sup>509</sup> William Whyte, *Redbrick: a Social and Architectural History of Britain's Civic Universities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 154-155.

<sup>510</sup> Whyte, *Redbrick*, 133.

<sup>511</sup> Lucinda Matthews-Jones, ‘I still remain one of the old Settlement boys’: Cross-class Friendship in the First World War Letters of Cardiff University Settlement Lads’ Club’, *Cultural and Social History*, 13:2 (2016) 195-211.

civic universities.<sup>512</sup> Borrowing again from the village carnival, the Rags combined comedic fancy dress and parades with charity football matches and other spectator sports.<sup>513</sup>

The Rag events were reported on in the press in much the same way as carnivals, with statements made about the funds raised, efforts praised, details given about parade routes, and the occasional accompanying image.<sup>514</sup> Much like the carnival reports, the press rarely commented on female impersonation in student Rags in much detail, or even noted that it happened at all. However, although comment was rarely made in writing, the Yorkshire press printed a number of images from the Leeds and Sheffield University Rags which clearly show male students in female clothes. These images reveal that the prevalence of ‘lad drag’ in this space went beyond one single ‘Rag Fairy’ further linking the two traditions of university Rag and community carnivals. Image one was originally printed in the *Leeds Mercury* and depicts two male students at Leeds University ‘Rag Day’ in 1930. The caption reads; ‘A “RAG” VAMP and “her” strangely clad escort collecting for charity’.<sup>515</sup> That the partner is noted as ‘strangely clad’ and not the ‘vamp’ demonstrates the pervasiveness of cross-dressing in this context. The ‘vamp’ is seen lifting her skirt to expose two muscular legs, thus revealing her ‘masculine’ form and highlighting the incongruity between the body and the female-coded clothing. Image two depicts the ‘Bow-legged Belles’, again male students from Leeds University but this time in 1933.<sup>516</sup> The Belles’ masculine form is more overt than that of the ‘Rag Vamp’. No attempt is really made to disguise their ‘true sex’ or to present themselves as feminine in any way. Dressed in floaty, thigh length

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<sup>512</sup> Georgina Brewis, ‘From Service to Action? Student’s, Volunteering and Community Action in Mid Twentieth-Century Britain’, *British Journal of Education Studies* 58 (2010), 439-449.

<sup>513</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 7 November 1923, p.7.

<sup>514</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 29 October 1923, p.9 : *Sheffield Independent*, 31 October 1930, p.6 : *Sheffield Independent*, 25 October 1926, p.10 : *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 29 June 1935, p.7 : *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 29 May 1925, p.11 : *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 2 July 1938, p.9.

<sup>515</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 30 June 1930, p.4.

<sup>516</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 26 June 1933, p.6.



dresses, this group of students chose not to don wigs or paint their faces. Whether this was intended to emphasise comedy or to protect the masculinity of these students is unclear. However, as this image was taken in 1933, when female impersonation in all entertainment spheres had begun to

decline in popularity and was beginning to be treated with increasing suspicion, it is possible that the 'Bow-legged Belles' chose to don a dress in a way that highlighted their masculine bodies, rather than disguised them, as a way to consciously protect their masculinity and respectability. Wearing the dresses emphasised their willingness to get involved with a good cause and engage in light-hearted fun. By avoiding being too convincing and leading others to believe that they were 'good' at female impersonation or took the act too seriously, they were keeping themselves far removed from men who cross-dressed for other purposes. This sharing of traditions and the amalgamation of entertainment styles in the very middle-class space of the university rag and the working-class space of the carnival evokes Geoffrey Ginn's argument that we should read cultural traditions not in a vacuum or as formed in a linear fashion but instead as a complex narrative which amalgamates a variety of classes and cultures.<sup>517</sup> In the case of carnivals and rag, the charitable intent behind the cross-dressing and the privileging of the masculine body could clearly cut across class distinctions.

### 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter focuses on carnival in Yorkshire to demonstrate the acceptability of cross-dressing in entertainment spaces outside of the theatre. Unlike the theatre, the carnival was a temporary,

<sup>517</sup> Geoffrey Ginn, *Culture, Philanthropy and the Poor in Late-Victorian London*, (New York: Routledge, 2017).

amateur space where, unlike the theatre, audience and performer were part of the same community. Female impersonation featured in carnivals in all counties of Britain and Rag weeks and lad drag appeared at redbrick universities across the country in the early twentieth century.<sup>518</sup> However, when compared to London carnivals in the same period, female impersonation appears to have been much more prevalent in Yorkshire, South and West Yorkshire in particular. This points towards the differences highlighted in previous chapters in relation to policing, crime, and more general attitudes towards cross-dressing and gender variance in different parts of the country. Yorkshire did not have the distinctive queer culture discussed in Houlbrook's *Queer London*, which changed policing methods and highlighted men dressed in women's clothes in public as potential deviants.<sup>519</sup> Links between female impersonation and 'deviant' sexuality were dependent on an incredibly specific set of circumstances.

There is, however, another factor at play. The carnivals in this chapter mostly took place in small villages and in tight-knit communities. These were communities who lived and worked alongside one another, knew each other by name and by occupation. This very Yorkshire community and the Yorkshire way of understanding masculinity and sexuality, highlighted by Smith, contributed to a space in which female impersonation was far removed from anything but, good, clean, family fun. The socio-economic conditions of Yorkshire, small close-knit communities whose bonds were formed through hard work, shared workplaces, and shared hardships, were not restricted to Yorkshire.<sup>520</sup> Therefore these arguments may apply elsewhere, suggesting that cross-dressing and gender transgressions more broadly may have been more widely accepted than the literature based around London suggests.

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<sup>518</sup> For example see, BFI, Northampton Carnival, 1932 : BFI, Jarrow Carnival, 1923 : BFI, Newport Carnival, 1936 : BFI, Carnival- Flint, 1930 : BFI, Southend Carnival Procession (1929) : BFI, Salisbury Celebrations (1920) : BFI, Richmond. Student's "Rag" (1920).

<sup>519</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*.

<sup>520</sup> Martin, 'Bodies of Knowledge', 239.

More importantly this chapter has helped to nuance understandings of gender performances which could be deemed transgressive or deviant in other contexts. In doing so it has emphasised the significance of region, community, and class to defining where an act sat on the spectrum of acceptability. The space of carnival allowed a miner to be a Queen, and brothers to perform as a married couple. Men were protected from accusations of impropriety by the performance of carnival freedom, but also by the community nature of carnival. While it is likely that some people in Yorkshire would have been aware of what Houlbrook termed the numerous 'pansy cases' which took place in London in this period due to regional press reporting, men who cross-dressed in carnival were viewed differently. This is mostly due to the carnival's separation from reality. This chapter has demonstrated that cross-dressing played a significant role in working-class entertainment culture even when the act was becoming increasingly linked to same-sex sex in other spaces. When considered alongside heteronormative models of gender and sexuality an analysis of cross-dressing in carnival demonstrates further the ability of misrule and performance to licence the transgression of acceptable codes of gendered behaviour in twentieth-century Yorkshire. This chapter has understood cross-dressing as an act which could simultaneously reinforce heteronormativity whilst subverting gendered codes of dress. In doing so, it helps destabilise binary notions of acceptance and deviance. Analysing female impersonation in carnival as it was intended to be viewed, as a comedic act, allows for the development of a more nuanced understanding of how masculinity was understood in this period.

This chapter has also emphasised the significance of space to understandings of gendered behaviour and raises questions about how we conceptualise queer acts in the past when, evidently, this is not how the act was understood by contemporaries. Analysing the space of carnival as one of temporal misrule highlights the intricacies of gendered behaviour and continues to emphasise the boundaries of acceptable gendered behaviour as historically contingent and constantly in flux. This chapter has demonstrated a need to separate our analysis

of cross-dressing from ideas of crime and deviance, and a need to instead focus on the act as one which can advance understandings of ‘normative’ gendered behaviour if we focus on its diverse potential interpretations and meanings. Despite its focus on an act which, on the surface, appears subversive, this chapter demonstrates the continued significance of a masculine identity that hinged on traditional markers of respectability across the twentieth century. More broadly, by conceptualising these potentially transgressive acts as existing on a scale of acceptability, this chapter encourages historians to continue to push against binary constructs of acceptance and deviance.

This chapter has shown how the act of subverting gendered dress does not necessarily serve to disrupt gender binaries but can instead reiterate gendered difference and reinforce heteronormativity. Yet while doing this, the display of the masculine form through its incongruity with female-coded clothing provided opportunity to admire the male form, either erotically or as part of a desire for the gendered attributes embodied in the physical form. When viewed as historically contingent and when separated from ideas of crime and deviance, analysis of cross-dressing can significantly advance understandings of societal norms and heteronormativity. Exploring the subversion of hegemonic gender roles in a space in which it was accepted as entertainment opens up new areas for discussion and follows queer theories quest to ‘denaturalise’ the present.<sup>521</sup> The display of the cross-dressed form was not limited to the older traditions of carnival and theatre; as the next chapter will show, these traditions retained their place in British popular culture as the development of new media nationalised entertainment.

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<sup>521</sup> Laura Doan, ‘Forgetting Sedgwick’, *Modern Language Association*, 125 (2010), 370-373 (371).

## Chapter 4: On Film

Motion picture technologies experienced a rapid period of development in the 1890s.<sup>522</sup> These new technologies transported motion pictures from “penny gaffs” and fairground side shows into their own glittering picture palaces.<sup>523</sup> These purpose-built spaces helped to transform cinema going into one of Britain’s most popular pastimes. As Annette Kuhn explained ‘it has been estimated that in 1914 cinema admissions reached around 364 million for the year’.<sup>524</sup> Despite economic instability and mass unemployment, interwar Britain continued to experience significant growth in purpose-built cinemas across the country.<sup>525</sup> As the popularity of music hall dwindled from 1918 onwards, the cinema moved to the centre of popular entertainment culture.<sup>526</sup>

One popular music hall trope that transferred to the screen almost seamlessly was female impersonation. Though primarily used as a comedic device, female impersonation appeared in a variety of film genres, including films focused on romance, crime, and even war.<sup>527</sup> Films featuring female impersonation maintained their popularity for the first 30 years of cinema, although their popularity fell rather quickly with the development of more narrative based feature length films.<sup>528</sup> These films brought a new style of storytelling to the screen. Nevertheless, films featuring female impersonation continued to be made and exhibited throughout the interwar period. The comedic tropes and styles of female impersonation within these films

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<sup>522</sup> Wheeler Winston Dixon and Gwedolyn Audret Foster, *A Short History of Film* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 1-9.

<sup>523</sup> Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality 1909-1925* (London: Routledge, 1988) Ebook.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>525</sup> Christine Grandy, *Heroes and Happy Endings: Class, Gender, and Nation in Popular Film and Fiction in Interwar Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 2 : Chris O’Rourke, ‘What a Pretty Man – or Girl!’ Male Cross-Dressing Performances in Early British Cinema, 1898-1918’, *Gender & History*, 32:1 (2020), 1-22. 6.

<sup>526</sup> By 1910 Britain was home to around 1,600 purpose-built cinemas and ‘by the middle of the First World War weekly attendance was estimated at twenty million’. For more on this see James C. Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema: British Film Censorship in Action, 1913-1972* (London: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>527</sup> Chris O’Rourke highlights the 1898 film *Ally Sloper* as the earliest film to include female impersonation. Chris O’Rourke, ‘What a Pretty Man’, 4.

<sup>528</sup> Feature length films tended to be more narrative based and thus stepped away from the world of slap-stick comedy which many of the female impersonators called home.

reflected those which had previously entertained music hall audiences.<sup>529</sup> However, this period of popularity on the stage also correlated with the period in which tales of men being arrested whilst cross-dressed on the street increasingly featured in national and regional newspapers.<sup>530</sup> This highlights the important distinction between cross-dressing in entertainment spaces and cross-dressing on the street. Female impersonation could be simultaneously vilified in one space yet enjoyed in another. In addition, interwar Yorkshire saw cross-dressing become a key comedic component at carnivals and student rag parades, as the previous chapter demonstrated. The interwar period then, can be seen as the moment when female impersonation reached the height of visibility in mainstream popular culture.

The fact that cross-dressing retained its position in popular entertainment within the medium of film is further evidence of female impersonation's enduring role in popular entertainment culture. This position not only challenges preconceptions about the relationship between cross-dressing and sexual deviance but shows the importance of space and context to defining the act's position on a scale of acceptability. That the tradition of female impersonation in British entertainment culture transferred to film demonstrates the widespread enjoyment of cross-dressing in entertainment. This chapter analyses cross-dressing on film to understand how it was situated in a culture which centred around binary ideas of gender. This is, however, also a story of decline. From the mid-1920s onward female impersonation appears less and less in films shown in Yorkshire, and in film more generally. This decline can be credited to changing technologies such as the development of sound and the feature length film which led to a general decline in the slap stick comedy shorts which were so often the home of female-impersonators on screen.<sup>531</sup> In addition, film reflected both national and international ideas in which

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<sup>529</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>530</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>531</sup> Frank Krutnik, 'A Spanner in the Works? Genre, Narrative and the Hollywood Comedian', 17-38 in Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins eds. *Classical Hollywood Comedy* (Oxon: Routledge, 1995) 20.



heterosexuality was privileged as central to constructions of masculinity, making any potential links between cross-dressing and same-sex desire increasingly difficult to ignore.

This chapter differs from the rest of this thesis in that it analyses films themselves, and the spaces within them, rather than the space of the cinema itself. Often, we are left only with small glances into the performances that took place in music halls and carnivals, yet many cross-dressing films screened in Yorkshire in the period under study can still be viewed in their totality. Film therefore provides a rare opportunity to view the exact same performances as those who lived in Yorkshire in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Although this means taking a step away from understanding the experience of the audience, being able to see exactly what people watched, and enjoyed, allows for a more detailed understanding of the role cross-dressing played in popular entertainment culture in Yorkshire.

This chapter analyses seven films featuring female impersonation which were shown in Yorkshire between 1912 and 1932.<sup>532</sup> The analysis builds on evidence from regional newspapers to discuss each film's reception and links to its Yorkshire audience. Viewing figures and audience reactions to early film are difficult to come by and are mostly non-existent for the period under study. For example, the ledger of admissions for the Regent Cinema in Portsmouth, discovered by Sue Harper, 'remains the only record that clearly links admission figures to the actual titles of feature films in the 1930s'.<sup>533</sup> Therefore, analysing the popularity of individual films is rarely straightforward. That a film was shown at all suggests at the very least that the theatre manager believed it would draw in an audience. As Chris O'Rourke argues;

The large number of films produced in Britain in the years before 1918 that featured male cross-dressing performances suggest that British filmmakers saw gender-crossing as a reliable source of amusement or as a way of adding interest to sensational stories of crime and detection.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> Films were chosen based on whether they had been screened in Yorkshire. This is not an exhaustive list on films that included male-to-female cross-dressing in this period, as this was a popular comedic trope.

<sup>533</sup> Grandy, *Heroes and Happy Endings*, 23.

<sup>534</sup> O'Rourke, 'What a Pretty Man', 15.

Films that featured female impersonation remained popular throughout the interwar period, demonstrating the reach of O'Rourke's argument beyond the earliest decades of films. As a new media which faced concerns about its ability to influence viewers from the very beginning, 'the [film] trade as a whole was engaged in a more or less ceaseless quest for respectability'.<sup>535</sup>

Therefore, that a film containing cross-dressing was screened at all demonstrates that those in charge of the cinema saw nothing in the film which would challenge the respectability of their establishment, and also suggests that the film contained themes which were either already known to be popular with audiences or themes that theatre managers believed would be popular. This links to female impersonation's long-standing tradition in British entertainment culture. Much like theatre, music hall, and carnival, film shared a separation from 'reality'. This in turn separated cross-dressing in entertainment spaces from cross-dressing in everyday life, which chapter one demonstrated was likely to arouse suspicion.

Christine Grandy has argued, in reference to the interwar period, that popular film and fiction 'heroes, villains, and love-interests mirrored the contemporary concerns of the audience'.<sup>536</sup> Grandy's work specifically focuses on representations of gender in these films and she situates the narratives against 'the period's simultaneous economic, political, and gender crisis'.<sup>537</sup> This chapter builds on Grandy's work by situating narratives from cross-dressing films in the context of early-twentieth-century Yorkshire in order to better understand how male-to-female cross-dressing can develop understandings not only of the act itself but of masculinity in Yorkshire more broadly. The work of O'Rourke has also been central to this chapter. Having drawn attention to the proliferation of female impersonation in early film, O'Rourke's work identifies a range of different genres of cross-dressing films produced in Britain.<sup>538</sup> The plethora of films noted in this work has helped to develop the regional comparisons in this thesis which

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<sup>535</sup> Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality*.

<sup>536</sup> Grandy, *Heroes and Happy Endings*, 3.

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>538</sup> O'Rourke, 'What a Pretty Woman', 1-22.

shows that certain genres were more popular than others, while some such as the anti-suffrage films, were not shown in Yorkshire at all.<sup>539</sup>

That the Yorkshire press contained little to no criticisms of the presentation of cross-dressing in films goes some way to revealing attitudes towards cross-dressing on film. This was perhaps due to discussions of film in the regional press more broadly. The Yorkshire press did not feature detailed film reviews. Most mentions of films were simple advertisements for local picture houses. Only occasionally did a more detailed review of a particular picture appear, yet even then cross-dressing films were only ever praised. The lack of comment on such films suggests not only acceptance but a pervasiveness of cross-dressing in entertainment culture which meant that no one would be particularly surprised by the presence of a man in female-coded clothing in these spaces.

Yorkshire did not have its own film industry and instead the films shown are reflective of national, and occasionally international culture. However, not all films featuring cross-dressing were screened in Yorkshire; therefore analysing films that *were* shown in Yorkshire, even if they were not produced in the county still speaks to the tastes of Yorkshire audiences and cinema managers. Additionally, this speaks to the increasing nationalisation of popular entertainment which took place alongside the development of film and later television. O'Rourke has identified 'more than eighty British films that feature cross-dressing performances' between 1898 and 1918; however only ten of these films are recorded in regional newspapers as having been shown in Yorkshire picture houses.<sup>540</sup> Six of these films only appear once in press advertisements for Yorkshire cinemas.<sup>541</sup> In addition, a number of American-made films which feature female

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<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>540</sup> O'Rourke, 1.

<sup>541</sup> This includes; *When Women Rule* (1908), *Bertie's Bid for Bliss* (1911), *Love and the Varsity* (1913), *Oh My Aunt!* (1913), *Petticoat Perfidy* (1913), *Joey's Aunt* (1916). *Barnsley Chronicle*, 27 May 1911, p.3 : *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 19 May 1913, p.3 : *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 14 March 1913, p.1 : *Leeds Mercury*, 24 December 1909, p.8 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 16 February 1916, p.3 : *Leeds Mercury*, Tuesday 11 January 1916, p.5.

impersonation were also shown to Yorkshire audiences and therefore form a significant part of this chapter's analysis.

In addition, American films dominated theatres across the country. For example, 'in 1917 73 percent of the films shown in British theatres were American, and by 1932 the number remained at 70 percent'.<sup>542</sup> Regional newspaper advertisements and reviews suggest that this was as true for Yorkshire as it was for the country as a whole, with a number of British made cross-dressing films not appearing in the Yorkshire press advertisements at all, and some of the most frequently shown films being American Keystone comedy films starring Charlie Chaplin and Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle.<sup>543</sup> Britain also had connections to many of the big Hollywood film studios, with a number of British actors taking key roles in American films, working alongside British script writers and other crew members.<sup>544</sup> Therefore, it is possible that American attitudes to gender crossing may have influenced attitudes to the act in Yorkshire via film. American ideals and values were slowly filtering into various aspects of popular entertainment culture in interwar Britain mostly due to the success of the American film industry. As Grandy has demonstrated, the parallels in the economic situation between the two nations following the First World War was reflected in the similarities between popular American film and fiction and British film and fiction.<sup>545</sup> Therefore, the rise in mass culture was not only the beginning of the break down in regional barriers between attitudes towards gender expression but potentially transatlantic barriers too.

This chapter begins by introducing the films that will be discussed in detail providing a brief overview of the plot of each film. It then discusses audience reception of cross-dressing

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<sup>542</sup> Christine, Grandy, 'Paying for Love: Women's Work and Love in Popular Film in Interwar Britain' *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19:3 (2010), 483-507 (485 & 486).

<sup>543</sup> Some of the British films that feature cross-dressing but do not appear in the Yorkshire press include; *The Woman Who Wasn't* (1908) : *Lieutenant Rose and the Gunrunners* (1910) : *Aunt Tabitha's Visit* (1911) : *Uncle Dunn Done* (1912) : *Detective Ferris* (1912) : *The Badness of Burglar Bill* (1913) : *The Sanctimonious Spinners' Society* (1913) : *How a Housekeeper Lost Her Character* (1913) : *Dad Caught Napping* (1913) : *A Novel Wooing* (1914).

<sup>544</sup> Grandy, 'Paying for Love', 485.

<sup>545</sup> Grandy, *Heroes and Happy Endings*, 25-29.

films, tracking when and where these films were shown in Yorkshire alongside press responses to the film. Following this, the chapter discusses censorship in the British cinema and the relationship between censorship and cross-dressing films. The chapter then moves on to discuss a number of themes; including crime, heteronormative masculinity, the masculine body, women's agency, and war. With the exception of women's agency, all of these themes have appeared in previous chapters. Finally, it draws these themes together in a discussion of the centrality of spaces within the films. Through this analysis this chapter argues that these films often reinforced hegemonic codes of masculinity and often privileged heterosexuality as the pinnacle of idealised masculinity. This speaks to the broader picture outlined in this thesis, that cross-dressing could not be defined in clear binaries of acceptability and deviance, the act could simultaneously reinforce the gender binary while subverting normative codes of gendered dress. This chapter therefore argues that the spaces in which men cross-dressed in these films were central to defining female impersonation as not only acceptable but harmless comedic fun.

#### 4.1 Cross-dressing films

As there is not space to analyse in detail every film shown in Yorkshire which included cross-dressing, this chapter analyses the following seven films in detail *Charlie The Perfect Lady* (1914), *The Masquerader* (1914), *Miss Fatty's Seaside Lovers* (1915), *The Butcher Boy* (1917) *Some Chaperone* (1916), *Madame Behave* (1925), and *Splinters* (1930). Each of these films was shown in a Yorkshire cinema at least twice. They share similarities in that they all encourage the viewer to laugh at overly amorous men and features some form of quest for heterosexual love. The films discussed in this chapter all fall under the category of slapstick humour which is used to encourage the audience to laugh at the incongruity between the male body and the female coded clothing which adorns it. This section includes a brief synopsis of each of these films.

*Charlie The Perfect Lady* is the story of a young man (Charlie Chaplin) on a quest to find love. He begins the film by fighting a man for the affections of one young woman, who gets lost

in the brawl. Moments after he has pushed the other gentleman into a pond Chaplin finds himself a new young lady to court. Unaware that this is the daughter of the man he had recently made an enemy of Chaplin heads back to the home of his new love for tea. Chaplin finds himself at the house of his new lover, unaware that the man he had pushed in the pond was his new lover's father. Following tea the father returns and Charlie is brought out to meet him, the pair recognise one another, they fight, with Charlie coming off much worse. During the fight Chaplin hides in an upstairs room where he is greeted by a woman's outfit on a mannequin which he decides to disguise himself in. Charlie's new lover finds him and gets in on the charade. She introduces the cross-dressed Charlie to her father as a friend of hers. The father, duped by the disguise, begins an attempted seduction of Chaplin. In the process of attempting to seduce Chaplin the father accidentally pulls down his skirt, revealing a large pair of spotted men's underwear. He then pulls off Chaplin's hat and wig finally revealing the identity of his daughter's new friend. The fight ends and with Chaplin being thrown out of the house where he lands on his bottom in dismay.

The second Chaplin film in which he dons a female disguise is a twelve-minute comedy short titled *The Masquerader*, also released in 1914. Chaplin plays an actor who is thrown off a film set after messing up a scene. He misses his cue for the first scene as he is outside kissing two young women, he returns late to the scene and causes chaos. After being fired by the director Chaplin returns to the film set disguised as a woman. After fawning over the disguised Chaplin, the director offers him a part in the film. When the director is out of sight, Chaplin removes the disguise and hides it in a cupboard. The director returns to find Chaplin in the same place he had left the woman, he opens the cupboard searching for the woman and instead finds Chaplin's dress and wig hanging on the back of the door. He realises he has been tricked and a fight ensues. The fight ends as the director and other male actors push Chaplin into a well.

*Miss Fatty's Seaside Lovers* tells the story of a young heiress (played by Roscoe Arbuckle) who, while on holiday at the seaside with her family, becomes the object of desire for a number

of young 'Mashers'. The young attempt to woo 'Miss Fatty' and her parents, despite Miss Fatty's inability to stay on her feet and general 'unladylike' demeanour. On a trip to the beach Miss Fatty is seen fighting with her parents, she pushes them into the sea, takes herself to sunbathe on a rock and then finds herself stranded by the incoming tide. The mashers rush to her rescue rowing a boat out to sea. Finally dragged back to shore Miss Fatty throws one of the men back in the sea. The film ends with Miss Fatty being comforted by her parents on the beach as she cries about her broken parasol.

In 1917, Arbuckle again appeared in a role which included the donning of female clothing this time as part of a trick to win the heart of a woman. Fatty plays the part of a butcher boy in love with Amanda, the daughter of his General manager Mr. Grouch. The sales manager Slim Snavely, is a rival for Amanda's affections. Amanda is sent off to boarding school but shortly after she arrives a large woman appears at the gates of the school, the woman being Fatty in 'disguise'. Fatty tells Amanda to introduce him as her cousin who wants to enrol in the school. Fatty is enrolled in the boarding school as 'Candy' and is greeted with much laughter by the other girls who know that Fatty is not really a girl. Outside of the school we see Slim donning a wig as he 'plans his own invasion'. Fatty recognises Slim once he has snuck into the school and they fight. The headteacher hears and separates them. Slim calls in two cronies who aid him in an attempt to kidnap Amanda. The headmistress calls the police and holds Slim and his cronies at gun point. Fatty and Amanda run off to get married.

In 1916 Nestor films *Some Chaperone* was released, a silent comedy short starring Betty Compson, Lee Moran and Harry Rattenby. Moran's Character is in love with Betty and when Betty's father dismisses their chaperone Moran disguises himself as an older woman to gain some alone time with Betty. The girls are both aware that their Chaperone is not really a middle-aged woman. Towards the end of the short Moran, still disguised as the chaperone 'Miss Smith', falls asleep next to the father. Her head lolls onto his shoulder and her wig gets

tangled in his jacket and falls off, revealing the identity of the Chaperone, the father gives chase and a comic fight ensues. All is forgiven in the end.

In *Madame Behave!* (1925), Julain Eltinge plays a Jack, who along with his friend Dick, is about to be thrown out by their landlord, resulting in a court case. Dick's lawyer reminds him that there is a missing witness who could testify against him. He suggests that Dick find the witness and marry her because 'a woman cannot testify against her husband.' Dick tells his rival of his plan who then vows to also find the missing witness and marry her so that she cannot testify against *him*. Meanwhile, Jack is mistaken for a burglar, but manages to evade the law by disguising himself as a woman. The Landlord then mistakes Jack for the missing witness. Jack attracts the attention of a Broadway show girl. The film ends with the landlord allowing Dick and Jack to remain in their house and the two heroes marry their respective girlfriends.

*Splinters* (1930) tells the story of the formation of a concert party behind the lines of the First World War. Private Hal Jones is taken off the lines to join the concert party as a comedian and to help put the troupe together. We see the soldiers preparing and rehearsing for the performances before we are shown the whole revue. Various scenes show privates being 'ticked' into believing the leading 'lady', Reg Stone, really is a woman, only to be quickly rebuked. During the final 'turn' the theatre is blown up and the men scramble to put their uniforms on over their dresses and grab guns to join in the fight. We then see shots of men fighting in dresses and dance shoes with hats and jackets over the top.

#### 4.2 Audience reception

Analysing audience reactions to film in this period is complex. While detail regarding audience reception can be accessed through film magazines and trade papers such as those used by Grandy and O'Rourke, as these focus on the wider industry, analysing these sources would mean taking a significant step away from the regional focus of this thesis. Therefore, this chapter focuses predominantly on film advertisements and reviews in the regional press. While this does not necessarily reflect popularity with individual audience members, when films are shown



multiple times in one city, or even multiple times in one cinema, it is safe to assume that these films had previously drawn in a substantial audience. Due to a lack of sources which reflect audience reactions, I have instead turned to regional newspapers to chart which films were shown, where they were shown, and when. As with the previous chapters, we are again working with partial evidence dealing with the issue that we can never precisely establish whether cross-dressing was the key factor in a film's popularity or otherwise. Yet as Laite argued, there is great benefit in understanding the unobserved past as a 'spectrum of possibilities.'<sup>546</sup>

Although the Yorkshire press rarely featured detailed film reviews the occasional descriptions that were included were mostly part of advertisements and were therefore overwhelmingly positive. For example, the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* described Chaplin's *The Perfect Lady* as 'his (Chaplin's) new great laughter maker', and the *Leeds Mercury* stated simply that the same film portrayed 'Charles Chaplin at his best.'<sup>547</sup> Although the nature of these sources makes it unlikely that they would be anything other than complementary, this still points to a positive reception of cross-dressing on film in Yorkshire. Adrian Bingham has argued that the press retained its status as 'the most important channel of information about contemporary life' into the late 1930s.<sup>548</sup> Therefore the messages contained within newspapers, even notes in advertisements, regarding cross-dressing on film had potential to influence the views of readers and to cement the acts status as acceptable in the context of film.

The films discussed in this chapter were not only free from censorship but appear to have also been received positively by Yorkshire audiences. For example, the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner's* description of *The Perfect Lady* as;

[O]ne of the finest Charlie Chaplin farce-comedies yet given. It is no exaggeration to say that the audience simply rocked with laughter the whole of the twenty minutes that the screen was occupied by Charlie's antics.<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> Julia Laite, 'Radical Uncertainty'.

<sup>547</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1916, p.1 and *Leeds Mercury*, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1915, p.5.

<sup>548</sup> Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press*, 3.

<sup>549</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 11 January 1916, p.2.

The popularity of the film also had the potential to cement this view amongst the people of Yorkshire. *The Perfect Lady* was shown at various picture houses across Yorkshire between December 1915 and August 1916. It was screened in at least five different picture houses in Hull, four different establishments in Sheffield, as well as cinemas in Leeds, Middlesbrough, Whitby, Todmorden, and Driffield.<sup>550</sup> In Sheffield, Hull, and Middlesbrough *The Perfect Lady* was at times screened simultaneously at cinemas in the same city, demonstrating the film's ability to draw in audiences to such an extent that it could be used to compete with other picture houses. Another of Chaplin's cross-dressing farces, *The Masquerader*, also proved popular across Yorkshire. In March 1915 *The Masquerader* was shown in at least seven picture houses in Sheffield.<sup>551</sup> The film was also shown in Driffield and Hull in March 1915 and returned to Sheffield as part of a 'Unique Whit-Week Programme' in June 1916.<sup>552</sup> *The Masquerader* was described by the *Sheffield Independent* as a 'Side-Splitting Comic' and as 'genuinely funny humour film' by the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*.<sup>553</sup> Chaplin's performance in *The Masquerader* received rave reviews in the Yorkshire press. For example the *Sheffield Independent* reported the following: 'Charles Chaplin plays a characteristically amusing part and his make-up as a girl is startlingly good'. The *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* stated, 'Charles Chaplin in "The Masquerader" is funny as ever' and 'in "The Masquerader" there is some clever acting by the popular cinema actor Charlie Chaplin'.<sup>554</sup> Again the popularity of this film and the reactions of the Yorkshire press presented this film, and the cross-dressing within it, as a 'normative' part of entertainment culture.

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<sup>550</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 11 December 1915, p.4 : *Leeds Mercury*, 14 December 1915, p.2 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 20 December 1915, p.4 : *Todmorden Advertiser and Hebden Bridge Newsletter*, 2 June 1916, p.5 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 3 January 1916, p.4 : *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 23 March 1916, p.1 : *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 21 February 1916, p.2 : *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 19 February 1916, p.3 : *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 11 January 1916, p.2 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 March 1916, p.1 : *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 11 April 1916, p.1 : *Driffield Times*, 12 August 1916, p.2 : *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 04 May 1916, p.1 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 2 May 1916, p.3 : *Whitby Gazette*, 25 February 1916, p.4.

<sup>551</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 1 March 1915, p.3 : *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 2 March 1915, p.2 : *Sheffield Independent*, 2 March 1915, p.8 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 9 March 1915, p.9 : *Sheffield Independent*, 15 March 1915, p.4 : *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 26 March 1915, p.2 : *Sheffield Independent*, 19 April 1915, p.10 : *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 20 April 1915, p.4.

<sup>552</sup> *Driffield Times*, 1 May 1915, p.2 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 11 May 1915, p.3 and *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 9 June 1916, p.1.

<sup>553</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 1 March 1915, p.3 : *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 2 March 1915, p.2.

<sup>554</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 1 March 1915, p.3 : *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 2 March 1915, p.2 : *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 20 April 1915, p.4.

Another Keystone comedy favourite, Roscoe Arbuckle, also starred in cross-dressing films shown in Yorkshire cinemas. Although these films met with a positive reception, they proved much less popular with cinema managers than Chaplin's films. *The Butcher Boy* was advertised as being shown in just two Yorkshire cinemas, one in Hull in 1920, and one in Shipley in 1921.<sup>555</sup> *Miss Fatty's Seaside Lovers* proved somewhat more popular and was shown in at least two cinemas in Hull, and at least one cinema in each Sheffield, Middlesbrough, Baildon, and Idle.<sup>556</sup> Although described as a 'screamingly funny picture', Arbuckle's films did not reach the same level of success in Yorkshire as Chaplin's.<sup>557</sup> The same is true for *Some Chaperone* which received minimal comment in the regional press other than being noted as 'a very amusing comic'.<sup>558</sup> Again, this film was shown in Sheffield, Driffield, Middlesbrough, Shipley and Todmorden.<sup>559</sup> *Madame Behave*, starring the infamous female impersonator Julian Eltinge, received even less comment but was shown at three cinemas in Leeds, three in Sheffield, one in Hull, and one in Todmorden.<sup>560</sup> However, Chaplin's films reflected similar themes and jokes of the other films suggesting that it was the almost unfailing popularity of Chaplin's comic characters which made his films stand out from the rest rather than any particular representation of cross-dressing.

There is a clear pattern in terms of the cities and towns that screened these films. Although the type of location ranges, from large cities such as Sheffield, Leeds, and Hull to much smaller towns in more rural locations such as Todmorden and Idle, the places that screened these films were often the same. This demonstrates that the popularity of cross-

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<sup>555</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 7 December 1920, p.5 : *Shipley Times and Express*, 28 January 1921, p.1.

<sup>556</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 30 December 1915, p.4 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 31 December 1915, p.1 : *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 11 January 1916, p.6 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 15 February 1916, 2 : *Shipley Times and Express*, 18 February 1916, p.1 : *Shipley Times and Express*, 28 April 1916, 4.

<sup>557</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 31 December 1915, p.1.

<sup>558</sup> *Todmorden & District News*, 'Olympia', 18 August 1916, p.5.

<sup>559</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 9 May 1916, p.6 : *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 30 May 1916, p.2 : *Todmorden & District News*, 18 August 1916, p.5 : *Shipley Times and Express*, 6 October 1916, p.9 : *Sheffield Independent*, 8 May 1916, p.4.

<sup>560</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 8 May 1926, p.2 : *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 29 November 1926, p.1 : *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 8 May 1926, p.1 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 24 September 1926, p.6 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 17 December 1926, p.13 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 11 March 1927, p.8 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 15 March 1927, p.5 : *Todmorden Advertiser and Hebden Bridge Newsletter*, 18 March 1927, p.1.

dressing on film varied across different areas. Smith has argued that communities in industrial South Yorkshire in particular were fairly tolerant of sexual and gendered difference, and this appears to have been reflected in their choice of film.<sup>561</sup> However, West Yorkshire also showed a preference for cross-dressing films. This adds weight to the argument that female impersonation was both a ubiquitous and acceptable facet of popular entertainment culture but that a particularly Northern understanding of masculinity influenced how these films were understood and enjoyed.

Press advertisements reveal that Sheffield and Hull screened a larger number of cross-dressing films than any other of Yorkshire's big cities such as York, Wakefield, Leeds, or Bradford. Between 1896 and 1939 Sheffield and its suburbs were home to at least 52 establishments that screened films for public consumption.<sup>562</sup> This made Sheffield the city with the highest number of cinemas in South Yorkshire, followed by Doncaster with only 32.<sup>563</sup> In West Yorkshire, Bradford and the surrounding areas was home to 39 establishments showing films in the same period, followed closely by Leeds and Leeds district which was home to 37 cinemas and picture houses.<sup>564</sup> Hull, in comparison was home to just 26 cinemas in the same period, still a significant number for a city of Hull's size.<sup>565</sup> Therefore, it is more likely that a cross-dressing film would be shown in the larger cities than in one of the smaller market town cinemas, simply due to the larger number of picture houses and thus larger number of films shown. This could lead to the assumption that cross-dressing films were more popular in urban areas than they were in smaller, more rural towns and villages. However, the fact that these films were screened in smaller, rural and suburban cinemas is more significant than the screening of

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<sup>561</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 3-4.

<sup>562</sup> Peter Tuffrey, *South Yorkshire Cinemas & Theatres* (Stroud: Amberly Publishing, 2011) pp.87-127.

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid*, pp.29-62.

<sup>564</sup> Peter Tuffrey, *West Yorkshire Cinemas and Theatres* (Stroud: Fonthill Media, 2013). For Bradford and district 9-40, for Leeds and district 87-126.

<sup>565</sup> K J Allison *A History of the County of York East Riding: Volume 1, the City of Kingston Upon Hull* (London: Victoria Country History, 1969), pp. 418-432. British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/yorks/east/vol1/pp418-432> [accessed 9 April 2020].

such films in city centres because they were able to show fewer films overall. As the previous chapter has shown, events such as carnivals and galas which included female impersonation were much more prevalent in smaller villages than they were in larger cities. This wider tradition of cross-dressing entertainment in these areas may have resulted in an increased popularity of films featuring female impersonation. Ultimately, the evidence available means we cannot know what made films such as these popular in particular places across the country. However, the repeated showing of films focused on cross-dressing in other contexts, such as the carnival and the theatre, suggests that cross-dressing might indeed have been the films' key factor in their success.

#### 4.4 Censorship

From the early years of cinema fears arose surrounding the ability of films to influence the behaviour of audience members. However, the film industry was not the only form of popular culture subject to these anxieties as Rachel Potter argued:

In the period of 1900– 1940... the claim that literary obscenity could corrupt the minds of the young and impressionable fuelled the censorship of a huge number of English language texts and made it one of the most tightly controlled periods in the history of literary expression.<sup>566</sup>

The belief that the morals of characters in popular film and fiction could influence the morals of the general public cemented censorship as a key component of the film and fiction industry in early twentieth-century Britain.<sup>567</sup> As a result, censorship features heavily in the historiography of early British cinema.<sup>568</sup> In 1909, just thirteen years after the first public film show in Britain, the Cinematography Act was introduced, intended to regulate public exhibition of film.<sup>569</sup> The

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<sup>566</sup> Rachel Potter, *Obscene Modernism: Literary Censorship and Experiment 1900-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 1-2, Ebook.

<sup>567</sup> Grandy, *Heroes and Happy Endings*, 13.

<sup>568</sup> Lise Shapiro Sanders, 'Indecent Incentives to Vice', *Regulating Films and Audience Behaviour from the 1890s to the 1910s*, in *Young and Innocent? The Cinema in Britain 1896-1930* ed. by, Andrew Higson (Exeter University Press: Exeter, 2002) 97- 110 (98). For discussions of censorship see also Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema* : Anthony Aldgate and James C Robertson, *Censorship in Theatre and Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005) : Kuhn, *Cinema* : Tom Dewe Mathews, *Censored, What They Didn't Allow You to See, and Why: the Story of Film Censorship in Britain* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994) : Guy Phelps, *Film Censorship* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1975) : Geoffrey Robertson, *Obscenity: An Account of Censorship Laws and their Enforcement in England and Wales* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979) : John Trevelyan, *What the Censor Saw* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973): Enid Wistrich, *I Don't Mind the Sex, It's the Violence: Film Censorship Explored* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978).

<sup>569</sup> Kuhn, *Cinema*.

original focus of this Act was on the physical safety of audience members rather than the regulation of film content. However, it was this Act that ‘eventually opened a legal path to certain practices of film censorship’.<sup>570</sup> In response to continuing concerns surrounding films’ influence on the public, The British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) was formed in 1912 with the aim of applying age-restrictive classifications on all films, thus becoming the first formal system of censorship brought to British cinema. The BBFC aimed to bring uniformity to censorship of film and, as Grandy explains:

The BBFC worked hard to shape the narratives that passed their script examiners by flagging certain dialogue, images, or themes that might cause offense. By and large, however, the BBFC concerned itself with images of overt female sexuality and ensured that adultery, nudity, and inappropriate language were not used.<sup>571</sup>

The Board officially began to classify films in 1913, awarding either a Universal certificate to a film deemed suitable for exhibition to audiences of any age, or an A-certificate to films deemed only suitable for adult audiences.<sup>572</sup> Although the BBFC classifications were not legally enforceable, films could still be subject to control via the statutory provisions on indecency and obscenity and could also be subject to sanction under the offences of ‘outraging public decency, conspiracy to outrage public decency, and obscene libel’.<sup>573</sup> Legally, cinema licencing and censorship was placed in the control of local authorities resulting in significant variations in censorship practices across the country. In Yorkshire, it seems, licences were usually only revoked or refused when the building itself was not deemed suitable or safe for large audiences.<sup>574</sup>

While the BBFC were busy policing female sexuality, nudity, and offensive language, female impersonation seems to have mostly passed through censorship regulations with relative

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<sup>570</sup> United Kingdom, *Cinematograph Act 1909*

<[https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1909/30/pdfs/ukpga\\_19090030\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1909/30/pdfs/ukpga_19090030_en.pdf)> : Kuhn, *Cinema*, NPN.

<sup>571</sup> Grandy, ‘Paying for Love’, 505.

<sup>572</sup> Gerry Turvey, ‘Another of Those Sex Films!?: The Transgressive Cinema of Harold Weston, 1914–17’, *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 9:1, (2011) 57-73, (60).

<sup>573</sup> Kuhn, *Cinema*. As Kuhn has shown, it is also noteworthy that prior to 1925 it was unheard of ‘for films shown in public cinemas to be prosecuted for indecency or obscenity.’

<sup>574</sup> See for example cases reported in; *Leeds Mercury*, 3 February 1930, p.7 : *Yorkshire Evening Post*: 2 December 1938, p.15 : *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 11 February 1920, p.3 : *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 2 May 1931, p.15 : *Hull Daily*, 20 July 1920, p.6.

ease. The lack of censorship of female impersonation in film supports the overall argument of this thesis, that female impersonation was only deemed deviant under a very specific set of circumstances and was accepted and enjoyed in a variety of forms of popular entertainment.<sup>575</sup> As previously noted, cinema managers would have avoided showing potentially controversial films, particularly in the early years of cinema. The screening of these films in mainstream cinema separates female impersonation from deviance in this context. Alongside this, in 1915 the BBFC made the decision to apply an 'A' certificate – certifying the film as suitable for adult audiences only - to all films which depicted the committing of a crime.<sup>576</sup> None of the films discussed in this chapter received an 'A' certificate, cementing the argument presented in chapter two that the sole act of male-to-female cross-dressing was not seen as directly linked to crime, and instead the acceptability of female impersonation was defined by a number of complex factors relating to context, class, reputation, and most importantly, space.

Despite cross-dressing's potential links to sexual deviance, only one of the films discussed in this chapter appears in BBFC records. Chaplin's *The Perfect Lady* was initially released under the title *A Woman* but was rejected by the BBFC in March 1915.<sup>577</sup> It was released in Britain the following July with a new title *Charlie The Perfect Lady*.<sup>578</sup> Although *The Perfect Lady* was likely one of the first films in which the BBFC was confronted with male-to-female cross-dressing, female impersonation was not the reason for the BBFC's original rejection of the film. As James Robertson explained;

an early sequence, incidental to the main story, shows a married man (Charles Insley) pursuing and then approaching a pretty girl (Margie Reiger) in a park. During 1915 the BBFC turned down at least one film for showing the premeditated seduction of a girl... it is just possible that the park scene fell into such a vague category and was the reason, rather than Chaplain's [cross-dressing], for BBFC concern.<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>575</sup> See chapters one, two, and three for more detail on this.

<sup>576</sup> Turvey, 'Those Sex Films', 60.

<sup>577</sup> Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema*, 8.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>579</sup> *Ibid*, 8

That the BBFC chose not to censor female impersonation in film is a clear indication that cross-dressing in this context was not classed as deviant. The change of title suggests a shift of focus, which may at first have been on the young women who Chaplin and Insley's characters pursue, and instead onto Chaplin's female impersonation. Contrary to the narrative of cross-dressing presented in criminal sources, this example demonstrates that female impersonation could be deemed more acceptable than the pre-meditated seduction of a young woman.

#### 4.5 Cross-dressing and Crime

Regardless of where they were shown the films discussed in this chapter were primarily comedies yet also fitted into the genres of romance, crime, or war. O'Rourke highlights four specific categories of cross-dressing films in early British cinema: short films which featured quick change artists, comedies about heterosexual romance and courtship, anti-women's suffrage comedies and crime films.<sup>580</sup> However, not all of these genres proved popular in Yorkshire. Of the thirteen British-made crime films which featured female impersonation between 1903 and 1913, I have found that just one of these films was shown in Yorkshire.<sup>581</sup> *The Great Tiger Ruby*, released in 1913, told the story of a detective who disguised himself as a woman in order to uncover a stolen ruby. This was shown in Leeds, Middlesbrough, Halifax, and Sheffield.<sup>582</sup> Unlike the other cross-dressing crime films highlighted by O'Rourke, it was the detective and not the criminal who cross-dressed. This separated the film from stories of cross-dressed criminals which appeared in the press and were more likely to be seen as deviant. As chapter one has shown, when coupled with a criminal act cross-dressing was seen as potentially dangerous or disruptive to the community. However, chapter three demonstrated that when cross-dressing had an honourable purpose, such as raising money for charity, then it was accepted as family entertainment. In *The Great Tiger Ruby* the intent was to catch a criminal. Although this chapter

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<sup>580</sup> O'Rourke, 1-22.

<sup>581</sup> O'Rourke, 8.

<sup>582</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 4 March 1913, p.3; *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 10 February 1913, p.2; *Halifax Evening Courier*, 26 March 1913, p.3; *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 7 February 1913, p.1.



argues that cross-dressing was generally enjoyed by Yorkshire audiences, the lack of crime films shown suggests that there were still some circumstances that made cross-dressing on film difficult to enjoy.

Another factor which may have made theatre managers step away from the crime films which featured the criminal dressing themselves in female-coded clothing is the unease surrounding crime as entertainment in this period.<sup>583</sup> As demonstrated by Victoria Stewart and Matt Houlbrook, crime fiction and true crime stories had become increasingly popular by the interwar period and criminal life stories, whether fact or fiction held a significant position in popular culture.<sup>584</sup> However, alongside the boom in popular film and fiction in the 1920s came growing concerns that there was an ‘obsession’ with crime in popular culture and that this had the potential to corrupt the morals of consumers.<sup>585</sup> Houlbrook argues that despite concerns surrounding moral corruption, individual life stories continued to grab the public’s attention, even more so than crime fiction which perhaps accounts for the lack of interest in fictionalised crime film.<sup>586</sup> Concerns surrounding the corrupting influence of crime films may have been enough to prevent cinema managers screening these films. Although stories of crime were undoubtedly popular, it is possible that the combination of cross-dressing and crime was felt to be a step too far.

As has been argued throughout this thesis, space was integral to defining cross-dressing as admissible or deviant. While the depiction of cross-dressing to catch a criminal may have been accepted (the cross-dressing is here being undertaken for a ‘noble cause’), an image of a man dressed in female clothes in order to commit a crime had very different connotations. Films

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<sup>583</sup> A number of these films were shown in other parts of the country but not in Yorkshire. These films include *The Interrupted Honeymoon* (1905), *A Slippery Visitor* (1906), *The Sharp Witted Thief* (1910) and *The Badness of Burglar Bill* (1913). For more on these films see O’rourke, ‘What a Pretty Man’, 92-94.

<sup>584</sup> Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters*, 115 and Victoria Stewart, ‘True-Crime Narratives and Detective Fiction in Interwar Britain’, *Clues*, 29: 2 (2011), 16-29.

<sup>585</sup> Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters*, 114.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

displaying the cross-dressed criminal may have compounded the fears and suspicions evoked by reports of men ‘disguised’ as women in order to commit crimes. Even in criminal cases, the spaces in which men cross-dressed were central to defining the seriousness of the ‘offence’. As the trial of John Russel showed, female impersonation in private spaces could be deemed admissible.<sup>587</sup> However as Clement Mitchell’s case shows, cross-dressing in public spaces, outside of entertainment, was much more likely to arouse suspicion.<sup>588</sup> Female impersonation in crime films was rarely contained to private spaces increasing the potential for the deceit and corruption of innocent bystanders. As will be demonstrated in more detail later in the chapter, it was not only the space of the cinema screen that was important in defining the acceptability of female impersonation but the spaces in which cross-dressing took place *within* the film.

#### 4.6 Heteronormative Masculinity

Regardless of genre, ideals of hegemonic and heteronormative masculinity were often reinforced in cross-dressing films. One of the ways these films reinforced hegemonic ideals was through the privileging of heterosexuality. Grandy has argued that in the popular film and fiction of the interwar period, a happy ending was often related to the restoration of heterosexual love.<sup>589</sup> The inclusion of a scene depicting what Grandy calls the ‘heterosexual moment of love’, was central to most genres of film in the period, and this included cross-dressing films.<sup>590</sup> Although most of the films discussed here are comedies, the quest for heterosexual love was often the main narrative device in a number of the cross-dressing films which proved popular in Yorkshire. O’Rourke also found that ‘the highest frequency of men’s cross-dressing performances in British films made before 1918 occurred in comedies about romance and courtship’.<sup>591</sup> In these films female impersonation was often used to gain access to female spaces enabling the protagonists to

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<sup>587</sup> Bland, *Modern Women on Trial*, 176-209.

<sup>588</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>589</sup> Grandy, *Heroes and Happy Endings*, 137.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

<sup>591</sup> O’Rourke, 8

get closer to their love interests.<sup>592</sup> In her discussion of gender crossing Butler has argued that cross-dressing parodies hegemonic constructions of gender, and,

constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities.<sup>593</sup>

In the context of these films, I argue that the quest for romantic love, or the quest to ‘get the girl’ actively reinforces gendered hegemony regardless of the male protagonists’ gendered dress.

Keeping heterosexual love at the centre of the narrative reinforces hegemonic gender norms and kept female impersonation in the realm of acceptability. As Connell has argued, there is a ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ in western society, which is central to hegemonic ideals of masculinity.<sup>594</sup> These films emphasise a link between masculinity and heterosexuality which is not present in the other spaces mentioned in this chapter. In this way, these films highlight the difference between regional and national understandings of masculinity. The Yorkshire working class privileged work and community representation as markers of respectable masculinity, whereas these films reflect a more national understanding of masculinity in line with Connell’s argument. In these films heterosexuality is placed at the centre of masculinity. This section analyses five cross-dressing films shown in Yorkshire which reinforce heteronormativity through a focus on the ‘getting the girl narrative’; *Charlie The Perfect Lady* (1915), *The Butcher Boy* (1917), *Some Chaperone* (1916), *The Masquerader* (1915), and *Madame Behave!* (1925).<sup>595</sup>

Although American-made, *The Perfect Lady* fits with O’Rourke’s assertion that the quest to ‘get the girl’ was central to many British cross-dressing films made in the 1910s.<sup>596</sup> In *The Perfect Lady* Chaplin’s insatiable quest to ‘get the girl’, or even to just get a girl, is one of a number of ways his masculinity is emphasised. Early on in this comedy short we see Chaplin flirting with

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<sup>592</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>593</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 188.

<sup>594</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 104.

<sup>595</sup> *A Woman/The Perfect Lady*, dir. by Charles Chaplin (Essany, 1915) : *The Butcher Boy*, dir. by Roscoe Arbuckle (Comique Film Company, 1917) : *Some Chaperone*, dir. by Al Christie (Nestor Film Company, 1915) : *The Masquerader*, dir by Charles Chaplin (Keystone Film Company, 1915) : *Madame Behave*, dir. by Scott Sidney (Christie Film Company, 1925).

<sup>596</sup> O’Rourke, 9.

a young woman. Despite his peculiar appearance (Chaplin is dressed in his trademark baggy trousers and oversized shoes), he appears to win the affections of the young woman with relative ease. When his initial seduction is thwarted, he quickly moves on to his next 'target' as he happens across another young woman sat on a park bench with her mother. In order to remain in the presence of his new love interest, and also to protect himself from her father's anger, Chaplin is willing to dress himself as a woman to escape the father but also to aid in his quest to 'get the girl'. Because the subversion of gendered dress is part of a narrative of heterosexual love, the act of donning clothes of the opposite sex reinforces heteronormativity in this instance.

Similar themes are reflected in *The Butcher Boy* (1917).<sup>597</sup> Arbuckle appears with long braids, a frilly bonnet, and a short, frilly dress which reflects the style of cross-dressing seen in Yorkshire carnivals. This outfit revealed rather than concealed his masculine frame. The film ends with Arbuckle and Amanda running away, hand in hand, to get married. Again, this follows the pattern of restoring heterosexual love. Unlike the other films analysed in this chapter, *The Butcher Boy* demonstrates the difference between the dishonourable and the honourable quest for heterosexual love. Slim Snavely, the 'bad guy' of the film, also disguises himself as a girl to gain admittance to the boarding school and to win Amanda's heart. At the end of the film Arbuckle 'gets the girl', but Snavely is handed over to the police for his misdemeanours. The differentiating factor between Arbuckle and Snavely is that Arbuckle's love for Amanda is returned, whereas Snavely's is not. When affections are not returned cross-dressing in order to gain access to female spaces reverts to being potentially dangerous and threatening to idealised femininity. Amanda's reciprocation of love helps to define Fatty as the hero and Slim as the villain.

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<sup>597</sup> *The Butcher Boy*, dir. by Roscoe Arbuckle (Comique Film Company, 1917).

*Some Chaperone* (1915) also utilises cross-dressing as a comedic tool to ‘get the girl’ and features the reciprocation of love from the female character.<sup>598</sup> Mirroring the tropes from music hall and pantomime discussed in previous chapters, Moran’s chaperone is an older, desexualised woman, and the audience is encouraged to laugh at his rather unconvincing portrayal of a woman. His manner of moving emphasises his ‘true sex’ despite his disguise being fairly convincing. As with *The Butcher Boy* and *The Perfect Lady*, the main character only dresses in female attire to aid his quest to ‘get the girl’. In *The Butcher Boy* Arbuckle is successful in his quest, though *The Perfect Lady* ends with Chaplin being physically thrown out into the street. Although films such as these clearly evoke the possibility of sexual deviance in terms of unmarried men and women spending time together unchaperoned, the focus remained on the blossoming of heterosexual love.

The restoration of heterosexual love was also central to cross-dressing films where ‘getting the girl’ was not the main narrative device. In *Madame Behave!*, ‘getting the girl’ the two main characters, Dick and Jack do not cross-dress in an attempt to win the heart of a young woman but they do restore the heteronormative order by marrying their respective girlfriends at the end of the film. *Madame Behave!* is the only film analysed in this section that includes heterosexual love in a way that is not key to the narrative. The heterosexual relationship instead functions to restore the equilibrium and emphasises the main characters heteronormativity after we have seen his cross-dressed escapades. As previous chapters have demonstrated, from the 1930s onwards more anxieties appeared in relation to cross-dressing’s potential for deviance. These increasing links meant that it was progressively more important for cross-dressed characters in a range of popular cultural forms to emphasise their respectable masculinity.

Alongside reiterating the importance of heterosexuality and the quest to ‘get the girl’ to hegemonic notions of masculinity, these films also highlight the boundaries of acceptable

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<sup>598</sup> *Some Chaperone*, dir. by Al Christie (Nestor Film Company, 1915).

masculinity and good character. The differentiation between hero and villain often lay in the return of the female characters' affections. Peter Stansfield's research into the Western, a genre that was seeing a significant expanse in popularity in the interwar period, revealed that the villain was often defined by having intentions that were 'far from honourable' in relation to the pursuit of a woman.<sup>599</sup> This is reflected in the rivalry between Fatty and Snavelly in *The Butcher Boy*.

Snavelly's rivalry with the beloved Fatty over the affections of Amanda paints him as the villain at the start of the film. His attempts to kidnap Amanda once she has been sent to boarding school without first finding out if his interests are returned emphasises his devious character. The film passes judgement on Snavelly's attempts to take Amanda by force by punishing him at the end of the film. While Fatty and Amanda skip off to get married, Snavelly finds himself held at gun point by the headmistress and awaiting the arrival of the police after his plot is discovered. Therefore, the quest to get the girl in *The Butcher Boy* reinforces reciprocal heterosexual love as the ideal whilst also demonstrating the importance of nuance in understanding idealised masculinity. In this instance honourable intentions are central to idealised masculine character regardless of choice to don female-coded clothing.

While desire for women was the pinnacle of the heteronormative masculine ideal, the 1915 Chaplin film *The Masquerader* shows how too much emphasis on the pursuit of women can threaten a man's good character and thus their masculine status. In addition, the BBFC censorship of *The Perfect Lady*, as discussed at the start of the chapter, demonstrates that the BBFC see the premeditated seduction of a young woman as much more problematic than male-to-female cross-dressing.<sup>600</sup> Smith has noted that, in the industrial north at least, promiscuity was one factor which cost a man his respectable masculine identity in his community.<sup>601</sup> Alongside this, William Reddy has argued that romantic love stands, 'in sharp contrast to sexual desire', and

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<sup>599</sup> Peter Stanfield, 'The Western 1909--14: A Cast of Villains', *Film History* 1:2 (1987), 97–112 (106-109).

<sup>600</sup> Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema*, 8.

<sup>601</sup> Smith, 'Love, Sex, Work, and Friendship', 68.

while the restoration of heterosexual love could serve to reinforce the good character and masculinity of the characters who donned female-coded clothing in a cross-dressing farce, overt sexual desire could have the opposite effect.<sup>602</sup> One of the misdemeanours that led to Chaplin being fired from the film studio was his failure to appear on set for his scene because he was busy flirting with two women outside. We see him standing outside with each of his arms draped over the shoulders of a young woman and a cigarette hanging from his mouth. In this instance it is not just his overly amorous nature that challenges his masculinity but also his inability or unwillingness to work.<sup>603</sup> After returning to the set disguised as a woman in the hope of getting cast in a female role, Chaplin's disguise is discovered, and he is chased by the other male actors before being thrown into a well. Chaplin is punished for allowing his pursuit of women to interfere with his ability to behave respectably.

The limits of acceptable heterosexuality are also highlighted by the father in *The Perfect Lady*.<sup>604</sup> Although Chaplin's female impersonation is the main comedic focus of the film, the narrative also serves as a commentary on unfaithful husbands and overly amorous men. The father of Chaplin's love interest and his competitor for the admiration of the first young woman we see in the film is the butt of the joke throughout. The father is first tricked when he almost loses a young lady to the ridiculous Chaplin. He is tricked again when he is pushed into a lake by Chaplin. He is tricked for the third and final time when he is duped into believing that Chaplin is an attractive young woman who he can seduce. The unfaithful husband and his friend, who appears equally enamoured with Chaplin, are the only characters 'at risk' from humiliation in this film. The father and his friend are the villains in this story, and their humiliation at having fallen for a man in women's clothes is emblematic of their inability to control their desires. To the

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<sup>602</sup> William Reddy, *The Making of Romantic Love: Longing and Sexuality in Europe, South Asia and Japan, 900-1200 CE* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2012) 44.

<sup>603</sup> Work has been emphasised as a key component to representing a respectable masculine image by a wide range of historians. Some examples include; Smith, *Masculinity: Joanna Bourke, Working Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960* (London: Routledge, 1994) 130-135; Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (London: Routledge, 1999), 303.

<sup>604</sup> *A Woman/The Perfect Lady*, dir. by Charles Chaplin (Essany, 1915).

audience, Chaplin's true sex is evident through his clumsy walk, poor manners, and giant shoes. Despite Chaplin's lack of femininity the father and his friend are so blinded by their desire for female attention, that they fail to realise Chaplin is in fact a man.

This resonates with Slim Snavely's over-ambition to 'get the girl' in *The Butcher Boy*. Although the quest for the girl reinforced heteronormativity, men who went too far, who pursued women who did not return their affections, who pursued too many women, or who attempted to have affairs whilst married, are ultimately punished. Within this commentary on male desire there is also another assertion of heteronormativity through the cross-dressed characters' efforts to avoid the advances of other men whilst they are dressed as a woman. By going to great efforts to avoid the kisses of the father and his friend in *The Perfect Lady*, Chaplin's character is removing himself from potential accusations of intentionally inciting male desire. This was important in a period when male-to-female cross-dressing in the street, particularly in London, was presented in the press alongside male prostitution and sexual deviance.<sup>605</sup> While I have argued that cross-dressing in this context was not linked to sexual or gendered deviance, if Chaplin had not spurned the advances of the other male characters in this film it is highly unlikely that the film would have passed the BBFC's rigorous censorship. This helps to understand the limitations to the expression of heterosexual desire and its relationship to acceptable masculinity.

While it is possible that the restoration and reciprocation of heterosexual love was intentionally used to protect cross-dressing films from accusations of promoting transgressive gendered behaviour, these tropes were also popular in a wide range of film genres. As Claire Langhamer has argued of the first half of the twentieth century, the importance of romantic heterosexual love was almost constantly reiterated in popular culture as the cornerstone of

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<sup>605</sup> See chapter one.



happiness and a successful marriage.<sup>606</sup> Therefore, the inclusion of the quest for heterosexual love in cross-dressing films speaks more to the centrality of heterosexual love in popular culture in general than it does to cross-dressing's relation to sexuality. However, it does demonstrate that popular cross-dressing films often served to reinforce heteronormative models of gender. The quest for, as well as the restoration of, heterosexual love positions the men who cross-dress in these films in contrast to men such as Boulton and Park whose cross dressing in public led to a highly publicised sodomy trial.<sup>607</sup>

#### 4.7 The Masculine Body

Key to presenting the quest to 'get the girl' in films where one part of the couple is cross-dressed is the visibility of the masculine body and the failure of the male character to present a 'convincing' image of femininity. The physical male body served as a symbol of innate masculinity and the incongruity between the masculine body and female-coded clothing was one of the most obvious ways that an individual's masculine nature was emphasised in cross-dressing films, much as they were in carnival.<sup>608</sup> Another way one's innate masculinity was emphasised was through the cross-dressed characters' inability to keep up the performance of femininity. For example, in *The Masquerader* Chaplin's innate manliness is emphasised through his inability to keep up the pretence of being a woman. After Chaplin has donned his female disguise, he adjusts his clothes often, emphasising his discomfort, and scratches his behind on more than one occasion.<sup>609</sup> All of the male actors who don female disguise in these films remind the audience of the masculine body beneath their clothes at some point. Usually, as in *The Butcher Boy* when Fatty lifts his skirt and flashes his underwear to the camera, this is only seen by the audience.<sup>610</sup> This positions the cross-dressing as a private joke between the man dressed as a woman and the

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<sup>606</sup> Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 1-21.

<sup>607</sup> See Carriger, 'The Unnatural History', 135-156 : 202. Neil McKenna, *Fanny and Stella: The Young Men Who Shocked Victorian England* (London: Faber & Faber, 2013) : Upchurch 'Forgetting the Unthinkable', 127-157.

<sup>608</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>609</sup> *The Masquerader*, dir by Charles Chaplin (Keystone Film Company, 1915).

<sup>610</sup> *The Butcher Boy*, dir. by Roscoe Arbuckle (Comique Film Company, 1917).

audience, again echoing the knowingness of stage performance. These themes are also reflected in *The Masquerader* as Chaplin's portrayal of femininity slips when the director's back is turned. Chaplin sneaks a drag of the director's cigarette, dramatically exhaling as if gaining a temporary relief from the performance.<sup>611</sup> As Penny Tinkler has demonstrated, smoking, in public at least, was almost exclusively associated with men and masculinity until after the First World War.<sup>612</sup> Therefore, this quick drag of a cigarette not only reminds the audience of Chaplin's 'cheeky' nature but also emphasises that hiding his masculinity is a struggle, and respectable femininity is difficult for him to portray.

Another example of a character's struggle with portraying femininity appears in *The Butcher Boy* with Slim Snavely. At the dinner table Snavely slurps his food, eats his peas from his knife, and dribbles gravy down his chin. His poor manners not only emphasise an inability to present himself as 'convincingly' feminine but also demonstrate a general lack of respectability of character. This not only emphasises his inability to present himself as convincingly feminine but also reiterates his role as the villain. In contrast, in *The Perfect Lady*, Chaplin is able to perform an image of respectable femininity and fools the father into believing he is really a woman. In contrast to Snavely's villain, Chaplin is instead presented as a loveable fool. However, Chaplin's transition to 'the perfect lady' is still not straightforward. When he first emerges dressed in female-coded clothing his love interest roars with laughter at his terrible disguise.<sup>613</sup> She convinces him to shave his moustache and don a pair of high heels instead of his giant floppy shoes. Only after he has been helped by his new love interests does he smile coyly at the camera and flutter his eyelashes, finally able to portray the image of 'the perfect lady'.

The incongruity between the masculine body and the female-coded clothing not only serves to emphasise the masculinity of the man beneath the clothes but also works as a comedic

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<sup>611</sup> *The Masquerader*, dir. by Charles Chaplin (Keystone Film Company, 1915).

<sup>612</sup> Penny Tinkler, *Smoke Signals: Women Smoking in Visual Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2006).

<sup>613</sup> *A Woman/The Perfect Lady*, dir. by Charles Chaplin (Essany, 1915).

device. As with theatrical female impersonation on the music hall stage, the comedy was more complex than the image of the masculine body remaining visible beneath the female-coded clothing. *Miss Fatty's Seaside Lovers* plays on the incongruity of the physical body of the man beneath the clothing more so than any other film discussed in this chapter.<sup>614</sup> Arbuckle was renowned for his distinctive physique which lent itself easily to the slapstick physical comedy the silent era has become famed for. Much like Chaplin's giant shoes, Arbuckle's size aided him greatly in his comic roles. In this comedy short Arbuckle does not become a girl within the film but begins the film as a female character, a trope more often seen on stage than on screen. This again relies on 'knowingness' because Arbuckle's fame and size mean the audience were very much aware that 'Miss Fatty' was being portrayed by a man. Bailey defines knowingness, 'as what everybody knows, but some know better than others.'<sup>615</sup> This ability to know more than others, or to feel one knows more than others, put the audience ahead of the joke. Numerous scenes use Fatty's size for comedic effect, including a scene which shows a group of young men struggling to save a drowning Miss Fatty from the sea as they struggle to lift her into a boat that she almost capsizes. Although men playing women without comment had been a long-standing tradition in the theatre, on the cinema screen the female impersonation was usually a narrative device, positioning *Miss Fatty's Seaside Lovers* as an anomaly. As O'Rourke argues, 'most of the early British examples [of cross-dressing films] that survive include moments in which characters purposely or inadvertently reveal their 'true' gender'.<sup>616</sup> Unless the female impersonator in film was well-known, the knowingness that aided the joke, or that according to Davis, protected female impersonators from accusations of deviance, would not exist.<sup>617</sup> As chapter two demonstrated, the 'revelation moment' was a popular trope in music hall and is one that seems to have transferred almost seamlessly from the stage to the screen. *Some Chaperone* and *The Perfect*

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<sup>614</sup> Although largely forgotten, save only for the scandal that ended his career, Arbuckle's films achieved success in both the United States and Great Britain and his popularity rivalled Chaplin's.

<sup>615</sup> Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning', 138.

<sup>616</sup> O'Rourke, 9.

<sup>617</sup> Davis, 'Slap on Slap Ever', 224.

*Lady* use the revelation moment as the peak comedic moment. When Moran's character in *Some Chaperone* loses his wig, his identity is revealed, and when the father accidentally pulls down Chaplin's skirt revealing his male underwear and thus his true identity, a classic silent era chase/fight scene ensues. However, perhaps Arbuckle's fame transgressed this need as the audience would have been under no illusion that 'Miss Fatty' was really a man.

The masculine body played a number of roles in cross-dressing films. First it served as a comedic device, highlighting the incongruity between female-coded clothing and the masculine forms beneath, encouraging us to laugh at characters such as the father in *The Perfect Lady* who are fooled by what the audience see as an 'unconvincing disguise'. This clear incongruity not only rendered the act humorous but also separated it from reality. The masculine body is almost always revealed eventually which highlights cross-dressing's temporary nature and emphasises the characters' inability to 'keep up' the performance of femininity. By highlighting that these 'impersonations' did not remain permanent they once again reinforce hegemonic ideals and gender binarity. In addition, the temporality of the cross-dressing and the cross-dressed characters' presence in the spaces within these films was also key to their framing as part of normative entertainment culture.

#### 4.8 Women's Agency

Being 'in on the joke' not only gave power to the audience, but also to a number of the female characters in these films. Young women, arguably the most vulnerable characters in the eyes of contemporaries, are never deceived in these films. The young women were always in on the deception and occasionally played an active role in facilitating female impersonation. The active role of the young, female characters in the cross-dressing farce points towards the importance of protecting women from unwitting infiltration of female only spaces by men disguised as women. In *Some Chaperone* soon after being offered the role of chaperone Moran reveals his true identity to Betty and she is delighted with the revelation. Reciprocal love once again reinforces

heteronormativity as the ideal and sanctifies the cross-dressing.<sup>618</sup> There is also significance in the type of characters men portrayed in films that included young women. The impersonations were mostly of non-sexual, familiar characters such as the aunt in *Some Chaperone* or the cousin in *The Butcher Boy*. Whilst this reflects the pantomime dame style of drag discussed in chapters two and three, the familiarity of these characters also makes them less threatening. These themes are repeated in other cross-dressing films shown in Yorkshire in the period such as *Oh! My Aunt!* (1913), *Love and the Varsity* (1913), and *Joey's Aunt* (1916).<sup>619</sup>

Women not only facilitate cross-dressing in these films, but they also accept the men who cross-dress as romantic partners. This not only reiterates the heteronormativity of the men who cross-dressed in these films but also demonstrates a level of agency held by the female characters. As Grandy has demonstrated, women's agency became increasingly visible in interwar film and fiction and was central to establishing an acceptable heteronormative relationship. However, many of the films discussed in this chapter take place in the first two decades of the twentieth century positioning the importance of women's choice in heterosexual relationships as a much earlier trope. As Langhamer has argued, love was 'a sphere in which women could exercise agency'.<sup>620</sup> In *The Perfect Lady*, the father ultimately removes his daughter's agency in choosing a romantic partner by removing Chaplin from the house. However, the female characters in these films still exercise a level of agency in choosing their romantic partners in the first place, even if this is later rebuked. By playing an active role in choosing men who cross-dressed as romantic partners, the female characters can be read as emblematic of wider societal

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<sup>618</sup> This also links to what Timothy Willem Jones calls the 'new expectations of mutuality and companionate relationships, and changing understandings of love and romance', which took place in the interwar period. Timothy Willem Jones, 'Love, Honour and Obey? Romance, Subordination and Marital Subjectivity in Interwar Britain' in, Alana Harris and Timothy Jones eds. *Love and romance in Britain, 1918-1970* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) pp. 124- 143 (124).

<sup>619</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 14 March 1913, p.1 : *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 19 May 1913, p.4 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 16 February 1916, p.3. As O'Rourke has demonstrated, a key point of reference for the makers of these films was *Charley's Aunt*, an incredibly popular stage farce by Brandon Thomas, first performed in London in 1892. O'Rourke, 'What a Pretty Man', 9.

<sup>620</sup> Langhamer, 50.

acceptance of men who cross-dressed. Of course, this acceptance was dependent on the very specific parameters set out in these films. That women who accepted men who cross-dressed were included in commercial film is conclusive in emphasising the distance between ‘deviant’ cross-dressing on the street and cross-dressing for entertainment purposes.<sup>621</sup> Women’s relationships with gender crossing men is a topic that is almost completely absent from the historiography. But these films highlight the important role women could play in legitimising men’s gender-crossing

As Smith has shown, in working-class communities in the north of England there is evidence that wives accepted their husbands same-sex relationships.<sup>622</sup> Smith cites cases as late as the 1950s where women stood by their husbands who had been accused of and even convicted of gross indecency with other men. These cases show that the support of a woman could go some way to making potentially transgressive behaviours seem more acceptable, or perhaps less troubling to the gender order. However, I argue that the role of the women in these films goes beyond support for potentially transgressive masculinity and instead demonstrates the centrality of women’s presence to defining acceptable masculinity. As Connell argues gender is inherently relational, and masculinity cannot exist without a contrasting model of femininity.<sup>623</sup> Therefore defining any given presentation of masculinity as acceptable requires the presence of an acceptable femininity.

In reality, of course, women’s seeming acceptance of men who cross-dressed could be contingent on a range of factors and staying married to, or choosing to marry a man who had been known to cross-dress was not necessarily indicative of an acceptance of cross-dressing. For many women, particularly working-class women, marriage may have been necessary for survival

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<sup>621</sup> Thinks links with Smith’s argument about women’s acceptance of men who had sex with other men. As long as men returned to the heteronormative family unit, their ‘transgressions’ could be either accepted or over looked. Smith, ‘Love, Sex, Work and Friendship’, 75.

<sup>622</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*, 121.

<sup>623</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 68.

rather than based in romance. Indeed, it is widely agreed for many that the idea of the ‘companionate marriage’ did not truly come into practice until the twentieth century.<sup>624</sup> The economic need to remain married to a man regardless of his actions would of have of course been even stronger for mothers.

#### 4.9 War and Cross-dressing.

Having analysed genres of cross-dressing films which featured in a number of titles, I will now move on to analyse a film trilogy that is unique in its combination of cross-dressing and war. Although the majority of films featuring female impersonation were made in the 1910s, arguably the most successful of this genre was a trilogy released between 1930 and 1937, when the creation of cross-dressing films was generally slowing down.<sup>625</sup> These were the three *Splinters* films which starred a troupe of cross-dressing ex-servicemen known as *Les Rouges et Noir*. Unlike other films discussed in this chapter, these films are set against the backdrop of war and are also feature length sound films as opposed to silent comedy shorts. Though the films still reflected some more traditional aspects of farce comedies, the background of war sets them apart from the farce films discussed previously in this chapter. The introduction of sound to the film industry added a level of realism which had been previously unattainable and, as Julian Dutton argued, led to a complete change in the aesthetic of film comedy which eventually saw the demise of classic, silent era slapstick.<sup>626</sup> As such the female impersonators in *Splinters* do not engage in the slapstick style comedy we see from the films previously discussed.

The *Splinters* films were not original in their use of cross-dressing as comedy in film. However, the combination of comedy, female impersonation, and war film, was original and the popularity of this trilogy suggests that this was a winning formula. As discussed in chapter two,

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<sup>624</sup> Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, ‘Love and Authority in Mid-Twentieth-Century Marriages: Sharing and Caring’, in Lucy Delap, Ben Griffin and Abigail Wills eds. *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 133.

<sup>625</sup> By most successful I am referencing the number of times the film was screened in Yorkshire, but that the original *Splinters* film spawned two sequels provides firm evidence that the films were a financial success.

<sup>626</sup> Julian Dutton, *Keeping Quiet: Visual Comedy in the Age of Sound* (Gosport: Chaplin Books, 2015) (ebook) 40.

the popularity of cross-dressed beauty choruses during and immediately preceding the First World War sparked a peak in the popularity of glamour drag on the stage. Despite the overwhelming success of the *Splinters* as both a stage show and a film franchise, very little attention has been paid to them by historians, Jacob Bloomfield being the main exception to this.<sup>627</sup> David Sutton has argued that because British comedies of the 1930s were relatively invisible as far as critics were concerned, they were able to ‘deviate from mainstream aesthetic and ideological parameters to explore issues of class, gender, and sexuality, absent in more prestigious texts.’<sup>628</sup> However, I argue that instead, comedic cross-dressing films borrowed tropes from other popular forms of entertainment and therefore were not necessarily deviating from ideological parameters. While the female impersonation allows for comedic moments, and was what the *Les Rouges et Noir* concert party were famed for, unlike most other films discussed in this chapter female impersonation is not the main narrative device in the *Splinters* films, and in the final two films female impersonation plays a relatively insignificant role.<sup>629</sup> The first film *Splinters* (1930) dramatizes the true story of the formation of the *Les Rouges et Noir* concert party. The concert party, formed behind the frontlines in France, was comprised entirely of soldiers and famed for its all-male ‘beauty chorus’.<sup>630</sup> The concert party plays a diminishing role in the second and third films with the leading man Sydney Howard taking centre stage (or screen).<sup>631</sup> *Splinters in the Navy* saw the troupe entertaining members of the navy onboard their ship. In *Splinters in the Air*, the third and final film in the franchise, the beauty chorus is completely absent from the main narrative and only appears for a brief musical number in the final scene.<sup>632</sup>

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<sup>627</sup> Bloomfield, ‘Splinters’ and Bloomfield, ‘Male Cross-dressing Performance’.

<sup>628</sup> Tony Williams, ‘Review: A Chorus of Raspberries: British Film Comedy, 1929-1939’, *Film Quarterly*, 55:1 (2001), 53-54.

<sup>629</sup> Bloomfield, ‘Splinters’, 1-28.

<sup>630</sup> See chapter one for a more detailed discussion of *Les Rouges et Noir* as a concert party.

<sup>631</sup> *Splinters in the Navy*, dir. by Walter Forde (Twickenham Film Studios Productions, 1932); *Splinters in the Air*, dir. by Alfred Goulding, (Herbert Wilcox Productions, 1937). For detailed discussions of *Les Rouges et Noir*, see Bloomfield, ‘Splinters’, 1-28.

<sup>632</sup> *Splinters in the Air*, dir. by Alfred Goulding (Herbert Wilcox Productions, 1937).



The First World War sparked a boost in cinema's popularity, both in terms of attendance and in altering perceptions of the medium as a 'respectable' pastime.<sup>633</sup> Although official war films such as *The Battle of the Somme* (1916) drew unprecedented audiences, it was not until the 1920s that commercial film producers truly began to capitalise on war films as popular entertainment.<sup>634</sup> It has been argued that fictional war film was not popular until after the release of *All Quiet on the Western Front* in 1930, coinciding with the growth of sound films.<sup>635</sup> However Lawrence Napper argues that from the very early years of the interwar period 'the war and its effect on the domestic lives of its survivors remained an insistent theme' in a variety of film genres.<sup>636</sup> Comedy was also one of the most popular film genres of the 1930s and despite the continued dominance of American films, 'the years following 1929 saw a considerable increase in the number of British film comedies produced... Out of a total of 1,741 British features released between 1930 and 1939 over 600 films were comedies.'<sup>637</sup> The *Splinters* films appeared on screen at a moment when war and comedy were experiencing a peak in their popularity and benefitted from the success of these tropes at drawing in audiences. When this was combined with the popularity of the troupe's touring productions, the *Splinters* films appear to have had the perfect recipe for cinematic success.<sup>638</sup>

Within the *Splinters* films men wear female-coded clothing in the very specific space of the front-line theatre with the inferred intent being to entertain their fellow servicemen. Although still imbued with theatrical traditions of cross-dressing experienced by female impersonators in variety theatres and music hall, as Sigel argues, 'the Great War brought a new

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<sup>633</sup> Lawrence Napper, *The Great War in Popular British Cinema of the 1920s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 3.

<sup>634</sup> Napper, *The Great War*, 3-4.

<sup>635</sup> Pierre Sorlin, 'Cinema and the Memory of the Great War', in Michael Paris eds. *The First World War and Popular Cinema: 1914 to the Present* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 17; Andrew Kelly, *All Quiet on the Western Front: The Story of a Film* (London: IB Tauris, 2002), 27.

<sup>636</sup> Napper, *The Great War*, 201.

<sup>637</sup> Paquette, William, 'Review: A Chorus of Raspberries. British Film Comedy 1929-1939', *Film & History*, 31:2 (2000), 82

<sup>638</sup> For more on the *Splinters* touring shows see Chapter 2, 'On the Stage'.

context to the practice.<sup>639</sup> Post-war representations frequently emphasised *Les Rouge et Noir's* war service and their status as ex-servicemen was reiterated in almost all of the advertisements for both their stage shows and their films.<sup>640</sup> In fulfilling hegemonic ideals of the soldier hero, *Les Rouges* were granted the ability to perform in female-coded clothing in a way that did not compromise their masculinity.<sup>641</sup> Bloomfield has argued that the performers status as ex-servicemen was significant part of *Splinters'* appeal and;

the artists' well-publicized participation in the war effort encouraged civilian audiences to view *Les Rouges'* shows as an authentic, informative, and entertaining way to engage with troops' wartime experiences during a period marked by uncertainties regarding how popular culture should engage with the war and its legacy.<sup>642</sup>

Although the backdrop of war means that the audience is constantly reminded of the performers' role as servicemen, the final scene of the first film really drives this home. During their performance the theatre comes under attack. The troupes quickly leave the theatre and the beauty chorus are seen scrambling to pull their uniforms on over their dresses. They are then shown running towards the action, guns raised, while the frills of their dresses can still be seen under their khaki. This is an example of men who cross-dressed being able to perform another facet of masculinity reflective of the Dawson's soldier hero ideal.<sup>643</sup> 'After shots are exchanged with the enemy, *Les Rouges* and their First Army comrades easily emerge victorious, with no casualties taken, before the end credits roll.'<sup>644</sup> While reminding the audience of the dangerous circumstances under which the concert party had originally been formed, this scene serves as the ultimate reminder of the performers 'ever-present masculinity' as they charge towards the battle

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<sup>639</sup> Sigel, *Best Love*, 102.

<sup>640</sup> Examples include ; *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 4 January 1930, p.5 : *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 11 January 1930, p.5 : *Sheffield Independent*, 14 August 1930, p.9 : *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 16 August 1930 p.5 : *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 3 October 1930, p.6 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 9 April 1932, p.2.

<sup>641</sup> For more in the significance of the Soldier Hero ideal in British popular culture, see Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*.

<sup>642</sup> Bloomfield, *Splinters*, 4.

<sup>643</sup> Dawon, *Soldier Heroes*.

<sup>644</sup> Bloomfield, 'Splinters', 16.

without hesitation.<sup>645</sup> The scene also invites a laugh at the sight of frills on the battlefield returning to the light-hearted comedy of the rest of the film.<sup>646</sup>

Caroline Radcliffe claims that '[b]y the end of the nineteenth century there was increasing distaste at seeing a man realistically portraying a woman, concurrent with a growing condemnation of "homosexuality".<sup>647</sup> The popularity of *Splinters*, famed for their realistic portrayal of attractive young women, and other glamour drag performers such as Julian Eltinge and Max Waldon, from the last few decades of the nineteenth century and into the 1930s, demonstrates that this distaste for convincing female impersonation was not as widespread as Radcliffe suggests. Male sexuality, and the accidental inciting of male desire, was far from absent in depictions of 'convincing' female impersonation and the *Splinters* films are no exception to this. In both *Splinters* and *Splinters in the Navy* some of the servicemen are clearly attracted to the female impersonators they see on stage. For example, during the first show in *Splinters* (1916) the men look on in awe as Reg Stone (the lead female impersonator) performs on stage. They wink at and nudge one another and make a show of trying to gain the performers' attention. Playing on this, Stone blows a kiss to one of the men in the audience who clamours to catch the 'kiss' in his hands. The same private who caught the kiss later sneaks backstage hoping to see his new sweetheart in person but is given a shock when he enters to find a fully made-up but de-wigged Stone smoking his pipe in his dressing room. This complicates Davis' argument that female impersonation was only deemed acceptable if the performers' true sex remained evident.<sup>648</sup> The film suggests that these men believed Stone was in fact a woman. However, because of Stone's reaction to the men, there is no hint that any further 'transgressions' would occur, the men who enter his dressing room in the hopes of finding a beautiful woman are quickly told to "Hop it!"

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<sup>645</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>646</sup> The juxtaposition of the filly dresses hanging out of the costumes of the men as they run towards the guns also links to Meyer's analysis of multiple masculinities in wartime. Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>647</sup> Caroline Radcliffe, 'Dan Leno: Dame of Drury Lane', in Jim Davis ed., *Victorian Pantomime: A Collection of Critical Essays* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 118-134 (122).

<sup>648</sup> Davis, 'Slap on Slap Ever', 224.

As soon as the soldier realises Stone's true identity they are horrified, and all amorous intent is dropped. This serves not only to demonstrate heteronormativity, and thus respectability, of the soldiers but also to portray a general lack of sexual deviance among soldiers who cross-dressed. As the work of Sigel has shown, this was not necessarily the case in reality. Men cross-dressed and enjoyed watching cross-dressed performance for a myriad of different reasons. Some men did experience sexual desire for those who cross-dressed.<sup>649</sup> It is possible then that this film was actively moving away from these discussions by emphasising servicemen's revues as harmless fun. Despite Radcliffe's claims, the inclusion of female impersonation in mainstream war films puts significant distance between female impersonation and sexual deviance.

The masculinity of the characters in the *Splinters* films was not just emphasised through their status as servicemen. Much in the way that Chaplin's characters emphasised their masculinity through drawing attention to their masculine habits and their masculine bodies beneath the clothing, there are a number of moments in these films where we are reminded of the female impersonators' masculinity, as in the example above where Stone removes his wig. Female impersonation is primarily used as a comic device in the *Splinters* films, and the 'revelation moments' serve as the peak comedy moment as it did in music hall and variety theatre. The addition of sound in film allowed for the more subtle signalling of masculinity through Stone's voice, which when he was offstage was particularly deep. Sound meant that performers no longer had to rely on physical comedy but could tell jokes out loud, and nuance these jokes with changes of tone and voice.

Despite the continued success of the *Les Rouges* stage show, the film franchised switched focus from the beauty chorus to the comedy hijinks of comedian Sydney Howard who played the central character in all three films. In both *Splinters in the Air* and *Splinters in the Navy* the concert party only makes a brief appearance in the final scenes. These films may have capitalized

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<sup>649</sup> Sigel, 'Best Love', 98-118.

on the fame of the concert part to draw in audiences, but by quickly shifted the focus away from female impersonation and onto Howards' various bumbling antics. This change suggests that by the 1930's female impersonation in film was no longer profitable or fashionable. This may have been due to an increased link between cross-dressing and 'deviant' sexual behaviour, the more general decline in short slapstick films, or the fact that new feature length films simply made space for more complex narratives which were able to break new ground rather than recycling old gags and themes from music hall. This points to a wider move away from female impersonation in a range of popular culture in this period.

#### 4.10 Spaces on Screen

Throughout this thesis I have argued that space significantly influenced how female impersonation was understood and experienced. While the cinema screen is its own space the spaces viewed on screen also played a role in the representation of cross-dressing. Beginning by thinking about the physical space of the cinema or picture house, I conceptualise the cinema itself is a public space that still offered relative privacy to its patrons. Concerns surrounding the morality of cinema audiences dominated middle-class discourse surrounding this new media in the early years. Despite a push from social reformers and film exhibitors in the late 1900s and early 1910s to develop technologies which would allow them to turn up the lights in cinemas, for the most part the cinema audience remained in darkness.<sup>650</sup> Martin Johnson argues that the semi-anonymity of the cinema allowed audiences to 'claim opacity in order to dissociate their specific identities from their own proclivities.'<sup>651</sup> Though the darkness of the space also created an environment in which emotions could be expressed openly 'without fear of censure.'<sup>652</sup> As Robert James has noted, historians of popular culture have too often identified consumers of

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<sup>650</sup> Martin L. Johnson, 'The Well-Lighted Theatre or the Semi-Darkened Room? Transparency, Opacity and Participation in the Institution of Cinema', *Early Popular Visual Culture* 12:2 (2014) 199-212 (200).

<sup>651</sup> Johnson, 'The Well-Lighted Theatre', 200.

<sup>652</sup> James Jones, 'These Intimate Little Places': Cinema-Going and Public Emotion in Bolton, 1930-1954', *Cultural and Social History* 16:4 (2019), 451-466 (453).

popular culture as passive observers with no individual agency.<sup>653</sup> But patrons of the cinema did not sit down in a room unaware of what film they were about to see. For example, that Sheffield cinemas screened so many cross-dressing films suggests that patrons continually chose to attend these screenings and if a particular actor or film genre drew in an audience then the cinema managers were more likely to screen similar films in future. In this way, the cinema was a space which gave the audience the power, as a collective, to shape which films were screened and where.

Space was often the differentiating factor between cross-dressing as ‘harmless fun’ and cross-dressing as deviant. In particular cross-dressing in the street and in unsanctioned public spaces was likely to be seen as deviant because of its potential to ‘corrupt’ innocent members of the public. In both *The Perfect Lady* and *Some Chaperone* female impersonation only takes place in domestic spaces. Because Chaplin and Moran do not leave the house whilst dressed in women’s clothes, the possibility of ‘tricking’ innocent bystanders is removed. Only those who are ‘in on the joke’ or are the intended ‘butt of the joke’ are affected by the presence of the female impersonator. The entirety of *Some Chaperone* takes place in the home of Betty, her sister, and their father. In contrast, a large number of characters witness Fatty and Slim whilst they are cross-dressed; however, this is still confined to the realms of the boarding school. All of the students at the school are aware of the true identities of Fatty and Slim and the headmistress is the only character ‘fooled’ by their disguises. This is reflective of Bailey’s conceptualisation of knowingness on theatre productions in that the audience are invited into the ‘in group’, in this instance the group who are aware of the impersonators ‘true sex’.<sup>654</sup> The young women in the school are not vulnerable to the deception because they are part of the ‘in group’.

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<sup>653</sup> Robert James, *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste in Britain, 1930-39 : A Round of Cheap Diversions?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>654</sup> Bailey, ‘Conspiracies of Meaning’, 138–170.

Much like Betty's home in *Some Chaperone*, the boarding school in *The Perfect Lady* is also a form of domestic space. The domestic space played a central role in defining gender roles, and as Tosh reminds us, '[f]or most of the nineteenth century home was widely held to be a man's place, not only in the sense of being his possession or fiefdom, but also as the place where his deepest needs were met.'<sup>655</sup> It is possible that a man's power over his home and the insularity of the family unit within the domestic space allowed him freedom to behave in ways inside the home that he would not be able to behave in public spaces. However, Tosh also argued that keeping 'order in the home' was a 'critical component of masculinity', something the fathers fail to do in *The Perfect Lady*, and *Some Chaperone* and are punished for when they fall for the 'trick.'<sup>656</sup> Discussion of men's freedom to transgress is somewhat absent from the literature on masculinity and domesticity. Karen Harvey has argued of eighteenth-century accounts of domestic life that 'men's absence has been shaped by the categories, models and narratives developed and deployed in historical work'. This appears to also be the case for visibility of men's transgressions within the home.<sup>657</sup> However, in the films examined in this chapter the men who intentionally transgress gender norms do not do so in their own homes, and those who do so unconsciously by unwittingly 'falling for' a man dressed as a woman are depicted as the fools. These films show that the deception caused by cross-dressing had to be carefully crafted so as not to deceive the innocent and vulnerable (mostly young women). However, deception could be comedic when it was the villain, Betty's Father, the strict headmistress, or the unfaithful husband, who was deceived.

Importantly, young women are never deceived in these films. Press coverage of the Boulton and Park case demonstrated a fear that women were at risk from men who cross-dressed due to their ability to infiltrate female-only spaces. In all of these films the innocence of

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<sup>655</sup> Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 1.

<sup>656</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>657</sup> Karen Harvey, 'Men Making Home: Masculinity and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century England', *Gender and History* 21 (2009), 520–40 (521).

young women is protected due to them being ‘in on the joke.’ It is also noteworthy that although men are often tricked into believing that the disguised is truly a woman, the truth is revealed before it is ‘too late’ and the men who disguise themselves as women frequently and successfully spurn the advances of other men, removing the possibility of them acting on their desires. The importance of who is tricked, and who is in on the joke is central to the retention of acceptability within these films and keeping the cross-dressing as light-hearted fun. Positioning the act as humorous, rather than as deviant, also relied on the spaces in which it took place.

#### 4.11 Conclusion

As with cross-dressing in theatre, by the end of the 1930s female impersonation had lost its prominence on the cinema screen. Although attitudes towards female impersonation and deviance had shifted in this period, the decline in the popularity of cross-dressing on film was also a result of the changing nature of film. Early short films often mirrored music hall style acts that developed into ‘slapstick’ comedies. However, with the birth of sound film or the ‘talkie’ film makers were able to produce much more complex narratives which lent themselves to longer, story-driven films and no longer relied on the slapstick comedy which had allowed the female impersonator to take centre stage. As John Phillips has shown, the male body adorned in female-coded clothing has never disappeared from Western film, though from the post-war period until at least the early 2000s, the audience was encouraged to laugh *at* rather than with the man in female-coded clothing.<sup>658</sup>

This chapter has explored the cinema as another space in which cross-dressing could be enjoyed as entertainment, once again noting that the endurance of the act in popular culture not only separates cross-dressing in this context from ideas of gendered or sexual deviance, but also challenges understandings of how gender deviance was defined. With the exception of Slim Snavely in *The Butcher Boy*, none of the men who cross-dressed in these films were presented as

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<sup>658</sup> John Phillips, *Transgender on Screen* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 52.



deviant. Instead, their cross-dressing reinforced their heteronormativity and their innate masculinity. Within the same film, Arbuckle's character demonstrated that cross-dressing could also lead to a man becoming the hero of the film and could even aid in his quest to 'get the girl'. Exploring a number of themes and spaces within these films has reiterated the argument that male-to-female cross-dressing could not be defined in clear binaries of acceptability and deviance. The intent behind the act and the space in which it took place determined the act's position on the scale of acceptability. In addition, the act's very potential for deviance added to the comedy of subverting gendered codes of dress. The popularity and lack of censorship of female impersonation in film also supports the overall argument of this thesis, that female impersonation was only deemed deviant under a very specific set of circumstances and was accepted in a variety of forms of popular entertainment.

This chapter has shown that the cross-dressing films shown in Yorkshire did not disrupt notions of hegemonic masculinity or disrupt the gender binary. The narratives presented in these films reinforced the moment of reciprocal, heterosexual love as the ultimate goal, the ideal 'happy ending'. In addition, these films also emphasised hegemonic ideals of masculinity through privileging ideas of honourable intentions with young women and punishing promiscuity. Analysing cross-dressing in film allows us to understand the act not as inherently subversive but as one which promoted hegemonic ideals of masculinity and heterosexuality. Within these narratives of heterosexual love, women are also granted a level of agency in terms of accepting male cross-dressing in a particular set of circumstances. In addition, women are always protected from men who cross-dressed which once again allowed the act to remain within the realm of acceptability. Understanding the complexity of the relationship between cross-dressing, masculinity, and acceptability in popular culture has emphasised the most important aspects of acceptable gendered behaviour. In doing so, it has positioned the role of women at the centre of defining the limits of acceptability regarding male-to-female cross-dressing.

This chapter has demonstrated that the traditions of cross-dressing reflected in other entertainment spaces such as the comedy of disrupting the binary, the reveal, the focus on the masculine body, and the emphasise on the cross-dressed characters' 'natural' masculinity easily transferred to early film. This discussion also moves the discussion of cross-dressing in Yorkshire entertainment spaces to the end of the period under study. This highlights the prevalence of cross-dressing in popular culture, and this prevalence to some extent accounts for the lack of comment. However, we see a shift in focus of idealized masculinity on film. As films reflect the nation and a trans-Atlantic culture the prevalence of work and community, which were so central to Yorkshire masculinity, were replaced by the privileging of heterosexual love and a focus on heteronormativity as central to constructions of the masculine ideal

## Conclusion

### In the Archive

This thesis aimed to further understand the position of cross-dressing in popular entertainment culture and as lived experience but also in relation to a particularly northern way of understanding masculinity. Because community acceptance was central to idealised masculinity amongst the working-classes in Yorkshire, this thesis has focussed on male-to-female cross-dressing in public spaces where men who cross-dressed were often surrounded by their communities. As a result, experiences of cross-dressing in private spaces are notably absent from this thesis. As well as being absent from this thesis, evidence of cross-dressing in private spaces is also much less prevalent in the archive. There is undoubtedly another story to be told surrounding the relationship between cross-dressing and masculinity in private spaces which would perhaps shift the focus towards masculinity as an internalised identity. While this thesis has explored masculinity in its outward form, as a performance, and as a reputation, masculinity is equally an internalised identity. It is only due to gaps in evidence for the period under study that the internal identities of men who cross-dressed are not discussed in this thesis. As Victor Jeleniewski Seidler stated ‘there might be no single history of men and masculinities because of the complexity of the interrelations that are alive in different historical moments.’<sup>659</sup> For the same reason, there is no singular history of cross-dressing.

To some extent the silences surrounding cross-dressing and identity have been consciously created by a society that began to see cross-dressing as directly linked to homosexuality following the Second World War. Because of this, men who cross-dressed outside of the confines of performance spaces were forced to do so secretly. This was also true across my period of study. As Simon Fowler argued ‘[s]ources and archives are neither neutral nor

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<sup>659</sup> Victor Jeleniewski Seidler, ‘Masculinities, Histories and Memories’, in *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World*, ed. by John H. Arnold and Sean Brady (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) pp.431-452 (449).

natural. They are created. It is this that is the reason for so many silences.<sup>660</sup> This is particularly poignant in the history of cross-dressing and queer history more broadly. Cross-dressing can be found in ‘mainstream’ archives but also in ‘queer archives.’<sup>661</sup> Although the private experiences of the men in these chapters will likely remain a secret, the growth in queer history as a field has encouraged the development of many more public ‘queer archives’ which make space for the collection of private stories. As many such archives did not begin collecting until the 1970s following the gay liberation movement, collecting examples of queer lives prior to this period is still difficult.<sup>662</sup> However, for those wishing to write queer histories after 1970 sources are becoming increasingly accessible. Oral history projects have made great steps towards collecting stories of individual experiences. Projects such as *Queer Beyond London*, and *West Yorkshire Queer Stories* have made great strides in collecting these histories. As the interwar period begins to disappear from living memory, these projects are of increasing importance.

One of the most comprehensive examples of an archive centred around private cross-dressing is the *Peter Farrer Collection*, currently held at Liverpool Museum. This collection moves beyond the places and moments analysed in this thesis, focusing on one man’s experiences in Liverpool, mostly in the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>663</sup> This archive is an excellent example of how sources based on private moments and individual identities can help to develop a more varied and detailed history of male-to-female cross-dressing. Farrer was a keen historian of cross-dressing and published a number of books including the meticulously researched *Confidential Correspondence on Crossdressing*.<sup>664</sup> The collection also contains Farrer’s own collection of

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<sup>660</sup> Simon Fowler, ‘Enforced Silences’, in *The Silence of the Archive*, David Thomas, Simon Fowler and Valerie Johnson (London: Facet Publishing (2017) pp.1-34 (1). Oram, ‘Cross Dressing and Transgender’, 259.

<sup>661</sup> Here I am not using the term ‘queer archive’ to relate solely to the histories of those who self-identified as queer but instead to mean an archive which contains documents and ephemera related to identities, sexualities, and experiences which do not conform to heteronormative ideologies of gender and sexuality.

<sup>662</sup> Alana Kumbier, *Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive* (California: Litwin Books, 2014), 2-3.

<sup>663</sup> Ben Whyman, ‘Exhibition Reflections: In Two Parts. Transformation: One Man’s Cross-Dressing Wardrobe’, *Fashion Theory* 22:4 (2018), 553-560

<sup>664</sup> Peter Farrer eds, *Confidential Correspondence on Cross Dressing 1911-1915* (Liverpool: Karn Publications, 1997) & Peter Farrer eds, *Confidential Correspondence on Cross Dressing Pt II 1916-1920* (Liverpool: Karn Publications, 1998). Farrer’s published works also include edited collections of sources such as Peter Farrer eds, *Men in Petticoats: A selection of letters From Victorian Newspapers* (Liverpool: Karn Publications, 1987) :

literature on cross-dressing and transvestism including magazines and pamphlets from the Beaumont society and an extensive collection of *Transvestia* magazines. But what makes the Peter Farrer collection truly unique is the artefacts that speak to Farrer's own experiences. In the short book he wrote with Christine Jane Wilson, *My First Party Frock and Other Contributions to The Glad Rag 1985-1991*, Farrer describes in detail the first time he wore female-coded clothing.<sup>665</sup> Despite the appearance of this collection as a queer archive, Farrer did not consider himself queer.

Describing his experience of cross-dressing, Peter said:

Dressing in a taffeta frock did not make me want to be a girl, but it certainly made me understand how much pleasure girls and women get from their party frocks, and intensified my interest in fashion and in the history of costume.<sup>666</sup>

Pauline Rushton, senior curator at Liverpool Museums and long-term friend of Farrer, is keen to ensure the collection portrays Farrer as he wanted to be portrayed. When I visited the collection, Rushton told me that he did not see himself as anything other than a straight man, his cross-dressing was not reflective of his sexual or gendered identity. Rushton is also quoted in his obituary as stating;

he'd have been horrified for anyone to know that he was doing it [cross-dressing] It wasn't a cry for help. Peter wasn't transitioning, and he wasn't doing it because he wanted to perform. His main reason was simply that he had a sexual fetish for taffeta, the tactile nature of it, and the noise it makes, rustling as it moves.<sup>667</sup>

The existence of Farrer's own description of his cross-dressing highlights the importance of nuancing representations of men who cross-dressed. Before the exhibition of his clothes at the Walker Gallery, Farrer's cross-dressing had taken place exclusively in private. If it were not for

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Peter Farrer, eds. *Borrowed Plumes: Letters from Edwardian Newspapers on Male Cross Dressing* (Liverpool: Karn Publications, 1994) : Peter Farrer eds, *The Regime of the Stay-Lace: A Further Selection on Letters From Victorian Newspapers* (Liverpool: Karn Publications 1995). Farrer also published Peter Farrer, *The Life of Marice Pollack, 1885-1918: a Birmingham Actor* (Liverpool: Karn Publications, 1998) : Peter Farrer, *Cross Dressing Between the Wars: Selections from 1923-1933* (Liverpool: Karn Publications, 2000): Peter Farrer, *Cross Dressing Between the Wars: Selections from 1934-1941* (Liverpool: Karn Publications, 2006) : Farrer, Peter. *Cross Dressing Since the War* (Liverpool: Karn Publications, 2011).

<sup>665</sup> Peter Farrer and Christine-Jane Wilson, *My First Party Frock and Other Contributions to The Glad Rag 1985-1991* (Liverpool: Karn Publications, 1997).

<sup>666</sup> Liverpool Museums, 'Transformation: One Man's Cross-Dressing Wardrobe' [accessed 04/06/2020] <<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/news/press-releases/transformation-one-mans-cross-dressing-wardrobe>>

<sup>667</sup> *The Times*, 22 April, 2017, p.80-81.

his own fascination with the history of cross-dressing and his personal relationship with one of Liverpool Museum's senior curators, it is likely that his experiences, and his vast collection of books, pamphlets, dresses, and ephemera would have remained hidden from public view.

This collection speaks of one man's experiences of cross-dressing in private, but also of the eventual publication of his collection of taffeta dresses in the very public space of the Museum. The publication of his historical works and the vast collection of literature relating to cross-dressing and 'transvestism' perhaps speak to the experience of a man intent on understanding his own desires and identity, or equally of a man with a keen interest in understanding gender through dress. Peter Farrer's collection demonstrates how much more detail about individual experiences can be gleaned from personal collections, personal stories, and to some extent, cross-dressing which took place in private. In Farrer's case cross-dressing was tied to his sexual preferences but it was also part of a heterosexual identity. Access to more such private collections could help us understand in more detail how cross-dressing in private could be linked to sexual urges, sexuality, gender and performance but equally such archives can also help historians further understand when these factors did not influence a man's decision to cross-dress.

This thesis has not aimed to understand the individual identities of men who cross-dressed but has instead analysed the relationship between cross-dressing and masculinity in order to better understand how cross-dressing functioned in relation to masculine identity in Yorkshire. Farrer's collection supports this approach. One could easily assume from his dresses, historical writings, and collection of *Transvestia* magazines that Farrer viewed himself as, to use the terminology of the magazines, a 'transvestite'. There was nothing within the museum collection to suggest Farrer cross-dressed due to his taffeta fetish; this was only revealed through his own testimony. Because testimony from men who cross-dressed in the period of this study is

so rare, it is easy to see how attempts to understand how they identified would not only be inaccurate but would also run the risk of removing the agency of historical actors.

A lack of direct evidence of how men who cross-dressed understood the act in the context of their own masculinity is perhaps the most significant gap in the evidence base of this thesis. Though as Hartman demonstrates, fragmentary evidence should not limit the historian's ability to tell a story. Particularly when writing about those who at first appear to exist outside of 'norms', those who have previously been side-lined, the historian must read both between the lines and against the grain.<sup>668</sup> Particularly in my discussion of the *Sheffield Ten*, I have constructed the lives of men who have left behind very little evidence of how they existed in, and experienced the world. My aim has not been to fabricate or invent stories but instead to follow Houlbrook's approach by positioning the stories I have created for my subjects within 'the social, cultural, economic and political conditions that made [their experiences] possible.'<sup>669</sup> Perhaps this thesis could have been braver in the stories it tells and in the lives it creates for the men for whom we know nothing more than their first initial, surname, and place of residence. This is where I have grappled with the question that has plagued so many historians before me, how far can we push the limits of what is knowable? The position I align most comfortably with, and where I feel most historians position themselves, is within the realms of making calculated assumptions about our historical subjects, based on detailed knowledge of the culture and community in which individuals lived.

### Acceptance and Normativity

Previously, historians have looked to cross-dressing as a signifier of queer lives, or as proof of a definitive queer culture in the past.<sup>670</sup> Although analysis of cross-dressing in this way can, and has, furthered understandings of queer lives and queer experiences, this approach often ignores

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<sup>668</sup> Hartman, *Wayward Lives*.

<sup>669</sup> Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters*, 16.

<sup>670</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London : Houlbrook*, 'Lady Austen's Camp Boys' : Senelick, *The Changing Room* : Norton, *Mother Clap*.

those whose cross-dressing did not necessarily separate them from mainstream, heteronormative culture. Through a focus on acceptance, this thesis has demonstrated a much broader range of experiences of men who cross-dressed. Tackling the topic through the lens of acceptance not only tells us about the lives of those who cross-dressed, but also furthers our knowledge of societal attitudes towards masculinity, gender, and cross-dressing more broadly. In addition, this approach has queered understandings of masculinity as a strictly binary concept, of male or female, of acceptable or deviant. This approach has shown how cross-dressing could provide men with the opportunity to explore femininity without calling into question their masculine reputation, if the act took place in the correct context. It has also shown how cross-dressing could be used to emphasise one's masculinity through bodily display. Instead of disrupting gender binaries, cross-dressing in entertainment spaces often reinforced them. As an alternative to focusing on binary definitions I have conceptualised acceptability and deviance not as mutually exclusive but as two ends of a scale.

As this thesis has shown, the relationship between cross-dressing, same-sex sex, and masculinity was understood differently in Yorkshire entertainment spaces than in press reports of men arrested for cross-dressing in London.<sup>671</sup> Men who cross-dressed in Yorkshire rarely received more than a figurative 'slap on the wrist' for cross-dressing outside of entertainment spaces.<sup>672</sup> For example the majority of the men from Sheffield who were caught up in the Manchester Fancy-Dress Ball case appear to have returned to their communities, occupations, and families despite their names and alleged crimes being printed in a number of local papers. This points to a certain level of acceptance, mostly absent from historiography based around London, and suggests that the mere act of cross-dressing was not seen as inherently deviant. In focussing on a wider range of spaces this thesis has highlighted the importance of historical and

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<sup>671</sup> See Smith, *Masculinity* and Matt Houlbrook, 'The Man with the Powder Puff in Interwar London', *The Historical Journal* 50:1 (2007), 145-172.

<sup>672</sup> See chapter one.



spatial specificities to understanding cross-dressing and has taken steps away from narratives of deviance by placing acceptance at the centre of the narrative.

This thesis has shown that from the end of the nineteenth century until the eve of the Second World War, male-to-female cross-dressing played a central role in a range of popular cultural forms. Cross-dressing was embraced by the general public in Yorkshire more often than it was cast as deviant. However, men who cross-dressed under the wrong circumstances could still find themselves the subject of suspicion from their community and/or the police. The potential for arrest for those men who cross-dressed in the ‘wrong’ place remained ever present. This demonstrates that links between cross-dressing and sexual deviance were never completely absent, but instead has shown that the acts potential for deviance did not make it unacceptable under all circumstances and in all spaces. This thesis has not argued that cross-dressing was absolved from relationships with homosexuality or same-sex sex and desire. Instead, it has demonstrated that because masculinity was not defined by who one had sex with in Yorkshire, potential links with same-sex sex or desire did not necessarily render the act entirely deviant.

This thesis has also portrayed cross-dressing as a mechanism for maintaining the gender order. Those acts, such as the pantomime dame, which mocked and parodied femininity did not offer a ‘challenge to easy notions of binarity’ which Garber argued was one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing.<sup>673</sup> The joke in these acts was not just a mocking of femininity but lay in the disparity between the masculine body and the feminine clothing, and therefore reinforced binary notions of masculinity and femininity. While lived experiences of gender and gendered performances existed on a scale of acceptability, cultural ideologies presented gender norms as a relatively static binary. The emphasis on the difference between men and women enforced this binary and continued to emphasise stereotypical differences between the sexes. This again goes some way to explaining the act’s acceptance in popular

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<sup>673</sup> Garber, *Vested Interests*, 10.

entertainment culture. In addition, the humour behind cross-dressing in the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries relied on very binary gender norms. Furthermore, the spaces in which cross-dressing was accepted were often separated from reality, such as the performative temporal spaces of the stage, the carnival, and film.

### Space and Regionality

For the most part, those who have explored the history of cross-dressing have retained a focus on either the stage or the court. My work has built on this literature and expanded analysis of female impersonation in these spaces but has also brought these spaces together.<sup>674</sup> By using space itself as a lens through which to analyse and understand the acceptability, potential deviance and the commonplace nature of cross-dressing, this thesis has helped to construct a much more nuanced understanding of how this act was understood in Yorkshire society. This thesis has employed the concepts of Doreen Massey in the context of cross-dressing in Yorkshire, that space ‘both reflects and has effects back on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live’.<sup>675</sup>

Moreover, as well as bringing space to the fore as a key category of analysis, this thesis has helped us to understand how regional difference influenced the meaning of cross-dressing in these various spaces, through a focus on Yorkshire. By using regionality as a lens through which to explore different spaces, this thesis has demonstrated how the space in which cross-dressing took place could not only alter its position on a scale of acceptability, but also how it could influence the way the act was performed. In addition to the individual spaces within Yorkshire, a focus on the county itself has allowed for more detailed focus on the society in which these men

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<sup>674</sup> Emily Rutherford discusses cross-dressing in student rags in ‘Rag Drag and Early Twentieth Century Undergraduate Masculinities’, *University Histories*, June (2018), <<https://universityhistories.com/2018/06/26/rag-drag-and-early-twentieth-century-undergraduate-masculinities/>> [accessed 27 June 2018], the topic is also briefly mentioned in Smith’s *Masculinity*, 84-85. Dion Georgiou briefly mentions male-to-female cross-dressing in ‘Redefining the Carnavalesque’, 339 & 349. Chris O’Rourke has recently discussed cross-dressing in early British cinema in ‘What a Pretty Man!’.

<sup>675</sup> Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 1.

cross-dressed. In complicating heteronormative constructs of gendered performance and presentation, this thesis has emphasised the importance of region and locality as a category of analysis which can significantly improve our knowledge of what gender meant in the past. This approach has identified spaces of acceptability by situating cross-dressing and the space in which it took place in their regional context. In doing so this work has demonstrated how region influences everyday lives, including attitudes towards and experiences of transgressions of gendered dress.

As such, this thesis has shown how both region and the places and spaces within that region shaped how cross-dressing was experienced, represented, and understood. As Flather explained, ‘One of the key points to emerge in spatial study has been the multiple and dynamic ways in which spaces can be conceived, used, experienced, and understood by different users at different times.’<sup>676</sup> The spaces in which men who cross-dressed appeared within the Yorkshire region were dynamic, temporal, and fluid, and so too was the way that the act itself was interpreted and experienced. Men who cross-dressed in the street were likely to arouse suspicion from the authorities, though had those same men cross-dressed on the same street during carnival, their cross-dressing would have been enjoyed as spectacle and entertainment.

In using space as a category for historical analysis, this thesis has demonstrated that cross-dressing was understood and experienced differently in both rural and urban spaces, in outdoor or indoor spaces, in the theatre or in the street. Perhaps most importantly, this work has also revealed that it was not just men who cross-dressed temporarily or for entertainment purposes who were accepted within their communities. The story of Clement Mitchell, discussed in chapter one, who lived and worked as a woman amongst a community who were aware that Mitchell was not born female, demonstrates that a certain level of acceptance could be afforded to men who lived their lives as women, as long as they adhered to other societal expectations.

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<sup>676</sup> Flather, ‘Space, Place, and Gender’, 346.

Because of the significance of occupation to regional working-class identities, many regional gender histories have focused on the workplace.<sup>677</sup> Exploring spaces of entertainment adds another dimension to current research by making space to explore concepts of misrule, and celebration. As Zemon Davis has argued,

rather than being a mere “safety-valve”, deflecting attention from social reality, festive life can on the one hand perpetuate certain values of the community, even guarantee its survival, and on the other hand, criticize political order.<sup>678</sup>

Exploring entertainment spaces broadens understandings of cultures and societies by highlighting community values. Focusing on cross-dressing as a public act puts community at the centre of defining acceptability and highlights the role of performance in defining the acceptability of an act. Thinking about entertainment spaces as public and community based again brings attention to the role of the audience in defining cross-dressing’s position on a scale of acceptability. This has brought both community and audience into discussions surrounding gender and public and private spaces. Although the cinema, the theatre, and the carnival were open to all, the audience in each of these spaces would have been predominantly made up of people who lived and worked in the immediate locality. This furthers the argument that part of what made cross-dressing acceptable in these spaces was a shared knowledge between audience and performer that cross-dressing in these contexts was temporary. Acceptability was not just defined by the presence of an audience but also who that audience was and how they themselves understood gender. By understanding the regionally specific culture of Yorkshire, this thesis has furthered knowledge of the nuances required to understand cross-dressing in its historical context.

Gender only occupies a minute part of regional history’s current literature, and this thesis has furthered the work of historians who have sought to emphasise the importance of region to

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<sup>677</sup> See for example; Smith, *Masculinity*; Martin, ‘Bodies of Knowledge’; Beier, ‘We Were Green as Grass’; Schwarzkopf, ‘Bringing Babies into Line, and Schwarzkopf, *Unpicking Gender*.

<sup>678</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, ‘The Reasons of Misrule’, 41.

histories of gender and sexuality, thus adding to both fields.<sup>679</sup> This has been achieved through highlighting the depth of understanding which can be gleaned from a regional approach, both in terms of the history of cross-dressing, but also to gender history more broadly. Early twentieth-century Yorkshire was renowned for its stereotypical insularity, dialects that could be almost impenetrable to the outsider, and a strong sense of regional identity and customs.<sup>680</sup> Particularly amongst the working classes in Yorkshire, identity was formed around a strong sense of belonging with one's own kind, this identity was also 'built on an opposition to what is other'.<sup>681</sup> Understanding the culture in which cross-dressing took place is central to understanding the act itself. As Oram explained:

Over the past 250 years, in British, north American and European societies, gender-crossing in everyday life has been understood at different times as a deliberate adoption of disguise, the expression of a person's physiological nature, or a demonstration of their interior psychological state. These different views are of course determined by the historically specific notions of gender in operation at the time, that is, whether it is viewed as a social role, an inalienably rooted in biological sex, or as a psychic sense of self.<sup>682</sup>

This thesis has situated male-to-female cross-dressing first in the regional context of Yorkshire and then in the space of the court, the stage, the carnival, and the cinema screen. As cross-dressing played such a significant role in Yorkshire entertainment culture, this thesis has not

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<sup>679</sup> With the exception of Smith and Cook, these studies have focused almost exclusively on women's experiences. Smith, *Masculinity*: Matt Cook, 'Local Matters: Queer Scenes in 1960s Manchester, Plymouth, and Brighton', *Journal of British Studies* 59:1 (2020) 32-56: Matt Cook, 1-12: Martin, 'Bodies of Knowledge': Laura Harrison, "Negotiating the Meanings of Space: Leisure, Courtship and the Young Working Class of York, C.1880-1920" (University of Leeds: unpublished PhD thesis, 2015): Lucinda McCray Beier, "Expertise and Control: Childbearing in Three Twentieth-Century Working-Class Lancashire Communities", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 78 (2004), 379-409: Lucinda McCray Beier "We Were Green as Grass: Learning about Sex and Reproduction in Three Working-Class Lancashire Communities, 1900-1970", *Social History of Medicine* 16:3 (2003), 461-480: Jutta, Schwarzkopf, *Unpicking Gender: the Social Construction of Gender in the Lancashire Cotton Weaving Industry, 1880-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004): Judith Giles, "Something That Bit Better: Working-class Women, Domesticity and 'Respectability' 1919-1939" (University of York: unpublished PhD thesis, 1989): Judy Giles, 'Playing Hard to Get': Working-Class Women, Sexuality and Respectability in Britain, 1918-40", *Women's History Review* 1:2 (1992), 239-255: Paul Atkinson, "Cultural Causes of the Nineteenth-Century Fertility Decline: A Study of Three Yorkshire Towns" (University of Leeds: unpublished PhD thesis, 2010).

<sup>680</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 345-346 & Smith, *Masculinity*, 11-12.

<sup>681</sup> Martin, 'Bodies of Knowledge', 19. See also Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 53.

<sup>682</sup> Alison Oram, 'Cross Dressing and Transgender', in *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality*, ed. by Harry Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (Palgrave: London, 2006), pp. 256-285 (259).

simply furthered knowledge of the act itself but also of working-class community in Yorkshire more broadly. This has identified spaces of acceptance and thus provides contrast to the London narratives that focus on the extent to which the act was viewed as deviant. It has also made an original contribution to the field of regional gender history by demonstrating the role of community in defining the extent to which cross-dressing could form part of a 'normative' image of masculinity.

Working within a range of different types of communities, from cities like Sheffield, to villages like Shipley, this thesis has shown how communities shaped understandings of cross-dressing. In contrast to bigger cities with transient populations, where men who cross-dressed might remain unknown to their audiences, this thesis has shown that in Yorkshire, community played a central role in creating an understanding of what cross-dressing meant. In addition, by stepping away from analysis of cross-dressing in the underground clubs and 'molly houses' of London, this thesis has reiterated the argument that cross-dressing was not always understood as deviant, or in contrast to hegemonic codes of masculinity. Nor was the act always hidden from view; instead it was often part of very public performances of gender.

While the men whose experiences are recounted in these pages were influenced by the region in which they lived, Yorkshire was not the only region in England to experience a strong regional identity built around work, class, community and often shared hardships. As Smith argues, the way masculinity was understood and experienced was a direct result of these somewhat insular communities, and work played a significant role in defining masculine reputation.<sup>683</sup> The experiences of men who cross-dressed in Yorkshire are unlikely to differ drastically from those who may have cross-dressed in the cotton towns of Lancashire, or in the various mining towns spread across the country, from Cornwall to Northumberland. In addition, the geographical and ideological separation from London allowed men in Yorkshire to view

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<sup>683</sup> Smith, *Masculinities*.

themselves in opposition to men embroiled in the ‘pansy cases’ in the capital.<sup>684</sup> As Smith has shown, different policing methods significantly influenced the relationship between men who cross-dressed and the criminal justice system in different parts of the country.<sup>685</sup> Again, however, communities with a similar attitude of ‘us and them’ in relation to the capital are likely to have had similar experiences. More work needs to be done across the country in order to analyse just how the experiences of men who cross-dressed in Yorkshire relate to experiences of men who cross-dressed in other counties.

As well as focusing on region, this thesis has situated cross-dressing as part of wider popular culture, rather than limiting analysis to one single performance space. It has argued that cross-dressing often reinforced binary ideas of gender through stereotypical representations of femininity and the fact that much of the cross-dressing that proved popular with Yorkshire audiences drew on the incongruity between the masculine body and female coded clothing for comedic effect. In doing so it has highlighted how the act could serve to reinforce hegemonic, and therefore heteronormative, ideals of gender in one space, yet be seen as emblematic of deviance in another. For the most part, cross-dressing seems not to have been understood as emblematic of deviance or danger, but instead, this form of gender non-conformity was used to emphasise heteronormative ideals. The aim of this thesis has not been to take away from a queer past by highlighting cross-dressing’s role in mainstream popular culture, but instead to queer the past by highlighting an acceptance of gender non-conformity and a different, less binary model for understanding gender.

The film chapter in this work deviated from some of the broader themes surrounding the relationship between space and experience by analysing the films themselves, rather than focusing on the cinema-going experience. The analysis of these films provides rich insight into

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<sup>684</sup> See Houlbrook, ‘Lady Austin’s Camp Boys.’

<sup>685</sup> Smith, *Masculinities*, 23-60.

exactly what was happening in cross-dressed performances in the period, while furthering knowledge of how cross-dressing functioned as popular entertainment in a heteronormative society. However, understanding how individuals experienced cinema-going, as well as what they watched on screen, could alter how we understand the relationship between cross-dressing films and hegemonic constructions of gender in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Yorkshire. This thesis considers cinemas as places where concepts of the local, national, and international intersect. The films themselves were viewed by both national and international audiences, yet the regional cinemas (like those in Yorkshire) would have been attended by individuals from within the local community. Especially in the smaller towns, cinema-goers were likely to have been sat next to work colleagues, neighbours, family and friends from within their community. Therefore, although the cinema itself was a darkened, semi-private space, the experience of visiting the cinema would have been far from anonymous. This adds weight to the argument that these films were broadly viewed as acceptable forms of entertainment. In addition, the cinema was a central point of the local community and therefore would have been influenced by local culture. Developing knowledge of what it was like to attend individual cinemas and how those cinemas were perceived by the wider community would allow for a more detailed understanding of what it meant to watch these films in Yorkshire specifically. This is again where this research would benefit from further comparisons in different parts of the country.

This thesis calls for more attention to regional history, space, and acceptance in the study of 'non-normative' gendered behaviours in the past. By understanding the influence region had on the construction of identity and community, we are able to access the nuance of gendered experience in the past. Shifting focus onto sources and spaces which demonstrate acceptance rather than deviance, and considering them in their regional context, can also further knowledge of the position of gender non-conformity or gendered difference within communities. As Matt Cook and Alison Oram's *Queer Beyond London* project shows, analysing queer lives in range of



different spaces and regions opens up avenues to explore the minutia of queer experience.<sup>686</sup> The evidence of Manchester's underground queer culture in the 1880s, exemplified by the fancy-dress ball case, provides evidence that there is another story to be told in Lancashire. The numerous cases of men dressed as women in Liverpool reported on in the regional press also suggests that analysis of the port city's transient population in regard to gender and sexuality may also add another important layer to the historical narrative.

This thesis has shown that defining the acceptability of cross-dressing was multifaceted, and the intersection of class, region, and space was central to individual experience as well as the wider historical narrative. Access to private space meant that upper- and middle-class men who cross-dressed were less likely to appear in the historical records than working-class men, whose lack of access to private space outside the home meant that their cross-dressing often could only take place in public. As we have seen, men who cross-dressed in public spaces without links to entertainment were more likely to be criminalised for their behaviour and therefore appear in the historical records of the criminal justice system. Importantly, it is the emphasise on region, space, and community in this thesis that has demonstrated how a single act can be seen simultaneously as sexually transgressive in one context, bit as suitable family entertainment in another.

### Masculinity

One of the most original contributions of this thesis has been in situating cross-dressing in the context of 'normative' masculinity. While it is important to remember that masculinity is also an internal identity, because cross-dressing in an outward performance of gender, this thesis has focused on the external features of masculinity. What is portrayed to others and how one was expected to behave has become central to this thesis. Tosh and Sean Brady have argued that because masculinity can have so many manifestations, historians of masculinity are often

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<sup>686</sup> See Matt Cook, 'Back to Back in the Gay Village' *Queer Beyond London* (2018) <<http://queerbeyondlondon.com/sources/back-to-back-in-the-gay-village/>> [accessed 30.11.2020].

studying different phenomena.<sup>687</sup> In following this idea and acknowledging that this thesis understands masculinity in a way which may differ from other historians, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the field by acknowledging that masculinity not only has multiple meanings to historical actors but also to historians.

Smith's work emphasised the importance of community to masculine identity in Yorkshire and has therefore brought attention to the 'audience' in the performance of masculinity.<sup>688</sup> A focus on cross-dressing in popular culture has built on this by drawing attention to the audience, of those who witnessed cross-dressing, and how the presence of an audience could remove notions of deviance from an act. This is most obvious in the discussion of carnival, where I argue that the community-based audience provided a safety net for men to cross-dress in the street without accusations of deviance.<sup>689</sup> If these men were comfortable, and confident in their masculinity because masculinity and masculine representation was formed in the community, they had no reason to suspect their masculinity would be challenged because of their cross-dressing in these spaces. The assumption that the men who cross-dressed would have been known by a large number of audience member also meant that their masculine reputation was not challenged by their decision to compete for the prize of 'best female impersonator' in these events. On a wider scale, this highlights the importance of audience in performances of gender as well as performances of self. Historians are used to considering the intended audience when discussing life-stories, ego-documents, and oral history interviews, yet this is an aspect of analysis often missing as an explicit theme from histories of gender as performance but also as performative.<sup>690</sup> Applying this method to gender performance aids in the development of more nuanced understandings of gender.

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<sup>687</sup> John Tosh and Sean Brady, *The History of Masculinity: An Outdated Concept?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1-2.

<sup>688</sup> Smith, *Masculinity*.

<sup>689</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>690</sup> See for example; Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History* 1:1, (2004) 65-93 (69) : Penny Summerfield, 'Dis/composing the

### Looking forward

This thesis ends at the beginning of a shift in how male sexuality was categorised and experienced. The Wolfenden report in 1957 and the subsequent partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967 brought the idea of sexual identity and a sexual ‘type’ firmly into the popular imagination. Despite continued links between homosexuality and female impersonation, the cross-dressed man remained ever present in British popular culture. Documenting this shift and the increasing links between the act of male-to-female cross-dressing and a queer sexuality in the second half of the twentieth century requires further research which sits outside the confines of this thesis. This is where archives such as the Peter Farrer Collection can help historians to develop a narrative of how representations and experiences of cross-dressing became more deeply cemented as a signifier of queer identity.

Although this thesis ends at the eve of the Second World War, the history of female impersonation as ‘respectable’ or ‘mainstream’ entertainment does not end here. There is both a wartime and a post-war history of female impersonation in entertainment spaces. As demonstrated by Vickers and Jackson, female impersonation continued to play a role in both official and unofficial troupe entertainment throughout the Second World War.<sup>691</sup> In addition the continuation of this tradition into prisoner-of-war camps has been explored by Sears Eldrige and Clare Makepeace.<sup>692</sup> Though both focus on female impersonators in these spaces as allowing men to blur ‘the boundaries of heterosexual desire’, this focus on sexuality at the centre of masculinity has a tendency to miss some of the more nuanced aspects of masculinity.<sup>693</sup> In post-

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Subject: Intersubjectivities in Oral History’ in), *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, ed by T. Cosslett, C. Lury and P. Summerfield (Routledge, London, 2000) pp. 93–108 : James Greenhalgh, “‘Till we Hear the Last all Clear’: Gender and Presentation of Self in Young Girls’ Writing about the Bombing of Hull during the Second World War”, *Gender & History* 26:1 (2014) 167-183 & Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 23.

<sup>691</sup> Vickers and Jackson, ‘Sanctuary or Sissy?’, 40-44.

<sup>692</sup> Sears Eldrige, “‘We Girls’: Female Impersonators in Prisoner-of-War Entertainments on the Thailand-Burma Railway”, *Popular Entertainment Studies* 5:1 (2014), 74-99 and Clare Makepeace, “Pinky Smith Looks Gorgeous! Female Impersonators and Male Bonding in Prisoner of War Camps for British Servicemen in Europe”, in *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War*, ed. by Linsey Robb and Juliette Pattinson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 71-96.

<sup>693</sup> Makepeace, ‘Pinky Smith’, 74 & Eldrige, ‘We Girls’, 74.

war Britain, ex-servicemen's revues once again toured the country. These revues were similar to those that had toured Britain's theatres at the end of the First World War almost thirty years earlier, though they did not appear in the numbers experienced in the 1920s.<sup>694</sup>

Jacob Bloomfield's work on post-war female impersonation has moved beyond these ex-servicemen's revues, and explores the act into the 1960s. His work has revealed that, as with cross-dressing in Yorkshire in earlier decades, defining the acceptability of female impersonation in mainstream entertainment was contingent on a range of specific factors.<sup>695</sup> In a discussion of the success of one of England's most successful female impersonators, Danny La Rue, Bloomfield argues the debates around the impact of the permissive society provided a backdrop against which La Rue could appeal to the 'conservative modernity of the 1960's' and thus present himself as respectable.<sup>696</sup> By positioning himself as a crusader against the moral decay which was perceived to have afflicted the nation by some, La Rue was able to create an image of himself as a person who aimed to 'protect' the traditional values of respectable entertainment.<sup>697</sup> As with earlier theatrical female impersonation, these performers remained within mainstream entertainment because they reinforced gender binaries rather than disrupted them. Roger Baker explains that even those female impersonators who performed in the 'seedier' areas of Soho and London's docklands and were often exclusively connected to homosexuality by the 1960s, performed to an audience of 'predominantly working-class families, local heroes and their birds who – like the thrust of the drag queen's jokes – were assertively heterosexual'.<sup>698</sup> The 'permissive society' of the 1960s, coupled with the protection afforded by theatrical spaces,

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<sup>694</sup> See for example advertisements for 'Soldiers in Skirts'; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 5 November 1, 1946 : *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 12 August 1946, p.6 : *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 27 October 1947, p.2 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 7 August 1948, p.3 : *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 24 September 1948, p.2 : *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 10 May 1949, p.2. See also 'Forces Showboat'; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 23 July 1948, p.2 : *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 16 August 1948, p.2 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 25 February 1949, p.5 : *Hull Daily Mail*, 3 March 1949, p.4 : *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 12 September 1949, p.2. Although the ongoing success of these shows, Rodger Barker remembers his bother claiming that a poster for one of these types of shows would have been 'quite unsuitable' for him to see when he was a child. See, Barker, *Drag*, 1.

<sup>695</sup> Bloomfield, 'Male Cross-Dressing Performance'.

<sup>696</sup> Bloomfield, 'Male Cross-Dressing Performance', 154 & 163.

<sup>697</sup> Bloomfield, 'Male Cross-Dressing Performance', 154.

<sup>698</sup> Baker, *Drag*, 3.

allowed performers such as La Rue to remain within the realm of acceptability. However, both Baker and Bloomfield's arguments are based around the specific context of female impersonation in predominantly working-class areas of London, and to some extent, use these arguments to speak for British culture as a whole. Although La Rue's films and television shows would have been viewed across the country, as this thesis has demonstrated, female impersonation would have been understood differently in different areas of the county, in different communities, and by different individuals.<sup>699</sup>

Post-war Britain saw the homosexual become the object of social scientific investigation.<sup>700</sup> These investigations brought ideas of the homosexual as both a 'social problem' a 'minority' into the public eye.<sup>701</sup> This period also saw an increase in what Justin Bengry refers to as the 'homosexual exposé' in the popular press.<sup>702</sup> Perhaps the most famous amongst historians of homosexuality in twentieth-century Britain is a series of articles titled 'Evil Men' which were published in the *Sunday Pictorial* in 1952.<sup>703</sup> These discussions emphasised the idea that men who had sex with other men were markedly different from men who had sex with women. This in turn would have disrupted the northern understandings of gender and sexuality discussed throughout this thesis. In addition, because of the historic links between same-sex sex and cross-dressing discussed in the introduction to this thesis, it became increasingly difficult to situate cross-dressing within the realm of normative masculinity.

Bloomfield's study of La Rue is situated in a period when the erosion of insular Northern cultures was significantly underway. From the 1950s onwards economic affluence in the north led to the slow disappearance of the shared hardship which played a significant role in shaping

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<sup>699</sup> Bloomfield, 'Male Cross-Dressing Performance', 148.

<sup>700</sup> Chris Waters, 'The Homosexual as a Social Being in Britain, 1945–1968C', *Journal of British Studies* 51:3, (2012) 685-710 (685).

<sup>701</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>702</sup> Justin Bengry, 'Profit (f)or the Public Good?', *Media History* 20:2 (2014) 146-166 (146).

<sup>703</sup> Bengry, 146, see also Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, From the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1990) 162–3.

the tolerance of working-class communities and allowed men to engage in same-sex sex without damaging their reputations.<sup>704</sup> The development of mass culture in the post war years, particularly in terms of television, further eroded the significance of locality to identity as the younger generation began to identify with ‘pop stars and the stories in their magazines more than with their class and communities’.<sup>705</sup> By the 1970s, even the most isolated areas of Yorkshire has been influenced by the expansion of mass culture.<sup>706</sup> The arguments made in this thesis are contingent on the specific, arguably insular, cultural context of late nineteenth- and early - twentieth-century Yorkshire. Therefore, the move towards mass culture in the post-war period and the slow erosion of work-based identity caused by what Smith terms ‘Margaret Thatcher’s attack on industry’, means that many of the arguments made in this thesis cannot be applied as easily to the post-war period.<sup>707</sup> Equally, arguments made about London in the earlier period cannot be unproblematically applied to the rest of the country. However, a similar study of female impersonation in the post-war period would illuminate how, when, and why attitudes towards cross-dressing changed in northern communities.

This thesis has uncovered a gradual decline in the popularity of cross-dressing in some entertainment spaces in the first half of the twentieth century. However, cross-dressing did retain some of its popularity into the second half of the twentieth century, never completely disappearing but maintaining a level of visibility until its resurgence in popular culture in the twenty-first century.<sup>708</sup> Cross-dressing did not, however, decline in popularity due to increasingly

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<sup>704</sup> Smith, *Masculinities*, 90-91.

<sup>705</sup> Smith, *Masculinities*, 91.

<sup>706</sup> Richard Benson, *The Valley: A Hundred Years in the Life of a Family* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

<sup>707</sup> Smith, *Masculinities*, p.188

<sup>708</sup> The continued popularity of female impersonation in twenty-first century popular culture is exemplified but the success of Tony, Grammy, and Olivier award winning musicals such as *Pricilla Queen of The Desert* (2006) and *Kinky Boots* (2012) which both continue to sell out tours across the UK. Cross-dressing has also been screened into the homes of millions around the world through the multi-Emmy award winning *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. RuPaul’s television empire has continued to experience rapid expansion since the first series was released in 2009. The first UK series appeared on the BBC in 2019. When not related to homosexuality or queer culture, cross-dressing’s role in popular culture has often been one of misogynistic humour, as exemplified in films of the 1990’s and early 2000’s such as *Mrs Doubtfire* (1993), *All Men are Liars* (1995), *Big Momma’s House* (2000), *All the Queen’s Men* (2001), and *White Chicks* (2004).

links between cross-dressing and same-sex sex, it was instead related to a change in the way same-sex sex came to be understood.<sup>709</sup> Instead, the increasing visibility of homosexuality as a distinct ‘sexual identity’ following the Second World War was followed by a ‘moral panic’ surrounding homosexuality in the years between the end of the war in 1945 and partial legalisation in 1967.<sup>710</sup> As this thesis has shown, although a gendered act, cross-dressing was rarely completely free from links to same-sex sex. This moral panic and the changing definitions of same-sex sex meant that it became increasingly difficult to brush it off as a mere indiscretion, or to view the act as part of ‘normative’ male sexuality. Because of cross-dressing’s long-standing association with same-sex sex, it also complicated presentations of cross-dressing as simple, harmless fun.

This thesis not only demonstrates the importance of considering region to understanding masculinity, but also encourages historians to think outside of binary concepts of acceptable and deviant, or ‘queer’ or ‘normative’. As the spaces in which men who cross-dressed appeared were dynamic, temporary, and fluid, so too was the way the act itself was interpreted and experienced. Through placing focus on the relationship between cross-dressing and masculinity as opposed to cross-dressing and sexuality, I have demonstrated how the act of adorning the male body in female-coded clothing could reinforce as well as potentially challenge binary gender stereotypes.

The specificities of gender and the relationship between cross-dressing and masculinity noted in this thesis are unlikely to only exist in Yorkshire. In order to understand exactly how this relationship was influenced by the socioeconomic conditions of Yorkshire, further regional studies are required. For example, a study of cross-dressing in a city such as Liverpool with its

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<sup>709</sup> Alison Oram has argued that in the 1930s, was increasingly viewed as a ‘code for sexual offences which could not be directly named’. While I do not dispute this claim, I believe this was due to a change in attitudes towards same-sex sex rather than a change in attitudes towards cross-dressing. Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, 82.

<sup>710</sup> Tim Newburn, *Permission and Regulation: Law and Morals in Post-War Britain* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 49–50 : Brian Lewis, *Wolfenden’s Witness: Homosexuality in Postwar Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p.5 : Jeffrey Weeks, *The World We Have Won: The Remaking of Erotic and Intimate Life* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 45–8 : Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 83–4.

mass of transient dock workers, or the rural, and somewhat 'closed off' communities of East Anglia, may tell a different story. Regional history has a lot to offer the historian of the everyday, and this thesis has barely scratched the surface in understanding how geography influenced understandings and experiences of gender.



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